

A NAPOLEONIC LEGEND.

Translated from the French of George D'Esparbes.



THE English held the crest of the Mountain of Alcoba and overlooked the whole French camp, while we could see but their vanguard perched between the Convent of Busaco and the pass. The position seemed impregnable; yet it must be attacked.

The 27th of September, Ney had the trumpets sounded, and, waving his sword, calm and smiling, led the march to the beating of the drums.

The position commanded the mountain and rose high up against the sky, surrounded by wide chasms and defended by granite fortifications.

An hour afterwards, although no one could think what gigantic wings had borne four thousand men so high, the marshal and two regiments of grenadiers appeared at twenty paces from the English. The cannons thundered and poured their deadly charge into the French ranks. Furious, panting for breath, Ney and his troops rushed forward on the English guns, fell beneath their fire, disappeared in the smoke, rose, and fell again, cut down by the unceasing storm of shot and shell.—Three hundred men had perished during the scaling of the rock; five hundred more in the attack. They fell in large groups, but behind these others followed, who, stepping over the bodies of their companions, dashed into the fray to be in their turn replaced by others . . . At last, the guns were silenced; the enemy's line wavered, and the red-

haired gunners, the tall English carbineers, fled . . .

—Forward, cried the marshal.

The French followed in pursuit,—but, suddenly the mountain was shaken as if by an earthquake. . . . A wide track of land broke asunder and a gaping chasm stood open over the enormous mass of men, a thousand English and four hundred French, who had tumbled down together into this frightful abyss! The remaining combattants heard but a loud clamor, then a low and distant cry . . . and nothing remained on the mountain but a kind of echo of a confused sound,—and the terror and silence of the retreating troops.

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At three o'clock in the afternoon, an Englishman bearing a flag of truce descended the Alcoba, asked for Ney and told the marshal that Wellington wished to speak to him about the mornings catastrophe.

Then only did Ney seem to awake. Since the battle he had been in a kind of stupor from which he had not yet been aroused. He rose at last and called an officer.

—Reynier, be my escort; order a captain and a company. The officer bowed, and a minute afterwards the troops were climbing the mountains.

Pale and agitated, surrounded by his officers, Wellington stood awaiting his arrival.

—Sir, he said quickly, you must be interested in the fate of the brave men who fell, this morning, over the precipice