

gable in stimulating the spirit of the people into overt acts of insurrection. The whole extent of its coast was open to the Mediterranean, and the province was liable at any moment to become the theatre of action for a British army. By the Navy of Britain the insurgents could easily be supplied with arms and warlike stores; and the patriotic cause in Catalonia numbered among its assertors a very considerable body of disciplined and efficient troops.

CHAP. VII.
1808.

May.

The general population, too, by the constitution of the province were inured to arms. At the signal of the alarm-bell or *Somaten*, every person capable of bearing arms was compelled to appear at certain indicated points of each district, ready to perform such service as the authorities of the province might require at their hands. From this circumstance it was, that the insurgent Catalans were distinguished by the name of *Somatenes*, a body, in point of military requisites, more than ordinarily formidable to the invaders.

Towards the end of May, Duhesme received orders to despatch two bodies of his army to cooperate with those in Valencia and Aragon. General Chabran, with a force somewhat ex-

CHAP. VII. ceeding four thousand men, was accordingly
 1808. ordered to gain possession of Tarragona, and, se-
 June. curing its occupation by a sufficient garrison, to
 proceed by way of Tortosa, and, having incor-
 porated the Swiss regiment of Wimpfen with his
 division, to unite with Moncey in his operations
 against Valencia. General Schwartz, with a force
 nearly equal in amount to that of Chabran, was
 despatched against Manresa, with orders to in-
 flict punishment on the promoters of sedition in
 that city, and to levy on it a heavy contribution.
 He was then to proceed to Lerida, and, having
 gained possession of the city, to garrison the
 castle with five hundred men; and subsequently
 to join Lefebvre's army in the siege of Zara-
 goza.

Jun. 3. On the third and fourth of June, these two
 divisions set forward from Barcelona. The
 object of Schwartz's movement did not remain
 secret. It was communicated to the people
 of Manresa, by intelligence from Barcelona,
 and they were prepared for his approach.
 The Somaten rung forth the alarm, and the
 peasantry of the country assembled in arms
 at the sound. The strong position of Bruch
 was selected as the scene of resistance, and

the force congregated on that point, were supplied with ammunition from the powder-mills at San Feliche. It was a circumstance favourable to the Somatenes, that the French General was induced by the inclemency of the weather to halt for a day at Martorel, where he arrived on the fifth. When Schwartz, on the day following, advanced to attack the position, he found, to his cost, that the interval thus afforded had not been misapplied. On his approach to Bruch, a heavy fire was opened on his column from the rocks and brushwood which surrounded the road, and his men fell back in confusion. But order was soon restored; and the Catalans, driven from their station, made a hasty retreat to Manresa and Igualada.

In such circumstances it was that Schwartz, unfortunately for his military fame, alarmed at the unexpected resistance he had encountered, instead of pushing forward to Manresa, halted his division. Encouraged by this circumstance the discomfited Somatenes rallied in their turn, and became the assailants. Schwartz, still more alarmed at this fresh instance of courage, gave orders for retreat. During this operation, the gallant Somatenes hung upon the flanks and

CHAP. VII.

1808.

June.

Jun. 5.

Jun. 6.

CHAP. VII. rear of the French army, and the difficulties of
1808. the latter becoming hourly more pressing, the
June. ranks fell into disorder; and when they reached Martorel, it was in such confusion, and after sustaining such loss, that the continuance of offensive operations was impossible. On the following day the troops re-entered Barcelona.

Throughout the whole province the tidings of this victory produced the most powerful effect. Insurrection broke out on all hands. It was no longer with fearful hearts that the inhabitants took arms: they flew to the standard of their country in the full hope and confidence of victory. Duhesme was soon aware of the peril which surrounded him, and despatched orders to Chabran instantly to return with his division.

