

CHAP.  
XIII.  
1808.

ing tranquillity, or their purpose shaken, by the apprehension of being left to contend alone. That such was, in fact, the main object of France in the proposals transmitted from Erfurth, his Majesty entertained a strong persuasion. But at a moment when results, so awful from their importance, and so tremendous from their uncertainty, might be depending upon the decision of peace or war, he felt it due to himself to ascertain, beyond the possibility of doubt, the views and intentions of his enemies. It was difficult for him to believe that the Emperor of Russia had devoted himself so blindly and fatally to the violence and ambition of the power with which his Imperial Majesty had unfortunately become allied, as to be prepared openly to abet the usurpation of Spain. He therefore met the seeming fairness and moderation of the proposal, with fairness and moderation on his part real and sincere, expressing his just confidence that the Spanish government, acting in the name of Ferdinand VII., was understood to be a party to this negotiation. The reply returned by France to this proposition cast off at once the thin disguise, which had been assumed for a momentary purpose, and displayed, with less than ordinary reserve, the arrogance and injustice of that government. The universal Spanish nation was described by the degrading appellation of the Spanish insurgents, and the demand for the admission of its government as a party to any negotiation was rejected, as inadmissible and insulting. With astonishment, as well as grief, he had received from the Emperor of Russia a reply similar in effect, although less indecorous in tone and manner. The King would readily have embraced an opportunity of negotiation which might have afforded any hope or prospect of a peace compatible with justice and with honour. He lamented an issue by which the sufferings of Europe were prolonged; but neither his honour nor the generosity of the British nation would admit of his consenting to

commence a negotiation by the abandonment of a brave and loyal people, who were contending for the preservation of all that is dear to man, and whose exertions, in a cause so unquestionably just, he had solemnly pledged himself to sustain.

CHAP.  
XIII.  
1808.

Such an answer was consistent with the honour, the principles, and the feelings of the British people. Buonaparte anticipated it: his proposals might have that effect which the English cabinet had foreseen, upon the powers which he oppressed, and they might deceive the French people; at least they gave a popular topic for his sycophants in the Senate, and those whose office it was to mislead the public mind. He himself knew what the result must be, and had not for a moment suspended or slackened his preparations. Before a reply could be made to the first overture, he returned to Paris, and, in his address to the legislative body, informed them that he should depart in a few days, to put himself in person at the head of his army, and, with God's help (such was the expression of the blasphemer), to crown the King of Spain in Madrid, and plant his eagles on the forts of Spain. It was a distinguished favour of the providence, he said, which had constantly protected his army, that passion had so far blinded the English councils, as to have made them abandon the defence of the seas, and at last produce their army on the continent. His vaunts and his impieties were, of course, echoed by those whom he addressed; but their flattery was far exceeded by the language of some deputies from the new Italian departments, who had audience on the same day. The destinies of the whole world, they told him, were confided by the Almighty to his impenetrable views, to the supreme power of his genius, to the miraculous exploits of his arms. Hence a new order of things, already written in the books of the Eternal, was prepared for their country. In the necessity in which he was to overthrow, to destroy, to disperse all enemies, as the wind dissipates the

*Buonaparte  
departs for  
Spain.*

*Oct. 25.*

CHAP.  
XIII.

1808.

dust, he was not an exterminating Angel; but he was the Being that extends his thoughts, and measures the face of the earth, to re-establish its happiness upon a better and surer basis. He was destined before all ages to be the Man of God's right hand; the Sovereign Master of all things. Language of more idolatrous adoration was never listened to by the frantic Caligula, nor uttered by the infatuated followers of Sabatai Sevi. It was not, however, too gross for the tyrant to whom it was addressed; and he applauded it in his reply. Immediately after this scene he left Paris, reached Bayonne on the 3d of November, and, five days afterwards, put himself at the head of his army at Vitoria.

## CHAPTER XIV.

BUONAPARTE ENTERS SPAIN. DEFEAT OF THE SPANISH ARMIES. SURRENDER OF MADRID. THE SPANIARDS ENDEAVOUR TO RALLY AT CUENCA, AND ON THE TAGUS.

AN old prophecy was at this time circulated in Paris, importing that the disasters which would lead to the overthrow of the French empire were to originate in Spain. It had probably been sent abroad in the days of Louis XIV. when his designs upon that kingdom were first manifested, and the resistance which they would provoke from the powers of Europe was foreseen. The persons by whom it was now reproduced, apprehended that the English would land a strong force in the north of the peninsula, so as to cut off the French armies from their communication with Bayonne. Like all desponding or discontented politicians, they overrated the wisdom and the power of the enemy. If indeed, when an expedition was sent to Portugal, this had been done at the same time, the issue can hardly be deemed doubtful. We had disciplined soldiers, ships to transport them, and means of every kind in abundance; but vigour was wanting in our councils, and in offensive war we had every thing to learn. It was, however, intended that an army little short of 40,000 men should take the field with the Spaniards; and had such an army been in the field, under an able and enterprising commander, subsequent events have given an Englishman right

1808.

October.

