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the interior of Spain, though fleets with troops on board, to hover about the coast, and take advantage of every favourable opportunity, might be of essential service. We had injured our allies instead of serving them. We had forced the Junta of Seville to abandon the excellent system of defence which they had arranged, and, by sending an army into the heart of the country, compelled them to engage in pitched battles with regular troops. Care must now be taken not to waste our resources in Quixotic schemes which it was impossible to accomplish. Our army, brave as it was, well-disciplined, and capable of doing every thing which men could be expected to perform, would find employment enough in securing our own defence. If the country was to be saved, its salvation could alone be effected by maintaining a force upon a scale commensurate with the increasing dangers of our situation. But, said he, I have no hesitation in declaring it to be my most decided opinion, that if the system hitherto acted upon be farther pursued, and the whole armed force of the country sent into the interior of Spain, the destruction of this monarchy is inevitable; and that we shall soon be reduced to the same condition with Prussia and the conquered states of the continent. To these speakers it was replied by the Home Secretary, who had now upon his father's death become Earl of Liverpool, that it would ill become us to be dismayed by those reverses which were from the beginning to be expected, and to renounce that system of support to which the nation was solemnly pledged, and in which those very reverses made it a more sacred duty to persevere. He entreated those who were inclined to despond that they would call to mind the lessons of history. There it would be found, that nations, after maintaining struggles for ten or twenty years, in the course of which they had been almost uniformly worsted in battle, had eventually succeeded in securing the object for which they strove. It was

*Earl of Liverpool.*



difficult to conceive any situation which would better warrant hopes of ultimate success than that of Spain. The people were unanimous in their resistance to the invader; and it was the only instance since the French revolution in which a whole people had taken up arms in their own defence. The territory of Spain was as large as that of France within its ancient limits, and the country possessed many local advantages for defence, . . . advantages, the value of which the Spanish history in former times ought to teach us duly to appreciate. The cause itself was most interesting to the best feelings of the human mind: it offered the last chance of salvation to the continent of Europe; and if it were considered in a selfish and narrower point of view, our own immediate security was in some degree involved in its fate. Was there then nothing to be risked in support of a generous ally? . . . nothing for the re-establishment of the general tranquillity? . . . nothing for our own safety and independence?

The opposition in the Lower House betrayed a wish to shake off the Spaniards and withdraw from the contest in whatever manner we could. Never, said Mr. Ponsonby, since Great Britain attained its present rank, has its public force been directed with so little skill, so little foresight, or so little success; though, in the expenditure of public money, he believed none would accuse his Majesty's counsellors with ever having been wanting in vigour. It was their duty now to examine whether they ought to risk an army in Spain, or confine their assistance to supplies. Elizabeth, under circumstances sufficiently like the present, took care to possess cautionary towns, and thereby assured herself of a retreat, and gained a safe point whither to send reinforcements, as well as a security that the United Provinces should not abandon her in the contest wherein they were engaged. He should not indeed think of abandoning the Spaniards in the hour of misfortune, but he could not admit that the present obligations were to be considered in the light of a solemn

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*Mr. Ponsonby.*



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treaty; they had been entered into in a moment of hurry and precipitation; they had not been laid before Parliament, and were therefore unauthorized by it, and Parliament might approve or disapprove, grant or refuse the supplies for carrying them into effect. Mr. Whitbread declared that if the recent disasters should appear to have proceeded from the misconduct of ministers, the House ought to demand condign punishment on their heads. It was now doubtful whether we had not been proceeding upon false information both with respect to Spain and Portugal. Were our troops agreeable to the people of Portugal? or were we not obliged to keep a certain force there for the purpose of keeping that people quiet, that is, to strike terror into our friends instead of our enemies? Were our troops, or were they not, welcome to the people of Spain? He had reason to doubt that fact. He was fearful that a multitude of Spaniards wished success to Buonaparte rather than to us. Although we must condemn the injustice of Buonaparte in his attack upon Spain, yet his measures were extremely judicious. He abolished the Inquisition, feudal rights, and unequal taxation. This was certainly holding out some temptation to the people to acquiesce in the changes which he wished to introduce, and unquestionably it had produced great effect. The government which England supported was not connected with any thing like a promise of the reform of any of the evils of the old system, nor with any thing like a melioration of the condition of the Spaniards. God forbid that we should abandon their cause while it was possible to support it with any prospect of success; but he was far from being sure that the time might not come when we should have to treat with France after she had totally subdued Spain. Ministers were justified in refusing to treat on the terms offered at Erfurth; indeed they must have been the basest of mankind if they had accepted such a preliminary. But he could not avoid regretting that the country had lost so many fair opportunities



of negotiating a peace, and that it had at length been reduced to so foul a one that it could not have been accepted without eternal disgrace. Mr. William Smith said, with a similar feeling, that though he concurred in the propriety of rejecting the last offer of negotiation, he by no means meant to declare that the country ought never to commence another while Spain was in the hands of the French government.

