

CHAP.
XVI.

1808.

Catalonia,
1808,

nanimous, and high-spirited, without the least apparent consciousness of being so.

After the fall of Madrid there was yet one quarter to which the Junta might look with reasonable hope, amid the disasters that crowded upon them. If Barcelona could be recovered, the acquisition of that most important place would balance the worst reverses which they had yet sustained. But ill fortune every where pursued them, and there was this to aggravate the disappointment, that their losses in Catalonia were more imputable to misconduct than to any want of strength. A force had been collected there fully equal both in numbers and discipline (had it been directed with common prudence) to the services expected from it. After the arrival of the troops from Portugal and Majorca, and the Granadan army, it consisted of about 28,000 regular troops, and 1600 cavalry, besides the garrisons of Rosas, Hostalrich, and Gerona, who were nearly 6000. The sea being commanded by their allies, was open to them along the whole line of coast, except at Barcelona; and the people, who have always been eminently distinguished for their activity, industry, hardihood, and invincible spirit of independence, were ready to make any sacrifices and any exertions for the deliverance of their native land. The province too was full of fortified places, and even in so defensible a country as Spain peculiarly strong by nature. But to counterbalance these advantages, there were the confusion and perplexity, as well as the distance of the Central Junta; the inexperience and rashness of those who had taken upon themselves the local government; want of science, of decision, and of ability in the generals; want of authority every where; the fearful spirit of insubordination, which on the slightest occasion was ready to break out; . . . and, above all, that reckless and unreasonable confidence which had now become part of the Spanish character.

There was some excuse for this confidence in the Catalans ; they knew their own temper and the strength of their country ; and they had obtained some signal successes before any regular troops came to their assistance. But this remembrance, and the knowledge that so large a regular force was in the field, induced a fatal belief that the difficulties of the struggle were over, and that nothing remained to complete their triumph but the recovery of Barcelona. And this, they said, might easily be effected : the enemy there were weak, in want of provisions, sickly, dispirited by defeat and desertion ; the English squadron at hand to assist in an attack upon Monjuich and the citadel ; and the inhabitants ready upon the first appearance of success to rise upon their invaders and open the gates. Among the French and Italians themselves, there were some, they affirmed, who would gladly forsake the wicked cause wherein they were engaged, and by contributing to deliver up these places atone for the treachery in which they had been compelled to bear a part. This was the cry of the people ; and these representations were strengthened by some of the citizens, who were perpetually proposing plans contradictory to each other, and alike impracticable : the Supreme Junta represented the people but too faithfully, partaking their inexperience, their impatience, and their errors ; and General Vives, surrounded by ignorant advisers, controlled if not intimidated by popular opinion, and himself altogether incompetent to the station which he filled, wasted the precious weeks in a vain display before Barcelona ; not perceiving or not regarding that the possession of the city would have been useless to him while the French possessed the citadel and Montjuich ; that he had no means for besieging those strong places ; . . . and above all, that if the French were prevented from relieving them, they must inevitably soon fall into his hands without a blow.

Duhesme, in fact, had announced to his government that his

CHAP.
XVI.
1808.

*Siege of
Barcelona.*

St. Cyr appointed to

CHAP.
XVI.

1808.

*command
the French
in Cata-
lonia.*

provisions would not hold out beyond the month of December ; and to throw in supplies by sea was impossible. Buonaparte was well aware of the danger, and saw in part what consequences might be apprehended from it. He knew how Barcelona had been defended in the Succession war, and had calculated that if it were now to be recovered by the Spaniards it would cost him not less than fourscore thousand lives to regain possession of it. Such a sacrifice he would have made without one compunctious feeling ; but that blood might have been expended without effecting the purchase, . . . for if such a siege had been undertaken, England must and would have made exertions commensurate to the occasion. That these consequences did not follow was owing to the errors and incapacity of his opponents, not to his own measures. In other cases the force which he prepared was always fully equal to the service for which it was designed ; in the present, it was so inadequate, as to excite in the General, Gouvion Saint Cyr, a suspicion that failure on his part would be more agreeable to the Emperor than success. That General had belonged to the army of the Rhine, which was an original sin in Buonaparte's eyes ; and having a command in Naples he had refused to obtain addresses from the troops soliciting the First Consul to take upon himself the imperial dignity ; . . . an irremissible offence. Moreover, great commander as Buonaparte was, he was jealous of any victories which were not obtained when he was in the field, so that the renown might redound to himself. Indulging at once this littleness of mind, and his personal or political dislike, it was his wish that Gouvion St. Cyr should not distinguish himself by any brilliant success ; at the same time he knew the miserable state of the Spanish armies, and still more of the counsels by which they were directed, well enough to rely upon his relieving Barcelona. His instructions were to effect that object, to collect considerable magazines in

Figueras at the enemy's expense ; to subdue the valleys, making them feel the whole weight of the war, and in fine to crush the enemy : having these objects in view, every thing was left to his own discretion.