Jun. 8. On the eighth that general reached Tarragona, without having encountered opposition; but his retreat was impeded by the Somatenes, who already occupied the towns of Vendrell, Arbos, and Villa Franca. On arriving at Vendrell, a small body of the insurgents, which still occupied the place, were immediately attacked and driven back without difficulty. At Arbos the chief stand was made; and Chabran, on his approach to that town, found

the Somatenes drawn up in position. The coun-
try was open and adapted for the operations
of cavalry; and the superiority of the French
in that arm, gave them an overwhelming advan-
tage. In these circumstances the Catalan army
was defeated, and the town of Arbos was pil-
laged and set on fire.

CHAP. VII.
1808.

June.

Duhesme, in the meanwhile, had judged it
prudent to despatch a reinforcement to Chabran,
which succeeded, on the eleventh, in effecting a
junction with the corps of that officer at San
Feliche. With this addition to his force, Chabran
marched against Manresa, in order to revenge
the disgrace which the gallant Somatenes, in
that neighbourhood, had already inflicted on the
French arms. Unluckily for the success of this
project, the pass of Bruch again intervened.
Since the former engagement every effort had
been made by the Catalan authorities to add, by
artificial means, to the natural strength of the
position. Chabran attacked it, and was driven
back with some loss; and, dispirited by this
circumstance, he retreated to Barcelona, amid
the scoffs of the triumphant peasants, who con-
tinued to harass his march to the very gates of
the city.

Jun. 11.

In every part of the province there was now

CHAP. VII. open and avowed hostility to the French authority. Almost every town possessed its Junta of government; and the flame of resistance, which had hitherto smouldered in the bosoms of the people, now burst forth in full volume and intensity. The danger of Duhesme became hourly more imminent. The frontier fortress of Figueras had already been attacked by the insurgents, and the garrison were driven from the town into the citadel, and subjected to a rigorous blockade. Thus was Duhesme's communication with France interrupted; and he determined, without delay, to proceed to the relief of that important fortress. With this view it was necessary that he should gain possession of Gerona; and he accordingly set out from Barcelona with the brigades of Generals Lecchi and Schwartz, in order to reduce that city. With the view of avoiding Hostalrich, a small fort held by the insurgents, Duhesme advanced by the road leading along the coast, and employed a French privateer, then at anchor in Barcelona, to attend his march.

For this movement the Somatenes were not unprepared. A considerable body had taken post on the heights near Mongat, a small fort, which had been erected on the coast to afford

1808.

June.

protection from the inroads of the Barbary Cor- CHAP. VII.
sairs. In attempting to defend the position thus
taken, the Catalans were unsuccessful. The
French drove them from the castle, and cap-
tured their guns; and another body, which
occupied the neighbouring heights of Moncada,
were likewise put to flight.

1808.
June.
Jun. 16.

The town of Mataro fell next. The resistance
of the people was neither strong nor pertina-
cious, yet the place was given up to plunder,
and the foulest atrocities were committed by the
French troops.

Cabanes.

On the morning of the twentieth, Duhesme
appeared before Gerona. The suburban villages
of Salt and St. Eugenia were occupied and given
up to plunder, and preparations were immediately
made for the assault of the city. Gerona stands
at the confluence of the Ter and the Ona; by the
latter of which rivers the city is divided. On
the east is a ridge of rocky hills; on the lower
acclivity of which, the town is chiefly built, while
a smaller portion, called the Mercadal, extends
into the plain. On a mountain to the north-east
stands the castle of Mont Jouy,* a place regu-

Jun. 20.

* There are in Catalonia two fortresses of that name.

CHAP. VII. larly fortified, and though small, of considerable strength. By three other forts connected by a ditch and rampart, the ridge to the eastward is completely commanded. All of these forts are within cannon shot of the city, and are separated from Mont Jouy by a rivulet and narrow valley. The more immediate defences of Gerona consist of an old wall with towers, but without ditch or platform, and two bastions, situated at the points where the Ona enters, and where it departs from the city. The Mercadal is fortified by a turreted wall with five regular bastions, but without half-moons or covered way.

In the city every preparation was made for a vigorous defence. The garrison consisted of three hundred men of the regiment of Ultonia, and a small party of artillery, which had escaped from Barcelona on its occupation by Duhesme. But the whole population of the city were in arms, and ready to bear part in the approaching contest.

