

CHAP. expose him to the suspicion and fury of his own soldiers.
 XVII. In endeavouring to restore order among the troops, and to
 1808. obtain food and clothing for them, he was indefatigable ; no man
 December. could have exerted himself with greater activity and zeal. The
 condition of his army indeed, officers as well as men, was
 pitiable. The military chest having been taken to Zaragoza,
 they were without pay ; and a great proportion of those who
 had endured the fatigue and sufferings of the retreat were now
 sinking under the effects. They lay upon straw, half-naked,
 in that severe season, and in the keen climate of that high coun-
 try, .. hundreds were perishing thus. The Duke established
 hospitals, collected beds from the city and from all the places
 within reach, appointed officers to the sole charge of seeing that
 the sick were supplied, and ordered the friars to attend upon
 them. His authority was exerted as far as it would extend, and
 when that failed, he begged for their support. These exertions
 were not without effect ; the progress of disease was stopped,
 men and stores were obtained, subordination was restored, and
 with little efficient strength there was the appearance as well as
 the name of an army.

Infantado,
42—44.

*Dreams of
offensive
operations.*

The Spaniards were not sensible how low they had fallen as a
 military people. Remembering what they had been, no lessons,
 however severe, could make them see themselves as they were ; and
 this error was not confined to the multitude ; it was partaken by
 all ranks, and seemed, indeed, inherent in the national character.
 It was an error which exposed their armies always to defeat,
 and yet as a nation rendered them invincible ; .. the French
 could have invaded no people whom it would have been so easy
 to rout, none whom it was so impossible to subdue. Infantado
 had his full share of this delusion ; he planned extensive and
 combined operations, such as required good troops, intelligent
 officers, and ready means ; .. he thought of relieving Zaragoza, ..

of recovering Madrid ; or of pursuing the left wing of that army which was then employed against the English ; . . and this with men and leaders whose incapacity was manifest upon every occasion. Upon intelligence that about 1500 French cavalry were scouring the country on both sides of the Tagus, and plundering great part of the provinces of Cuenca and La Mancha, he concerted a scheme for surprising them at Aranjuez and Tarancon, sending Venegas with 4000 foot and 800 horse to attack them in the latter place, while D. Antonio de Senra, with an equal force of foot and 1000 horse, was to fall upon Aranjuez, overcome the enemy there, and intercept those who would retreat thither in their endeavour to escape from Tarancon. The attempt failed, wholly through mismanagement. Senra stopped short at El Horcajo, in fear of a detachment of French cavalry at Villanueva del Cardete, though that force had been calculated upon in the combinations of Infantado. The division with Venegas lost their way in the night and the snow ; some went in one direction, some in another, . . the cavalry who were thus separated had no directions how to act ; and the infantry, instead of surprising the enemy in Tarancon, were themselves surprised by them. There were, however, some good troops among them, who stood firm, and the French, being very inferior in number, retreated with some loss to Aranjuez.

This failure had the ill effect of creating discord among the Spaniards. Infantado blamed the commanders ; they reproached the officers under them ; and both were willing to excuse themselves by supposing that what had failed in the execution had been planned unskilfully. Yet, as some advantage had been gained, the Duke resolved to pursue it . . The left bank being now cleared as far as Aranjuez, he hoped to take possession of that point and of Ocaña, and as in that rainy season the Tagus was nowhere fordable, his purpose was to remove the boats,

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December.

*Movement
against the
French at
Tarancon
frustrated.*

*Infantado,
45—55.*

Dec. 25.

*Venegas
falls back
from Ta-
rancon to
Ucles.*

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break down the bridges, and place himself at Toledo. Venegas therefore was ordered to canton his troops in Tarancon, Ucles, and the neighbouring villages, preparatory to this movement, and his force was increased to 8000 foot and 1900 horse, . . the commander-in-chief retaining with himself about 10,000, of whom a third part were without arms, and a considerable number otherwise unfit for service. This was their position at the beginning of the year. Of what was passing in other parts they were ill-informed, and the false reports which abound in such times were always on the favourable side. They believed the French in Madrid were in hourly fear that this army would appear before the capital; and that Romana had entirely destroyed the enemy at Guadarama. Some movements, however, on the part of the French about Aranjuez made Venegas resolve to fall back from Tarancon upon Ucles. He apprehended that it was their intention to attack the part of his force which was stationed at this latter place, and he resolved therefore to march his troops thither as a better position than Tarancon, and one where he might cover the army.

*Rout of the
Spaniards
at Ucles.*

Ucles is a decayed town, where the Knights of Santiago had their chief convent in the bright ages of that military order: here their banner was kept which Gregory XI. had blessed, and which the Kings of Spain delivered to every new master on his appointment: hither the knights from all the other provinces resorted when their services were required, and from hence they had set forth for the conquest of Cordoba, and Seville, and Jaen, and Murcia. To a Spaniard of these times it was a melancholy place, for the proud as well as the mournful recollections which it recalled; for here Alonso VI. had lost his only son, in the most disastrous defeat that the Christians had ever suffered from the Moors since the destruction of the kingdom of the Goths. He fell in battle with the Almoravides; and because seven Counts

had died bravely in defending the Infante, the African fanatics, in their insolent triumph, called the spot where they fell the Place of the Seven Swine. This ill-omened ground was now to become the scene of an action disgraceful to the Spaniards for the facility with which they were routed, and infamous to the French for the enormous wickedness with which they abused their victory.

