

CHAPTER XXX.

SIEGE OF HOSTALRICH. ATTEMPT UPON VALENCIA. CAPTURE
OF LERIDA. OPERATIONS BEFORE CADIZ.

IF proof had been wanting that men of any country may be made good soldiers under good discipline, it might have been seen at this time in Buonaparte's armies, where the Italians, who in their own country ran like sheep before the French, were now embodied with them, and approved themselves in every respect equal to their former conquerors. These men, who were taken by the conscription to bear part in a war wherein they had no concern, who had no national character to support, nothing but the spirit of their profession to animate them, were nevertheless equal to any service required from them, and needed no other excitement than that they were fighting for pay, and plunder, and life. Was it then to be doubted, that if the same care were bestowed in training, the same results would be seen in the Spaniards and Portugueze, who were under the influence of every passion and every principle which can strengthen and elevate the heart of man, . . . both people too being alike remarkable for national feeling, and for patience under difficulties and privations, docility to their superiors, and faithful attachment to those in whom they trust? It was not indeed to be expected that the Spaniards would so far acknowledge their military degradation as to put themselves under the tuition of an ally; Spain had not abated sufficiently of its old pretensions, thus to humiliate itself. Neither indeed was that degradation so com- 1810.

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plete as it had been in Portugal. The Spanish artillery was most respectable; and there were officers in the army who had studied their profession, and whose talents might have raised them to distinction in the proudest age of Spanish history. But the Portuguese were conscious of their weakness, and in this knowledge they found their strength: for when that brave and generous people, in the extremity of their fortune, submitted implicitly to the direction of their old hereditary ally, . . . when they offered hands and hearts for the common cause, and asked for assistance and instruction, the ultimate success of that cause became as certain as any thing can possibly be deemed by human foresight. With Portugal for the scene of action, and her population ready for every sacrifice that duty might require, it remained only for Great Britain to feel and understand its own strength, and employ its inexhaustible resources in exertions adequate to the occasion.

But Great Britain as yet hardly understood its strength. The cold poison which was continually instilled by party writers into the public ear had produced some effect even upon the sound part of the nation. From the commencement of the war it had been proclaimed as a truth too certain to be disputed, that England could no longer as a military power compete with France, consequently that we must rely upon our insular situation, and husband our resources. These opinions had been so long repeated, that they had acquired something like the authority of prescription; the government itself seemed to distrust the national power, and in the fear of hazarding too much, apportioned always for every service the smallest possible force that could be supposed adequate to the object, instead of placing at the general's disposal such ample means as might ensure success. The first departure from this over-cautious system was in the expedition to Walcheren, where a great armament was worse

than wasted. That miserable enterprise weakened the government, and in some degree disheartened it; and Lord Wellington, in addition to the other difficulties of his situation, had long to struggle with insufficient means. But the exertions and the experience of the last year had not been lost: the British army had acquired a reputation which, however successfully Buonaparte concealed it from the French people, was felt by his soldiers and his generals: time had been gained for training the Portuguese troops, and preparing for the defence of Portugal; and the British Commander having proved both his enemies and his allies, had clearly foreseen the course which the war would take, and determined upon his own measures with the calmness of a mind that knew how to make the best advantage of the events it could not controul.

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While both parties were preparing for a campaign in Portugal, in which the enemy expected to complete the conquest of the Peninsula, and Lord Wellington felt assured that the tide of their fortune would be turned; while the war before Cadiz was pursued with little exertion or enterprise on either side, and the cities of Andalusia were occupied without a struggle by the invaders; in Catalonia the contest was carried on with renewed vigour. The fall of Gerona enabled the besieging army to undertake farther operations; but the Catalans, as well as the French, had changed their commander. Upon Blake's recall to the south, D. Juan de Henestrosa had succeeded to the command; the provincial Junta, however, in accord with the general wish of the people and of the troops, appointed O'Donnell in his stead, and this nomination was confirmed by the Regency. It gave offence to Garcia Conde, who was an older officer, and had also distinguished himself during the siege of Gerona. He resigned the command of the first division in disgust: this act of intemperance, however, was overlooked, and he was made go-

*O'Donnell
appointed to
the com-
mand in
Catalonia.*

*Garcia
Conde made
governor of
Lerida.*

*Von Staff,
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vernor of Lerida, a post of great importance at that time, but to which his services and his character seemed fairly to entitle him. The Duque del Parque had more reason for displeasure at O'Donnell's promotion; in the belief that he was to have the command in Catalonia by the express desire of the Catalan people, he had taken leave of his own army, and Romana had been appointed to succeed him.

