

ambassador, Mr. Frere, than whom no man judged more generously, nor more wisely, of the Spanish character and the Spanish cause. But this essential precaution had been neglected; and when the Toledans applied for artillery and ammunition, disaster followed so close upon disaster, that there was no leisure for attending to their request, urgent as it was. What then could be done? They sent off their moveable property to Seville; 12,000 swords also were dispatched to the same place, from that fabric which for so many centuries has been famous, and which probably owes its original celebrity to workmen from Damascus. The Junta, the legitimate authorities, and all the most distinguished inhabitants, left the city; neither the threats nor promises of the Intruder could induce them to return: they retired to the free part of the peninsula, submitting to poverty with that dignified composure which resulted from the consciousness of having discharged their duty. This was the fate of the parents, while their sons, in the corps of students, fought and bled for the independence of Spain. It is plain, therefore, that though the gates of Toledo were opened to the enemy, that same spirit still existed within its walls which, during the war of the Commons of Castille, rendered it the last hold of Spanish liberty.

From Toledo, from Aranjuez, and from Ocaña, parties of French cavalry overran the open and defenceless plains of Lower La Mancha, foraging and plundering the towns and villages with impunity as far as Manzanares. The La Manchans, relying, like the government, too confidently upon the resistance which regular armies and the modes of regular warfare could oppose to such a military power as that of France, had made no preparations for defending themselves: some places were deserted by the inhabitants; all left open to the enemy, who scoured the country at their pleasure. The little townlet of Villacañas afforded a single and honourable exception. A party

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December.

*Defence of
Villacañas.*

CHAP. of 60 horse entered it on the night of the 20th of December, being
 XIV. a detachment from a much larger force which had quartered
 1808. itself in Tembleque. The people caught up such arms as they
 December. could find, and drove the invaders out; they began immediately
 to dig trenches and throw up barricadoes, . . the adjoining pea-
 santry came to their assistance, . . a few persons of high quality
 fled; but, with these few exceptions, the utmost zeal and alacrity
 were displayed by all ranks, and ready obedience was paid to
 some old soldiers, who took upon themselves the command.
 During five successive days the French renewed their attacks,
 and were constantly repulsed; their plundering parties had no
 artillery with them, and the means of defence, therefore, as long
 as the Spaniards took care not to expose themselves to a charge
 of horse in the open country, were equal to those of attack.
 Weary at length of repeated failures, and unwilling to incur
 farther loss in an object of no other value than what the plunder
 of the place might be worth, the French desisted from any farther
 attempts, and Villacañas remained safe and uninjured, while all
 the country round was ransacked. The example was deservedly
 thought of such importance, that the whole details of this little
 siege were published by the government in an extraordinary
 gazette. Whatever contributions were due to the state by the
 inhabitants of this townlet were remitted to them, and those per-
 sons who had taken the lead were rewarded by other privileges.
 "This," said the government, "is the kind of war which our
 perfidious enemy feareth most, and which is the most advan-
 tageous for ourselves. Let the people of every village arm
 themselves, entrench themselves in their very houses, break up
 the roads, lay ambushes upon every height and pass, intercept
 his provisions, cut off his communications, and make him per-
 ceive that at every step he will find the most obstinate resistance.
 Thus we shall waste his forces; thus we shall show to the world

that a great and generous nation is not to be insulted with impunity, not to be conquered when it fights for its king, for its liberty, and for its religion.”

