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ACCOUNT OF THE WAR
IN
Spain & Portugal.

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ACCOUNT
OF THE
WAR
IN
SPAIN AND PORTUGAL,
AND IN
THE SOUTH OF FRANCE,
FROM 1808, TO 1814, INCLUSIVE.

BY
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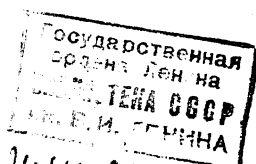
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PREFACE.

THE determination to submit this work to the public arose from the numerous memoirs on the war in the Peninsula, published by French officers, and the announcement of the speedy appearance of more laboured productions on the same subject, without any British officer stepping forward with a narrative of the actions of his countrymen.

It is constantly observed in the recital of the most ordinary events of life, that the details are made to appear materially different by the several actors; each indulging in animated description of the scenes in which he was personally engaged, and, through ignorance, either misrepresenting or passing over in silence the part borne by others. This unintentional deviation from equity applies with double force to the writings of belligerent nations, as, however pure the intentions of the authors, a variety

of incidents creditable to the hostile force must be imperfectly understood, or altogether unknown to them; and consequently it serves considerably to enhance the martial reputation of a people, that its own narratives should be implicitly received, even when drawn up with the utmost candour. It will therefore readily be conceived that such an advantage is carried to an undue extent in France, when, most of the writings which have appeared respecting the war in the Peninsula, are avowedly attempts to sustain the reputation of particular individuals, or to uphold the deeds of particular armies, and consequently written under the bias of personal as well as national feeling. Passing through such refracting mediums every action and circumstance is distorted. Severity of examination is, however, in some degree averted by the avowal of the motives which actuated the authors; and the knowledge that many of the chiefs, whom their writings were framed to eulogize, are already removed from the enjoyment of praise, and that the troops, whose merit they were intended to exalt, have been nearly exterminated, serves further to repress the exposure of their errors, and has hitherto gained uncontradicted currency for their statements.

Other writings, of a different description, on the same subject, appeared during the temporary reinstatement of the imperial rule, framed chiefly with a view to raise the confidence and reanimate the courage of the troops, by deceiving them into a belief that, though collectively unfortunate, they had ever been individually victorious. The exaggerations for this purpose are so gross and palpable as to carry their own detection, and their currency, it may be hoped, will be nearly as evanescent as the government they were intended to support.

A History of the War in Spain, originally published in England, is of a third description, and is more calculated to mislead than either of the former, as the author, without the apology of country or friends to support, has, under an ostentatious affectation of candour, well succeeded in giving a false colouring to all he relates; extraordinary boldness of assertion throughout being rendered plausible by reasoning founded on extreme ignorance of the localities, and of the details of his subject.

The tendency of these writings, however more or less vitiated the source from whence they flow, or however transient their duration, is unquestionably to shake that universally high opinion formed of the Portuguese and

British military from their success in the Peninsula; for what disinterested or impartial man, after reading of such gross blunders, such want of enterprize, such ignorance of the art of war as is imputed to them, and to their commander, on each separate occasion, does not feel his opinion of their merit diminished, and almost regret their general success over opponents represented as so much braver, and so much more skilful? Now, as local knowledge and personal observation are necessary to the detection of many of these delusions, is it not too probable, unless the future historian shall have it in his power to contrast the French statements with others of equal or similar authority, that they may, in a few years, be admitted as facts, and the details of a series of brilliant triumphs furnish laurels only to the vanquished? These considerations are submitted as an apology for a soldier's stepping out of his line to undertake a task for which he feels himself little qualified.

It is not intended by the foregoing observations to impute wilful misrepresentation to the French officers; prejudice and personal feeling too frequently blinding the judgment and perverting the understanding. This is strongly exemplified in the writings of our own countrymen respecting their allies, many of which

by actors in the scene, and penned at the moment, must be considered expressions of genuine feeling, as well as ocular testimony of passing events. A striking instance may be selected in the various accounts of the train of disasters which preceded the fall of a much esteemed officer at the commencement of the war. Every sufferer on that occasion taxed the natives with having been in some mode or other the authors of his misfortunes; and the numerous military friends of that respected chief, influenced by his desponding feelings, and desirous to exonerate his conduct and sustain his reputation, even went farther, representing the Spaniards not only as apathetic and cowardly, but as totally devoid of good will; and to such extent did national vanity warp the good sense of the people of England, that these aspersions were most implicitly received, and most loudly echoed, at the moment when the Gallicians were offering the noblest vindication of their character, by expelling, and nearly annihilating the intruders.

Even to this hour their statements have left an impression unfavourable to those mountaineers, notwithstanding time and more happy events have so far softened down personal and national feeling, that we inquire with astonish-

ment how such prejudices could have arisen, and on what ground it was expected that an unarmed peasantry should oppose the French at the moment when the finest troops they ever beheld, or, perhaps, ever were seen, which they regarded as invincible, and which they dignified with every vaunting appellation, deemed themselves incapable of defending their passes for a moment, and were seeking safety in hurried retreat to their ships.

The injustice of taxing the population of Galicia with cowardice and want of good will, was, however, paralleled by similar illiberality on their part towards the whole British army for the misfortunes of a single corps. At Corunna, nearly to the conclusion of the war, the inhabitants, (particularly the ladies,) when speaking of the British, after eulogizing their appearance, their deportment, their figure, their dress, invariably concluded by exclaiming, "What a pity such fine well-looking men should be afraid to fight!"

