

Some time before we left these quarters to advance, an attack was made by the French, under General Junot, on our advanced troops; and we were ordered under arms to defend our position, in the event of them pushing forward. During that day, and the succeeding night, the baggage of the troops in front, along with the inhabitants of the surrounding country, filled the road leading through our village. It was a melancholy sight to see the poor natives, carrying their children, and any little thing which they were able to bring with them, moving along the road, after having left their homes and property—cast on the world without a prospect, travelling they knew not whither, desolate and friendless. In a few days they might be reduced to beg, or perhaps (what was not uncommon in Portugal) die of hunger. Alas! thought I, what misery war causes! I hope I will never see my own country in such a state; but it has been, and it may be again. I brought the picture home; but I could not pursue the idea: it was too distressing. Bad as this place is, said I to myself, and much

as we have to endure, I would willingly remain in it for life, rather than see Britain the seat of war: and, I firmly believe, that was the sentiment of all around me.

The French were beaten back, and our troops resumed their former station; but few of the inhabitants returned. Not long after this we were reviewed, along with part of the first division, by Lord Wellington. From the place where we were assembled, we could see Santarem, General Massena's head-quarters. Next day, the whole army was ordered to advance, as Massena had retreated during the night. This opened the campaign of 1811. From Alcoentre we marched to Rio Mayor (our former quarters, when we were on our way to join the army); but it was sadly altered—the inhabitants had mostly all left it; the houses were in ruins; and it wore a desolate appearance. Next day we crossed to Alcaneyde. Many of the houses were on fire, when we entered. This was the dirtiest of all the dirty villages in Portugal that I have seen; it was actually a dunghill from end to end.

From that we proceeded along a very stony road towards Porto de Mos. The surface of the surrounding country, on this day's march, was completely covered with stones. It seemed as if they had fallen in showers from the clouds: they were, in general, small: but, here and there, very large ones were poised on one end, and so completely balanced, that, although they were many tons weight, they could be moved by the slightest touch.

We entered Porto de Mos by a fine avenue of trees. There was a large convent fronting us as we entered, which had been set on fire by the French, as well as many of the houses. I never before witnessed such destruction. The finest furniture had been broken up for fire wood; the very floors torn up; beds, cut in pieces, with their contents, thrown about, intermixed with kitchen utensils, broken mirrors, china, &c. &c. all in one heterogeneous mass of ruin.

We had scarcely taken up our quarters, until I was called out for duty, and placed on the commissary guard. The mules, with the stores, had arrived, and

the store-keeper looking for a place to put them in, when we joined him. At last he pitched on a chapel for the purpose. There was a large fire in the middle of the floor, on which was heaped broken pieces of the altar, wooden images, frames of pictures; even the ornamented wood-work of the organ was broken up for the purpose.

In searching for the cleanest place to set down the bags of biscuit, we found a door leading to some place apart from the chapel. As it was quite dark, I caught up a burning piece of wood to inspect the place—but, what was my horror, when I entered and found the half-consumed skeletons of human beings on every side; some lying, others kneeling, and more of them standing upright against the walls! The floor was covered with ashes, in many places still red. I stood fixed to the spot—the burning stick dropped from my hand. I could find no epithet bad enough to designate such monsters of inhumanity. I informed some of my comrades of what we had seen; and we re-entered. Such an appalling

sight was never witnessed. Of those who had sunk on the floor nothing remained but the bones: while the others, who were in a kneeling or standing posture, were only partially consumed; and the agonized expression of their scorched and blackened features, was awful beyond description.

On going to the upper end of the apartment, I perceived a bag lying on the floor with some thing in it. I was almost afraid to open it, lest some new object of horror should present itself. I was not mistaken in my apprehensions; for, when the bag was examined, it was found to contain the dead body of an infant, which had been strangled; the cord used for that purpose still remained about its little neck. "Savage fiends!" said I, "is helpless innocence no protection from your cold-blooded cruelty? How depraved and lost to every feeling of humanity must have been the wretches who perpetrated this deed!!!"

Next morning, we continued our march to Leria; where I was relieved off guard, and found the regiment quartered in a

large convent. We remained here the succeeding day.

On the top of a hill, to the left of the town, was a sort of redoubt. I went with Dennis to take a view of the place; and, going up to where some of our soldiers were standing, we found three children lying, two already dead, but the other was still breathing. There were pieces of biscuit lying beside them, which our soldiers had brought—but it was too late. They had evidently perished with hunger. One of them had expired with the bit in his mouth. This was part of the horrors of war; but only a part. The wanton cruelty of the French soldiers, on this retreat, defies discription. Fiends let loose, with a commission to destroy mankind, could not have exceeded it.

