

It is remarkable that the first correct information of the capitulation of Madrid should have been thus acquired from the enemy, ten days after the event had taken place; nor is it less curious, that while Mr. Frere's letters were filled with vivid descriptions of Spanish enthusiasm, Napoleon should have been so convinced of their passiveness, as to send this important despatch by an officer, who rode post, without an escort, and in safety, until his abusive language to the post-master at Valdestillos created a tumult, in which he lost his life. Captain Waters, an English officer sent to obtain intelligence, happening to arrive in that place, heard of the murder, and immediately purchased the despatch for twenty dollars; and the accidental information thus obtained was the more valuable, as neither money nor patriotism had hitherto induced the Spaniards to bring any intelligence of the enemy's situation, and each step the army had made was in the dark.* It was now however certain that Burgos was or would be strongly protected, and that Baird's line of march was unsafe if Soult, following these instructions, advanced. On the other hand, as the French appeared to be ignorant of the British movements, there was some chance of surprising and beating the second corps before Napoleon could come to its succor. Hope, therefore, was ordered to pass the Duero at Tordesillas, and direct his march upon Villapando; head-quarters were removed to Toro; and Valderas was given as the point of junction to Baird's division, the head of which was now at Benevente.

The 16th Mr. Stuart arrived at Toro, accompanied by Don F. X. Caro, a member of the Spanish government, who brought two letters, the one from the Junta, the other from Mr. Frere.† That from the Junta complained, that when Romana proposed to unite fourteen thousand picked men to the British army, with a view to make a forward movement, his offer had been disregarded, and a retreat determined upon, in despite of his earnest remonstrances; this retreat they declared to be uncalled for, and highly impolitic, "as the enemy was never so near his ruin as in that moment." If the Spanish and British armies should unite, they said, it would give "liberty to the Peninsula," that "Romana, with his fourteen thousand select men," was still ready to join Sir John Moore, and that "thirty thousand fresh levies would, in a month, be added to the ranks of the allied force."

This tissue of falsehoods—for Romana had approved of the intention to retreat, and never had above six thousand men armed—was addressed to Mr. Frere, and by him transmitted to the General, together with one from himself, which, in allusion to the retreat

* Appendix, No. 13, § 4.

† Sir John Moore's Papers, MS.

upon Portugal, contained the following extraordinary passages: * "I mean the immense responsibility with which you charge yourself by adopting, upon a supposed military necessity, a measure which must be followed by immediate if not final ruin to our ally, and by indelible disgrace to the country with whose resources you are intrusted." "I am unwilling to enlarge upon a subject in which my feelings must be stifled, or expressed at the risk of offence, which, with such an interest at stake, I should feel unwilling to excite; but this much I must say, that if the British army had been sent abroad for the express purpose of doing the utmost possible mischief to the Spanish cause, with the single exception of not firing a shot against their troops, they would, according to the measures now announced as about to be pursued, have completely fulfilled their purpose."

These letters were dated at Truxillo; for the Junta, not thinking themselves safe at Badajos, had proceeded so far on their way to Seville, and on that side the French had continued to advance, the remnants of the Spanish armies to fly, and everything bore the most gloomy appearance. Mr. Frere knew this. In a subsequent letter he acknowledged that the enthusiasm was extinguished, and a general panic commencing at the moment when he was penning these offensive passages. † He was utterly ignorant of the numbers, the situation, and the resources of the enemy; but he formed hypotheses, and upon the strength of them insulted Sir John Moore, and endangered the interests of his country. In this manner the British General, while struggling with unavoidable difficulties, had his mind harassed by a repetition of remonstrances and representations, in which common sense, truth, and decency were alike disregarded; but he did not fail to show how little personal feelings weighed with him in opposition to the public welfare. He had reason to suppose Mr. Frere had received his letter relative to Charmilly's mission, yet, as it was not acknowledged, he took advantage of the omission, and, with singular propriety and dignity, thus noticed the plenipotentiary's second insulting communication: "*With respect to your letter delivered to me at Toro by Mr. Stuart, I shall not remark upon it. It is in the style of the two which were brought to me by Colonel Charmilly, and consequently was answered by my letter of the 6th, of which I send you a duplicate; that subject is, I hope, at rest!*"

At Toro Sir John Moore ascertained that Romana, although aware of the advance of the British, and engaged to support them, was retiring into Galicia. Nominally commander-in-chief of the Spanish armies, he was at the head of a few thousand miserable

* Sir John Moore's Papers, MS.

† Appendix, No. 13, § 7.

soldiers; for the Spaniards, with great ingenuity, contrived to have no general when they had an army, and no army when they had a general.* After the dispersion of Blake's people at Reynosa, Romana rallied about five thousand men at Renedo, in the valley of Cabernuigo, and endeavored to make a stand on the borders of the Asturias: but without any success, for the vile conduct of the Asturian Junta, joined to the terror created by the French victories, had completely subdued the spirit of the peasantry, and ruined the resources of that province. Romana complained that, when checked for misconduct, his soldiers quitted their standards: indeed, that any should have been found to join their colors is to be admired; for, among the sores of Spain, there was none more cankered, more disgusting, than the venality, the injustice, the profligate corruption of the Asturian authorities. Without a blush, they openly divided the English subsidies, and defrauded not only the soldiers of their pay and equipments, but the miserable peasants of their hire, doubling the wretchedness of poverty, and deriding the misery they occasioned by pompous declarations of their own virtue.†

From the Asturias Romana had led the remnants of Blake's force to Leon, about the period of Moore's arrival at Salamanca. Like others, he had been deceived as to the real state of the country, and at this time repented that he had returned to Spain.‡ He was a person of talent, quickness, and information, but disqualified by nature for military command; a lively principle of error pervaded all his notions of war, and no man ever bore the title of general who was less capable of commanding an army. Neither was he exempt from the prevailing weakness of his countrymen. At this moment, when he had not strength to stand upright, his letters were teeming with gigantic offensive projects; and although he had before approved of the intention to retreat, he was now as ready to urge a forward movement, promising to co-operate with twenty thousand soldiers, when he could scarcely muster a third of that number, and those only half armed, and scarcely capable of distinguishing their own standards: and, at the very time he made the promise, he was retiring into Galicia—not meaning to deceive, for he was as ready to advance as to retreat; but this species of boasting is inherent in his nation. It has been asserted that Caro offered the chief command of the Spanish armies to Sir John Moore, and that the latter refused it. This is not true. Caro had no power to do so, and there were no armies to command; but that gentleman, in his interview, either was or affected to be satisfied of the sound-

* Sir John Moore's Papers, MS. Col. Syme's Correspondence. Gen. Leith.

† Appendix, No. 13, § 5.

‡ Ibid. § 7.

ness of the English General's views, and ashamed of the folly of the Junta.

The 18th, head-quarters were at Castro Nuevo, from which place Moore wrote to Romana, informing him of his intention to fall upon Soult. He desired his co-operation, and requested that the Marquis would, according to his own plan given to the British minister in London, reserve the Asturias for his own line of communication, and leave Galicia to the British. The latter were now in full march. Baird was at Benevente, Hope at Villepando, and the cavalry scouring the country on the side of Valladolid, had several successful skirmishes and took a number of prisoners. The French could be no longer ignorant of the movement, and the English General brought forward his columns rapidly. On the 20th the whole of the forces were united, the cavalry at Melgar Abaxo, the infantry at Mayorga, and as much concentrated as the necessity of obtaining cover in a country devoid of fuel and deep with snow would permit. The weather was exceedingly severe and the marches long; but a more robust set of men never took the field. Their discipline was admirable, and there were very few stragglers; the experience of one or two campaigns alone was wanting to make a perfect army. The number was however small; nominally it was nearly thirty-five thousand, but four regiments were still in Portugal, and three more were left by Sir David Baird at Lugo and Astorga; one thousand six hundred and eighty-seven men were detached, and four thousand and five were in hospital.* Hence the actual number present under arms on the 19th of December was only nineteen thousand and fifty-three infantry, two thousand two hundred and seventy-eight cavalry, and one thousand three hundred and fifty-eight gunners—forming a total of twenty-three thousand five hundred and eighty-three men, with sixty pieces of artillery. They were organized in three divisions—a reserve, two light brigades of infantry, and one division of cavalry; four batteries were attached to the infantry, two to the cavalry, and one was kept in reserve. Meanwhile Romana, who had been able to bring forward very few men, promised to march in two columns by Almanzer and Guarda, and sent some information of the enemy's position. But Sir John Moore depended little upon his intelligence, when he found him, even so late as the 19th of December, upon the faith of information from the Junta, representing Madrid as still holding out; and, when the advanced posts were already engaged at Sahagun, proposing an interview at Benevente to arrange the plan of operations.

