

beyond our right, and attacked that flank with very superior numbers and with great impetuosity. The greater part of the Spaniards hastily formed front to the right to meet the attack; and, after a short and gallant resistance, were overpowered and driven from their ground. The enemy now commanded and raked our whole position: the fire of his artillery was heavy, but fortunately for us, not very well directed. It became now imperiously necessary to retake, at any price, the important post, unfortunately, not blameably, lost by the Spaniards. The three brigades of the division Stewart marched on it in double quick time, led by that General. The first, or right brigade, commanded by Colonel Colborne, was precipitated into action under circumstances the most unfavourable: it deployed by corps as it arrived near the enemy, fired, and was in the act of gallantly charging with the bayonet on the heavy column of their infantry, when a body of Polish lancers, having galloped round upon its rear in this most unfortunate moment (for a charge is often a movement of exult-

ing confusion), overthrew it with a great and cruel slaughter. The 31st regiment, not having deployed, escaped this misfortune; and the third brigade, under General Houghton, and second, under Colonel Abercromby, successively arriving re-established the battle, and, with the assistance of the fusileer brigade under Sir William Myers, the fortunes of this bloody day were retrieved, and the French driven in every direction from the field. I should not omit to mention, that, during the whole of the day, there was very heavy skirmishing near the village, which was occupied and held, throughout the contest, by the German light infantry, under the orders of Major-General Alten. General Lumley, who commanded the allied cavalry, displayed great ability, and foiled every attempt of the enemy's horse to turn our right \*, who were in that arm very superior, and who directed their efforts re-

\* This may sound inconsistent; but it will be understood that the order of battle was changed from its commencement; and again, the Polish horse were but a small body, detached for a particular object.

peatedly to that object. The Portuguese troops, with the exception of one brigade, were very little engaged in this affair, and numbers of the Spanish troops never came into action. The brunt of the battle fell on the British, who lost 4,103 killed and wounded, including in this number 120 of the German legion. The Portuguese lost about 400; the Spaniards 1,800: making a total of about 6,300. The French lost, at the lowest calculation, 9,000. Soult had about 24,000; and we were, perhaps, in point of numbers, a little superior to him altogether, but had only 7,000 English. The two British brigades, who more particularly distinguished themselves on this glorious day, were the fusileer brigade, commanded and led by Sir William Myers, and the third brigade of the second division, headed by General Houghton. The first of these, composed of two battalions of the 7th regiment and one of the 23d, lost upwards of 1,000 men; and the other, composed of the 29th, first 48th, and 57th regiments, lost 1,050 men killed and wounded, having entered the field about

1,400 strong. This last brigade went into action led by a major-general, and with its due proportion of field-officers and captains. I saw it at three in the afternoon : — a captain commanded the brigade ; the 57th and 48th regiments were commanded by lieutenants ; and the junior captain of the 29th regiment was the senior effective officer of his corps. Not one of these six regiments lost a man by the sabre or the lance ; they were never driven, never thrown into confusion ; they fought in line, sustaining and replying to a heavy fire, and often charging ; and when the enemy at length fled, the standards of these heroic battalions flew in proud, though mournful triumph, in the centre of their weakened but victorious lines. I have read the annals of modern warfare with some attention, and I know of little which can compare with, nothing which has surpassed, the enthusiastic and unyielding bravery, displayed by these corps on the field of Albuera. Yet this dear-bought, and, let me add, not useless victory, won by *unaided* courage, graced with no trophies, and followed by no pro-

portionate result, has almost sunk into oblivion, or is remembered only, and spoken of, as a day of doubtful success, if not of positive disaster. It was certainly not useless, because the object of Marshal Soult, which was the relief of Badajos, and the expulsion of our troops from Spanish Estremadura, was wholly defeated; but it had yet a higher, a nobler, a more *undying* use, it added one to the many bright examples of British heroism; it gave a terrible and long-remembered lesson to the haughty legions of France; and, when Soult rode by the side of his Imperial master on the field of Waterloo, as the cheering of the English soldiery struck upon his ear, Albuera was not forgotten, and he could have whispered him, that they were men, who could only be defeated, by being utterly destroyed. So much for the battle, generally considered. I would now relate what fell under my own observation, and describe, if it be possible, my feelings on that day. We stood to our arms an hour before break of day: it was a brilliant sight, at sunrise, to see the whole of the French cavalry moving on the plain;

