

they have no hope of preserving it. They know that a new French army has already passed your frontiers, and that if this should not be sufficient, another will come after it; but they will have destroyed your naval establishments, they will have caused the destruction of Lisbon, and this is what they aim at, and what they desire: they know that they cannot maintain themselves upon the Continent; but if they can destroy the ports and the navy of any other power, they are content. I depart full of confidence in you. I reckon upon all the citizens who are interested in the preservation of public order; and I am persuaded that it will be preserved. Call to mind the miseries which must necessarily follow, if this beautiful city should compel my troops to enter it by force! The exasperated soldiers would not be then to be controlled; . . . fire, sword, all the horrors of war which are practised in a city taken by assault, . . . pillage, . . . death, . . . behold what you would draw upon yourselves! The thought alone makes me shudder. Inhabitants of Lisbon, avert from yourselves these terrible calamities!"

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*August.*

*Observador  
Portuguez,  
408.*

The tone of the French was somewhat altered in their menaces. There had been no shuddering when the fate of Beja and Evora was announced to the people of Lisbon, nor when the massacre at Leiria was perpetrated. Care was taken to manifest that the French were prepared to execute their threats if needful. The Russian squadron, which lay at anchor in a line from Junqueira to Boa Vista, was made ready for action, the men being stationed at their quarters with lighted matches; they, no doubt, apprehended an attack from the English fleet, but La Garde intimated that they would fire upon the city in case an insurrection were attempted. Justly apprehensive, however, for his personal safety, this Intendant, whom, because perhaps of his office, the people regarded with peculiar hatred, went sometimes to pass the night on board the Vasco da Gama, and

*Prepara-  
tions on  
board the  
Russian  
squadron.*

*Observador  
Portuguez,  
410.*



CHAP. General Travot, though he was evidently esteemed by the people  
 XI. for his mild and honourable conduct (so much is a good name  
 1808. worth even in the worst times) thought it prudent not to sleep  
 August. out of the Castle.

*Junction of  
 Loison, La-  
 borde, and  
 Junot.*

Junot went by water to Villa Franca, and leaving Thiebault there to command the reserve, joined Loison at Alcoentre. That General had reached Santarem on the 13th, in a deplorable condition. The weather was intensely hot, without a cloud in the sky, or a breath of air stirring. Whole companies lay down upon the way; many died of thirst, and more would have perished if the officers of the staff, as soon as they arrived at that city, had not gone out with a great number of the inhabitants carrying water to meet them; brandy also was sent out, and carts to convey those who were unable to proceed farther on foot. Each of Loison's long marches at this time is said to have cost him not less than an hundred men. The troops were so dreadfully exhausted, that he was compelled to remain two days at Santarem. On the 16th he proceeded to Alcoentre, where Junot joined him the next day; they then moved to Cercal, and on the day after the action at Roliça the British army distinctly saw their columns in the line of Torres Vedras. To that place Laborde was now recalled, who had retreated beyond it to Montachique; he effected his junction on the 19th, and when General Thiebault arrived with the reserve on the 20th, the whole force which Junot could bring into the field was collected there, in number about 12,000 infantry, and 1200 or 1500 horse.

*Early Cam-  
 paigns, 18.*

*Thiebault,  
 190—193.*

*The British  
 advance to  
 Vimetro.*

*Aug. 18.*

Sir Arthur had not pursued Laborde after the battle of Roliça; the line by which the enemy retired would have led him from the sea. He was beginning his march for Torres Vedras on the morrow, when he received advice that General Anstruther was arrived on the coast. His original intention had been to employ this General's brigade, and that of General Acland, in



besieging Peniche, if that should be necessary ; otherwise, to land them in some of the bays near the rock, in the rear of the enemy, while he pressed upon their front. But the resistance which he had experienced at Roliça, and his disappointment of any co-operation from Freire, induced him now to land General Anstruther's troops, and join them to the army. He proceeded therefore to the village of Vimeiro, that being the position best calculated to effect his junction, and, at the same time, a march in advance. Calms prevented the fleet, which was anchored off the Berlings, from standing in, till the evening of the 19th. The brigade was then landed at Maceira, upon a sandy beach, at the foot of a cliff almost perpendicular, the ascent of which is exceedingly steep and difficult. The landing was a measure of extreme difficulty and hazard. The boats were almost always filled in going-in by the surf, many were swamped, and a few men perished ; the disembarkation, however, by the great exertions and skill of the navy, was effected with less loss than might have been expected. The French could not oppose the landing, but, profiting by their superiority in cavalry, they sent a body of dragoons, in the hope of attacking the brigade on its march. Against this danger due precautions had been taken. The troops, when they had marched about three leagues, found a detachment under General Spencer waiting at Lourinham to receive them, and took their place in the advanced guard.