On the French side, Soult was concentrating his force on the Carrion. After his rapid and brilliant success at the opening of the

* Appendix, No. 25.

campaign, his corps was ordered to remain on the defensive, until the movements against Tudela and Madrid were completed, and the despatches directing him to recommence his offensive operations, were, as we have seen, intercepted on the 12th; but on the 16th, he became acquainted with the advance of the English army.* At that period, General Bonnet's division occupied Barquera de San Vincente and Potes, on the Deba, watching some thousand Asturians whom Ballasteros had collected near Llanes; Merle's and Mermet's divisions were on the Carrion, Franceschi's dragoons at Valladolid, Debelle's at Sahagun. The whole formed a total of sixteen or seventeen thousand infantry, and twelve hundred cavalry, present under arms, of which only eleven thousand infantry and twelve hundred cavalry could, without uncovering the important post of Santander, be opposed to the advance of the British.† Soult, alarmed at this disparity of force, required General Mathieu Dumas, commandant at Burgos, to direct all the divisions and detachments passing through that town, whatever might be their original destination, upon the Carrion, and this decisive conduct was approved by the Emperor.‡

On the 21st, Bonnet's division was still on the Deba, but Mermet's was in the town of Carrion, Merle's at Saldaña; Franceschi's cavalry had retired from Valladolid to Riberos de la Cuesca, Debelle's continued at Sahagun, and thirteen hundred dragoons, under General Lorge, arrived at Palencia from Burgos. Meantime, the fifteenth and tenth British hussars, having quitted Melgar Abaxo during the night, came close to Sahagun before daylight on the 21st. The tenth marched straight to the town, while the fifteenth turned it by the right, and endeavored to cut off the enemy; a patrol gave the alarm, and when four hundred of the fifteenth had reached the rear of the village, they were opposed by a line of six hundred French dragoons. The tenth were not in sight, but Lord Paget, after a few moments, charged with the fifteenth, broke the enemy's line, and pursued them for some distance. Some twenty killed, two lieutenant-colonels, and eleven other officers, with a hundred and fifty-four men prisoners, were the result of this affair, which lasted about twenty minutes. Debelle then retired to Santerbas; the English infantry occupied Sahagun, and head-quarters were established there. During these events Romana remained at Mancilla, and it was evident that no assistance could be expected from him. The truth was, that, ashamed of exposing the weakness and misery of his troops, he kept away, for, after all his

* S. Journal of Operations, MS.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid.

promises, he could not produce six thousand fighting men. His letters however were, as usual, extremely encouraging. *The French force in Spain was exceedingly weak, Palafox had not been defeated at Tudela; Soult, including Bonnet's division, had scarcely nine thousand men of all arms; it was an object to surround and destroy him before he could be succored;—and other follies of this nature.*

The English troops having now outmarched their supplies, halted the 22d and 23d, and Soult, whose intention was to act on the defensive, hastened the march of the reinforcements from the side of Burgos; yet being fearful for his communication with Placentia, he abandoned Saldaña on the 23d, and concentrated his infantry at Carrion.* Debelle's cavalry again advanced to Villatilla and Villacuenta, Franceschi remained at Riberos, the dragoons of General Lorge occupied Paredes, and General Dumas pushed on the divisions of the eighth corps, of which Laborde's was already arrived at Palencia; Loison's and Heudelet's followed at the distance of two days' march, but they were weak. Sir John Moore's plan was to move during the night of the 23d, so as to arrive at Carrion by daylight on the 24th, to force the bridge, and afterwards, ascending the river, to fall upon the main body of the enemy, which, his information led him to believe, was still at Saldaña. This attack was, however, but a secondary object; his attention was constantly directed towards Madrid. To beat the troops in his front would be a victory of little value beyond the honor, because the third and fourth corps were so near; the pith of the operation was to tempt the Emperor from Madrid, and his march from that capital was to be the signal for a retreat, which sooner or later was inevitable.

To draw Napoleon from the south was Moore's design, and it behoves the man to be alert who interposes between the lion and his prey. On the 23d, Romana first gave notice that the French were in motion from the side of Madrid; and in the night of the 23d, when the troops were actually in march towards Carrion, this intelligence was confirmed by the General's own spies,—all their reports agreed that the whole French army was in movement to crush the English: the fourth corps had been halted at Talavera, the fifth at Vittoria, the eighth was closing up to reinforce the second, and the Emperor in person was marching towards the Guadarama. The principal objects of Sir John Moore's advance were thus attained; the siege of Zaragoza was delayed, the southern provinces were allowed to breathe, and it only remained for him to prove, by a timely retreat, that this offensive operation, although hazardous, was not the result of improvident rashness,

* S. Journal of Operations, MS.

nor weakness of mind, but the hardy enterprise of a great commander acting under peculiar circumstances. As a military measure, his judgment condemned it; as a political one, he thought it of doubtful advantage, because Spain was really passive; but he had desired to give the Spaniards an opportunity of making one more struggle for independence. That was done. If they could not, or would not profit of the occasion, if their hearts were faint or their hands feeble, the shame and the loss were their own; the British General had done enough—enough for honor, enough for utility, more than enough for prudence; the madness of the times required it. His army was already on the verge of destruction, the enemy's force was hourly increasing in his front, the first symptoms of a retreat would bring it headlong on, and in the mean time the Emperor threatened the line of communication with Galicia, and by the rapidity of his march left no time for consideration.

After the first burst, by which he swept the northern provinces, and planted his standards on the banks of the Tagus, that monarch had put all the resources of his subtle genius into activity, endeavoring to soften the public mind, and by engrafting benefits on the terror his victories had created, to gain over the people; but, at the same time, he was gathering in his extended wings, and preparing for a new flight, which would have carried him over the southern kingdoms of the Peninsula, and given him the rocks of Lisbon as a resting place for his eagles. Madrid was tranquil, and Toledo, notwithstanding her heroic promises, had never shut her gates; one division of the first corps occupied that town, another was in Ocaña, and the light cavalry scoured the whole of La Mancha, even to the borders of Andalusia; the fourth corps, and Milhaud's and Lasalle's horsemen, were at Talavera, preparing to march to Badajoz, and sixty thousand men, with one hundred and fifty guns and fifteen days' provisions in carts, were reviewed at the gates of Madrid upon the 19th; three days afterwards they were in full march to intercept the line of Sir John Moore's retreat.

Napoleon was informed of that General's advance on the 21st, and in an instant the Spaniards, their juntas, and their armies, were dismissed from his thoughts; his corps were arrested in their different movements, ten thousand men were left to control the capital, and on the evening of the 22d fifty thousand men were at the foot of the Guadarama. A deep snow choked the passes of the Sierra, and, after twelve hours of ineffectual toil, the advanced guards were still on the wrong side. The general commanding reported that the road was impracticable; but Napoleon, dismounting, placed himself at the head of the column, and, amidst storms of hail and drifting snow, led his soldiers over the mountain. Many men and

animals died during the passage, which lasted two days; but the Emperor, personally urging on the troops with unceasing vehemence, reached Villacastin, fifty miles from Madrid, on the 24th, and the 26th he was at Tordesillas with the guards and the divisions of Lapisse and Dessolles; the dragoons of La Houssaye entered Valladolid on the same day, and Marshal Ney, with the sixth corps, was at Rio Seco.