CHAP.
XVI.
1808.

When St. Cyr arrived at Perpignan, at the end of August, the town was full of sick and wounded, for whose relief no preparation had been made, so little had any reverses been expected. He found there some Tuscan regiments, the poor Queen of Etruria's guards, and a battalion from the Valais . . for even that country was called upon to contribute from its recesses to this insatiable tyrant's demand for human life. These troops had been sent back from Figueras by General Reille as being quite unable to take the field, not for want of discipline only, but of equipments, arms, and even necessary clothing. So miserable was their condition, that it was deemed prudent to quarter them in remote places, and train them out of sight, lest they should excite indignation as well as commiseration in the people, who in the south of France had always been ill affected toward Buonaparte, and suffering at this time from the loss of their trade with Spain, detested the injustice of the war, and were in a temper which might have produced formidable consequences if any serious invasion had been attempted on that side. During the autumn troops continued to arrive there, mostly consisting of conscripts from Genoa, Naples, and other parts of Italy : under good training they soon became good soldiers, and only less to be trusted than the French because they were more inclined to desert. These forces when collected amounted to 18,000 men. Reille had 4000 at Figueras, and 8000 were with Duhesme in Barcelona.

St. Cyr, 26.
42. Do.
Pièces Jus-
tificatives,
No. 7.

St. Cyr,
19 34.

Early in November St. Cyr received orders to enter Spain, and he determined to commence his operations with the siege of Rosas. While the fine roadstead which that fortress commands

He deter-
mines upon
besieging
Rosas.

CHAP. was open to the English, there was scarcely a chance of throw-
 XVI. ing supplies into Barcelona by sea ; to escort them by land was
 1808. not possible while Gerona and Hostalrich were in possession
 November. of the Spaniards ; and if those places had been taken they could
 not be provisioned unless Rosas also were held by the French.
 Rosas is situated four leagues east of Figueras, in the bottom of
 the bay, where the plain of Ampurdan touches the skirts of the
 Pyrenees. The town, containing then about 1200 inhabitants,
 is built along the shore, and completely commanded by the for-
 tress ; the fortress, which is an irregular pentangle, the town,
 and a smaller fort, called, after a custom too prevalent in Ca-
 tholic countries, Fuerte de la Trinidad, forming a semi-circle
 round the bay. This place had sustained a most gallant siege
 of ten weeks in 1795 after Figueras, strong as it was, had been
 surrendered without defence ; and when the commander, D.
 Domingo Yzquierdo, could maintain the almost demolished
 works no longer, he succeeded in embarking the remains of his
 garrison. During the peace nothing had been done to repair the
 works, as if no future war was to be apprehended. Even after
 the present struggle had commenced, six months, in that supine-
 ness which belongs to the Spanish character, had been suffered
 to elapse without taking any measures for strengthening and
 securing a place of such evident importance. There were many
 persons, and even some members of the nearest Juntas, who were
 acquainted with the details of the last siege, and knew what re-
 pairs were necessary, and also what the points were which it was
 most material to strengthen. But their attention was wholly
 engrossed by local and immediate interests, and the press-
 ing representations which the commandant of engineers re-
 peatedly addressed to the higher authorities produced no effect.
 Nothing could rouse them from their dream of recovering Bar-
 celona by force of arms.

The Governor however, D. Pedro O'Daly, Lieutenant-Colonel of the regiment of Ulster, as soon as he apprehended an attack had made some preparations ; he ordered all strangers who had taken refuge there to depart, and sent away by sea such of the garrison as were incapable of service. The ditches were cleared, parapets formed, and guns mounted. The north angle of the fort had been demolished by the explosion of a magazine ; a wall of stones without mortar was run up by the peasants ; it closed the breach, but that part of the works remained useless. The stores were as incomplete as the works : there were neither measures for the powder, nor saws for the fusees, . . hats and axes were used instead. The buildings within the fort were in ruins, an old church and one other edifice being all that were serviceable. Before the former siege a line nearly half a mile in length, with some redoubts, had been formed from the citadel to that part of the mountain range which is called Puig-rom, for the purpose of covering the town ; but it was now in all parts so dilapidated, that though the garrison as well as the inhabitants were aware how much they needed this additional protection, any attempt at re-establishing it was deemed hopeless.

Preparations for the siege had been made at Figueras, and in order to deceive the Spaniards a report had been encouraged that the design was against Gerona. St. Cyr established his head quarters at Figueras, and General Reille, to whom the conduct of the siege had been entrusted, encamped before Rosas with his own division and that of the Italian General Pino. General Souham took a position between Figueras and the Fluvia, to protect the besiegers on that side against any attempt which might be made from Gerona ; and Chabot was stationed nearer the frontier, the General being well aware that the opposition which he had to apprehend was not so much from regular troops as from the whole population of the country. But

CHAP.
XVI.

1808.

November.

*Dilapidated
state of that
fortress.*

*Cabañes,
c. 10.*

*Prepara-
tions for the
siege.*

Nov. 6.