Rapid promotion in the Spanish armies.

If heroes who carry victory with their single presence were to be produced as if by miracle, according to Lord Holland's supposition, by democratic institutions, during such struggles as that in which the Spaniards were engaged, fairer opportunities for their appearance could not have been afforded under the most democratic forms than were given both by the Central Junta and by the Regency. There had been a flagrant exception in the case of Alburquerque; the union of high rank, deserved popularity, and great military talents in his person, had excited unworthy jealousies in some, and worse passions in others: but in every other instance, promotion had rapidly followed upon desert; a rash and even ruinous confidence had been shown where any promise of ability appeared; and men were raised so rapidly, that they became giddy with their sudden elevation. But Henrique O'Donnell justified the expectations which had been formed of him. While the French proclaimed in their official accounts, that now Gerona had been taken, little more was required for the complete subjugation of Catalonia; that the Ampurdam was already reduced; that the peasants, as they were taken in arms, were hung up in great numbers upon the trees along the road side, and that the French communications had at length been rendered secure; the fall of Gerona, like that of Zaragoza, had animated the Spaniards, not discouraged them: they looked to the spirit which the garrison and the inhabitants had displayed, not to the surrender which famine had rendered

inevitable, and in the religious and heroic endurance which had there been manifested, found cause for more ennobling pride and surer hope than a victory in the field would have given them. Eroles was charged by the superior Junta to enforce the decree for embodying every fifth man. He called upon the Catalans in language suited to the times, reminding them of their forefathers who spread terror through the Greek empire; and referring to those regiments of the Gerona garrison, which but a little while before the siege had been filled up with men thus levied, as having exemplified not less illustriously the powerful effects of discipline. By this means the army was recruited, and the men hoping for change of fortune with every change of commander, entered cheerfully upon the service under O'Donnell, who had hitherto only been known by his adventurous exploits and his success.

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In the other parts of Spain, grievously as all had suffered, the scene of action had frequently been shifted; but in Catalonia there had been no intermission. From the commencement till the termination of the war, the struggle was carried on there without an interval of rest. A memorable instance of the provincial spirit was given at this time by the people of Villadrau, an open town, in the plain of Vich; on the approach of an enemy's detachment, which they had no means of resisting, the whole of its inhabitants, in the middle of February, retired to the mountains. The French Commandant, finding the place utterly deserted, wrote to the Regidor, telling him that if the inhabitants were not brought back by the following day, he should be obliged to report their conduct to Marshal Augereau, and take the necessary measures for reducing them to obedience: at the same time he assured him that the most effectual means should be used for preserving order. This answer was returned by the Regidor: "All these people, that the French nation may

*Conduct of
the people of
Villadrau.*

CHAP. know the love they bear to their religion, their King, and their
 XXX. country, are contented to remain buried among the snows of Mont-
 1810. sen, rather than submit to the hateful dominion of the French
 troops." So many families, in the same spirit, forsook their
 homes, rather than remain subject to the invaders, that the
 superior Junta, at O'Donnell's suggestion, issued an order for
 providing them with quarters in the same manner as the soldiers.
 The exceptions to this spirit were found, where they were to be
 expected, in the rich commercial towns, as at Reus. If the
 people of Barcelona, like those of Villadrau, and of so many
 smaller places, had abandoned their houses, that city could not
 long have been held by the enemy; in that case the blockade
 might have been as rigorous, and almost as effectual by land
 as by sea: but provisions for the use of the inhabitants were
 allowed by the Spanish generals to enter; and therefore, though
 the French might be sometimes inconvenienced, it was certain that
 they would never be exposed to any serious danger of famine.

Hostalrich.

