

CHAP. briefly related the series of reverses which rendered it necessary
XLVI. to withdraw from Spain 30,000 men, leaving only garrisons in
1814. Barcelona, Gerona, and Figueras. The Marshal, he said, was
February. before Barcelona, waiting impatiently for their arrival, that he
might begin his march: his desire was that no man should be
left in the hospitals if he could safely be removed; that General
Robert should bring away all the artillery he could, and include
the public money with his own to avoid all difficulty upon that
score: for himself, he added, he must proceed with the same
orders to Murviedro and Peñíscola. Plique inquired if the
English assented to the armistice, and was assured that they did.
He then asked if the only favour which the Emperor had
bestowed upon their garrison was that of granting the grand-
cross to General Robert, the Marshal, he said, when he with-
drew from Valencia, having promised to recommend several
officers for promotion. Van Halen told him he had understood
that two Generals of Brigade were made, M. Plique himself he
believed being one, and M. Jorry, then at Murviedro, the other.
The Colonel appears to have been completely deceived; but he
was instructed to invite Brigadier Sans to a repast before the
town should be evacuated, and to request that he would send
officers of artillery to take possession of the magazines, and
that he would allow the aide-de-camp to return with him into
the town, and take up his quarters there. This, Sans said, he
was positively enjoined not to permit; all he could allow was
that M. Van Halen, accompanied by a Spanish officer, should
present himself at the Puente de Jesus, and confer there with
General Robert. When they reached the bridge, Robert did
not come out, but he sent the chief of his staff, with several
officers, and one company, and they renewed the request that
Van Halen might enter; this of course was refused, and in case
an attempt had been made to seize him, Eroles with a body

of horse was near at hand. A letter was sent in, inclosing a copy of the forged treaty, and the parties then separated. Van Halen suspected that the deceit had been discovered; still, however, he carried it on, and wrote to Robert, saying, that as the officers had urged him to do, he should have evaded the presence of the Spanish Colonel, had he not been strictly ordered by Marshal Suchet to do nothing which could tend to interrupt the good understanding during the armistice; and being now obliged to communicate without delay his orders in Murviedro and Peñiscola, he was deprived of the honour of seeing him. General Robert answered this by a letter to Sans, regretting that he had not accepted his invitation. Van Halen's letter, he said, gave him no satisfactory notion either of his proceedings or those of his government; and unless he conferred with Van Halen in the fortress, he should not observe the armistice, but renew hostilities that afternoon, and continue them till this aide-de-camp, whom he must see, returned from Murviedro.

It was known afterwards that a spy during the preceding night had entered the town, and his letters made General Robert immediately suspect the stratagem: disappointed of getting Van Halen into his hands, and of taking the Spanish officers in a counter-snare, he took the only vengeance in his power, by putting to death the wounded peasant who had brought the first forged letter. Eroles, meantime, not discouraged by this failure, lost no time in trying the same artifice elsewhere. Mequinenza had hitherto only been observed by part of one regiment; and the garrison, though reduced in number, made incursions for many leagues round, by which means they had laid in stores of provision for eighteen months, and kept the surrounding country in continual alarm. Eroles, on his way

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1814.

*February.**It fails there.**Attempt at Lerida;*

CHAP. from Xerta towards Lerida, sent his adjutant, Don Antonio
 XLVI. Mazeda, with Don José Antonio Cid, a member of the provin-
 1814. cial deputation of Catalonia, to raise the Somatenes, and by
 February. this means cut off all communication with the place; and he
 dispatched before them a peasant with such another letter as
 that which at first had imposed upon General Robert. He
 halted that night a day's journey from Lerida, having in his
 company Don Juan Antonio Daura who forged the signatures,
 Van Halen, and Lieutenant Don Eduardo Bart, who spoke
 French so perfectly, that he was able to personate a French
 officer. Here they parted company, the two latter making for
 Torres del Segre, a place on the river of that name, six leagues
 from Mequinenza, and three from Lerida; there they remained
 in secret, coming out only at night to confer with Eroles, learn
 from him the state of affairs, and copy such papers as were
 required, none of which were forwarded till they had been
 examined by each of the party most carefully. The Baron himself
 proceeded to the blockading force before Lerida, and appear-
 ing there as Commandant-General of the blockade of that place,
 Monzon and Mequinenza, he reviewed the troops, inspected
 their posts, and made dispositions for straitening the blockade;
 Feb. 9. meanwhile the forged orders were sent in by a trusty agent to the
 governor, General Lamarque. Hither the spy from Mequinenza
 returned, bringing with him the reply of Baron Bourgeois the
 governor, to Marshal Suchet, in which he acknowledged the
 receipt of his orders, said that he was preparing to obey, inclosed
 the returns of his force, the state of the military chest and the
 magazines, and thanked the Emperor for the grand-cross with
 which he had been pleased to honour him; the same messenger
 brought also a letter from Mazeda, saying that he had strictly
 blockaded the place. The reply from the governor of Lerida

was in like manner brought him, and he thus obtained the exact returns which he wished, and understood also that both commandants were ready to fall into the snare.

