

Sardam, where, during the following day and night, he occupied one half the united villages, the enemy's cavalry occupying the other. As he could no longer be of service here, and was aware that he should be attacked in the course of the day if he remained longer, early on the 30th he resolved to retire behind the Vouga. La Croix, who, with a column of horse, was scouring the country upon the right flank of the invading army, fell in with his outposts, attacked them, and drove them in with the loss of one officer and * five-and-twenty men. The infantry, by good fortune, had effected their passage; they formed in defence of the bridge, and La Croix having no infantry, did not attempt to force it. The Vouga was at this time fordable, and therefore Trant marched in the night to Oliveira, on the Porto road, from whence, if it should be necessary, he could in one day reach the Douro, and cross it for the defence of that city. There were then no other troops to defend it, and if the enemy had pursued, Porto might have been a second time in their power. That this was not done is not surprising, because it did not consist with the scheme of Massena's operations; but that the French should have neglected so fair an opportunity of dispersing Trant's force, which if not dispersed might be expected presently to harass their rear, must be accounted among those errors with which the whole course of human events is marked, and in which the religious mind perceives the superintendence of a higher power than man.

The allies being on the shorter line to Coimbra, were sufficiently in advance of the enemy for all their movements to be conducted with the same coolness and order which had characterized the whole retreat. On the 30th the infantry crossed from Coimbra

*The allies
cross the
Mondego.*

* A loss which was magnified to 500 in Massena's dispatches.

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 XXXII. in front of Fornos, and remained bridled up all night, in a very
 1810. dangerous situation, the enemy having pushed a strong force
 October. close to them. In the morning they were driven in some con-
 Oct. 1. fusion through Fornos by a large body of horse and foot: they
 formed on the great plain of Coimbra, and the French seeing
 the three brigades of cavalry with six guns of the horse artillery
 ready to receive them, did not venture to leave the inclosures.
 Before noon the rear-guard received orders to retire, and crossed
 the Mondego accordingly at the fords near S. Martinho do Bispo.
 The enemy pushed on their horse, came up just as the passage
 had been effected, and attempted to cross, as if in pursuit: they
 were charged, and driven back by a squadron of the 16th, after
 which they dismounted, and fired with their carbines ineffectually
 across the river. The passage might have been defended with
 good prospect of success, but this was not consistent with Lord
 Wellington's plans, which were to draw the French to a point
 where they should be at the greatest distance from their resources,
 and where his own would be at hand.

*Flight of
 the inhabit-
 ants from
 Coimbra.*

When it was known in Coimbra that the enemy were ap-
 proaching, and the retreat of the British made it evident that
 the city would be at their mercy, a cry soon arose that the French
 had actually entered, and the whole of the inhabitants who had
 not yet provided for their safety ran shrieking toward the bridge.
 On all other sides they were cut off from flight. The bridge,
 which is long and narrow, was presently choked by the crowd of
 fugitives; and multitudes in the hurry of their fear rushed into
 the Mondego, and made their way through the water, which was
 in many parts three or four feet deep. The gateway, which was
 the city prison, is near the bridge, and the screams of the pri-
 soners, who beheld this scene of terror from their grates, and
 expected something far more dreadful from the cruelty of the

French than they had reason to apprehend from the laws of their own country, were heard amid all the uproar and confusion. Lord Wellington heard them, and in compassion sent his aide-de-camp, Lord March, to set them at liberty.

