

CHAP. ought to have been bold, and rash in enterprise when he ought
 XX. to have been cautious. Had Henestrosa been supported in time
 1809. (for there had been time enough to support him), the ground
March. was so strong, and the Spaniards in such a temper, that the
 French could hardly have reached the position at Miravete
 without sustaining a loss severe enough to have crippled them.
 In pursuance of this unwise resolution, on the night of the 18th
 he began his retreat, with the intention of forcing his way through
 the French corps, which he expected to fall in with, and of taking
 up the best position he could find for his own subsistence, and
 for covering the frontiers of Andalusia. But by thus abandon-
 ing an excellent position, he left Extremadura open to a hungry
 enemy.

*Skirmishes
 at Truxillo
 and Mia-
 jadas.*

When the Central Junta were informed of these movements,
 they imputed the disastrous measure to Henestrosa's abandon-
 ment of his post, and ordered Cuesta to proceed against him
 with all the rigour of the law. But the old General, though
 disposed at first to condemn him, was too generous to do this.
 He replied that the Camp-Marshal had in all other cases behaved
 well, and with a courage amounting to rashness, and that in this
 he had acted only under an error of judgement. He met with
 no enemies on his night march, and halting in the morning
 beyond the Rio Monte, learnt that the detachment which he had
 expected to encounter was taking a direction for Truxillo. To
 Truxillo he proceeded on his retreat, and, leaving Henestrosa to
 cover that city, took up a position at the Puerto de Santa Cruz,
 forty miles from the stronger pass whence he had retreated.
 There it was his intention to wait till it should be seen whether
 Alburquerque's division could effect its junction, and whether it
 would make him equal to the enemy. On the following morn-
 ing Henestrosa was attacked, and driven to a little bridge on
 the other side of Truxillo: there he repulsed the enemy, and the

March 20.

skirmishing continued all day, with equal loss on either side, the Spaniards behaving in such a manner as to increase the General's confidence in his troops. Cuesta expected now to be attacked on the morrow, either in front or on his left toward the village of Abertura, and had made up his mind to abide an action. But Cuesta's resolutions were sometimes changed with as little consideration as they had been taken, for he was a man who acted more frequently upon the impulse of the moment than upon reflection. The whole of Victor's force was collected at Truxillo; his advanced parties kept the Spaniards upon the alarm as well as the alert, and Cuesta then began to apprehend that the Puerto de S. Cruz was not defensible against the superior force that would be brought against him, especially as the ground was not favourable for cavalry. In the morning, therefore, he recommenced his retreat, evidently not knowing whither, and with no determined purpose, but in good order and in good heart, for, injudicious and ruinous as all the late movements had been, the men were not yet dispirited. While he was halting near Miajadas to refresh the troops, the *chasseurs* of the enemy's advanced guard approached near enough to expose themselves; the advantage was well taken, and the French Colonel tore his hair in an agony of grief when he saw some hundred and fifty of his finest men cut down. This success was obtained by the regi-

CHAP.
XX.
1809.
March.

Rocca, 93.

CHAP. the morrow, he marched for Campanario, to join Alburquerque,
 XX. who with his little division was coming by way of Aguda and
 1809. Garbayuela. He did not, however, remain there till the junction
 March. was effected, but moved to Valle de la Serena, chiefly for the
 sake of facilitating his supplies. Some magazines had fallen
 into the enemy's hands at Truxillo, one of the ill consequences
 arising from his rash retreat; there was no want of food in that
 as yet unravaged country, but he complained to the government
 of the incapacity and irregularity of all the persons employed in
 that department, and protested that unless this evil was remedied
 it would be impossible for him to maintain discipline, or prevent
 dispersion.

*Junction
 with Albur-
 querce's
 division.*

The information which Cuesta received at this time, that a
 train of heavy artillery had been sent from Madrid toward Ex-
 tremadura, made him apprehend the chief object of the enemy
 was to lay siege to Badajoz. The possession of that fortress was
 so important toward the success of their operations against Por-
 tugal, that this design had been apprehended as soon as they
 became masters of the field, and the Governor had been re-
 peatedly charged to omit no means for putting it in a good state
 of defence. Forming a new plan in consequence of this, Cuesta
 informed the Central Junta that he should annoy the besiegers,
 and cut off their communication with Madrid. But he had no
 sooner effected his junction with Alburquerque than he deter-
 mined upon seeking the enemy, and offering battle in the first
 favourable situation. It was not the addition of strength which
 induced him to this measure, for he had expected to meet 6000
 men, and had found little more than half that number;... but
 long irresolution usually ends in some rash resolve.

