



















SKETCH

OF THE

CAMPAIGN

IN

Portugal.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR JOHN MURRAY, 32, FLEET STREET;

W. BLACKWOOD, EDINEURGH; AND

M. N. MAHON, DUBLIN.

1810.



London: Printed by C. Roworth, Bell-yard, Temple-bar.

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THE misconceptions which have prevailed, and the misrepresentations which have been circulated, with respect to the campaign in Portugal, have determined me to lay before the public what appears to me a more correct view of this important subject than has hitherto appeared. I confess that I have been additionally urged to this undertaking, by the indignation which I have felt at the unworthy attempts which have been made to undermine the military reputation of the distinguished officer at the head of the allied army in Portugal: attempts which, whether they have proceeded from the violence of political hostility, or the rancour of personal malice, are equally disgusting to the feelings, and inconsistent with the generosity of the British nation.

The first question which suggests itself, in considering this subject, is, What was Lord Wellington's object in the present campaign? I answer, strictly and literally the defence of Portugal, involving (exclusively of all political considerations) the consequent occupation of a powerful French army, which would otherwise have been applicable to a variety of important points, and equal perhaps (if not so occupied and opposed) to the subjugation

His planwould, in a mere military point of view, have necessarily been defensive, whether in reference to the numerical inferiority of his force, at least at the opening of the campaign, or to the then state of the Portuguese army, which, being perfectly untried, ought upon no account to have been risked in the field, in the first instance, except under circumstances of peculiar advantage or of absolute necessity.

What, on the other hand, was the object of the enemy? Nothing less than the expulsion of the British army, the conquest of Portugal, and all the momentous consequences on the fate of the peninsula, which these successes would produce. With these objects a

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very powerful force was assembled, consisting of the corps d'armée of Ney, Junot, and Regnier, under the command of Marshal Massena, one undoubtedly of the best generals in the French service, supported by a staff, whose names are eminently distinguished in all the campaigns of Buonaparté. Massena, in his proclamation to the Portuguese, estimated his army at a hundred and ten thousand men: its real force was probably between eighty and ninety thousand. I have no means of judging accurately of the allied force at the same period, but I should apprehend that it could certainly not exceed, and probably did not nearly amount to sixty thousand men. Indeed, exclusive of the militia, which was divided upon many different points, I cannot, on any information ation of which I am possessed, carry it higher than fifty thousand regulars. The plan of the enemy was therefore offensive, for his object could not be attained, unless he compelled the British army to evacuate Portugal. Let us see then how far he has attained this object; and let us with that view trace the course of events during the campaign.

Its commencement may be dated from the movement of the French army to invest Ciudad Rodrigo: The force which was assembled for that purpose, consisted of the two corps of Ney and Junot, whilst that under Regnier moved from the neighbourhood of Badajos, to the right bank of the Tagus, where it threatened the frontier of Portugal, along the course of

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that river, and communicated with the main body under Massena, through the mountains to the northward of the Vale of Placentia.

In order to oppose this plan of attack, Lord Wellington assembled the main body of the allied army in the neighbourhood of Almeida, and directed General Hill, who watched the motions of Regnier from the vicinity of Elvas, to make a movement to the right bank of the Tagus, and to cover the road to Lisbon by Castello Branco, which was threatened by the corps of Regnier: and a reserve was assembled at Thomar under General Leith. Those who are at all acquainted with military subjects, and above all with the military topography of Portugal, will easily perceive the ability with which

which this disposition was made. The ground taken up by Lord Wellington himself was so strong as to be secure from any direct attack, and General Hill was enabled from his position at Elvas to anticipate any movement which Regnier might make with a view to turn Lord Wellington's right; which accordingly we find that he actually did; and the moment that the French general entered into direct co-operation with Massena by moving to the right of the Tagus, General Hill, by a corresponding movement, placed himself upon Lord Wellington's right, and thus secured that important point. The position occupied by General Leith at Thomar, enabled him to move either on his left, to the Mondego, to support Lord Wellington, if he retired along along the valley of that river; to his front to support General Hill; or on his right to maintain the line of the Tagus.

After a siege which cost the enemy many lives, and, what he valued more, much time,—which did great honor to the brave garrison who defended it, and was of considerable ultimate advantage to the Allies by deferring the invasion of Portugal, Ciudad Rodrigo was compelled to surrender.

