

CHAP.
XLVI.

1814.

February.

it was found that only three of them could be brought to the water's edge before daylight; and therefore it was deemed advisable by the officers in command to withdraw the troops behind some sand-hills, where they were quite concealed, and collect the pontoons. Some of the officers, meantime, before day broke, examined the shore, to see where would be the most favourable points for putting the rafts into the water; the sentry on the opposite bank challenged them, but no answer was returned, and no alarm taken. Sir John Hope came to the spot at daylight, but afterwards sent orders to attempt the passage, at all hazards, when the tide would permit. A little before noon the river became passable, the tide, still running out, being nearly slack. At this time the fleet from Socoa was in sight, but at considerable distance, and with an unfavourable though not a strong wind, rather losing than gaining ground. The river at the point where the passage was to be attempted appeared to be about 200 yards wide at low water. The British made no show of men, and could only see a small piquet of the enemy's on the other side; this piquet appeared at a loss what to do, and as soon as the first boats were carried to the water's edge on men's shoulders, they fairly ran off, without discharging a single shot, the piece of their advanced sentry having missed fire. The six boats were soon on the water, each carrying only six soldiers; and the tide coming in soon increased the labour of the passage. A rope was passed from one side to the other, and three rafts were put together with all speed, each carrying from 50 to 60 men; but, after two or three passages had been effected, the tide came in with such force, that it was found impracticable to get the raft either backward or forward from the middle of the current, where it remained tide-bound, the united strength of all who were on board not being sufficient to haul with any effect upon the hawser. About five o'clock they

ceased working, the few seamen whom they had, and who were all Portugueze, being exhausted with fatigue. By that time 500 of the guards had been ferried across, the rocketeers having been the last, with Captain Lane of the artillery, who came out with them from England. All was at this time quiet, and apparently the day's work was done. But a little before dusk the enemy pushed down two regiments from the citadel; they came on with apparent spirit, beating the charge. Colonel Stopford posted the guards behind some low sand-hills, with their right on the river, and their left on a morass, the ground in their front being flanked by the artillery on the opposite bank; but a well-directed discharge of rockets made the French hastily retreat: the effect of this weapon was more terrible because they had never before witnessed it, and they retired with all speed into the citadel.

The troops bivouacked that night on the ground which they occupied; those who were in the wood felled trees and kindled fires. As soon as the tide served more men were passed across, the pontoons being used as row-boats, carrying fifteen men at each turn: it was bright moonlight, the weather perfectly still, and there was no enemy to offer any opposition. The wind sprung up for the flotilla during the night, and at morning it was seen, . . . about threescore vessels, including boats of all kinds, some of them near the mouth of the river, standing off and on. The Admiral was in the Porcupine frigate: he had been apprized, through the naval agent at Socoa, how anxiously the entrance of the vessels for the bridge was desired. The surf had increased in proportion as the wind became favourable; and the bar, which extends from the right bank, nearly across the river, shifting with the change of wind and tide, and at all times dangerous, was at this time more than usually formidable. The agent, who set off in his boat from Socoa as soon as he received the last night's advices, had no pilot on board, and mistaking the chan-

CHAP.
XLVI.
1814.
February

*Entrance of
the flotilla.*

Feb. 24.

CHAP.

XLVI.

1814.

February.

nel where he should have entered the river, beached himself on a spit of sand; fortunate, however, in his mishap, for the boat cleared the sand by great exertion, and having been pulled, sails standing, over the spit, got into deep water. One boat, which had the principal pilot on board, and therefore was selected as the safest, led the way, and was upset, several of the crew perished, and most of those who saved themselves were dreadfully bruised. Captain O'Reilly, who had command of the flotilla, was on board, and Captain Faddy (who had charge of 50 artillerymen sent in five gun-boats), both with great difficulty escaped: a second succeeded in reaching the beach; the larger vessels then put off, to wait the chance of the next tide, it being, as the Admiral declared, scarcely possible that one in fifty could then have effected the passage. Some small boats, however, attempted it, and were swamped; what boats were on the river were sent to pick up those who were struggling for life, but without success; some who regained their own boats, and clung to them, were swept off into the sea, and only one man was saved.

Had the bar been smoother, the tide was now too low for vessels to attempt the entrance; but a pilot was landed to the south-west of it, that he might walk to the Adour, and make signals from within the bar, to guide the vessels into the safer parts, supplying thus the signal-staff which on that side had been removed, for from the sea there appeared only one long and heavy line of surf. Meantime the troops continued to cross as they could, about 100 yards above the mouth of the river, some on rafts, some in a pontoon-boat which carried only twelve at a time; and when the tide presented least difficulty, a few cavalry by swimming. When the tide had risen sufficiently, the vessels boldly stood in, the pilot who had been landed having set up a halberd, with a handkerchief fixed to it, as a signal for directing them. The master's mate of the *Lyra* led the way;

