

the Spanish army to be put under the orders of the British Commander-in-chief for the time being, as it had been under Lord Peterborough.

When Charmilly reached Talavera, on his way, he found that Mr. Frere had just arrived there, following the Central Junta, who were retiring from Aranjuez to Badajoz. To him he communicated what had passed with the Duque del Infantado; and the Ambassador requested him, as a colonel in the British service, to take charge of a letter to Sir John Moore, urging him to suspend his retreat, as a measure which would have the worst effect upon the Spanish cause, and be of the greatest injury both to Spain and England. But thinking that, having begun the retreat, Sir John might suppose himself engaged to go on with it, Mr. Frere entrusted Colonel Charmilly with a second letter, to be delivered in case the General persisted in his determination. The purport of this letter was to request that the bearer might be examined before a council of war; and the reason for this measure was, that the decision of a council of war would exonerate the Commander-in-chief from the responsibility by which he might otherwise feel himself fettered. Charmilly reached Salamanca while Sir John was deliberating upon the dispatch from Morla and Castelfranco. He delivered the Ambassador's first letter. The state of Madrid, Mr. Frere said, so much exceeded every thing which he had ventured to say of the spirit and resolution of the people, that he could not forbear representing to the General, in the strongest manner, the propriety, not to say the necessity, of supporting the Spanish people by all the means which had been entrusted to him for that purpose. "I have no hesitation," he added, "in taking upon myself any degree of responsibility which may attach itself to this advice, as I consider the fate of Spain as depending absolutely, for the present, upon the decision which you may adopt. I say, for the present; for

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*Col. Charmilly sent to Sir John Moore by the Duque del Infantado and Mr. Frere.*

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such is the spirit and character of the country, that, even if abandoned by the British, I should by no means despair of their ultimate success." Having read this letter, and heard Charmilly's communication, Sir John Moore gave him no reason to suppose that the intention of retreating would be given up. He retired, however, to reflect upon what he had heard. His instructions directed him to receive the representations both of the Spanish government and the British Ambassador with the utmost deference and attention: . . . both deprecated his retreat. Charmilly had been an eye-witness of the preparations which were making in Madrid, and accounts confirming his report came from various quarters. He was persuaded that a great improvement in the public affairs had taken place, and that it was not becoming him to fly at such a time; and he wrote, that night, to Sir David Baird, telling him to suspend his retrograde march till he heard again, and to make arrangements for returning to Astorga, should it be necessary.

*Sir John Moore resolves to advance.*

Still the rooted feeling of his heart was despondency. In this very letter he expressed his fear that the spirit of resistance had arisen too late, and that the French were now too strong to be resisted in that manner. All this, he said, appeared to him very strange and unsteady; yet if the spirit of enthusiasm did arise, and the people would be martyrs, there was no saying, in that case, what a British force might do. In the morning he wrote a second letter, ordering Sir David to return to Astorga. "We must be at hand," said he, "to aid and take advantage of whatever happens. The wishes of our country and our duty demand this of us, with whatever risk it may be attended." But he added, "I mean to proceed bridle in hand; for if the bubble bursts, and Madrid falls, we shall have a run for it." These were ominous words. It was apparent that he had no confidence in the patriotism of the Spaniards, nor in his own means of resisting the

French, however strong the country; it was apparent also, that, while these impressions weighed upon him, he looked on with apprehension to the opinion of the English public, and that in deference to that opinion he was sacrificing his own.

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While Sir John was dispatching these instructions, it was not known at Salamanca that he had changed his intention of retreating: officers and men alike were delivering their opinions loudly, and speaking of another investigation. Charmilly hearing this, and being equally ignorant of the determination which had been formed, supposed that his second letter was necessary, and accordingly delivered it. The General, not perceiving the intent for which it was written, and feeling like a high-spirited officer who thought himself injured, tore the letter in pieces, and gave vent to his indignation in violent language. Part of his anger fell upon Charmilly, and, on the following day, he ordered him to quit Salamanca. Charmilly respectfully represented that he had not deserved such treatment. The General replied that he did not mean to give him the smallest offence; but he repeated the order, and it was obeyed. Sir John Moore, in his resentment for what he conceived the improper interference of the Ambassador, soon, however, recollected what was due to him as the King's minister. He told Mr. Frere, therefore, that he should abstain from any remarks on the two letters delivered by Colonel Charmilly, or on the message which accompanied them. "I certainly," said he, "did feel and express much indignation at a person like him being made the channel of a communication of that sort from you to me. Those feelings are at an end, and I dare say they never will be excited towards you again. If M. Charmilly is your friend, it was, perhaps, natural for you to employ him; but I have prejudices against all that class, and it is impossible for me to put any trust in him." He informed the Minister that every thing should be done, for the assistance of

CHAP. Madrid and the Spanish cause, that could be expected from such  
 XV. an army as he commanded, . . . but he could not make a direct  
 1808. movement on Madrid, because the passes of Guadarrama and  
 December. Somosierra were in the hands of the French, and, besides, he was  
 much too weak, until joined by Sir David Baird.

