

bank of the Adige, and inspiring them with his own spirit of enterprise, Alvinzi had taken his position on the left bank, nearly opposite to Verona. His army occupied a range of heights called Caldiero, on the left of which, and somewhat in the rear, is the little village of Arcola, situated among marshes, which extend around the foot of that eminence. Here the Austrian general had stationed himself, with a view, it may be supposed, to wait until Davidowich and his division should descend the right bank of the Adige, disquiet the French leader's position on that river, and give Alvinzi himself the opportunity of forcing a passage.

Buonaparte, with his usual rapidity of resolution, resolved to drive the Austrian from his position on Caldiero, before the arrival of Davidowich. But neither on this occasion was fortune propitious to him. A strong French division, under Massena, attacked the heights amid a storm of rain; but their most strenuous exertions proved completely unsuccessful, and left to the general only his usual mode of concealing a check, by railing at the elements. The situation of the French became critical, and what was worse, the soldiers perceived it, and complained that they had to sustain the whole burden of the war, had to encounter army after army, and must succumb at last under the renewed and unwearied efforts of Austria. Buonaparte parried these natural feelings as well as he could, promising that their conquest of Italy should be speedily sealed by the defeat of this Alvinzi; and he applied his whole genius to discover the means of bringing the war to an effective struggle, in which he confided that, in spite of numbers, his own talents, and the enterprising character of an army so often victorious, might assure him a favourable result. But it was no easy way to discover a mode of attacking with even plausible hopes of success. If he advanced northward on the right bank to seek out and destroy Davidowich, he must weaken his line on the Adige, by the troops withdrawn to effect that purpose; and during his absence, Alvinzi would probably force the passage of the river at some point, and thus have it in his power to relieve Mantua. The heights of Caldiero, occupied by the Austrian main body, and lying in his front, had, by dire experiment proved impregnable. In these doubtful circumstances, the bold scheme occurred to the French general, that the position of Caldiero, though it could not be stormed, might be turned, and that by possessing himself of the village of Arcola, which lies to the left, and in the rear of Caldiero, the Austrians might be compelled to fight to a disadvantage. But the idea of attacking Arcola was one which would scarce have occurred to any general save Buonaparte.

Arcola is situated upon a small stream called the Alpon, which, as already hinted, finds its way into the Adige, through a wilderness of marshes, intersected with ditches, and traversed by dikes in various directions. In case of an unsuccessful attack, the assailants were like to be totally cut off in the swamps. Then to debouche from Verona, and move in the direction of Arcola, would have put Alvinzi and his whole army on their guard. Secrecy and celerity are the soul of enterprise. All these difficulties gave way before Napoleon's genius.

Verona, it must be remembered, is on the left bank of the Adige,—on the same with the point which was the object of Buonaparte's attack. At nightfall the whole forces of Verona were under arms; and leaving fifteen hundred men under Kilmaine to defend the place from any assault, with strict orders to secure the gates and prevent all communication of his nocturnal expedition to the enemy, Buonaparte commenced his march at first to the rear, in the direction of Peschiera; which seemed to imply that his resolution was at length taken to resign the hopes of gaining Mantua, and perhaps to abandon Italy. The silence with which the march was conducted, the absence of all the usual rumours which used in the French army to precede a battle, and the discouraging situation of affairs, appeared to presage the same issue. But after the troops had marched a little way in this direction, the heads of columns were wheeled to the left, out of the line of retreat, and descended the Adige as far as Roncon, which they reached before day. Here a bridge had been prepared, by which they passed over the river, and were placed on

the same bank with Arcola, the object of their attack, and lower than the heights of Caldiero.

There were three causeways by which the marsh of Arcola is traversed—each was occupied by a French column. The central column moved on the causeway which led to the village so named. The dikes and causeways were not defended, but Arcola and its bridge were protected by two battalions of Croats with two pieces of cannon, which were placed in a position to enfilade the causeway. These received the French column with so heavy a fire on its flank, that it fell back in disorder. Augereau rushed forward upon the bridge with his chosen grenadiers; but, enveloped as they were in a destructive fire, they were driven back on the main body.

