

CHAP.

XLI.

1812.

June.

colleagues, thinking as he did, though not included in it, that the description which had been given of them was unjust, he must have abandoned every sense of duty if he had not been anxious to repel the charge." . . . Having then touched upon Earl Moira's negotiation with the two lords, and observed that the question concerning the household had been taken up in a tone which the country would never countenance in those who approached the throne, he concluded thus : . . . " And now all I have to say for ministers is, that they claim the constitutional support of Parliament till their actions seem to speak them unworthy of it ; and though the present government may not possess within itself all those attributes which we have heard given to broad and extended administrations, they have at least one recommendation to public confidence (and it is not a small one), that they have no disunion among themselves. We have no private ends to answer ; we are anxious to serve our country, to do our best, and to submit our conduct to the judgement of Parliament."

With these remarkable circumstances was that ministry formed, under whose administration the French were beaten out of Spain, and Buonaparte's empire overthrown. For the second time since the commencement of the war it had rested with the leaders of opposition whether or not they should take the government into their own hands ; and for the second time, by an overweening opinion of their own importance, and a most undue depreciation of those whom they expected to displace, they disappointed their own hopes, and in an equal degree the apprehensions of the nation. The sound part of the public, and they were a large majority, regarded the result with as much satisfaction as they had felt upon the recapture of Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz ; they looked upon it as tantamount to a great victory over the enemy, and the enemy would indeed have

seen in a contrary result the surest presage of their own success: for what more could the French ministers desire than that the British government should be conducted by men who from the beginning of the war in Spain up to this crisis had pronounced their own cause to be hopeless? That danger was no longer to be feared; and although the cabinet had lost its ablest member in Mr. Perceval . . the only member who united in himself powerful ability with sound judgement, and strength of character with strength of principle, and who commanded in an equal degree the respect of his opponents and the confidence of his friends, the opposition had lost more in the exposure of their temper and the total frustration of their hopes, which was as much the proper as the necessary consequence.

The only unfortunate circumstance in these transactions was, that Marquis Wellesley should have been excluded, or rather should have excluded himself, from a place in the ministry: whatever his own expectations might have been, his friends had expected to see him at its head; and had Lord Wellington been supplied with such reinforcements as in that event might have been looked for, it was believed in the army that in the course of the year he would have driven the French out of Spain. The Spanish Government was at this time little satisfied with Great Britain, because greater pecuniary assistance was not afforded them from resources which they supposed to be infinite. It was indeed the opinion of those whose opportunities of information enabled them to form a just opinion upon the subject, that the Spaniards could make no efficient exertion unless they were aided with two millions a year in money and one in provisions, which might be procured at Cadiz from America and from the Mediterranean by bills on England: but the British Government consented only to give £600,000 in the course of the current year, with arms and clothing for 100,000 men; at length it

CHAP.
XLI.

1812.

May.

*Pecuniary
assistance
to the Spa-
niards.*

CHAP. agreed that the money should be one million. The Spaniards
 XLI. did not remember with how little wisdom and effect the large
 1812. supplies which they had hitherto received had been expended ;
 and in England sufficient allowance was not made for the pe-
 culiar difficulties in which Spain was placed ; and while the
 errors of its successive governments were strongly perceived,
 sufficient credit was not given for the national spirit which
 had displayed itself with such unexampled and invincible en-
 durance.

May.

*Proposal
 concerning
 Spanish
 troops.*

Some persons there were who were of opinion that no sure progress could be made towards the deliverance of Spain unless a Spanish army were created on whose operations Lord Wellington could calculate and rely. But the opinion was abandoned upon farther knowledge of the Spaniards: the officers, with some rare and noble exceptions, were too ignorant, too idle, too prejudiced, and too proud, to receive instruction from their allies ; and British officers could not be introduced in any useful number, for this would have offended the national pride. It was suggested by Mr. Tupper, who in his station as consul at Valencia had acted with great zeal and ability in the common cause, that the foreign regiments in the Spanish service might be taken into English pay, and officered by British officers. They still retained their foreign names, and were under foreign officers, but were chiefly composed of Spanish recruits : this, therefore, he argued, might be done without wounding the pride of the Spaniards, offending their prejudices, or injuring the interests of any class of men ; whereas to place the Spanish army under the same subordination as the Portugueze, though the people, and especially the soldiers themselves, might like it, must be impossible, so great would be the opposition of the officers and of all the higher classes. This suggestion, for whatever reason, was either not entertained, or not found practicable ; and the

only arrangement made at this time was, that the Spaniards allowed 5,000 men to be inlisted and incorporated with the allies. Some hope, however, was entertained from a diversion to be made on the eastern coast by a British force from Sicily in conjunction with a Spanish division, which by General Whittingham's recommendation had been formed in Majorca, and trained there under his directions. This force it was thought, if its operations were well planned and vigorously pursued, might compel the French to withdraw from the southward; and engaged as it was now evident that Buonaparte would be in his Russian war, the deliverance of Spain might be hoped for as now not long to be delayed.