And here it may be necessary to say a few words in answer to a charge which was attempted to be made against Lord Wellington for not endeavouring to raise the siege of that fortress. In the first place, his force was, as I have stated, numerically

numerically inferior to that of the enemy, particularly in cavalry; and secondly, the Portuguese army had never been under fire, and it was impossible to know what might be the consequences of exposing it to an attack in an open country against a superior force, and exposing it too, in a situation where the advantages to result from success were doubtful, but where even a check might have been attended with all the consequences of an entire defeat. I have no hesitation, therefore, in stating, that if Lord Wellington had moved his army from the mountains into the plain under such circumstances, he would have committed an act of consummate rashness, and risked not only the safety of his own army, but possibly the fate of the whole peninsula: and,

and, after all, the object was in no degree worth the risk; for the fall of Ciudad Rodrigo (however important the place might be in many respects) did by no means involve the loss of the campaign, whereas the loss of a battle in attempting to save it, might, in that advanced position of the allied armies, have been found irreparable and fatal. It appears, indeed, by an intercepted letter from Berthier, that the enemy calculated upon the possibility of such an attack, and considered themselves as strong enough to render it ineffectual, and to take the place into the bargain. But this very circumstance is only an additional reason to induce us to conclude that Lord Wellington, instead of deserving censure for not attempting to relieve

lieve that fortress, is entitled to the greatest praise for the skill and foresight, which induced him to forbear. The same reasoning will apply, in a great measure, to the case of Almeida, although undoubtedly from the neighbourhood of that place to Lord Wellington's position, a movement in its support would have been less hazardous than in the former instance; and possibly such an operation might have been attempted, had not its untimely and accidental fall prevented it. It may not be improper, however, to observe, that in this case also, the fortress of Almeida was of much less consequence to the final result of the campaign, than has been generally imagined. It certainly was of importance in so far as it tended to delay the progress of the enemy, and

and to procrastinate the campaign; but, I believe, all military authorities agree in considering the possession of it as giving no decisive advantages to an army attacking Portugal. However desirable therefore it might have been to retain it, it was not worth the considerable risk which I think might have been incurred in the attempt to relieve it.

Immediately after the fall of Almeida, the French army began to be more decided in its measures, and Lord Wellington soon ascertained that their object was to turn his left, and that in order to support this operation, the corps of Regnier had moved by its right to the northward, and advanced towards the position occupied by the corps under the immediate

diate command of His Lordship, whilst the remaining divisions of the French army also moved still further to their right; Lord Wellington immediately saw the expediency of retiring; and moving himself along the valley of the Mondego, he directed Generals Hill and Leith to move by their left and to join him on the Alva at the position of the Ponte de Marcella. It is generally understood that at this point he determined to make a stand; and the position was one of such strength (which will be obvious on mere inspection of the map) as to give him every reason to hope for a favourable issue, in case it were attacked. The enemy, however, instead of following the British army along the left bank of the Mondego, crossed over, in preference

ference to the course that would have led him to an attack upon the British, to the right, and took the road to Viseu, which is the very worst road in Portugal, and materially impeded the course of their operations. Their object was to avoid, and by avoiding to turn, without risking an engagement, the position of the Ponte de Marcella, by marching upon Coimbra; by this movement they threatened Lord Wellington's rear on the one hand, and Oporto on the other. But his Lordship penetrating their design, made a rapid and brilliant movement by his left, and placed himself in the powerful position of Busaco, where I believe the enemy never expected to find him, and where, perhaps from ignorance as to the extent of force which had been

been moved to this point, they made a most rash and fruitless attempt to carry his position. It is needless to enter into any details of this affair, further than to state, that while the enemy's force was considerably weakened, the spirits and confidence of the Allies were infinitely increased by the courage and steadiness displayed by the Portuguese troops.

