

AN
ACCOUNT
OF
THE CENTRAL
OR
SUPREME JUNTA
OF
Spain,
ITS CHIEF MEMBERS,
AND
MOST IMPORTANT PROCEEDINGS.

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ACCOUNT

OF THE

SUPREME JUNTA.

DURING the campaign in Spain, the attention of the public was so exclusively directed to the military events in that country, that they had scarcely leisure to attend to the political transactions of its government, much less to investigate the principles upon which it was formed, or to examine the tendency of the measures it adopted.

The Provincial Juntas, struck out at the heat of the moment, were sufficient to inflame

the enthusiasm of the people, and to produce the explosion to which the popular wishes had previously given the proper direction; but they soon became assemblies of intrigue, cabal, and corruption; and even where the embers of public spirit remained in them, they were not perceptible beyond the limits of their respective provinces. Disunion, if not civil war, was apprehended; and the necessity of some metropolitan government was generally felt, and early acknowledged. Nearly all Spaniards joined in the propriety of establishing some general government; though they differed as to the form it should assume, or the persons who should compose it, according to the tenor of their respective political principles, the bias of their professions, or the accidents of their local interests and affections. Military men were generally averse to Juntas and Assemblies, and would willingly have entrusted the whole government to a Regent. The gentlemen of the robe were all for leaving it in the hands of the Council of Castile. And the Provincial Juntas, reluctant

reluctant to part with their new-acquired authority, and still more with the patronage they had very generally assumed, and used very lavishly, were nevertheless inclined to acquiesce in any expedient rather than submit to the Council of Castile, from whom they could expect no favours, and whose conduct in the critical moments of the revolution, if susceptible of apology, was neither entitled to gratitude nor reward.

After a variety of intrigues and jealousies, and one instance of considerable violence,* the Deputies from the various Provincial Juntas met at Aranjuez on the 19th of September; and, with as much pomp as the occasion required, were invested with the authority of the Supreme Government of the Kingdom, under the title of *Central or Supreme Junta*. The tranquillity of their inauguration was, in a great measure, due to the forbearance and moderation of General Castanos; for it is univer-

* General Cuesta's imprisonment of VALDES, Deputy from Leon.

sally supposed in Spain, that nothing but his concurrence was wanting for the completion of a plan of provisional government, which would have been purely and exclusively military. In that plan, General Cuesta was the prime mover. The subsequent conduct of the Central Junta, in acknowledging his real merits, at a moment when his defeat would have enabled them to ruin him in the estimation of the public, is a rare instance of magnanimity and justice, which deserves to be recorded; while, on the other hand, if report says true, that gallant and popular veteran both feels and shows his gratitude for such distinctions, in a manner equally honourable to his head and heart.

The Central Junta consists only of thirty-six Deputies; a number too small for a popular assembly, and yet too large (even if entirely composed of able statesmen) for an Executive Government or Council of State. But there are not greater defects in the constitution, than in the

the composition of that Assembly. It is true, that, with the exception of Don FRANCISCO SAAVEDRA, who declined being a Deputy, and has been since nominated Minister of Finance, the persons most remarkable for their political reputation and talents are to be found in the list. But there is too much reason to believe, that, in most instances, the choice fell on individuals of no experience, and little capacity; and, in some, on such as from their character should have been excluded from any share of authority in a well regulated state. Of the latter, however, the examples are very few; and the Junta has been so well aware of them, that, in the most flagrant instance, it has very prudently sought a pretext for removing the Deputy from the Seat of Government, by appointing him to a commission of no great importance; but which, in all probability, the peculiar turn of his talents will convert into a profitable job for himself.

The most remarkable persons in the Junta, at the time of its first formation, were Count

FLORIDA BLANCA; Don Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos; Don Antonio Valdes, Knight of Malta; Prince Pio; Don Martin Garay, Don Lorenzo Calvo; and, in point of rank, wealth, and probity, the Count of ALTAMIRA, better known in England by the title of Marquis of Astorga.

Prince Pio, who was an accomplished man, with considerable talents, died soon after the battle of Tudela; and was succeeded by the Marquis of ROMANA, who has never quitted his army to take his seat in the Junta.