The French cavalry were active during this and the preceding day ; they scoured the country, and Sir Arthur could obtain no information of the enemy, except that their position was very strong, and occupied by their whole force. On the 20th, at noon, it was announced that General Acland was in the offing ; and on the evening of the same day Sir Harry Burrard, the second in command, arrived in Maceira Roads. Sir Arthur immediately went on board, informed him of what had been

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*General  
Anstru-  
ther's bri-  
gade lands.*

*Arrival of  
Sir Harry  
Burrard  
in the roads.*



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done, and of the present state of things, and laid before him the plan of operations upon which he had intended to proceed. His purpose was to march on the following morning, push his advanced guard to Mafra, and halt the main body about four or five miles from that place, thus turning the enemy's position at Torres Vedras. He possessed as much knowledge of the ground as good maps and scientific descriptions could impart; Sir Charles Stuart (a man whose great military talents had never been allowed a field whereon to display themselves) had carefully surveyed this part of the country when he commanded the British troops in Portugal; it had not escaped him, that upon this ground, in case of serious invasion, the kingdom must be saved or lost; and his maps and papers were in Sir Arthur's hands. The battle would thus be fought in a country of which he had adequate knowledge, and he hoped to enter Lisbon with the retreating or flying enemy. Such was the plan which he had formed, and orders for marching on the morrow had actually been issued, before Sir Harry's arrival.

*He alters  
the plan of  
the cam-  
paign.*

To Sir Arthur, who had a well-founded confidence in himself and in his troops, no prospect could have been more encouraging; but the new commander did not behold it hopefully. The objections to a forward movement preponderated in his mind; he learnt that the artillery \* horses were inefficient, that

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\* They were cast off cavalry, purchased in Ireland; and they were described as old, blind, and lame: some of them, it was said, had already at this time died of age, others of work, though they had been carefully fed: nearly a sixth part had thus perished on the way, and of the remainder a great number were not worth the forage which they consumed. Nine years after these poor horses had been delivered over to the dogs and wolves, a representation was made to me in their favour, and I feel myself bound to notice it, were it only for the singularity of the case. I am assured that the 300 horses (which Lord Castlereagh good-naturedly called his countrymen) were



our men, for want of cavalry, were kept close to their encampments by the enemy's horse; and that it would not be possible to go far into the country, because they depended upon the ships for bread. Weighing these things, he was not convinced that Sir Arthur's intentions were expedient; the decision which he was now to make appeared to him most serious in its consequences; he thought it was impossible to calculate the disasters to which a check might expose the army, and therefore he deemed it necessary to wait for Sir John Moore's division. Sir Arthur had recommended that that division, when it arrived in the Mondego, should march upon Santarem, a position from whence it might intercept the enemy's retreat, whether they attempted to make their way to Almeida or to Elvas; but the new commander hearing on his way of the action at Roliça, and disapproving this arrangement, had immediately dispatched instructions by which Sir John Moore was directed to proceed from the Mondego, and join him as speedily as possible in Maçeira Roads. In vain did Sir Arthur represent the precious

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selected with the greatest care, as well as knowledge in horseflesh, from 1050 of which the corps was then composed; that they were in the very best condition and working order; they were drafts from a collection made by purchase in 1803, (that is, five years before, and therefore not young); or from the best and most useful horses cast from dragoon regiments, as unfit for dragoon service generally, (the inferior description of such cast horses having been from time to time sold); that they had been always carefully groomed and well fed, and were in excellent condition for common draft, the service for which they were required. From the manner in which this representation was made to me, I have no doubt of its truth. The horses, when they began the campaign, had probably not recovered from the voyage; they were not accustomed to the food of the country, and were employed in much harder work than had ever fallen to their lot before, and upon much worse roads. And so, peace to their memory. I must not however omit to observe, that Captain Eliot, in his Treatise on the Defence of Portugal, says, these artillery horses, in the brigade to which he was attached, did their duty perfectly well at the battle of Vimeiro.