From Tordesillas Napoleon, communicating with Soult, informed him of these movements, concluding his despatch thus: "*Our cavalry scouts are already at Benevente. If the English pass to-day in their position, they are lost; if, on the contrary, they attack you with all their force, retire one day's march; the farther they proceed, the better for us. If they retreat, pursue them closely.*"* Then, full of hope, he hastened himself to Valderas, but had the mortification to learn that, notwithstanding his rapid march, having scarcely rested night or day, he was twelve hours too late. The British were across the Esla! In fact Soult was in full pursuit when this letter was written; for Sir John Moore, well aware of his own situation, had given orders to retreat the moment the intelligence of Napoleon's march from Madrid reached him, and the heavy baggage was immediately moved to the rear, while the reserve, the light brigades, and the cavalry, remained at Sahagun—the latter pushing patrols up to the enemy's lines, and skirmishing to hide the retrograde march.

The 24th, General Hope, with two divisions, had gone back by the road of Mayorga, Baird, with another, by that of Valencia de San Juan, where there was a ferry-boat to cross the Esla river. The Marquis of Romana undertook to guard the bridge of Mansilla. The enemy's dragoons, under Lorge, arrived the same day at Frechilla, and the division of Laborde entered Paredes. The 25th the General-in-chief, with the reserve and light brigades, followed the route of Hope's column to Valderas, and the 26th, Baird passed the Esla at Valencia, and took post on the other side, but with some difficulty, for the boat was small, the fords deep, and the river rising. The troops, under the commander-in-chief, approached the bridge of Castro Gonzalo early in the morning of the 26th, but the stores were a long time passing, a dense fog intercepted the view, and so nicely timed was the march, that the scouts of the imperial horsemen were already infesting the flank of the column, and even carried off some of the baggage.

As the left bank of the river commanded the bridge, General Robert Crawford remained with a brigade of infantry and two guns to protect the passage; for the cavalry was still in the rear, watch

* S. Journal of Operations, MS.

ing Soult, who, aware of the retreat, was pressing forward in pursuit. Meanwhile Lord Paget, after passing Mayorga, was intercepted by a strong body of horse, which belonged to Ney's corps, and was embattled on a swelling ground close to the road. Though the soil was deep and soaked with snow and rain, two squadrons of the tenth, riding stiffly up, gained the summit, and notwithstanding the enemy's advantage of numbers and position, killed twenty men and captured one hundred. This was a bold and hardy action; but the English cavalry had been engaged more or less for twelve successive days, with such fortune and bravery that above five hundred prisoners had already fallen into their hands; and their leaders being excellent, their confidence was unbounded.

From Mayorga Lord Paget proceeded to Benevente; but the Duke of Dalmatia, with great judgment, now pushed for Astorga by the road of Mancilla, whereupon Romana, leaving three thousand men and two guns to defend the bridge at the latter place, fell back to Leon.* Thus, by a critical march, Moore recovered his communications with Galicia, and had so far baffled the Emperor; but his position was by no means safe, or even tenable.

The town of Benevente, a rich open place, remarkable for a small, but curious Moorish castle, containing a fine collection of ancient armor, is situated in a plain that, extending from the Gallician mountains to the neighborhood of Burgos, appears to be boundless. The river Esla wound through it, about four miles in front of Benevente, and the bridge of Castro Gonzalo was the key to the town; but the right bank of the Esla was completely commanded from the further side, and there were many fords. Eighteen miles higher up, at Valencia de San Juan, a shorter road from Mayorga to Astorga crossed the river by the ferry-boat; and at Mancilla, the passage being only defended by Spaniards, was in a manner open to Soult, for Romana had not destroyed the arches of the bridge. Beyond Mancilla, under the hills skirting this great plain, stood the town of Leon, which was inclosed with walls, and capable of resisting a sudden assault.

Moore, aware of his incapacity, resolved to remain no longer than was necessary to clear out his magazines at Benevente, and to cover the march of his stores. But the road to Astorga by Leon was much shorter than that through Benevente; and as Romana was inclined to retreat to Galicia, Sir John requested that he would maintain himself at Leon as long as he could, and repeated his desire to have that province left open for the English army. Romana, who assented to both these requests, had a great rabble with him; and as Leon was a walled place, and a number of citizens

* S. Journal of Operations, MS.

and volunteers were willing and even eager to fight, the town might have made resistance. Moore hoped that it would do so, and gave orders to break down the bridge at Castro Gonzalo in his own front, the moment the stragglers and baggage should have passed; but at this time the bad example of murmuring given by men of high rank had descended lower, many regimental officers neglected their duty, and what with the dislike to a retreat, the severity of the weather, and the inexperience of the army, the previous fine discipline of the troops was broken down. Such disgraceful excesses had been committed at Valderas, that the General issued severe orders, justly reproaching the soldiers for their evil deeds, and appealing to the honor of the army to amend them.

On the night of the 26th, the light cavalry of the imperial guard, riding close up to the bridge of Castro Gonzalo, captured some women and baggage, and endeavored to surprise the post, which gave rise to a remarkable display of courage and discipline. John Walton and Richard Jackson, private soldiers of the forty-third, being posted beyond the bridge, were directed, on the approach of an enemy, the one to stand firm, the other to fire and run back to the brow of the hill, to give notice whether there were many or few. Jackson fired, but was overtaken, and received twelve or fourteen sabre cuts in an instant; nevertheless he came staggering on, and gave the signal, while Walton, with equal resolution, stood his ground and wounded several of the assailants, who then retired, leaving him unhurt; but his cap, knapsack, belts, and musket, were cut in above twenty places, and his bayonet was bent double and notched like a saw. The 27th, the cavalry and the stragglers being all over the river, General Crawford commenced the destruction of the bridge amidst torrents of rain and snow; and while half the troops worked, the other half kept the enemy at bay from the heights on the left bank, for the cavalry scouts of the imperial guard were spread over the plain.

At ten o'clock at night a large party of French, following some wagons, again endeavored to pass the piquets and gallop down to the bridge; that failing, a few dismounted, and extending to the right and left, commenced a skirmishing fire, while others remained ready to charge, if the position of the troops, which they expected to ascertain by this scheme, should offer an opportunity. The event did not answer their expectations, and this anxiety to interrupt the work induced General Crawford to destroy two arches of the bridge, and to blow up the connecting buttress; yet the masonry was so solid and difficult to pierce, that it was not until twelve o'clock in the night of the 28th that all the preparations were completed. The troops then descended the heights on the left bank, and pass-

ing with the greatest silence, by single files, over planks laid across the broken arches, gained the other side without loss; an instance of singular good fortune, for the night was dark and tempestuous, the river, rising rapidly with a roaring noise, was threatening to burst over the planks, and the enemy was close at hand. To have resisted an attack in such an awkward situation would have been impossible, but happily the retreat of the troops was undiscovered, and the mine was sprung with good effect.

Crawfurd marched to Benevente, where the cavalry and the reserve still remained. Here several thousand infantry slept in the upper part of an immense convent built round a square, and a frightful catastrophe was impending; for the lower galleries were so thickly stowed with the horses of the cavalry, that it was scarcely possible to pass them; there was but one entrance, and two officers of the forty-third, returning from the bridge, on entering the convent, perceived that a large window-shutter was on fire, that in a few moments the straw under the horses would ignite, and six thousand men and animals must inevitably perish in the flames. One of these officers, Captan Lloyd, a man of great strength, activity, and of a presence of mind which never failed, made a sign of silence to his companion, and then springing on to the nearest horse, ran along the backs of the others, until he reached the blazing shutter, which he tore off its hinges and cast out of the window, and then awakening a few men, cleared the passage without any alarm, which in such a case would have been as destructive as the fire.