Meantime the Juntas of Ciudad Real, (the capital of Upper La Mancha,) and of the four kingdoms of Jaen, Granada, Cordoba, and Seville, which compose the province of Andalusia, formed a Central Assembly in La Carolina, where two deputies from each province met to consult upon speedy measures for fortifying the gorge of Despeñaperros, this pass of the Sierra Morena being considered as the Thermopylæ, where the progress of this new barbarian might be withstood. Here an army was necessary, and there was none: the Marques de Palacio was sent by the Supreme Junta to form one under his command. The Juntas of Andalusia and La Mancha raised new levies; and officers and men who had deserted from the central army, many of them scattering alarm and sedition where they fled, re-entered into this new establishment. The marine battalions and brigades of artillery were ordered hither from Cadiz, leaving only 300 men in that city, besides the volunteers. Fourteen pieces of cannon had been fortunately stopped at Manzanares, on their way to Madrid. These were now mounted upon the works which were thrown up to defend this important position. Another road also, by which the enemy might have passed the Sierra, was occupied by a detachment of 500 men. Before the middle of December, 6000 foot and 300 horse had assembled at La Carolina, and their number increased daily. But it was not towards the Sierra Morena that Buonaparte was looking; his attention was chiefly fixed upon the English army, and the road by which he thought to reach Andalusia was through Extremadura, hoping to overtake the Supreme Junta in their flight; having reached them at Truxillo, his armies might divide,

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Prepara-
tions for
defending
the Sierra
Morena.

CHAP. one marching to take possession of Lisbon, the other to take
 XIV. vengeance for Dupont at Seville and Cadiz.

1808. There was no force in Extremadura which could oppose any
 obstacle to this plan. When the pass of Somosierra was lost,
 San Juan, who commanded there, cut his way sword in hand
 through a squadron of Poles, and by by-roads reached Segovia,
 where he found the troops who had retired from Sepulveda.
 From thence he marched to Guadarrama, united with the Extre-
 maduran troops under General Heredia, and descended to the
 Escorial, because he was without provisions in the pass. There
 they received orders to hasten to Madrid, and enter that city
 by the gate of Segovia. On the way exaggerated reports were
 spread of the strength of the enemy; suspicion increased the
 insubordination of the soldiers; the artillery and baggage-men
 forsook their charge and fled, and several corps broke up. The
 whole of Heredia's van-guard dispersed in this manner, in spite
 of all San Juan's efforts to detain them; they would rally, they
 said, at Talavera: this word went through the army, and served
 as a pretext for every one who chose to fly. The two generals
 had only a handful of men with them when they approached
 Madrid, and then they discovered that the city had been be-
 trayed. No other course remained for them than to repair to
 Talavera, in the hope of rallying what would still form a con-
 siderable force. The rabble of the army, sufficiently faithful to
 their appointment, bent their way to that city, plundering as
 they went along; and there San Juan met them, unhappily for
 himself. The wretches who had been foremost in subverting
 discipline, and instigating the troops to break up, began to ap-
 prehend punishment if the army should again assume a regular
 form; and this was likely to be the case immediately, for many
 thousands (many having escaped from Madrid) were now col-

December.

Murder of
 San Juan at
 Talavera.

lected there, and the government had already begun to take measures for re-equipping them. It was easy for these villains to raise a cry against San Juan: all men knew the importance of the position at Somosierra; but there were few who knew with what insufficient means the general had been supplied. Mobs never reason, least of all when they are under the influence of fear; and the Spanish troops had suffered so much from incapacity, that when any person was denounced as a traitor, it seemed like a relief to themselves, and an act of justice to their country, to vent their vengeance upon him. The cry against San Juan became general: a friar went at the head of a party to the convent of the Augustines, where he had taken up his quarters, and they cried out that they were come to put Benito San Juan to death. San Juan attempted to expostulate, but in vain. He drew his sword to defend himself, and immediately he was pierced with their bullets. The rabble dragged the body to a gibbet, and hung it there; next they sought for Heredia, that they might kill him also; but he eluded their search. As soon as their fury was allayed, the instigators of these excesses secured themselves by flight; and the troops, who had been misled, perceived the consequences of their lawless conduct. If San Juan had indeed been a traitor, they felt that they ought to have delivered him up to the proper tribunal; . . . by taking vengeance into their own hands they had made themselves obnoxious to the laws. Whom too could they trust, whom were they to obey? Instead, therefore, of forming a new army, as they had designed, at Talavera, they dispersed again, not having now any rallying place appointed, but each man going whither he thought best. Some took the road to Andalusia, some to Avila: the Extremadurans, who were the most numerous, went to their homes.

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1808.

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Dec. 7.

CHAP.

XIV.

1808.

