

It must be admitted, however, that an account of this reign could not have been undertaken at any preceding period, with any thing like the advantages at present afforded; owing to the light which recent researches of Spanish scholars, in the greater freedom of inquiry now enjoyed, have shed on some of its most interesting and least familiar features. The most important of the works to which I allude are, the History of the Inquisition, from official documents, by its secretary, Llorente; the analysis of the political institutions of the kingdom, by such writers as Marina, Sempere, and Capmany; the literal version, now made for the first time, of the Spanish-Arab chronicles, by Conde; the collection of original and unpublished documents, illustrating the history of Columbus and the early Castilian navigators, by Navarrete; and, lastly, the copious illustrations of Isabella's reign, by Clemencin, the late lamented secretary of the Royal Academy of

Ferdinand et Isabelle, par l'Abbé Mignot, Paris, 1766," and the "Geschichte der Regierung Ferdinand des Katholischen, von Rupert Becker, Prag und Leipzig, 1790." Their authors have employed the most accessible materials only in the compilation; and, indeed, they lay claim to no great research, which would seem to be precluded by the extent of their works, in neither instance exceeding two volumes duodecimo. They have the merit of exhibiting, in a simple, perspicuous form, those events, which, lying on the surface, may be found more or less expanded in most general histories.

History, forming the sixth volume of its valuable Memoirs.

It was the knowledge of these facilities for doing justice to this subject, as well as its intrinsic merits, which led me, ten years since, to select it; and surely no subject could be found more suitable for the pen of an American, than a history of that reign, under the auspices of which the existence of his own favored quarter of the globe was first revealed. As I was conscious that the value of the history must depend mainly on that of its materials, I have spared neither pains nor expense, from the first, in collecting the most authentic. In accomplishing this, I must acknowledge the services of my friends, Mr. Alexander H. Everett, then minister plenipotentiary from the United States to the court of Madrid, Mr. Arthur Middleton, secretary of the American legation, and, above all, Mr. O. Rich, now American consul for the Balearic Islands, a gentleman, whose extensive bibliographical knowledge, and unwearied researches, during a long residence in the Peninsula, have been liberally employed for the benefit both of his own country and of England. With such assistance, I flatter myself that I have been enabled to secure whatever can materially conduce to the illustration of the period in question, whether

in the form of chronicle, memoir, private correspondence, legal codes, or official documents. Among these are various contemporary manuscripts, covering the whole ground of the narrative, none of which have been printed, and some of them but little known to Spanish scholars. In obtaining copies of these from the public libraries, I must add, that I have found facilities under the present liberal government, which were denied me under the preceding. In addition to these sources of information, I have availed myself, in the part of the work occupied with literary criticism and history, of the library of my friend, Mr. George Ticknor, who during a visit to Spain, some years since, collected whatever was rare and valuable in the literature of the Peninsula. I must further acknowledge my obligations to the library of Harvard University, in Cambridge, from whose rich repository of books relating to our own country I have derived material aid. And, lastly, I must not omit to notice the favors of another kind for which I am indebted to my friend, Mr. William H. Gardiner, whose judicious counsels have been of essential benefit to me in the revision of my labors.

In the plan of the work, I have not limited myself to a strict chronological narrative of passing events, but have occasionally paused, at the ex-

pense, perhaps, of some interest in the story, to seek such collateral information, as might bring these events into a clearer view. I have devoted a liberal portion of the work to the literary progress of the nation, conceiving this quite as essential a part of its history as civil and military details. I have occasionally introduced, at the close of the chapters, a critical notice of the authorities used, that the reader may form some estimate of their comparative value and credibility. Finally, I have endeavoured to present him with such an account of the state of affairs, both before the accession, and at the demise of the Catholic sovereigns, as might afford him the best points of view for surveying the entire results of their reign.

How far I have succeeded in the execution of this plan, must be left to the reader's candid judgment. Many errors he may be able to detect. Sure I am, there can be no one more sensible of my deficiencies, than myself; although it was not till after practical experience, that I could fully estimate the difficulty of obtaining any thing like a faithful portraiture of a distant age, amidst the shifting hues and perplexing cross lights of historic testimony. From one class of errors my subject necessarily exempts me; those founded on national or party

feeling. I may have been more open to another fault; that of too strong a bias in favor of my principal actors; for characters, noble and interesting in themselves, naturally beget a sort of partiality akin to friendship, in the historian's mind, accustomed to the daily contemplation of them. Whatever defects may be charged on the work, I can at least assure myself, that it is an honest record of a reign important in itself, new to the reader in an English dress, and resting on a solid basis of authentic materials, such as probably could not be met with out of Spain, nor in it without much difficulty.

