

CHAP.

XI.

1808.

August.

frustrated by some mistake in the delivery of an order. Ferguson's brigade was, in consequence of this error, brought into the plain to support the central movement; and the attack was made in front, upon the strength of the position, before the enemy apprehended any danger on the flanks or in the rear, and consequently while they were able to apply their whole force and undivided attention where they were strongest.

Roliça was at that time a large and beautiful village, with more appearance of comfort and welfare about it than was usual in Portugueze villages. The place, with its five dependent hamlets, contained about three hundred families, the larger half of the population being in Roliça itself. Most of the houses had an inclosed garden or orchard, and the country is full of olive grounds, vineyards, and gardens, with stone inclosures. A little beyond Roliça is the hamlet of N. Senhora de Misericordia, a place of fewer houses, but of the same description: just without this village the British artillery was well placed, on a rising ground, where there stood some of those strong and well-built windmills which are common in Portugal; below were olive grounds, and an open grove of ilex or cork, under cover of which our troops were enabled to approach and deploy with little loss, though the French kept up a constant fire from the heights. Laborde had planted his eagle on the highest point of Monte S. Anna, near a wooden cross, which marked the spot of some murder or accidental death. The view from those heights is singularly beautiful, presenting just such objects as Gaspar Poussin delighted in painting, and in such combination as he would have placed them; rocks and hills rising in the valley, open groves, churches with their old galilees, and houses with all the picturesque varandas and porticos which bespeak a genial climate; Obidos with its walls and towers upon an eminence in middle distance, and its aqueduct stretching across the country

as far as the eye could follow it; Monte Junto far to the east, and on the west the Atlantic. And till the iniquitous invasion of the country by France, there had been something in the condition of the people here which accorded with the loveliness of the scene wherein they were placed. Such as their lot was, they were contented with it; three and even four generations were found under the same roof: like plants, they grew, and seeded, and decayed, and returned to earth upon the spot where they had sprung up. If this state of things be not favourable to commercial prosperity and the wealth of nations, it is far more conducive to individual virtue and happiness than the stage by which it is succeeded.

Upon this beautiful ground it was that the British troops were first to be tried against the soldiers of Buonaparte in the Peninsula. The strength of the enemy's position fully compensated for their inferiority in numbers. The way by which the assailants had to ascend was up ravines, rather than paths, more practicable for goats than men, so steep, that in many parts a slip of the foot would have been fatal, in some parts overgrown with briars, and in others impeded by fragments of rock. Three of these dry water-courses, which appeared the least difficult, were attempted; that in the centre was the most promising, and this the 9th and 29th regiments attacked. They were protected in their advance by the fire of our artillery. The way would not admit more than three or our men abreast, in no place more than six. Near the top there was a small opening, in the form of a wedge, overgrown at the point with a thick coppice of myrtle, arbutus, arborescent heath, and those other shrubs which in this part of Portugal render the wild country so beautiful. An ambush of riflemen had been posted here, and here Colonel Lake, of the 29th, fell, with many of his men. When they had reached the summit, they were exposed to a fire

CHAP.
XI.

1808.

August.

*Battle of
Roliça.*

Britain which a Frenchman cannot understand.

VOL. I.

CHAP.
 XI.
 1808.
 August.

from the vineyards, while they could not form a front to return it. The grenadier company, by a brave charge upon that part of the enemy who were in the open ground, won for them time to form; and though Laborde, with great promptitude, rallied the French as soon as they gave way, and brought them thrice to the charge, they kept their ground. This severe contention had continued two hours, when Brigadier-General Fane, with the light troops, appeared on the right, and Major-General Hill on the left. Laborde then deemed it necessary to abandon his first line and retire into the hamlet of Azambugeira, which was in the rear. Throughout the action this General had shown that the high military reputation which he enjoyed was well founded; all his movements were judiciously planned, and rapidly and well executed, men and officers giving good proof of skill and courage. The superiority of the British troops was therefore finely shown; for, from the nature of the ground, and from unavoidable circumstances, the force which on our side was actually engaged was by no means equal to that of the enemy. A gallant charge, under Major-General Spencer, drove them from this last position in the hamlet; the advantage could not be followed up for want of cavalry, and also because of the difficulty of bringing up cannon and more troops in time. Laborde therefore, making his last stand upon a height beyond Azambugeira, collected his troops on the plain ground behind, formed them into lines, and then retired toward Torres Vedras, leaving his guns upon the field.

*Abrantes
 occupied
 by the Por-
 tuguese.*

The loss of the British, in killed, wounded, and missing, was nearly 500. The French * acknowledge to have lost nearly 600.