but in a short time they retired into the wood, leaving their piquets as before. The battalion being dismissed, I breakfasted, and immediately afterwards set out to walk towards the Spanish troops, little dreaming, that day, of a general action. But the sound of a few shots caused me to return ; and I found our line getting hastily under arms, and saw the enemy in motion. The prelude of skirmishing lasted about an hour and a half, and our division lost a few men by random gun-shot ; all this time we were standing at ease, and part of it exposed to a heavy, chilling, and comfortless rain. Sounds, however, which breathed all the fierceness of battle, soon reached us ; the continued rolling of musketry, accompanied by loud and repeated discharges of cannon on our extreme right, told us, convincingly, that the real attack was in that quarter. The brigades of our division were successively called to support it. We formed in open column of companies at half-distance, and moved in rapid double quick to the scene of action. I remember well, as we moved down in column, shot and shell flew over

and through it in quick succession ; we sustained little injury from either, but a captain of the twenty-ninth had been dreadfully lacerated by a ball, and lay directly in our path. We passed close to him, and he knew us all ; and the heart-rending tone in which he called to us for water, or to kill him, I shall never forget. He lay alone, and we were in motion, and could give him no succour ; for on this trying day, such of the wounded as could not walk, lay unattended where they fell :—all was hurry and struggle ; every arm was wanted in the field. When we arrived near the discomfited and retiring Spaniards, and formed our line to advance through them towards the enemy, a very noble-looking young Spanish officer rode up to me, and begged me, with a sort of proud and brave anxiety, to explain to the English, that his countrymen were ordered to retire, but were not flying. Just as our line had entirely cleared the Spaniards, the smoky shroud of battle was, by the slackening of the fire, for one minute blown aside, and gave to our view the French grenadier caps, their arms, and

the whole aspect of their frowning masses. It was a momentary, but a grand sight; a heavy atmosphere of smoke again enveloped us, and few objects could be discerned at all, none distinctly. The coolest and bravest soldier, if he be in the heat of it, can make no calculation of time during an engagement. Interested and animated, he marks not the flight of the hours, but he feels that

— “Come what come may,  
Time and the hour run through the roughest day.”

This murderous contest of musketry lasted long. We were the whole time progressively advancing upon and shaking the enemy. At the distance of about twenty yards from them, we received orders to charge; we had ceased firing, cheered, and had our bayonets in the charging position, when a body of the enemy's horse was discovered under the shoulder of a rising ground, ready to take advantage of our impetuosity. Already, however, had the French infantry, alarmed by our preparatory cheers, which always indicate the charge,



broken and fled, abandoning some guns and howitzers about sixty yards from us. The presence of their cavalry not permitting us to pursue, we halted and recommenced firing on them. The slaughter was now, for a few minutes, dreadful; every shot told; their officers in vain attempted to rally them; they would make no effort. Some of their artillery, indeed, took up a distant position, which much annoyed our line; but we did not move, until we had expended every round of our ammunition, and then retired, in the most perfect order, to a spot sheltered from their guns, and lay down in line, ready to repulse any fresh attack with the bayonet. To describe my feelings throughout this wild scene with fidelity, would be impossible: at intervals, a shriek or groan told that men were falling around me; but it was not always that the tumult of the contest suffered me to catch these sounds. A constant feeling to the centre of the line, and the gradual diminution of our front, more truly bespoke the havock of death. As we moved, though slowly, yet ever a little in advance, our own killed and

wounded lay behind us; but we arrived among those of the enemy, and those of the Spaniards who had fallen in the first onset: we trod among the dead and dying, all reckless of them. But how shall I picture the *British soldier* going into action? He is neither heated by brandy, stimulated by the hope of plunder, or inflamed by the deadly feelings of revenge; he does not even indulge in expressions of animosity against his foes; he moves forward, confident of victory, never dreams of the possibility of defeat, and braves death with all the accompanying horrors of laceration and torture, with the most cheerful intrepidity. Enough of joy and triumph. The roar of the battle is hushed; the hurry of action is over; let us walk over the corpse-encumbered field. Look around, — behold thousands of slain, thousands of wounded, writhing with anguish, and groaning with agony and despair. Move a little this way, here lie four officers of the French hundredth, all corpses. Why, that boy cannot have numbered eighteen years! How beautiful, how serene a countenance! Perhaps,

