

Thus, for instance, it was argued, and the argument was sanctioned by the whole Cortes, that the deficit for the current year of a hundred and sixty-one millions of reals was calculated only on probabilities, the data for which were taken partly from the months of June, July, and August last, an epoch when the vessel of the state was contending against the storm by which it was assailed; that although there might have been a delay in the payments of the taxes, it did not follow that they never would be paid; that until the termination of the financial year it could not be ascertained what the amount of the deficit would really be; and that it was premature at present to set down that as a deficit which was no more than an irregularity in the payment of the contributions—an irregularity that might be repaired in the course of the remaining months. The Government, it was further said, had it in their power to render effective the means which were granted to them, and the means so granted were sufficient to meet the necessities of the state. That is to say, the Finance Minister had it in his power to call on the commanding officers in the provinces for military assistance to enforce the payment of the contributions: the commanding officers answered, that they had no troops to spare, because in fact there was not money to pay them; and thus the Cortes went on in a circle of complete delusion, which it was impossible they could have believed, though they legislated upon the supposition of its truth. Was this done with the view of leading foreign countries to think that the finances of Spain were not in a deplorable condition; and that her revenues were not likely to be materially affected by her intestine divisions?

The English reader who has not attended much to the financial affairs of the Peninsula, may, perhaps, have been a little surprised not to find enumerated amongst the ways and means of the country, the suppressed convents, the

December. property of the Inquisition, the confiscated estates of Godoy the Prince of Peace, the suppressed estates of the king, the mines of Almaden and Rio Tinto, the temporalities of the Jesuits, and the military orders, and the proceeds arising out of all sorts of religious property, which was secularised at the Revolution, and appropriated to the exigencies of the state. It is necessary, therefore, to state, that previous to the restoration of the Constitution, Spain was burthened by a large national debt, composed of credits with interest, and credits without interest. By a decree of Cortes, bearing date the 29th of November, 1820, it was enacted that the property above-mentioned, and all other which was embraced under the title of national property, should be appropriated, one part to pay the interest on the debt that bore interest; and the other to extinguish the capitals of the debt which bore no interest. The part of the national property applicable to the latter was to be sold off by public auction, at stated periods. A national junta of public credit was formed for the purpose of managing the two classes of property.

The old debt which bore interest, and the old debt which bore no interest, were both represented by vouchers on paper, which the national junta issued to each claimant as soon as his claim was acknowledged. The latter class of paper was at a discount of from 85 to 90 per cent for money, although the junta was compellable to take it at its full nominal amount in payment for the national property which it sold by auction.

With respect to the new rentes of 40 millions of reals, it remains to be stated, that the ministers intimated their readiness to receive proposals for the sale of bonds for the whole sum; or to constitute one or more houses the agents of the government, to sell the bonds on commission, provided that such houses were willing to advance a sum on account for the pressing necessities of the state. At first,

several competitors were spoken of; but the only parties known to have entered into negotiations on the subject were Mr. Piedra, partner in the firm of Bernales and Nephew, of London, and Mr. Simon Cock, agent for several capitalists also of London*.

No actual offer was for some time made by Mr. Cock, his proceedings being limited to an inquiry whether the government would entertain an offer on the principle that his friends should have the sale of the bonds on commission, the amount of such commission to be regulated by the price of the bonds; they undertaking to guarantee to the government that a stated amount of the bonds first disposed of should produce a certain sum per cent. Another of the proposed conditions was, that the contractors should supply the government with arms and military

* The primary object of Mr. Cock's visit to Madrid was, to obtain compensation for several British ships and cargoes which had been seized and condemned by the Spanish authorities for having traded with the late Spanish settlements in South America, in violation of the laws of the Indies, which laws, notwithstanding that several of those countries have some years ago asserted their independence, the Spanish government professed to consider to be in full force. It being soon known that Mr. Cock, besides being the agent of the ship-owners, was clothed with full power to treat for a loan for the whole sum required by the government, every means were tried to induce him to come forward with proposals. He, however, gave it to be distinctly understood, that unless the fullest satisfaction was made to the British ship-owners and merchants for their losses, he could not think of making any proposals, since the inevitable consequence of denying them that justice must be, that serious differences would arise between the two nations; but that as soon as the demands of the British minister on that head were satisfied, Mr. Cock would be ready to treat for the loan. Accordingly the very day after that on which it was signified to Sir Wm. A'Court, the British Minister at Madrid, that the government would make full compensation for the value of the ships and cargoes, Mr. Cock commenced his negotiation.

