

CHAP.
XXXIX.

1811.

August.

artillery at Villafranca was ordered back into the interior, three regiments took a position upon the heights of Valcarcel to cover the roads from that town, and another detachment was stationed at Toreno for the double purpose of assisting the reserve and watching Asturias. Abadia himself took a position at the Puente de Domingo Florez. In the Vale of Orras he hoped to find provisions, meaning, as soon as he should have collected enough for three days, and received shoes for his men, to act upon the offensive, in co-operation with the Portugueze general Silveira.

Lord Wellington observes Ciudad Rodrigo.

The French hoped, that while Dorsenne was dispersing the Galician army, and getting possession of that important province, Lord Wellington would make some incautious movement upon Salamanca, and expose himself to Marmont's superior numbers, and far superior cavalry, in the open country. Lord Wellington knew better in what manner to relieve Galicia. Immediately upon his failure at Badajoz, his attention had been directed to Ciudad Rodrigo, and orders were given for bringing a battering train and siege stores up the Douro to Villa de Ponte, whereby much of the difficulty experienced in Alentejo for want of means of transport was avoided. General Hill had been left with 14,000 men to guard that frontier; the rest of the army was collected on the Agueda; and Lord Wellington fixing his head quarters at Fuente Guinaldo, kept his troops there in a healthy country, and rendered it impossible for the enemy to throw supplies into Ciudad Rodrigo, unless they advanced with an army strong enough to give him battle. Marmont, in consequence, recalled Dorsenne to join him, that they might raise the blockade, and supply the fort with provisions for a long time. Dorsenne, indeed, could not have advanced without danger of having his retreat cut off; even in his own account, wherein he asserted that the Galician army was entirely dis-

Dorsenne recalled from Galicia.

persed, and could not possibly resume the offensive, he pretended to have occasioned them no greater loss than that of 300 killed and wounded, and 200 prisoners: but in reality no dispersion had taken place; if he had pursued his original plan of descending upon Lugo and Coruña, Abadia would have been in his rear, and the French knew by experience what it was to encounter the peasantry of Galicia, armed against them, and thirsting for vengeance. Dorsenne therefore retired more rapidly than he had advanced, leaving behind him some of his wounded, and provisions enough to supply Abadia's army with three days' consumption, . . . a booty of no little consequence in the deplorable state of the Spanish commissariat. The Spaniards in their turn advanced, and fixed their head quarters in Molina Seca, where they had won the eagle four days before; and the French derived no other advantage from their expedition, than the possession of Astorga, which they once more occupied, and repaired its ruined fortifications.

The relief of Ciudad Rodrigo was an object not less important to the French in this part of the country than that of Badajoz had been on the side of Extremadura, and equal exertions were made to effect it. Lord Wellington had formed the blockade to make these exertions necessary, not with any serious intention of attacking the town, an operation for which he was not yet prepared. Two important objects were fulfilled by making the enemy collect their force upon this point. It relieved Galicia, and it drew from Navarre General Souham's division, which had been destined to hunt down Mina. Lord Wellington was perfectly informed of Marmont's plans; the only thing doubtful was the strength of the enemy, and upon that head reports were as usual so various, that he determined to see them, being certain of his retreat, whatever their superiority might be, and ready to profit by any opportunity which might

CHAP.
XXXIX.

1811.

August.

Aug. 31.

*Movements
of the
French to
throw sup-
plies into
Ciudad
Rodrigo.*

CHAP.
XXXIX.

1811.

Sept. 22.

be offered. As soon, therefore, as the French commenced their movements with the convoy of provisions from the Sierra de Bejar, and from Salamanca, he collected his army in positions from which he could either retire or advance without difficulty, and from whence he could see all that was going on, and ascertain the force of the hostile army.

The third division occupied a range of heights on the left of the Agueda, between Fuente Guinaldo and Pastores, having its advanced guard on the heights of Pastores, within three miles of Ciudad Rodrigo. The fourth division was at Fuente Guinaldo, which position had been strengthened with some works. The light division was on the right of the Agueda, its right resting upon the mountains which divide Castille and Extremadura. The left, under General Graham, who, having joined Lord Wellington's army, had succeeded Sir Brent Spencer as second in command, was posted on the Lower Azava; D. Carlos d' España and D. Julian Sanchez observed the Lower Agueda, and Sir Stapleton Cotton, with the cavalry, was on the Upper Azava in the centre. The fifth division was in the rear of the right, to observe the pass of Perales, for General Foy had collected a body of troops in Upper Extremadura. On the 23d, the enemy appeared in the plain near the city, and retired again: the next morning they advanced in considerable force, and before evening collected on the plain their whole cavalry, to the amount of 6000, and four divisions of infantry; the rest of their army was encamped on the Guadapero, immediately beyond the hills which surround the plain; and on the following day an immense convoy, extending along many miles of road, entered the town under this formidable escort.