He then set out for Mequinenza, with 300 foot and 40 horse, including a company of Mina's division, which he met upon the way, and ordered to follow him. Van Halen was instructed to join him by a different road, which he did, in sight of the fortress, Eroles having first sent in dispatches, signed in D'Eschalard's name, and sealed with the seal of the staff, informing the governor of the pretended armistice, and stating that the two aides-de-camp, Van Halen and Captain Castres, would go round to the fortresses with the necessary orders; he accompanied this with a letter in his own name, announced the arrival of an officer from Marshal Suchet, and requested to be informed what number of officers the French Commandant would bring out to confer with this officer in his presence, that he might present himself with an equal number; coming himself, if the Commandant came, or deputing one of his chief officers, if General Bourgeois should think proper to act by delegate: in either case, his troops should be drawn out at an equal distance with those of the French from any central point which the Commandant might please to name. Time and place were accordingly appointed, and Van Halen in his French uniform, and Bart as his orderly, went to the conference without any escort, and with an effrontery which prevented all suspicion. Van Halen presented a letter as from Suchet, in which the Marshal was made to say how painfully he felt the circumstances which compelled him to give orders for evacuating places wherein, at the cost of so many sacrifices, they had planted their victorious banners. But unexampled defections had forced the Emperor to this measure; and his object now was, to preserve these brave garrisons, and place them once more in the first rank of his bayonets. His aide-de-

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and at Me-
quinenza,
where it suc-
ceeds.

CHAP. camp was charged with verbal communications. Van Halen
XLVI. acted his part perfectly; and having arranged every thing for
1814. the march of the troops, who were to evacuate the place on the
February. following noon, Eroles hastened with his subtle agent to Lerida,
there to repeat the stratagem.

*Success at
Lerida.*

The news that Mequinenza was recovered had already spread; but none of the circumstances were known, and the better to deceive the French, it was now necessary to deceive the Spaniards also. Eroles, therefore, issued an order of the day, stating that Mequinenza was that day to be evacuated, and that Lerida and Monzon were to be given up by the same treaty; and commanding the Spaniards not to molest the French during the twelve days' truce, but to treat them with that generosity which characterized the Spanish nation. He had approached the blockading force amid the rejoicings of the people, who gathered round him on his way. General Lamarque's suspicions were completely disarmed; and when he requested that Van Halen might be allowed to enter the place and confer with him, because his own orders did not permit him to go beyond a certain distance from it, Van Halen, relying upon his courage and his strength of countenance, ventured in. The governor met him on the bridge, and they retired into an adjoining house, where, after some searching questions, he produced a dispatch received, as he said, by an emissary who had recently arrived, in which the Marshal approved of some proposals for the farther security of the place, and held out a hope of succouring him in the course of a few weeks. Van Halen answered by a reference to the date of his own letter, and the recent events which had produced an alteration in the Marshal's views. The conversation turned upon the Spanish Generals, and the circumstances of the blockade; and Van Halen took occasion to represent that Eroles seemed hurt by the General's declining to commu-

nicate with him in person, when he, in proposing such a meeting, had gone beyond the line of his instructions from General Copons. The French General, upon this, not to be outdone in courtesy, sent to offer a meeting; and went accordingly beyond his own advanced posts with his treacherous companion. At this interview every thing was arranged, and three o'clock on the following afternoon was fixed upon as the hour for evacuating the city. Van Halen was invited to return with the General, and be his guest that night; but he pleaded the necessity of hastening to Monzon as his excuse, and thither he departed with a Spanish escort.

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Feb. 14.

Monzon had been besieged by part of Mina's troops since the end of September, to the great distress of the inhabitants, who were under the guns of the fortress. The besiegers attempted to mine the rock on which it was placed. There was but one man belonging to the engineers in the place, and he was a simple miner; but, being a man of great ability, the commandant and the garrison confided in him; and the works which were executed under his direction were so skilfully devised, that they baffled all the attempts of the assailants, and they had in consequence converted the siege into a blockade. Here Van Halen had two difficulties to overcome with the commandant: a report had reached him that there was a Spaniard at this time with Eroles who had served as aide-de-camp to Suchet; and, the place being held under the orders of the Governor of Lerida, he could not surrender it, without sending to receive his instructions. The suspicion which the report ought to have excited seems to have been removed by the confidence with which Van Halen presented himself. And the second objection was easily disposed of: the false aide-de-camp, though he might reasonably judge that the real purport was to discover whether or not there was any fraud in the

and at
Monzon.

Suchet, 2.
n. pp. 371,
372.