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This first debate made it apparent that the cause of the Spaniards, in which all Britain had appeared to partake so universal and generous a sympathy, was now regarded by a party in the state as a party question; and that because ministers, true to the interest of their country, and to its honour (of all interests the most important), were resolved to continue faithful to the alliance which they had formed with Spain, there were men who felt little concern for what Europe and liberty and human nature would lose if Buonaparte should succeed in bowing the Spaniards beneath his yoke, and who looked on with ill-dissembled hope to the advantage which such a catastrophe might give them over their parliamentary opponents. Their disposition was more broadly manifested when the overtures from Erfurth were discussed, and an address moved approving the answer which had been returned. They admitted that the overtures were insincere, and could not possibly have led to peace, and yet they took occasion to carp and cavil at what they could not in common decency oppose.

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the Over-  
tures from  
Erfurth.  
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In the Upper House a feeling of utter hopelessness was expressed with sincere regret by Lord Grenville and Lord Auckland: the former asserted that Buonaparte went to Spain with the moral certainty of effecting its subjugation, the most important object of any that he had yet had in view; and that in the course of two months he actually had attained that object. The latter affirmed, that what we called the Spanish cause was

*Lord Gren-  
ville.  
Lord  
Auckland.*



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ning.

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lost, for the present at least, and without any rational hope that it could be soon revived. To such opinions Mr. Canning alluded, saying, it was said that whenever Buonaparte declared he would accomplish any measure, his declaration was to be received as the fiat of a superior being, whom it was folly to resist *He* never pledged himself to any thing but what he could accomplish! *His* resolves were insurmountable! *His* career not to be stopped! Such, said the orator, is not my opinion, nor the opinion of the British people. Even were the ship in which we are embarked sinking, it would be our duty still to struggle against the element. But never can I acknowledge that this is our present state. We are riding proudly and nobly buoyant upon the waves! To the argument that we ought, as Buonaparte had done, to have held out a prospect of political reform to the Spaniards, he replied we had no right to assume any dictatorial power over a country which we went to assist. We were not to hold cheap the institutions of other countries because they had not ripened into that maturity of freedom which we ourselves enjoyed; nor were we to convert an auxiliary army into a dominating garrison; nor, while openly professing to aid the Spaniards, covertly endeavour to force upon them those blessings of which they themselves must be the best judges. If the Spaniards succeeded, they would certainly be happier and freer than they had hitherto been; but that happiness and freedom must be of their own choice, not of our dictation. The Central Junta was not indifferent to this prospective good, for it called upon all literary men to contribute their assistance in suggesting such laws as might best be enacted for the good of the state. If the suggestion of such laws were to accompany a subsidy, he doubted much whether it would meet with assent: and sure he was that the Spaniards could not but dislike them, if dictated at the point of the bayonet. In these enlightened days, said he, the im-



position of a foreign dynasty is not regarded with so much abhorrence, as it is considered what useful internal regulations the usurpers may introduce! So detestable a mode of reasoning is confined to only a few political speculators; the general sense and feeling of mankind revolt at it. There is an irresistible impulse which binds men to their native soil; which makes them cherish their independence; which unites them to their legitimate princes; and which fires them with enthusiastic indignation against the imposition of a foreign yoke. No benefit to be received from a conqueror can atone for the loss of national independence. Let us then do homage to the Spanish nation for their attachment to their native soil; an attachment which in its origin is divine; . . . and do not let us taunt them with being a century behind us in civilization or in knowledge, or adhering to prejudices in religion, in politics, or in arts, which we have happily surmounted.

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The more moderate opposition members, such as Mr. Ponsby and Lord Henry Petty, agreed that the government had taken a proper course in demanding an explanation with regard to Spain before any negotiation was commenced. But Mr. Whitbread said he lamented that the offer had been so abruptly put an end to. Even in breaking with France it was better to break with her in a spirit of as little acrimony as possible, . . . for, let gentlemen say what they would, we must ultimately treat with France, . . . to this complexion we must come at last; and it would not be easy to say when we might calculate upon even as good terms as we had been offered in the late overture. With respect to Spain, the hopes he once had were nearly gone; and the various reports from different quarters, from some of the want of wisdom in the government, from others of want of energy in the people, were not calculated to revive them. Perhaps before this Portugal was reconquered. Buonaparte was

Lord H.  
Petty.

Mr. Whit-  
bread.



