

CHAP.
XV.
1809.
January.

had marched for that port; and General Fraser, with his division, had been ordered to follow and join them. A dispatch was sent to stop him: the dragoon who was entrusted with it got drunk on the way, and lost the letter; and these troops, in consequence, had proceeded a full day's journey, on their way towards Vigo, before the counter-order reached them, and they were marched back. Thus, instead of having two days' rest at Lugo, as had been designed, they returned to that place excessively harassed, and with some diminution of number, occasioned by fatigue. When the horses entered Lugo, many of them fell dead in the streets, others were mercifully shot; . . . above four hundred carcasses were lying in the streets and market-places; . . . there were none of the army who had strength to bury them; the townspeople were under too painful a suspense to think of performing work which it seemed hopeless to begin while the frequent musquet-shot indicated so many fresh slaughters; there therefore the bodies lay, swelling with the rain, bursting, putrifying, and poisoning the atmosphere, faster than the glutted dogs and carrion birds could do their office. Here the retreating army might have rested, had the destruction of the bridges been effected; but this attempt had been so imperfectly executed, that the French came in sight on the 5th, and, collecting in considerable strength, took up a good position opposite our rear guard, a valley dividing them.

*Sir John
offers battle
at Lugo.
Jan. 6.*

On the following day they attacked the outposts, opening upon them with two Spanish pieces of ordnance, which they had taken on their march. The attack was made with great spirit; but it was received, says an officer, "with a steadiness which excited even our own wonder;" . . . for at the sight of the enemy, and the sound of battle, the English recovered heart, and derived from their characteristic and invincible courage a strength which soon made them victorious. On the 7th another attack

Jan. 7.

was made, and in like manner repelled. The prisoners reported that Marshal Soult was come up with three divisions. Sir John Moore, therefore, expecting a more formidable attempt, drew up his whole force on the morning of the 8th. It was his wish now to bring the enemy to action: he had perfect confidence in the valour of the troops, and perceived, also, that, unless he crippled his pursuers, there was no hope of embarking unmolested. Order and discipline were instantaneously restored by this resolution to fight, and the men seemed at once to have recovered from their sufferings. The French were not equally eager for battle; the trial which they had made of their enemies on the two preceding days was not such as to encourage them; and Soult was waiting for more troops to come up. The country was intersected with inclosures, and his position was thought too strong to be attacked by an inferior force. But, in reality, the French at this time were less numerous than the English. Another reason assigned for not attacking the enemy was, that the commissariat had only provisions for two days: delay, therefore, was judged as disadvantageous as retreat. It was afterwards known, that the French expected to be attacked, that they had no confidence in the strength of their position, and that their ablest officers apprehended their advanced guard would have been cut off. They frequently spoke of this to those English who were left in their power at Lugo, and exulted that Sir John Moore had contented himself with offering battle, instead of forcing them to an engagement. After waiting till the afternoon, during a day of snow and storms, Sir John ordered large fires to be lighted along the line, for the purpose of deceiving the enemy, and continued his retreat during the night.

Before the reserve left Lugo, the General once more endeavoured to repress the irregularity of the march. He warned the soldiers that their safety depended entirely upon their keeping their divisions, and marching with their regiments; and that

CHAP.
XIV.

1809.

January.

Jan. 8.

*Retreat to
Coruña.*

CHAP. those who stopped in villages, or straggled in the way, would
 XV. inevitably be cut off by the French cavalry, . . . “ who have
 1809. hitherto,” said he, “ shown little mercy even to the feeble and
January. infirm who have fallen into their hands. The army has still
 eleven leagues to march ; the soldiers must make an exertion to
 accomplish this : the rear guard cannot stop ; and they who
 fall behind must take their fate.” These representations were
 ineffectual : . . . it was, indeed, impossible to obey them : many of
 the men were exhausted and foot-sore, and could not keep their
 ranks ; . . . others, who had totally broken through all discipline,
 left them for the love of wine, or for worse motives. So irresistible
 was the temptation of liquor to men in their state, that it was
 deemed better to expose them to the cold and rain of a severe
 night, than to the wine-houses of Betanzos, the next town upon
 their march. When the Royals reached that place, they only
 mustered, with the colours, nine officers, three serjeants, and
 three privates : the rest had dropped on the road ; and many of
 those who joined did not come up for three days. There was a
 memorable instance, in this part of the retreat, of what might
 have been accomplished by discipline and presence of mind.
 A party of invalids, between Lugo and Betanzos, were closely
 pressed by two squadrons of the enemy’s cavalry. Serjeant
 Newman, of the 2d battalion 43d, was among them : he made
 an effort to pass three or four hundred of these poor men, then
 halted, rallied round him such as were capable of making any
 resistance, and directed the others to proceed as they could.
 This party he formed regularly into divisions, and commenced
 firing and retiring in an orderly manner, till he effectually covered
 the retreat of his disabled comrades, and made the cavalry give
 up the pursuit.

