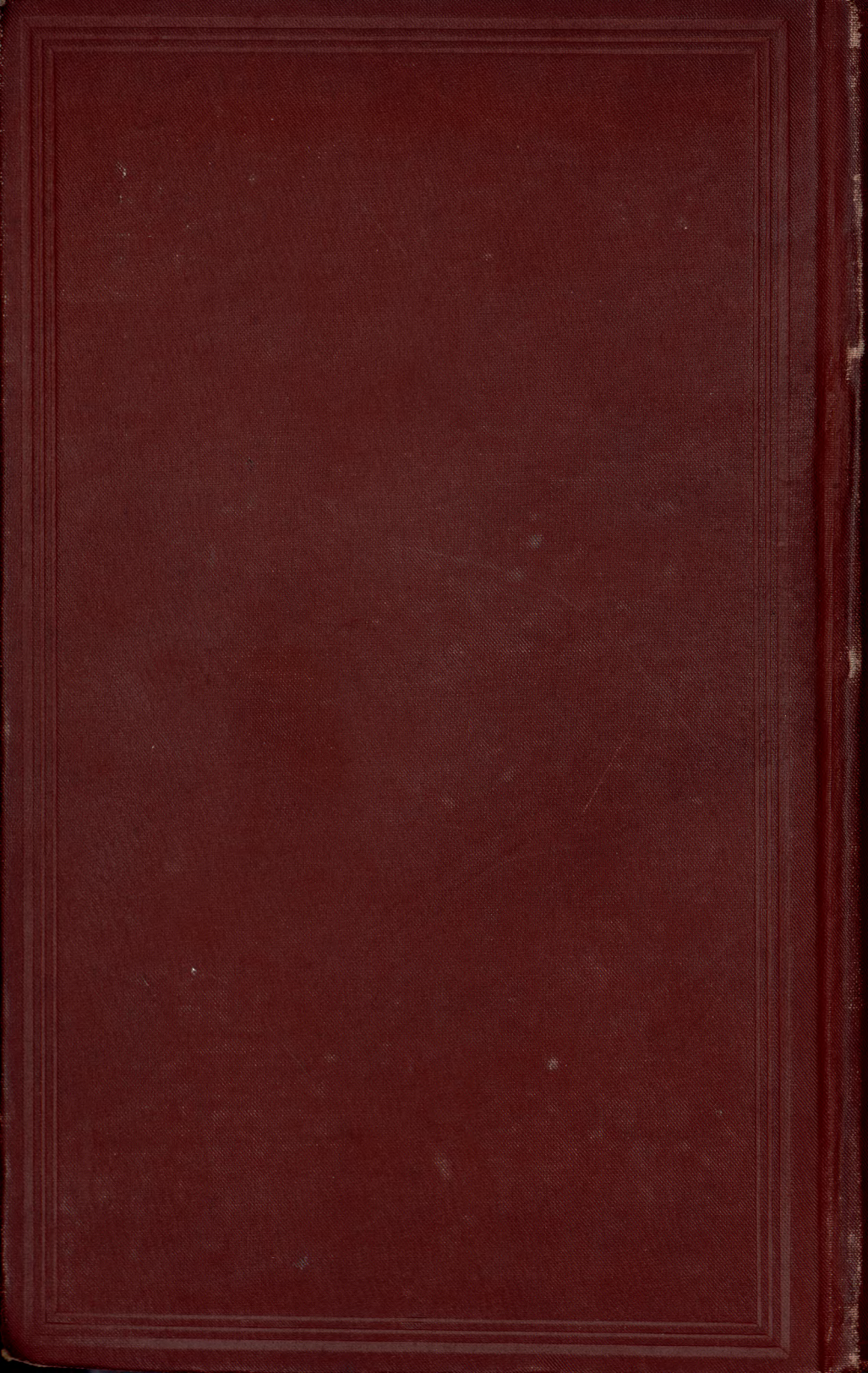


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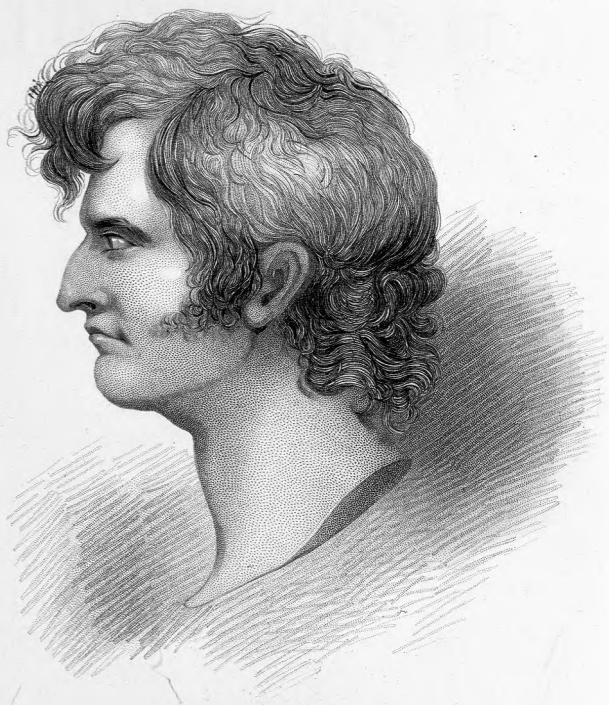
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Lieut. General Sir W Napier, Rnz^s — F Halpin, Sculp^t

HISTORY
OF THE
WAR IN THE PENINSULA

AND IN THE
SOUTH OF FRANCE

FROM A. D. 1807 TO A. D. 1814

BY MAJOR-GENERAL SIR W. F. P. NAPIER, K.C.B.

COLONEL TWENTY-SEVENTH REGIMENT,
MEMBER OF THE ROYAL SWEDISH ACADEMY OF
MILITARY SCIENCES

IN FIVE VOLUMES
WITH PORTRAITS AND PLANS
VOL. I.

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P R E F A C E .

FOR six years the Peninsula was devastated by the war of independence. The blood of France, Germany, England, Portugal, and Spain was shed in the contest, and in each of those countries, authors, desirous of recording the sufferings, or celebrating the valor of their countrymen, have written largely touching that fierce struggle. It may, therefore, happen that some will demand, why I should again relate "a thrice-told tale?" I answer, that two men observing the same object, will describe it diversely, following the point of view from which either beholds it; that which in the eyes of one is a fair prospect, to the other shall appear a barren waste, and yet neither may see aright! Wherefore, truth being the legitimate object of history, I hold it better that she should be sought for by many than by few, lest, for want of seekers, amongst the mists of prejudice, and the false lights of interest, she be lost altogether.

That much injustice has been done, and much justice left undone, by those authors who have hitherto written concerning this war, I can assert from personal knowledge of the facts. That I have been able to remedy this, without falling into similar errors, is more than I will venture to assume; but I have endeavored to render as impartial an account of the campaigns in the Peninsula, as the feelings which must warp the judgment of a contemporary historian will permit. I was an eye-witness to many of the transactions that I relate; and a wide acquaintance with military men has enabled me to consult distinguished officers, both French and English, and to correct my own recollections and opinions by their superior knowledge.

