

PASSAGE OF THE DOURO.

BY HARRY LORREQUER.

NEVER did the morning break more beautiful than on the 12th of May, 1809. Huge masses of fog-like vapour had succeeded to the starry cloudless night, but, one by one, they moved onward towards the sea, disclosing, as they passed, long tracts of lovely country, bathed in a rich golden glow. The broad Douro, with its transparent current, shone out like a bright coloured ribbon, meandering through the deep garment of green; the darkly shadowed mountains, which closed the background, loomed even larger than they were; while their summits were tipped with the yellow glory of the morning. The air was calm and still, and the very smoke that arose from the peasant's cot, laboured as it ascended through the perfumed air, and, save the ripple of the stream, all was silent as the grave.

The squadrons of the 14th, with which I was, had diverged from the road beside the river, and to obtain a shorter path, had entered the skirts of a dark pine wood: our pace was a sharp one, an orderly had been already dispatched to hasten our arrival, and we pressed on at a brisk trot. In less than an hour we reached the verge of the wood, and, as we rode out upon the plain, what a spectacle met our eyes. Before us, in a narrow valley, separated from the river by a narrow ridge, were picketed three cavalry regiments; their noiseless gestures and perfect stillness bespeaking, at once, that they were intended for a surprise party. Farther down the stream, and upon the opposite side, rose the massive towers and tall spires of Oporto, displaying from their summits the broad ensign of France; while, far as the eye could reach, the broad dark masses of troops might be seen; the intervals between their columns glittering with the bright equipments of their cavalry, whose steel caps and lances were sparkling in the sunbeams. The bivouac fires were still smouldering, and marking where some part of the army had passed the night; for, car-

ly 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 here, 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 hand 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.