The communication between Gerona and that city was im-
 peded by Hostalrich, a modern fortress, overlooking a small and
 decayed town, which had once been fortified. It is situated
 on high and broken ground, seven leagues from Gerona. The
 intermediate country is of the wildest character, consisting of
 mountains covered with pines; the road winds through sundry
 defiles, so narrow, that in most places the river nearly fills up
 the way; the pass is so difficult, that in one part it has obtained
 the name of El Purgatorio; and the outlet is commanded by
 this fortress. Part of the town had been burnt during the siege
 of Gerona, when the magazines which had been collected there
 were taken by the enemy. An enemy's division, under the
 Italian General Mazzuchelli, occupied it now, preparatory to the
 siege of the castle; the inhabitants, upon their approach, took
 refuge in the church, and there defended themselves till a de-

tachment of the garrison sallied, and relieved them; and before the blockade of the fortress was pressed, they had time to remove and seek shelter where they could. The garrison meantime prepared for a Spanish defence. This fortress, said the governor Julian de Estrada, is the daughter of Gerona, and ought to imitate the example of its mother!

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The siege began on the 13th of January: a week afterwards one of the outworks, called the Friars' Tower, was attacked; the officer in command, D. Francisco Oliver, was killed by a hand-grenade, which exploded as he was in the act of throwing it; and the man who succeeded him, immediately, either through cowardice, or from a worse motive, surrendered his post. Augereau, who was at this time come to inspect the siege and accelerate the operations, thought it a good opportunity to intimidate the governor. He therefore summoned him to surrender, saying, that the garrison should in that case be allowed the honours of war, and marched as prisoners into France; giving them two hours to reply, and warning them that if they refused to submit upon this summons, they must not expect to be treated like soldiers, but should suffer capital punishment, as men taken in rebellion against their lawful king. Estrada replied, that the Spaniards had no other king than Ferdinand VII. The siege was carried on with little vigour till the 20th of February, when the French began to bombard the fort; but the men who defended it showed themselves worthy of the cause in which they were engaged, and of their commander; and here, as at Gerona, the French, with all their skill, and all their numbers, found that the strength of a fortress depends less upon its walls and bulwarks, than upon the virtue of those who defend it.

*Commence-
ment of the
siege.*

The force under Augereau's command was sufficiently large for carrying on the siege of Hostalrich, commencing operations against Lerida, and acting at the same time against O'Donnell,

*First suc-
cess of
O'Donnell.*

CHAP. whose troops the French Marshal despised, as consisting merely
 XXX. of raw levies. He was soon taught to respect them and their
 1810. General; for when he himself went to Barcelona with a con-
 siderable convoy of stores, and 1500 of the garrison were sent
 to occupy O'Donnell's attention, not a fifth part of the number
 effected their retreat into the city. More than 500 of the French
 were slain, and nearly as many taken prisoners. They suffered
 a greater loss from desertion. Buonaparte had pursued the
 wicked policy of forcing into his own service the Austrian pri-
 soners taken in the late war; 800 of these men went over to the
 Spaniards in a body, stipulating only that they might keep their
 arms, and remain together, till they should be distributed among
 the regiments of the line. General Doyle had addressed pro-
 clamations to the soldiers in the French service, not only in the
 French and Spanish languages, but in Italian, Dutch, German,
 and Polish also, setting before them the real cause of a war, the
 nature of which they saw and felt. The Catalans too had learnt
 the good policy of distinguishing between the French and the
 foreigners in the French army, treating the latter, when they
 were taken, with kindness, as men who had been brought against
 them by compulsion. The effect of this system, and of the pro-
 clamations, was such as greatly to alarm the enemy. They lost
 in this manner more than 6000 men, wretched as the service was
 to which the men went over. It was not possible for them to
 take any effectual means for checking this evil, when such con-
 stant opportunities were offered in the desultory warfare which
 they were compelled to carry on.

*Desertion
 from the
 French
 army.*

*Want of
 concert be-
 tween the
 provinces.*

Had the Spanish army been even in a tolerable condition, this cause must have produced the ruin of the French in Catalonia; but the deserters found that they were exchanging a bad service for a worse. The French troops, though by a policy not less ruinous than detestable, left to supply themselves as they