The enemy, however, having succeeded in turning Lord Wellington's flank by a movement which the intended occupation of Sardao, if it could have been effected in time, might have prevented, or at least considerably delayed, rendered the position of Busaco no longer tenable, and Lord Wellington retired behind the Mondego, upon the reinforcements

inforcements which were marching to join him from Lisbon. This river, notwithstanding the assertions in the Moniteur of the 'superb positions of the Mondego,' affords, as is well known, no position which, considered with a reference to the defence of Lisbon, may not be turned; and consequently, when the enemy evinced an intention of advancing, his Lordship, in pursuance of his previous resolutions, determined to retire before him, and not to attempt to make any serious stand till he had reached those positions nearer to Lisbon, which he had before examined, and had caused to be fortified with great care, and which he conceived to be of such natural and artificial strength, as to justify his determination there to await the collected efforts of the enemy, and to contend for the ultimate deliverance of Portugal.

As an additional security, exertions had been made to deprive the country through which the enemy was to pass, and that which he would at last be compelled to occupy, of those resources which otherwise would have been of great advantage to him. It is obvious, that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to render such a measure completely efficacious: But Lord Wellington, knowing that the enemy had advanced without any magazines, and that in pursuance of the arrangements which had been previously made, the enemy's rear would be extremely harassed by the Portuguese militia, felt persuaded that the B 2 more

more he could draw the French into the heart of the country, and the longer he could retain them there without exposing his own army to hazard, the more difficult would their situation become, and the more unequal would they prove to subsequent operations.

He therefore most wisely and judiciously, and consistently with all his previous opinions and proceedings, adopted the course which I have described; and, having caused to the French army a loss incalculably greater than that suffered by his own, he has placed himself and the enemy in a situation anxious and critical, it must be confessed, from the importance of the interests at stake, but which, from being greatly misunderstood, has occasioned

sioned much on the one side of unreasonable hope, and on the other of unnecessary despondency.

As soon as it was known that Lord Wellington had retired in security to his present position, and that the enemy, being considerably straitened for provisions, and harassed upon his right and rear, had not ventured to attack the allied army, (which his rapid advance seemed to promise that he would not have delayed to do,) the most sanguine and extravagant hopes were entertained. It was universally supposed that Massena would either be starved into a surrender, or, at least, compelled by famine immediately to retreat with a dreadful and irreparable loss; and many, who five months before had в 3 prophesied

prophesied the expulsion, and even the capture, of the British army, were now ready to censure and to vilify its General because he did not (by what means it was to be done those critics did not state) make the French General and his whole army prisoners of war. Now, I think I may venture to assert, that Lord Wellington has never written a single line, or uttered a single word which could justify so absurd and unreasonable an expectation; and I would appeal to the liberal feelings of mankind, whether it be not, at the least, unjust (to speak mildly of it) to charge the disappointment arising from our own high-flown and foolish hopes to the account of a gallant officer, the final effect of whose operations cannot yet be fully ascertained. Lord Wellington, it is true, tells us, that, from all the accounts which he receives, the enemy finds considerable difficulty in procuring supplies, and that he is much harassed on his right and rear; but what man of sense, what military man is there, who would thence conclude that the French army was in a state to be starved into surrender? We have on record numberless instances of crews of ships and of extensive garrisons subsisting for a considerable period upon short allowances, and yet retaining their spirits and courage to the last: but such vague notions exist in this country, (which has not for ages been the seat of war,) with regard to what an army can or cannot do, that although we may lament, we cannot wonder at any errors which prevail upon these subjects.

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It has also been argued, by those who are disappointed, that Lord Wellington is inconsistent, when he says 'that the enemy occupies no more ground than he stands upon;' whereas it appears that in fact he has pushed a corps across the Zezere, and opened thereby a new source of supply. Now Lord Wellington appears to me to be perfectly accurate in his statement; he does not mean to say, nor does he say, that Massena could not have forced a communication with other neighbouring districts, but he says, with great truth, that so far from having subdued when he had over-run the country, he could not without such

such a direct application of his forces attain such communications; that a hostile population surrounded and even pressed upon the outposts of his armies; that his hospitals were taken, and his sick and wounded made prisoners, within a few leagues of his head-quarters; and that his route through the whole kingdom was marked, not by any acquiescence, either of fear or favour, in his power, but by a most determined and vigorous hostility.