During the day, two batteries, which had been established by the French, opened fire on the city, but with little effect; and, as night closed, the assaulting column advanced, in a state of great disorder, against the bastion of Santa Clara.

Laffaille.

The attack was feebly supported. Some of the assailants succeeded in surmounting the wall, but these were charged instantly by the regiment of Ultonia, and hurled back into the ditch.

CHAP. VII.
1808.
June.

Another attempt was made on the gate del Carmen. This too was repulsed with great slaughter; and Duhesme, discouraged by these reverses, made no further attempt to gain possession of the city. The day following was spent in fruitless negotiation; and, foiled alike in artifice and arms, Duhesme judged it prudent to return to Barcelona.

Jun. 21.

The leading Junta of Catalonia was that of Lerida. The authority of that body was generally acknowledged throughout the province; and its endeavours were directed to give effect and organization to the desultory resistance of the people. In pursuance of this object, a communication was kept up with Seville, Gibraltar, and the Balearic Islands, with Aragon and Valencia; and measures were adopted to collect and discipline a body of regular troops, or, in the language of the country, *Miquelets*, which might meet the enemy in the field with some prospect of success. Eighty *tercios*, or regiments of one thousand men each, were directed to be raised,

CHAP. VII. forty of which were to act as regulars, the remainder as a reserve.

1808.

June.

In measures of such vigour and decision, there was of course much to excite the alarm of the French Government for the stability of their footing in Catalonia. General Reille was accordingly sent forward from Perpignan to the relief of Figueras. His force amounted to about nine thousand men; and having accomplished the primary object of the expedition, he was directed to continue his operations against Rosas and

Jul. 5.

Gerona. On the fifth of July, Reille appeared in the neighbourhood of Figueras, and with difficulty effected the relief of the fortress. On the eleventh, he proceeded against Rosas, a small but fortified town on the coast, and on his route encountered no enemy. The gates of Rosas, however, were closed against his entrance; and on summoning the place to surrender, the messenger was made prisoner, and a shower of bullets from the walls conveyed the answer of the garrison. Reille had no time for a siege. Don Juan Claros had raised the country in his rear, and an immediate retreat became necessary to the safety of his army. This was not effected without loss. The insurgents harassed his march;

and his loss, before reaching Figueras, exceeded two hundred men. CHAP. VII.

1808.
July.

In the meanwhile, the insurgents had again occupied the strong country on the right of the Llobregat, from San Boy to Martorel. In order to dislodge them, a force, under General Lecchi, was despatched from Barcelona, which, on the thirtieth, appeared before Molinos del Rey. While the attention of the Somatenes was thus directed to the movements of Lecchi, the brigades of Bessieres and Goulas crossed the river at San Boy; and, taking them by surprise, turned the line of their position. The French thus successful, continued the pursuit to Martorel, plundering and burning the villages through which they passed.

Jun. 30.

Nearly at the same time, Chabran, having recruited his division by a halt at Mataro, set out from that town to collect provisions in the neighbouring country. Near Granollers he encountered a body of Somatenes, commanded by Don Francisco de Milans, and after an engagement, at most of doubtful success, Chabran fell back to Mataro, harassed on his retreat by the insurgent force.

Jul. 5.

Duhesme, still bent on the reduction of Gero-

- CHAP. VII. na, proceeded to that city by the road along the coast, and encountered new difficulties every mile of his progress. The Catalans had obstructed the road by every possible impediment ; and while his left flank was exposed to annoyance from the insurgents in that quarter, his right was cannonaded by Lord Cochrane in the *Impe-rieuse* frigate, and by several Spanish feluccas. After passing Mataro, General Goulas, with three battalions, was detached to attack the fort of Hostalrich, with the view of protecting the flank of the army from the continued hostilities of the Somatenes. The attack on Hostalrich failed. Goulas twice attempted an escalade, and was repulsed with loss ; and desisting from further efforts, again joined the army of Duhesme before the walls of Gerona.
1808.
July.
- Jul. 21. The city was invested on the twenty-second ; and, on the day following, the army was reinforced by the division of General Reille. By Duhesme, the capture of Gerona was regarded as certain. A battering train had been brought from Barcelona ; and he is said to have declared, that, on the third day of the siege, the city should be taken—on the fourth, it should be destroyed. There is a homely proverb, by the

recollection of which, Duhesme would have done well to temper his vaticinations. CHAP. VII.