his boat was lost, and himself and the whole of the crew. Several vessels shared the same fate. One who was on the shore, close at hand, and who had been accustomed to fields of battle, declared that he had never beheld a scene so awful. The boats were so agitated as they attempted the passage, sails flapping, oars apparently useless, and all steerage lost, that it seemed as if each must inevitably be wrecked. Two vessels were stranded, but almost all their crews were by great exertion saved. A gun-brig also was driven ashore; Captain Elliot of the Martial gun-brig was swamped in his boat: his surgeon was picked up by this gun-boat, but upon her striking the ground the shock threw down a 24-pounder, which fell upon him and killed him. Three transport boats with their crews were lost; every exertion was made to save those who were struggling for life in the surf, literally within ten yards of their countrymen on shore; but though there were men with ropes tied to them on the beach, who spared no endeavour for assisting them, and who when the waves retired appeared as if they were close to them, not a soul could be saved: some who actually obtained footing on the ground were carried back by the receding surf, and swept away for ever. But the zeal and intrepidity of British seamen will overcome all obstacles that are not absolutely insuperable: officers and men on this occasion displayed gallantry which could not be surpassed, and skill which has seldom been equalled; vying with each other, they essayed the passage; and happily the wind towards evening gradually died away, and about thirty vessels got in.

The passage of the troops, meantime, had been continued; it was quite dark before the last party were ferried over, and the tide was then running out so rapidly, that the most strenuous rowing hardly prevented the boat from being drifted out to sea. The whole of General Howard's division, about 6000 in number, were then on the right bank. They bivouacked on the

CHAP.
XLVI.

1814.

February.

*A bridge
carried over
the Adour.*

CHAP.

XLVI.

1814.

Feb. 25.

sand hills where the enemy on the yester-evening had been discomfited by the rockets. On the morrow they advanced toward the citadel, their right flank resting on the Adour, the left extending to the great road leading from Bayonne to Bourdeaux. Closing in to the verge of a deep and marshy ravine, which separates the high ground about the citadel from the surrounding country, they cut off the enemy's communication with the open tract to the north of the river, and completed the investment of the fortress and its camp; a feint attack being kept up the while on the opposite side by Lord Aylmer's brigade, the 5th division, and the Spaniards. By great exertions the bridge was finished on the following day. The point fixed upon for it was near the village of Boucaut, where the river is 270 yards wide. It consisted of six and twenty *chasse-marées*, anchored each at the bow and stern so as to resist both the ebbing and the flowing tide; to many of these, as a substitute for anchors, the heavy iron guns were used which had been taken in the redoubts on the Nive. The vessels were lashed together both at bow and stern. Five cables were stretched by capstans across these vessels from shore to shore, and oaken planks were laid athwart upon these, and secured to the two outer cables, so as to form a platform strong enough to bear the passage of artillery, yet pliant enough to adapt itself to the motion of the vessels with the tide. On the right bank the cable ends were fastened to some of the heaviest iron guns which had been taken in the camp of the Nivelle; on the left they were wound round capstans, which were firmly fixed by large stakes driven into the ground; and by these the tension of the platform could be increased or lessened as the rise or fall of the river might require. A little way above the bridge a boom-chain was laid down for its protection; and above this the gun-boats were anchored, in readiness to engage those of the enemy, should

any attempt be made upon the bridge by sending them down the river. The piers on both sides were wide enough for carriages of all descriptions; and that on the right bank was used for the artillery, in a part where the water is admitted at flood through apertures, and where a road could not have been formed without great expense of labour and of time.

This bridge was of the greatest importance, not only as affording a communication between the troops upon both banks during the blockade and intended siege of Bayonne, but also because it opened a way to the *chaussées* on the right of the river, whereby the army in its advance toward the interior could be much more easily supplied than by the bad roads in the exhausted country along the skirts of the Pyrenees, and where the Gaves and other tributary streams of the Adour were to be crossed. The inhabitants of Boucaut and of the adjacent villages had been ordered to take up arms against the allies; they had refused; and in consequence, the French troops upon leaving them committed some excesses. The contrast indeed was so great between the treatment which they experienced from their own soldiers and from the allies, that the peasantry volunteered to repair the roads for their uninvited, but now not unwelcome visitors.

While Bayonne was thus being invested by the left wing of the army, the two divisions which had hitherto observed that place between the Adour and the Nive joined the main body; and Lord Wellington, as soon as the troops were closed up, continuing his operations to the right, made a general advance. Marshal Beresford, who had remained since Sir Rowland's movement with the 4th and 7th divisions and with Colonel Vivian's brigade on the lower Bidouze, attacked the enemy on the 23d in their fortified posts at Hastings and Oyergave, on the left of the Gave de Pau, and made them retire within

CHAP.
XLVI.

1814.

February.

Batty's
Campaign,
126, 127.

Passage of
the Gaves.

CHAP.

XLVI.

1814.