In such a position of the enemy, and in such a state of the country, Lord Wellington's assertion is true in the spirit, and even in the letter; for, admitting that by large detachments Massena is enabled to push to a distant point, and to ob-

tain supplies by mere military power, it is obvious that such an extension of force implies an extension of the ground upon which the army stands: but does it thence follow, that, independent of the presence of the French army, any portion of the country is under their controul?-this point may be thus illustrated; Massena, by pushing a corps across the Zezere, has extended his position, and may draw from the country so occupied the resources which it contains; but still his supplies are limited to that extent, and can only be cotemporary with such occupation; whereas in Germany or Italy, where the communications to the French armies have always been free, and where magazines have been formed either previous to or during the course of the campaign,

paign, the order of a mere commissary, without the application of any military force, has been sufficient to procure the necessary supplies, drawn, in some degree at least, from tracts of country not occupied, strictly speaking, by the army, and therefore not forming part of the ground upon which it may be said to stand.

What has been stated with respect to Massena's means of forcing a communication for the purpose of procuring provisions, will also apply to his power of retreating from Portugal altogether, if he should find it necessary to do so. No one, indeed, who has studied military history, could have supposed that a great army, conducted by a brave and skilful commander (and such undoubtedly

are the French army and its general), would suffer itself to be detained in a fixed position, till it was starved into a surrender? a retreat must be almost necessarily accompanied with more or less disaster and loss; but no general, fertile in the resources of war, will suffer his retreat to be entirely cut off, unless the superiority of his opponent's numbers be so great as to render useless the utmost exertion of skill and courage, by opposing to him an equal force on every side to which his course could be directed; and we may be perfectly sure that no such general will ever commence a retreat, and particularly in difficult circumstances, till he finds it indispensably necessary. These observations may, I think, shew, that if we are finally

finally disappointed in the result of the campaign, as far at least as refers to the capture of the enemy, or to his immediate and total evacuation of the country, it will be in consequence of our own impatient and unreasonable hopes, not in consequence of Lord Wellington's conduct.

It is now necessary to advert to the opinions of those, who, having throughout looked upon the campaign as hopeless, are now disposed to view the situation of the Allies in a still more gloomy light, and to accuse Lord Wellington of having undertaken more than he can execute, in undertaking the defence of Portugal.

It is to be observed that persons of this description are no less severe in their their animadversions upon his Lordship's conduct, than those whose dissatisfaction arises from the feeling to which the preceding arguments apply. They admit of course that Lord Wellington has succeeded in effecting his retreat in safety to his position near Lisbon, although they prophesied long since that it could only be effected under the most afflicting circumstances; but they ask, has he effected his object of defending Portugal? Is he not shut up in a nook of the country, and compelled to derive all his supplies from Lisbon? Can he prevent the enemy from receiving reinforcements? Are not reinforcements actually on their march to join him? Can he resist them when they are all collected? or even if he can, can he be said to have rendered any service to the cause of Spain by his conduct during the campaign? I will endeayour to examine the force of these different questions. To the first, I answer, yes; for as long as he is able to maintain his position before Lisbon, (which, be it remembered, is the spot on which it was always intended to make the final stand for the liberation of Portugal,) the enemy cannot be said to have conquered the country, or to be themselves free from difficulty, or even from danger. I shall presently consider the question with a reference to reinforcements; but in the mean time, I think I am justified in saying, that in the present situation of the French they are harassed on almost every point, nor can they venture, with their present force, to make any strong or permanent detachments tachments capable of disarming the country, and of clearing themselves from the swarms of enemies which are collected round them. Lord Wellington therefore has hitherto succeeded in defending Portugal, and in the way precisely in which the defence was originally planned; and the enemy has hitherto failed in conquering it, and failed precisely on account of the obstacles and difficulties which Lord Wellington had foreseen and created to obstruct him.

But secondly, it is asked, is not Lord Wellington shut up in a nook of the country, and compelled to draw all his supplies from Lisbon? It is true that the main strength of the allied army is concentrated near Lisbon,

but it is equally true that Lord Wellington's communication is open with every part of the country, except that where the French army stands; that he is at liberty to apply the resources, of every description, from all Portugal, (with the above narrow exception,) to any point or object which he may deem expedient; and that the maintenance of his commanding position near the capital, and the perfect security of the southern provinces, give consistency and confidence to the patriotic spirit and the active operations of all the other parts of Portugal. It is a shrewd observation of those critics, that Lord Wellington is himself in but one nook of all Portugal; I do not see how it could be otherwise as far as regards his person, and I admit the fact; but it would have been candid

spirit which guide his proceedings, pervade the whole kingdom, and receive co-operation and respect from a unanimous people. Lord Wellington is at Torres Vedras, but what spot of Portugal is it to which his influence does not extend?

