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Walter Scott

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CHAPTER I.

British Expedition to Calabria, under Sir John Stuart.—Character of the People.—Opposed by General Regnier.—Battle of Maida, 4th July 1806.—Defeat of the French.—Calabria evacuated by the British.—Erroneous Commercial Views, and Military Plans, of the British Ministry.—Unsuccessful Attack on Buenos Ayres.—General Whitelocke—is cashiered.—Expedition against Turkey, and its Dependencies.—Admiral Duckworth's Squadron sent against Constantinople.—Passes and repasses the Dardanelles, without accomplishing anything.—Expedition against Alexandria.—It is occupied by General Fraser.—Rosetta attacked.—British troops defeated—and withdrawn from Egypt, September 1807.—Curacoa and Cape of Good Hope taken by England.—Assumption of more energetic Measures on the part of the British Government.—Expedition against Copenhagen—its Causes and Objects—its Citadel, Forts, and Fleet, surrendered to the British.—Effects of this Proceeding upon France—and Russia.—Coalition of France, Russia, Austria, and Prussia, against British Commerce.

THE treaty of Tilsit is an important point in the history of Napoleon. At no time did his power seem more steadfastly rooted, more feebly assailed. The

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canker-worm by which it was ultimately to be destroyed, was, like that of the forest-tree, entrenched and hidden in the bosom of him whom it was destined to sap and consume. It is a fitting time, therefore, to take a general survey of the internal character of his government, when the arrangements seemed to be at his own choice, and ere misfortune, hitherto a stranger, dictated his course of proceeding, which had before experienced no control save his own will. We propose, therefore, in the next chapter, to take a brief review of the character of Buonaparte's government during this the most flourishing period of his power.

But, ere doing so, we must shortly notice some circumstances, civil and military, which, though they had but slight immediate effect upon the general current of events, yet serve to illustrate the character of the parties concerned, and to explain future incidents which were followed by more important consequences. These we have hitherto omitted, in order to present, in a continuous and uninterrupted form, the history of the momentous warfare, in the course of which Prussia was for the time subjugated, and Russia so far tamed by the eventful struggle, as to be willing to embrace the relation of an ally to the conqueror, whose course she had proposed to stem and to repel.

Among these comparatively minor incidents, must be reckoned the attempt made by the British government to rescue the Calabrian dominions of the

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Neapolitan Bourbons from the intrusive government of Joseph Buonaparte. The character of the inhabitants of that mountainous country is well known. Bigots in their religion, and detesting a foreign yoke, as is usual with natives of a wild and almost lawless region; sudden in their passions, and readily having recourse to the sword, in revenge whether of public or private injury; enticed also by the prospect of occasional booty, and retaining a wild species of attachment to Ferdinand, whose manners and habits were popular with the Italians, and especially with those of the inferior order, the Calabrians were readily excited to take arms by the agents sent over to practise among them by the Sicilian court. Lawless at the same time, cruel in their mode of conducting war, and incapable of being subjected to discipline, the bands which they formed amongst themselves, acted rather in the manner, and upon the motives of banditti, than of patriots. They occasionally, and individually, showed much courage, and even a sort of instinctive skill, which taught them how to choose their ambushes, defend their passes, and thus maintain a sort of predatory war, in which the French sustained considerable losses. Yet if their efforts remained unassisted by some regular force, it was evident that these insurrectionary troops must be destroyed in detail by the disciplined and calculated exertions of the French soldiers. To prevent this, and to gratify, at the same time, the an-

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xious wishes of the Court of Palermo, Sir John Stuart, who commanded the British troops which had been sent to defend Sicily, undertook an expedition to the neighbouring shore of Italy, and disembarked in the Gulph of St Euphemia, near the frontier of Lower Calabria, in the beginning of July 1806, with something short of five thousand men.

The disembarkation was scarce made, ere the British commander learned that General Regnier, who commanded for Joseph Buonaparte in Calabria, had assembled a force nearly equal to his own, and had advanced to Maida, a town about ten miles distant from St Euphemia, with the purpose of giving him battle. Sir John Stuart lost no time in moving to meet him, and Regnier, confident in the numbers of his cavalry, the quality of his troops, and his own skill in tactics, abandoned a strong position on the further bank of the river Amata, and on the 4th July came down to meet the British in the open plain. Of all Buonaparte's generals, an Englishman would have desired, in especial, to be opposed to this leader, who had published a book on the evacuation of Egypt, in which he denied every claim on the part of the British to skill or courage, and imputed the loss of the province exclusively to the incapacity of Menou, under whom Regnier, the author, had served as second in command. He was now to try his own fate with the enemy, for whom he had expressed so much contempt.