Two days' rest had been gained at Benevente, but as very little could be done to remove the stores, the greatest part were destroyed. The army was and had been from the first without sufficient means of transport, the General had no money to procure it, and the ill-will of the Spaniards and the shuffling conduct of the Juntas added infinitely to their difficulties. But time pressed. Hope and Fraser marched by La Baneza, and reached Astorga the 29th, where Baird joined them from Valencia de San Juan; on the same day the reserve and Crawfurd's brigade quitted Benevente. The cavalry remained in the town, leaving parties to watch the fords of the Esla. In this state of affairs General Lefebvre Desnouettes, seeing only a few cavalry posts on the great plain, rather hastily concluded that there was nothing to support them, and crossing the river at daybreak, by a ford a little way above the bridge, with six hundred horsemen of the imperial guard, advanced into the plain. The piquets under Major Loftus Otway retired fighting, and being joined by a part of the third German hussars, even charged the leading French squadrons with some effect.

General C. Stewart then took the command, and the ground was obstinately disputed, but the enemy advanced. At this moment the plain was covered with stragglers, baggage-mules, and followers of the army, the town was filled with tumult, the distant piquets and videttes were seen galloping in from the right and left, the French were pressing forward boldly, and every appearance indicated that the enemy's whole army was coming up and passing the river.

Lord Paget ordered the tenth hussars to mount and form under the cover of some houses at the edge of the town, for he desired to draw the enemy, whose real situation he had detected at once, well into the plain before he attacked; in half an hour, everything was ready, and he gave the signal. Then the tenth hussars galloped forward, the piquets that were already engaged closed together, and the whole charged. The scene changed instantly; the enemy were seen flying at full speed towards the river, the British following close at their heels, until the French squadrons, without breaking their ranks, plunged into the stream, and gained the opposite heights, where, like experienced soldiers, they wheeled instantly, and seemed inclined to come forward a second time; but a battery of two guns opened upon them, and after a few rounds they retired. During the pursuit in the plain, an officer was observed separating himself from the main body, and making towards another part of the river; being followed, and refusing to stop, he was wounded and brought in a prisoner. It was General Lefebre Desnouettes.

Although the imperial guards were outnumbered in the end, they were very superior at the commencement of this action, which was stiffly fought on both sides, for the British lost fifty men, and the French left fifty-five killed and wounded on the field, besides the General and other officers; according to Baron Larrey, seventy of those who recrossed the river were also wounded, making a total loss of above two hundred excellent soldiers.* Lord Paget maintained his posts on the Esla, under an occasional cannonade, until the evening, and then withdrew to La Baneza; and while these things were passing, Napoleon arrived at Valderas, Ney at Villaton, and Lapisse at Toro. The French troops were worn down with fatigue, yet the Emperor still urged them on. The Duke of Dalmatia, he said, would intercept the English at Astorga, and their labors would be finally rewarded. Nevertheless, the destruction of the bridge of Castro Gonzalo was so well accomplished, that twenty-four hours were required to repair it, the fords were now impassable, and it was the 30th before Bessières could cross the Esla; but on that day he passed through Benevente with nine thousand

* Larrey's Surgical Campaign.

cavalry, and bent his course towards La Baneza;* the same day Franceschi carried the bridge of Mansilla de las Mulas by a single charge of his light horsemen, and captured the artillery and one half of the Spanish division left to protect it. Romana immediately abandoned León and many stores, and the 31st the Duke of Dalmatia entered that town without firing a shot, while the Duke of Istria, with his cavalry, took possession of La Baneza; the advanced posts were then pushed forward to the Puente d'Orvigo on one side, and the Puente de Valembre on the other.† The rear of the English army was still in Astorga, the head-quarters having arrived there only the day before.

In the preceding month large stores had been gradually brought up to this town by Sir David Baird, and as there were no means of transport to remove them, orders were given, after supplying the immediate wants of the army, to destroy them; but Romana, who would neither defend León nor Mansilla, had, contrary to his promises, pre-occupied Astorga with his fugitive army, and when the English divisions marched in, such a tumult and confusion arose, that no orders could be executed with regularity, no distribution made, nor the destruction of the stores be effected. The disorder thus unexpectedly produced was very detrimental to the discipline of the troops, which the unwearied efforts of the General had partly restored; the resources which he had depended on for the support of his soldiers became mischievous, and contributed to disorganize instead of nourishing them. And he had the further vexation to hear Romana, the principal cause of this misfortune, proposing, with troops unable to resist a thousand light infantry, to recommence offensive operations on a plan, in comparison with which the visions of Don Quixote were wisdom.

On the 31st, the flank brigades separated from the army at Bonillas, and bent their course by cross-roads towards Orense and Vigo, being detached to lessen the pressure on the commissariat, and to cover the flanks of the army; Fraser's and Hope's divisions entered Villa Franca, and Baird's division was at Bemibre; the reserve, with the head-quarters, halted at Cambarros, a village six miles from Astorga, until the cavalry fell back in the night to the same place, and then the reserve marched to Bemibre. The Marquis of Romana, after doing so much mischief by crossing the line of march, left his infantry to wander as they pleased, and retired with his cavalry and some guns to the valley of the Minho, and the rest of his artillery mixed with the British army, but most of it was captured before reaching Lugo.

* Bulletin.

† S. Journal of Operations, MS.

Upon the 1st of January the Emperor took possession of Astorga, where seventy thousand French infantry, ten thousand cavalry, and two hundred pieces of artillery, after many days of incessant marching, were now united. The congregation of this mighty force, while it evinced the power and energy of the French monarch, attested also the genius of the English General, who, with a handful of men, had found the means to arrest the course of the conqueror, and to draw him, with the flower of his army, to this remote and unimportant part of the Peninsula, at the moment when Portugal, and the fairest provinces of Spain, were prostrate beneath the strength of his hand. That Spain, being in her extremity, Sir John Moore succored her, and in the hour of weakness intercepted the blow which was descending to crush her, no man of candor and honesty can deny. For what troops, what preparations, what courage, what capacity was there in the south to have resisted, even for an instant, the progress of a man who, in ten days, and in the depth of winter, crossing the snowy ridge of the Carpentinos, had traversed two hundred miles of hostile country, and transported fifty thousand men from Madrid to Astorga, in a shorter time than a Spanish courier would have taken to travel the same distance?

This stupendous march was rendered fruitless by the quickness of his adversary; but Napoleon, though he had failed to destroy the English army, resolved, nevertheless, to cast it forth of the Peninsula, and being himself recalled to France by tidings that the Austrian storm was ready to burst, had fixed upon the Duke of Dalmatia to continue the pursuit. For this purpose three divisions of cavalry and three of infantry were added to his former command; but of these last, the two commanded by Generals Loison and Heudelet were several marches in the rear, and General Bonnet's remained always in the *Montaña de Santander*. Hence the whole number bearing arms which the Duke led immediately to the pursuit, was about twenty-five thousand men, of which four thousand two hundred were cavalry, composing the divisions of Lorges, La Houssaye, and Franceschi.* Fifty-four guns were with the columns, Loison's and Heudelet's divisions followed by forced marches, and Soult was supported by Ney with the sixth corps, wanting its third division, but mustering above sixteen thousand men under arms, the flower of the French army, together with thirty-seven pieces of artillery. Thus, including Laborde, Heudelet, and Loison's division, nearly sixty thousand men and ninety-one guns were put on the track of the English army. Meanwhile the Emperor returned to Valladolid, where he received the addresses of the notables and deputies from Madrid and other great towns.

* S. Journal of Operations, MS.

and strove, by promises and other means, to win the good opinion of the public. Appointing Joseph to be his lieutenant-general, he allotted separate provinces for each "corps d'armée," and directing the imperial guard to return to France, after three days' delay he departed himself with scarcely an escort, but with an astonishing speed that frustrated the designs which the Spaniards had, as some say, formed against his person.

CHAPTER V.

Sir John Moore retreats towards Vigo; is closely pursued—Miserable scene at Bembibre—Excesses at Villa Franca—Combat at Calcabeilos—Death of General Colbert—March to Nogales—Line of retreat changed from Vigo to Coruña—Skilful passage of the bridge of Constantino; skirmish there—The army halts at Lugo—Sir John Moore offers battle; it is not accepted; he makes a forced march to Betanzos; loses many stragglers; rallies the army; reaches Coruña—The army takes a position—Two large stores of powder exploded—Fleet arrives in the harbor; army commences embarking—Battle of Coruña—Death of Sir John Moore—His character.

