

was superior, he having forty-two field pieces, of which several were twelve pounders, the allies only thirty. He had the greater advantage of commanding soldiers who were all in the highest possible state of discipline, and whom, though they were of many countries, long habit had formed into one army; whereas the allied force consisted of three different nations; the Portuguese indeed disciplined by British officers, but the Spaniards in their usual state of indiscipline; and one third of the army not understanding, or understanding imperfectly, the language of the other two.

CHAP.
XXXVII.
1811.
May.

Soult did not know that Blake had joined during the night, and he thought to anticipate his junction by attacking the right of the allies, thus throwing himself upon their line of communication, when the possession of the rising ground would decide the battle. At eight in the morning his troops were observed in motion; his horse crossed the Ferdia, and formed under cover of the wood in the fork between the two rivulets. A strong force of cavalry, with two heavy columns of infantry, then marched out of the wood, pointing toward the front of the allied position, as if to attack the village and bridge of Albuhera; while, at the same time, under protection of that superior cavalry which in such a country gave them command of the field, their infantry filed over the river beyond the right of the allies. Their intention to turn the allies by that flank, and cut them off from Valverde, was now apparent; upon which Beresford ordered Cole's division to form an oblique line to the rear of the right, with his own right thrown back, and requested Blake to form part of his first line and all his second to that front.

*May 16.
Battle of
Albuhera.*

While the French General Godinot made a false attack upon Albuhera, Soult, with the rest of the army, bore on the right wing of the allies. The attack began at nine o'clock; a heavy storm of rain came on about the same time, as favourable

CHAP. to the French, who had formed their plan, and consequently
 XXXVII. arranged their movements, as it was disadvantageous for the al-
 1811. lies, whose measures were to be adapted for meeting those of the
 enemy. After a gallant resistance, the Spaniards were forced
 from the heights, and the enemy set up a shout of triumph
 which was heard from one end of the line to the other; their
 exultation was not without good cause, for the heights which
 they had gained raked and entirely commanded the whole
 position. The Spaniards to a man displayed the utmost
 courage; but their want of discipline was felt, and the danger
 of throwing them into confusion whenever change of position
 was necessary; yet the station which had been intrusted to
 them was precisely that upon which the fate of the whole army
 depended. They rallied at the bottom of the hill, turned upon
 the enemy, and withstood them, while Lieutenant-Colonel Col-
 bourne brought up the right brigade of Stewart's division, and
 endeavoured to retake the ground which had been lost.

These troops had been hurried as soon as the intention of
 the French was perceived: they arrived too late; instead of being
 the defendants of the strongest ground, they had to assail the
 enemy already established there, and the more they advanced
 the more their flank became exposed. Finding that they could
 not shake the enemy's column by their fire, they proceeded to
 attack it with the bayonet; but in the act of charging, they were
 themselves suddenly turned and attacked in the rear by a body
 of Polish lancers: these men carried long lances with a red flag
 suspended at the end, which, while so borne by the rider as to
 prevent his own horse from seeing any other object, frightens
 those horses who are opposed to it. Never was any charge
 more unexpected, or more destructive; the rain, which thickened
 the whole atmosphere, partly concealed them; and those of the
 brigade who saw them approaching mistook them for Spa-

niards, and therefore did not fire. A tremendous slaughter was made upon the troops who were thus surprised; and the loss would have been greater, if the Poles, instead of pursuing their advantage, had not ridden about the field to spear the wounded. The three regiments of Colbourne's brigade lost their colours at this time; those of the Buffs were recovered, after signal heroism had been displayed in their defence. Ensign Thomas, who bore one of the flags, was surrounded, and asked to give it up. Not but with my life! was his answer, and his life was the instant forfeit; but the standard thus taken was regained, and the manner in which it had been defended will not be forgotten when it shall be borne again to battle. Ensign Walsh, who carried the other colours, had the staff broken in his hand by a cannon ball, and fell severely wounded; but, more anxious about his precious charge than himself, he separated the flag from the shattered staff, and secured it in his bosom, from whence it was taken when his wounds were dressed after the battle.

The 31st regiment, being the left of the brigade, was the only one which escaped this charge, and it kept its ground under Major L'Estrange. The issue of the day seemed at this time worse than doubtful, and nothing but the most determined and devoted courage saved the allies from a defeat, of which the consequences would have been worse than the immediate slaughter. The third brigade under Major-General Houghton, with the fusileers and Portugueze brigade under Major-General Cole, advanced to recover the heights, their officers declaring that they would win the field or die. Houghton and Sir William Myers fell, each leading on his brigade. The fusileers, and the Lusitanian legion, 3000 when they advanced, could not muster 1000 after they had gained the rising ground, . . . for they did gain it after all this carnage; 2000 men, and sixty officers, including every lieutenant-colonel, and field officer, were either

CHAP.
XXXVII.
1811.

