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approbation of the Junta Blake formed a plan for driving the enemy from this part of the country ; for which purpose it was necessary to collect these troops, and strengthen them with a small detachment from the garrison of Tortosa. The French division was that which Junot had commanded at the siege of Zaragoza, and was now under General Laval ; it consisted of from 6000 to 7000 men and 500 horse, having lost about half its number during the siege. Laval's head quarters were at Alcañiz, where the greater part of the division was stationed ; but he was at this time in the field with 2000 or 3000 men, for the purpose of driving away the Spaniards, who were observing him too closely, and continually harassing his posts.

D. Pedro Roca was to conduct the troops from Morella to the place appointed for their junction, Lazan those from the Algas. Both had orders to avoid any action with the enemy till the junction should have been effected. But it so happened that Laval took up his quarters in the village of Beceyte on the day when Lazan had to arrive there, and the Spanish general rightly concluded that his instructions were not intended to prevent him from seizing any decided advantage which might present itself. He stationed some light troops in points that commanded the defiles through which the French must pass, and killed or wounded about an hundred of the enemy, with the loss of only five or six men on his own part. On the following day the junction was effected at Monroyo, great difficulty having been overcome in bringing the artillery through such a country. Having reached the Ermita at Fornoles, the vanguard under D. Pedro Texada was sent forward to interpose between Alcañiz and Val de Algorfa, which was the usual position of the enemy's van. Two columns, under D. Martin Gonzalez da Menchaca and D. Josef Cucalo, had preceded them to occupy the villages of Castelseras and Torrecilla. The remainder of Blake's little

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army, consisting of three columns of infantry, the cavalry, and the artillery, began their march by night along the only road from Morella to Alcañiz, from which place they were five or six hours distant.

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*The French withdraw.*

Upon reaching Val de Algorfa, it was seen that the enemy were protected by the walls of the inclosures, and by a chapel, where they had formed a parapet. They were some 500 or 600 in number, and being dislodged from thence by the artillery, retreated toward Alcañiz; but when they had advanced about half a league, they came upon Texada's detachment, and being thus between two fires, dispersed with as much alacrity as a body of Spaniards could have done. By this time Menchaca and Cucalo were approaching the city from the left, and the French, who were sallying forth against Texada, seeing themselves threatened on that side also, began to retreat hastily in the direction of Samper. There, and at La Puebla and Hajar, they collected their troops, withdrawing them from Caspe and Calanda. The people of Alcañiz, priests, women, young, and old, went out to meet their deliverers, carrying refreshments for the soldiers, and blessing them with prayers and tears. Blake himself was affected at the sight, and said, that if the tyrant of the world, as he called Buonaparte, could have seen the emotions of that multitude, and heard their shouts for their King, their country, and their religion, he would perhaps have begun to doubt the possibility of raising for his brother in Spain a party, not of persons attached to his cause, but even of those who would be resigned to his usurpation.

Upon the approach of a Spanish detachment the enemy withdrew from Samper to the Puebla de Hajar, and being there reinforced from Zaragoza, advanced toward Alcañiz, to revenge themselves for their late reverses. They were now 10,000 foot,

*Suchet comes against him.**May 21.*

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 XXIII. manded in person. Blake was informed of their approach,  
 1809. and drew up his army to meet them on the plain of Alcañiz,  
May. before that city. The plain is surrounded with heights. About  
 two musket shot from the city is a range of hills, accessible for  
 cavalry, and on all sides sloping gently to the plain. The road  
 to Zaragoza crosses there. Here he stationed the main body of  
 his forces, their wings being supported by two batteries, which,  
 with others in the centre, completely flanked the whole line.  
 The weak side of this position was on the right, where the  
 plain was lowest, and there were trees enough to afford cover to  
 the enemy; but the heights terminated here, and upon their  
 loftiest part, where a chapel commanded the road from Caspe,  
 he stationed 2000 men, under Camp-marshal D. Juan Carlos  
 Areizaga. The vanguard, under Texada, was placed on an  
 eminence in front of the position; some light troops, among  
 the olive-yards on the left, to prevent the French from turning  
 them on that side; and the cavalry, under D. Miguel Ibarrola,  
 in front of all, upon the Zaragoza road.