All measures, compatible with the strength of the besieging army, were immediately adopted to cut off external communication with the city. The corps of General Reille was posted at Puerta Mayor; and the line of investment extended along the heights of San Miguel to the fords of the Ter, and from thence onward to the Monte Livio.

1808.
July.

The labours of the siege were prosecuted with little vigour. Several batteries were opened, and shells were thrown into the town, but the resolution of the inhabitants remained unshaken. The garrison was reinforced by the arrival of a light-infantry battalion, thirteen hundred strong, which, with two pieces of field-ordnance, entered the city on the twenty-fifth. This raised the spirit of the people to a pitch of exultation seldom to be found in a besieged city.

Jul. 25.

Nor were their countrymen without less active and energetic in the cause than the garrison within. The Miquelets of Milans, and the Somatenes, commanded by Don Juan Claros, hovered round the camp of the enemy, attacking all stragglers, and driving back the foraging-par-

CHAP. VII. ties sent out to collect provisions in the neighbouring country. The resources of the besieging army were becoming daily more precarious. Sickness broke out in the camp; and while the city, whose communication with the neighbouring country still continued unbroken, received abundant supplies, the French were, in truth, suffering all the evils of a blockade.

1808.

July.

While matters were in this situation before Gerona, the Marques del Palacio, governor of the Balearic Islands, having concluded a treaty with Lord Collingwood, who commanded the British fleet in the Mediterranean, landed at Tarragona, with about five thousand men, and thirty-seven pieces of artillery. This produced a great change in the aspect of affairs throughout the province. The Spanish fleet became disposable for the general purposes of defence; and the Catalans, filled with joy at this accession of strength, became inspired with new confidence in the extent of their resources. Many officers, who had hitherto remained passive, and several of the civil authorities, quitted Barcelona, and joined the standard of Palacio. The Supreme Junta immediately repaired to Tarragona; and constituting that city the seat of govern-

ment, appointed Palacio to the chief command of the provincial forces. CHAP. VII.

 1808.

July.

The primary object of the new leader was to strengthen the line of the Llobregat, which had again been occupied by the Somatenes. With this view, the Count de Caldagues, with a force about two thousand strong, was detached to Martorel, where he was joined by the Miquelets, commanded by Colonel Bajet, a patriotic scrivener of Lerida. A part of this force had scarcely taken post at San Boy, when the position was attacked by a body of the enemy, which encountered a vigorous repulse.

An assault on the castle of Mongat was concerted with Lord Cochrane, and executed with complete success. The crew of the Imperieuse bore part in the action; and, relying on the faith of a British officer, the commander of the castle surrendered on capitulation. Jul. 31. By this event, about an hundred prisoners, seven guns, and a considerable quantity of ammunition and stores, fell into possession of the victors.

Secure in their position on the Llobregat, the Spanish army became disposable for the relief of Gerona. But Palacio, deficient in the arm of

CHAP. VII. cavalry, was probably averse to risk the conse-

1808.

August.

quences of a general engagement, with troops so palpably inferior in discipline and equipment, to those with whom the palm of victory must, in such circumstances, have been contested. But willing to impede the progress of the siege, he despatched the Count de Caldagues, with four companies of regular troops, three field-pieces, and two thousand Miquelets and Somatenes, to harass the French army in their position, and intercept their supplies. From the fort of Hostalrich, where he halted for some days, the force of Caldagues was increased by the addition of about two thousand of the new levies, and two pieces of artillery. On the fourteenth, he took post at Castella, about two leagues in rear of the French encampment. Here Caldagues was joined by Claros and Milans, and a scheme of joint operations was concerted with the garrison.