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Massena expected to find great resources in Coimbra, a large and flourishing city situated in the finest part of a beautiful and fertile country. He found it utterly deserted, like every place which the French had hitherto entered on their march. With the intent of securing the stores, he forbade all pillage, and gave orders that only the brigade which was to be left in garrison there should enter. In defiance of these orders Junot commanded his men to make their way in, and break open the houses, as the owners had thought proper to abandon them. Such directions were eagerly obeyed; the men forced the guard, which, in pursuance of Massena's instructions, had been stationed at the gate of S. Sophia; the other troops immediately joined them in their occupation, and Massena neither attempted to enforce his own orders, nor manifested any displeasure during the scene of wanton waste and havoc which ensued. The magazines of the allied army had been removed, and Montbrun, who was dispatched to Figueira for the chance of overtaking them there, arrived too late: but provision enough, it is said, was found in Coimbra to have served the enemy for a month's consumption, if proper measures had been adopted for its preservation. The people who so unanimously forsook their homes had had neither time nor means for removing their property. So long as it was uncertain in which direction the invaders would move, and while a possibility remained that they might be successfully resisted upon the way, the people of Coimbra had lived in hope that this dire necessity might be averted; and when it came upon them, so many cars were

*The French
enter Coim-
bra.*

CHAP. required for the sick and wounded, and other services of the
XXXII. enemy, that few or none were left for them.

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*The Portu-
guese people
fly before the
enemy.*

It is the custom throughout the south of India, that when a hostile army approaches, the natives bury their treasure, forsake their houses, take with them as much food as they can carry, and seek the protection of some strong place, or conceal themselves among the woods and mountains. People in these deplorable circumstances are called the Wulsa of the district. The Wulsa has never been known to depart on the approach of a British force, if unaccompanied by Indian allies. This, however, is no peculiar honour of the British name; it belongs rather to the European character, for no such spectacle had ever been exhibited in European warfare till the present campaign. The orders of the Regency and of the commander-in-chief might have been issued in vain, if the Portuguese people had not from cruel experience felt the necessity of this measure for their individual safety. The alternative was dreadful, and yet better than that of remaining at the mercy of such invaders. It was a miserable sight to see them accompanying the columns of the retreating army, well-ordered as the movements of that army were, and resolutely, as on the few occasions which were offered, it met and checked the pursuers. All ranks and conditions were confounded in the general calamity: families accustomed to the comforts of a delightful climate and fruitful country followed the troops on foot; there was no security for age, or sex, or * childhood, but in flight. Every thing was left behind them

* The under-gardener of the Botanical Garden at Coimbra, with his family, consisting of his wife (a young woman of eighteen, with an infant at the breast) and her mother, having tarried too long to accompany the army, was overtaken in the little town of Soure by some stragglers from the enemy's advanced guard, who were

except what the women could carry; for even in this extremity the men very generally observed the national prejudice, which deems it disgraceful for man to bear a burthen.

Boastful as the French commander was, and confident in his own fortune, and in the hitherto unchecked prosperity of the Emperor Napoleon, the battle of Busaco made him apprehend that the enterprize in which he had engaged was not so easy as he had imagined, nor so free from all risk of disasters. There were not fewer than 5000 sick and wounded whom it was necessary to leave at Coimbra; as many more had been left at Busaco dead on the field, or abandoned there because their condition was hopeless, or for want of means to remove them. But a loss of 10,000 men upon his march, without any commensurate

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*Hopes and
expectations
of the
French.*

in search of plunder. These miscreants secured the husband by fastening his hands behind him: they tied the mother in the same manner; the villain then, to whom the wife was allotted, either by agreement among them, or by virtue of his authority, endeavoured to tear the infant from her arms, that he might proceed to violate her in presence of her mother and her husband. Failing in this, and enraged at a resistance which he had not expected, he drew back a few yards, presented his musket, and swore he would fire at her if she did not yield. "Fire, devil!" was her immediate reply, and at the word she and her infant fell by the same shot. The ruffians stripped her body, and compelled the husband to carry the clothes on his back to Thomar, whither they carried him prisoner. During his detention there he pointed out the murderer to a Portugueze nobleman then serving with Massena; but whatever this traitor may have felt at the crime, he did not venture to report it to the French commander, and demand justice upon the criminal: the hopes of co-operation on the part of the Portugueze people which he had held out had been proved so utterly false, that Massena treated him with contemptuous dislike, and moreover every thing was permitted to their soldiers by the French generals in that atrocious campaign. The gardener effected his escape to Coimbra, where a subscription was raised for him, but he soon died, broken-hearted. The man himself related this tragedy to the British officer, from whom I received it. It is recorded here as an example of the spirit which the invaders frequently found in those Portugueze women who were unfortunate enough to fall into their hands.