*December.**Edict
against
deserters.*

The dispersion of the soldiers called forth a severe edict. It began by stating, that the martial laws of Spain had affixed no punishment for officers who deserted their colours or stations, it never having been supposed that men of such rank could possibly be guilty of such a crime. But now it had unhappily been seen that many officers, forgetful of all honour and duty, had fled, scattering disorder and terror wherever they went, and pretending treason in their generals as an excuse for their own conduct; whereas they themselves had been the worst enemies of their country, by abandoning their generals in the most critical moments. The Junta, therefore, pronounced sentence of death against every officer who absented himself from his colours without permission, and confiscation of his property for the relief of the widows and orphans of soldiers in his parish. Soldiers were made liable to the like penalty; any person who harboured a deserter was to be punished by confiscation of his property, and the same penalty was denounced against all magistrates who suffered deserters to remain within their jurisdiction. But all who, within fifteen days, should present themselves to the nearest authority in order to rejoin the army, were exempted from the pains in this decree.

A few English stragglers butchered by the French cavalry.

Four days after the murder of San Juan, and the dispersion of his army, two divisions of French cavalry, under Milhaud and Lasalle, entered Talavera. They found the body of the Spanish General still on the gibbet, and this murder furnished Buonaparte with a new subject of invective against the Spaniards; though this, and the thousand deaths, and all the untold crimes, and all the unutterable miseries with which the peninsula was filled, were the consequences of his own single conduct, the fruits of his individual wickedness. Lasalle fell in with sixteen Englishmen upon the road, stragglers from General Hope's

detachment, and it was related in the bulletins * of Buona-
 parte, as an exploit worthy of remembrance and commenda-
 tion, that a division of French cavalry, falling in with sixteen
 Englishmen who had lost their way, put them to the sword.
 This was but a small part of the force which was destined to
 proceed in this direction. As soon as Madrid had been deli-
 vered up, Lefebvre was ordered to advance from Valladolid
 towards Lisbon. First he advanced to Segovia, which he entered
 unresisted. The people were dispirited by the panic and flight
 of their armies; but it should not be forgotten for their exculpa-
 tion, that the more generous and heroic spirits, having flocked to
 their country's standard among the foremost levies, had already
 received their crown of martyrdom, or were clinging to the
 wreck of the two great armies of the north and the centre, or
 were consummating the sacrifice of duty in Zaragoza. In one
 place only between Valladolid and the capital did this part of
 the French army experience any opposition. The pass of Gua-
 darrama was open to them: General Hope had been stationed

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* This part of the bulletin was officially transmitted by Lord Castlereagh to Sir John Moore, with the following instructions:—"His Majesty cannot overlook this account, descriptive, according to the obvious sense of it, of the murder of some unresisting stragglers of his army, although his Majesty is disposed to disbelieve a transaction, however sufficiently recorded, which is so utterly repugnant to the usual laws of war, and to every principle of humanity. His Majesty therefore desires that you will take the earliest means of ascertaining the truth of the fact so recorded, and the circumstances under which it was perpetrated, if perpetrated at all. If it shall upon investigation appear to be founded, I am to desire you will cause a protest to be made by you to the nearest head-quarters of the French army, and that you will take such measures as shall appear to you most expedient for the protection of the troops under your orders against conduct so barbarous and so disgraceful."—No such measures were taken, in consequence of Sir John Moore's retreat. This instruction, however, exculpates the British government from any charge of indifference upon the subject.

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1808.

December.

*The French
take possession of the
Escorial.*

there, but was recalled by Sir John Moore, and there were no native troops to supply his place. But when the enemy descended upon the Escorial, and proceeded to take possession of that palace, the magnificent monument of a victory which Spain had achieved over France in open, honourable war, and in a fair field, they found the peasantry assembled to defend the seat and sepulchres of their kings. Undisciplined as they were, ill-armed, and with none to direct their efforts, they stood their ground till they were overpowered by practised troops, superior in numbers as well as in arms; and the French, after the slaughter of these brave peasants before the gates, took up their quarters in the palace of the Philips. He who founded that stately pile, could he then have beheld from his grave what was passing around him, would have seen the consequences of that despotic system which he and his father established upon the ruins of the old free constitution of Spain.