Aug. 14.

The army, thus united, was about six thousand strong; and it was determined, on the following morning, to attack the works of the enemy, who had removed the greater part of his force to the plain on the left bank of the Ona. The batteries in front of Mont Jouy were but slenderly tenant-

ed with troops; and against these, the efforts of the Catalan army were to be principally directed.

 1808.

August.

Aug. 16.

At nine o'clock on the morning of the sixteenth, the garrisons of Mont Jouy and Gerona, made a simultaneous sally on the besiegers; and overpowering the French troops opposed to their progress, carried and set fire to the batteries. One of these was for a moment recovered by a fresh column of the enemy; but reinforcements coming up, the battery was again stormed, and remained in possession of the Spaniards.

In the meanwhile, the force of Caldagues advanced in several columns, and driving the French from the heights of San Miguel, attacked their encampment at Camp Duras, and finally pursued them across the Ter.

The advantages of this most brilliant achievement were, fortunately, not lost to the gallant Catalans, by any imprudent prosecution of their victory. Instead of following an enemy, superior in all military requisites, to the open plain, Caldagues, with the prudence of a wise general, remained on the heights, and made preparations

CHAP. VII. to repel the attack which he anticipated on the following morning.

1808.

August.

But Duhesme, dispirited by the defeat he had sustained, thought only of retreat. Under cover of night he put his army in motion ; and separating his force from that of Reille, fled to Barcelona, while the latter fell back to Figueras. All his heavy artillery, large stores of ammunition, and even many of the wounded were abandoned. Duhesme did not venture to take the road by the coast ; but on learning that an English frigate was prepared to rake his columns on the march, he betook himself to the mountains, destroying his stores, and throwing his artillery over the rocks. Reille was more fortunate, and succeeded in reaching Figueras without hostile impediment.

Of the brilliant victory thus achieved over an army superior in numbers, discipline, and equipment, and commanded by an officer of high military pretensions, the Catalans were justly proud. Duhesme endeavoured to conceal his disgrace by encouraging the belief, that he had retreated, in consequence of positive orders to relinquish the prosecution of the siege. But

St. Cyr.

this report was too improbable to gain credit; and St. Cyr informs us, that even in the French army under his command, "*ce bruit ne trouva que des incredules.*"

CHAP. VII.
1808.
August.

As a general, Duhesme must stand convicted of gross ineptitude. In his management of the campaign, we can discover no skilful adaptation of means to ends; and his conduct, before Gerona in particular, exhibits a strange mixture of bullying and timidity.* His attacks on the city were foolish, and conducted in a manner utterly disgraceful to a disciplined army. He evidently expected to conquer without resistance; and, deceived in this, he sought immediate refuge in flight. To subdue a brave people he seems to have relied solely on measures of fero-

* Colonel Laffaille, in his work, "*Memoires sur les Campagnes de Catalogne,*" gives some amusing details, illustrative of the vacillation of his leader, during the first attempt on Gerona. The same author informs us, that after the second siege, it even became a question, between Reille and Duhesme, whether the latter should not abandon Barcelona, and fall back on Figueras. But Duhesme knew that the loss of Barcelona could not fail to draw down on him the indignation of Napoleon; and this circumstance overbalanced his fears. Laffaille's information, on this matter, is stated to have been derived from the General himself. It certainly affords satisfactory evidence of the terror the gallant Somatenes had excited in their opponents.

CHAP. VII. cious intimidation. But there is no axiom more
 1808. true, than that cruelty is not only a moral crime,
 August. but a military error; and we have authority for
 Cabanes. the fact, that the savage inflictions of Duhesme
 were beheld, not with terror, but hatred; and
 that many of those who, in other circumstances,
 would have remained neutral in the contest, took
 arms from despair. At once to conciliate and
 subdue, is the achievement of a higher intelli-
 gence. Fire and slaughter are ever the instru-
 ments of a bungler. Let it be the lasting dis-
 grace of Duhesme, that he employed such wea-
 pons, and employed them in vain.