I hope I shall be acquitted of egotism, although I add a few words respecting the peculiar embarrassments I have encountered, in composing these volumes. Soon after my arrangements were made, early in 1826, for obtaining the necessary materials from Madrid, I was deprived of the use of my eyes for all purposes of reading and writing, and had no prospect of again recovering it. This was a serious obstacle to the prosecution of a work, requiring the perusal of a large mass of authorities, in various languages, the contents of which were to be carefully collated, and transferred to my own pages, verified by minute reference.* Thus shut

* "To compile a history from various authors, when they can only be consulted by other eyes, is not easy, nor possible, but with

out from one sense, I was driven to rely exclusively on another, and to make the ear do the work of the eye. With the assistance of a reader, uninitiated, it may be added, in any modern language but his own, I worked my way through several venerable Castilian quartos, until I was satisfied of the practicability of the undertaking. I next procured the services of one more competent to aid me in pursuing my historical inquiries. The process was slow and irksome enough, doubtless, to both parties, at least till my ear was accommodated to foreign sounds, and an antiquated, oftentimes barbarous phraseology, when my progress became more sensible, and I was cheered with the prospect of success. It certainly would have been a far more serious misfortune, to be led thus blindfold through the pleasant paths of literature; but my track stretched, for the most part, across dreary wastes, where no beauty lurked, to arrest the traveller's eye and charm his senses. After persevering in this course for some years, my eyes, by the blessing of Providence, recovered sufficient strength

more skilful and attentive help than can be commonly obtained." (Johnson's *Life of Milton*.) This remark of the great critic, which first engaged my attention in the midst of my embarrassments, although discouraging at first, in the end stimulated the desire to overcome them.

to allow me to use them, with tolerable freedom, in the prosecution of my labors, and in the revision of all previously written. I hope I shall not be misunderstood, as stating these circumstances to deprecate the severity of criticism, since I am inclined to think the greater circumspection I have been compelled to use has left me, on the whole, less exposed to inaccuracies, than I should have been in the ordinary mode of composition. But, as I reflect on the many sober hours I have passed in wading through black letter tomes, and through manuscripts whose doubtful orthography and defiance of all punctuation were so many stumbling-blocks to my amanuensis, it calls up a scene of whimsical distresses, not usually encountered, on which the good-natured reader may, perhaps, allow I have some right, now that I have got the better of them, to dwell with satisfaction.

I will only remark, in conclusion of this too prolix discussion about myself, that while making my tortoise-like progress, I saw what I had fondly looked upon as my own ground, (having indeed lain unmolested by any other invader for so many ages,) suddenly entered, and in part occupied, by one of my countrymen. I allude to Mr. Irving's "History of Columbus," and "Chronicle of Granada";

the subjects of which, although covering but a small part of my whole plan, form certainly two of its most brilliant portions. Now, alas! if not devoid of interest, they are, at least, stripped of the charm of novelty. For what eye has not been attracted to the spot, on which the light of that writer's genius has fallen?

I cannot quit the subject, which has so long occupied me, without one glance at the present unhappy condition of Spain; who, shorn of her ancient splendor, humbled by the loss of empire abroad, and credit at home, is abandoned to all the evils of anarchy. Yet, deplorable as this condition is, it is not so bad as the lethargy in which she has been sunk for ages. Better be hurried forward for a season on the wings of the tempest, than stagnate in a deathlike calm, fatal alike to intellectual and moral progress. The crisis of a revolution, when old things are passing away, and new ones are not yet established, is, indeed, fearful. Even the immediate consequences of its achievement are scarcely less so to a people who have yet to learn by experiment the precise form of institutions best suited to their wants, and to accommodate their character to these institutions. Such results must come with time, however, if the nation be but true to itself.

And that they will come, sooner or later, to the Spaniards, surely no one can distrust who is at all conversant with their earlier history, and has witnessed the examples it affords of heroic virtue, devoted patriotism, and generous love of freedom;

“ Chè l' antico valore
—— non è ancor morto.”

Clouds and darkness have, indeed, settled thick around the throne of the youthful Isabella; but not a deeper darkness than that which covered the land in the first years of her illustrious namesake; and we may humbly trust, that the same Providence, which guided her reign to so prosperous a termination, may carry the nation safe through its present perils, and secure to it the greatest of earthly blessings, civil and religious liberty.

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