*Sir John
 is advised to
 propose
 terms.*

The partial actions at Lugo, and the risk to which he had
 been exposed of a general one, checked Soult in his pursuit ;
 and he was too sensible of the danger which he had escaped, to

trust himself again so near the British, without a superior force. The British army, therefore, gained twelve hours' march upon him, and reached Coruña with little farther molestation; they obtained implements from Coruña for destroying the bridge over the Mero, and thus impeded the enemy's progress. At Coruña, if the General had not represented the cause of Spain as hopeless, they might have found reinforcements from England, which would have enabled them to turn upon their pursuers, and take ample vengeance for the sufferings and the shame which they had endured. But, instead of reinforcements, he had directed that empty transports should be sent; and, for want of due knowledge of the country, had ordered them to Vigo, instead of Coruña. That order had been countermanded as soon as the error was discovered; but contrary winds detained the ships, . . . happily for the honour of their country, for otherwise the troops would have quitted Spain as fugitives. It was apparent now that they could not escape unless they gained a battle. Coruña was a bad position. Had they been numerous enough to have occupied a range of hills about four miles from the town, they could have defended themselves against very superior numbers, . . . but these heights required a larger force than the English army, of which not less than a fourth part had been foundered by the way. Both flanks would have been liable to be turned: it was therefore necessary to relinquish them to the enemy, and be content with occupying a second and lower range. Such, however, were the disadvantages of this situation, that some of our general officers advised the Commander to propose terms to Soult, for permitting the army to embark unmolested. In communicating this to the Government, Sir John said he was averse to make any such proposal, and exceedingly doubtful if it would be attended with any good effect, . . . but whatever he might resolve upon this head, the Ministers might rest assured that he would accept no terms which were in the least dishonourable to the army or to

CHAP.

XV.

1809.

*January.**Jan. 11.*

CHAP.

XV.

1809.

January.

the country. Happily for his own memory, upon farther consideration, he rejected the advice. It is sufficiently disgraceful that such advice should have been given; and deeply is England indebted to Sir John Moore for saving the army from this last and utter ignominy, and giving it an opportunity of displaying to the world that courage which had never forsaken it, and retrieving the honour which, had this counsel been followed, would irretrievably have been lost.

Preparation for battle.

Arrangements, therefore, were made to give the enemy battle. One division, under General Hope, occupied a hill on the left, commanding the road to Betanzos: the height decreased gradually to the village of Elvina, taking a curved direction. At this village General Baird's division commenced, and bent to the right: the whole formed nearly a semicircle. On the right of Sir David Baird, the rifle corps formed a chain across a valley, and communicated with General Fraser's division, which was drawn up about half a mile from Coruña, near the road to Vigo. The reserve, under General Paget, occupied a village on the Betanzos road, about half a mile in the rear of General Hope. On the outside of the British posts was a magazine, containing 4000 barrels of gunpowder, which had been brought from England, and left there, while the Spanish armies were without ammunition! It was now necessary to blow it up:.. the explosion shook the town like an earthquake; and a village near the magazine was totally destroyed.

The artillery embarked.

The French made their appearance on the morning of the 12th, moving in force on the opposite side of the river Mero. They took up a position near the village of Perillo, on the left flank, and occupied the houses along the river. Their force was continually increasing. On the 14th they commenced a cannonade, which was returned with such effect, that they at last drew off their guns. In the evening of this day the transports from Vigo hove in sight. Some slight skirmishes took place the following

morning. Preparations meantime were making for the embarkation. Sir John finding that, from the nature of the ground, much artillery could not be employed, placed seven six-pounders and one howitzer along the line, and kept four Spanish guns as a reserve, to be advanced to any point where they might be wanted: the rest of the artillery was embarked. The sick and the dismounted cavalry were sent on board with all possible expedition. A few horses also were embarked, . . . but there was little time for this: most of them were completely disabled; another slaughter, therefore, was made of them: and the beach was covered with their bodies. Some of these animals, seeing their fellows fall, were sensible of the fate intended for them: they became wild with terror, and a few broke loose.

The preparations for embarking were completed on the morning of the 16th, and the General gave notice, that he intended, if the French did not move, to begin embarking the reserve at four in the afternoon. This was about mid-day. He mounted his horse, and set off to visit the out-posts: before he had proceeded far, a messenger came to tell him that the enemy's line were getting under arms; and a deserter arriving at the same moment, confirmed the intelligence. He spurred forward. Their light troops were pouring rapidly down the hill on the right wing of the British, and the advanced picquets were already beginning to fire. Lord William Bentinck's brigade, consisting of the 4th, 42d, and 50th regiments, maintained this post. It was a bad position, and yet, if the troops gave way on that point, the ruin of the army was inevitable. The guards were in their rear. General Paget was ordered to advance with the reserve, and support Lord William. The enemy opened a cannonade from eleven heavy guns, advantageously planted on the hills. Two strong columns, one advancing from a wood, the other skirting its edge, directed their march towards the right

CHAP.
XV.

1809.

January.