May 23.

*Defeat of  
 the French  
 before Al-  
 cañiz.*

At six in the morning the enemy appeared: the advanced  
 parties retired before them, and the cavalry and the vanguard  
 fell back before superior numbers, as they had been instructed;  
 the infantry to the chapel on the right, the horse, with two pieces  
 of flying artillery, to the protection of their batteries. The  
 chapel, as Blake had anticipated, was the main point of attack;  
 the enemy presented themselves in front of this post and on the  
 right, and occupied all the immediate heights. After a brisk  
 fire on both sides, a column of about a thousand grenadiers  
 attempted to take this position with the bayonet: they were  
 broken presently, and the light troops of the Spaniards in their  
 turn attacked the French on the heights, who kept their ground.

In the hope of relieving this post, which he saw would be again attempted in force, Blake directed Menchaca to make an attack upon the enemy's centre; but the French were strong enough to attend to this and renew their efforts against Areizaga. The second effort, however, was not more successful than the first. The Spanish cavalry had been ordered from the Zaragoza to the Caspe road, to assist in supporting this point: and as they came out from the trees, a discharge from the French infantry wounded their commander Ibarrola; they were attacked with a superior troop of horse, and fell back to the position. The enemy, now abandoning their first plan of winning the chapel, turned upon Menchaca, who found himself suddenly assailed by very superior numbers; he fell back in good order to the position, but one light battalion found it necessary to retire upon Areizaga's post. Encouraged by this, the French made a desperate attack upon the centre of the Spanish line: it was saved by the artillery: they approached almost to the cannon's mouth, but were mown down by a fire of grape; and those who turned one of the batteries fell by the fire of the troops. Defeated in this attempt also, they withdrew to the heights on which they had first been seen, and after an action of seven hours, both armies remained looking at each other. The rich plain of Alcañiz was between them; and Blake said in his dispatch, that the sight of it might have warmed the heart of the coldest Spaniard, and animated him to defend the beautiful country which God had given him. It would have been rash in him to have attacked the enemy when they had the advantage of the ground; to have thus decidedly repulsed them was no inconsiderable advantage in the state of his army, some corps of which had never before been in action. The French retreated under cover of the night, and took up a strong position behind the Huerba near Zaragoza. They left 500 dead on the

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field, and their total loss was estimated at \* 2000; that of the Spaniards did not amount to 400.

Among the officers whom Blake particularly commended for their conduct Lazan was one, who was at his side during the whole day; Loigorri, the commandant of the artillery, was also deservedly noticed, and Areizaga, upon whom the brunt of the action had fallen; to the two latter he frankly declared that the victory was owing. He returned thanks to his army; and noticing that a few wretched men had fled from the field, said their names should be struck off the roll, that the Spanish army might no longer be disgraced by them. The Central Junta, in consequence of this success, nominated him Captain General of Aragon, Catalonia, Valencia, and Murcia, as well as General-in-chief of the united army of those provinces, and conferred upon him the Encomienda of the Peso Real in Valencia. The officers whom he recommended were promoted also, Areizaga to the rank of Lieutenant-General.

Anniver-  
sary at Va-  
lencia.

The day on which the battle of Alcañiz was fought was celebrated at Valencia as the anniversary of their insurrection against the intrusive government. The ceremonies were characteristic of the times and of the people. The festivities, as usual in Catholic countries, began on the eve of the holiday; the city was illuminated on the preceding night, the portraits of Ferdinand and his ally the King of Great Britain were exhibited under the flags of the allied kingdoms; and the Valencians displayed their national humour in caricatures of Murat, Buonaparte, and Joseph. In the morning, the civil authorities, the

\* Marshal St. Cyr speaks of this as *un petit événement heureux*. (165.) Comparatively small as the numbers were on either side, and uninfluential as it was upon the issue of the war, it was a well-fought battle, in which the French, under one of their ablest generals, were fairly defeated.