*The allies
fall back.*

On the 25th, fourteen squadrons of their cavalry drove in our posts on the right of the Azava. General Anson's brigade charged them, pursued them across the river, and resumed the

posts. But their chief attention was directed toward the heights on the left of the Agueda; and they moved a column in the morning, consisting of between thirty and forty squadrons of cavalry, fourteen battalions of infantry, and twelve guns, from Ciudad Rodrigo, against that point. The cavalry and artillery arrived first, and one small body sustained their attack. A regiment of French dragoons succeeded in taking two pieces of cannon; the Portuguese artillerymen stood to their guns till they were cut down; and the guns were immediately retaken by the second battalion of the fifth regiment under Major Ridge. When the enemy's infantry were coming up, Lord Wellington saw they would arrive before troops could be brought to support this division, and therefore he determined to retire with the whole on Fuente Guinaldo. The 77th, which had repulsed a charge of cavalry, and the second battalion of the 5th, were formed into one square, and the 21st Portuguese regiment into another, supported by General Alten's small body of cavalry, and by the Portuguese artillery. The enemy's horse immediately rushed forward, and obliged our cavalry to retire to the support of the Portuguese regiment. The 5th and 77th were then charged on three faces of the square; Lord Wellington declared, that he had never seen a more determined attack than was made by this formidable body of horse, and repulsed by these two weak battalions. They halted, and received the enemy with such perfect steadiness, that the French did not venture to renew the charge.

In the evening, Lord Wellington had formed his troops into an *echelon*, of which the centre was in the position at Guinaldo, the right upon the pass of Perales, and the left at Navedeaver. In the course of that night, and of the ensuing day, Marmont brought his whole army in front of the position. Fuente Guinaldo stands on an extensive plain, and from the convent there

CHAP.
XXXIX.

1811.

September.

CHAP.
XXXIX.

1811.

September.

the whole force of the enemy, and all their movements, could be distinctly seen. Their force was not less than 60,000 men, a tenth part being cavalry, and they had 125 pieces of artillery. There was no motive for risking a battle, for the happiest result would only have been a profitless and dearly-purchased victory, as at Albuhera. Lord Wellington therefore retired about three leagues. No movement was ever executed with more ability in the face of a superior enemy; . . . yet even this, performed with consummate skill and perfect courage, without hurry, without confusion, and almost without loss, presented but too many of those sights which make the misery of a soldier's life. The sick and hungry inhabitants of the villages were crawling from their huts, too well aware of the fate which awaited them if they trusted to the mercy of Buonaparte's soldiers; women were supplicating our troops to put their children in the provision cars; and the sick and wounded were receiving medical assistance, while they were carried over a rugged and almost impassable road.

Lord Wellington formed his army, after this retreat of twelve miles, with his right at Aldea Velha, and his left at Bismula: the fourth and light divisions with General Alten's cavalry in front of Alfayates, the third and seventh in second line behind it. Alfayates, though now one of the most wretched of the dilapidated towns in Portugal, was once a Roman station, and has since been considered as a military post of great importance. It is about a league from the border, standing so as to command an extensive view over a beautiful, and in happier times a fertile, country. Here Lord Wellington stood by the castle (one of the monuments of King Diniz), observing the enemy with a glass. Marmont had intended to turn the left of the position at Guinaldo by moving a column into the valley of the Upper Azava, and thence ascending the heights in the rear of the position by Castillejo; from this column he detached a

division of infantry and fourteen squadrons of cavalry to follow the retreat of the allies by Albergaria, and another body of equal strength followed by Forcalhos. The former drove in our piquets at Aldea da Ponte, and pushed on to the very entrance of Alfayates. Lord Wellington, with General Stuart and Lord Robert Manners, stood watching them almost too long; for the latter, who retired the last of the three, was closely pursued by ten of the enemy's dragoons, and might probably have been taken, if his horse, being English, and accustomed to such feats, had not cleared a high wall, and so borne him off.

General Pakenham, supported by General Cole, and by Sir Stapleton Cotton's cavalry, drove the enemy back through Aldea da Ponte upon Albergaria; the French being reinforced by the column which had marched upon Forcalhos advanced again about sunset, and again gained the village, from which they were again driven. But night had now come on; General Pakenham could not know what was passing on his flanks, nor was he certain of the numbers which might be brought against him; and knowing that the army was to fall back farther, he evacuated Aldea da Ponte during the night. The French then occupied it; and Lord Wellington, falling back one league, formed his army on the heights behind Soito, having the Sierra das Mesas on their right, and their left at Rendo on the Coa. Here ended his retreat. Marmont had accomplished the object of throwing supplies into Ciudad Rodrigo, and could effect nothing more. Lord Wellington was not to be found at fault. He had fallen back in the face of a far outnumbering enemy, without suffering that enemy to obtain even the slightest advantage over him. The total loss of the allies on the 25th amounted to twenty-eight killed, 108 wounded, twenty-eight missing. On the 27th, fourteen killed, seventy-seven wounded,

CHAP.
XXXIX.

1811.

October.

