

in the sunbeams. The bivouac fires were still smouldering, and marking where some part of the army had passed the night; for, early as it was, it was evident that their position had been changed; and, even now, the heavy masses of dark infantry might be seen moving from place to place, while the long line of the road to Valonga was marked with a vast cloud of dust. The French drum and the light infantry bugle told, from time to time, that orders were passing among the troops; while the glittering uniform of a staff officer, as he galloped from the town, bespoke the note of preparation.

"Dismount. Steady: quietly my lads," said the Colonel, as he alighted upon the grass. "Let the men have their breakfast."

The little amphitheatre we occupied, hid us entirely from all observation on the part of the enemy, but equally so excluded us from perceiving their movements. It may readily be supposed, then, with what impatience we waited her, while the din and clangour of the French force, as they marched and countermarched so near us, were clearly audible! The orders were, however, strict that none should approach the bank of the river, and we lay anxiously awaiting the moment when this inactivity should cease. More than one orderly had arrived among us, bearing dispatches from head-quarters; but where our main body was, or what the nature of the orders, no one could guess. As for me, my excitement was at its height, and I could not speak for the very tension of my nerves. The officers stood in little groups of two and three, whispering anxiously together; but all I could collect was, that Soult had already begun his retreat upon Amarante, and that with the broad stream of the Douro between us, he defied our pursuit.

"Well, Charley," said Power, laying his arm upon my shoulder, "the French have given us the slip this time: they are already in march, and, even if we dared force a passage, in the face of such an enemy, it seems there is not a boat to be found. I have just seen Hammersley."

"Indeed! Where is he?" said I.

"He's gone back to Villa de Conde; he asked after you most particularly; don't blush man; I'd rather back your chance than his, notwithstanding the long letter that Lucy sends him. Poor fellow! he has been badly wounded, but, it seems, declines going back to England."

"Captain Power," said an orderly touching his cap, "General Murray desires to see you."

Power hastened away, but returned in a few moments.

"I say, Charley, there's something in the wind here. I have just been ordered to try where the stream is fordable. I've mentioned your name to the General, and I think you'll be sent for soon. Good bye."

"I buckled on my sword, and looking to my

girths, stood watching the groups around me; when, suddenly a dragoon pulled his horse short up, and asked a man near me if Mr. O'Mally was there?

"Yes; I am he."

"Orders from General Murray, sir," said the man, and rode off at a canter.

I opened and saw that the dispatch was addressed to Sir Arthur Wellesley, with the mere words, "with haste," on the envelope.

Now which way to turn I knew not; so springing into the saddle, I galloped to where Colonel Merivale was standing talking to the colonel of a heavy dragoon regiment.

"May I ask, sir, by which road I am to proceed with this dispatch?"

"By the river, sir," said the Colonel; a large dark-browed man, with a most forbidding look. "You'll soon see the troops: you'd better stir yourself, sir, or Sir Arthur is not likely to be pleased with you."

Without venturing a reply to what I felt a somewhat unnecessary taunt, I dashed spurs to my horse, and turned towards the river. I had not gained the bank above a minute, when the loud ringing of a rifle struck upon my ear: bang went another. I hurried on however, at the top of my speed, thinking only of my mission and its pressing haste. As I turned an angle of the stream, the vast column of the British came in sight, and scarcely had my eye rested upon them when my horse staggered forwards, plunged twice with his head nearly to the earth, and then rearing madly up, fell backwards upon the ground. Crushed and bruised as I felt by my fall, I was soon aroused to the necessity of exertion; for, as I disengaged myself from the poor beast, I discovered he had been killed by a bullet in the counter; and scarcely had I recovered my legs when a shot struck my shako and grazed my temples. I quickly threw myself to the ground, and creeping on for some yards, reached at last some rising ground, from which I rolled gently downwards into a little declivity, sheltered by the bank from the French fire.

When I arrived at head-quarters, I was dreadfully fatigued and heated; but resolving not to rest till I had delivered my dispatches, I hastened towards the convent of La Sierra, where I was told the commander-in-chief was.

As I came into the court of the convent, filled with general officers and people of the staff, I was turning to ask how I should proceed, when Hixley caught my eye.

"Well, O'Mally, what brings you here?"

"Dispatches from General Murray."

"Indeed: oh follow me."

He hurried me rapidly through the buzzing crowd, and ascending a large gloomy stair introduced me into a room, where about a dozen persons in uniform were writing at a long deal table.