

kept up upon them. At length part of the Merida battalion on the right gave way, and a road was thus left open by which the position might have been turned. Then Sir Robert ordered a retreat upon the heights above Baños, and from thence sent to secure the road of Monte Mayor, which turned the Puerto de Baños, a league in the rear, and by which the French were directing a column. Don Carlos d'Espagna came up at this time with his battalion of light infantry, took post along the heights commanding the road to Baños, and enabled Sir Robert to detach a party to the mountain on the left, commanding the main road. On the Extremadura side this Puerto is not a pass of such strength as on the side of Castille. Sir Robert had no artillery, and the French were not less than treble the number of his troops; nevertheless he maintained his ground for nine hours. At six in the evening three columns of the enemy succeeded in gaining the height on the left; his post was then no longer tenable, and he retired along the mountains, leaving open the main road, along which a considerable column of cavalry immediately hastened. It came in sight of the battalion of Seville, which had been left at Bejar with orders to follow on the morrow; but when Sir Robert was obliged to retire, and the action commenced, he ordered it to the pass to watch the Monte Mayor road and the heights on the rear of his left. As soon as the French cavalry came nigh, an officer with some dragoons rode on, and called out to the Spanish commanders to surrender. They were answered by a volley that killed the whole party; the Spaniards then began to mount the heights; they were attacked and surrounded by two bodies, one of horse, the other of foot; but they succeeded in cutting their way through, and Ney, having forced the pass, hastened on to Salamanca. Sir Robert's loss was not considerable, and after halting

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CHAP. two days at Miranda de Castañas, to rest his men, and collect
 XXIV. those who were dispersed, he proceeded on his way.

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*The French
 enter Tala-
 vera.*

*Victor be-
 haves well to
 the English
 wounded.*

The retreat of Cuesta from Talavera, however much both the former and subsequent conduct of that general may deserve censure, was, under his circumstances, at least an excusable measure. About 1500 of the wounded were left, whom there was no time to remove; most of whom, indeed, were not in a state to bear removal. Cuesta had hardly begun his march before the French were in sight. When Victor entered the town he found some of the wounded, French and English alike, lying on the ground in the Plaza. After complimenting the English, and observing that they understood the laws and courtesies of war, he told them there was one thing which they did not understand, and that was how to deal with the Spaniards. He then sent soldiers to every house, with orders to the inhabitants immediately to receive and accommodate the wounded of the two nations, who were lodged together, one English and one Frenchman; and he expressly directed that the Englishman should always be served first. Many had already died in the square, and the stones were covered with blood; Victor ordered the townsmen to come with spades and besoms, remove and bury the dead, and cleanse the Plaza; he was speedily obeyed, and then the French said the place was fit for them to walk in. This was done a few hours after they entered the town. The next day the troops were assembled at noon, and liberty of pillaging for three hours was allowed them. Every man was provided with a hammer and a small saw for this purpose in his knapsack, and they filed off by beat of drum in regular parties to the different quarters of the town upon this work, as a business with which they were well acquainted. Nothing escaped their search: they discovered corn enough to supply the French army for

three months; these magazines had been concealed both from the Spanish and English generals, and the owners were now punished for their treachery to their countrymen and their allies, by the loss of the whole. Dollars enough to load eight mules were also found hidden beneath some broken wheels and rubbish in a yard belonging to one of the convents.

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The behaviour of Victor to the wounded English deserves more especially to be mentioned, because Soult was carrying on the war with unrelenting barbarity. From Plasencia he laid waste the fertile vale in which that city stands with fire and sword. Serradilla, Pasanon, Arroyo-Molinos, El Barrado, Garganta la Olla, Texada, Riolobos, Malpartida, and La Oliva, were burnt by his troops, who, when they were not otherwise employed, went out upon the highways, robbed every person whose ill fortune compelled them to travel in this miserable country, and usually killed those whom they robbed. D. Juan Alvarez de Castro, the Bishop of Coria, in his eighty-sixth year, was murdered by these wretches. When Lapisse, in the month of June, marched from Salamanca to Alcantara, the Bishop with great difficulty and fatigue escaped; but the hardships which he then underwent were too much for one in such extreme old age, and when Soult quartered himself in this part of the country, he was confined to his bed, in the village of Los Hoyos. Had he been removed he must have died upon the road; it was, therefore, not a matter of choice but of necessity that he should remain and take his chance. Three of his clergy and some of his domestics remained with him; and a few old men took refuge under the same roof, thinking the presence of their venerable pastor would render it a safe asylum. The French entered the village, and took possession of the house where the old prelate lay in bed. His chaplains met them, and intreated protection for their spiritual father, and his domestics waited upon them,

