

the Lords had a duty to perform ; having seen what had taken place before in Spain and Portugal, they could not exculpate themselves for having continued to repose confidence in such ministers. They must exert themselves in this most imminent crisis of their country. “ You cannot be ignorant,” said he, “ of its tremendous situation, and where can you look ? To the government ! See it, my Lords, broken, distracted, incompetent, incapable of exerting any energy, or inspiring any confidence ! It is not from the government that our deliverance is to be expected ; it must be found, if it be found at all, in your own energy and in your own patriotism.” And he concluded with moving as an amendment to the address, that vigorous and effectual proceedings should be instituted, as the only atonement which could be made to an injured people !

CHAP.
XXVII.
1810.
January.

The language of the opposition in the House of Commons was not more temperate. “ Lord Wellington’s exploits at Talavera,” said the Honourable Mr. Ward, “ left the cause of Spain as desperate as they found it, and in their consequences resembled not victories, but defeats. For by what more disastrous consequences could defeat have been followed, than by a precipitate retreat, by the loss of 2000 men left to the mercy of the enemy upon that spot where they had just fought and conquered, but fought and conquered in vain ; that spot which, as it were in mockery to them, we had endeavoured to perpetuate in the name of the general ? By what worse could it have been followed than by the loss of all footing in Spain, the ruin of another army, and the virtual renunciation of all the objects of the war ? William III. used by his skilful generalship to render defeat harmless, . . . our generals made victory itself unavailing.”

*Honourable
Mr. Ward ;*

Mr. Ponsonby said it was a crisis which called upon the House of Commons to put forth its penal powers ; and that had he a choice between punishment and pardon, he should prefer

*Mr. Pon-
sonby ;*

CHAP.
XXVII.

1810.

January.

Mr. Whit-
bread;

punishment, because the circumstances of the country imperiously required some solemn example. Mr. Whitbread directed the force of his invective against Marquis Wellesley. "To Spain," he said, "he had gone, after delays which ought to be accounted for; and what were his services when he got there? Why, he went through the mummery of dancing on the French flag! He visited the Junta, went through all the routine of etiquette and politics, made a speech about reform, took his glass after dinner, and religiously toasted the Pope. On his return, of course, when the places were going, he came in for his share, and made one of the administration which the Chancellor of the Exchequer had at length compiled; but in what manner had he compiled it? His first application was to two noble lords, with whose principles he had been at war all his political life: they rejected the tender in a manner worthy of their dignity, and the rebuff which they gave would have daunted any man of less temerity than himself. There was not a man, from the Orkneys to the Land's End, who did not pronounce him and his administration weak, incapable, and insufficient. Even with the addition of the two colleagues who had deserted them they were feeble, but they then stood on a principle, or rather in opposition to a principle; but now, having been rejected by all who were worthy, the weak, and old, and infirm, were collected from the hedges and high roads, and consorted with for want of better.

"Let our relative situation with the enemy," he pursued, "be well considered! Austria gone, the French force concentrated, and Spain their only object. We are told that Portugal may be defended by 30,000 men; but would not Buonaparte know our force to a drummer? and where we had 30,000 he would have three score. Who would struggle against such fearful odds? We held our ground in that country just at the will of the French Emperor, and at his option he could drive us out of it. And

what could we expect from our present ministry, . . . or rather from a single man, for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in fact, stood alone? Marquis Wellesley, of whom such account had been made, might be considered as completely insignificant. Who was he? The governor of India, . . . the man who had scarcely escaped the censure of that house for his cruel tyranny! the man who had assailed the press, that sacred palladium of the people! the friend of despotism! the foe to liberty! Could this man say to Buonaparte, in the noble indignation of insulted virtue, 'I have not done as you have!' Alas! if such a man had strength, he would indeed be a fearful acquisition to such a government; but he was known, and therefore weak and harmless. Peace," Mr. Whitbread concluded, "should be the cry of the nation. Peace, . . . particularly because the thralldom of millions of our fellow-subjects was the tenure by which this incapable junto held their offices."

CHAP.
XXVII.
1810.
January.