May.

CHAP.
XXXVII.
1811.

May.

killed or wounded. But the enemy in their turn suffered greater slaughter when they were forced down into the low ground toward the river; our musketry and shrapnells then mowed them down. The attack upon the village was continued somewhat longer; but the enemy were never able to make any impression there.

Soult made a vigorous effort to rally his men in this part of the field: he rode forward with an eagle in his hand, and for a moment checked their flight; but it was only for a moment: they saw their left retreating in confusion, and they followed the example. Only two battalions could be collected at first, and afterwards four, in any order: these formed behind the first rivulet at the foot of the ridge; the rest of their force was dispersed like a swarm of bees, and could not be brought up till they reached the wood. Still the superiority of the enemy in horse was such that it was impossible for the allies to pursue their victory. Soult therefore retired to his bivouac in the wood, and his reserve with a powerful artillery occupied the hill, under cover of which he had formed his columns of attack. The rain which had fallen heavily during the action became more severe at evening, and continued so that night and the following day. The rivulets, swoln now to torrents as they poured from the heights, were reddened with blood; and exposed to that weather the wounded lay where they had fallen, for there was no possibility of removing them; not a house which could have afforded shelter was near.. not a carriage or beast of burden could be found for transporting them to the rear. But wickedness is ever on the alert, and many of the wounded in this condition were stripped to the skin, by those miscreants who attend upon the movements of an army like birds and beasts of prey.

The allies made fresh dispositions immediately after the battle, in case the enemy should re-advance: they improved

their position by moving toward the right flank; their freshest troops were placed in the first line; and the flags taken from the Polish lancers, some hundreds in number, were planted in defiance upon the crest of the position, singular trophies of a most well-deserved victory. Kemmis's brigade came up the next morning, and reinforced them with 1500 men; but all continued quiet on both sides. On the night of the 17th, Soult moved off his wounded under cover of the wood, and prepared for his retreat, which he commenced the ensuing day. Our cavalry followed to hang upon his rear, and in a very gallant affair with the rear guard at Usagre, about 150 of their horse were killed, wounded, or taken, without loss on our part, though they had then 3000 men in the field, and the allies not more than half that number. Hamilton's division was sent back to reinvest Badajoz: that place had remained free between the 16th and 19th, in which interval it had received no relief, and the garrison had only time loosely to fill up the approaches which had been made. Lord Wellington arrived at Elvas on the 20th; rode over the field the next day, and expressed himself highly pleased with Marshal Beresford, upon whom so arduous a responsibility had rested, and with the army which had demeaned itself so gallantly.

The battle of Albuhera was one of the most murderous in modern times. The British loss consisted of nearly 900 killed, 2732 wounded, 544 missing; the Portugueze, of whom only a small part were brought into action, lost about 400; the Spaniards above 2000. The French left 2000 dead on the field; about 1000 were made prisoners; Generals Werle and Pepin were killed. Soult, in his official dispatch, declared, that his whole loss amounted only to 2800 men; but a letter from General Gazan was intercepted, wherein he stated that he had more than 4000 wounded under his charge. The heat, he said, would prove very injurious to them, especially as there

CHAP.
XXXVII.
1811.
May.

CHAP. were only five surgeons to attend them, and many had died
 XXXVII. upon the road. This letter was written three days after the
 1811. action, and as the bad cases die in numbers in the first few
May. days, and the mortality must have been greatly increased by
 want of rest, of accommodation, and of surgical aid, it was in-
 ferred, that the total loss of the enemy could not have been
 less than 8000 men. Soult is said to have acknowledged, that,
 in the whole course of his long service, he had never before
 seen so desperate and bloody a conflict. He is said, also, to
 have observed, "there is no beating those troops, in spite of
 their generals! I always thought them bad soldiers, and now I am
 sure of it; for I turned their right, and penetrated their centre;
 they were completely beaten; the day was mine, and yet they
 did not know it, and would not run." About 300 of his prisoners
 were put into a convent which had been converted into a prison:
 they undermined the wall, and escaped with their officers at
 their head. The peasantry guided them, and supplied them
 with food on their way, and they rejoined the army in a body
 on the thirteenth day after the battle.

The official dispatch of the French general was, as usual,
 falsified for the public. Soult there asserted that, having gained
 the height, he was surprised to see so great a number of troops,
 and that he then first learned from a prisoner how Blake with
 9000 Spaniards had effected a junction during the night. This
 discovery, he said, made him resolve not to pursue his victory, but
 content himself with keeping the position which had been taken
 from the enemy, and that position he* retained, . . . the enemy,
 after the carnage which was made among them by Latour

* The dispatch, however, like other falsehoods of the same kind, carried with
 it its own confutation; for it stated that the allies made no prisoners except two or
 three hundred wounded, who were left on the field; but the same dispatch said,

Maubourg and the Polish lancers, not having dared to attack him again. CHAP.
XXXVII.