*Murder of
the Bishop
of Coria.*

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hoping to obtain favour, or at least to escape injury. But after these ruffians had eaten and drank what was set before them, they plundered the house of every thing which could be converted to their own use, and destroyed whatever they could not carry away. Then they fell upon the unhappy people of the house, one of whom they killed, and wounded six others; lastly, they dragged the Bishop from his bed, and discharged two muskets into his body.

*Venegas's
army kept
in inaction
before and
after the
battle of
Talavera.*

The plans of the enemy on the side of Extremadura were effected; they who had so lately trembled for Madrid had seen the allied armies recross the Tagus, and they gave themselves credit for the fortunate issue of a campaign, in which, if it had not been for the misconduct of the Spanish General and of the Central Junta, they must have been driven to the Ebro. On the side of La Mancha they were not less successful. Venegas, on the 14th of July, had received orders to occupy the attention of the enemy, and divert them from the allied armies as much as possible, without endangering himself. In consequence he advanced his army from El Moral, Ynfanles, Puerto Elano, and Valdepeñas, to Daniel, La Solana, El Corral de Caraquel, and Manzanares, keeping his head-quarters still at Santa Cruz de Mudela, and expecting intelligence which would justify him in advancing to Consuegra and Madrilejos. At this time he supposed it was the intention of the combined armies to march upon Madrid; and when the want both of provisions and means of transport rendered it impossible for the British army to proceed, Cuesta gave him no intelligence of this, thereby exposing him to be destroyed, if the French, instead of marching upon Talavera, had directed their attack against him. Cuesta's whole conduct respecting the British army was so utterly unreasonable, that it can only be accounted for by ascribing it to obstinacy and incapacity. The wants of the British army were palpable;

he had them before his eyes, and could at any moment have satisfied himself of the truth of every complaint which he received; yet he concealed the real state of things both from his own government and from Venegas, to both of whom it was of such essential importance that they should be accurately informed. The Spanish government received true intelligence from Mr. Frere, and in consequence they dispatched a courier to Venegas, directing him to suspend his operations, and take up a defensive position. Cuesta's neglect rendered it prudent to dispatch these orders; but one evil produced another. Two hours after the arrival of the courier, Venegas received intelligence of the victory of Talavera, which was the more unexpected, because the Intruder, true to the French system, had published an extraordinary gazette, stating that he had defeated the allied armies on the 26th. Venegas ordered Te Deum to be sung in the neighbouring churches, and celebrated the victory by a general discharge: but he failed to improve it; and, instead of considering that the circumstances under which the Junta had dictated his instructions were now entirely changed, he adhered strictly to them, and lost the opportunity of advancing to Madrid; thus consummating the series of blunders by which a campaign so well planned, and a victory so bravely won, were rendered fruitless. Had he pushed for that city immediately, he might have entered it; Sir Robert Wilson would have joined him there, the resources of the city would have been secured for the allies, and the recovery of the capital would have raised the whole country far and near against the French. If Alburquerque had commanded this army, the momentous opportunity would not have been lost.