Mr. Perceval replied to this speech in all its parts. "As to the situation," he said, "which he had the honour to hold in his Majesty's council, he must state, in the most explicit manner, that it was not an object of his own desire; on the contrary, if his wishes had been realized, another person would then have held the office of first lord of the treasury. When, by his Majesty's directions, he had applied to Lords Grey and Grenville, for the purpose of forming an extended administration, the first proposition which he should have made to them, if they had given him an opportunity of stating it, would have been, that it should be left to themselves to determine who should be the first lord of the treasury." This was a confession of weakness: twelve months before, Mr. Perceval was strong in the opinion of the people; but now the deplorable Walcheren expedition hung about him like a mill-stone, and, even in his own feelings, weighed him down. Having said what he could in defence of

Mr. Perceval.

CHAP. that expedition, he rose into a higher strain, when speaking of
 XXVII. the Spaniards, and the unjust and unfeeling manner in which
 1810. their conduct had been represented. “ Was it liberal,” he said,
January. “ that the defenders of Zaragoza and Gerona should be said to
 have displayed no generosity, no enthusiasm, no patriotism? Well, indeed, might those persons censure what was done to aid the Spanish cause, who could assert that the cause did not deserve success! But neither in ancient nor in modern history could an example be found of a country maintaining a contest like that which this degraded Spain, and this degraded Spanish government, had so long supported. Never, in recent times, had 250,000 Frenchmen been so long in a country without subduing it. Spain was not subdued; but what effect upon the Spaniards such language as had been used that night might produce, it was impossible to predict!”

*Vote of
 thanks to
 Lord Wel-
 lington op-
 posed by the
 Earl of Suf-
 folk.*

*Earl Gros-
 venor.*

Earl Grey.

When a vote of thanks to Lord Wellington was moved in the House of Lords, it was opposed by the Earl of Suffolk, who argued that the best mode of assisting Spain was by a floating force, which might be landed wherever it could be most useful; by such a mode of warfare, he said, Gerona, during its long and glorious defence, might have been relieved. Earl Grosvenor also opposed the vote, and made some judicious remarks upon the practice of raising men to the peerage whose fortunes were not adequate to support the rank. The ends of military fame, he said, would be better promoted if different orders of military merit were established; the same spirit of valour might be excited, and all inconveniences to the constitution avoided. Earl Grey denied that the battle of Talavera was a victory; it had been trumpeted as such, he said, by ministers, but in so doing they had practised an unworthy deception. Lord Wellington had betrayed want of capacity and want of skill: the consequences had been most disastrous, nor did we yet know the

extent of the evil. One army had been compelled to retreat into Portugal, where he feared it was in a very critical situation, and where, from the unhealthiness of the position which it occupied, disease had made such an alarming progress among the troops, that he believed their numbers did not at that time exceed 9000 effective men.

CHAP.
XXVII.
1810.

Marquis Wellesley replied, that he knew the circumstances which had influenced his brother in all his movements during the campaign, and the plain statement of those circumstances triumphantly vindicated him. "Against strange mismanagement," he said, "such unlooked for, such unaccountable casualties as had occurred during that campaign, and frustrated a plan so wisely contrived, no human prudence on Sir Arthur's part could provide. Concerning the necessity of a radical change in the government of Spain, his opinions," he continued, "were not unknown. But it surely was not to be expected that Spain could reach at once the vigour of a free government, just emerging as she was from that dreadful oppression which had broken down the faculties of her people, . . . from those inveterate habits and ancient prejudices which had so long contracted her views and retarded her improvement, and from the disconnexion and disunion between her different provinces. The change which was desired could not be the work of a day. But were we therefore to desert the Spaniards in this crisis of their fortunes, and abandon them to the mercy of their invaders? . . . As for the circumstances which attended and followed the battle of Talavera, nothing more perhaps, in a military sense, could be said of the result, than that the British troops had repulsed the attack of a French army almost double their numbers, the efforts of which had been chiefly directed against them. But was there no skill, no bravery, no perseverance displayed in the mode in which that repulse was effected? Did no glory redound from it to

*Marquis
Wellesley.*

CHAP.
XXVII.

