

might be, nor where it was distributed, nor in what condition it was: but the march of Mortier with some 15,000 men from Aragon to their assistance had been ascertained, and it was certain therefore that a movement might be apprehended from that quarter. The proposal was received with some ill humour on Cuesta's part, for he was surrounded by intriguers, some of whom perhaps sought to serve the enemy by embroiling the allies, and others who, having as much national pride as professional ignorance, had as much selfishness as either; these persons had persuaded the hasty old man that Sir Arthur sought to weaken the Spanish army by dividing it, in order to obtain for himself the glory of expelling the French from Madrid, which was now, they represented, within Cuesta's reach. He was prevailed upon however by his Adjutant-General, O'Donoju, to promise that this should be done; and if the performance fell far short, the detachment being incompetent in force, and almost wholly unprovided, the failure must be imputed to his erring judgement and the disorderly state of the commissariat department, not to any want of faith or perverse purpose on his part.

In pursuance of the arrangements at this interview, the British army broke up from Plasencia on the 17th and 18th of July, and formed a junction with Cuesta on the 20th at Oropesa. Sir R. Wilson marched from his position on the Tietar on the 15th, and reached Escalona on the 23d, threatening Madrid on that side, from which he was about eight leagues distant. Venegas had been directed to break up from Madrilejos at the same time as the British army, march by Tembleque and Ocaña, cross the Tagus by the ford at Fuente Duenas, and advance to Arganda, so to threaten Madrid, which would then be within a few hours' march. Had this plan been followed, either a considerable body of the French must have been detached against

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*Junction of
the British
and Spanish
armies.*

CHAP. Venegas, or he would have entered the capital without re-
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*Opportu-
 nity of at-
 tacking the
 French*

But Sir Arthur was destined throughout the campaign to have his plans continually frustrated by the misconduct of those from whom he looked for cordial co-operation. On the 22d the combined armies moved from Oropesa, and the advance attacked Victor's rear-guard, which was drawn up in order of battle, upon a plain about a league from Talavera. Their right wing was turned by Brigadier-General Anson, and Alburquerque attacked them in front, and drove them back. They retreated to a position upon the Alberche, a league beyond the town, and the combined armies advanced, and encamped that night in the vine and olive-yards between the town and the French. Sir Arthur had a narrow escape that day; while he was reconnoitring, a three-pound shot was fired at him with so good an aim, that it cut a bough from a tree close to his head. He determined to attack the enemy the following morning, and bring Victor to action before he should be joined by Sebastiani and the Intruder. Nothing could be more favourable to his views than this unskillful halt of the enemy, an opportunity being thus presented for beating them, as he had hoped, in detail. The columns were formed for this purpose at an early hour, and at five in the morning they received orders to march. But when Cuesta was informed of the determination which had been taken, no arguments could induce him to make up his mind, and give the necessary instructions: at midnight he remained undecided, and the orders therefore were necessarily countermanded, . . . not more to the disappointment of the army, than to the sore vexation of the General, who knew the whole importance of the opportunity which had thus been lost. So unaccountable was this conduct in Cuesta, that it has been supposed he scrupled at fighting

*lost by Cu-
 esta's inde-
 cision.*

upon a Sunday. Whatever his reasons were, they have never been explained, and could not have been more valid than this would have been: but thus the fair occasion was let pass; for when, on the morning of the 24th, he was ready to offer battle, it appeared that Victor, profiting by the precious time which had been given him, had decamped during the night, and retired to St. Olalla, and from thence towards Torrejos, to effect that meditated junction which Sir Arthur's measures would have frustrated.

