

(EXTRACT.)

CHARLES O'MALLEY, THE IRISH DRAGOON.

MICKEY FREE'S ADVENTURE.

When I returned to the camp, I found the greatest excitement prevailing on all sides. Each day brought in fresh rumours that Marmont was advancing in force; that sixty thousand Frenchmen were in full march upon Ciudad Rodrigo, to raise the blockade, and renew the invasion of Portugal. Intercepted letters corroborated these reports; and the guerillas who joined us, spoke of large convoys which they had seen upon the roads from Salamanca and Tames.

Except the light division, which, under the command of Crawford, were posted upon the right of the Aguada, the whole of our army occupied the country from El Bodon to Gallegos; the fourth division being stationed at Fuente Guinaldo, where some entrenchments had been hastily thrown up.

To this position Lord Wellington resolved upon retreating, as affording points of greater strength and more capability of defence than the other line of road which led to Almedia upon the Coa. Of the enemy's intention, we were not long to remain in doubt; for on the morning of the 24th, a strong body were seen descending from the pass above Ciudad Rodrigo, and cautiously reconnoitring the banks of the Aguada. Far in the distance a countless train of wagons, bullock-cars, and loaded mules were seen wending their slow length along, accompanied by several squadrons of dragoons.

Their progress was slow, but, as evening fell, they entered the gates of the fortress, and the cheering of the garrison mixing with strains of martial music faint from distance, reached us where we lay upon the far off heights of El Bodon. So long as the light lasted, we could perceive fresh troops arriving; and even when the darkness came on, we could detect the position of the reinforcing columns, by the bright watch fires that gleamed along the plain.

By day break we were under arms, anxiously watching for the intention of the enemy, which soon became no longer dubious. Twenty-five squadrons of cavalry, supported by a whole division of infantry, were seen to file along the great road from Ciudad Rodrigo, to Guinaldo. Another column, equally numerous marched straight upon Espeja: nothing could be more beautiful, nothing more martial than their appearance; emerging from a close mountain-gorge, they wound along the narrow road, and appeared upon the bridge of the Aguada, just as the morning sun was bursting forth; his bright beams tipping the polished cuirassiers and their glittering equipments, as they shone in their panoply like the gay troop of some ancient tournament. The lancers of Berg distinguished by their scarlet dolmans and gorgeous trappings, were followed by the cuirassiers of

the guard, who again were succeeded by the *chasseurs à cheval*, their bright steel helmets and light blue uniforms, their floating plumes and dappled chargers, looking the very *beau ideal* of light horsemen; behind, the dark masses of the infantry pressed forward, and deployed in 'o the plain; while bringing up the rear, the rolling din, like distant thunder, announced the "dread artillery."

On they came, the seemingly interminable line converging on to that one spot upon whose summit now we assembled a force of scarcely ten thousand bayonets.

While this brilliant panorama was passing before our eyes, we ourselves were not idle. Orders had been sent to Picton to come up from the left with his division. Alten's cavalry, and a brigade of artillery were sent to the front, and every preparation which the nature of the ground admitted, was made to resist the advance of the enemy. While these movements on either side occupied some hours, the scene was every moment increasing in interest. The large body of cavalry was now seen forming into columns of attack. Nine battalions of infantry moved up to their support, and, forming into columns, echelons, and squares, performed before us all the manoeuvres of a review with the most admirable precision and rapidity; but from these our attention was soon taken by a brilliant display upon our left. Here, emerging from the wood which flanked the Aguada, were now to be seen the gorgeous staff of Marmont himself. Advancing at a walk, they came forward amid the vivas of the assembled thousands, burning with ardor and thirsting for victory. For a moment as I looked, I could detect the marshal himself, as, holding his plumed hat above his head, he returned the salute of a lancer regiment who proudly waved their banners as he passed; but hark! what are those clanging sounds, which, rising high above the rest, seem like the war-cry of a warrior?

"I can't mistake those tones," said a bronzed old veteran beside me. "Those are the brass bands of the imperial guard. Can Napoleon be there? see! there they come." As he spoke, the head of a column emerged from the wood, and, deploying as they came, poured into the plain. For above an hour that mighty tide flowed on, and, before noon, a force of sixty thousand men were collected in the space beneath us.

I was not long to remain an unoccupied spectator of this brilliant display; for I soon received orders to move down with my squadron to the support of the eleventh light dragoons, who were posted at the base of the hill. The order at the moment was anything but agreeable, for I was mounted upon a hack poney, on which I had ridden over from Crawford's division early in the morning, and suspecting there might be some hot work during the day, had ordered Mike to follow with my horse. There was no time,