on the banks of the murmuring and peaceful Loire, some mother thinks anxiously of this her darling child. Here fought the third brigade ; here the fusileers : how thick these heroes lie ! Most of the bodies are already stripped ; rank is no longer distinguished. Yes : this must have been an officer ; look at the delicate whiteness of his hands, and observe on his finger the mark of his ring. What manly beauty ! what a smile still plays upon his lip ! He fell, perhaps, beneath his colours ; died easily ; he is to be envied. Here charged the Polish lancers ; not long ago, the trampling of horses, the shout, the cry, the prayer, the death-stroke, all mingled their wild sounds on this spot ; it is now, but for a few fitful and stifled groans, as silent as the grave. What is this ? A battered trumpet ; the breath which filled, this morning, its haughty tone, has fled, perhaps, for ever. And here again, a broken lance. Is this the muscular arm that wielded it ? 'Twas vigorous, and slew, perhaps, a victim on this field ; it is now unnerved by death. Look at the contraction of this body, and the anguish of these features ;

eight times has some lance pierced this frame. Here again lie headless trunks, and bodies torn and struck down by cannon shot ; such death is sudden, horrid, but 'tis merciful. Who are these that catch every moment at our coats, and cling to our feet, in such a humble attitude? The wounded soldiers of the enemy, who are imploring British protection from the exasperated and revengeful Spaniards. What a proud compliment to our country !

Some readers will call this scene romantic, others disgusting : no matter ; it is faithful ; and it would be well for kings, politicians, and generals, if, while they talk of victories with exultation, and of defeats with philosophical indifference, they would allow their fancies to wander to the theatre of war, and the field of carnage. Incredible as it may appear, Marshal Beresford evidently thought a renewal of their attack, on the 17th, very possible ; for he had us under arms two hours before break of day, and made arrangements, which certainly indicated any thing rather than intention to advance. It is to be presumed, that could

the marshal have guessed the dreadful slaughter he had made in the ranks of the enemy, and their consequent disorganization and discontent, he would have entered the wood, to which they retired on the evening of the sixteenth, and thus have achieved a more complete triumph than any up to that period gained in the Peninsula. Report said that Blake very strongly urged this measure. Our army was indubitably equal to an affair on the evening of the sixteenth: we had been reinforced by a British brigade under the orders of Colonel Kemmis, who arrived after the battle; the casualties of our German light battalions had been trifling; our Portuguese division was quite fresh, as were two Spanish divisions; and our cavalry, an arm most ably commanded by General Lumley, had sustained little or no loss; and all the troops were much animated by what they had witnessed. Had Wellington commanded on this day, he would have altogether destroyed the army of Soult, and captured the whole of his *matériel*; and the men, who fought in the ranks of the two distin-

guished brigades I had occasion to particularise, in my general sketch of the action, would not now, perhaps, have had the mortification of walking, unnoticed and undecorated, by the side of the more fortunate heroes of Waterloo. The whole of the seventeenth we never ventured across the stream, but stood looking at the enemy's picquets, and videttes, posted impudently on the little plain between us and their bivouack. On the eighteenth they retired, destroying the contents of many of their tumbrils and ammunition cars, to facilitate the conveyance of their wounded; and they were followed, at a respectful distance, by our cavalry and light infantry. It was not until the nineteenth, that is, three days after the battle, that we occupied the wood to which the enemy, after their bloody defeat, had been driven in discomfiture and confusion.

Our wounded were removed, with as much expedition as possible, to Valverde; but the field hospitals, for two or three days after the engagement, presented scenes, at the recollection of which humanity quite

shudders. I never can forget seeing, on the twentieth, the small chapel at Albuera filled with French wounded, very great numbers of whom had suffered amputation, and who lay on the hard stones, without even straw, in a dirty, comfortless state; all which was unavoidably the case, for we had nothing to give them on the spot, and, owing to the want of conveyances, they were forced to wait till our own people had been carried to the rear.