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This retreat surprised Cuesta as much as if his own procrastination had not deprived Spain of the victory which prompt measures would have secured. The British General had foreseen the consequence of so ill-timed a delay, and the disappointment was the more grievous because he could not pursue the French. From the hour in which he entered Spain he had never been able to procure means of transport: . . he required none for the baggage of individuals, . . only for provisions, ammunition, money, and military stores, things indispensable for an army: and these were not to be obtained. The country was in a state of total disorganization; and what was more extraordinary, the government seemed to be totally ignorant of this, and to suppose that nothing more was required of it than to issue edicts, which would be carried into effect as if things were in their ordinary course. This inconvenience had been so severely felt, that Sir Arthur, before he left Plasencia, informed Cuesta it would be impossible for him to undertake any farther operations after their arrangements against Victor should have been carried into effect, unless the necessary means of transport were supplied. Justice to his Majesty, and to the army with which he had been intrusted, required this determination, he said, and he was equally bound in justice to communicate it to General Cuesta without delay. The means which he required were such as

*Distress of
the British
army for
want of
transport.*

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every country in which an army was acting was bound to afford; and if the people of Spain were either unwilling or unable to supply what the British army required, they must do without its services. This declaration had been made as early as the 16th; a week had now elapsed, there had not been the slightest effort to remedy the evil, and from the same cause the troops were now in actual want of provisions. For the Spanish commissariat was in the most deplorable state; and that of the British army, which was far from being in a good one, could effect nothing in a country where they exerted no authority themselves, and the government would exert none for them. The evil was aggravated by the junction of two large armies, in a country which had scarcely ever been without troops to exhaust it during the preceding twelve months. When the two combined armies became competitors for food, the inhabitants naturally preferred their own countrymen: . . . it was afterwards discovered also, that, with a stupid selfishness, which admits neither of justification or excuse, they concealed the greater part of their stores from both.

*Sir Arthur
halts.*

Thus painfully circumstanced, Sir Arthur could not proceed. He conceived also that his engagement with Cuesta was fulfilled by the removal of Victor from the Alberche; for if advantage were duly taken of that movement, it gave the Spanish General possession of the course of the Tagus, and opened the communication with La Mancha and Venegas. He halted from absolute necessity, and he determined even to return to Portugal, if he were not properly supplied. Cuesta appeared fully sensible of the propriety of this determination, and trusting that good fortune would put him in possession of Madrid, which now seemed just within his reach, he, having means of transport in abundance, advanced four leagues in pursuit of Victor, to the village of Bravo; Sir Arthur, meantime, taking up a position at Talavera,

*Cuesta ad-
vances in
pursuit of
Victor.*

to wait the issue of a movement which was undertaken against his opinion, moved two divisions of infantry and a brigade of cavalry, under General Sherbrooke, across the Alberche to Casalegas, to keep up the communication with Cuesta and with Sir Robert Wilson. Near that village the body of a Spanish peasant was found, whom the French soldiers had a little before burnt, or rather scorched to death. It lay with the arms lifted and the hands clenched, as if in the act of prayer, the features distorted, and the whole corpse stiffened in one dreadful expression of agony!

Joseph Buonaparte and Marshal Jourdan left Madrid on the 23d, and halted that night at Navalcarnero, designing to form a junction with Victor at Casalegas, and to order Sebastiani thither as soon as that general, in pursuance of his instructions, should have returned from Consuegra and Madrilejos, where he was watching Venegas, to Toledo. Another object which Jourdan had in view was to check Sir Robert Wilson, whose force he supposed to be considerably greater than it was, and of whose enterprising spirit the French stood in fear. But Victor, who was well informed of the plans of his enemies, perceived, that if he fell back upon Navalcarnero to join the Intruder, it would be easy to interpose between them and Sebastiani, in which case the junction of their whole force in this quarter would be rendered exceedingly difficult, if not impossible. Apprising Joseph, therefore, of his movements, he retreated to the left bank of the Guadarrama, at its confluence with the Tagus near Toledo. Sebastiani reached that city the same day, and the Intruder, marching to the same point, fixed his head-quarters at Vargas, two leagues distant, so that the whole force which he could bring against the allies was now united. It consisted of 45,000 men, after 3000 were left to defend Toledo. They resolved immediately, now that this great

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*Junction of
Joseph and
Sebastiani
with Victor.*

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*Cuesta's
vanguard
attacked by
the French.*

object was effected, to act upon the offensive; and on the next day they began their march to Torrejos.