CHAP.
XLI.
1812.

May.
*Plan of a
diversion
from Sicily.*

At this time, when nothing could be expected from the Spanish armies, the Guerrillas acted in larger bodies than before, and engaged in more difficult enterprises than they had yet undertaken. Duran having obtained a plan of the fortifications of Soria from an architect who resided there, resolved upon attacking that city as an important post, from whence the French commanded a considerable extent of country. Soria, which stands on the Douro, near the supposed site of Numantia, and contained about 1,100 families in the middle of the last century, is surrounded by an old wall eighteen feet in height and six in thickness, to which some works adapted to a more modern art of war had been added; the suburb also had been fortified, and the castle strengthened. He approached the city by a circuitous route (during a most tempestuous night of wind and snow, which froze as it fell,) and reaching it at daybreak scaled the walls, forced the suburb, and obtained possession of the city. The enemy retired into the castle, and Duran prepared to besiege it, setting fire to four convents to clear the way for his operations.

Duran enters Soria.

March 18.

The adventurers had arrived in fortunate time, for the morrow

CHAP. was St. Joseph's day, when a ball and supper were to have been
 XLI. given in honour of the Intruder for his name's sake, and the
 1812. delicacies which had been prepared for this occasion served to
 regale these unexpected and unwelcome visiters. Battering-
 rams were employed with great effect against the old walls, that
 the city might no longer afford protection to the French; the
 public money was seized, great quantities of grain and biscuit
 dispatched by all the means of transport which could be found,
 and a contribution levied upon the inhabitants, for hitherto they
 had contributed nothing to the national troops, being under the
 yoke of the French, and thinking it evil enough to pay what
 the invaders exacted; but the Guerrillas admitted of no such ex-
 cuse: they supposed the people to be rich because it was a trading
 city, and many who had formerly been rich proprietors dwelt
 there; the contribution, therefore, was not likely to be lightly
 imposed. Duran enrolled also such men as he thought fit for
 service, ordered others who might have been serviceable to the
 enemy to leave the city, and retreated himself without loss,
 when a detachment arrived from Aranda to the succour of the
 garrison.

*Members of
 the Junta
 of Burgos
 seized by
 the French
 and put to
 death.*

March 21.

This enterprise led to a tragedy characteristic of the spirit in which the war was carried on on both sides. The French, who had come in time to save the castle of Soria, obtained intelligence that the Junta of Burgos were in a village called Grado; and there under the guidance of a Spanish traitor, Moreno by name, a party of 450 horse, making a march of fourteen leagues in less than four-and-twenty hours, surprised them early in the morning. Some twenty soldiers with their commander were found fast asleep, and made prisoners, as were three members of the Junta and the secretary of the Intendency: but more persons escaped than were taken, though the enemy set every house on fire, with the intention of burning those who might

have hidden themselves. As soon as the news was known, Duran and the Junta of Soria sent to the French commander in that city, reminding him that the prisoners taken there had been treated with humanity, and threatening reprisals if the persons who had now been captured should be put to death. This was of no avail. The vice-president of the Junta, D. Pedro Gordo, who was the parochial priest of Santibañez, was inhumanly scourged by Moreno, . . . perhaps from some impulse of private enmity: the prisoners were then conducted to Aranda, from whence the soldiers contrived to effect their escape. Navas, the secretary of Gordo, and the two other members of the Junta, D. Jose Ortiz de Covarrubios, and D. Eulogio Jose de Muro, with a young lad, son of the former, were sent in irons to Soria, there to be tried by the criminal Junta of that city. The trial, which took place during the night, occupied five hours, all the formalities of justice being observed; and the boy, whom because of his youth it would have been monstrous to condemn, was acquitted; the other four were sentenced to death, and four priests were ordered immediately to attend them; but no more time was allowed than was necessary for bringing together and forming the soldiers who were to conduct them to the place of execution.

The different behaviour of the sufferers was such as deeply to affect the spectators. Ortiz was greatly moved at the thought of leaving his son fatherless and destitute; but overcoming that emotion with a Spaniard's feeling, he commended the boy to God as the orphan's Father, and called upon the Lord to receive his soul as a victim for his religion and his country. The priest held a crucifix in one hand as he went to execution, and beat his breast incessantly with the other; and, while tears of ardent devotion streamed down his cheeks, implored with a loud voice forgiveness for his own sins and for those of the people.

CHAP.
XLI.

1812.

March.

April 2.