could, were, even at the worst, better provided than the Spaniards in their best state. They had always the benefit of system, regularity, and order; while the Spaniards suffered as much from the confusion which insubordination and the total want of method occasioned, as from neglect on the part of the local authorities and the provincial government. Owing to these combined causes their armies were often in a state of destitution. Unanimous as Spain was in its feeling of indignant abhorrence at the insolent usurpation which Buonaparte had attempted, it was divided against itself whenever provincial interests appeared to clash. Neither Catalonia nor Valencia would at this time make common cause with Arragon, although they were engaged with the same passionate feeling, for the same object, against the same enemy, and although their own safety was immediately involved in the fate of that kingdom. The Arragonese army consisted of about 13,000 men in three divisions, one of which was near Teruel, another near Tortosa, and the third on the line of the Cinca; the men were without pay, without arms, without clothing; the officers on a fourth part of their appointments. Twenty thousand men would eagerly have joined that army, if they could have been armed and fed; the people had given abundant proof of their zeal, and spirit, and devotion, and the army had done its duty: yet Valencia would spare them none of its own ample resources, and the Catalan government even stopped the supplies which were intended for Arragon. The Arragonese felt this the more indignantly, because while Lazan was at their head, his rank and influence ensured some attention to his representations on their behalf; but Lazan, whether or not justly, had been arrested, as being implicated in the intrigues of Montijo and D. Francisco Palafox, and was kept a close prisoner in Peñiscola. The judge who officially inquired into his conduct declared that there was not the slightest proof against

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CHAP. him ; and upon the overthrow of the Central Junta, Saavedra
 XXX. dispatched an order for his liberation ; but the Junta of Va-
 1810. lencia, with that order in their hands, detained him in strict con-
 February. finement.

*Neglect of
 the Valen-
 cian go-
 vernment.*

No province had as yet suffered so little as Valencia ; the people were proud of the spirit and signal success with which they had repelled Marshal Moncey from the walls of their capital ; their country was the most fertile and most populous part of Spain ; men were in abundance, wealth was not wanting, and there were more appearances of activity and preparation than were any where else to be seen. In every town and village militia and guerilla bands were formed ; about 50,000 were thus embodied, the greater part armed with fire-arms ; and besides these there were 11,000 troops of the line ; but with this force nothing was undertaken. Good service might have been rendered on one side by harassing the enemy's communications in La Mancha ; and scenes of more important action were open both in Arragon and Catalonia, . . even on their own borders ; but the will, courage, and means were inefficient, for want of capacity in their leaders. They waited for the enemy upon their own ground, in hope and in confidence, but without foresight or system. General Doyle endeavoured to convince the provincial government that no time should be lost in fortifying the important points of Morella, Oropesa, and Murviedro. He inferred from some of Suchet's movements an intention to establish himself in the latter place, which would have cut off the communication between Catalonia and the rest of Spain, and have given him command of the Huerta de Valencia, and of the whole country to the very gates of Tortosa. But in the confidence and confusion which prevailed alike in the people and in the officers and the rulers, nothing was done ; and so far were they from storing Tarragona, and forming a depot at Peñiscola, as

the importance of the crisis required, that Tortosa itself had not at this time provisions for a week's consumption. They relied upon the defence of their frontier, upon their own numbers and resources, upon fortune and Providence; for themselves, they were ready to meet the danger manfully whenever it should come, . . . but as for any system of defence, to fortune and Providence that seemed to be left.

The Valencians were in this state when the half-armed, half-clothed, half-hungred Arragonese, with whom their abundant means ought to have been shared, were dispersed, and the frontier in consequence was left open. General Caro determined to march upon Teruel, which the French had entered, but the movements of an active enemy soon compelled him to change this determination. One division of Suchet's army advanced from Alcañiz upon Morella; no means had been taken for strengthening that important point, the Valencians therefore fell back from thence, and from San Mateo also, and the enemy, without experiencing any opposition, proceeded by Burriol with all speed toward Murviedro. Meantime Suchet with the other division advanced upon the same point by way of Alventosa; there he encountered a brave resistance from the vanguard of Caro's army, and after a contest, which lasted nearly the whole day, was repulsed. The Spanish commander, expecting a renewal of the attack, requested a reinforcement from Segorbe; he was informed in reply, that General Caro had ordered the troops to fall back upon the capital. This disheartened men who were too prone to interpret an order for retreating as a signal for flight; they dispersed upon the next attack, leaving the artillery upon the ground; Segorbe was entered in pursuit, and Suchet, having sacked that place, effected a junction with the other division of his army at Murviedro.

His corps consisted of about 12,000 men, with thirty field-

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*The force
on the Va-
lencian
frontier
dispersed.*