February.

their *tête-de-pont* at Peyrehorade. On the 24th, Sir Rowland, with the light, the 2d, and the Portugueze divisions, under Baron Alten, Sir William Stewart, and Camp-Marshal Lecor, passed the Gave d'Oleron, by a ford near Ville-nave, without opposition. Sir Henry Clinton passed in like manner with the 6th, between Monfort and Laas; and Sir Thomas Picton with the 3d made demonstrations as if he would have attacked the enemy's position at the bridge of Sauveterre, upon which they blew up the bridge. Morillo at the same time drove in their posts near Navarreins, and blockaded that place, which was fortified strongly enough to require battering-artillery for its reduction. Immediately after the passage of the Oleron Gave, Sir Rowland and Sir Henry Clinton moved toward Orthes, and the great road leading from Sauveterre to that town; and the enemy retiring from Sauveterre across the Gave de Pau in the night, destroyed the bridges upon that river, and assembled their army near Orthes on the 25th. The allies continued to advance that day, and on the following Beresford crossed the Gave de Pau below its junction with that of Oleron, at some fords about four miles above Peyrehorade; these were not discovered till after some unsuccessful attempts, and the current there was so rapid, that the infantry of General Walker's division could hardly support each other against it, and for some minutes there was reason to fear that the column would be carried down the stream. The Marshal then moved along the high road from Peyrehorade toward Orthes, on the enemy's right. Sir Thomas Picton had found a ford below the bridge of Berenx, where he crossed with the 3d division, and Sir Stapleton with the cavalry as Beresford approached; the 6th and light divisions made a flank movement to support them, and Sir Rowland occupied the heights opposite Orthes, and the high road leading to Sauveterre, on the left bank of the Gave. His corps advanced directly

upon the bridge of Orthes, with the hope of forcing it; but, being without artillery, and finding the approach defended by loop-holed houses, and by a tower strongly manned against them, they desisted from their intent.

Orthes, which before the territorial arrangement of France was revolutionized, was the capital of the Senechalry of the same name, is supposed by Scaliger to have been the ancient city of Bearum, the Beneharnus of Antoninus, and the Benarnus of writers in a later age; but this opinion seems to have been satisfactorily disproved. It stands upon the Gave de Pau, there a considerable river, and remarkable, because its accessible source is a waterfall, higher, except one in America, than any that has ever yet been measured; it springs from a height of 1266 feet, and being twice broken on the way by projections of the precipice, falls upon a bed of perpetual snow, under which it works its passage. Orthes was the residence of the Princes of Bearn during some 200 years from the middle of the 13th century, when Gaston de Moncada built the *Chateau Noble* there, upon the plan of his hereditary castle in Aragon, and in a like situation, on an eminence commanding the town, and overlooking a wide circuit of country. In that castle Froissart was entertained by Gaston Phebus, the twelfth Count of Foix, and Lord of Bearn, and there he was informed concerning the affairs of Castille, Portugal, Navarre, Aragon, Gascony, and England, Gaston himself communicating to him what he knew, and telling him that the history which he had undertaken to write would be esteemed above all others, because more marvellous deeds of arms had been done in the world within the last fifty years than in three centuries preceding. There the good old chronicler was as happy as splendid hospitality, and the diligent use of favourable opportunities, could make him; the thing which he most desired being to collect information for his great work,

CHAP.
XLVI.

1814.

February.

Orthes.

Ramond's
Tr. in the
Pyrenees,
p. 92.

P. de Mar-
ca. Hist.
de Bearn,
L. 1. c. 6.
§ 4. 14.

CHAP.

XLVI.

1814.

February.

and having at his wish there, lords, knights, and squires, ready and willing to inform him. In this castle Gaston Phebus kept his treasure, and it is said to have amounted at one time to no less a sum than three million florins, raised by taxation, which was borne cheerfully, because he maintained order in his dominions; neither English nor French, nor robber nor rover, harassed his people; and he had the reputation of being as liberal as he was just, not heralds and minstrels only, but strangers who came there having cause to praise him for his bounty. Froissart had been in many courts of kings, dukes, princes, earls, and great ladies, but never in any, he says, that so well liked him as the Castle Noble of Orthes; and he had seen many knights, kings, and princes, but none like this Count of Foix for personage, nor of so fair form, nor so well made; for in every thing he was so perfect, that he could not be praised too much, loving what ought to be beloved, and hating that which ought to be hated. Yet so accustomed were men to the most atrocious actions, in that which was the brightest age of chivalry, that this very Gaston committed a murder in this Castle as much in violation of honour and of hospitality, as of laws both human and divine; tortured innocent persons to death upon mere suspicion, and with his own hands killed his own son at the close of a frightful tragedy, of which this castle was the scene; and the faithful historian who thus extols him has related all these things! The ruins of the *Chateau Noble* are yet to be seen, and the tower in which Gaston kept his treasure was standing in the last century. Orthes ceased to be the residence of the Counts in 1460, when they removed their court to Pau; and their removal was not compensated by the short-lived university which about a century after Queen Jeanne of Navarre founded there for the Huguenots, and endowed from the church property in her dominions.

Here Marshal Soult had taken a strong position, extending