*News of the  
 surrender of  
 Madrid.  
 Dec. 7.*

On the following day, Sir John received a letter from the Junta of Toledo, telling him they intended to re-unite the dispersed armies there, and defend the city to the last. He replied, that if the Spaniards acted up to such sentiments, there could be no doubt of their ultimate success, whatever temporary advantages the French might gain; and he sent a British officer to reside at Toledo, and concert measures for its defence. On the 8th, he informed Sir David Baird that he should move a corps on the 10th to Zamora and Toro, and ordered him to push on his troops, by brigades, to Benevente. But, on the 9th, Colonel Graham, whom he had dispatched to Morla and Castelfranco, returned from Talavera, with tidings that these men had surrendered Madrid. The number of the French there was computed at between 20,000 and 30,000 men, and it was said that they remained at the Retiro, not having taken possession of the city, in consequence of the temper of the inhabitants. Another part of the French army was engaged in besieging Zaragoza. From Toledo the news was equally discouraging: Victor no sooner approached than it was surrendered to him. These circumstances did not induce the British General to alter his plan: his object was to threaten the French communications, draw their attention from Madrid and Zaragoza, and thus favour any movements which might be projected by the armies forming on the south of the Tagus. If no advantage was taken of it, and no efforts made, he saw that the French might turn against him what portion of their force they pleased. That they would be able to do this he expected; and he believed that nothing which

his army could effect would be attended with any other advantage than the character which might be won for the British arms. He looked, therefore, to a retreat, as an event which would soon be unavoidable; in his dispatches home, dissuaded the government from sending out reinforcements, and desired that transports might be ready, at Lisbon and at Vigo, to receive the troops; being fully persuaded that the efforts of England could be of no avail, and that it would be necessary to evacuate the peninsula.

Having determined, in this inauspicious state of mind, upon advancing, he wrote to Romana, who was then at Leon, collecting and refitting the remains of Blake's army. Sir John complained to him that he had been put in no communication with any of the Spanish armies, had been kept perfectly in the dark with respect to their movements, the plans of their generals and their government, and that while his army was on the march to assemble and unite itself, he had been left exposed, without the least support. Therefore, though his wish had always been to co-operate with the Spaniards, it became necessary for him, finding that he was left to himself, to think of himself alone. Under that feeling he had ordered the corps at Astorga to fall back on Coruña, and meant himself to retire upon Portugal, there to be ready for the assistance of Spain whenever their affairs were better managed, and an opportunity offered for doing them any good. Perhaps this opportunity had now occurred; and as his retreat had been reluctant, so he had stopped it the moment a chance of acting to advantage presented itself. His wish now was to unite with the Marques, for whose character he had the highest respect, and who would always find him ready to undertake whatever was practicable for the service of the Spanish nation. The account which Romana gave of his army in reply was far from encouraging. He had 20,000 men under arms, but they were almost all without haversacks, cartridge boxes, and

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with Romana.*

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 XV. to foot. Their spirits however were good, and if they were well  
 1808. fed they would do their duty. Their dispersion in Biscay had been  
December. wholly owing to the want of subsistence. He should not doubt of  
 uniting with Sir John, and concerting a decisive attack upon the  
 troops which surrounded Madrid, were it not for a division of  
 8000 or 10,000 men, extending from Sahagun to Almanza, whose  
 apparent object was to check his army. As long as they re-  
 mained in that position, he could not abandon his, because it  
 would leave them a free way into Asturias; they would take pos-  
 session of the country from whence he drew large supplies, and  
 they would threaten the passage into Galicia. A combined  
 movement with Sir David Baird might oblige them to fall back  
 upon Reynosa, and then it would not be difficult to form a  
 junction.

*First skir-  
 mish at  
 Rueda.*

From the beginning Sir John Moore had thought so poorly  
 of the Spaniards, that this account of the force with which he was  
 to co-operate could make no alteration in his views. It was per-  
 fectly understood by him that he must stand, or fall, by his own  
 means. He left Salamanca on the 12th. On the same day,  
 Lord Paget, with the principal part of the cavalry, marched from  
 Toro to Tordesillas; and General Stuart surprised and cut off a  
 party of French who were posted at Rueda. This was the first  
 encounter between the British and French in Spain; and the  
 prisoners declared it was universally believed that the English  
 army had retreated. On the 14th, when Sir John was at Alaejos,  
 a packet of letters, from the head-quarters of the French army,  
 was brought to him. Some peasantry had killed the officer who  
 had them in charge. Among them was a letter from Berthier to  
 Marshal Soult, directing him to take possession of Leon, drive  
 the enemy into Galicia, and make himself master of Benevente  
 and Zamora. He would have no English in front, it was said;

for every thing evinced that they were in full retreat. A movement had been made to Talavera, on the road to Badajoz, which must compel them to hasten to Lisbon, if they were not already gone; and when they had retired, the Emperor thought Soult could do whatever he pleased. It appeared, from this letter, that Soult had two divisions with him at Saldaña; that Junot was collecting another at Burgos; and that another, under Mortier (Duke of Treviso), had been ordered to march against Zaragoza.

