

This simple order was enough ; an officer, with a company of the Buffs, embarked, and thus began the Passage of the Douro.

So engrossed was I in my vigilant observation of our leader, that I would gladly have remained at the convent, when I received an order to join my brigade, to which a detachment of artillery was already proceeding.

As I reached Avintas all was in motion. The cavalry was in readiness beside the river: but as yet no boats had been discovered, and, such was the impatience of the men to cross, it was with difficulty they were prevented trying the passage by swimming, when suddenly Power appeared, followed by several fishermen. Three or four small skiffs had been found, half sunk in mud, among the rushes, and with such frail assistance we commenced to cross.

"There will be something to write home to Galway soon, Charley, or I'm terribly mistaken," said Fred, as he sprang into the boat beside me; "was I not a true prophet when I told you, 'We'd meet the French in the morning?'"

"They're at it already," said Hixley, as a wreath of blue smoke floated across the stream below us, and the loud boom of a large gun resounded through the air.

Then came a deafening shout, followed by a rattling volley of small arms, gradually swelling into a hot sustained fire, through which the cannon pealed at intervals. Several large meadows lay along the river side, where our brigade was drawn up as the detachments landed from the boats ; and here, altho' nearly a league distant from the town, we now heard the din and crash of battle, which increased every moment, the cannonade from the sierra Convent, which at first was merely the fire of single guns, now thundered away in one long roll, amid which the sounds of falling walls and crashing roofs was mingled. It was evident to us, from the continued fire kept up, that the landing had been effected, while the swelling tide of musketry told that fresh troops were momentarily coming up.

In less than twenty minutes our brigade was formed, and we now only waited for two light fourteen-pounders to be landed, when an officer galloped up in haste, and called out :

"The French are in retreat," and pointing at the same moment to the Valonga road, we saw a long line of smoke and dust leading from the town, through which, as we gazed, the colours of the enemy might be seen, as they defiled, while the unbroken line of the waggons and heavy baggage proved that it was no partial movement, but the army itself retreating.

"Fourteenth, threes about, close up, trot," called out the loud and manly voice of our leader, and the heavy tramp of our squadrons shook the very ground, as we advanced towards the road to Valonga.

As we came on, the scene became one of overwhelming excitement ; the masses of the enemy that poured unceasingly from the town could now be distinguished more clearly, and amidst all the crash of gun carriages and caissons, the voices of the staff officers rose high as they hurried along the retreating battalions. A troop of flying artillery galloped forth at top speed, and wheeling their guns into position with the speed of lightning, prepared by a flanking fire to cover the retiring column. The gunners sprung from their seats, the guns were already unlimbered, when Sir George Murray, riding up at our left, called out:—

"Forward ; close up ; charge!"

The word was scarcely spoken, when a loud cheer answered the welcome sound, and the same instant the long line of shining helmets passed with the speed of a whirlwind: the pace increased at every stride, the ranks grew closer, and like the dread force of some mighty engine we fell upon the foe. I have felt all the glorious enthusiasm of a fox hunt, when the loud cry of the hound, answered by the cheer of the joyous huntsman, stirred the very heart within, but never till now did I know how far higher the excitement reaches, when man to man, sabre to sabre, arm to arm,