THE Duke of Dalmatia, a general who, if the Emperor be excepted, was no wise inferior to any of his nation, commenced his pursuit of the English army with a vigor that marked his eager desire to finish the campaign in a manner suitable to the brilliant opening at Gamonal. The main body of his troops followed the route of Foncevadon and Ponteferrada; a second column took the road of Cambarros and Bembibre; Franceschi entered the valley of Syl, and moving up that river, turned the position of Villa Franca del Bierzo.*

Thus Sir John Moore, after having twice baffled the Emperor's combinations, was still pressed in his retreat with a fury that seemed to increase every moment. The separation of his light brigades, a measure which he reluctantly adopted by the advice of his quartermaster-general, had weakened the army by three thousand men, yet he still possessed nineteen thousand of all arms, good soldiers to fight, and strong to march, although shaken in discipline by the disorders at Valderas and Astorga; for the General's exertions to restore order and regularity were by many officers slightly seconded, and by some with scandalous levity disregarded. There was no choice but to retreat. The astonishing rapidity with which the Emperor had brought up his overbearing numbers, and thrust the English army into Galicia, had rendered the natural strength of

* S. Journal of Operations, MS.

that country unavailing; the resources were few, even for an army in winter quarters, and for a campaign in that season, there were none at all. All the draught cattle that could be procured would scarcely have supplied the means to transport ammunition for two battles, whereas the French, sweeping the rich plains of Castile with their powerful cavalry, might have formed magazines at Astorga and Leon, and from thence have been supplied in abundance, while the English were starving.

Before he advanced from Salamanca, Moore, foreseeing that his movement must sooner or later end in a retreat, had sent officers to examine the roads of Galicia and the harbors which offered the greatest advantages for embarkation; by the reports of those officers, which arrived from day to day, and by the state of the magazines which he had directed to be formed, his measures were constantly regulated.* The magazines of Astorga, Benevente, and Labaneza, were, by untoward circumstances, and the deficiency of transport, rendered, as we have seen, of no avail beyond the momentary supply they afforded, and part of their contents falling into the enemy's hands, gave him some cause of triumph; but those at Villa Franca and Lugo contained about fourteen days' consumption, and there were other small magazines formed on the line of Orense and Vigo.

More than this could not have been accomplished. It was now only the fifteenth day since Sir John Moore had left Salamanca, and already the torrent of war, diverted from the south, was foaming among the rocks of Galicia. Nineteen thousand British troops, posted in strong ground, might have offered battle to very superior numbers, but where was the use of merely fighting an enemy who had three hundred thousand men in Spain? Nothing could be gained by such a display of courage, and the English General, by a quick retreat, might reach his ships unmolested, embark, and carrying his army from the narrow corner in which it was cooped to the southern provinces, establish there a good base of operations, and renew the war under favorable circumstances.† It was by this combination of a fleet and army that the greatest assistance could be given to Spain, and the strength of England become most formidable. A few days' sailing would carry the troops to Cadiz, but six weeks' constant marching would not bring the French army from Galicia to that neighborhood. The northern provinces were broken, subdued in spirit, and possessed few resources; the southern provinces had scarcely seen an enemy, were rich and fertile, and there also was the seat of government. Sir John Moore, reasoning thus, resolved to fall down to the coast and embark, with as little

* Sir John Moore's Papers, MS. Appendix, No. 13, §§ 2 and 8.

† Appendix, No. 28, § 3.

loss or delay as might be ; but Vigo, Coruña, and Ferrol were the principal harbors, and their relative advantages could not be determined except by the reports of the engineers, none of which, so rapidly had the crisis of affairs come on, were yet received ; and as those reports could only be obtained from day to day, the line of retreat became of necessity subject to daily change.

When the Duke of Dalmatia took the command of the pursuing army, Hope's and Fraser's divisions were, as I have said, at Villa Franca, Baird's at Bembibre, the reserve and cavalry at Cambarros, six miles from Astorga. Behind Cambarros, the mountains of Galicia rose abruptly, but there was no position, because, after the first rise at the village of Rodrigatos, the ground continually descended to Calcabellos, a small town, only four miles from Villa Franca, and the old road of Foncevadon and Ponteferrada, which turned the whole line, was choked with the advancing columns of the enemy.* The reserve and the cavalry therefore marched during the night to Bembibre, and on their arrival Baird's division proceeded to Calcabellos ; but in the immense wine vaults of Bembibre many hundred of his men remained behind inebriated, the followers of the army crowded the houses, and a number of Romana's disbanded men were mixed with this heterogeneous mass of marauders, drunkards, muleteers, women, and children ; the weather was dreadful, and, notwithstanding the utmost exertions of the General-in-chief, when the reserve marched the next morning, the number of those unfortunate wretches was not diminished. Leaving a small guard to protect them, Sir John Moore proceeded to Calcabellos, yet scarcely had the reserve marched out of the village, when some French cavalry appeared, and in a moment the road was filled with the miserable stragglers, who came crowding after the troops, some with shrieks of distress and wild gestures, others with brutal exclamations, while many, overcome with fear, threw away their arms, while those who preserved them were too stupidly intoxicated to fire, and kept reeling to and fro, alike insensible to their danger and to their disgrace. The enemy's horsemen, perceiving this, bore at a gallop through the disorderly mob, cutting to the right and left as they passed, and riding so close to the columns, that the infantry were forced to halt in order to check their audacity.

At Calcabellos the reserve took up a position. Baird then marched to Herrerias, and the General-in-chief went on to Villa Franca. But in that town great excesses had been committed by the preceding divisions ; the magazines were plundered, the bakers driven away from the ovens, the wine stores forced, and the com-

* See Colonel Carmichael Smyth's report. Appendix. No. 13, § 2.

missaries prevented from making the regular distributions; the doors of the houses were broken, and the scandalous insubordination of the soldiers proved that a discreditable relaxation of discipline on the part of the officers had taken place. Moore arrested this disorder, and caused one man taken in the act of plundering a magazine to be hanged in the market-place; then issuing severe orders to prevent a recurrence of such inexcusable conduct, he returned to Calcabellos, which the enemy were now approaching.

The Guia, a small, but at this season of the year a deep stream, ran through that town, and was crossed by a stone bridge. On the Villa Franca side a lofty ridge, rough with vineyards and stone walls, was occupied by two thousand five hundred infantry, with a battery of six guns; four hundred riflemen, and about the same number of cavalry, were posted on a hill two miles beyond the river, to watch the two roads of Bembibre and Foncevadon. In this situation, on the 3d of January, a little after noon, the French General Colbert approached with six or eight squadrons, but observing the ground behind Calcabellos so strongly occupied, demanded reinforcements. Soult, believing that the English did not mean to make a stand, replied by ordering Colbert to charge without delay, and the latter, stung by the message, obeyed with precipitate fury. From one of those errors so frequent in war, the British cavalry, thinking a greater force was riding against them, retired at speed to Calcabellos, and the riflemen, who, following their orders, had withdrawn when the French first came in sight, were just passing the bridge, when a crowd of staff-officers, the cavalry, and the enemy, came in upon them in one mass; in the confusion thirty or forty men were taken, and Colbert, then crossing the river, charged on the spur up the road. The remainder of the riflemen had however thrown themselves into the vineyards, and when the enemy approached within a few yards, opened such a deadly fire, that the greatest number of the French horsemen were killed on the spot, and among the rest Colbert himself; his fine martial figure, his voice, his gestures, and, above all, his great valor, had excited the admiration of the British, and a general feeling of sorrow was predominant when the gallant soldier fell. Some French voltigeurs now crossed the river, and a few of the 52d regiment descended from the upper part of the ridge to the assistance of the riflemen, when a sharp skirmish commenced, in which two or three hundred men of both sides were killed or wounded. Towards evening, Merle's division of infantry appeared on the hills in front of the town, and made a demonstration of crossing opposite to the left of the English position, but the battery of the latter checked this movement, and night coming on the combat ceased.