This same day I again went down to that part of the field, which was covered with the slain; they lay ghastly and unburied: here and there, indeed, you might remark a loose-made grave, where some officers or soldiers had been to perform an act of private friendship. I was much struck with one affecting, though simple proof of the attachment of our peninsular allies: the hands of vast numbers of the British corpses had been clasped together in the attitude of prayer, and placed by the Spaniards in the manner they superstitiously imagine it important to lay out their dead.

On the 22d we marched upon Solano,

and the 23d resumed our old quarters at Almendralejo. We found here three hundred French soldiers, all wounded, who had been left in a convent, and recommended to our protection. Several hundred prisoners were made, at the different cantonments of the army, under similar circumstances; but General Gazan carried four thousand wounded to Seville in safety. The Hon. William Stewart, our division general, paid great attention to such of the enemy as were left in Almendralejo; he almost daily visited their hospitals, and satisfied himself, by personal inquiries, whether they were properly taken care of. I have more than once been present at these visits, and the gratitude of these poor fellows was strongly pictured on their countenances, and in every thing they said. In speaking of their own commanders, they called Soult blood-thirsty and avaricious, saying that he cared not how he sacrificed his men, and that he was wholly bent on the pursuit of dignities and wealth.

On the 25th of May, General Lumley had a brilliant affair with the enemy's ca-



valry, near Usagre; and conducting it, as he did every thing, both with skill and intrepidity, he overthrew and routed them, though very superior in number, sabring several on the spot, and taking nearly one hundred prisoners. The detachment captured was composed entirely of French heavy dragoons, of the 4th, 20th, and 26th regiments: many of them were severely cut over the head and face; but they were, with few exceptions, fine soldier-like looking men, who had apparently seen a great deal of service; and they all wore that warlike helmet, which I have before mentioned, and which we have since adopted.

During the whole time that we remained stationary at Almendralejo, the siege of Badajos was carried on, under the direction of Wellington in person, by two divisions of the army of the north, which had come from Beira to strengthen us in this quarter. Two gallant assaults were made on the fort of San Christoval, the possession of which would have secured the reduction of the place. Our troops displayed great courage,

but were repulsed.\* On the 10th of June the siege was raised ; for it was known that Marshal Marmont was breaking up from the environs of Ciudad Rodrigo, and about to form a junction with Soult, for the relief of Badajos. On the 11th we retired from Almendralejo, on the 14th and 15th we bivouacked near Albuera, and on the 17th we forded the Guadiana, about three leagues to the south of Badajos, and marched upon Elvas. On the line of march this day, I saw a body of the Estremaduran legion ; a corps raised, clothed, and commanded by a General Downie, an Englishman, who had formerly been a commissary in our service. Any thing so whimsical or ridiculous as the dress of this corps, I never beheld : it was meant to be an imitation of the ancient costume of Spain. The turned-up hat, slashed doublet, and short mantle, might have figured very well in the play of Pizarro, or at an exhibition of Astley's ; but in the rude and ready bivouack, they ap-

---

\* Their repulse was caused by obstacles which no valour could overcome.

peared absurd and ill-chosen. In the midst of our misery and discomfort, the same evening, we could not avoid laughing at the recollection of these poor devils, who, in their fantastic dresses, must have been exposed to the same violent storm which extinguished our fires, soaked our ground, and, forcing its way through our tents, drenched us to the skin.

On the 18th we were moved into Elvas, to get a drying and a night's rest under cover. Many of our wounded officers and men were in hospital, or billets in this town, and the day was of course quite a holiday of the heart to us all. It was a strange thing to see, in the crowded wards of the hospitals, English and French soldiers lying helplessly side by side, or here and there performing little kind offices for each other, with a willing and a cheerful air. Their wants and thoughts, I observed, they communicated to each other in phrases of Spanish, which language many of the French privates spoke fluently, and our men understood well enough for all common purposes.

On the 19th we marched to the banks of