* General Thiebault affirms, that they had only 1900 in the field. An officer who was dying of his wounds informed Sir Arthur Wellesley that their numbers were 6000. General Thiebault asserts also, that in a charge made by General Brenier with two

Laborde was slightly wounded at the beginning of the action. Even during the action he was in hopes that Loison might arrive; but Loison, finding that the English were before him at Leiria, found it necessary to take the line of Torres Novas and Santarem, and so for Torres Vedras. The Portugueze had anxiously watched his movements, and no sooner was it ascertained that he had left Thomar, than they prepared to cut off the small garrison which he had left in Abrantes. Freire had ordered Bacellar to get possession of that city, with the aid of some Spanish troops under the Marques de Valadares, who had arrived at Castello Branco. Captain Manoel de Castro Corréa de Lacerda had been sent forward to obtain certain intelligence of the enemy; and he finding circumstances favourable, and adventurers enough to join him, determined, with three priests militant, by name Captain-Father P. Manoel Domingos Crespo, Lieutenant-Father Lourenço Pires, and Ensign-Father José Nicolao Beja, to make the attempt without waiting for the Spaniards. They collected at Villa de Rei some three hundred men, armed with hunting-spears, and a few with firelocks; a considerable number of the *Ordenanças* joined them during the night on the heights of Abrançalha, which was the place appointed for their meeting; and early on the morning of that day on which the battle of Roliça was fought, they entered Abrantes, leaving Ensign-Father Beja with a party of spearmen in ambush

CHAP.
XI.
1808.
August.

companies in front of Azambugeira, the 29th regiment having lost its colonel, and many of its officers and men, surrendered *tout entier*: but that *par-malheur* the firing did not cease, and the wreck of the regiment saved itself by a spontaneous movement, leaving a major, eight officers, and fifty men, in the hands of the French. There is an official test by which the accuracy of this statement may be tried; and thereby it appears, that only four officers were missing in this action, and that there was no major among them. The loss of the English he states at more than 2000. The accuracy of our official lists of the killed and wounded is among those things relating to Great Britain which a Frenchman cannot understand.

CHAP.

XI.

1808.

August.

to cut off the enemy if they should attempt to fly. The French, upon the first appearance of danger, retired into the old castle, and fired from the windows, . . . for there was no artillery there. Upon this Father Crespo stationed some sharpshooters upon the roof of S. Vicente's church, which was opposite. The enemy, then knowing how impossible it was to hold out in their unprovided state, resolved to sally, and make for the river side, where they had four vessels laden with stores, about to fall down the stream for Lisbon; but before they could reach the shore, they were surrounded by such numbers, and lost so many men, that they laid down their arms. They who were on board the vessels, seeing their danger, leaped into the river; some perished in attempting to cross it, they who reached the opposite shore were pursued and hunted down like wild beasts; fifty-two were killed that day, and 117 taken prisoners: the few who escaped for the time had no place of safety near, and fell into the hands of the peasantry. The Corregedor-Mor at this time met with a miserable fate. Because of the office which he unfortunately held, the French had made him the instrument of their exactions: the same constitutional timidity which prevented him from resigning his post rather than obey their tyrannical orders, induced him now to fly, in the unworthy hope of securing himself under their protection. He therefore forded the river, and hid himself in a vineyard; there a peasant discovered him, to whom he immediately offered 200 milreis if he would conduct him to the French army; the villain took the money, led him to a solitary place, stabbed him in five places, then robbed him, and left him to expire. On the third day he was found by some women, still alive, and was carried to Abrantes; no care availed to save his life, and he died rather of inanition and loss of blood, than from the nature of his wounds; but he was able to relate what had passed, so that the murderer was apprehended and brought to justice.

Among the French effects which were taken at Abrantes were about 200 hides and 1000 bags of cotton, which the state of the intermediate country had prevented them from sending into France: they had carried on a gainful trade while the communication was open. But now they began to feel that the amount of their gains and of their plunder was in danger. In spite of all prohibitions and precautions, some intelligence still found its way to Lisbon. The British squadron and the transports had been seen from the heights, and though the French abated nothing of their high tone, the inhabitants were now well assured that their deliverance was at hand. As the only course which offered any hope of extricating himself, Junot resolved to collect the whole of his disposable force, and give the English battle before their reinforcements arrived, and before they should be ready to act on the offensive. The only places in which he left garrisons were Elvas, Almeida, and Peniche. Setubal had hitherto been occupied by a force under General Graindorge, who had succeeded Kellermann in the command there. His situation had not been tranquil, while Mestre had taken possession of Alcacere do Sal, and an English frigate was off the port. But Mestre was recalled in all haste to Beja, when that city, after the fate of Evora, apprehended a second visitation with fire and sword. The men whom he commanded gave on this occasion proof of that patient and uncomplaining spirit with which the Spaniards and Portugueze endure privations. They started fasting and without provisions, and after a long day's march reached the little town of Odivella, where no rations had been provided for them. Mestre and his adjutant then went from door to door, to beg bread, and with the bread which was thus obtained they were contented and cheerful. Aware of the alarm which Loison's operations had excited, Graindorge resolved to clear the neighbourhood, and the Juntas

CHAP.
IX.

1808.

August.

*Movements
in Alem-
Tejo and
Algarve.*

CHAP. of Alcacere, Santiago de Cacem, and Grandola, fled at his ap-
 XI. proach. But when Beja was relieved from danger by Loison's
 1808. movements to the north, Mestre, who had been dispatched

August.