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 XXI. peace, with this man probably we must make it, and it was  
 1809. always wrong to use insulting language towards him; the least  
January. price of peace would be for us to use something like decorous  
 language to a power which was perhaps the greatest that had  
 ever existed on the face of the world. And it was extraordinary  
 indeed that a government which had committed the attack upon  
 Copenhagen should call the usurpation of Spain unparalleled!  
 It really carried with it an air of ridicule. Why should we  
 talk of atrocity? Why should we blasphemously call on our God  
 . . we, the ravagers of India, . . we who had voted the solemn  
 thanks of the House to the despoilers of that unhappy, persecu-  
 ted country?

Thus did Mr. Whitbread attempt, . . not indeed to justify  
 Buonaparte, few of his admirers had at that time sufficient  
 effrontery for this, . . but to defend him by the yet viler method  
 of recrimination; to apologize for his crimes by the false as-  
 sertion that England had perpetrated crimes as great; to stand  
 forth as the accuser of his country; and to disarm it, as far as his  
 ability and his influence might avail, of its moral strength, and  
 of its hope in God and a good cause. Six months before he had  
 prayed God to crown the efforts of the Spaniards with success  
 as final as those efforts were glorious. "Never," he then said,  
 "were a people engaged in a more arduous and honourable  
 struggle. Perish the man, he then exclaimed, who would enter-  
 tain a thought of purchasing peace by abandoning them to their  
 fate! Perish this country rather than its safety should be owing  
 to a compromise so horridly iniquitous!" It was now apparent  
 that the sympathy which had been thus strongly expressed had  
 not been very deep. He moved as an amendment upon the  
 address, that though we should have witnessed with regret any  
 inclination to consent to the abandonment of the cause of Spain,



it did not appear that any such disgraceful concession was required as a preliminary by the other belligerent powers. The stipulation, therefore, on our part, that the Spaniards should be admitted as a party was unwise and impolitic ; an overture made in respectful terms ought to have been answered in more moderate and conciliatory language, and immediate steps taken for entering into negotiation on the terms proposed in that overture. The amendment concluded by requesting that his Majesty would be graciously pleased to avail himself of any opportunity which might offer of acceding to, or commencing a negotiation for the restoration of the blessings of peace, on such terms as the circumstances of the war in which we were engaged might render compatible with the true interests of the empire, and the honour of his Majesty's crown.

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The proposed amendment provoked a severe reply from Mr. Croker. He exposed the inconsistency of the mover, who in his letter to Lord Holland, when he had stated his opinion that it became the Government at that time to negotiate, recommended that "the complete evacuation of Spain by the French armies, the abstinence from all interference in her internal arrangements, and the freedom of the Royal Family, should be the conditions of the negotiation." Mr. Croker commented also with just indignation upon the strain of argument which Mr. Whitbread had pursued. "He has set out," said he, "by doing Buonaparte the favour of trying to find a parallel for his attack on Spain ; and he boasts of having found many. But in the registers of British discussion, in the recollections of British feeling, I defy the honourable gentleman to find a parallel for his own speech, . . . a speech calculated only to plead the enemy's cause. I do not mean to represent him as intentionally their advocate ; but I will assert that, whether intentionally or not, he has taken that course by seeking for examples which might keep the French govern-

*Mr. Croker*



CHAP. ment in countenance. But even if he were not so deeply to  
 XXI. blame for this, . . . supposing even that this course was necessary  
 1809. to his argument, . . . even then he had been in error: he had pro-  
 February. duced no parallel instance; the history of the world did not fur-  
 nish one; and he had fruitlessly gone out of the path to weaken  
 the cause of his country."

*Mr. Whit-  
 bread's  
 speech cir-  
 culated by  
 the French  
 government.*

Mr. Whitbread's amendment was so little in accord with the feelings even of his colleagues in opposition, that it was not put to the vote. But his speech was so favourable to Buonaparte, and so suited to the furtherance of his purposes, that the French government availed themselves of it. A very few omissions adapted it to the meridian of Paris; it was translated, inserted in the provincial papers as well as those of the capital, and circulated through France and those countries which were under its dominion or its influence. To deceive the French and the people of the continent by the official publication of false intelligence was part of Buonaparte's system; but no fabrication could so well have served his purpose as thus to tell them that an English statesman, one of the most eminent of the Whigs, of the old advocates of liberty, a leading member of the House of Commons, had declared in that House that the overtures of peace made by France were unexceptionable, and had been unwisely, impolitically, and unnecessarily answered with insult; that Buonaparte, wielding the greatest power which had ever existed, was hastening to fulfil all his prophecies; that England must be reduced to treat with him at last, and therefore that the King of England ought to be advised by his Parliament to commence a negotiation as soon as possible upon such terms as circumstances might permit!

*Debates on  
 the Portu-  
 guese cam-  
 paign.*

The debates upon the campaign in Portugal and the Convention of Cintra terminated in confirming by the sense of Parliament the opinion which the Court of Inquiry had pronounced.