December. clothing, at the current prices, to the amount of one or two millions sterling, as might be wanted, payment for the articles as delivered, being made in bonds. The remainder of the bonds to be sold for account of the government, after the lapse of a certain period, and an account of the proceeds rendered monthly. A sum equivalent to one-fifth part of the whole proceeds of the bonds was to be paid into the Bank of England in the joint names of the Spanish ambassador, and the contractors, to form a fund for the payment of the half-yearly dividends on the bonds. There was a further stipulation for the protection of the contractors, in the event of Spain being involved in war with France, or any other power.

It cannot be doubted that, situated as the Spanish government was, a contract on the principle thus proposed was every way eligible for them, and in this light it appeared to be considered; but then it involved a most important question, namely, the removal of the British Order in Council, which prohibited the exportation of arms, military clothing, and munitions of war, from England to Spain and her colonies; for without the removal of this prohibition, that important part of the proposed contract which regarded a supply of those articles could not be carried into effect. The Spanish government had been previously officially informed, that the prohibition could not be removed as to Spain, without being also rescinded as to the new Governments in South America.

As Mr. Cock did not think fit to give up this important part of the plan, upon the principles of which he was ready to make a proposal; and the government did not feel themselves in a situation to receive the arms and clothing on the only condition upon which they could receive them, the negotiation was ended by the expression of the regret of the government that they could not treat with Mr. Cock on the present

occasion ; and of their hope, that a future and more favourable opportunity might arrive. The offer of Mr. Piedra being finally the only one left, and the wants of the government not admitting of delay, it was accepted *. December.

The agreement with this gentleman was to the effect, that Bernales and Nephew should have the whole of the bonds for 40 millions of reals of rentes, to sell on commission, for account of the government, on condition of their relieving the pressing wants of the government by accepting draughts for 800,000*l.* at three months date. To meet such engagements, Bernales and Nephew were to sell bonds to the requisite amount ; but were not until the market had been tried for two months, to sell them under a certain price. As soon as the terms of this contract were publicly known, it was generally conjectured that a large amount of the bonds would be brought into the market, to furnish the funds with which Messrs. Bernales and Nephew were to meet their engagements. The consequence of this, added to the growing apprehension of a French war, was, that the price of the bonds fell suddenly to a degree that appears to have alarmed them ; for after having accepted upwards of 70,000*l.* of the draughts, they refused to go further. The remainder of them, therefore, to the amount of several hundred thousand pounds which the government had negotiated before they heard of the demur on the part of the contractors, were returned dishonoured. Under these circumstances the bonds for the rentes were not put into circulation.

It is understood that Mr. Bernales justifies his non-performance of the contract, upon the ground that the bonds

* The period of this transaction is, for the sake of convenience, anticipated. The offer of Mr. Piedra was agreed to on the 12th of January, 1823.

December. were not ready to be delivered to him within the time agreed upon.

The Cortes had brought upon themselves no slight degree of unpopularity, by the precipitate manner in which they suppressed the convents; and they gained no recompense for it in the accession of revenue which was derivable from this class of national property. Let it not be supposed that I defend the establishment of convents in such numbers as they formerly existed in Spain. Men's minds in that country are naturally of a pensive turn, and more than any other people, perhaps, they have need of retirements, where they can wholly devote themselves to that luxury of melancholy meditation, which is amongst the most amiable weaknesses of the human heart. Still the custom of religious seclusion increased to such a magnitude, that it was necessary to reduce it within rational limits. But the Cortes might have gone to work with it in a different manner. They might have said to a certain number of convents, "You shall receive no further addition to your present numbers: you may remain peaceable in your cells; you enjoy a revenue of six thousand dollars; the urgent necessities of the state demand that you shall pay a yearly contribution of two thousand dollars, and in proportion as your numbers are lessened, this contribution must be increased until the brotherhood ceases to exist. When that is the case, the convent, and lands attached to it, shall become national property." To others they might have said, "You may remain as you are, on the condition that you confine your numbers to a certain amount, which you may perpetually preserve by filling up vacancies as they may be caused by deaths, and on the further condition that you contribute a third part of your revenue to the state." Had the Cortes done this, the conditions required to be performed, on the part of the convents, would probably have been fulfilled, the government would have had a secure