*Circumstances
of the execution.*

CHAP. Muro, who was a much younger man than either, was of a weak
XLI. constitution, still further weakened by the fatigues he had un-
1812. dergone in the performance of his duties ; so that what with ill
April. treatment, and what he had suffered during twelve days' imprison-
ment, there seemed to be an entire prostration of his strength :
faintings and cold sweats succeeded each other, and it was
thought he would expire before he could reach the place where
he was to be put to death. He had asked earnestly for a cru-
cifix : the priest who attended him not knowing for what service
he had been summoned had improvidently left his house without
one ; he gave him therefore in its stead a rosary, with a medal
attached to it, on which was the image of Our Lady of the
Pillar. Muro had studied in the university of Zaragoza, where
it is said he had never omitted for a single day to visit and
adore the tutelary idol of that city ; and this trifling circum-
stance, which at any other time would have appeared to him
light as air, acted upon him now in a manner that might seem
miraculous or incredible to those who cannot comprehend the
force of imagination and the strength of a believing mind ;
for no sooner had he seen what image the medal bore, than, as
if by an influx of divine support, he put off all weakness, and
proceeded to the place of death with a firm step, and a cheerful
countenance, and ejaculations of jubilant devotion. When they
came to the foot of the hill on the top of which they were to
suffer, " Up, brothers !" he exclaimed, " up ! let us ascend this
our Mount Calvary, where it is vouchsafed to us that we should
imitate our Redeemer ! I pray and trust that this hour our
offences shall be blotted out by virtue of the blood which on his
holy Calvary he shed for our sins." In this spirit he knelt down
upon the fatal spot, raised his eyes to heaven, and presented his
breast to the soldiers. The Spaniards compared the circum-
stances of this man's death with what the French themselves

had related of Marshal Lasnes, how after he had received his mortal wound, a visit from Buonaparte comforted and for a while revived him: "Let patron," said they, "be compared with patron, client with client, and cause with cause!"

The bodies of these victims were suspended from the gallows till the following day, when the French gave orders that they should be taken down and buried. But the execution had been an act of impolitic severity: after Duran's recent visit, the national cause would not have been popular in Soria, unless the national feeling had been thus provoked; and that feeling was now manifested in a manner which the invaders had not looked for. The clergy, the nobles, the different brotherhoods of the city, and the people assembled: the bodies were carried to the church of St. Salvador in procession, with a long line of tapers, and a most numerous attendance; they were then dressed in grave-clothes with becoming decency, that of the priest in his sacerdotal habits. So public and ostentatious a funeral was considered by the French an insult to their authority; soldiers, therefore, were sent to interrupt it, and some of the attendants were compelled to carry the bodies back to the gallows and hang them there again, the priest in his alb, the others in their shrouds; there they remained many days, and what the birds and the dogs had left was then buried at the foot of the gallows.

When D. Jose O'Donell, who commanded what was called the 2nd and 3rd army then in Murcia, received official intelligence of these executions, he wrote to Duran, as acting commander in Aragon and Soria, and instructed him to put to death ten prisoners, without distinction of rank, for each of the four victims, first apprising the nearest French commandant that he had received these orders, and should act upon them unless such reparation were made as might be deemed propor-

CHAP.
XLI.
1812.

April.
*Treatment
of their
bodies.*

*Retaliatory
executions.*

CHAP. XLII.
 1812.
 April.

tionate to the offence. Without waiting for such instructions, the Merino had exacted vengeance upon a larger scale. Having defeated a considerable body of the French who had marched from Aranda to collect requisitions, killed and wounded some 150 and taken about 500 prisoners, he put 110 of them to death, twenty of these being in reprisals for each member of the Junta of Burgos ; the others, at the rate of ten for each of his own people whom the French had executed. The other prisoners were marched into Asturias where opportunity might be found for embarking them ; but all the officers, twelve in number, including the lieutenant-colonel, their commander, were reserved to be shot unless General Rey, who commanded at Burgos, would rescue them from that fate by delivering the traitor Moreno into the Merino's hands. The unhappy prisoners are said to have addressed a letter to Rey, entreating him to save their lives by complying with this proposal, for they well knew, that in these cases the Spaniards never failed to execute what they threatened : the issue has not been related, but may easily be guessed, as it was scarcely possible that the French commander should so far break his faith with a Spaniard in the Intruder's service as to deliver him to certain death.

El Manco.

There were no persons whom the Spaniards regarded with such hatred as those who had forsaken the national cause, and entered into the Intruder's service. Albuir, known as a Guerrilla chief by the name of El Manco, had taken this course, and became therefore a special object of vengeance to his countrymen : it is the only instance of any man who had acquired celebrity as a Guerrillero becoming a traitor, while in the officers of the army such cases were not unfrequent : this was because the regular officers were men, who having entered the service either as a matter of course or of compulsion, felt severely the poverty of the government, and often had little else