Venegas supposed that the French were bringing forces against him across the Tagus, by the ferry at Villamanrique. His danger was from a different quarter. Victor had marched from Toledo against Infantado's army, knowing as little of the Spaniards' movements as they did of his, but with such troops, that his only anxiety was to find the enemy, and bring them to action wherever they might be found. Victor himself, with General Ruffin's division, went by way of Alcazar, and General Villate, taking the direction of Ucles, discovered the Spaniards there on the morning of the 13th. Venegas apprehended an attack on his right, or in the rear; but the French crossed the brook, and fell upon the left wing of the Spaniards, who were stationed upon some high and broken ground, commanding the convent and the town. If the general erred in not strengthening this position, the troops allowed him no time for remedying his error; they retreated precipitately to the town, and when orders came to occupy the convent it was too late; . . . the enemy were within the enclosure, and fired from thence, as under cover of a parapet. The panic presently spread, the raw levies disordered those who would have done their duty, and many officers made a brave but vain sacrifice of their own lives in endeavouring to rally and encourage the men. The fugitives in one direction came upon the enemy's artillery, under General Cenar-mont, and were cut down with grape-shot; in another they fell in with Victor and the remaining part of the French army. One

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body, under D. Pedro Agustin Giron, seeing that all was lost, made their way desperately through the enemy in good order, and got to Carrascosa, where they found the Duke. It was a series of errors on the part of the Spaniards, and the consequences were as disastrous as they could be. The French boasted of having taken 300 officers and 12,000 men, . . . the whole force, however, which Venegas had with him did not amount to this, but the loss was very great. The prisoners were marched to Madrid, and such as fell by the way from hunger and exhaustion were shot by their inhuman captors.

*Rocca, p.
79.*

*Cruelties
committed
there by the
French.*

Never indeed did any men heap upon themselves more guilt and infamy than those by whom this easy conquest was obtained. The inhabitants of Ucles had taken no part in the action; from necessity they could only be passive spectators of the scene. But they had soon cause to lament that they had not rather immolated their wives and children with their own hands, like the Numantians of old, and then rushed upon the invaders to sweeten death with vengeance, instead of submitting to the mercy of such enemies. Plunder was the first object of the French, and in order to make the townspeople discover where their valuables were secreted, they tortured them. When they had thus obtained all the portable wealth of the place, they yoked the inhabitants like beasts, choosing especially the clergy for this outrage, loaded them with their own furniture, and made them carry it to the Castle Hill, and pile it in heaps, where they set fire to it, and consumed the whole. They then in mere wantonness murdered above threescore persons, dragging them to the shambles, that this butchery might be committed in its proper scene. Several women were among these sufferers, and they might be regarded as happy in being thus delivered from the worse horrors that ensued: for the French laid hands on the surviving women of the place, amounting to some three hundred,

.. they tore the nun from the altar, the wife from her husband's corpse, the virgin from her mother's arms, and they abused these victims of the foulest brutality, till many of them expired on the spot. This was not all,.. but the farther atrocities which these monsters perpetrated cannot even be hinted at without violating the decencies of language and the reverence which is due to humanity. These unutterable things were committed in open day, and the officers made not the slightest attempt at restraining the wretches under their command; they were employed in securing the best part of the plunder for themselves. The Spanish government published the details of this wickedness, in order that if the criminals escaped earthly punishment, they might not escape perpetual infamy.

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*Gazeta del
Gobierno,
April 24,
1809.*

Infantado was severely censured for exposing his advanced guard fourteen leagues from his head-quarters, so that support was impossible; and an equal want of judgement had been shown by Venegas in not falling back upon the main body, which he knew was actually on the way to join him. The Duke left Cuenca on the morning preceding the action, and took up his quarters that night at Horcajada. Desirous to know for what reason Venegas had retreated from Tarancon, he rode forward on the 13th with his aides-de-camp, and when he reached Carrascosa, which is a league and half from Ucles, some carriers informed him that as they were leaving that town they heard firing at the outposts. Part of his troops were at Carrascosa; they had heard nothing; and the Duke was preparing to sit down to table with their general, the Conde de Orgaz, when news came that horse and foot were approaching in disorder. Immediately he mounted and rode forward; the first person whom he met was the commandant of the light troops, D. Francisco Copons y Navia, an officer in whom he had great confidence: seeing him without his battalion,

*Infantado
collects the
fugitives.*

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Infantado,
119—132.