*Battle of
Coruña.*

CHAP. wing. A third column approached the centre: a fourth ad-
 XV. vanced slowly upon the left: a fifth remained half way down the
 1809. hill, in the same direction. Both in number and weight of guns
 January. they had a decided superiority; and they fired with such effect
 from the commanding situation which they had chosen, that
 the balls in their bounding reached the British reserve, and
 occasioned some loss there.

Sir David Baird had his arm shattered with a grape-shot as
 he was leading on his division. The two lines of infantry ad-
 vanced against each other: they were separated by stone walls
 and hedges which intersected the ground: but as they closed, it
 was perceived that the French line extended beyond the right
 flank of the British, and a body of the enemy was observed
 moving up the valley to turn it. Marshal Soult's intention was
 to force the right of the British, and thus to interpose between
 Coruña and the army, and cut it off from the place of embarka-
 tion. Failing in this attempt, he was now endeavouring to out-
 flank it. Half of the 4th regiment was therefore ordered to fall
 back, forming an obtuse angle with the other half. This man-
 œuvre was excellently performed, and they commenced a heavy
 flanking fire: Sir John Moore called out to them, that this was
 exactly what he wanted to be done, and rode on to the 50th,
 commanded by Majors Napier and Stanhope. They got over
 an inclosure in their front, charged the enemy most gallantly,
 and drove them out of the village of Elvina; but Major Napier,
 advancing too far in the pursuit, received several wounds, and
 was made prisoner, and Major Stanhope was * killed.

* He was shot through the heart, and died so instantaneously, that the smile with
 which he was regarding the conduct of his men was fixed upon his cheek. They
 buried him at the entrance of the bivouac which he had occupied the preceding night;

The General now proceeded to the 42d. "Highlanders," said he, "remember Egypt!" . . . they rushed on, and drove the French before them, till they were stopped by a wall: Sir John accompanied them in this charge. He now sent Captain Hardinge to order up a battalion of guards to the left flank of the 42d. The officer commanding the light infantry conceived, at this, that they were to be relieved by the guards, because their ammunition was nearly expended, and he began to fall back. The General, discovering the mistake, said to them, "My brave 42d, join your comrades: ammunition is coming, and you have your bayonets!" Upon this, they instantly moved forward. Captain Hardinge returned, and pointed out to the General where the guards were advancing. The enemy kept up a hot fire, and their artillery played incessantly on the spot where they were standing. A cannon-shot struck Sir John, and carried away his left shoulder, and part of the collar-bone, leaving the arm hanging by the flesh. He fell from his horse on his back, his countenance did not change, neither did he betray the least sensation of pain. Captain Hardinge, who dismounted, and took him by the hand, observed him anxiously watching the 42d, which was warmly engaged, and told him they were advancing; and upon that intelligence his countenance brightened. Colonel Graham, who now came up to assist him, seeing the composure of his features, began to hope that he was not wounded, till he perceived the dreadful laceration. From the size of the wound, it was in vain to make any attempt at stopping the blood; and Sir John consented to be removed in a blanket to the rear. In raising him up, his sword, hanging

CHAP.
XV.
1809.
January.

and as his brother leant forward to look upon the body for the last time, a rifle-shot passed through his cloak, and struck his side; its force was broken by the folds of the cloak, otherwise the blow must have been fatal, and he would have fallen into the grave upon his brother's corpse.

CHAP.

XV.

1809.

January.

on the wounded side, touched his arm, and became entangled between his legs: Captain Hardinge began to unbuckle it; but the General said, in his usual tone and manner, and in a distinct voice, "It is as well as it is; I had rather it should go out of the field with me." Six soldiers of the 42d and the guards bore him. Hardinge, observing his composure, began to hope that the wound might not be mortal, and said to him, he trusted he might be spared to the army, and recover. Moore turned his head, and looking steadfastly at the wound for a few seconds, replied, "No, Hardinge, I feel that to be impossible."

As the soldiers were carrying him slowly along, he made them frequently turn round, that he might see the field of battle, and listen to the firing; and he was well pleased when the sound grew fainter. A spring-waggon came up, bearing Colonel Wynch, who was wounded: the Colonel asked who was in the blanket, and being told it was Sir John Moore, wished him to be placed in the waggon. Sir John asked one of the Highlanders whether he thought the waggon or the blanket was best? and the man said the blanket would not shake him so much, as he and the other soldiers would keep the step, and carry him easy. So they proceeded with him to his quarters at Coruña, weeping as they went.

General Paget, meantime, hastened with the reserve to support the right wing. Colonel Beckwith dashed on with the rifle corps, repelled the enemy, and advanced so far as nearly to carry off one of their cannon; but a corps greatly superior moved up the valley, and forced him to retire. Paget, however, attacked this body of the enemy, repulsed it, and pressed on, dispersing every thing before him, till the enemy, perceiving their left wing was now quite exposed, drew it entirely back. The French then advanced upon Generals Manningham and Leith, in the centre, and there they were more easily repelled, the ground being more