

demi-bastion, and reached the town by the steps running down from it into the street.

Just as the town was won, the low black skies hanging over the city awoke in tempest, and the tumult of earthly battle below was drowned beneath the rolling thunder in the cloudy sky-depths above. It was deep calling to deep; the anger of the sky rebuking the petty anger of the earth. But, heedless of tempest and thunder, men fought like devils in the streets of San Sebastian, and many, at least, of the British, broken loose from all restraint, seemed like very fiends. The town took fire, and ten days afterwards was still burning. Strange scenes of riot and cruelty were witnessed. Rey himself, with quenchless valour, fell back into the castle, and still held out, only surrendering, indeed, on September 8. When the garrison marched out with the honours of war, at its head, with drawn sword, walked Rey himself, accompanied by the scanty survivors of his staff, and every officer on Graham's staff saluted the grim old veteran with respect. He had lost San Sebastian, but had not lost his soldierly reputation. Rey was curiously unheroic in personal appearance, but to his gross and aldermanic body he added the brain and daring of a fine soldier.

Wellington paid a great price for San Sebastian. Some 70,000 shot and shell were poured on its defences, and in the trenches around this petty town, or on its breaches, not less than 3800 of Wellington's

troops fell; nearly as large an expenditure of life, as sufficed to win the history-making battle of Vittoria. The siege of San Sebastian is a conundrum not easily solved. Never was courage more desperate than that shown in the attack, yet never was courage so long cheated of its just reward. How was it that a third-rate fortress, and in bad condition when first invested, resisted a besieging army with a strong battering train for sixty-three days?

Napier gives a catalogue of "explanations," least important amongst which is the blunders committed by the besiegers. "Wellington," he says, "was between sea and shore, and received help from neither." The Spaniards, that is, refused to supply carts and boats; the British Admiralty failed to close Sebastian from the sea, or to give reasonable help in the landing of stores, &c. For the first time in war an important siege was maintained by women; for the stores for the besiegers were landed in boats rowed by Spanish girls. Soult's ten desperate battles in the Pyrenees, Napier thinks, were less injurious to the operations of the besiegers than the negligence and stupidities of the British Government. The over-haste of the besiegers, in brief, the scornful impatience of their valour, added to the sloth of the Spaniards, the serene indifference of the British Admiralty, and the persevering blunders of the British Government, explain why San Sebastian had

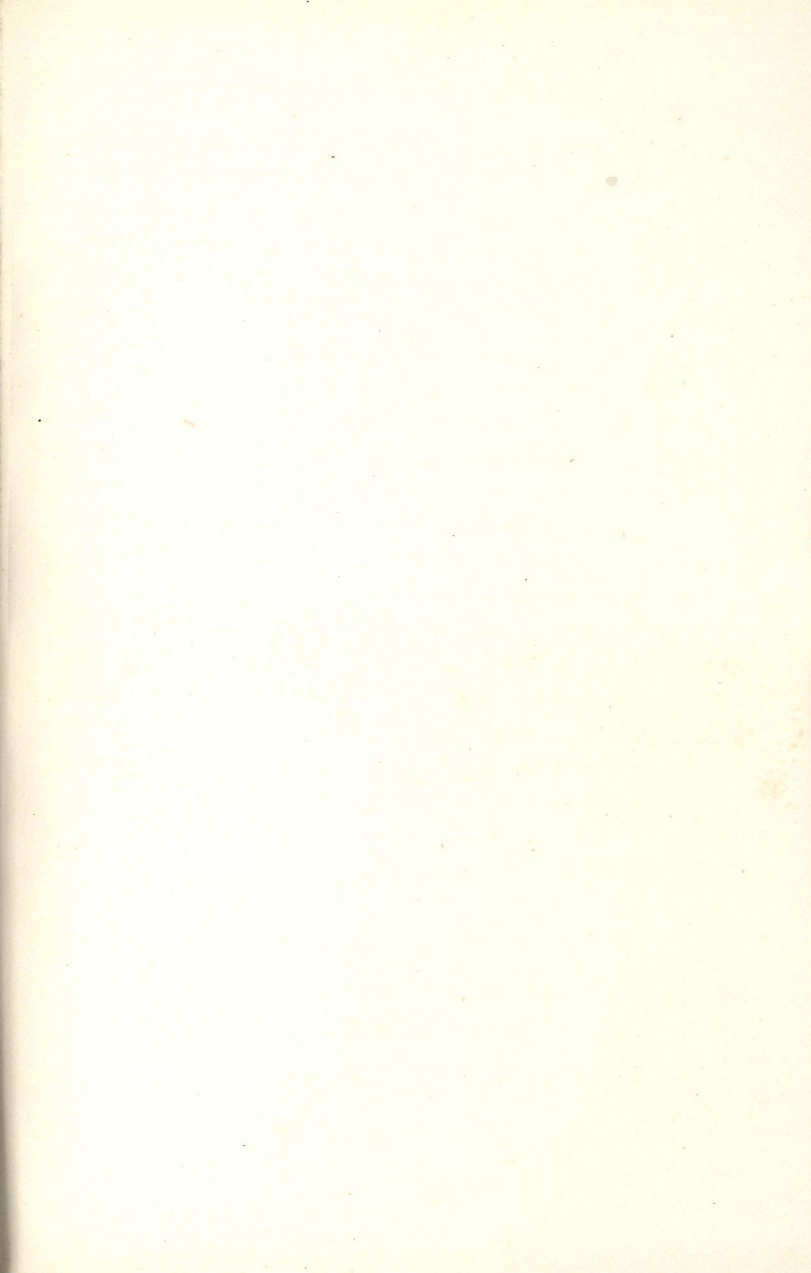
to be purchased at the cost of so much heroic and wasted blood.

In his Journal of the siege Jones shows how this dreadful slaughter was due, also, to mere neglect of the alphabet of engineering art, and the attempt to make the blood and valour of the soldiers a substitute for patience and scientific skill in attack. The capture of San Sebastian, with an adequate siege train and a sufficient use of breaching batteries, he says, would have been an easy and certain operation in eighteen or twenty days, and would have involved little loss of life. A too eager haste spread out that operation over sixty days, and cost the besiegers 3500 men and officers, killed, wounded, or taken prisoners.

Leith Hay gives a vivid picture of the scene offered by the great breach the day after San Sebastian was stormed. "The whole ascent of the breach," he says, "was covered with dead bodies; stripped and naked they lay on the ground where they had individually fallen, but in such numbers that on a similar space was never witnessed a more dreadful scene of slaughter. Behind this impressive foreground rose columns of smoke and ashes, and occasionally through the vapour was to be distinguished the towering castle keep, from whence, and from its batteries, issued, at intervals, an artillery discharge, or irregular and half-subdued musketry fire. Above all this was distinguishable the thunder of the British mortar batteries, as from the right

attack they poured shells upon the devoted rock, whose surface became furrowed and torn by their repeated explosions. Having walked up the face of the breach, I proceeded along the curtain, which presented a scene of indescribable havoc and destruction. The heat from the blazing houses was excessive; and from the midst of the mass of fire at intervals was to be heard the noise created by soldiers still busied in adding to the miseries that had overtaken the devoted town. Never was there in the annals of war a more decided case of annihilation than that of San Sebastian. The buildings all having communication, and being very closely arranged, ensured the conflagration becoming general—roofs falling, and the crashing of ruined walls that rolled down, and, in some cases, blocked up the passages in the street. The scene was rendered more impressive from the obscurity occasioned even at midday by the dense cloud of smoke that shrouded this scene of ruin and desolation.”

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