*Pasley on  
the Military  
Policy of  
Great Bri-  
tain, p. 34.*

CHAP. to affirm, that no force which could have been brought against  
 XIV. it in one point, would have been able to defeat it. But this  
 1808. intention was frustrated as much by the precipitance of the  
October. Spaniards as by the dilatoriness of the British movements.

*Movements  
 against  
 Blake's  
 army.*

By the latter end of October not less than 100,000 troops had crossed the Pyrenees from the side of Bayonne, to reinforce their countrymen. The head-quarters were at Vitoria, where they had continued since Joseph arrived there on his flight from Madrid. The left wing, under Marshal Moncey, Duke of Cornegliano, was posted along the banks of the Aragon and the Ebro, having its head-quarters at Tafalla; Marshal Ney, Duke of Elchingen, had his head-quarters at Guardia; Marshal Bessieres, Duke of Istria, at Miranda, with a garrison at Pancorbo; Marshal Lefebvre, Duke of Dantzic, occupied the heights of Durango, and defended the heights of Mondragon from the threatened attack of the Spaniards. Blake had posted the main body of his army in front of Lefebvre's force, and occupied with the rest the debouches of Villarcayo, Orduña, and Munguia. He hoped that the Asturian General, Azevedo, would cut off the communication between Durango and Vitoria by Ochandiano, and that, by possessing himself of the heights of Mondragon, and thus getting in the rear of the enemy's advanced guard, he might be enabled to strike a great blow. The plan was good, if it could have been executed in time; but Blake persisted in it after he knew that the French had received strong reinforcements. Some trifling advantages, and the confidence of the Spanish character, encouraged him to this imprudence, by which he exposed himself to be entirely cut off. It was Buonaparte's intention to take the advantage which was thus offered him; and Lefebvre therefore had been ordered to content himself with keeping the Spaniards in check till the Emperor should arrive; but his flanks were so much annoyed by Blake, that this delay

became inconvenient, and on the last day of October the French attacked him. After a long and well-contested action of nine hours the Spaniards retreated in good order by Bilbao and Valmaseda to Nava, without losing colours or prisoners. No artillery had been used, the country being too mountainous for it. The enemy entered Bilbao the next day; and the corps of Marshal Victor, Duke of Belluno, arriving at this time, was directed by Munguia and Amurrio to Valmaseda, to fall upon the flank of the Galician army.

CHAP.  
XIV.  
1808.  
October.

Blake's intention had been to fall back till he could concentrate his whole force; but the second division, and a part of the Asturians under Azevedo, had their communication cut off; and as the French were strengthening themselves at Arancadiaga and Orrantia to prevent the junction, he prepared to attack them. They retreated during the night of the 4th; but on the following day a division of his army came up with 7000 of the enemy near Valmaseda, and drove them from thence with considerable loss. Having thus effected the junction, he attacked the enemy again on the 7th at Gueñes, and turned their left wing, but his own centre was unable to advance; and perceiving that the French had received very considerable reinforcements that day from Bilbao, his own men too being exhausted by hunger and fatigue, he deemed it prudent to retire to Espinosa de los Monteros, where he hoped to refresh and feed his men, and draw artillery and supplies from Reynosa. Seldom indeed have any troops endured greater hardships. From the 23rd of October they had been continually in the open air, among the mountains of Biscay, during rainy nights and the most inclement weather: they were all without hats, great part of them half clothed, and barefooted, and they had been six days without bread, wine, or spirits; indeed, without any other supply of food than the sheep and cattle which were to be found among the moun-

*Blake falls  
back to Es-  
pinosa.*

CHAP. tains. There had been a considerable desertion among the  
 XIV. young recruits ; but from those who remained not a murmur was  
 1808. heard under all these privations : they manifested no other wish  
 November. than that the sacrifice of their lives might contribute to the  
 destruction of the enemy, and the deliverance of Spain.

*Battle of  
 Espinosa.*

The system of the French was to beat this army down, as their increasing numbers enabled them to do, by repeated attacks. Blake intended to remain some days at Espinosa, for the purpose of giving his men some rest. But having arrived on the 9th, his rear-guard, under the Conde de San Roman, one of the officers who had escaped from the Baltic, was attacked on the following day, by a far superior force. He immediately posted his army in front of the town ; Azevedo, with the Asturians and the first division, on a height to the left, covering the road to S. Andero ; the second division on a hill to the right ; the third and the reserve in the centre. The van-guard was posted on a little hill close in the rear of the centre, with six four-pounders. The enemy were successful in their first attack, and drove the Spaniards from a wood which they had occupied ; they returned, however, to the charge, being reinforced with the third division, and the action became general, except on the left of the Spanish position. It continued for three hours, till evening closed in ; and Blake thought the advantage was on his side, though the enemy had gained possession of a wood and ridge of hill in front of his centre and right. The contest had been very severe, and a very great proportion of the Spanish officers had fallen, San Roman among them, and the Galician General Riquelme, both mortally wounded. The men lay on their arms that night, and Victor, who commanded in this battle, brought up fresh troops from his rear to the ridge. At daybreak, when the main attention of the Spaniards was drawn towards this point, he made his great attack upon their left, commencing it with a strong body of sharp-shooters ;