Such was the issue of the first noble and suc-
 cessful struggle made by the Catalans for the
 liberation of their province. At the end of Au-
 gust, 1808, the French, defeated at all points,
 remained only in possession of the city of Barce-
 lona, and the fortresses of Figueras and Mont
 Jouy.

CHAPTER VIII.

OPERATIONS IN THE NORTH.

GALLICIA possessed many advantages as a theatre of resistance to the usurping government. Its surface was rugged and mountainous, difficult of access, and easy of defence ; and, removed from the immediate sphere and influence of the arms of France, it was yet sufficiently near to interrupt, by a single successful operation, the most important line of her communication. From its numerous seaports, the intercourse with England was easy and rapid ; and Galicia may be said to have been the heart by which the vital succours of Britain were circulated through the great body of the Spanish people. The population of Galicia is hardy and vigorous beyond that of any other province ; and, driven by the poverty of their

 1808.

CHAP. VIII own country to seek employment abroad, these

1808.

June.

gallant and athletic mountaineers had become, as it were, the Parias of their wealthier neighbours, and might be found throughout Spain, engaged in every labour requiring powerful exertion, and continued bodily endurance.

In Galicia, the spirit of resistance to French authority was no less resolute and pervading than in the other provinces. The assembling and training of new levies went vigorously on; and the strong mountainous position of Manzanal, in the neighbourhood of Astorga, was fortified by intrenchments, to serve as a station of defence. The leader of the Gallician army was Don Antonio Filangieri, Captain-General of the province, whose prudence and circumspection, in the first burst of national enthusiasm, had excited popular indignation. By his energy and military knowledge, he had subsequently rendered good service to the patriotic cause; but the suspicions of the people were never wholly eradicated,—and Filangieri died by assassination.

Don Joachim Blake, an officer of Irish extraction, succeeded him in command. During the month of June, the forces of the province were assembled at Lugo; and their num-

bers were materially increased by the return of Taranco's army from Portugal, and by five thousand Spanish prisoners whom England had debarked in Galicia, in a state of complete equipment for service.

CHAP. VIII
1808.
July.

Cuesta, after his defeat at Cabezon, had rallied the army of Castile, and taken post at Benevente. There he was joined by Blake, who, leaving only one division of his army to secure the position of Manzanal, reached Benevente on the sixth. It was the intention of Bessieres, if possible, to prevent this junction by a sudden attack on Cuesta; but, disappointed in this object, he made immediate preparations to encounter the combined armies in the field. On the ninth he quitted Burgos with the reserve. On the tenth he reached Palencia, where he collected the scattered columns of his army, and was joined by the division of General Mouton, which had advanced from Bayonne to replace the portion of the army engaged in the siege of Zaragoza. The force thus assembled, amounted to about fifteen thousand men, with thirty-two pieces of artillery.

Jul. 6.

No sooner had Cuesta been reinforced by the

CHAP. VIII junction of the Gallician army, than he publicly
 1808. announced his intention of advancing to Vallad-
 July.olid. On the prudence of this project, differ-
 ences are understood to have occurred between
 the generals. Blake, aware of the superior dis-
 cipline of the French troops, and of the great
 advantages they possessed in point of cavalry,
 was unwilling to advance into the plains, and
 try the hazard of a battle. He urged the policy
 of retiring to a strong position in the moun-
 tainous country of Leon or Galicia, which, with-
 out a large reinforcement of his army, it would
 have been impossible for Bessieres to attack.
 But the more prudent counsels of Blake were
 overruled by Cuesta, on whom, as senior officer,
 the chief command had devolved. The Spanish
 army were put in motion; and leaving a divi-
 sion at Benevente, proceeded in a direction
 which threatened Burgos and Valladolid.