As the road from Villa Franca to Lugo led through a rugged country, the cavalry were now sent on to the latter town at once, and during the night the French patrols breaking in upon the rifle piquets, wounded some men, but were beaten back without being able to discover that the English troops had abandoned the position. This however was the case, and the reserve reached Herrerias, a distance of eighteen miles, on the morning of the 4th Baird's division being then at Nogales, Hope's and Fraser's near Lugo.

At Herrerias, the English General, who constantly directed the movements of the rear-guard himself, received the first reports of the engineers relative to the harbors. It appeared that Vigo, besides its greater distance, offered no position to cover the embarkation, but Coruña and Betanzos did. The march to Vigo was of necessity abandoned, the ships were directed round to Coruña, and Moore, who now deeply regretted the separation of his light brigades, sent forward instructions for the leading division to halt at Lugo, where he designed to rally the army, and give battle if the enemy would accept it. These important orders were carried to Sir David Baird by one of the aides-de-camp of the commander-in-chief, but Sir David forwarded them by a private dragoon, who got drunk and lost the despatch. This blamable irregularity was ruinous to General Fraser's troops; in lieu of resting two days at Lugo, that General, unwitting of the order, pursued his toilsome journey towards St. Jago de Compostella, and then returning without food or rest, lost more than four hundred stragglers.

On the 5th, the reserve having, by a forced march of thirty-six miles, gained twelve hours' start of the enemy, reached Nogales, at which place they met a large convoy of English clothing, shoes and ammunition, intended for Romana's army, yet moving towards the enemy—a circumstance characteristic of the Spanish mode of conducting public affairs. There was a bridge at Nogales which the engineers failed to destroy, but this was a matter of little consequence; the river was fordable above and below, and the General was unwilling, unless for some palpable advantage, which seldom presented itself, to injure the communications of a country that he was unable to serve: moreover, the bridges were commonly very solidly constructed, and the arches having little span, could be rendered passable again in a shorter time than they could be destroyed. At this period of the retreat also the road was covered with baggage, sick men, women, and plunderers, all of whom would have been thus sacrificed; for the peasantry, although armed, did not molest the enemy, but fearing both sides alike,

carried their effects into the mountains: even there the villanous marauders followed them, and in some cases were by the Spaniards killed—a just punishment for quitting their colors. Under the most favorable circumstances, the tail of a retreating force exhibits terrible scenes of distress, and on the road near Nogales the followers of the army were dying fast from cold and hunger. The soldiers, barefooted, harassed, and weakened by their excesses at Bembibre and Villa Franca, were dropping to the rear by hundreds, while broken carts, dead animals, and the piteous appearance of women and children, struggling or falling exhausted in the snow, completed a picture of war, which, like Janus, has a double face.

Franceschi, who, after turning Villa Franca, had scoured the valley of the Syl and captured many Spanish prisoners and baggage, now regained the line of march at Becerea, and towards evening the French army, recovering their lost ground, passed Nogales, galling the rear-guard with a continual skirmish; and here it was that dollars to the amount of twenty-five thousand pounds were abandoned.* This small sum was kept near head-quarters to answer sudden emergencies, and the bullocks that drew it being tired, the General, who could not save the money without risking an ill-timed action, had it rolled down the side of the mountain, whence part of it was gathered by the enemy, part by the Gallician peasants. The returns laid before Parliament in 1809 made the sum £60,000, and the whole loss during the campaign nearly £77,000, but it is easier to make an entry of one sum for a treasury return, than to state the details accurately; the money-agents were, like the military agents, acting independently, and all losses went down under the head of abandoned treasure. Officers actually present agree, that the only treasure *abandoned* by the army was that at Nogales, and that the sum was £25,000. When it was ordered to be rolled over the brink of the hill, two guns and a battalion of infantry were engaged with the enemy to protect it, and some person in whose charge the treasure was, exclaiming, "It is *money!*" the General replied, "So are shot and shells." Accidents will happen in wars. An officer of the guards had charge of the carts that drew this treasure, and in passing a village, another officer, observing that the bullocks were exhausted, took the pains to point out where fresh and strong animals were to be found; but the escorting officer, either ignorant of, or indifferent to his duty, took no notice of this recommendation, and continued his march with the exhausted cattle.

Towards evening the reserve approached Constantino; the French were close upon the rear, and a hill within pistol-shot of

* S. Journal of Operations, MS.

the bridge offered them such an advantage, that there was little hope to effect the passage without great loss. Moore, however, posted the riflemen and the artillery on the hill, so as to mask the hasty passage of the reserve, and the enemy, ignorant of the vicinity of a river, were cautious, until they saw the guns go off at a trot, and the riflemen follow at full speed; then they pursued briskly, but when they reached the bridge the British were over, and a good line of battle was formed on the other side. A fight commenced, and the assailants were continually reinforced as their columns of march arrived; yet General Paget maintained the post with two regiments until nightfall, and then retired to Lugo, in front of which the whole army was now assembled.

A few of the French cavalry showed themselves on the 6th, but the infantry did not appear, and the 7th Sir John Moore, in a general order, gave a severe but just rebuke to the officers and soldiers for their previous want of discipline, at the same time announcing his intention to offer battle. It has been well said, that a British army may be gleaned in a retreat, but cannot be reaped; whatever may be their misery, the soldiers will always be found clean at review, ready at a fight; and scarcely was this order issued, when the line of battle, so attenuated before, was filled with vigorous men, full of confidence and valor. Fifteen hundred had fallen in action or dropped to the rear, but as three fresh battalions, left by Sir David Baird when he first advanced from Astorga, had rejoined the army between Villa Franca and Lugo, nineteen thousand combatants were still under arms.

The right of the English position was in comparatively flat ground, and partially protected by a bend of the Minho. The centre was amongst vineyards, with low stone walls. The left, which was somewhat withdrawn, rested on the mountains, being supported and covered by the cavalry. It was the intention of the General to engage deeply with his right and centre, before he closed with his left wing, in which he had posted the flower of his troops, thinking thus to bring on a decisive battle, and trusting to the valor of the men to handle the enemy in such sort as that he should be glad to let the army continue its retreat unmolested. Other hope, to re-embark the troops without loss, there was none, save by stratagem. Soult, an experienced general, commanding soldiers habituated to war, might be tempted, but could never be forced, to engage in a decisive battle among those rugged mountains, where whole days would pass in skirmishing, without any progress being made towards crippling an adversary.

It was mid-day before the French Marshal arrived in person at the head of ten or twelve thousand men, and the remainder of his

power followed in some disarray, for the marches had not been so easy but that many even of the oldest soldiers had dropped behind. As the columns came up, they formed in order of battle along a strong mountainous ridge fronting the English, and as the latter were not distinctly seen, from the inequalities of the ground, Soult doubted if they were all before him; wherefore taking four guns, and some squadrons commanded by Colonel Lallemande, he advanced towards the centre, and opened a fire, which was immediately silenced by a reply from fifteen pieces. The Marshal, being then satisfied that something more than a rear-guard was in his front, retired. About an hour after he made a feint on the right, and at the same time sent a column of infantry and five guns against the left. On that side the three regiments which had lately joined were drawn up, and the French, pushing the outposts hard, were gaining the advantage, when Moore arrived, rallied the light troops, and with a vigorous charge breaking the adverse column, treated it very roughly in the pursuit. The estimated loss of the French was between three and four hundred men.