Venegas therefore remained with his vanguard at Aranjuez, and his head-quarters at Ocaña, while another division of his army under Lacy was employed in an idle attempt upon Toledo,

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*His useless
attempt upon
Toledo.*

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which, as he did not choose to destroy the houses from whence the enemy fired at him, because it was a Spanish town, could not possibly succeed, and therefore ought not to have been made. On the third day after the battle Cuesta wrote to Venegas, directing him to advance upon Madrid. "This operation," he said, "must oblige Victor to detach a large part of his force toward the capital, in which case the allies would pursue him to that city, and if any unforeseen accident should compel Venegas to retire, he might retreat by Arganda and along the skirts of the mountains." This letter was written at eleven at night. Twelve hours afterwards Cuesta forwarded a second dispatch, stating that Victor's army had marched in the direction of Torrijos and Toledo. Venegas, upon receiving the first, ordered his whole force to unite at Aranjuez, meaning to lose no time in reaching the capital. The contents of the second staggered him; if the enemy marched for Toledo, they would fall on his rear-guard; if they went through Torrijos direct upon Madrid, they had the start, and would get between him and that city. He determined therefore still to collect his force in the neighbourhood of Aranjuez, and there wait for fresh orders; and he reminded Cuesta how indispensably necessary it was that their movements should be combined.

*Venegas
complains
of Cuesta.*

His army was collected on the night of the 3d, leaving only 600 foot and 200 horse in the neighbourhood of Toledo. The next day he received another dispatch from Cuesta, telling him of his march from Talavera to reinforce Sir Arthur. This letter was written with preposterous confidence; he was going, he said, to secure the victory against Soult, after which they should return to attack Victor. Meantime he advised Venegas to bear in mind, that general actions with better disciplined troops than their own did not suit them. Venegas felt the danger of his own situation, but his prevailing feelings were indignation and

resentment at the multiplied proofs of incapacity which Cuesta had given. He wrote to his government, stating, "that he was thus left to himself with an army inferior in number to the enemy, and, by the acknowledgement of the captain-general, inferior in discipline also: how much more deeply should he have been committed, if, in obedience to that general's orders, he had marched upon Madrid, relying on the promised support of the allied armies!" The reflection was just as well as natural; but Venegas ought to have reflected also, that if he had marched upon Madrid in time, that support would not have failed him. He added, that no choice was left, save of commencing a retreat, which would dispirit the troops, and destroy the national enthusiasm in all the places which they had occupied and must now abandon. Consequences like these, which were immediately before his eyes, made him determine to remain where he was, and fight if he were attacked, preferring to be cut to pieces rather than submit to a shameful flight.

The enemy were well aware of the danger to which they had been exposed from the army of La Mancha. The Intruder, after his defeat at Talavera, retreated to Santa Olalla, leaving Victor to take up a position behind the Alberche, and watch the combined armies. The next day he moved to Bargas and Olias, near Toledo. On the night of the 31st, he received advices from Victor, who being alarmed by Sir Robert Wilson's movements, was about to fall back to Maqueda; at the same time he learnt that Venegas was collecting his force at Aranjuez and threatening Madrid. Alarmed at this, he ordered Sebastiani and the corps of reserve to take up a position at Illescas, from whence they might either advance rapidly to support Victor, or to attack Venegas. Victor's next advices expressed farther fears from the troops at Escalona, whose force he supposed to be far greater than it was: "If the enemy advanced in that direction,"

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*August.**The Intruder's movements after the battle.*

CHAP. he said, "as seemed probable, he should retire to Mostoles."

XXIV. Joseph, trembling for the capital, moved to that place himself

1809. in the night between the 3d and 4th: Mostoles is only twelve
 August. miles from Madrid, . . so near had the scene of action been

brought. From thence, having learnt that Victor's apprehensions had subsided, he turned back on the following night to Valdemoro, summoned Sebastiani thither, and ordered an attack to be made upon Venegas.