Retreat
from Cu-
enca.

he knew that some fatal blow must have been sustained, and asking what had happened, was told that the troops at Ucles were all either killed or taken. His first impulse was to rush forward, and throw himself upon the enemy's bayonets. A timely thought of duty withheld him from this act of desperation. The troops under Giron, who had fought their way through the French, came up now in good order; with these and with such fugitives as could be brought together, he made dispositions which checked the pursuit in this direction, and retired when the evening was closing to Horcajada. They rested there during the early part of the night, and setting forward at three in the morning, reached the Venta de las Cabrejas before daybreak.

Here, while the troops were receiving their rations, the generals held a council whether they should retreat to the borders of Valencia, and take up a position for the defence of that kingdom, which was threatened on the side of Daroca; or join the Marques del Palacio in La Mancha, and if compelled, fall back to La Carolina or Despeña-Perros; or march for Zaragoza, to attack the besiegers, and raise the siege. This was gravely proposed; but the madness of making such an attempt with an unprovided, undisciplined, routed army, dispirited by a long series of disasters, and above all, by the scandalous defeat of the preceding day, was universally acknowledged. The scheme of joining Palacio, and making for the Sierra Morena, was likewise rejected, because in the plains of La Mancha they would be exposed to the enemy's cavalry; and it was resolved without a dissentient voice to retreat into Valencia, where there were great resources for refitting and increasing the troops. This being determined, the army reached Cuenca that night, and continued its retreat on the following morning, the artillery being sent off in the middle of the night by a better road, to join them at Almodovar del Pinar. But four-and-twenty hours of the heaviest

rain rendered this road also impassable; and in spite of every exertion the greater number of the guns could not be got farther than Olmedilla, one league from Cuenca, by the following midnight, and there the escort left them. The Duke, who was with the artillery himself, in hope of expediting the most difficult part of their movements, had preceded them to Tortola, where a few of the guns had arrived, and whither the rest were to be brought next day, the worst part of the road being past. He sent orders therefore that one regiment of horse and another of foot should be dispatched to Tortola, for the purpose of escorting the artillery when it should be thus brought together, and went himself to join the army at Valera de arriba. On his arrival there on the evening of the 16th he found that no infantry had been sent; being barefooted and exhausted by marching in such weather, they had been deemed actually incapable of the service. Presently advice arrived that a company of the Ordenes Militares, which he had left at Tortola, had thought proper to leave the place immediately after his departure: that a party of enemy's cavalry had come up, and that the regiment of dragoons at the very sound of the French trumpets had taken flight, abandoning the guns to them. He now ordered a battalion of infantry and the Farnese regiment of dragoons to hasten and retake them: the night was dark, the distance considerable, the roads in the worst imaginable state; and when at daybreak they came to Tortola, scarcely an hundred infantry could be mustered, the rest having lost the way, or dispersed. The dragoons behaved well, and twice made themselves masters of the guns, but to no purpose; they were embedded in the soil too deeply to be removed at once; and while they were vainly labouring there, reinforcements came up to the enemy, and many brave men were sacrificed before the regiment desisted from the attempt at saving these guns, which with such exertions had been

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*Loss of the
artillery.*



CHAP. brought thither from Tudela. Infantado knew that any farther
 XVII. effort, considering the state of his army, must be hopeless, and
 1809. would moreover expose him to the imminent danger of having
January. his retreat cut off, for one column of the enemy appeared to be
 taking the direction of Almodovar; and in fact when the Duke
 reached that place, it was ascertained that they were within three
 leagues of it. After a few hours' rest therefore he ordered the
 retreat to be continued to La Motilla del Palancar, near Alarcon;
 and being, however unfortunate as a commander, willing to per-
 form a soldier's part to the last, took his station with his own
 family and his orderly dragoons, as an outpost, within three
 miles of the enemy. This had an excellent effect upon the
 troops; so many indeed had deserted since the rout at Ucles,
 that few perhaps remained except those who acted upon a sense
 of duty, and their movements were now conducted with more
 composure. Infantado remained at La Motilla till he was as-
 sured that the French had turned aside from the pursuit; re-
 moving then to Albacete and Chinchilla, he gave his troops a
 few days' necessary rest, and issued directions for the better
 observance of discipline and order.

Infantado,
 133—141.

*Infantado
 frustrates a
 movement
 of the enemy
 against the
 Carolina
 army.*

On the 25th the army moved to Hellin and Tobarra, the
 object being to cover Murcia, call off the attention of the enemy
 from Valencia, and receive reinforcements from both those king-
 doms and from Andalusia. Infantado was more enterprising and
 more hopeful than some of the generals under his command,
 who would have had him retreat to the city of Murcia, there to
 refit his troops, or take shelter even at Carthagen. The mi-
 nister at war submitted to his consideration whether it would
 not be advisable to take up a position between the Peñas de S.
 Pedro and Carcelen, for the purpose of communicating with the
 Sierra Morena by the Sierra de Alcaraz. This the Duke thought
 a bad position in itself, even if it were not in a desert, and with-