With respect to his Lordship's deriving all his supplies from Lisbon, it is neither more nor less than drawing them from his grand magazine; and I am disposed to consider the circumstance of Lord Wellington's neighbourhood to Lisbon as very advantageous with regard to provisioning his troops, inasmuch as the shortness of the distance diminishes in a most important degree both the time and labour requisite for transporting the supplies from

the magazines to the army; besides which, the resources of the province of Alentejo and the kingdom of Algarve would, in any case, be most conveniently, and I might almost say, necessarily collected at Lisbon, which port, adverting to the complete command which we have of the sea and the mouth of the Tagus, seems, by its situation, calculated to be, in any plan of campaign which could be adopted, the great magazine and depôt of the country.

The enemy, on the other hand, having advanced into Portugal without any magazines, must derive his supplies from the ground which he permanently occupies, or, for that special purpose, overruns; and whoever considers that Portugal does not feed its own population

population for above seven months in the year, may easily conceive that these resources must, sooner or later, be exhausted, when applied to the subsistence of a great army, and exposed to the waste which invariably accompanies such an application of the produce of a country. So far, therefore, as the mere question of subsistence goes, it is, I apprehend, quite evident, that, at the present moment, Lord Wellington is in a much better situation than his adversary.

It is, however, argued, that the arrival of reinforcements, whether from the north under Drouet, or from the south under Mortier, may change the face of things, nay, may enable Massena to attack Lord Wellington's position with advantage, and compel his Lordship

Lordship to embark; or at all events, enable the French to extend their positions with security, and by occupying a larger portion of the country, to cover the formation of magazines and protect the regular transport of convoys. With regard to the first point, that of attacking Lord Wellington with advantage, I rather conceive that neither I nor those who censure, can speak with any certainty. In order to form a just estimate of the strength of a position, it is necessary to have the most accurate knowledge of its locality; of the number and nature of the roads by which it can be attacked; of the points which constitute its security, whether in front or on its flanks; of the number of men which are necessary for its defence, and of the num-

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ber and quality of those actually assembled in it. Upon these points, I cannot pretend to speak with accuracy; but it seems generally admitted, that it is a position of very great strength; and there needs no greater proof of this, than the sudden stop which it has put to the operations of the enemy, and the necessity under which he seems to labour of drawing reinforcements from other quarters: and with regard to the troops which are assembled in it, I think no doubt can exist of their excellent quality, and of their general competency to meet the enemy whenever a fit opportunity may be given them. With the example of Busaco before their eyes, every thing that valour can achieve may reasonably be expected in such a conflict: although, although, of course, the uncertainty which accompanies the events of war in general cannot be removed from this individual case. The reinforcements to which I have alluded, if they either join Marshal Massena or take up such positions in direct communication with him as may enable him to command a more extensive tract of country, will thus far furnish him with various advantages which he does not at present possess: but, unless they are of such strength as to enable him completely to repress the operations of the irregular force by which the French position is now so much harassed, and to drive Lord Wellington from the country, I confess I do not see how the conquest of Portugal can fairly be considered as achieved, and the professed object of Lord Wellington C 4

lington as defeated: and unless they enable the enemy, as before stated, to cover the formation of magazines and protect the transport of convoys, they will not relieve him from his embarrassments in this respect, which, on the contrary, will increase in proportion to the increased number of mouths to consume the existing resources. I shall not enter into a discussion of the more or less probability of Massena's being joined by reinforcements to any great amount, as I am willing to give those, whose arguments I am combating, the full advantage of their supposition upon this head. But it is not to be forgotten, that the supposed march of reinforcements from other quarters, amounts to a distinct admission, that the force originally destined for the conquest

of Portugal has been found, perhaps I should rather say made, unequal to the task; and we are, therefore, justified in concluding, that the calculations upon which Lord Wellington built his opinion of the defensibility of Portugal against that force were rational and sound: and further it is to be observed, that upon the supposition of the necessity of these reinforcements to enable. Massena completely to repress the operations of the Portuguese militia and peasantry, and to expel the British, every man, thus added to the French army, must be considered as subtracted from the offensive means of the enemy in Spain, and that therefore the maintenance of Lord Wellington's position will operate as a most important diversion in favour of that part of the peninsula.