CHAP. business, knew that Lerida had by this time been delivered up ;
 XLVI. he prevailed upon the blockading force, therefore, to let an
 1814. officer pass with this commission, and required the commandant
 February. to hold himself in readiness for marching as soon as he should
 return. The officer accordingly arrived before Lerida on the
 night after its surrender. Eroles affected anger when he heard
 his errand, and declared that, if there were any further delay,
 the treaty as it respected Monzon should be annulled, and he
 would march against it and reduce it to ashes. The officer,
 finding him in possession of Lerida, was confounded, made
 what excuse he could for his superiors, and faithfully promised
 that Monzon should be given up immediately on his arrival
 there ; and this was done.

*The three
 garrisons
 made pri-
 soners.*

Monzon was at this time stored for seven months, Mequi-
 nenza for eighteen, and Lerida for two years. By the recovery
 of these places, 40,000 inhabitants were saved from the miseries
 of a siege, and 6000 Spanish troops were rendered disposable for
 other service. The navigation of the Ebro, the Cinca, and the
 Segre was restored, the most fertile part of Catalonia delivered,
 Aragon secured, and a direct communication opened with
 Lord Wellington's army. The next business was to secure the
 garrisons who had been thus deceived, amounting to more than
 2300 men. As soon as Eroles had taken measures for pre-
 serving order in Lerida, which, under such circumstances,
 required extraordinary care, he set out with two battalions
 of infantry and 200 horse in the rear of the French, Colonel
 Don Josef Carlos having gone before them with an equal
 force. The intention was to intercept them in the defiles of
 Igualada ; but they made a forced march, and frustrated this
 part of the plan. Upon this, lest they should succeed in
 effecting a junction with the troops in Barcelona, part of the
 blockading army was sent for ; and when they arrived at

Martorell, they found themselves surrounded there. General Lamarque was then informed that he had been deceived by a stratagem of war; and that nothing remained for him but to lay down his arms, give up the public treasure, and submit to fortune. Eroles expressed his personal esteem for the General, and his sorrow that the misadventure should have fallen upon him; he promised that the officers should be sent to Tarragona, and receive every attention which could alleviate their imprisonment; and he observed, that the General himself could not but in his heart approve a stratagem by which so much bloodshed and misery was prevented, as must have attended the reduction of these places, whether by siege or by blockade. Lamarque upon this asked if Van Halen was a Spaniard; and Bourgeois remarked upon the answer, that in truth he had rendered a great service to his country. The former said he had been dreaming for the last five days, and hardly knew if he were yet awake*.

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February.

Chagrined as Marshal Suchet was by the success of what,

* This statement is drawn up from the printed narrative by Van Halen, and from a manuscript one by Eroles. Marshal Suchet's brief account is erroneous in stating that Tortosa was the last place at which the stratagem was tried instead of the first. He says that Van Halen deserted, *monté sur un cheval dérobé, et laissant à Barcelone des dettes criardes.* (T. 2. 366.) Concerning the horse, it is not likely that in such circumstances the adventurer would be scrupulous; but as to his debts, he left a letter at Barcelona, saying, that there were the arrears of his pay to liquidate them, being more by one half than all that he owed amounted to.

Van Halen afterwards got into the Inquisition as a freemason and a liberal, got out of it, published his adventures in English, went to Brussels, headed the inhabitants in that insurrection the success of which they have had so much reason to repent, was suspected of treachery by the party whom he had served, thrown into prison, and after a while released. And there the drama of his unquiet life breaks off.

CHAP.
XLVI.

1814.

February.

*Suchet dis-
mantles
Gerona and
other places.*

*Suchet,
2, 374.*

though he might justly deem it treachery in the agent, he could not but consider to be an allowable stratagem on the part of an injured, enterprizing, and ever active enemy, . . . it was even more mortifying for him immediately afterwards to make overtures, by order of the minister at war, to General Copons for evacuating all the places which he yet retained, Figueras only excepted; and to find the allies so confident of speedily obtaining them unconditionally that his proposals were disregarded. In retiring from the vicinity of Barcelona he had destroyed his works at the bridge of Molins del Rey, and in the pass of Moncada, and at Mongat; he now found it necessary to demolish the fortified posts at Besalu, Olot, Bascara, Palamos, and other smaller places; and even to dismantle Gerona, evacuate it, and retire with the remains of his army to the neighbourhood of Figueras. Jaca, too, about the same time was compelled to surrender to a part of Mina's army.

*State of
Lord Wel-
lington's
army.*

On the Biscayan coast Santona was the only place which still remained in the enemy's power; the garrison were blockaded; but they contrived to get supplies by sea, sometimes by successful runners from the opposite side of the bight, sometimes by capturing traders that approached too near, for they had one or two armed vessels in the port; but more by means of smugglers, who ran in for the sake of a good market, and in the spirit of their illicit occupation cared not with whom they dealt. The British depôts had been removed from Bilbao and St. Sebastian's; and, notwithstanding the stormy season, the army was always abundantly supplied, except with fodder; when this failed, bruised furze was used; the horses ate it with avidity, and kept in excellent condition. The men, during this inaction, suffered more; some of the corps were very sickly; and one regiment, which lost many men by a