revenue to a very considerable amount, and they would have saved themselves from the disagreeable task of turning out communities of poor old men, whose grey hairs entitled them to more lenient consideration, from those cloisters where they had hoped to measure the few remaining days of their existence. And what has been the result of it? Those convents which have been so rudely suppressed have been exposed to sale, as well as the lands appertaining to them, and in very few places has a purchaser been found. It may be called religious fanaticism, or monkish influence; but such is the character of the people, they would deem it a sacrilege to appropriate to their own use the lands of a convent. See then the consequences. Those very resources which the Cortes imagined the most ready and the most productive, turned out to be mere incumbrances on their hands. They raised for themselves hosts of well organised and influential enemies, in every part of the country, in the ruined communities, and there is no calculating the extent of the odium which they incurred among the people, who deemed their religion insulted, and felt all their early prejudices offended by this sweeping annihilation of the monasteries. I do not defend their prejudices; I well know that monasteries form no essential part of their religion; nor do I think they have much reason to regret the decline of that monkish influence, which, whether exerted for good or evil ends, was at least liable to suspicion. All I say is, that such were their prejudices, such their feelings and dispositions; and he must be little acquainted with human nature who would wantonly wage war against these strong foundations of national character.

The unpopularity of this measure was evident from the number of petitions which were presented to the Cortes against the suppression of various convents. Those petitions were signed by numbers of the people, and often expressed,

December. in an affecting manner, their attachment to those ancient institutions. The case of the convent of the Batuecas was deemed particularly severe. It was situated in a wild mountainous country, where the population is scattered in little hamlets. The people seem, from the simplicity and innocence of their manners, to belong to the primitive ages of the world. Few of them have ever gone beyond the precincts of their peculiar territory; the arts and vices of the world are unknown to them; their days pass away in pastoral occupations, unmarked by strifes or injustice of any sort, and their evenings are usually closed by works of piety, intermingled occasionally with such musical enjoyments as they can derive from a rude knowledge of the tambour and guitar. The convent was the principal source of religious information, of spiritual assistance, and of medicinal relief, which the Batuecan shepherds possessed. It was occupied by fifteen monks, who, it was asserted (and the assertion was not contradicted), spent their whole time in religious exercises, and works of practical virtue, never hesitating, at any hour of the night, to traverse the coldest mountains, to administer the consolation of their sacred functions to those who required them. They never evinced a disposition to mingle in the civil war which afflicted the country: the ruggedness of the territory in which the convent was placed was a security that it could never be fixed upon as an asylum for arms and provisions of the factious. The locality of the establishment; the thousand recollections by which it was endeared to the simple race of people around it, and its acknowledged utility in such a situation, were however pleaded in vain for its continuance; it was subjected to the rigid law of suppression. It was the first public calamity which the people of the Batuecas experienced; it was not doubted that they would, one and all, resent it as a wanton act of hostility on the part of the government.

It was considered a great misfortune in the constitution of December. the present Cortes, that there were very few of the deputies men of property. To the majority the stipend * paid for their attendance was an object of primary consideration. Nobody would say that a poor man might not be a good legislator. But when it is considered that almost every law which is enacted has an immediate or remote influence upon property, it would perhaps be desirable, if the security of property be an object of care to the Constitution, that the legislator should have an interest rather in defending than undermining it. The reader is perhaps aware that the ninety-second article of the Constitution declares that, in order to qualify a candidate for a seat in Cortes, he must be possessed of a proportionate yearly income; but the ninety-third article suspends this wise provision until a future legislature shall determine the amount of the income, and the nature of the property from which it should arise.

There were those who felt little surprise that the measures of a body so constituted should have been looked upon with extreme jealousy by several of the courts of Europe. Had it confined itself within the jurisdiction of an assembly strictly deliberative, it would have been less liable to objection. But the Cortes went a great deal beyond this; they exercised at once the powers of the legislature and the executive; they revised the proceedings of inferior courts of justice, and indirectly influenced the disposal of every office in the state, civil and military. Nay, they even interfered with the regulations of the Universities, and ordered degrees to be conceded simply on the petition of the party. In short, every thing of importance was transacted through the medium of Cortes: they acted more as a sovereign senate than as the legislature of a representative monarchy.

It is a remarkable fact that perhaps in no capital of

* About five dollars a day.

December.

Europe was freedom of opinion less tolerated at this time than in Madrid. Infamy was attached to that side which did not hold that the established Constitution was the best which Spain could adopt, and that it was so perfect as to need no alteration whatsoever. If one of independent mind ventured to think otherwise, and to express his sentiments freely in society, he was put down as a factious individual; his most intimate friend would either denounce him to the government, or abandon him as an enemy with whom he could hold no kind of correspondence. Hence society might be said to have existed no longer in Madrid. Conversation, in such a state of things, must generally turn on politics; if all were not of the same way of thinking, disputes and disagreeable altercations arose; and if they were all agreed, the conversation soon stagnated. In these circumstances many were afraid to speak at all, because they did not wish to break friendships, on one hand, or to expose themselves to the persecution of the authorities on the other. Perhaps, however, some degree of intolerance was natural, if not inevitable, where a new system was in a process of consolidation. Fiery zeal, impatience, and obstinacy are the usual characteristics of those who have suddenly espoused the cause of liberty, and meet with difficulties in maintaining it. The remark applies to revolutionary men in every age and country; but it is strange enough at the same time, that free governments should have their period of tyranny as well as those which are most enslaved.