From Leria we advanced to Pombal; where our division left the main road, and struck off to the right among the mountains, to turn the left flank of the French.

## CHAPTER XVI.

COME UP WITH THE FRENCH—ATTEMPT TO CUT  
OFF THE RETREAT OF THEIR REAR GUARD—  
FAIL—HARASS THEIR RETREAT—WANT RA-  
TIONS FOR TWO DAYS—HOPE EXCITED BY SEE-  
ING LOADED MULES COMING TOWARDS THE  
DIVISION—DISAPPOINTMENT—ON PICQUET—  
MILL—STRATAGEM—COME UP WITH THE  
FRENCH AT SABUGAL—INSTANCE OF FRENCH  
CRUELTY—ENCAMPMENT.

AFTER we left the main road, it would be impossible to give any regular account of our route or halting places; for, while we were among the mountains, it was nothing but a series of marching and counter-marching, up one hill, and down another, in search of the enemy. As to the names of places, few of us knew anything about them; and where we halted for the night was uniformly designated by the word *camp*. The first place we came up with the French, was near a ravine, which run up



between the mountains, with a village at its extremity. We were advancing on a hill which overlooked this ravine, when a cannon shot from the French struck our column, killed a sergeant, and wounded two or three men, besides tearing our armourer's knapsack open, and scattering its contents (which were principally his tools) about in every direction. The poor fellow was so frightened, that he grew sick, went to the rear, and soon after died. We were then ordered back from the verge of the hill; and, descending, marched round its base into the ravine; and here we saw the French retreating in columns towards the village. Our light companies had been skirmishing before we came up; and they were now briskly engaged with their sharpshooters, who were covering the retreat. Some of their columns were observed to be much in rear of the others; and the General, thinking that they might be intercepted, and taken prisoners, ordered those men who could swim to the front, for the purpose of crossing a river, which run down the centre of the ravine: they were



headed by one of our majors, and took the river; but, as it was found deep, and running very strict, there was some difficulty in getting over. In consequence of this, the French were enabled to reach the village before they could be intercepted, which they set fire to as they passed through. It was now near dark, and we passed to the right of the town, where we encamped.

They were out of sight next morning; and we had to commence the hunt again, which was an arduous task, for, no sooner did we get to the top of one hill, where we had seen them assembled, than we found them formed on another. The valleys, which lay between the mountains, were so narrow, that they were more like great clefts than anything else; and the sides so steep, that we had to scramble on our hands and feet to ascend them.

During the time that they were leading us this wild-goose chase, we were very ill supplied with rations, often without bread and rum for two days together; and, when we did get it, perhaps only half allowance. We were almost always sup-

plied with beef, but it was of that description, that there was little nourishment in it. The cattle were brought from Barbary, and often had to travel many hundred miles before they were used, with very little to eat on their journey; the consequence was that, when killed they were nothing more than a mass of emaciated muscle, with a semi-transparent covering of, what would be a perversion of language to call, fat—it was more like a coating of train oil. It was never bled properly; and, when boiled, it was as tough and stringy as a piece of junk. The water it was boiled in, was dignified with the name of soup: and, if the blood which boiled out of the beef, along with the wood ashes that fell into it, constituted soup, we had it in perfection.

One day we had halted rather early; at this time we had been without rations for two days. Many a curse was poured on the head of the commissary, who was considered the responsible person. “There comes the stores, at last,” cried out one of the men. “Where? where?” said those around. Every eye was now directed

to a hill at some distance, where a long train of mules were perceived successively rising over its summit, and bending their way towards the division. The men were in transports of joy; a general cheer greeted their appearance.

“We will have full rations to-day,” cried one; “and rum too,” said another, “for I can see casks on the mules.” Another cheer succeeded this discovery; and we were dancing about overjoyed. “Who goes for the rations? Get out blankets for the biscuit, and camp kettles for the rum.” There was soon plenty of volunteers for this duty. The mules had, by this time, got into a sort of defile. Every eye was on the stretch, waiting for their re-appearance. As the first mule emerged from the place where they were hid, every face was dressed in smiles: but the next second produced an effect, similar to that which a criminal might feel, who had been informed of his reprieve on the scaffold, and the next moment told it was a mistake; for it turned out to be mules with ammunition for the division. Never did I witness such a withering

effect on men, as this disappointment produced. We stood looking at each other for a minute, in all the agony of hope deferred; the next was opened by a torrent of execration on all concerned. Those who have never experienced the extremes of hunger can form no idea of our feelings.