Thus assisted, and thus encouraged to undertake the work, I offer it to the world with the less fear, because it contains original documents, which will suffice to give it interest, although it should have no other merit. Many of those documents I owe to the liberality of Marshal Soult, who, disdaining national prejudices, with the confidence of a great mind, placed

them at my disposal, without even a remark to check the freedom of my pen. I take this opportunity to declare that respect which I believe every British officer, who has had the honor to serve against him, feels for his military talents. By those talents the French cause in Spain was long upheld, and after the battle of Salamanca, if his counsel had been followed by the intrusive monarch, the fate of the war might have been changed.

Military operations are so dependent upon accidental circumstances, that, to justify censure, it should always be shown that an unsuccessful general has violated the received maxims and established principles of war. By that rule I have been guided, but, to preserve the narratives unbroken, my own observations are placed at the end of certain transactions of magnitude, where, their real source being known, they will pass for as much as they are worth, and no more: when they are not well supported by argument, I freely surrender them to the judgment of abler men.

Of those transactions, which, commencing with "the secret treaty of Fontainebleau," ended with "the Assembly of Notables" at Bayonne, little is known, except through the exculpatory and contradictory publications of men interested to conceal the truth; and to me it appears, that the passions of the present generation must subside, and the ultimate fate of Spain be known, before that part of the subject can be justly or usefully handled. I have, therefore, related no more of those political affairs than would suffice to introduce the military events that followed: neither have I treated largely of the disjointed and ineffectual operations of the native armies; for I cared not to swell my work with apocryphal matter, and neglected the thousand narrow winding currents of Spanish warfare, to follow that mighty English stream of battle, which burst the barriers of the Pyrenees, and left deep traces of its fury in the soil of France.