CHAP. XI. time that would be lost before this division could be landed and  
 1808. become serviceable at Vimeiro; the far greater utility which  
 August. might be expected from its presence at Santarem; the evil of  
 at once changing their operations from an offensive to a de-  
 fensive course; and of allowing the enemy to choose their time  
 and ground. For, situated as the two armies now were, it was  
 impossible to avoid an action. If the British troops advanced,  
 they would have the advantage of acting on the offensive; it was  
 his opinion that they might reach Mafra before the French could  
 bring on a general engagement; and in that case they should  
 turn the French position. But these representations were un-  
 availing; an inauspicious spirit of caution prevailed. The whole  
 plan of the campaign was changed; and with the enemy col-  
 lected within three leagues, the army was ordered to remain  
 stationary, till a corps should arrive, of which no tidings had  
 yet been received. In a general who commands good troops  
 the want of confidence is as great a fault as the excess of it in  
 the commander of an ill-disciplined army.

*The battle  
of Vimeiro.*

*Thiebault,  
194.*

It was soon seen how well Sir Arthur had judged of the  
 enemy's intentions. Junot was ill supplied with provisions;  
 he could not venture long to be absent from Lisbon: situated as  
 he was, it appeared to him that there would be less evil in an  
 immediate defeat, than must arise from prolonged operations,  
 though they should lead to a victory. His business, therefore,  
 was to bring on an action as soon as possible, and to make the  
 attack; and at the moment when Sir Harry Burrard, resolving  
 upon delay, had countermanded the orders for advancing on the  
 morrow, the French were in motion.

Vimeiro, a name which was now to become memorable in  
 British and Portuguese history, is a village situated nearly at the  
 bottom of a lovely valley, about three miles from the sea, and  
 screened from the sea breeze by mountainous heights, through



which the little river Maceira winds its way. The village stands at the eastern extremity of these heights; and on the opposite side, separated from them by a deep ravine, are other heights, over which the road to Lourinham passes, a little town in the *Termo* or district of which the parishes of Vimeiro and Maceira are included. The western termination reaches the sea-shore. As the army had halted here only for the night, meaning to proceed early on the morrow, they were disposed of, not as expecting an attack, but as most convenient for the troops. Six brigades bivouacked on the height to the westward. The advanced guard was posted on a hill south-east of Vimeiro, to cover the commissariat and stores which were in the village: this height was entirely commanded by higher ground to the westward. The cavalry and the reserve of artillery were in the valley, between the hills on which the infantry were placed; and there were picquets of observation on the hills to the eastward.

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The enemy, who had marched all night, and whom some accidents had impeded on their way, first appeared at eight in the morning, forming in strong bodies upon the heights toward Lourinham, thus threatening the advanced guard and the left, which was the weak part of the British position. Sir Arthur had visited the advanced posts early in the day, and had returned to his quarters before the first shots were exchanged with the enemy's advance. He now moved the brigades of Generals Ferguson, Nightingale, Acland, and Bowes, successively across the ravine to the heights on the Lourinham road. General Anstruther's brigade took post on the right of the advanced guard, and Major-General Hill was moved nearer, as a support to these troops, and as a reserve, in addition to which our small cavalry force was in the rear of their right. The French army was in two divisions, . . . the right, of about 6000 men, under General Loison, the left, about 5000, under Laborde. Kellermann had the re-

*Aug. 21.*



CHAP. XI. serve, which was intended to connect the two wings, but they were too distant from each other. General Margaron commanded the cavalry.