A day or two after this, we crossed a river and ascended a hill, where we encamped. Dennis and I were for duty, and both placed on the out picquet, which was posted on the face of a hill in front of the division. The French was on the opposite rise; and a small river ran at the foot of it. We had only got one day's rations from the time the incident mentioned above occurred; and, as Dennis expressed it, "our bellies were thinking our throats were cut."

I procured leave from the officer to go to the river for water; intending to proceed a little farther down, to see if I could find anything that I could eat. Turning round the hill, I came to a mill; and, entering it, found a number of soldiers belonging to different regiments of the

division busy grinding Indian corn; others were employed drawing a baking of bread, which the French had left in their hurry, when we took up our position. I attempted to help myself to some corn, which was lying in a basket.—“Drop that like a hot potato,” said one of the Connaught Rangers. I tried another basket, but it also was appropriated; and, as there were none of my regiment there, I could not expect to succeed by force; so I left the place, sorrowful enough, on my way back to the picquet, with a cargo of cold water—poor cheer, certainly. But, just as I turned round the hill, I met my friend Dennis, who had got leave from the officer on some pretence to go down to the river. I told him my melancholy story; he paused for a moment; then, clapping his hand to his forehead, he exclaimed, “Now I have it! Give me the canteens.” When I gave them to him, he poured out the water, and slung them over his shoulder. “Now, just stand there a minute,” said he, “and I’ll show you a scatter.” He then commenced running, with the canteens clattering at his back. Those

who were in the mill, being startled by the noise, looked out to see what was the matter." When Dennis saw them he cried out, "Och, ye rogues o' the world, run for your lives; for the division has fell in, and the provost is coming down with his guard; and every one of yees will be taken." They were all out in a moment. "Which way is he coming?" "this way," said Dennis, pointing to the way he had came himself. "I am on picquet, and I just run down to give you warning." They all took to their heels in the opposite direction, leaving the field clear to Dennis and I; and we lost no time in filling our haversacks.

In our next day's march, we passed many dead bodies of French and Portuguese, lying on the road; and one part of it was covered with asses, which the French had hamstringed before they left them. It was pitiable enough to see the poor creatures in this state; yet there was something ludicrous in the position that the animals had taken. When thus cruelly lamed, they were sitting in a groupe upon their hinder end, staring in

each other's faces, seemingly in deep consultation on some important subject, and looking as grave and as dull as many an assembly of their *biped brethren* at home.

Nothing very particular occurred between this and the action at Sabugal. On that day, our sharpshooters commenced skirmishing at an early hour in the morning. The enemy fell back across the Coa; and, when we gained the heights above it, we found they had taken up a position on the opposite side, seemingly determined to make a stand. As we descended the hill towards the river, we passed a convent or chapel, half way down; at the door lay an old man, who had been killed with a musket shot, and a genteelly dressed Portuguese was standing beside him: he spoke to us as we passed, but we had no time then to pay any attention to what he said. We learned after, however, by some of the men, who were following us with the baggage, that he had been hung up by some of the French soldiers, because he would not, or could not, show them where he had hid his

money. His old father who was lying at the door, had been shot, and his mother's throat cut. His sisters had been first violated by the monsters, and then cruelly used: one of them had her eyes blackened, and the other her arm broken. His life was saved by the French General, who came up just as he had been suspended, and ordered him to be cut down. such were the tender mercies of the French soldiery!!!

We had now gained the edge of the river; the French columns were posted on the height above us. We passed the river, under a heavy fire, and proceeded to ascend the hill. We could now see that more of our army had crossed, both to our right and left. As we advanced up the hill, we formed line. General Picton rode up in front of us, with his stick over his shoulder, exposed to the heavy fire of the enemy, as composedly as if he had been in perfect safety. "Steady, my lads, steady," said he, "don't throw away your fire until I give you the word of command." We were now close on them; the balls were whizzing about our



ears like hailstones. The man before me received a shot in the head, and fell. "Why don't they let us give the rascals a volley," said some of the men. The left of our line, which was nearest them, now opened a heavy fire; and, by the time the line was all formed, the French had taken to their heels. At this moment a severe rain storm commenced, and darkened the air so much that we lost sight of them completely: nor did we again see them, until the sky cleared up, when they were discovered, about a mile forward, scrambling their way over hedge and ditch without any regularity. The ground which they had occupied, now lay before us, strewed with the dead and wounded: and the Portuguese regiment belonging to our division, were busy stripping them naked. In this barbarous action, however, they were joined by very few of the British.

The divisions to our right and left had, by this time, succeeded in turning the flanks of the French army; and they were now retreating in great confusion. After waiting under arms for some time, we

were ordered to encamp on the ground we then occupied, where we remained during the night.

FINIS.









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