new-raised levies, and the city volunteers, went in procession to the Plaza of the Cathedral, where a statue of Ferdinand had been erected upon a Grecian column. The statue was concealed behind a silk curtain, so disposed as to fall in tent-hangings and disclose it, when the Captain General, D. Joseph Caro, asked the people in their own dialect if they wished to see their King? At the same moment the music struck up, the bells were rung, the guns fired, and the shouts of the multitude were heard prevailing over all. They then proceeded to the Cathedral, where the banners of the volunteers were blessed by the Archbishop at the high altar, and afterwards delivered to them at the feet of the statue. The display was in French taste, but it was sanctified by Spanish feeling. The Valencians were reminded of their defeats as well as of their triumphs; they were told that many of their countrymen who had assisted in driving Moncey from their gates had fallen in the field of Tudelá, or lay buried under the ruins of Zaragoza.

A week after the ceremony Blake reviewed his army at Caspe, on St. Ferdinand's day, which of all festivals in the year the Spaniards then regarded with most feeling. The Romanists, instead of birthdays, keep the festival of the saint from whom they take their names; this therefore was especially sacred to a people who, measuring the virtues of their captive King by their own loyalty, believed him to be all that they desired, and all that he ought to have been. They were told by their government that King St. Ferdinand, who had united in himself all the virtues of a man, all the talents of a hero, and all the qualities of a monarch, looked down from the heights of Heaven with complacent eyes upon the defenders and avengers of one who, as he inherited his throne and name, so also did he imitate and adore his virtues. An annual service on this day was appointed to be held in all cathedral and collegiate churches for

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*Celebration  
of King St.  
Ferdinand's  
day.*

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evermore in remembrance of the sacred war against the usurper ; and the day following was to be kept as a perpetual anniversary for the souls of all who fell in it. Blake's army had now been increased to 14,000 men : their late conduct had filled him with what might have seemed a well-founded hope ; and their appearance and discipline were now so satisfactory, that as they filed before him, he said, a few more such days as that of Alcañiz would open for them the way to France. There were indeed at that time evident marks that the French were dispirited : they had been weakened by the withdrawal of Mortier's division ; and having in this last action for the first time been beaten by a Spanish force, not superior to them in number, and when the advantage of cavalry was on their side, it was believed that they were preparing to retire from Zaragoza. Blake was informed that their papers and baggage were already without the city, ready to be removed ; and that they had actually begun their march toward Navarre, but returned in consequence of receiving dispatches on the way. The news of Buonaparte's failure at Essling arrived at this time ; and when Blake communicated it to the troops in general orders, he observed that it had taken place on the day when they had defeated another of his armies at Alcañiz.

*Executions  
in Barce-  
lona.*

*May 16.*

While the hopes of the Spaniards in this quarter had thus been raised by their own success, by the events in Germany, and by the news from Portugal, circumstances occurred at Barcelona to heighten their indignation against the oppressors of their country, and exasperate the desire of vengeance. In conformity to a scheme concerted with the inhabitants of that city, Coupigny had sent a body of troops, who were to be admitted in the night, while the attention of the garrison should be called off by the cannonade of a Spanish frigate upon one of the batteries. The ship performed its part, and the troops approached the gates ; but no movement was made to favour them. The French

had obtained sufficient intelligence to put them upon their guard, and render it impracticable, and several persons were in consequence arrested. One of these, by name Pou, a doctor of laws in the university of Cervera, being asked upon his trial before the military tribunal whether he had not distributed fifty muskets, replied yes, and that he would do so again if he had an opportunity, as they were for the defence of his religion, his King, and his country. They told him this could not be, for religion forbade the shedding of blood, the King desired no such proceedings, and the country abhorred them: he replied, that as they neither professed the Catholic religion, nor acknowledged Ferdinand for King of Spain, nor belonged to that country, it was to be expected that he and they should differ in opinion. They asked him to whom the muskets had been distributed: his answer was, to good and loyal Spaniards, whose names he would never disclose. A young tradesman, who was tried before the same tribunal for endeavouring to purchase ammunition for the same purpose, threw back the appellation of traitor upon Duhesme, saying, "Your Excellency is the traitor, who, under the cloak of friendship, took possession of our fortresses: I only bought part of what you plundered from us." This person, with two others, was hanged, at the same time that Pou and the Prefect of S. Cayetano were strangled, the Prefect administering the last offices of religion at the place of execution to his fellow-sufferers.