Alvinzi, who conceived it only an affair of light troops, sent however forces into the marsh by means of the dikes which traversed them, to drive out the French. These were checked by finding that they were to oppose the strong columns of infantry; yet the battle continued with unabated vigour. It was essential to Buonaparte's plan that Arcola should be carried; but the fire continued tremendous. At length, to animate his soldiers to a final exertion, he caught a stand of colours, rushed on the bridge, and planted them there with his own hand. A fresh body of Austrians arrived at that moment, and the fire on flank blazed more destructively than ever. The rear of the French column fell back; the leading files, finding themselves unsupported, gave way, but, still careful of their general, bore him back in their arms through the dead and dying, the fire and the smoke. In the confusion, he was at length pushed into the marsh. The Austrians were already between him and his own troops, and he must have perished or been taken, had not the grenadiers perceived his danger. The cry instantly arose,—“Forward—forward—save the general!” Their love to Buonaparte's person did more than even his commands and example had been able to accomplish. They returned to the charge, and at length pushed the Austrians out of the village; but not till the appearance of a French corps under general Guieux had turned the position, and he had thrown himself in the rear of it. These succours had passed to the ferry of Alborado, and the French remained in possession of the long-contested village. It was at the moment a place of the greatest importance; for the possession of it would have enabled Buonaparte, had the Austrians remained in their position, to operate on their communications with the Brenta, interpose between Alvinzi and his reserves, and destroy his park of artillery. But the risk was avoided by the timely caution of the Austrian field-marshal.

Alvinzi was no sooner aware that a great division of the French army was in his rear, than, without allowing them time for farther operations, he instantly broke up his position on Caldiero, and evacuated these heights by a steady and orderly retreat. Buonaparte had the mortification to see the Austrians effect this manœuvre by crossing a bridge in their rear over the Alpon, and which could he have occupied, as was his purpose, he might have rendered their retreat impossible, or at least disastrous. As matters stood, however, the village of Arcola came to lose its consequence as a position, since, after Alvinzi's retreat, it was no longer in the rear, but in the front of the enemy. Buonaparte remembered he had enemies on the right as well as the left of the Adige; and that Davidowich might be once more routing Vau-bois, while he was too far advanced to afford him assistance. He therefore evacuated Arcola, and the village of Porcil, situated near it, and retreating to Ronco, recrossed the river, leaving only two demi-brigades in advance upon the left bank. The first battle of Arcola, famous for the obstinacy with which it was disputed, and the number of brave officers and men who fell, was thus attended with no decisive result. But it had checked the inclination of Alvinzi to advance on Verona—it had delayed all communication between his army and that of the Tyrol—above all, it had renewed the Austrians' apprehensions of the skill of Buonaparte and the bravery of his troops, and restored to the French soldiery the usual confidence of their national character.

Buonaparte remained stationary at Ronco until next morning at five o'clock, by which time he received intelligence that Davidowich had lain quiet in his former position; that he had no cause to be alarmed for Vau-bois's safety, and might therefore operate in security against Alvinzi. This was rendered the more easy (16th of November) as the Austrian general, not aware of Buonaparte's having halted his army at Ronco, imagined he was on his march to concentrate the forces nearer Mantua, and hastened therefore to overwhelm the rear-guard, whom he expected to find at the ferry. Buonaparte spared them the trouble of a close advance to the Adige. He again crossed to the left side, and again advanced his columns upon the dikes and causeways which traversed the marshes of Arcola. On such ground, where it was impossible to assign to the columns more breadth than the causeways could accommodate, the victorious soldiers of France had great advantage over the recent levies of Austria; for though the latter might be superior in number, on the whole, success must in such a case depend on the personal superiority of the front or leading files only. The French, therefore, had the first advantage, and drove back the Austrians upon the village of Arcola; but here, as on the former day, Alvinzi constituted his principal point of defence, and maintained it with the utmost obstinacy. After having repeatedly failed when attacking in front a post so difficult of approach, Napoleon endeavoured to turn the position by crossing the little river Alpon, near its union with the Adige. He attempted to effect a passage by means of fascines, but unsuccessfully; and the night approached without any thing effectual being decided. Both parties drew off, the French to Ronco, where they recrossed the Adige; the Austrians to a position behind the well-contested village of Arcola. The battle of the 16th of November was thus far favourable to the French, that they had driven back the Austrians, and made many prisoners, in the commencement of the day; but they had also lost many men; and Napoleon, if he had gained ground in the day, was glad to return to his position at night, lest Davidowich, by the defeat of Vau-bois, might either relieve Mantua, or move on Verona. The 17th was to be a day more decisive.