Jul. 12. On the night of the twelfth, the army of Bes-
 sieres set out from Palencia. On the thirteenth
 it halted in a position extending from the Torre
 de Marmojas to Ampudia. In the evening,
 Marshal Bessieres received intelligence that the
 enemy were at Medina del Rio Seco. Before

day-dawn on the fourteenth, his army, formed in two columns, was on the march to attack them. CHAP. VIII

The strength of the Spanish army has been variously represented. Amid conflicting statements, it may reasonably be assumed to have amounted to about twenty-five thousand infantry, with a few hundred cavalry, and from twenty to thirty pieces of artillery. The body, thus formidable in point of numbers, was drawn up in two lines; the first of which, supported by a strong artillery, ranged along the summit of a plateau, with a considerable declivity towards the French army, formed by the overflowing of the rivulet Sequillo during the rains of spring and winter. The country around was flat and cultivated, and divided into enclosures by stone walls. The second line was placed about a mile in rear of the first, and extended greatly beyond it on the left. In this were stationed the best troops; and the remainder of the artillery was ranged in the centre. The position of the cavalry was somewhat in rear of the first line, and within a short distance of the road.

The disposition of the Spanish army gave ad-

1808.
July.



CHAP. VIII advantages to Bessieres, which he did not neglect.

1808.

July.

The great distance intervening between the lines afforded an opportunity of dividing them ; and, with this view, while the brigades of Sabathier and Ducos advanced in column of battalions to attack the front of the position, the divisions of Merle and Mouton took the enemy in flank, and the front line of the Spaniards was instantly broken, and driven from its position with great slaughter. Nearly at the same time, the cavalry was charged by General Lasalle, and instantly put to flight.

Under these unfavourable circumstances, a gallant attempt was made by Cuesta to retrieve the fortunes of the day. Two columns of attack were directed to advance from the second line, in order to regain the plateau. That on the right made a vigorous and successful charge on the enemy, and drove him back in disorder. Part of Mouton's division was likewise assailed by the Spanish cavalry, and compelled to retreat ; but a body of the imperial guard advancing to its assistance, the Spaniards in turn were forced to give ground.

The attack of the second line, however, was

vigorous ; the French were losing ground, and several of their guns were already taken. But the right column of the Spaniards had not been supported in its advance by the left, and from this circumstance its flank was unprotected. Of the opportunity thus afforded Bessieres took immediate advantage. The exposed flank of the column was charged by the division of Merle ; and the Spaniards were driven back in irretrievable confusion. An attempt was made to rally in the town of Rio Seco, but without success. It was carried by Mouton's division at the point of the bayonet ; and the cavalry continued charging the fugitives with great slaughter, along the road to Benevente. The division of Blake was the only portion of the army which retreated in tolerable order.

In this unfortunate action, the loss of the Spanish army was about five thousand. Fifteen pieces of artillery, and a considerable quantity of ammunition were taken on the field. On the part of the French, the victory was earned with little expense of life. Their loss, in killed and wounded, is said to have amounted only to one hundred and twenty-five of the former, and four

1808.
July.

Foy.

CHAP. VIII hundred of the latter. By another account it is

1808.

July

estimated at eight hundred.*

The battle of Rio Seco, though unfortunate, was far from dishonourable to Spanish prowess. The proximate cause of defeat was, unquestionably, the unskilful disposition of the army, which exposed it to be beaten in detail. Under circumstances the most unfavourable and dispiriting, the second line of the Spaniards fought with a courage and pertinacity worthy of a better general, and a more fortunate result. The advantage of the French, in point of cavalry, was counterbalanced by nothing in the position of the Spanish army. The latter fought in front of a defile, and were simultaneously attacked both in front and flanks. That, after the defeat of the first line, the issue of the battle should even for a time have become doubtful, is a circumstance honourable to the courage of the Spanish troops. No general of sound discretion would have given battle in the circum-

* It is stated by Mr. Southey, on what he calls "*the best authority*"—that of the neighbouring priests—that the number of slain, alone, in the battle, amounted to twenty-seven thousand. Were it worth while, the extravagance of this calculation might be easily demonstrated by a *reductio ad absurdum*.