*Cuesta of-
 fers battle
 at Medellin*

Having forsaken that strong ground, which, if it had been
 defended as well as it was wisely chosen, would have covered
 Extremadura, it was as much Cuesta's policy to have avoided an

action now as it had been then to have stood an attack, for he knew that he might expect a British army to co-operate with him. Sometimes as facile and vacillating as he was obstinate and impracticable at others, no man was more unfit to command an army in critical times ; and yet the honest originality of his character, his fearless and buoyant spirit which nothing could cast down, his energy which neither age nor infirmity had abated, and the warmth of his heart as well as his temper, had won for him in no common degree the attachment not of the soldiers alone, but of those even who perceived and lamented his errors. The enemy at this time occupied Merida and Medellin : the latter town, memorable as having been the birth-place of Hernan Cortes, stands on the left bank of the Guadiana, in a wide and open plain, without tree or cover of any kind. On that plain Cuesta formed his whole force in one line, of about a league in extent, without any reserve, disdaining all advantage of ground, as if he had desired nothing but a fair field and mere individual courage were to decide the day. His army consisted of 20,000 infantry and 2000 cavalry. The vanguard, under Henestrosa, and the Duque del Parque's division, formed the left, which Cuesta took under his own charge, as being placed on the highest ground, from whence he could overlook the field. The centre was under D. Francisco de Trias. D. Francisco de Eguia, who was second in command, was with the right wing, which consisted of the Marques de Portago's division and Alburquerque's, the Duke having with him his own horse. The cavalry were on the left, that being the point where the French presented the greatest force.

Victor's army consisted of about 18,000 foot and 2500 horse. He had collected his whole force there, for the purpose of striking an efficient blow, and destroying, if that were possible, the Spanish army, in pursuance of the murderous system upon

CHAP.
XX.
1809.
March.

March 28.

Battle of
Medellin.

CHAP. which he had been instructed to act. They were formed in an
 XX. arc between the Guadiana and a cultivated ravine which extends
 1809. from Medellin to the village of Mengabril; Lasalle's division
March. of light cavalry on the left, the division of German infantry in
 the centre, in large close columns; the dragoons under General
 Latour-Maubourg on the right, the divisions of Villate and
 Ruffin in reserve; their front was covered by six batteries of
 four guns each. The action began about eleven o'clock. These
 batteries opened on the Spanish infantry, who were ordered by
 Cuesta to charge with the bayonet and take them. The order
 was bravely obeyed; two regiments of French dragoons charged
 the foot, and were repulsed with loss: the German division
 formed itself into a square, and resisted with such difficulty the
 resolute attack of the Spaniards, that Cuesta was in full hope
 of a complete victory, and Victor not without apprehensions of
 a defeat, till part of his reserve succeeded in enabling his in-
 fantry to keep their ground. The Spaniards on the left had
 taken the first battery; a strong body of horse, protected by a
 column of infantry, advanced to recover it, and at that moment
 the whole of the Spanish cavalry on the left took panic, and
 without facing the foe, without attempting to make the slightest
 stand, fled in the greatest disorder from the field, most of them
 to the distance of many leagues. Instances of such scandalous
 panic were but too frequent in the Spanish armies during the
 war, but in no instance was it more fatal or more unaccountable
 than in this; for the day was going on well, the infantry were in
 good heart, the advantage was on their side; and the regiments
 which at that crisis disgraced themselves, and betrayed their
 country, had displayed both skill and courage during the retreat
 from the Tagus, and had distinguished themselves in the affair
 near Miajadas.

Cuesta, who was at the other end of the wing when he saw

*Misconduct
 of the Span-
 ish cavalry.*

this shameful abandonment, clapped spurs to his horse in the hope of rallying them ; his staff followed, .. but in vain ; the enemy, quick in seizing opportunity, turned the left, which was thus exposed, and as there was no second line or reserve, defeat then became inevitable. The old General was thrown, and wounded in the foot, and not without great difficulty rescued and saved from capture by the exertion of his two nephews and some other brave and faithful officers. But the day was irrecoverably lost ; and the French, having routed the left wing, turned upon the centre and the right.

CHAP.
XX.

1809.

March.

*Cuesta
thrown,
and wound-
ed.*

The right wing of the Spaniards, meantime, had made the enemy give ground, and were following up their success ; but Alburquerque, seeing what had occurred in the other flank, proposed to form in close columns of battalions, and begin their retreat. Eguia overruled this, saying he had no instructions to that effect, and not daring even in this evident emergence to act upon his own responsibility. Indeed it is affirmed, that not one of Cuesta's officers knew his intention of giving battle an hour before the action began. Affairs were every moment growing worse, and Eguia having left the right of the line, the Duke gave the necessary command ; but it had been delayed too long ; the whole force of the French artillery was concentrated upon these columns, who were now the only troops that remained unbroken ; a total dispersion took place ; and the enemy, forming a chain of cavalry all round the routed army, executed their orders, which were to give no quarter. They had suffered enough in the action to make them obey this atrocious command with good will. They had themselves 4000 men killed and wounded, .. nearly a fifth of their whole force ; their official statement of the Spanish loss made it 7000 killed ; other accounts carried it to 12,000. Cuesta could only state that it was very great, and ascertain that a hundred and seventy officers of infantry and ten of cavalry were killed, wounded, or missing.