Prejudices are thus found on all sides, and the dissipation of them by exposure would lead to endless controversy; no attempt is therefore made in this work to analyse or refute the writings of others, the actions of the contending parties being simply narrated with-

out other object or colouring than the author's belief. This, however, on many points, is so much at variance with generally received opinions, that he shall esteem himself fortunate to escape suspicion of wilful misrepresentation; and he feels so strongly the probability that an impression of undue partiality towards the allied Portuguese and British army may lessen the value of his narrative, that he thinks it advisable to offer a few exculpatory observations on the following points:

1st. The little mention made of the exertions of the Spanish people subsequently to the first burst of popular feeling.

2d. The omission of the details of nearly all the battles fought by the Spaniards separately against the French.

3d. The little credit latterly assigned to the Guerrillas.

4th. The unvaried failure of success attributed to the efforts of the French against the British, and the reverse as attending the efforts of the British against the French.

Although the writer, from strict adherence to a belief founded on great opportunities of personal observation, totally denies the Spaniards the credit of those acts of hostility attributed to them by many others as arising from

an enthusiasm regardless of consequences, he is far from undervaluing an enmity always constant, always in activity, carried on with policy, and under great deception. It will, however, readily be perceived that a few scattered instances of the former would give more scope for detail than successive years of the latter conduct. As the blast of the tempest, or the raging of the whirlwind, though local in their action and transient in their duration, offer many descriptive particulars, whilst the general desolation produced by the silent progress of evils far more calamitous, can only be marked by a summary of their results—so it is with the opposition of the Spanish people to the French armies, infinitely more fatal in its effects than brilliant in its operation. The writer therefore considered it better to make this preliminary admission of the great benefit which accrued to the allied armies from the general good will of the inhabitants, than interrupt the military narrative by the introduction of the various instances of it within his knowledge, which, though highly creditable to individuals, had yet only a secondary influence on the event of the operation, and would prove of little interest to the reader.

The motive for omitting the details of most

of the actions fought by the Spanish armies, would be explained in the most satisfactory manner by an appeal to the French officers, many of whom have stated to the writer, that their greatest victories were nearly bloodless to themselves; various Spanish officers of distinction admit the fact; such is the testimony of several British officers who had opportunities of ascertaining the reality; and the writer has had ocular proof of the ease with which the French obtained more than one of their principal successes. A judgment formed on these data is the scale on which he rates the Spanish actions; he could not therefore conscientiously copy details or reports of a scientific combination of dispositions and tactics ending in such trifling results. The writer is far from wishing to depreciate their great merit collectively and individually; on the contrary, he finds much difficulty in checking the enthusiasm in their favour, which their steady perseverance and unshaken fortitude are so calculated to inspire; and he intended no disparagement to that deserving people by representing, that want of good officers, of organization, and of discipline, rendered their regular armies unfit to contend with the French. The Spaniards are naturally brave, hardy, and patient: their infantry, pre-

viously to its overthrow at the battle of Rocroy, though alloyed by an intermixture of various nations, was the admiration of Europe for its firm and steady courage; and their conduct on the heights of St. Marcial, when the beforementioned defects had been very partially remedied, proves that with due attention it may be rendered so again.

Sufficient has been said of the Guerrillas in the narrative for the reader to form his own judgment of their merits; lest, however, the writer should be supposed to rate them below his real opinion, he will state it in two lines:—whilst acting in small bodies, their efficiency, and the advantage drawn from them, could not be too highly valued; when united into large ones, they had all the inconveniences of regular armies without their good qualities.

The last point requires a more full examination, as strong suspicion of want of candour must naturally attach to the narrative of an officer of a rival nation, which, in seven active campaigns, denies one solitary triumph over his countrymen to those generals by whose tactics, and to those troops by whose prowess, every opponent had been previously overcome.

The talents of the French commanders are admitted to the fullest extent; they frequently

displayed the greatest ability, and the powerful armies entrusted to their charge were often manœuvred with peculiar skill; and so far is the writer from possessing any illiberality of feeling towards them, that he will venture an apology for their want of general success in the early periods of the war, by stating what he considers to have been the principal cause.

Trained in a school where every thing was effected by force of numbers, they were little fitted to appreciate that combination of prudence and boldness so happily blended in the conduct of their opponent: reasoning only on their own ideas of the value of men, they were constantly deceived by his unvarying steadiness in pursuing the object marked out for himself; never sacrificing his troops for the chance of converting a certain into a more brilliant result; but, whenever requisite, resorting to the boldest measures, and deeming no loss nor hazard too great to ensure success. Their own dispatches bear ample proof of their having been the dupes of the former conduct. The passage of the Douro in 1809; the siege of Rodrigo immediately after having relinquished the blockade; the still more arduous attack of Badajos; and the unexampled boldness of the march on Almaraz, are unquestion-

able examples of the latter; each deceiving the French commanders, and succeeding by a great, but well-judged temerity.

The strongest exemplification, however, is to be drawn from the action of Fuentes de Honor, fought to gain possession of Almeida soon after the conclusion of Marshal Massena's retreat out of Portugal. That officer, after spending five months near Lisbon, fruitlessly offering battle under the most disadvantageous circumstances, till his forces were completely disorganized and half wasted away, little expected that the moment his army was recomposed, reinforced, and again formidable, he should find his prudent competitor suddenly transformed into the boldest of adversaries, offering battle on most disadvantageous ground, and with retreat nearly impracticable. In the one case, the object in view was certain of being attained without risk; in the other, the prize could only be gained by hazarding all. This contrasted conduct offers the highest display of prudence, judgment, and boldness, forming so pure an example of the legitimate use of battles, as must have been incomprehensible to the French commanders of the revolution, and by such they were constantly foiled, and the superior force under their command rendered of no avail.