*Alcacere do
 Sal and Se-
 tubal aban-
 doned by the
 French.*

toward Evora, was ordered to return upon Alcacere, and the same direction was taken by one body of men from Algarve, and by another under Lopes from Beja. Graindorge had now received orders to retire with his troops to Almada; Alcacere therefore was abandoned when the Portugueze arrived there, and Setubal also. Setubal had been singularly fortunate during a time of general rapacity. Perfect order had been maintained there while Solano and the Spaniards possessed it; and when Graindorge succeeded Kellermann, a Portugueze woman, who lived with him as his mistress, had influence enough to prevent him from delivering up that beautiful town to pillage, which his men required, and which, it is said, they had been promised. The Portugueze writers ought not to have passed over in silence the name of one who averted so much evil, and who, it may well be believed, was more to be pitied than condemned for her frailty.

*Neves, iv.
 173—179.
 Observador
 Portuguez,
 291.*

*Measures at
 Lisbon.*

About 300 men were left at Palmella. Graindorge had two regiments under his command at Almada and other places on the left bank of the Tagus. The forts at the Bugio, Trafaria, and St. Julien, were occupied by the French, and they had troops also at Cascaes and Ericeyra. Sufficient force was to be left in and near Lisbon, to keep down the inhabitants, by the presumed aid of the Russian squadron, whose presence in the river was of great importance to Junot at this time. The enemy had recourse also to their usual policy of circulating fabricated intelligence. They affirmed, that 20,000 French had arrived at Braganza, and they produced Badajoz Gazettes which must have been forged for the purpose, relating the defeat and consternation of the Spaniards, and the rejoicings with which Joseph had been received on his triumphant entrance into Madrid. Few

persons were deceived by these artifices. On the 15th the Emperor Napoleon's birthday was celebrated; the guns from the ships and fortresses were fired, Junot gave a grand entertainment to his officers, and appeared afterwards at the Opera in state; but meantime every thing was made ready for his departure. The night was passed in giving orders, and at day-break the reserve was in motion, with the staff, the military chest, containing a million francs, and the most precious and portable part of their plunder. The Comte de Bourmont, and some other French emigrant officers who had found an asylum in Lisbon during the horrors of the Revolution, on this occasion joined the French army, the Count at his own solicitation being placed upon the staff, to fight against a government by whose bounty they had been supported, and a people who had hospitably received them in their distress: and for this moral treason they have been extolled in their own country, with that perversion of principle and utter insensibility to honour, which equally characterise the schools of the Revolution, and of Buonaparte.

It had been proposed to form a national guard at Lisbon at this time, composed of all who had any property to protect; but this was rejected, less as being impracticable than as dangerous. The Lisbonians had too much reason to execrate their oppressors. Their sufferings, though not of that kind which give a splendour to history, and consecrate the memory of the sufferers, had been more pitiable, for they had been long continued and obscure. The French themselves confessed, that they knew not how the people of Lisbon subsisted during the three months preceding the harvest; for it was known that the consumption of food in that great city was only one-third of what it used to be, and the numbers who had been expelled, who had emigrated with the court, or had found means of following it, were not greater than

CHAP.
XI.

1808.

August.

*Observador
Portuguez,
406.
Thiebault,
187-8.*

*Proclama-
tion to the
people of
Lisbon.*

*Thiebault,
95.*

CHAP.

XI.

1808.

August.

that of the foreign troops who had been introduced. Impossible as it was to conciliate a people upon whom they had inflicted such deep and irreparable injuries, the French deemed it politic at this time to take the most conciliatory measures in their power; if the popular feeling could be repressed or allayed only for a few days, by that time they should either have obtained a victory over the English, or have placed themselves by treaty under the safeguard of British honour. With these views Junot left a decree, that the heads of the tribunals, and the chief persons among the nobility and clergy, should be invited to assist at the council of government during his absence. He left also a proclamation to the inhabitants of Lisbon, saying, that he was departing from them for three or four days, to give battle to the English, and whatever might be the event, he should return. "I leave," said he, "to govern Lisbon, a general who, by the mildness and firmness of his character, has obtained the friendship of the Portugueze at Cascaes and Oeyras; General Travot will, by these same virtues, obtain that of the inhabitants of Lisbon. Hitherto you have been tranquil; it is your interest to continue so! do not stain yourselves with a horrible crime at the moment when, without any danger of your own, the lot of arms is about to determine by what power you are to be governed. Reflect for an instant upon the interests of the three nations who are contending for the possession of Lisbon. What the French desire is the glory and the prosperity of the city and of the kingdom, for this is the interest and the policy of France. Spain wishes to invade Portugal and reduce it to a province, that she may again make herself mistress of the Peninsula. And England would domineer over you for the purpose of destroying your port and your navy, and impeding the progress of industry among you. The English regard the magnificence of your port with envy; they will not suffer it to exist so near them, and