As it was now evident that the British meant to give battle, the Duke of Dalmatia hastened the march of Laborde's division, which was still in the rear, and requested Marshal Ney, who was then at Villa Franca, to detach a division of the sixth corps by the Val des Orres to Orense; Ney, however, merely sent some troops into the valley of the Syl, and pushed his advance posts in front as far as Nogales, Poyo, and Dancos.* At daybreak on the 8th the two armies were still embattled. On the French side seventeen thousand infantry, four thousand cavalry, and fifty pieces of artillery were in line, but Soult deferred the attack until the 9th.† On the English part, sixteen thousand infantry, eighteen hundred cavalry, and forty pieces of artillery impatiently awaited the assault, and blamed their adversary for delaying a contest which they ardently desired; yet the darkness fell without a shot having been fired, and with it fell the English General's hope to engage the enemy on equal terms. What was to be done? assail the French position? remain another day in expectation of a battle? or, in secrecy, gain a march, and get on board without being molested, or at least obtain time to establish the army in a good situation to cover the embarkation? The first operation was warranted neither by present nor by future advantages, for how could an inferior army expect to cripple a superior one, posted, as the French were, on a strong mountain, with an overbearing cavalry to protect their infantry, should the latter be beaten; and when twenty thousand fresh troops were at the distance

* S. Journal of Operations, MS.

† Ibid.

of two short marches in the rear? The British army was not provided to fight above one battle; there were no draught cattle, no means of transporting reserve ammunition, no magazines, no hospitals, no second line, no provisions; a defeat would have been ruin, a victory useless. A battle is always a serious affair, but two battles, under such circumstances, though both should be victories, would have been destruction. But why fight at all, after the army had been rallied, and the disasters of the march from Astorga had been remedied? What if, beating first Soult and then Ney, the British had arrived once more above Astorga, with perhaps ten thousand infantry, and half as many hundred cavalry? From the mountains of Galicia their General might have cast his eyes as far as the Sierra Morena, without being cheered by the sight of a single Spanish army; none existed to aid him, none to whom he might give aid. Even Mr. Frere acknowledged that at this period six thousand ill-armed men collected at Despeñas Peros, formed the only barrier between the French and Seville, and Sir John Moore was sent out, not to waste English blood in fruitless battles, but to assist the universal Spanish nation!

The second proposition was decided by the state of the magazines; there was not bread for another day's consumption remaining in the stores at Lugo. It was true that the army was in heart for fighting, but distressed by fatigue and bad weather, and each moment of delay increased privations that would soon have rendered it inefficient for a campaign in the south, the only point where its services could now be effectual.* For two whole days Moore had offered battle; this was sufficient to rally the troops, to restore order, and to preserve the reputation of the army. Lugo was strong ground in itself, but it did not cover Coruña, the road leading from Orense to St. Jago de Compostella turned it; the French ought to have been on that line, and there was no reason to suppose that they were not; Soult, as we have seen, pressed Ney to follow it. It was then impossible to remain at Lugo, and useless if it had been possible. The General adopted the third plan, and prepared to de-camp in the night; he ordered the fires to be kept bright, and exhorted the troops to make a great exertion, which he trusted would be the last required of them.

The country immediately in the rear of the position was intersected by stone walls and a number of intricate lanes; precautions were taken to mark the right tracks, by placing bundles of straw at certain distances, and officers were appointed to guide the columns. At ten o'clock the regiments silently quitted their ground and retired in excellent order; but a moody fortune pursued Sir John

* Sir John Moore's Papers.

Moore throughout this campaign, baffling his prudence, and thwarting his views, as if resolved to prove the unyielding firmness of his mind. A terrible storm of wind and rain, mixed with sleet, commenced as the army broke up from the position, the marks were destroyed, and the guides lost the true direction; only one of the divisions gained the main road, the other two were bewildered, and when daylight broke, the rear column was still near to Lugo. The fatigue, the depression of mind occasioned by this misfortune, and the want of shoes, broke the order of the march, and the stragglers were becoming numerous, when, unfortunately, Baird, who was with the leading division, thinking to relieve the men during a halt which took place in the night, desired them to take refuge from the weather in some houses a little way off the road. Complete disorganization followed this imprudent act; from that moment it became impossible to make the soldiers keep their ranks; plunder succeeded, the example was infectious, and what with real suffering, and evil propensity encouraged by this error of inexperience, the main body of the army, which had bivouacked for six hours in the rain, arrived at Betanzos on the evening of the 9th, in a state very discreditable to its discipline.

The commander-in-chief, with the reserve and the cavalry, as usual, covered the march, and in the course of it he ordered several bridges to be destroyed, but the engineers failed of success in every attempt.* Fortunately, the enemy did not come up with the rear before the evening, and then only with the cavalry, otherwise many prisoners must have fallen into their hands; for the number of stragglers uncovered by the passage of the reserve was so numerous, that when pressed, they united, under Sergeant Newman, of the 43d regiment, and repulsed the French cavalry themselves: a signal proof that the disorder was occasioned as much by insubordination in the regiments as by the fatigue of the march. The reserve, commanded by General Edward Paget, an officer distinguished during the retreat by his firmness, ability, and ardent zeal, remained in position during the night a few miles from Betanzos; the rest of the army was quartered in that town, and as the enemy could not gather in strength on the 10th, the commander-in-chief halted that day, and the cavalry passed from the rear-guard to the head of the column. The 11th, the French interrupted those employed to destroy the bridge of Betanzos, but from some mismanagement, although the twenty-eighth regiment repulsed the first skirmishers, the bridge constructed of wood, was only partially destroyed. In the mean time Sir John Moore assembled the army in one solid mass. The loss of men in the march from Lugo to Betanzos had been greater

* Mr. James Moore's Narrative.

than that in all the former part of the retreat, added to all the waste of the movement in advance and the loss sustained in the different actions; nevertheless, fourteen or fifteen thousand infantry were still in column, and by an orderly march to Coruña under the personal direction of the commander-in-chief, demonstrated that inattention and the want of experience in the officers was the true cause of those disorders, which had afflicted the army far more than the sword of the enemy or the rigor of the elements.*

As the troops approached Coruña, the General's looks were directed towards the harbor, but an open expanse of water painfully convinced him, that to fortune at least he was no way beholden; contrary winds still detained the fleet at Vigo, and the last consuming exertion made by the army was rendered fruitless! The men were put into quarters, and their leader awaited the progress of events.

The bridge of El Burgo was destroyed, and also that of Cambria, situated a few miles up the Mero river; but the engineer employed at the latter, mortified at the former failures, was so anxious to perform his duty in an effectual manner, that he remained too near the mine, and was killed by the explosion. Meanwhile three divisions occupied the town and suburbs of Coruña, and the reserve was posted between the village of El Burgo and the road of St. Jago de Compostella. For twelve days these hardy soldiers had covered the retreat, during which time they had traversed eighty miles of road in two marches, passed several nights under arms in the snow of the mountains, were seven times engaged with the enemy, and now assembled at the outposts, having fewer men missing from the ranks, including those who had fallen in battle, than any other division in the army: an admirable instance of the value of good discipline, and a manifest proof of the malignant injustice with which Sir John Moore has been accused of precipitating his retreat beyond the measure of human strength.