Cuesta had by this time advanced to St. Olalla. He there learnt that Victor had turned off towards Toledo; and so far was he from divining the obvious intent of such a movement, that he supposed the French were in full retreat, and that he had nothing to do but to pursue them. From some strange misconception, too, he supposed the English were about to follow him; they were very short of provisions and means of conveyance, he informed his own government, but he was doing all in his power to persuade them of the necessity of putting themselves in motion. He thus deceived himself and his government, instead of making efforts to supply the wants of the English army, or assisting them with his own means of transport. These he possessed in sufficient quantity; and it was discovered when too late, that food in abundance might have been procured, had proper means been used for obtaining it. In the morning of the 25th Cuesta dispatched intelligence that he was in pursuit of the French; in the evening he discovered that he was in some danger of being attacked by them, and on the following day his out-posts were assailed in Torrejos, and driven in. General Zayas advanced with the vanguard to meet the French; he was attacked by Latour Maubourg, with the French advanced guard, and suffered considerable loss; but Zayas was a good officer, and maintained his ground against superior numbers while he sent to require support. Alburquerque had requested that his division might be the first to support the vanguard, either in case of its attacking the enemy or being attacked. While Cuesta made arrangements for the retreat of the whole army beyond the Alberche, the Duque advanced time enough to save Zayas from complete rout, and the army from that utter defeat which

*Alburquerque saves
Cuesta
from defeat.*

must necessarily have resulted. The vanguard was flying at the moment when he arrived; he charged the enemy, checked them, and gave the van time to re-form, and fall back in good order. But for this timely success the army would have been dispersed, for all the artillery and baggage were in the streets of St. Olalla, carts of bread were there also blocking up the way, the commissaries had taken flight, and the men, catching that panic which want of order in an army never fails to occasion on the first approach of danger, had begun to throw away their arms, that they might neither be incumbered with them in running away, nor supposed to be soldiers if they were overtaken.

Alburquerque would have pursued his success had he not been compelled to retreat by repeated orders from the commander-in-chief, at the moment when he was about to attack a disheartened enemy, with troops confident in their own courage and in the skill of their leader, and heated by the advantage which they had gained. He had, however, done much in saving the army, for never were the movements of an army conducted in a more wretched and disorderly manner; like a rabble upon a pilgrimage, such was Alburquerque's description, they proceeded without any regard to distance, order, or method, and with the whole park of artillery; they had neither provisions, staff, nor settled plan; and they stopped upon their marches to repose like flocks of sheep, without taking up any position, so that, if the French had known the condition they were in, defeat must have been inevitable whenever they were unexpectedly attacked. Saved from that total dispersion which must have ensued, had not Alburquerque thus checked the French in their career, the Spanish army retreated twenty miles from St. Olalla to the Alberche unmolested, thus again forming a junction with the British, and bivouacked on the left bank. At day-break Sir Arthur crossed, and having with some difficulty

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Cuesta retreats to the Alberche

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*Sir Arthur
prevails on
him to cross
that river.*

pénetrated to the old General's tent, found him asleep there, and the army in that state of disorder which is usually consequent upon a forced retreat. He pointed out the necessity of passing the river without loss of time, and taking up his ground on the right of the British position. Fortunately Cuesta yielded to this advice, although he thought it unlikely that the enemy would venture to attack them: there was a report that they had detached 15,000 men towards Madrid, and this strengthened his opinion. In fact, had Venegas performed his part of the concerted operations, either this must have been done by the French, or Madrid would have fallen. But though this General was under Cuesta's orders, and had been instructed how to act in pursuance of the plan arranged with the British Commander, counter orders were sent him by the Supreme Junta; and he, in consequence, disconcerted the whole arrangement by employing himself in a useless cannonade of Toledo; thus permitting the French to bring their whole force against the allies.