These executions occasioned a strong feeling among the Catalans, and it was heightened by a decree of Duhesme's against the clergy, who were at the head, he said, of all the conspiracies for assassinating the French, and who made their churches and convents so many places of meeting for the conspirators. All such buildings therefore were ordered to be closed at six in the evening, and not opened till half after five

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*Blake advances toward Zaragoza.*



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in the morning. If any person were found in a church or belfry between those hours, or in a convent if he did not belong to it, he was immediately to be delivered over to a military commission as a conspirator; and a secret agent of the police was to be appointed, who was to watch every church and convent, and be paid at its expense. The indignation of the Spaniards made them more eager in their hopes and expectations of deliverance; and the Valencians more especially expressed their confidence of fresh victories, because of the appearance and temper of the troops who marched from their city to join the army under Blake. That general's headquarters were at Samper de Calanda, part of his troops being stationed at Hajar and Puebla de Hajar. Having received intelligence that a French corps, which was estimated at a third part of the force under Suchet, had been detached to Carineña, and was committing its usual excesses in the surrounding country, he formed a plan for cutting off this corps, and then advancing upon Zaragoza, in the hope of effecting the deliverance of that city, an exploit which, if it were achieved, would of all possible successes produce the greatest impression upon the public mind, not in Spain alone, but throughout Europe. With this view he directed Areizaga to take post with his division at Botorrita, while he with the rest of the army proceeded to Villanueva de la Huerva. The artillery was to move behind Longares, where it was expected that the enemy would pass on their retreat to Zaragoza as soon as they knew the Spaniards were in motion. When Areizaga reached Botorrita, he learned that the greater part of the French had retired to their main body, about 1500 only remaining at Puebla de Muel, and these moved off so quickly towards the Xalon, that it was not possible to cut them off, . . . only a convoy which they would have escorted to Zaragoza was taken by the Spanish advance.

As this corps had not fallen back upon the main body, which it might easily have done, but had passed on toward Alagon, Blake was confirmed in his opinion that the French did not mean to defend Zaragoza if it should be attacked. Nevertheless, reflecting that the country in his rear was entirely open, and considering the general situation of the Spanish armies, the importance of preserving his own, which was in so promising a state, and the complicated and hazardous movements of a retreat, in which he knew how little it could be trusted, he deemed it by no means advisable to bring on a general action, and therefore did not alter Areizaga's position, looking upon Botorrita as a strong post, where, in case of any reserve, the enemy might be detained. When he joined Areizaga there, the troops had begun to skirmish; this had been brought on by that general's making a reconnoissance in considerable strength; and Blake was so well satisfied with the behaviour of his troops, that he endeavoured to surround the enemy, but they retired in time. Early on the following morning Suchet drew out his whole force from Zaragoza to attack him. The firing began at the advanced posts by five in the morning, and went on increasing till the same hour in the afternoon, when the French resolved to break the Spanish line, supposing that the men were weary and the ammunition spent.

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*Suchet attacks the Spaniards.*

*June 14.*

Blake's advanced guard was at Maria, where the road from Zaragoza to Madrid crosses the cordillera: the ground between him and the city consisted of hills and vales, ridge behind ridge. His cavalry was stationed in the high road, the rest of the line was formed by the infantry and artillery. The Spaniards, fighting and retreating in good order, fell back successively from one of these heights to another, but when they reached the fourth, their cavalry had been worsted. Blake then thought it necessary to fall back on Botorrita, which he did with as much

*Blake retreats to Belchite.*