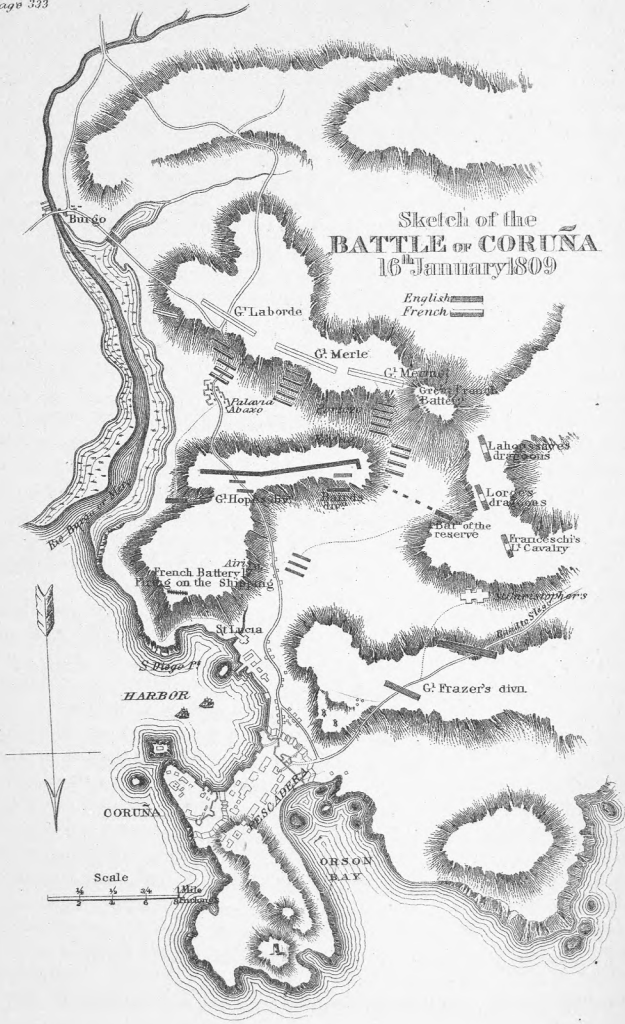
The town of Coruña, although sufficiently strong to oblige an enemy to break ground before it, was weakly fortified, and to the southward commanded by some heights close to the walls. Sir John Moore therefore caused the land front to be strengthened, and occupied the citadel, but disarmed the sea face of the works; and the inhabitants cheerfully and honorably joined in the labor, although they were fully aware that the English intended to embark, and that they would incur the enemy's anger by taking a part in the military operations. Such flashes of light from the dark cloud which at this moment covered Spain may startle the reader, and make him doubt if the Spaniards could have been so insufficient to their own defence as they have been represented in the

* Appendix, No. 27.

course of this history. I answer, that the facts were as I have told them, and that it was such paradoxical indications of character that deceived the world at the time, and induced men to believe that that reckless, daring defiance of the power of France so loudly proclaimed by the patriots would be strenuously supported. Of proverbially vivid imagination and quick resentments, the Spaniards feel and act individually rather than nationally, and during this war, that which appeared constancy of purpose was but a repetition of momentary fury; a succession of electric sparks, generated by constant collision with the French army, and daily becoming fainter as custom reconciled them to those injuries and insults which are commonly the attendants of war.

Procrastination and improvidence are the besetting sins of the nation. At this moment large magazines of arms and ammunition, which had been sent in the early part of the preceding year from England, were still in Coruña unappropriated and unregarded by a nation infested with three hundred thousand enemies, and having a hundred thousand soldiers unclothed and without weapons. Three miles from the town they had piled four thousand barrels of powder in a magazine built upon a hill, and a smaller quantity, collected in another storehouse, was at some distance from the first. To prevent them from falling a prey to the enemy, Moore caused both to be exploded on the 13th, and the inferior one blew up with a terrible noise, which shook the houses in the town; but when the train reached the great store, there ensued a crash like the bursting forth of a volcano; the earth trembled for miles, the rocks were torn from their bases, and the agitated waters rolled the vessels as in a storm; a vast column of smoke and dust, shooting out fiery sparks from its sides, arose perpendicularly and slowly to a great height, and then a shower of stones, and fragments of all kinds, bursting out of it with a roaring sound, killed many persons who remained too near the spot. Stillness, slightly interrupted by the lashing of the waves on the shore, succeeded, and the business of war went on. The next measure was a painful one; for the ground in front of Coruña is impracticable for cavalry, and as the horses were generally foundered, and it was impossible to embark them all in the face of an enemy, a great number were reluctantly ordered to be shot; these poor animals, already worn down and feet broken, would otherwise have been distributed among the French cavalry, or used as draft cattle, until death relieved them from procrastinated sufferings.

But the French were now collecting in force on the Mero, and it became necessary to choose a position of battle. A chain of rocky elevations, commencing on the sea-coast north-west of the



place, and ending on the Mero just behind the village of El Burgo, offered an advantageous line of defence, covered by a branch of the Mero, which, washing a part of the base, would have obliged the enemy to advance by the road of Compostella. This ridge was however too extensive for the English army, and if not wholly occupied, the French might have turned it by the right, and moved along a succession of eminences to the very gates of Coruña. There was no alternative, but to take possession of an inferior range, inclosed as it were within the other, and completely commanded by it within cannon-shot; here, therefore, the army was posted. Meanwhile the French army had been so exhausted with continual toil, that it was not completely assembled on the Mero before the 12th. On that day the infantry took post opposite El Burgo, the cavalry of La Houssaye lined the river as far as the ocean, and Franceschi, crossing at the bridge of Celas, seven miles higher up the river, intercepted some stores arriving from St. Jago, and made a few prisoners. The 14th, the bridges at El Burgo being rendered practicable for artillery, two divisions of infantry, and one of cavalry, passed the river, and to cover this march some guns opened on the English posts, but were soon silenced by a superior fire. In the evening the transports from Vigo hove in sight, and soon after entered the harbor of Coruña, and the dismounted cavalry, the sick, all the best horses, and fifty-two pieces of artillery, were embarked during the night, eight British and four Spanish guns only being retained on shore ready for action.

On the 15th, Laborde's division arrived. The French then occupied the great ridge inclosing the British position, placed their right on the intersection of the roads leading from St. Jago and Betanzos, and their left upon a rocky eminence which overlooked both lines;* after this they extended their cavalry, supported by some troops on their own left, and a slight skirmish took place in the valley below. The English piquets opposite the right of the French also got engaged, and were so galled by the fire of two guns, that Colonel M'Kenzie, of the fifth regiment, pushed out with some companies to seize the battery; a line of infantry, hitherto concealed by some stone walls, immediately arose, and poured in such a fire of musketry, that the Colonel was killed, and his men force back with loss.

In the course of the night, Soult with great difficulty established a battery of eleven heavy guns on the rocks which closed the left of his line of battle, and then formed his order of battle.† Laborde's division was posted on the right, having one half on the high ground,

* Noble's Expedition de Gallice.

† Ibid.

and the other half on the descent towards the river. Merle's division was in the centre. Mermet's division formed the left. The position was covered in front of the right by the villages of Palavia Abaxo and Portosa, and in front of the centre by a wood. The left was secured by the rugged heights where the great battery was established, which was about twelve hundred yards from the right of the British line, and midway the little village of Elvina was held by the piquets of the fiftieth British Regiment.* The late arrival of the transports, the increasing force of the enemy, and the disadvantageous nature of the ground had greatly augmented the difficulty and danger of the embarkation, and several general officers now proposed to the commander-in-chief, that he should negotiate for leave to retire to his ships upon terms. There was little chance of such a proposal being agreed to by the enemy, and there was no reason to try. The army had suffered, but not from defeat; its situation was dangerous, but far from desperate; wherefore the General would not consent to remove the stamp of energy and prudence, which marked his retreat, by a negotiation that would have given an appearance of timidity and indecision to his previous operations, as opposite to their real character as light is to darkness; his high spirit and clear judgment revolted at the idea, and he rejected the degrading advice without hesitation.

All the encumbrances of the army were shipped in the night of the 15th and morning of the 16th, and everything was prepared to withdraw the fighting men as soon as the darkness would permit them to move without being perceived; and the precautions taken would, without doubt, have insured the success of this difficult operation, but a more glorious event was destined to give a melancholy but graceful termination to the campaign. About two o'clock in the afternoon a general movement along the French line gave notice of an approaching battle, and the British infantry, fourteen thousand five hundred strong, immediately occupied the inferior range of hills already spoken of. The right was formed by Baird's division, and, from the oblique direction of the ridge, approached the enemy, while the centre and left were of necessity withheld in such a manner that the French battery on the rocks raked the whole of the line.† General Hope's division, crossing the main road, prolonged Baird's line to the left, and occupied strong ground abutting on the muddy bank of the Mero. A brigade of Baird's division remained in column behind the right wing, and in like manner a brigade of Hope's division was behind the left wing, while Paget's reserve, posted at Airis, a small village in rear of

* Sir John Moore's Letter to Lord Castlereagh.

† Vide Plan of the Battle.