CHAP. nine missing. The hereditary Prince of Orange was in the
 XXXIX. field, being then for the first time in action.

1811.

October.

*The French
retire.*

*Marmont
boasts of his
success.*

While the British took their position behind Soito, the French retired to Ciudad Rodrigo, and then separated, Dorsenne's army toward Salamanca and Valladolid, Marmont's toward the pass of Baños and Plasencia. Marmont boasted in his dispatches of having forced Lord Wellington to abandon an intrenched camp, and driven him back with great loss and confusion; "The Spanish insurgents," he added, "have felt the greatest indignation at seeing themselves thus abandoned in the north as well as in the south; and this contrast between the conduct of the English, and the promises which they have incessantly broken, nourishes a natural hatred which will break out sooner or later." "We should have followed the enemy," said Marshal Marmont, "to the lines of Lisbon, where we should have been able to form a junction with the army of the south, . . . which is completely entire, and has in its front only the division of General Hill, . . . had the moment been come which is fixed for the catastrophe of the English." Soult, of whose unbroken strength Marmont thus boasted, was at this time devising measures for destroying the army which Castaños had recruited, or rather remade, since it had been so miserably wasted after Romana's death. General Girard, therefore, with a division of about 4,000 foot and 1,000 cavalry, was sent into that part of Extremadura which was still free, thus to confine Castaños within narrower limits, and deprive his army of those rations which it still, though with difficulty, obtained, and which were its sole means of subsistence; for, in the miserable state of the Spanish commissariat and Spanish Government, their armies subsisted upon what they could find, and had little or nothing else to depend upon.

Girard took his position at Caceres, extending as far as Brozas. Of the spirit in which his detachment acted, one instance will suffice. He sent a party against the house of D. Jose Maria Cribell in Salvatierra, an officer in the service of his country; they carried off his wife in the fifth month of her pregnancy; plundered the house, even to the clothes of her two children, one five years old, the other three, and left these children naked to the mercy of their neighbours. The presence of such a force greatly distressed the country, and produced the intended inconvenience to Castaños; that general, therefore, concerted with Lord Wellington a movement for relieving this part of Extremadura by striking a blow against the enemy. The execution was entrusted to General Hill, with whom a Spanish detachment was to co-operate under Camp-Marshal D. Pedro Augustin Giron.

CHAP.
XXXIX.
1811.

October.

Girard in
Extrema-
dura.

General Hill, with such a portion of his force as was thought sufficient for the service, moved from his cantonments in the neighbourhood of Portalegre on the 22d of October, and advanced toward the Spanish frontier. On reaching Alburquerque he learned that the enemy, who had advanced to Aliseda, had fallen back to Arroyo del Puerco; and that Aliseda was occupied by the Conde de Penne Villemur with the rear of the Spaniards. At that place, the allies and the Spaniards formed their junction the next day. The French occupied Arroyo del Puerco with 300 horse, their main body being at Caceres. Penne Villemur, on the 25th, drove back their horse to Malpartida, which place they held as an advanced post. At two on the following morning the allies began their march upon this place, in the midst of a severe storm; they arrived at daybreak; but the enemy had retired in the night. Penne Villemur, with the Spanish cavalry, and a party of the second hussars, followed them, skirmishing as far as Caceres, supported by the Spanish

General
Hill moves
against
him.

CHAP.
XXXIX.
1811.

October.

infantry under D. Pablo Morillo. Girard, as soon as he knew that the allies were advancing, retired from that city, and General Hill received intelligence of his retreat at Malpartida, but what direction he had taken was uncertain. In consequence of this uncertainty, and of the extreme badness of the weather, the British and Portugueze halted for the night at Malpartida, the Spaniards occupying Caceres.

Oct. 27.

The next morning General Hill, having ascertained that the enemy had marched on Torremocha, put his troops in motion, and advanced along the Merida road, by Aldea del Cano, and the Casa de D. Antonio; for as this was a shorter line than that which Girard had taken, he hoped to intercept him and bring him to action. On the march he learned that the French had only left Torremocha that morning, and that their main body had again halted at Arroyo Molinos, leaving a rear-guard at Albala. This proved that Girard was ignorant of the movements of the allies, and General Hill therefore made a forced march that evening to Alcuéscar, a place within four miles of Arroyo Molinos, where he was joined by the Spaniards from Caceres. Every thing confirmed the British general in his opinion that the enemy were not only ignorant of his near approach, but also off their guard; and he determined upon attempting to surprise them, or at least bringing them to action, before they should march in the morning. The troops, therefore, lay under a hill, to be out of sight of the enemy; they had marched the whole day in a heavy rain, the rain still continued, and no fires were allowed to be made.

Arroyo
Molinos.

Arroyo Molinos is a little town situated at the foot of one extremity of the Sierra de Montanches; this mountain, which is every where steep and appears almost inaccessible, forms a cove or crescent behind it, the two points of which are about two miles asunder. The Truxillo road winds under the eastern point;