COUNT FLORIDA BLANCA, though of a great age, lived till the month of January, and died President of the Central Junta in Seville, where he was interred with great pomp. He had been named President for six months, from a knowledge of his unimpeachable integrity, from a well-grounded confidence in his zeal for the cause, from deference to his great experience, from the popularity of his name, and an extravagant admiration of his long ministry; which,

compared with what followed it, seemed to be the epoch of Spanish glory and prosperity. But his talents, at all times those of an adroit politician rather than an able statesman, had not improved by retirement; and if age had not impaired his faculties, neither had it abated his love of power, sweetened his temper, nor softened his prejudices. He was not only unfit for the management of a machine, so totally dissimilar from that which he had once been accustomed to wield; but, inured by system and habit to the substance as well as forms of arbitrary monarchy, he was on every occasion as fearful of the people whom he governed, as of the enemy against whom he hoped to direct their exertions. Extremely jealous of his personal dignity and authority, he clung to the heterogeneous form of Government from which he had derived it; and his prejudices, his impatience of contradiction, and his art in checking questions which he could not meet, may be considered as the chief causes of the long neglect of those measures, which it was the first duty of the Central Junta to have adopted.

They were, however, early called upon to consider those measures by Don Gaspar Melchor de JOVELLANOS. That philosophical minister, so justly celebrated for the variety and excellence of his literary productions, had been released from his long and unjust confinement, by one of the first orders of the short-lived power of Ferdinand the Seventh. He consequently espoused the cause of his country and King, from motives of patriotism mixed with personal gratitude. The same feelings induced him to leave the retirement which he had sought to repair his shattered health, and, at the nomination of his native province of Asturias, to take his seat in the Junta. He immediately called the attention of his colleagues to the nature of their authority, and urged the necessity of concentrating the executive government without delay, and of placing the legislative power on its only true basis, by fixing a period for the convocation of the General Cortes of the kingdom. His motion was delivered in writing; and as great apprehension was entertained

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of its publicity, the subject was promised to be resumed at a future period, and all discussion upon it deprecated in the interval.

The same influence in the Junta procured a decree, declaring the laws of Spain, with respect to the Press, in full force; and no opposition to this inexcusable measure has ever reached us, but a protest of CALVO, the Deputy from Saragossa. Let it not, however, be inferred, that such a declaration excited neither disgust nor disappointment in Spain. The authors at Madrid who had most distinguished themselves in the popular cause, and particularly that society of literary men who conducted the *Semanario Patriótico*, (a work not less remarkable for the liberality and boldness of its principles, than for the excellence of its style,) received the intelligence with mixed emotions of concern and indignation. If, on the subsequent reverses of fortune, every other feeling had not been sacrificed to the cause of national independence, there is no doubt but the friends of

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a free press would have formed a party, which would ultimately have proved fatal to the authority of the Junta. But the irruption of the French made all good Spaniards suspend all secondary considerations; and those who had been the objects of the ill-directed jealousy of the Government, were found in the hour of its adversity to be its steadiest and ablest supporters.

On the arrival of the Junta at Seville, Don Pedro CEVALLOS, who had ingratiated himself with Count FLORIDA BLANCA, was sent, according to the dying request of the latter, on a special embassy to England; and the business of the Foreign Office was transferred to Don Martin GARAY, Member and Secretary of the Junta; who, to high principle, and great talents for the dispatch of business, adds the advantages of very popular manners and the activity of a man in the vigour of life. One of his first measures was the appointment, to what we should call the

under Secretaryship of State, of Don Manuel

QUINTANA, well known to the literary world for his political compositions and other works, and still more valued in Spain for the general liberality of his principles, his inflexible independence of character during the influence of the Prince of the Peace, and his steady and disinterested attachment to the cause of his country; when he was exposed to the harder trial of resisting temptations offered him by General O'Farril, and rejected with scorn the advances of persons, whom till then he had been accustomed to regard with esteem and affection.

The first month of the residence of the Government at Seville was a period of uncertainty and consternation; in which both the public and the Junta were chiefly occupied with projects of defence, equipment of troops, and organization of armies. Indeed, defective as the Central Junta is, both in constitution and composition, the disinterested spirit evinced in its appointment of civil and military officers must be acknowledged to be a phenomenon by those most conversant

conversant with the character and history of oligarchies; and the enlistment, clothing, and equipment of full 90,000 infantry and 9000 cavalry, in the course of four months, in Andalusia, will hardly be considered as less miraculous by persons who are acquainted with the nature, resources, and habits of the Southern Provinces of Spain.

