

elevated, and favourable for artillery. The position on the left was strong, and their effort there was unavailing: but a body of them took possession of a village on the road to Betanzos, and continued to fire from it, till Lieutenant-Colonel Nicholls attacked it, and beat them out. Night was now closing in, and the French had fallen back in all parts of the field. The firing, however, was not discontinued till it was dark.

CHAP.
XV.
1809.
January.

Never was any battle gained under heavier disadvantages. The French force exceeded 20,000 men, the British were not 15,000. The superiority in artillery was equally great: . . . the enemy had met English guns on the way, sent off, thus late, to the patriotic armies, and these they had turned back, and employed against the English. Our artillery was embarked; and the Shrapnell shells, which contributed so materially to the success at Vimeiro, were not used in this more perilous engagement. If the moral and physical state of the two armies be considered, the disadvantages under which our soldiers laboured were still greater: . . . the French, equipped in the stores which they had overtaken upon the road, elated with a pursuit wherein no man had been forced beyond his strength, and hourly receiving reinforcements to their already superior numbers; . . . the English, in a state of misery, to which no army, perhaps, had ever before been reduced till after a total defeat; having lost their military chest, their stores, their baggage, their horses, their women and children, their sick, their wounded, their stragglers, every thing but their innate, excellent, unconquerable courage. From 6000 to 7000 men had sunk under the fatigues of their precipitate retreat. The loss in the battle did not amount to 800; that of the * French is believed to have exceeded 2000. If such a victory

* The historian of Marshal Soult's campaigns in 1809 states the loss of the French at 150 killed and 500 wounded. They were successful on all points, he says; the victory

CHAP.

XV.

1809.

January.

was gained by the British army under such circumstances, what might not have been achieved by that army when unbroken, with all its means at hand, in health and strength, in its pride, and in its height of hope!

The General lived to hear that the battle was won. "Are the French beaten?" was the question which he repeated to every one who came into his apartment; and he expressed how great a satisfaction it was to him to know that they were defeated. "I hope," he said, "the people of England will be satisfied! I hope my country will do me justice." Then, addressing Colonel Anderson, who had been his friend and companion in arms for one-and-twenty years, he said to him, "Anderson, you know that I have always wished to die this way... You will see my friends as soon as you can:.. tell them every thing... Say to my mother"—But here his voice failed, he became excessively agitated, and did not again venture to name her. Sometimes he asked to be placed in an easier posture. "I feel myself so strong," he said, "I fear I shall be long dying. It is great uneasiness... it is great pain." But, after a while, he pressed Anderson's hand close to his body, and, in a few minutes, died without a struggle. He fell, as it had ever been his wish to do, in battle and in victory. No man was more beloved in private life, nor was there any general in the British army so universally respected. All men had thought him worthy of the chief com-

was decided, and if the action had begun earlier, and if the ground had permitted the cavalry to charge, *c'en etait fait de cette armée Anglaise*. These are modest mis-statements in an author who asserts that, in the hope of impeding the French in their pursuit, the English conceived the horrible intention of blowing up the town of Betanzos, where the inhabitants had received them as allies; and that for this purpose they deposited six thousand weight of powder on the ground floor of the town-house, and set fire to the four quarters of the town!!

mand. Had he been less circumspect, had he looked more ardently forward, and less anxiously around him, and on all sides, and behind, . . . had he been more confident in himself and in his army, and impressed with less respect for the French Generals, he would have been more equal to the difficulties of his situation. Despondency was the radical weakness of his mind. Personally he was as brave a man as ever met death in the field; but he wanted faith in British courage, and it is faith by which miracles are wrought in war as well as in religion. But let it ever be remembered with gratitude, that, when some of his general officers advised him to conclude the retreat by a capitulation, Sir John Moore preserved the honour of England.

He had often said that, if he were killed in battle, he wished to be buried where he fell. The body was removed at midnight to the citadel of Coruña. A grave was dug for him on the rampart there, by a party of the 9th regiment, the aides-du-camp attending by turns. No coffin could be procured; and the officers of his staff wrapped the body, dressed as it was, in a military cloak and blankets. The interment was hastened; for, about eight in the morning, some firing was heard, and they feared that, if a serious attack were made, they should be ordered away, and not suffered to pay him their last duty. The officers of his family bore him to the grave; the funeral service was read by the chaplain; and the corpse was covered with earth.

Meantime, General Hope, on whom the command devolved, passed the night in embarking the troops. At ten o'clock he ordered them to march from the field by brigades, leaving strong picquets to guard the ground, and give notice if the enemy approached. Major-General Beresford, with a rear-guard of about 2000 men, to cover the embarkation, occupied the lines in front of Coruña. Major-General Hill, with a corps of reserve, was

CHAP.
XV.

1809.

January.

CHAP. XV.
 1809.
 January.
 Jan. 17.

stationed on a promontory behind the town. Nearly the whole army was embarked during the night: the picquets were withdrawn and embarked also before day, little remaining ashore at daylight except the rear-guard and the reserve. The French, seeing this, pushed on their light troops to the heights of St. Lucia, which command the harbour, got up some cannon to a rising ground, and fired at the transports. Several of the masters of these vessels were frightened, and cut their cables: four of them ran a-ground. The men were put on board other ships, and these were burnt. During the night of the 17th, and the following morning, Beresford sent off all the sick and wounded who were in a condition to bear removal: and, lastly, the rear-guard got into the boats, no attempt being made to interrupt them. Thus terminated our first campaign in Spain.

END OF VOL. I.





Biblioteca Regional
de Madrid Joaquín Leguina



1346101

B.1