The Spaniards have boldly asserted, and the world has believed, that the deliverance of the Peninsula was the work of their hands; this assertion, so contrary to the truth, I combat; it is unjust to the fame of the British General, and injurious to the glory of the British arms. Military virtue is not the growth of a day, nor is there any nation so rich and populous, that, despising it, can rest secure. Now the imbecility of Charles IV., the villainess of Ferdinand, and the corruption of Godoy, were undoubtedly the proximate causes of the calamities that overwhelmed Spain; but the primary cause, that which belongs to history, was the despotism arising from the union of a superstitious court with a sanguinary priesthood; a despotism which, by repressing knowledge and contracting the public mind, sapped the foundation of all military as well as civil virtues, and prepared the way for invasion. No foreign potentate would have attempted to steal into the fortresses of a great kingdom, if the prying eyes, and the thousand clamorous tongues belonging to a free press, had been ready to expose his

projects, and a well-disciplined army present to avenge the insult; but Spain, being destitute of both, was first circumvented by the wiles, and then ravaged by the arms of Napoleon. She was deceived and fettered because the public voice was stifled; she was scourged and torn because her military institutions were decayed.

From the moment that an English force took the field, the Spaniards ceased to act as principals in a contest carried on in the heart of their country, and involving their existence as an independent nation. They were self-sufficient, and their pride was wounded by insult; they were superstitious, and their religious feelings were roused to fanatic fury by an all-powerful clergy who feared to lose their own rich endowments; but after the first burst of indignation the cause of independence created little enthusiasm. Horrible barbarities were exercised on all French soldiers thrown by sickness or the fortune of war into the power of the invaded, and a dreadful spirit of personal hatred was kept alive by the exactions and severe retaliations of the invaders, yet no great and general exertion to drive the latter from the soil was made, at least none was sustained with steadfast courage in the field. Manifestoes, decrees, and lofty boasts, like a cloud of canvas covering a rotten hull, made a gallant appearance, when real strength and firmness were nowhere to be found. The Spanish insurrection presented indeed a strange spectacle. Patriotism was seen supporting a vile system of government; a popular assembly working for the restoration of a despotic monarch; the higher classes seeking a foreign master; the lower armed in the cause of bigotry and misrule. The upstart leaders, secretly abhorring freedom, though governing in her name, trembled at the democratic activity they had themselves excited; they called forth all the bad passions of the multitude, and repressed the patriotism that would regenerate as well as save. The country suffered the evils, without enjoying the benefits, of a revolution; for while tumults and assassinations terrified or disgusted the sensible part of the community, a corrupt administration of the resources extinguished patriotism, and neglect ruined the armies. The peasant-soldier, usually flying at the first onset, threw away his arms and returned to his home, or, attracted by the license of the *partidas*, joined the banners of men who, for the most part, originally robbers, were as oppressive to the people as the enemy; and these *guerilla* chiefs would, in their turn, have been as quickly exterminated, had not the French, pressed by Lord Wellington's battalions, been obliged to keep in large masses; this was the secret of Spanish constancy. It was the copious supplies from England, and the valor of the Anglo-Portuguese troops, that supported the war, and it was the gigantic vigor with which the Duke of Wellington resisted the fierceness of France, and sustained the weakness of three inefficient cabinets, that delivered the Peninsula. Faults he committed, and who in

war has not? yet shall his reputation stand upon a sure foundation, a simple majestic structure, that envy cannot undermine, nor the meretricious ornaments of party panegyric deform. The exploits of his army were great in themselves, great in their consequences, abounding with signal examples of heroic courage and devoted zeal. They should neither be disfigured nor forgotten, being worthy of more fame than the world has yet accorded them—worthy also of a better historian.

NOTICE.

Of the manuscript authorities consulted for this history, those marked with the letter S. the author owes to the kindness of Marshal Soult.

For the notes dictated by Napoleon, and the plans of campaign sketched out by King Joseph, he is indebted to his Grace the Duke of Wellington.

The returns of the French army were extracted from the original half-monthly statements presented by Marshal Berthier to the Emperor Napoleon.

Of the other authorities it is unnecessary to say more, than that the author had access to the original papers, with the exception of Dupont's Memoirs, of which a copy only was obtained.

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