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Sir John had intended to march to Valladolid, but seeing that Soult was stronger than had been represented, he thought it better to move to Toro, and unite his army there, Sir David Baird doing the same at Benevente, from whence the two corps might be joined, either by a forward or flank movement, and strike a blow against Soult, before that General should be reinforced. While the head-quarters were at Toro, a member of the Junta arrived there with Mr. Stuart. After the manner in which Colonel Charmilly had been dismissed, Mr. Frere had little reason to hope that any thing would induce Sir John Moore to alter his determination of retiring from the country in despair. The Spanish Government had, however, pressed him to make one effort more: if that determination were persisted in, they said, it would bring on the most dreadful consequences. The measures which alone could save Portugal and Spain would be completely disconcerted, and England would have afforded them succour only to make them rely on an effective aid, and then to withdraw it at the critical moment when it was most needed. In reality, the enemy at this moment exposed himself to ruin by dividing his army to cover such an extended line. Romana would join Sir John Moore with 14,000 men, and the Junta had taken such measures that within a month 30,000 would be raised in Leon, Galicia, and Asturias. Mr. Frere inclosed this note to

*Head-  
quarters re-  
moved to  
Toro.*

*The com-  
mand of the  
Spanish  
armies  
offered to Sir  
J. Moore.*



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the British Commander, and reminding him of the immense responsibility with which he charged himself in adopting a measure which must be followed by immediate if not final ruin to our ally, and by indelible disgrace to the country with whose resources he was entrusted, expressed a hope that Mr. Stuart, who was personally esteemed by the General, would by that advantage be enabled to urge this argument with the warmth of regard. "I am unwilling," he pursued, "to enlarge upon a subject in which my feelings must be stifled, or expressed at the risk of offence; which, with such an interest at stake, I should feel unwilling to excite. But this much I must say, that if the British army had been sent abroad for the express purpose of doing the utmost possible mischief to the Spanish cause, with the single exception of not firing a shot against their troops, they would, according to the measures now announced as about to be pursued, have completely fulfilled their purpose. . . That the defence of Galicia should be abandoned, must appear incredible." . . This letter arrived too late to have any influence upon Sir John's movements; he had advanced, but it was with a heavy heart: and when the Deputy from the Junta, D. Francisco Xavier Caro, at this time offered him the command in chief of the Spanish armies, he refused it. He would not have done this if he had had any hope of acting with success against the enemy, or any intention of making a stand against them: for at this time he learnt that Romana was beginning to retire on Galicia, and felt how inconvenient it was that the army which was to cooperate with him should be independent of him. He therefore wrote to the Marques, saying, he had looked for the assistance of such part of his corps as was fit to move; and had expected also that the road to Coruña would have been left open for the British army, as that by which it must receive its supplies, and the only one by which it must retreat, if compelled so to do.



Romana replied, that he should have had no thought of retreating had it not been for the intelligence which he received from Sir D. Baird ; that he was ready to act with Sir John ; and that this was the moment, not for retreating, but for trying what could be done against the enemy, and drawing him from the capital.

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The junction with Sir D. Baird was formed at Mayorga on the 20th ; the united force amounting to something more than 28,000 men, of whom 2450 were cavalry, with 50 pieces of artillery. The cavalry under Lord Paget were pushed forward, and having learned that some of the enemy's cavalry were posted at Sahagun, Lord Paget endeavoured to cut them off. The alarm was given, and they had time to form in a favourable position ; but they were out-manceuvred, charged, overthrown in a moment, and dispersed in every direction, with the loss of many killed, and 157 prisoners, including two Lieutenant-Colonels. In this affair about 400 of the 15th Hussars encountered nearly 700 French ; and the British felt and proved their own exceeding great superiority. Head-quarters were advanced to Sahagun on the 21st. The weather was severe ; the roads bad, and covered with snow ; and as the troops had suffered from forced marches, they halted there for a day, and there a co-operation with Romana was finally concerted, the Marques engaging to move with from 9000\* to 10,000 men, being that part of his force which was sufficiently clothed and armed to take the field. Pitiabie as their condition appeared when they were compared to troops so admirably equipped as the English, it was, nevertheless, evident, even to a desponding observer, that they might be brought into

*Junction  
with Sir D.  
Baird  
formed.*

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\* The French historian of Marshal Soult's Campaigns in 1808-9, affirms that Sir John Moore had 37,000 effective men, and Romana had from 25,000 to 30,000 ; their united force amounting thus to more than 60,000 !