*Dispersion
of the Span-
ish army.*

CHAP.

XX.

1809.

*March.**No quarter given.*

Weariness, rather than compunction, on the part of the French, at length put a stop to the carnage, and the account of prisoners is variously stated from three thousand to seven ; but it is certain that not two ever reached Madrid. A wounded Spanish officer was brought into the room where Victor was at supper, and the French Marshal said to him, " If my orders had been obeyed, sir, you would not have been here." Those orders had been obeyed too well. The dragoons that night in the French camp were rubbing their sword arms with soap and spirits, to recover the muscles from the strains of that day's slaughter. Their cruelty was not satiated even with this success. A peasant in one of the near villages had a son who was in Cuesta's army, where he had served for some time. When the army drew near Medellin, this Juan went to his father's house, and his conversation induced his two brothers, Antonio and Carlos, to go with him as volunteers. Juan was never seen after the battle ; but the father upon searching the field found Antonio's body, and the other brother, wounded, and weeping over it. He removed the dead son and the living one to his cottage, that the one might receive Christian burial, and the other such help as might have restored him. A party of the French, in their work of pillage, entered the house, and finding a wounded Spaniard there, deliberately shot him, before his father's face.

Escape of Alburquerque.

When the dispersion of his columns took place, the Duke of Alburquerque found his retreat completely cut off. Four officers were with him ; with these he advanced upon the French cordon of cavalry, and when at the distance of about an hundred yards, turning to one of his companions, he said, " You see that officer of chasseurs so gaily caparisoned ? I will have him down in a moment." He then spurred his horse, and rode at him full speed : of course his companions followed ; . . the French officer was startled, and moved rapidly on one side, several of the chasseurs

imitated his movement, and Alburquerque with his friends got through the opening they had thus made. D. Miguel de Alava was one of those friends; he had behaved with distinguished gallantry that day, and just before the dispersion of the last battalions, sword in hand, singly retook a Spanish nine-pounder from two French dragoons who had taken possession of it. Soon after they had broken through, and were still hotly pursued, a wounded artilleryman besought Alava to save him from the general massacre. "Get up behind me," was the answer, "and I will carry you off, or we will perish together." This little party, happily for Spain, effected their escape. About midnight they arrived at a lone farm-house, far enough from the field to feel themselves in safety; and having got some wood upon the fire, and lighted their cigars, they agreed unanimously that the loss of the battle was of no * importance. Such was the spirit of the Spaniards; a spirit which no misfortunes could abate, which no defeats could subdue.

CHAP.
XX.
1809.
March.

The battle itself, most unfortunate as it was, afforded Cuesta some vindication for the error which he had committed in risking it. It had been fought so well by the infantry, that they had obtained, and that for a considerable time, a decided advantage, till the horse took fright, and abandoned them. But it was after the defeat that the strength of the old man's character appeared with full effect; and certainly on that memorable occasion both the General and the government proved themselves worthy of their country and their cause. The advance of the French was impeded by the weather, a storm of wind and heavy rain having raged uninterruptedly for three

The remains of the Spanish army collected.

* *Que la perdida de la batalla nada importaba.* The French used to say that the best General in Spain was the General *no importa*.

CHAP. days after the battle, and swollen the brooks so as to render
 XX. them like rivers. A mishap also had befallen them at Almaraz,
 1809. where their bridge gave way while some ammunition carts were
March. passing: many lives were lost, and the operations of the army
 were delayed in consequence. They collected, however, in and
 about Merida, and their advanced parties appeared at Almen-
 dralejo and Villa Franca. This seemed to indicate an intention
 of entering Andalusia; and Cuesta was of opinion, that, know-
 ing the total dispersion of his army, they would not hesitate at
 dividing their own force, and execute this design with one part,
 while they laid siege with the other to Badajoz, which was not
 in a state for making a long military defence. He urged the
 government to send all the disposable force in Andalusia to S.
 Olalla without delay; between that place and Ronquillo, he
 said, was the only position where they could resist the enemy
 with good probability of success, provided there were troops,
 and artillery, and subsistence.

*Cuesta dis-
 graces those
 who had be-
 haved ill.*

He had appointed Llerena as the rallying point for the
 fugitives. The infantry came slowly in, but when Cuesta ar-
 rived he found that the cavalry had collected there with little
 diminution. He thanked the army in his general orders for
 their good conduct at Medellin, excepting by name the horse
 regiments which had so disgracefully taken flight, and thereby
 occasioned that to be a defeat, which, if they had done their
 duty like the foot, would have proved a most glorious and im-
 portant victory. For this offence he suspended three Colonels
 from their rank. It does not appear that any heavier punish-
 ment was inflicted: . . the fault had been too general to fix it upon
 individuals; . . and if recourse had been had to lot, it might have
 fallen upon men who, with the best heart and will, had not been
 able in that precipitate movement to check either their com-
 panions or their horses. The privates were disgraced by having