Few battles have ever given the contending powers so high an opinion of each other. The French exhibited the highest possible state of discipline that day: nothing could be more perfect than they were in all their movements; no general could have wished for more excellent instruments, and no soldiers were ever directed by more consummate skill. This was more than counterbalanced by the incomparable bravery of their opponents. The chief loss fell upon the Buffs and the 57th. The first of these regiments went into action with twenty-four officers and 750 rank and file;... there only remained five officers and thirty-four men to draw rations on the following day. Within the little space where the stress of the battle lay, not less than 7000 men were found lying on the ground, literally reddening the rivulets with blood. Our dead lay in ranks as they had fought, and every wound was in the front. A captain of the 57th, who was severely wounded, directed his men to lay him on the ground at the head of his company, and thus continued to give his orders. Marshal Beresford saved his life by his dexterity and personal strength: as he was encouraging his troops after the charge of the Polish lancers, one of these men attacked him; avoiding the thrust, he seized him by the throat, and threw him off his horse; the lancer recovered from his fall to aim a second thrust, but at the moment was shot by one of the general's orderlies. Sir William Myers, leading on that brigade

1811.

May.

that the French kept the field for two days, retaining the position they had won, . . . how then could the wounded who were left upon the field have fallen into the hands of the allies? But throughout this war the remark made some three centuries ago by the Flemish historian Meyer was verified, that *res suas Galli non majore solent SCRIBERE fide, quam GERERE.*

CHAP.
XXXVII.

1811.

May.

which recovered the fortune of the field, exclaimed it would be a glorious day for the fusileers. In ascending the ground his horse was wounded; another was brought, which he had hardly mounted, when a ball struck him under the hip, and passed upward obliquely through the intestines. He did not fall, and attempted to proceed; but this was impossible, and when he was carried off the field he seemed to forget his own sufferings in exultation at beholding the conduct of his brave companions. A heavy rain was falling, there was no shelter near, and Valverde, whither it was thought proper to convey him, was ten miles distant. He would rather have had a tent erected over him; but his servants, hoping that he might recover, insisted upon removing him to a place where a bed might be procured. The body of General Houghton was borne past him, on a mule, to be interred at Elvas. Upon seeing it, Sir William desired, that if he should die they would bury him on the spot. He lived, however, to reach Valverde, and till the following day. When his dissolution drew near, he desired that his ring might be taken to his sister, and that she might be told he had died like a soldier. Six of his own men bore him to the grave, and laid him under an olive tree near Valverde. It is to be hoped that a monument will be placed there to mark the spot.

Blake, Castaños, Mendizabal, Ballasteros, Zayas, and Carlos d'España, were in the field, and all distinguished themselves. Blake and Castaños had each an arm grazed. España was run through the hand by a lance. In the heat of the action, when the issue of the battle appeared most hopeless, many of the Spaniards were heard exclaiming to each other, "What will the *Conciso* say?" . . . thus stimulating themselves to new exertion by remembering the honour or dishonour which a free press would bestow, according to their deserts. Of three stand of colours which were taken from the enemy, one was presented to the

Cortes. Del Monte moved, that it should be deposited in some church dedicated to the Virgin-Mother, the patroness of the Spains; but Garcia Herreros observed, that the hall in which they met would, after the dissolution of the Cortes, again be used as a church, and it was therefore resolved that the colours should remain there. It was proposed also, that a pillar should be erected in the plains of Albuhera; and that the little town of that name which had been entirely destroyed, should be rebuilt by the nation, and exempted from all rates and taxes for ten years.

By this time the 3d and 7th divisions arrived from Beira. Lord Wellington re-invested Badajoz on the 25th, and broke ground four days afterward. It was well that the former siege had been interrupted; there would otherwise have been a great sacrifice of men in attempts which, for want of adequate means, must have been unsuccessful. The means, though somewhat increased both in men and materials, were still inadequate; time pressed also; for where Lord Wellington's efforts were directed, thither would those of the enemy be directed also; Marmont would move from the Tormes toward the Tagus to co-operate with Soult against him, and the disposable force which they might bring together far exceeded all that he could command. Rapid measures, therefore, were necessary, and it was determined to pursue the original plan, but to commence the attacks upon Fort Christoval and the castle at the same time, that the enemy's attention might be divided. Guns were brought from Elvas, and the officers and gunners of a company of British artillery were distributed among the Portugueze, to supply as far as their numbers went the want of skill in their allies: but the guns were of a soft composition of metal, false in their bore, without any of the modern improvements; the shot were of all shapes and sizes; the howitzers which were used for mortars

CHAP.
XXXVII.

1811.

*May.**Siege of
Badajoz re-
sumed.*