CHAP.
XVI.
1808.
November.

the measures of the Catalans were so ill-directed at this time, that the invaders suffered more from the weather, and from the gross neglect of their own government in sending them supplies, than from all the efforts of their enemies. St. Cyr was obliged to send his cavalry back into France to the neighbourhood of Beziers, that the horses might not perish for want of fodder during the siege; and when he wrote pressingly for supplies for his men, directions were sent him in return to collect and convey provisions to Barcelona. He was desired not to regard any reports concerning the rabble opposed to him, for it was nothing more, and the time was fixed within which the emperor expected that he would be master of Barcelona and of the country ten leagues round. In reply to this he stated that he would not break up the siege of Rosas without positive orders; that it was sufficiently hazardous to advance leaving Gerona behind him; but if Rosas were left also, Figueras would be again blockaded by the Spaniards, and must fall, because it was not possible to store it: so that the only way to secure that most important fortress was to take Rosas.

St. Cyr,
34—41.

Do. Pièces
Justif. 45—
16.

British
squadron in
the Bay of
Rosas.

However much St. Cyr and the government under which he acted differed in other points, they both knew the incapacity of the forces opposed to them, and relied upon it. They knew that there would be no difficulty in routing the Spaniards whenever they were brought to action, that nothing was to be apprehended from any combined operations, and that neither by sea or land was any such exertion as the time required to be expected from the English, . . . the siege of Rosas would otherwise have been a more perilous undertaking than the march to Barcelona. The English had just force enough in the Bay to give the French an opportunity of boasting that the siege was effected in spite of them, and to show what might have been done if a flying squadron with troops on board had been on the coast ready to act

wherever it might be most serviceable. Captain West was in the bay in the *Excellent*, with the *Lucifer* and *Meteor*, bomb vessels; and when the enemy, having taken possession of the heights which encompass the whole bay, had driven the troops in, and the peasants from the nearest villages with them, and entered the town, these vessels bore a part in the action, and assisted in dislodging them. Five-and-twenty marines were then sent to reinforce Fort Trinidad, and the rest of the marines, with fifty seamen, went cheerfully to assist in defending the citadel. Upon this a report was spread by the enemy, who were always endeavouring to make the Spaniards jealous of their allies, that the English had taken possession of the place; and as while this report was circulated they succeeded in intercepting all communications from Rosas to Gerona, the Junta of that city wrote to Captain West, requesting an explanation of his conduct. The artifice was then discovered; but not till the end had been answered of deceiving the Junta for a time, and thus preventing them from taking such measures for the relief of the place as might have been in their power.

Reille had expected to take Rosas by a sudden attack. The commandant of the engineers had served in that same capacity at the last siege, and was therefore well acquainted with the place and with its weakness. On the evening of the 9th a breach was made in the ramparts of the citadel sufficient for twenty men abreast; but it was so dark that the enemy did not discover the extent of the mischief. Immediate intelligence was sent to the ships; one of the bomb-vessels was then stationed where it could flank the breach, and the boats appointed to enfilade the shore with carronades, while more seamen were landed to repair the damage. British seamen are made of such materials, that it is indifferent to them on what service they are employed; whether at sea or ashore, whatever is to be done by courage, activity,

CHAP.
XVI.
1808.
November.

CHAP. intelligence, and strenuous exertion, they can accomplish. The
 XVI. Spaniards exerted themselves with emulous alacrity, and this,
 1808. against which the enemy had directed their fire as the weakest
 November. part of the works, was by their united labour placed in a re-
 spectable state of defence.

*Disposition
 of the Ita-
 lian troops
 to desert.*

Reille now found that neglected as Rosas had been, with its feeble works, its unsupported garrison, and its insufficient stores, it was necessary to proceed against it by regular siege. Some difficulties he encountered from the state of the weather, some from the sallies which were made to interrupt him; but his greatest uneasiness arose from the desertion of the Italians, which was so frequent as to leave no doubt that in case of any serious reverse the whole division would go over to the Spaniards. The state of durance in which the Pope was held had probably offended their religious feelings, and the Tuscans perhaps in their indignation for the treatment of the Queen of Etruria felt some sympathy with the Spaniards. But Buonaparte cared not for the hearts of men, so their hands were at his service and their lives at his disposal. And such are the effects of discipline, that the Italians, who when left to themselves are the worst troops in the world, became as efficient as the best soldiers in his army. One regiment at this siege was composed of subjects turned out from others, the refuse of the whole Italian army: example, encouragement, and restraint, made them behave well in the field, . . . and how they behaved out of it was a matter of indifference to their officers and the government which employed them. Two companies of Italians having been surrounded and made prisoners by the Somatenes, under an old man of seventy, (who had been a captain of Miquelets in the last war, and now acted under the orders of the Spanish commander, D. Juan Claros), St. Cyr gave orders to seize an equal number of the inhabitants, and send them into France; there to be confined till an exchange

St. Cyr, 38.