1810.

the British arms? Had it not been acknowledged, even by the enemy, as the severest check they had yet sustained? That victory had saved the south of Spain from absolute destruction, had afforded time for Portugal to organize her army, and had enabled Lord Wellington to take a position where he might derive supplies from Spain, at the same time that he drew nearer to his own magazines. He should not attempt to diminish the disasters which afterwards befel the Spanish armies; both his noble brother and himself had earnestly advised them to keep on the defensive; but, flushed with the victory of Talavera, and too sanguine of success, they advanced at all points, and the result had fatally justified the propriety of the advice which had been given them. This, however, was not the present subject. It was enough for him to have shown that Lord Wellington had arrested the progress of the French armies into the south of Spain, and procured a breathing time for Portugal; that country was placed in a greater degree of security than at any time since it had been menaced by France, and such essential improvements had been introduced into the Portugueze army, that it would be enabled effectually to co-operate with the British troops. These advantages were fairly to be ascribed to Lord Wellington; and he did not hesitate to say, that his brother was as justly entitled to every distinction which his sovereign had conferred, and to every honour and reward which it was in the power of that house to bestow, as any noble lord who for his personal services had obtained the same distinctions, or who sat there by descent from his illustrious ancestors."

Lord Grenville.

To this temperate and able speech, which showed that means had been taken with due foresight, and that with due perseverance there was a well-grounded hope of success, Lord Grenville replied by arguing from the misconduct of the Spanish ministers against our own. "Let the house," he said, "consider

how much dependence the administration had placed upon such a government as that of the Spaniards, and then ask themselves if they could be justified in supporting them in a continuance of error. We were now told that reliance was to be placed upon the co-operation of the Portugueze; but they ought to judge of the future from the past, to recollect that for want of co-operation it had been found necessary to retreat, and that the remnant of the army was in a situation not unlike that in which it was placed by its advance to Talavera."

CHAP.
XXVII.

1810.

The vote of thanks was opposed in like manner in the House of Commons. General Tarleton said, that Lord Wellington's dispatches were vain-glorious, partial, and incorrect; that he had been deficient in information concerning the amount and situation of Soult's army; and that he had been compelled to a precipitate retreat, after abandoning his sick and wounded. Mr. Whitbread affirmed, that the battle had been more a repulse than a victory; nor could he, he said, withhold a tear, when he thought of the British blood which had been spilt in sacrifice to incapacity and folly. The consequence of the battle was, that the army had no other retreat than that through Deleitosa, and their condition during that retreat was such, that many hundred perished on the road from famine. The Spanish cause, he concluded, was now more hopeless than ever. But the motion received a powerful support from Mr. Windham, who, setting all party views aside, followed the feelings of his own generous nature. "The unproductive consequences of this victory," he said, . . . "for a victory it was, and a glorious victory, . . . were not to be put in comparison with the military renown which we had gained. Ten or fifteen years ago, it was thought on the continent that we might do something at sea, . . . that an Englishman was a sort of sea-animal; but our army was considered as no-

Feb. 1.

General
Tarleton.

Mr. Whit-
bread.

CHAP.
XXVII.

1810.

*Pension
voted for
Lord Wel-
lington.*

Feb. 16.

thing. Our achievements in Egypt first entitled us to the name of a military power; the battle of Maida confirmed it; and he would not give the battles of Vimeiro, Coruña, and Talavera, for a whole Archipelago of sugar islands."

The vote was carried in both houses without a division. But the opposition tried their strength in the House of Commons upon the King's message, recommending that a pension of 2000*l.* should be settled upon Lord Wellington, and the two next heirs to his title in succession. "With the grant of the peerage," Mr. Calcraft said, "that house had nothing to do; he was sorry it had been conferred; but though there was no remedy for it, the house ought not to add to it the pension. Pensions and thanks might be voted, but they could not permanently blind the country; whatever the public opinion might be now, it would not be with ministers upon this subject a month hence, when the whole fruits of Lord Wellington's victories and campaigns would develop themselves to public view. It was mournful and alarming to hear that Lord Wellington had said he could defend Portugal with 50,000 men, provided 30,000 of them were British; for if the French were in earnest in their designs upon that country, before three months Lord Wellington and his army would be in England. Neither Portugal nor any other country could be defended by victories like that of Talavera."