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diminution of the allies, had not been allowed for in his calculations ; and he found himself unable to leave a guard of sufficient strength at Coimbra, without weakening his army too much. He thought therefore that the surest course by which he could secure his sick and wounded was to pursue the English with all his force, and drive them out of the country, for he still persuaded himself that they were flying to their ships. This opinion he expressed in dispatches which were intercepted. The other generals partook the same delusion ; they no longer despised the British troops, but they had not yet been taught to respect the councils of the British government, and the nature of its policy they could neither believe nor comprehend ; for it appeared to them incredible that any government should act upon principles of integrity and honour. They supposed that Lord Wellington would embark as soon as he reached Lisbon, and that it was his intention to carry off as many of the Portuguese youth as he could get on board, by way of securing some compensation for the expenses of the war !

*Confusion
at Condeixa*

With these expectations they followed the retreating army, not with the ardour of pursuit, but ready to avail themselves of any opportunity that might present itself, and cautious how they offered any to an enemy whom they no longer affected to despise. The single occasion which occurred in their favour they were not near enough to seize. It was at Condeixa (the Conimbrica of the Romans) ; the town is built on the ridge of the hill, and the road passes through it along a narrow street : the people of the vicinity crowded in simultaneously with the troops, and the inhabitants at the same time hurried to join in a retreat which they had delayed till the last minute. They were in great alarm, the way was blocked up by some of the country carts, and had it not been for the good discipline which the troops observed in this scene of confusion, and the exertions of the officers, the

enemy might have obtained no inconsiderable advantage. But they were not near enough to profit by the favourable opportunity : order was restored in time ; and this was the only moment of serious danger during the whole retreat. Massena pushed forward to this town, without halting at Coimbra ; but he found it necessary to remain here three days, for the purpose of resting his troops and collecting such provisions as the inhabitants had not been able to remove, and the retreating army had left untouched. As the enemy advanced, the allies retired a march or two before them ; the infantry proceeded with as little molestation as if they had been marching through a country which was in peace ; the cavalry covered the retreat, and no stragglers were to be seen.

Some skirmishing took place near Pombal, with trifling loss on the part of the allies, and more on that of the enemy. Ney and Junot took this line of march, while Regnier advanced upon the road to Thomar. Leiria was forsaken by its whole population : a city thus deserted offered such temptation, that discipline could not be maintained in the retreating army without some examples of severity, and one British and one native soldier were punished with death for breaking into a chapel and plundering it. Here the allied army divided, one part taking the road to Alcobaça, the other to Rio Mayor. The monks of Alcobaça performed on this occasion toward the British officers their last act of hospitality. Most of them had already departed from the magnificent and ancient abode, where the greater part of their lives had been spent peacefully and inoffensively, to seek an asylum where they could ; the few who remained prepared dinner for their guests in the great hall and in the apartments reserved for strangers, after which they brought them the keys, and desired them to take whatever they liked, . . . for they expected that every thing would be destroyed by the French.

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Leiria forsaken.
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Alcobaça forsaken by the monks.

CHAP. Means were afforded them, through General Mackinnon's kind-
 XXXII. ness, for saving some things which they could not otherwise have
 removed; and then the most venerable edifice in Portugal for its
 1810. antiquity, its history, its literary treasures, and the tombs which
October. it contained, was abandoned to an invader who delighted in de-
 filing whatever was held sacred, and in destroying whatever a
 generous enemy, from the impulse of feeling and the sense of
 honour, would carefully have preserved.