*Venegas
 prepares for
 battle at
 Aranjuez.*

That general expected such an attack from the moment when he was apprised of Cuesta's retreat. At daybreak on the 5th, he went from his head-quarters at Tembleque to reconnoitre the position at Aranjuez. The Queen's Bridge was the only one which had not been broken down; his first measure was to recall Lacy with the advanced guard from Puente Largo on the Xarama, that he might secure his retreat over this bridge in time; then he resolved to occupy the range of heights adjacent to Ontigola, beginning from Mount Parnaso, and to defend the passage of the river. Having directed these measures, he returned to his quarters, leaving Giron in command of the three divisions upon the Tagus. Three hours had hardly elapsed before Giron sent word that large columns of horse and foot and artillery were marching upon Puente Largo, and that some had already crossed the Xarama; this was followed by tidings that a great dust was seen in the direction of the ford of Añover. It could not now be doubted that a serious attack was about to be made; the ford would certainly be attempted, and Venegas was apprehensive that he should be assailed in the rear at the same time by troops from Toledo. He therefore ordered Lacy to cross the Queen's Bridge, and break it down; and marched his reserve from Ocaña to the height on the left of the road between that town and Aranjuez, where they might be ready to resist an attack on the side of Toledo or the ford, and to support the retreat of the

other divisions, who, if they found themselves unable to guard the river, were instructed to retreat to Ocaña; but their orders were to defend the passage to the utmost, and maintain every position inch by inch.

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Lacy could not commence his retreat soon enough to avoid an attack; a strong body of cavalry from the Cuesta de la Reyna fell upon his rear, but they resisted the enemy, and, retiring in good order over the Queen's Bridge, broke it down, and took post upon some heights which protected it: the bridge itself was defended by Don Luis Riquelme with three battalions and four pieces of cannon; another battalion was stationed in the Plaza de S. Antonio. D. Miguel Antonio Panes, a captain of artillery, only son of the Marquis of Villa Panes, defended the broken Puente de Barcas with two eight-pounders and two companies. Other troops were stationed at the ford of the Infante Don Antonio's garden, at the Puente Verde, at the Vado Largo, or broad ford, and in the Calle de la Reyna. A reserve was placed on each side the road to Ocaña, and in the walks immediately adjoining the palace, on the left of which the whole of the cavalry stood ready to charge the enemy in case they should win the passage of the river, or attack the Spaniards in the rear by a party which might have crossed at some remoter point.

The ground whereon a battle has been fought is never passed over by an intelligent traveller without producing a meditative train of thought, however transient, even if the scene has no other interest; but when the local circumstances are remarkable, the impressions become deeper and more durable, especially if the war were one in which, after any lapse of time, the heart still feels a lively concern. Aranjuez had been for nearly two centuries the spring residence of the Spanish court. It stands in a rich and lovely country, where the Xarama falls into the

*Aranjuez
and its gar-
dens.*

CHAP. Tagus, in what was once a peninsula. Charles V. had built a
 XXIV. hunting seat there, which Philip III. enlarged into a palace, yet
 1809. such a palace as was designed for comfort and comparative
 August. retirement, rather than for splendour. In his time a canal was
 made between the two rivers, partly with the intent of giving
 the place a character of safety, that the King might be secure
 there with no larger body of guards than his dignity required.
 Succeeding monarchs each added something to the embellish-
 ment of the grounds, and Charles IV., when Prince of Asturias,
 made a garden which was called by his name. Aranjuez itself
 was a poor village till the time of Grimaldi's administration,
 when a town was built there under his directions, and partly on
 the Dutch plan; the streets being long, spacious, straight, and
 uniform, with rows of trees, for beauty and for shade, . . . only
 the canals were wanting. The population had increased to some
 10,000 persons, who depended in great measure for their pros-
 perity upon the annual residence of the court.

The pride of Aranjuez was in its gardens; they were in the
 French style, but with a charm which that style derived from a
 Spanish climate. Long and wide avenues were overbowered
 with elms, which loved the soil, and which, by the stateliness of
 their growth, and the deep umbrage of their ample branches,
 repaid the care with which water from the Tagus was regularly
 conducted to their roots. That river also supplied numerous
 fountains, each in the centre of some area, square or circular,
 hex- or oct-angular, where, in peaceful times, at all hours of the
 day, some idlers or ruminators were seen on the marble benches,
 enjoying the shade, and the sight and the sound of the water,
 which was thrown up by statues of all kinds, appropriate or
 preposterous, beasts, harpies, sea-horses, Tritons, and heathen
 gods and goddesses, in jets or curvilinear shoots, intersecting
 each other, falling in regular forms, sparkling as they played,