It was said by General Craufurd, a peerage might be an incumbrance to Lord Wellington without a pension. General Loftus also remarked, that he had always been one of the most liberal men in existence, and the state of his circumstances was therefore, he imagined, far from sufficient for the support of the dignity to which he was elevated. Sir Francis Burdett took this occasion for touching a popular note. "If Lord Welling-

*Opposed by
Sir Francis
Burdett.*

ton's liberality," he said, "had brought him into difficulty or debt, who was it whom they called upon to free him from the incumbrance? . . . the people; . . . who already owed debts enough, not in consequence of any prodigality of their own, but through the impositions of their representatives. As to the military part of the question, he could only say, that the result was failure, . . . failure as complete as failure could be. But even if the occasion had been such as to deserve reward, he should object to making any appeal for that purpose to the people's purse. What was become of the patronage of the government? Where were the sinecures, which were always defended because they afforded a fund for such purposes as these? Yet application was made to the people, . . . and this by a government who, while they perpetually threw the burden upon the people, had greater means of rewarding merit at their disposal than all the combined merit of Europe could possibly exhaust."

CHAP.
XXVII.

1810.

The same strain of argument was pursued by Mr. Whitbread. *Mr. Whitbread.* "It was often argued," he said, "that the expectation of one of those great places falling in satisfied many a claimant: if so, why should not Lord Wellington wait for one of them? It was an important part of the question, whether, supposing the peerage to have been merited, the circumstances of the new peer were such as to require the pension; for if they were not, it would be a scandalous waste of the public money. Nor was it necessarily to follow, that whenever the king was advised to grant a peerage to any officer, the House of Commons was bound to vote him a pension."

This produced from Mr. Wellesley Pole a statement of his brother's fortune. Mr. Wilberforce then appealed to the house, *Mr. Wilberforce.* whether, if Lord Wellington had devoted the great talents which confessedly belonged to him to the bar, or to any other liberal pursuit, he would not have rendered them infinitely more productive

CHAP. than it appeared that he had done by actively employing them in
 XXVII. the service of his country? and he protested against the unjust and
 1810. impolitic illiberality of opposing such a grant upon such grounds.

Mr. Can-
 ning.

The same opinion was delivered by Mr. Canning. "The vic-
 tories of Lord Wellington," he said, "had re-established our
 military character, and retrieved the honour of the country,
 which was before in abeyance. If the system of bestowing the
 peerage was to be entirely changed, and the House of Lords to
 be peopled only by the successors to hereditary honours, Lord
 Wellington certainly would not be found there. But he would
 not do that noble body the injustice of supposing that it was a
 mere stagnant lake of collected honours: it was to be occa-
 sionally refreshed by fresh streams. It was the prerogative of
 the crown to confer the honour of the peerage; it was the duty
 of that house to give it honour and independence. The question
 was, whether they would enable Lord Wellington to take his
 seat with the proudest peer in the other house, or whether they
 would send him there with the avowed intention that it was only
 to the crown he was to look for support. It was their duty to
 take care if the crown made a peer, that it should not make a
 generation of peers wholly dependent on its favour for their
 support."

The com-
 mon council
 petition
 against the
 pension.

There was a great majority upon this question, 213 voting
 for the grant, 106 against it. But the current of popular opinion
 in the metropolis set in with the opposition at this time; for the
 Walcheren expedition, like a pestilential vapour, clouded the
 whole political horizon. The common council presented a pe-
 tition against the pension: a measure so extraordinary, they
 said, in the present state of the country, and under all the afflict-
 ing circumstances attending our armies in Spain and Portugal
 under that officer's command, could not but prove highly in-
 jurious in its consequences, and no less grievous than irritating