*Surprise at
 Alcoentre.*

The rains now commenced, and set in with their accustomed severity in that country. By this time the infantry had reached their positions; but the cavalry who covered the rear were exposed to the whole severity of the weather, bivouacking every night, because the enemy were so close that it would have been imprudent for them to occupy a village. Sir Stapleton Cotton, however, having reached the little town of Alcoentre, took up his quarters there: the French, expecting that in this heavy and incessant rain the English would apprehend no enterprise on their part, took advantage of the weather, and endeavoured to surprise him there; his piquets were driven in; and almost as soon as the alarm could be given, they were in the town, and in possession of six guns. A squadron from the 10th came down in time, charged them in the street, recovered the guns, and drove them to the other end of the town. Some severe skirmishing occurred on the following day, in which the 3d regiment of French hussars behaved most gallantly. At daybreak on the 10th the enemy had lost sight of the allies, and when they reached Moinho do Cubo, where the roads to Alenquer and Lisbon divide, they knew not which course to take. Two peasants were brought in by their detachments, and were asked which way the English had retreated, and where their lines were, . . . for by this time Massena had found cause to doubt whether a general who retreated so deliberately had no other intention than to

embark and fly as soon as he reached Lisbon. The men answered that they could give no information on either point, because they knew nothing; military punishment was immediately inflicted upon them, to extort what they were determined not to disclose, and they both endured it till they fainted, thus giving the French another proof of national resolution, and of the feeling of the Portugueze towards them. Being thus disappointed of the intelligence which they expected, the French vanguard, which consisted of 10,000 men, divided. The division which took the Alenquer road came in sight of a column of the allies on the heights beyond that town; on the following day this column retreated in good order to Sobral, and was driven out of it; the French were pursuing their advantage when a peasant fell into their hands, who, unlike his countrymen, answered without hesitation all the interrogatories which were put to him; he told the commander that they were close upon the British lines, and pointed out to him where the batteries were, in constructing which he had himself laboured. Had it not been for his warning, this body of the enemy would presently have been in a situation from which it could hardly have escaped. They halted instantly, and fell back: Massena was informed of the discovery which had been made; and three days elapsed before the invaders again approached the works of the allies so nearly.

The army had commenced their retrograde movement from the frontiers with an impression that the cause wherein they were engaged had become hopeless, and that when they reached Lisbon they should be embarked, and abandon Portugal. This opinion had been altered by the course of events during the retreat, and by the manner in which that retreat had been conducted. There had been no alarm, no confusion, no precipitance upon the march. Nothing could have been conducted with greater ease to the troops; not a straggler had been taken, not a gun aban-

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October.*The French discover the lines of the allies.**Investigador Portuguez, t. vi. 64.**Feelings of the army.*

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done, not an article of baggage lost; the infantry had never even been seen by the enemy, except at Busaco, where they gave them battle, and signally defeated them: and the cavalry had taken on the way more prisoners from the enemy than the allies lost, a circumstance which probably never occurred in any former retreat. The troops, therefore, became confident that their commander had no thought of abandoning the contest; and that an embarkation was not his object, but that he was acting upon some settled plan, which he was well able to carry to the end. But when they entered the lines which they were to occupy, their surprise was hardly less than that of Massena and his army, at the foresight which they there saw displayed, and the skill with which a strong position had been rendered impregnable.

*The lines of
Torres Vedras.*

At the close of the last century Sir Charles Stuart had perceived that, if the French should ever seriously attempt the conquest of Portugal, here was the vantage ground of defence; and Lord Wellington, in his campaign against Junot, had observed this part of the country at leisure, and came to the same conclusion. Portugal, he said in the House of Commons, could be defended, but not on the frontier; the defence must be on the strong ground about Lisbon; and that consideration, he added, was in his mind when the Convention of Cintra was made. As soon, therefore, as the impossibility of co-operating with the Spaniards to any good effect had been fully proved, and it became apparent that the decisive struggle must be made in Portugal, upon this ground he resolved to make it. Early in the year it was stated in the English newspapers that men were employed in fortifying this position, but no mention of it had subsequently appeared, and it is truly remarkable that works of such magnitude and importance should have been commenced and perfected without exciting the slightest attention during