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Laborde came along the valley to attack the advanced guard on the eminence or table hill; he had a column of infantry and cavalry to cover his left flank, and on his right one regiment marched in column to turn the defenders, and penetrate the village by the church; but this purpose had been foreseen, and part of the 43rd had been ordered into the churchyard to prevent it. The French advanced with perfect steadiness, though exposed to a severe fire of riflemen posted behind the trees and banks, and of seven pieces of artillery well directed. They advanced like men accustomed to action and to victory; but suffering more severely as they drew nearer, and especially from the Shrapnell shells, (then first brought into use,) they faltered, and opened a confused fire. Still they advanced, and arrived within a few paces of the brow of the hill, where the 50th regiment, under Colonel Walker, with a single company of the rifle corps on its left, stood opposed to them. That regiment poured upon them a destructive volley, and instantly charged with the bayonet, and penetrated the angle of the column, which then broke and turned. The regiment which was entering the village by the church, was attacked in flank by General Acland's brigade, then advancing to its position on the heights; and our cavalry, poor in number as it was, charged with effect. The discomfiture of this column was then complete; they fled, leaving about 1000 men on the ground, 350 prisoners, and seven pieces of artillery; and they were pursued for nearly two miles to the plain beyond the woody ground, where they were supported by a reserve of horse, and where Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor, of the 20th light dragoons, who particularly distinguished himself that day, fell, with many of his men, overpowered by a much superior force of



cavalry. The secondary column, under General Brenier, which was to have supported Laborde in his attack, made a side movement to the left, in order to cross the ravine, and thus it was separately engaged by General Anstruther's brigade; and being charged with the bayonet, was repulsed with great loss. An aide-de-camp of Sir Arthur's coming up to tell this General that a corps should be sent to his assistance, he replied, "Sir, I am not pressed, and I want no assistance; I am beating the French, and am able to beat them wherever I find them."

Loison's attack was made nearly at the same time as Laborde's: it was supported by a large body of cavalry, and made with the characteristic and imposing impetuosity of French troops. They drove in our light troops, but they were checked by General Ferguson's brigade, consisting of the 36th, 40th, and 71st, which formed the first line; after some close and heavy firing of musketry, the 82d and 29th came up, and the brigades of Generals Bowes and Acland. The enemy were then charged with the bayonet: this weapon is of French invention, but it was made for British hands. They came to the charge bravely, and stood it for a moment; . . . in that moment their foremost rank fell "like a line of grass before the mowers." This is not the flourish of an historian, seeking artfully to embellish details which no art can render interesting to any but military readers; it is the language of an actor in the scene, who could not call it to mind in after-hours without shuddering; for the very men whose superiority was thus decidedly proved, could not speak without involuntary awe, of so complete and instantaneous a destruction, produced as it was, not by artillery or explosions, but by their own act and deed, and the strength of their own hearts and hands. The bodies of about 300 French grenadiers were counted upon the field, who had fallen in this charge. The enemy were pursued to a considerable distance, and six pieces of cannon were taken in the

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CHAP. XI. 1808. August. pursuit. General Kellermann made a vigorous attempt, late in the action, to recover these from the 71st and 82d, which were halted in a valley where the guns had been captured. These regiments retired a little way to some advantageous ground, then faced about, fired, and advancing with the bayonet, drove the French back with great loss. Thus were they every where repulsed, though their whole force had been engaged, while not more than half the British army had been brought into action.

*Sir Harry  
Burrard  
takes the  
command.*

Before the action began Sir Harry Burrard and his staff left the ship; they soon heard the firing after they were on shore, and by the time they reached Vimeiro, which is about three miles from the landing-place, the armies were hotly engaged. They found Sir Arthur on the heights, and he explained in few words to the new Commander the position of the army, and the measures which he had taken for beating the enemy. Sir Harry was perfectly satisfied, and directed him to go on with an operation which he had so happily and so well begun. This he did not as giving up his command for the time, but as fulfilling one of the functions of a commander, by directing Sir Arthur to pursue measures which he approved, and holding himself as responsible for the event as if the plan had been originally his own. So far all was well. Toward the close of the action, when the French were beaten on the left, and it was evident that they must be every where defeated, Sir Arthur went to him, and represented that this was the moment for advancing; that he ought to move the right wing to Torres Vedras, and pursue the beaten enemy with the left. By this movement upon Torres Vedras, the French would be cut off from the nearest road to Lisbon, or if they attempted it, they would find themselves between two bodies of our troops; there remained for them, as the alternative, the circuitous route by Alenquer and Villa-Franca; . . . they were dispirited, beaten, and in confusion, absolutely, in his opinion,