they were twice repulsed ; meantime one of their large columns, under General Maison, came up and formed in line ; the sharpshooters, being reinforced, returned to the charge, and General Ruffin, with his division, attacked the centre. There the enemy were well resisted ; but on the left they succeeded, owing, in great part, it appears, to the system which on this and the preceding day was practised, of marking out the officers. Azevedo, and the two Asturian Generals who were next in command, fell ; this threw the men into confusion, and when they saw themselves cut off from the road to S. Andero, and that the French were advancing to occupy a height in rear of the town which commands the road to Reynosa, they gave way, and nothing remained but to order a general retreat. They had to retire by a bridge over the Trueba and a defile ; and instead of attempting to save the guns, which would necessarily have impeded the retreat of the army, Blake thought it better to employ them till the last moment ; this was done with great effect, and they were spiked when the enemy was close to them.

Blake was one of those men who would have been thought worthy of the chief command if they had never been trusted with it. His talents were considerable ; he understood the theory of his profession well, and could plan an action or a campaign with great ability ; but he was deficient in that promptitude and presence of mind which are the first qualifications of a commander. His own game he could play skilfully, but when the adversary disconcerted it by some unexpected movement, he was incapable of forming new dispositions to meet the altered circumstances. By persisting against a superior and continually increasing force in operations which had been calculated against an inferior one, he exposed himself to the imminent hazard of being entirely cut off ; and by advancing so far into a country which had been stripped of its provisions, and with no commissariat to follow him,



CHAP. he exhausted his men. Under every privation he indeed set  
 XIV. them an example of cheerfulness, and let them see that he fared  
 1808. as hardly as themselves ; but this could not counteract the effects  
 November. of inanition. They were in a state of famine when they arrived  
 at Espinosa, and would have found nothing there to relieve them  
 if 250 mules, laden with biscuits, had not most opportunely ar-  
 rived, sent by Major-General Leith, who was forwarding partial  
 supplies toward them by every possible way. But men thus hun-  
 gered, and enfeebled also by long continued exposure to cold  
 and rain, were ill fitted for close action, in which much depended  
 upon personal strength. Another and more lamentable error  
 was, that the troops from the Baltic, the only thoroughly dis-  
 ciplined part of his force, were brought into action after the first  
 defeat, and exposed by single battalions to bear the brunt of  
 every conflict ; and thus they were sacrificed in detail, giving  
 melancholy proof, by the devoted courage with which they stood  
 their ground, of what they could have effected, if, as a body, they  
 had been brought into some fair field of battle.

*Dispersion  
 of Blake's  
 army at  
 Reynosa.*

Blake attempted with the remains of his army to make a  
 stand at Reynosa ; his principal magazine and his park of ar-  
 tillery were there ; it is one of the strongest positions in that  
 strong country, and had it been occupied in time, the event of  
 the campaign might have been different. But the forlorn hope  
 of collecting his scattered forces there was soon defeated. Victor  
 was pursuing him closely from Espinosa ; Lefebvre from the side  
 of Villarcayo. And from the side of Burgos, where a fatal blow  
 had now been struck, Marshal Sault, Duke of Dalmatia, marched  
 upon Reynosa. No alternative was left him but to retreat toward  
 S. Andero, and the dispersion was so complete, that there no  
 longer remained any force on this side to oppose the enemy.  
 Yet in justice to this ill-fated army it should be said, that no men  
 ever behaved more gallantly, nor with more devoted patriotism.

Without cavalry, half clothed, almost without food, they fought battle after battle against troops always superior in number, and whose losses were always filled up with reinforcements. Nor did any circumstance of disgrace attend their defeat; there was no capitulation, no surrender of large bodies, or of strong places; the ground on which they fought was won by the French, and that was all, as long as any body of the Spaniards remained together. The magazines at Reynosa now fell into their hands, and they entered S. Andero. The Bishop saved himself in an English ship, and General Riquelme expired as his men were lifting him on board. They had borne him thither from Espinosa; for, routed as they were, they would not leave him to die in the hands of the enemy. Here, and in some of the smaller ports, the French found a considerable booty of English goods.

CHAP.  
XIV.  
1808.  
November.

Nov. 16.

When Buonaparte arrived in Spain he was not pleased at finding that Lefebvre had opened the campaign; his hope had been to march a strong force in the rear of Blake's army, and thus place it in a situation where it must either have been destroyed or have laid down its arms. In crossing the mountains near Mondragon he had nearly lost one of his favourite Generals, Marshal Lasnes, Duke of Montebello; the ground was covered with frozen snow, his horse fell with him, and in attempting to rise fell on him. He was carried to Vitoria in a state of great danger, his body covered with those discolorations which show that the small vessels of the skin are ruptured, the abdomen swoln, the extremities cold, suffering acute pain, and with all the symptoms of inflammation in the intestines, from the shock and the pressure. M. Larrey, who attended Buonaparte in all his campaigns, had learnt a remedy from the savages of Newfoundland, applied by them to some sailors whose boat had been broken to pieces and themselves dashed by the waves upon their

*Buonaparte  
arrives in  
Spain.*