In the early part of this session of Cortes, it was said that an intention was entertained of bringing the two princes, Don Carlos and Don Francisco de Paula, to trial for their conduct on the 7th of July. The meeting of the Congress at Verona evidently gave a decided check to the ministerial party, who were inclined to extreme measures, and very probably prevented this dangerous proceeding from taking

place. The permission given to Morillo and the Duke del Infantado to stay in Madrid on their paroles, and the decision of the Cortes, with respect to the dictamen of the commission on the affair of the Guards, were sufficient to indicate that the dominant party had very lately learned a lesson of moderation.

As to a war with France, notwithstanding all the preparations which had been already made on the frontiers, there were very few persons in Madrid who, at this time, believed it probable. The Spaniards are an extremely sanguine people. Whatever they wish should happen, that they believe will come to pass, and they go on from day to day under this delusion, until they are at last awakened to their error by the very presence of the evil whose approach they would not credit. The French would never dare to cross the Pyrenees. What! would they have the temerity once more to commit themselves with that "heroic Spanish people," which had already destroyed the flower of their veteran army? It was ridiculous to think of it! Thus they assured themselves, on the remembrance of their former successes; and I observed, that, in alluding to those events, the British army was never mentioned, or thought of, no more than if such a force had never been in the Peninsula.

CHAPTER VII.

THEATRES.—BULL-FIGHTS.

December. ALTHOUGH the theatrical amusements of Madrid are yet behind those of Paris and London, so far as good acting and changes of fine scenery are concerned, still they are not altogether unworthy of notice. The Opera particularly, is at least as good as we had some years ago in London. It is conducted at the principal theatre (El Teatro del Principe) by an Italian company, which, though not numerous, possesses one or two engaging singers. The theatre is about the size of the Lyceum, in the Strand, and is well calculated for the equal distribution of sound. The boxes have a dull appearance, as they are all painted a dead French grey, without gilding or decoration of any sort, except that one or two have velvet cushions, fringed with gold, which belong to noblemen. The King's box, which is in the second circle opposite the stage, is, I am told, handsomely ornamented; but when his Majesty is not present (and it is very seldom lately that he attends the theatre), his box is covered over with a curtain of faded crimson tapestry, which only increases the dull aspect of the house. The boxes in the first circle are mostly private property, being rented by annual subscriptions; a considerable space in the first circle immediately under the Royal box is formed into a kind of tribune, which is allotted to females exclusively. On the other hand, the pit is reserved as exclusively for the men; and, indeed, nothing can be more desirable for an amateur of music than one of the seats in this part of the theatre. They are separated from each other by rails, which support the

arm, and each affords ample accommodation for one person. They are all numbered, and the visitor occupies the number which he finds written on his card of admission. Thus, in the first place, the inconvenience of a crowd is avoided, for no tickets can be issued beyond the number which the seats amount to. In the next place, by a timely application in the morning, one may purchase whatever seat he pleases; and if, during the performance, he wishes to go out and return, his place is still reserved. The convenience of such an arrangement is so obvious, that the London managers would do well to adopt it.

The first opera which I attended was *La Gazza Ladra*: for Rossini is as much the rage here as he is in Paris and London. The principal female character, that of *Nineta*, was performed by Signora Adelaida Sala. She is of a short figure, an intelligent, though not a very handsome countenance, and possesses a charming voice. It is not of an extensive compass, being what is called a contr' alto; but there is a fluidity and a precision of intonation in her notes which must always please the hearer. Nor does she want that divine power of expression, the true magic of the human voice, which revealing, as it were, the internal recesses of the heart of the performer, exercises the same influence over that of the auditor, and binds them together for a moment in the invisible chains of sympathy. I never heard that beautiful prayer of *Nineta*, when she is about to be taken to the scaffold—*Del tu reggi in tal momento*, sung with so much true and touching pathos as by Sala. Without displaying the whole range of her musical knowledge, which the Italian artistes are usually fond of doing, wishing to make themselves appear rather as professors than as performers, Sala runs through every note and change of mode with such facility and in such perfect tone, that she shows herself to be at the same time a refined as well as a judicious mu-

December.