It was a noble feeling which led these peasants to sacrifice themselves in defence of the Escorial, and the action did not pass unnoticed by those able and enlightened Spaniards whose patriotic writings at this time did honour to themselves and to their country. "Nothing," said Don Isidro de Antillon, "is more worthy of public interest, and nothing will more excite the admiration of posterity, than a deed like this. If indeed we had only armies to oppose to Buonaparte, infallibly we should become his slaves; the victory would be the usurper's beyond all resource. But it is the collective strength of our inhabited places, the defence of our walls, the obstinate and repeated resistance of the people in the streets and gateways, along the roads and upon the heights, wherever they can cut off or annoy the detachments of the enemy, . . . the universal spirit of insurrection, now become as it were the very element of our existence; this it is which disconcerts his plans, which renders his victories

useless, and after a thousand vicissitudes and disasters, will finally establish the independence and the glory of Spain."

Lefebvre entered Madrid on the 8th of December. Buonaparte reviewed his division in the Prado, and dispatched it to Toledo, while Sebastiani with another division marched for Talavera. In that city, by the 19th, about 25,000 French were assembled, including 5,000 cavalry. The wiser inhabitants fled before their arrival, preferring the miseries of emigration to the insults and atrocities which they must otherwise have endured: for the exaction of heavy contributions, which reduced half the people to beggary, was the least evil those towns endured that fell under the yoke of the French. Every where the soldiers were permitted to plunder; no asylum could secure the women from their unrestrained brutality; churches and convents were profaned with as little compunction as dwelling-houses were broken open; and in many instances, the victims were exposed naked in the streets. The Spanish government exclaimed loudly against these enormities. "In other times," they said, "war was carried on between army and army, soldier and soldier; their fury spent itself upon the field of battle; and when courage, combined with fortune, had decided the victory, the conquerors behaved to the conquered like men of honour, and the defenceless people were respected. The progress of civilization had tempered the evils of hostility, till a nation which so lately boasted that it was the most polished in the world, renewed, in the 19th century, the cruelty of the worst savages, and all the horrors which make us tremble in perusing the history of the irruptions of the barbarians of old. Like tygers, these enemies make no distinction in their carnage, .. the aged, the infants, the women, .. all are alike to them, wherever they can find blood to shed."

This appeal could be of no avail against a tyrant who, in the

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*Excesses of
the French.*

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very origin of the war, had shown himself dead to all sense of justice, humanity, and even of honour, which sometimes supplies their place; nor against generals and officers who could serve him in such a cause. Such men could be taught humanity only by the severest retaliation. The language which the government addressed to their own subjects might be more effectual. "What resource have you," said they, "in submission and in cowardice? If by this abasement you could purchase a miserable existence, that perhaps with base minds might exculpate you. But you fly to your houses to perish in them, or to be idle spectators of the horrors which these ruffian soldiers are preparing for you! Yes! wait for them there, and they will not tarry long ere they come and shed before your eyes the blood of the innocent victims whom you will not defend. Old fathers, wretched mothers, prepare to receive your daughters released from the arms of an hundred barbarians only when they are in the act of death! or if they recover life, to curse it in the bitterness of unextinguishable shame; tell them to reproach those cowardly husbands, those base lovers, who are content to live, and see them plunged in this abominable infamy. But they will not be suffered to live: hand-cuffed and haltered, they will be dragged out of their country; they will be made soldiers by force, though they would not become so from honour and a sense of duty; there they will be exposed in the foremost ranks to the fire of the enemy; there they will not be able to fly; . . . the toil, the danger, and death will be theirs; the glory and the spoil will be their conquerors', and the crowns which they win will be for the tyrant, the cause of all this misery."

Galluzo collects the fugitives in Extremadura.

It had been happy for Spain if the government had always acted as energetically as it wrote; but it should be remembered in justice to the Spaniards, that the dispersion of the troops was in many instances an act of self-preservation, so utterly were