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At nine in the morning, the two lines were opposite to each other, when the British light infantry brigade, forming the right of the advanced line, and the 1^{ere} Légère on the French left, a favourite regiment, found themselves confronted. As if by mutual consent, when at the distance of about one hundred yards, the opposed corps threw in two or three close fires reciprocally, and then rushed on to charge each other with the bayonet. The British commanding officer, perceiving that his men were embarrassed by the blankets which they carried at their backs, halted the line that they might throw them down. The French saw the pause, and taking it for the hesitation of fear, advanced with a quickened pace and loud acclamations. An officer, our informer, seeing their veteran appearance, moustached countenances, and regularity of order, could not forbear a feeling of anxiety as he glanced his eye along the British line, which consisted in a great measure of young and beardless recruits. But disembarrassed of their load, and receiving the order to advance, they cheered, and in their turn hastened towards the enemy with a rapid pace and levelled bayonets. The French officers were now seen encouraging their men, whose courage began to falter when they found they were to be the assailed party, not the assailants. Their line halted ; they could not be brought to advance by the utmost efforts of their officers, and when

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the British were within bayonet's length, they broke and ran; but too late for safety, for they were subjected to the most dreadful slaughter. An attempt made by Regnier to redeem the day with his cavalry, was totally unsuccessful. He was beaten on all points, and in such a manner as left it indisputable, that the British soldier, man to man, has a superiority over his enemy, similar to that which the British seaman possesses upon his peculiar element.

It would be in vain to inquire whether this superiority, which we do not hesitate to say has been made manifest, with very few exceptions, wherever the British have met foreign troops upon equal terms, arises from a stronger conformation of body, or a more determined turn of mind; but it seems certain that the British soldier, inferior to the Frenchman in general intelligence, and in individual acquaintance with the trade of war, has a decided advantage in the bloody shock of actual conflict, and especially when maintained by the bayonet, body to body. It is remarkable also, that the charm is not peculiar to any one of the three united nations, but is common to the natives of all, different as they are in habits and education. The Guards, supplied by the city of London, may be contrasted with a regiment of Irish recruited among their rich meadows, or a body of Scotch from their native wildernesses; and while it may be difficult to assign the palm to either over the other two, all are found to

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exhibit that species of dogged and desperate courage; which, without staying to measure force or calculate chances, rushes on the enemy as the bull-dog upon the bear. This great moral encouragement was the chief advantage derived from the battle of Maida; for such was the tumultuous, sanguinary, and unmanageable character of the Calabrian insurgents, that it was judged impossible to continue the war with such assistants. The *malaria* was also found to affect the British troops; and Sir John Stuart, re-embarking his little army, returned to Sicily, and the efforts of the British were confined to the preservation of that island. But the battle of Maida was valuable as a corollary to that of Alexandria. We have not learned whether General Regnier ever thought it equally worthy of a commentary.

The eyes of the best-informed men in Britain were now open to the disadvantageous and timid policy, of conducting this momentous war by petty expeditions and experimental armaments, too inadequate to the service to be productive of anything but disappointment. The paltry idea of making war for British objects, as it was called, that is, withholding from the general cause those efforts which might have saved our allies, and going in search of some petty object in which Britain might see an individual interest, was now universally acknowledged; although it became more difficult than ever to select points of attack where

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our limited means might command success. It was also pretty distinctly seen, that the plan of opening a market for British manufactures, by conquering distant and unhealthy provinces, was as idle as immoral. In the latter quality, it somewhat resembled the proceedings of the surgeon mentioned in Le Sage's satirical novel, who converted passengers into patients by a stroke of his poniard, and then hastened, in his medical capacity, to cure the wounds he had inflicted. In point of profit, we had frequently to regret, that the colonists whom we proposed to convert by force of arms into customers for British goods, were too rude to want, and too poor to pay for them. Nothing deceives itself so willingly as the love of gain. Our principal merchants and manufacturers, among other commercial visions, had imagined to themselves an unlimited market for British commodities, in the immense plains surrounding Buenos Ayres, which are in fact peopled by a sort of Christian savages called Guachos, whose principal furniture is the skulls of dead horses, whose only food is raw beef and water, whose sole employment is to catch wild cattle, by hampering them with a Guacho's noose, and whose chief amusement is to ride wild horses to death.* Unfortunately, they were

* See the very extraordinary account of the Pampas, published by Captain Head of the Engineers.

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found to prefer their national independence to cottons and muslins.

Two several attempts were made on this miserable country, and neither redounded to the honour or advantage of the British nation. Buenos Ayres was taken possession of by a handful of British troops on the 27th June 1806, who were attacked by the inhabitants and by a few Spanish troops; and, surrounded in the market place of the town, under a general and gallant fire, were compelled to lay down their arms and surrender prisoners of war. A small remnant of the invading forces retained possession of a town on the coast, called Maldonado. In October 1806 an expedition was sent out to reinforce this small body, and make some more material impression upon the continent of South America, which the nation were under the delusion of considering as a measure extremely to the advantage of British trade. Monte Video was taken, and a large body of troops, under command of General Whitelocke, a man of factitious reputation, and who had risen high in the army without having seen much service, marched against Buenos Ayres. This person proved both fool and coward. He pushed his columns of attack into the streets of Buenos Ayres, knowing that the flat roofs and terraces were manned by excellent though irregular marksmen; and, that the British might have no means of retaliation, they were not permitted to load their muskets,—as if stone walls could have been