*Position of
the allies in
front of Talavera.*

Sir Arthur, as soon as the Spaniards fell back to the Alberche, expected a general action, and immediately prepared for it, recalling Sherbrooke from Casalegas to his station in the line. The position extended something more than two miles. The British were on the left; there the ground was open, and commanded by a height upon which a division of infantry was stationed under Major-General Hill. Still farther upon the left was a low range of mountains separated from the height by a valley about 300 fathoms wide, and here a ravine running from north to south covered the left and centre of the position, and terminated at the beginning of the olive grounds on the right. The valley was not occupied, because it was commanded by the height, and because the mountains were thought too distant to be of any consequence in the expected battle. The right, consisting of Spaniards, extended immediately in front of Talavera

down to the Tagus: this part of the ground was covered with olive trees, and much intersected by banks and ditches. The high road leading from the town to the bridge of Alberche was defended by a heavy battery in front of the Ermida, or chapel of Nuestra Señora del Prado, which was occupied by Spanish infantry. All the avenues to the town were defended in like manner; the town itself was occupied, and the remainder of the Spanish foot formed in two lines behind the banks, on the road which led to the position of the British. In the centre between the allied armies was a commanding spot, on which the British had begun to construct a redoubt. Brigadier-General Alexander Campbell was posted here with a division of infantry; and General Cotton's brigade of dragoons, with some Spanish cavalry, in the open ground in his rear.

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When Sherbrooke was recalled from Casalegas, General Mackenzie had been left with a division of infantry and a brigade of horse as an advanced post near Casa de Salinas, in a wood on the right of the Alberche, which covered the left of the British army. About two in the afternoon of the 27th the enemy appeared in strength on the left bank; Victor forded the Alberche, and before Mackenzie's division could be withdrawn from the wood on the left, it was attacked by very superior forces under Generals Lapisse and Chaudron Rousseau. Sir Arthur, from a tower immediately in their rear, which he had ascended for the purpose of observation, saw the men falter when about to be attacked by such overpowering numbers, and descending just in time, with difficulty mounted his horse in the midst of the affray, and escaped being made prisoner. Had he been taken at that moment, or had Marlborough, a century before, been recognised and detained when he fell into the hands of a French partisan on the Meuse, how differently would the latter days of Buona- parte and of Louis XIV. have closed, and how different at this

*Sir Arthur
nearly made
prisoner.*

CHAP. hour would have been the condition of England, of Europe, and
 XXIV. of the world! The British suffered considerably, but they with-
 drew in perfect order, and took their place in the line. Mean-
 1809. time the other divisions of the French crossed, and advanced
July. within cannon-shot of the allied army. They cannonaded the
Battle of left of the British position, and they attacked the Spanish in-
Talavera. fantry with their horse, hoping to break through and win the
 town; but they were bravely withstood and finally repulsed. The
 action ceased a little before nine at night. A little before eleven
 the first line of the Spanish left opened a tremendous fire; Sir Ar-
 thur, who was near the spot, observed that the fire was admirably
 well kept up, and hoped they would do as well next day; but as
 he suspected that at that moment there was nothing to fire at,
 he wished to stop it. While he was speaking, three battalions
 of Spaniards, alarmed at their own noise, gave way, and fairly
 took to their heels. The vacancy was promptly filled up; and
 these very men the next day bore their full share of the battle,
 and behaved as steadily as the best troops could have done. Victor
 had marked the height on which General Hill was posted; he considered
 it to be the key of the position, and thought that, if he could beat
 the English from thence, it would be impossible for them to maintain
 the field afterwards. This might best be done during the night. He,
 therefore, ordered Ruffin to attack the hill with three regiments,
 Vilatte to support him, and Lapisse to make a feint upon the centre
 of the allied armies, which might serve as a diversion. The attack
 was made soon after night had closed; for a moment it was successful,
 and they got possession of the height. General Hill instantly
 attacked them with the bayonet, and recovered the post. At
 midnight the attempt was repeated, and failed again. According
 to the French account, one of the regiments destined for this
 service lost its way, owing to the darkness, and another was