sician. Her ear is delicately true, and she seldom deviates into luxuriant ornament from the current of the melody. Sala would be deemed a valuable acquisition at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket; but as she has been recently married, with Ferdinand's consent, to a Spanish Count, there is no probability that she will try her fate on English boards. The part of *Pippo*, in which Madame Vestris is so great a favourite, was sustained by Signora Josefa Spontoni, a young lady, who, by the mere management of an innate grace, contrives to render an ordinary face and an irregular figure actually agreeable. Her fine eyes, indeed, assist her considerably in creating this delusion. Her voice is pretty, but limited. The tenor *Gianneto* was Luis Mari, one of the musicians of the Royal Chapel. Two or three of his middle notes are remarkably powerful and harmonious; but though he governs his tones generally with a vigilant judgment, he sometimes slides into a weak and tremulous falsetto, which spoils the effect he might otherwise have produced. The orchestra is numerous, and composed of excellent instrumentalists. The first and second violins are not less remarkable for their tact of execution, than for the taste with which they accompanied the sweet airs of this enchanting opera.

It is out doing justice to the Madrilénian audience to add, that they attended to the whole of the performance in a manner which proved the prevalence of a general taste for music. They did not, indeed, wave either their hats or handkerchiefs, nor did they clamour for the favourite singer after the curtain fell. Their attention was silent and fervent; their applause judicious, and their disapprobation decidedly, though rarely, bestowed on the unfortunate Basso. The house was full; but, though the company was certainly of the most respectable order, it did not appear brilliant, because, as is usual in the continental theatres,

every body came dressed as he chose. The ladies mostly wore bonnets, the gentlemen were wrapt in their cloaks. Six small lustres for candles give a dim light to the body of the house, though beneath every box sconces of three branches are affixed, which are lighted on state occasions. Three nights in the week are allotted to operas, the other four to comedies, at this theatre. Those which are dedicated to operas are considered the most fashionable. December.

The only new opera which was produced during the season was *La Fiesta de la Rosa*—The feast of the Rose. The story is founded on a custom established at Salency, a village in the Isle of France, by Medardo, one of the Bishops of Noyon. Salency was his native place, and when he was raised to the mitre, he granted a fund, from which twenty-five pounds was to be paid to the most virtuous girl of the village. The decision was to be by election, and to be renewed every year. The prize this time is unanimously awarded to Carlota Valci, a young maid of amiable qualities, and beloved by Carlos, the adopted son of De Salency, Lord of the Manor. Carlos had gained her heart under the disguise of a peasant, and the fictitious name of Julio. The distinction just conferred upon her added fresh fervour to his attachment, and he had gained her consent to their marriage, when some doubts occurred to the magistrate of the village, as to the validity of the election. This person had sinister designs upon Carlota, and he refused to give her the prize, saying that she encouraged secret amours, which sullied her character. At this stage of the affair there happened to pass through Salency a Prussian Baron, named De Wibrac, an oddity of a genius, advanced in years, crippled with the gout, but still the gallant champion and slave of the women. He hears the story of Carlota, and interests himself so much about her, that he wishes to marry her himself. He represents her case to De Salency, who orders the tardy

December. magistrate to give her the prize; but when he finds that she is the betrothed of his adopted son, he rescinds his decision. At length, after a sufficiency of crosses, and hopes, and inquietudes, it is discovered that Carlos is the son of De Wibrac, who had deserted from the Prussian army some years before, and all parties are made happy at the conclusion. The music is by Carlos Coccia, a Spanish master of some eminence, and too advanced in years, I should imagine, to be, as it is charged to him, a mere imitator of Rossini. The truth is, that the Italians, who give the mode in music, are so wrapt up in their admiration of Rossini, that they imagine nobody can compose a song without drinking from that great source of harmony. It is true that there are several passages in *La Fiesta de la Rosa* which remind one of Rossini's peculiarities, but they are too bold, and in more than one instance, I may add, too beautiful, to be deemed the production of a servile invention. The first act is rather tame, but the second is studded with brilliant pieces, some pursuing an even tranquil current of melody, some gay in the extreme, others as like as possible to what I have seen somewhere called a "conversational *row*," full of comic spirit and character. Sala, or rather the Countess de la Fuentes, for that is her matrimonial name, sustained the character of Carlota. The music, which was written expressly for her voice, is conversant chiefly with the middle tones, in which her organ displays itself with great facility and eloquence. There never was a singer more free from affectation, more at ease, and at the same time more diligent in the precision and execution of her part, than this lady. Her voice is so imbued with kind and pathetic sentiment, that an imaginative mind is disposed to believe she must have acquired it in some delicious sylvan solitude, where the soft echoes of waters falling among the mountains taught her to modulate its natural sweetness. The Baron de