

ING 014

John Wilson Croker

The Battles of Talavera

[selecciones]

1809

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PROYECTO OLE 11
ARCHIVO ELECTRÓNICO DE FUENTES PRIMARIAS
POESÍA PATRIÓTICA PROESPAÑOLA EN INGLÉS, FRANCÉS, ALEMÁN Y PORTUGUÉS (1808-1814)
TEXTO INDIVIDUAL DE OBRA ING 014

John Wilson Croker, *The Battles of Talavera* (1809)

*Dicam insigne, recens, adhuc
Indictum ore alio.*

I.

'Twas dark; from every mountain head
The sunny smile of heaven had fled,
And evening, over hill and dale
Dropt, with the dew, her shadowy veil;
In fabled Teio's darkening tide
 Was quenched the golden ray;
Silent, the silent stream beside,
Three gallant people's hope and pride,
 Three gallant armies lay.
France, every nation's foe, is there,
And Albion's sons her red cross bear,
With Spain's young Liberty to share
 The patriot array,
Which, spurning the oppressor's chain,
Springs arm'd, from every hill and plain
From ocean to the eastern main---
 From Seville to Biscaye.

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All, from the dawn till even-tide,
The fortune of the field had tried
 In loose but bloody fray;
And now with thoughts of dubious fate
Feverish and weary, they await
 A fiercer, bloodier day.

II.

Fraternal France's chosen bands
He of the stolen crown commands,
And on Alberche's hither sands
 Pitches his tents to-night:
While, Talavera's wall between
And olive groves and gardens green,
 Spain quarters on the right;
All scatter'd in the open air
In deep repose; save here and there,
 Pondering to-morrow's fight,
A spearman, in his midnight prayer,
Invokes our Blessed Lady's care
 And good Saint James's might.
Thence to the left, across the plain
 And on the neighbouring height,
The British bands, a watchful train,
Their wide and warded line maintain,
Fronting the east, as if to gain
 The earliest glimpse of light.

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XV.

But not to that tremendous hour
Does Heaven remit its torturing power;
And ev'n thy tyrant heart shall feel,
That *here*---that *now*---there's vengeance still!
In vain, thy gorgeous state would hide
Of conscious fear and wounded pride,
 The self-inflicted pang;---
Though monarchs to thy car be tied,
Though over half the world beside,
 Thy chains of conquest clang,---
Britain and Spain, erect and proud,
Defy thee to the strife aloud,
And wave to Europe's servile crowd,
 The flag of liberty:
In it, thou seest thy glory's shroud;
It's shadow, like a thunder cloud,
 O'erhangs thy destiny.

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XIX.

In front of Talavera's wall,
And near the confluent streams, the Gaul
His royal banner rears to sight,
With all the borrow'd blazon bright
 Of Leon and Castille;
And seems to meditate a fight

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That Spain alone shall feel.
Oh, vain pretence ! to Wellesley's eyes,
 As pervious as the air !
He knows, that while the red cross flies,
From the strong covert, where she lies
Entrench'd and sheltered, Spain defies
 The utmost France can dare--
That Britain, on her blood-stained hill,
 The brunt of fight must bear--
And France, though baffled thrice, will still
Strain all her force, exhaust her skill,
 To plant her eagles there;
Which soon, from that commanding height
Would speed their desolating flight,
And, sweeping o'er the scattered plain,
The hopes of England and of Spain
 With iron talon tear.

...

XXI.

Belluno sees the coming storm,
 And feels the instant need--
' Break up the line, the column form,
 ' And break and form with speed,
' Or under Britain's thundering arm
 ' In rout and ruin bleed !'
Quick, as upon the sea-beat sands
Vanish the works of childish hands,
 The lengthened lines are gone,

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And broken into nimble bands

Across the plain they run:

Spur, Britain, spur thy foaming horse,

'O'ertake them in their scatter'd course,

'And sweep them from the land !'

She spurs, she flies; in vain, in vain--

Already they have pass'd the plain,

And now the broken ground they gain,

And now, a column, stand !

'Rein up thy courser, Britain, rein'!--

But who the tempest can restrain?

The mountain flood command?

Down the ravine, with hideous crash,

Headlong the foremost squadrons dash,

And many a soldier, many a steed

Crush'd in the dire confusion bleed.

The rest, as ruin fills the trench,

Pass clear, and on the column'd French,

A broken and tumultuous throng,

With glorious rashness pour along,

Too prodigal of life;

And they had died, ay every one,

But Wellesley cries, 'On, Anson, on,

'Langworth, and Albuquerque and Payne,

'Lead Britain, Hanover, and Spain,

'And turn the unequal strife.'

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XXVIII.

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In vain.--New hopes and fresher force
Inspirit France, and urge her course,
A torrent, rapid, wild, and hoarse,
 On Britain's wavering train.
As when, before the wintery skies,
The struggling forests sink and rise,
 And rise and sink again,
While the gale scatters as it flies
 Their ruins o'er the plain;
Before the tempest of her foes,
So England sank, and England rose,
And, though still rooted in the vale,
Strew'd her rent branches on the gale.
Then, Wellesley! on thy tortured thought
With ripening hopes of glory fraught,
 What honest anguish crost !
Oh, how thy generous bosom burn'd,
To see the tide of victory turn'd,
 And Spain and England lost !---
Lost--but that, as the peril great
And rising with the storms of fate,
 His rapid genius soars,
Sees, at a glance, his whole resource,
Drains from each stronger point its force,
 And on the weaker pours:
Present where'er his soldiers bleed,
 He rushes thro' the fray,
And, (so the doubtful chances need,)
In high emprise and desperate deed,
 Squanders himself away !

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XXXII.

From Talavera's wall and tower

And from the mountain's height,

Where they had stood for many an hour

To view the varying fight,

Burghers and peasants in amaze

Behold their groves and vineyards blaze:

Calm they had view'd the bloody fray,

And little thought that France's groan

And England's sigh, ere close of day,

Should mingle with their own !

But ah ! far other cries than these

Are wafted on the dismal breeze--

Groans, not the wounded's lingering groan--

Shrieks, not the shriek of death alone--

But groan, and shriek, and yell,

Of terror, torture, and despair;

Such as 'twould chill the heart to hear

And freeze the tongue to tell--

When to the very field of fight,

Dreadful alike in sound and sight,

The conflagration spread,

Involving in its fiery wave

The brave and reliques of the brave--

The dying and the dead!