These merits, undoubtedly, entitle the present Government of Spain to more praise than they have met with; but they do not render the general narrowness of their system less unjustifiable, or the original defects of their constitution less glaring or dangerous. Indeed, the doubtful nature of the right on which their authority has been founded, has occurred more than once to persons, whom, in the discharge of their duties, they have been compelled to displace; and reflections on the consequences of a victory or a defeat of their armies, which the approach of the enemy towards Andalusia must have forced upon the minds of the Mem-
bers,

bers, have no doubt convinced them of the precarious tenure of their authority, and the justice of that prediction, which told them that the only *eulhanasia* of so anomalous a body was to be found in the arms of the General Cortes of the Kingdom.

The principles originally laid down, with his usual perspicuity and eloquence, by JOVELLANOS, have gradually gained Proselytes among his colleagues; and the dignity of his character has given authority to opinions which he was too scrupulous to urge by intrigue, and too mild to enforce with vehemence or intimidation. This worthy and truly philosophical man, with large and enlightened views, and eloquence both pathetic and convincing, feels so much disdain for the arts usually resorted to for obtaining political power and importance, that he is perhaps justly suspected of neglecting even the legitimate and practical means of giving effect to the notions which he espouses and recommends. If, therefore, the Spanish
people

people owe the first mention of their rights to his disinterested and inflexible patriotism, they will not be less indebted to the activity and zeal of his younger associates, if any part of his designs is carried into execution.

Among these, CALVO and GARAY are the most conspicuous in the Junta. The former, a merchant of Madrid, took an early part in the revolution, had great influence with General Palafox, and on more occasions than one distinguished himself, even among the defenders of Saragossa, for personal intrepidity, in the course of the first memorable siege of that city. His decision of character, and energy in council, are said to be equal to his constitutional bravery; and when convinced of the necessity of a measure, he is not likely to overlook the favourable moment, or to omit the most effectual means, of accomplishing it. He is supposed, within these few weeks, to have brought the question of the Government of Spain to a crisis, by boldly avowing his determination

of publishing his opinion and the grounds of it, if the measure of announcing a convocation of the Cortes be not adopted.

In consequence of the instances of CALVO, the original motion of JOVELLANOS has been referred to the various sections into which the Junta is divided; and the substance of it has been approved of by all of them. It is generally supposed, that a day is actually fixed for determining at what period the convocation of the Cortes is to be fixed, and in what form and language the resolution, announcing that event to the public, is to be couched. There is too much reason to apprehend, that the period fixed for the Cortes will be remote; for though the perverse and prejudiced opposition, which is said to be fomented by RIQUELME, the Deputy from Grenada, may not be able to resist the unquestionable rights of their countrymen, they will probably be successful in withholding the enjoyment of them from the people for a very considerable time.

If, indeed, there were any means of apprising the body of the people of the nature of the measure in agitation, there is little doubt but the general voice of the country would overwhelm every impediment to its progress. But the Provincial Juntas, too much disposed to consider the exclusive interests of their own body, are not likely to recommend a scheme, which, they would very reasonably infer, must impair their influence, if not destroy their existence: and, exclusive of the severity of the laws respecting publications, the actual dearth of printing presses, and persons capable of working them, presents no small obstacle to the diffusion of necessary knowledge upon such topics throughout the country. The printing presses at Seville, and in every town out of the possession of the French, with the exception perhaps of Valencia, are barely sufficient to publish the edicts of the Government and the news of the day. Don Pedro CEVALLOS was commissioned by the Government to procure a press in London; but, on frivolous pretences of

of difficulties which might easily have been overcome, it has not yet been furnished. These circumstances are the more to be regretted, because the preponderance of a liberal party in the administration of the Government of Spain, though unable to accomplish the total repeal of the restrictive laws, might so far prevent the execution of them, that, with a proper degree of circumspection and prudence, the purposes of a free press at this moment might in a great measure be accomplished.

Even under these disadvantages, the publication of the *Semanario Patriotico* has been resumed; and as all the authors of it have found their way to Seville, there is little doubt but such a publication will be productive of the most beneficial consequences to the cause of Spanish Liberty and Independence.

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FINIS.