sula, by detaining in front of Lisbon, in a state of comparative inactivity, and in a certain degree of deterioration, an immense French army, a large proportion of which might otherwise be employed, either in disarming and reducing to subjection the remainder of Portugal; in occupying and securing the north western provinces of Spain; in reducing the remaining fortresses of Catalonia; in making a decisive attack upon Valencia; or finally in supporting, and perhaps terminating successfully, the siege of Cadiz.

In drawing up this slight sketch of operations of the campaign in Portugal, and in making such observations as have occurred to me upon the subject, I have purposely abstained from entering upon the question of the general

neral policy of employing a British force in the peninsula, or of undertaking to officer and to pay a large proportion of the Portuguese army: these are questions which refer more particularly to the conduct of the government at home by whom they are decided, and, to what may be called, the politics of war. My object has in this instance been to do justice to a great officer, and to rescue his character from the insinuated and sarcastic censure of some, and the direct obloquy of others; and whilst attempting to moderate the extravagant expectations of the sanguine, to discountenance at the same time the apprehensions of the despondent. It is impossible for me to say how far I may have succeeded in these latter objects; but I hope I have have been able to shew that the conduct of Lord Wellington has been throughout consistent and systematic, that he foresaw, or at least acted as if he had foreseen, the course that the campaign would take, and that the relative situations in which the contending parties find themselves, are, with reference to the present campaign, as favourable to the English as distressing and discouraging to the French army.

How long we may be able to maintain a footing in the peninsula, to inspire confidence by our presence, and promote activity by our councils and our example, it is not for me, or I should think for any reasonable man, to venture to predict: but every hour that we do remain, every day by which the campaign is lengthened, give, I will not say, a greater chance merely, but a ground of more confident hope of final success. Austria was subdued in a month, Prussia in a day. For two years and a half the war in the peninsula has lasted, and Spain and Portugal are yet unconquered: such a contest in such a cause will not, I trust, be abandoned while the power of continuing it, in any degree and in any quarter, remains; and I am convinced that the conduct of Lord Wellington, not uniformly daring or uniformly defensive, but, enterprising or cautious as the various circumstances require, is that by which the peninsula is to be saved, if its salvation is within human power.

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Dec. 8th, 1810.

P. S. The foregoing observations were written before intelligence was received that Marshal Massena had retired from his advanced position in front of Lord Wellington, and had established himself at Santarem. It does not appear to me that this circumstance alters the view which I have endeavoured to give of the campaign; it, on the contrary, confirms (as far as it affects) the statements which I have made; but I do not, in the view which I am at this distance enabled to take of this event, think that I should be authorised in attributing to it such immediate and direct importance as the public feeling seems to have done—it is, perhaps, the commencement of occurrences

rences of great moment and value; but considered as a single portion of the campaign, I can venture to deduce from it nothing more, than that in the views and intentions with which Marshal Massena advanced to his position at Villa Franca, he has been deceived and foiled, and that the prudence and ability of Lord Wellington's arrangements are, to this point, confirmed by experience. The campaign, as at first contemplated, is at an end. Lord Wellington had taken up his position, and Massena, after pushing forward with every demonstration of a resolution to assail it, has not ventured upon the attempt; to this extent, therefore, his rapid advance seems to have been unavailing, and his designs appear to have failed .- What other course of proceeding,

proceeding, what new measures the French, and, in opposition to them, Lord Wellington may think fit to adopt, we have no means of knowing, and no grounds even of conjecturing; and as to the result, it would be falling into the very error which I have endeavoured to correct, if I were to suffer my entire confidence in Lord Wellington and his army, and my anxious feelings for my country's glory, to betray me into brilliant anticipations and predictions, the value of which, my knowledge of the actual state of the armies, and of the views of their leaders, under these new circumstances, would not enable me to substantiate.

THE END.

London: Printed by C. Roworth, Bell-yard, Temple-bar.