The field of battle and the preliminary manœuvres were much the same as on the preceding day; but those of the French were nearly disconcerted by the sinking of one of the boats which constituted their bridge over the Adige. The Austrians instantly advanced on the demi-brigade, which had been stationed on the left bank to defend the bridge. But the French, having repaired the damage, advanced in their turn, and compelled the Austrians to retreat upon the marsh. Massena directed his attack on Porcil—general Robert pressed forward on Arcola. But it was at the point where he wished to cross the Alpon that Buonaparte chiefly desired to attain a decided superiority; and in order to win it, he added stratagem to audacity. Observing one of his columns repulsed, and retreating along the causeway, he placed the 32d regiment in ambush in a thicket of willows which bordered the rivulet, and saluting the pursuing enemy with a close, heavy, and unexpected fire, instantly rushed to close with the bayonet, and attacking the flank of a column of nearly three thousand Croats, forced them into the marsh, where most of them perished. It was now that, after a calculation of the losses sustained by the enemy, Napoleon conceived their numerical superiority so far diminished, and their spirit so much broken, that he need no longer confine his operations to the dikes, but meet his enemy on the firm plain which extended beyond the Alpon. He passed the brook by means of a temporary bridge which had been prepared during night; and the battle raged as fiercely on the dry level, as it had done on the dikes and among the marshes.

The Austrians fought with resolution, the rather that their left, though stationed on dry ground, was secured by a marsh which Buonaparte had no means of turning. But though this was the case, Napoleon contrived to gain his point by impressing on the enemy an idea that he had actually accomplished that which he had no means of doing. This he effected by sending a

daring officer, with about thirty of the guides (his own body-guards they may be called) with four trumpets; and directing these determined cavaliers to charge, and the trumpets to sound, as if a large body of horse had crossed the marsh. Augereau attacked the Austrian left at the same moment; and a fresh body of troops, advancing from Legnago, compelled them to retreat, but not to fly. Alvinzi was now compelled to give way, and commence his retreat on Montebello. He disposed seven thousand men in echellons to cover this movement, which was accomplished without very much loss; but his ranks had been much thinned by the slaughter of the three battles of Arcola. Eight thousand men has been stated as the amount of his losses. The French, who made so many and so sanguinary assaults upon the villages, must also have suffered a great deal. Buonaparte acknowledges this in energetic terms. "Never," he writes to Carnot, "was field of battle so disputed. I have scarce any generals remaining.—I can assure you that the victory could not have been gained at a cheaper expense. The enemy were numerous, and desperately resolute." The truth is, that Buonaparte's mode of striking terror by these bloody and desperate charges, in front upon strong positions, was a blemish in his system. They cost many men, and were not uniformly successful. That of Arcola was found a vain waste of blood, till science was employed instead of main force, when the position was turned by Guieux on the first day; on the third, by the troops that crossed the Alpon.

The tardy conduct of Davidowich, during these three undecided days of slaughterous struggle, is worthy of notice and censure. It would appear, that from the 10th of November that general had it in his power to attack the division which he had hitherto driven before him, and that he had delayed doing so till the 16th; and on the 18th, just the day after Alvinzi had made his retreat, he approached Verona on the right bank. Had these movements taken place before Alvinzi's defeat, or even during any of the three days preceding, when the French were engaged before Arcola, the consequences must have been very serious. Finding, however, that Alvinzi had retreated, Davidowich followed the same course, and withdrew into the mountains, not much annoyed by the French, who respected the character of his army, which had been repeatedly victorious, and felt the weakness incident to their own late losses. Another incidental circumstance tends equally strong to mark the want of concert and communication among the Austrian generals. Wurmser, who had remained quiet in Mantua during all the time when Alvinzi and Davidowich were in the neighbourhood, made a vigorous sally on the 23d of November; when his doing so was of little consequence, since he could not be supported.

Thus ended the fourth campaign, undertaken for the Austrian possessions in Italy. The consequences were not so decidedly in Buonaparte's favour as those of the three former. Mantua, it is true, had received no relief; and so far the principal object of the Austrians had miscarried. But Wurmser was of a temper to continue the defence till the last moment, and had already provided for a longer defence than the French counted upon, by curtailing the rations of the garrison. The armies of Friuli and the Tyrol had also, since the last campaign, retained possession of Bassano and Trent, and removed the French from the mountains through which access is gained to the Austrian hereditary dominions. Neither had Alvinzi suffered any such heavy defeat as his predecessors Beaulieu or Wurmser; while Davidowich, on the contrary, was uniformly successful, had he known how to avail himself of his victories. Still the Austrians were not likely, till reinforced again, to interrupt Buonaparte's quiet possession of Lombardy.