

Literature, &c.

THE URBANOS OF CENICERO.

THAT most dreadful of all national scourges, civil war, whilst it sets in turbulent motion the worst passions of human nature, and leaves society so saturated with its demoralizing virus, that the paralyzing effects are usually visible for a long period after the cessation of the armed struggle, has also frequently brought to light many noble qualities, and has produced deeds of heroism in resisting lawless attacks on domestic peace, or in defending institutions which the people feel to be essential to the honor, welfare, and security of their country.

The late fierce struggle in Spain—which was not merely a contest for the possession of a throne, but a hot dispute between antagonist political principles—afforded numerous examples of the bright as well as of the dark side of the picture.

It was in the autumn of 1834, when the Carlist rebellion had lasted more than a year, that the pretender's army had assumed an imposing attitude under the command of the celebrated chief Zumalacarrégu. The system of warfare adopted by that remarkable man was well calculated to strengthen the position of Don Carlos in a military point of view. At that early period of the civil war, the sturdy inhabitants of the Basque provinces and Navarre believed that their Fueros, or their privileges, as well as their religious institutions, were in imminent peril, and that Don Carlos was the only means of salvation from such dreaded evils: they accordingly took up arms without hesitation against the queen's forces, and in every way aided and seconded the operations of Zumalacarrégu; supplying his troops with provisions and resources of every description, and adopting those efficacious means of harassing and attacking the enemy, which their mountainous country enabled them to put in practice, with comparatively little danger to themselves, but with deadly effect upon the Christians, whenever they ventured to penetrate into the Carlist territory. After six years or more of sacrifices of every kind, they discovered their grievous error: but to our narrative.

In the autumn of 1834 when the rebellion was in its full force, although Zumalacarrégu wisely confined his operations, in a general way to Navarre and the Basque provinces, his troops occasionally crossed the Ebro at places where it is fordable at certain periods, and made incursions into Castile, carrying off whatever booty they could seize, inflicting the severest calamities on the unprotected inhabitants, and wreaking dire vengeance upon those who might unsuccessfully oppose them.

One of the most active and intelligent agents was in Castile, disguised as a por-diosero, or a beggar for God's sake. His seemingly decrepit frame was scantily covered with patched and tattered garments, his face was overgrown with stubby matted hair, whilst an old dirty brown cloth cap, of uncouth form, encased his head, and overshadowed his eyes. In this miserable guise, and with a wallet slung across his shoulders, the spy went from place to place soliciting alms and broken victuals from the unsuspecting and charitable inhabitants, from whom he frequently contrived to gather much valuable intelligence.

Having ascertained that eight waggon loads with military clothing were on their way from Miranda de Ebro to Logronno, under a comparatively feeble escort, and that there was not any considerable body of the queen's forces in the vicinity, or within several days' march, the por-diosero took his leave of the worthy laborer or small farmer under whose humble roof, near the Venta de la Estrella, in the rich and fertile district of La Rioja, in Old Castile, he had received shelter and sustenance, and leaning on his staff, with body bent apparently with infirmity, he crept along the road from Miranda de Ebro to Cenicero, a small town on the right bank of the Ebro, on the high road to Logronno, and two leagues from that city.

The day was drawing to a close; the vineyards were glowing with clusters of ripe grapes; the ancient olive trees cast the shadows of their picturesque trunks on the rich soil; thick stubble showed that the harvest had been abundant, and the fruit trees were still adorned with their luscious burdens; on the brown hills, variegated and perfumed with wild thyme, rosemary, and other aromatic herbs, large flocks of sheep were feeding; and all told of a state of society still consistent with the pursuit of the ordinary occupations of peaceful life, though the consciousness that the focus of war was so nigh at hand grievously interfered with its enjoyment.

“Una limosnita por Dios, señor!”—“A trifling alms for God's sake, señor!”—drawled the pseudo beggar, as he was overtaken by a hardy-looking man, wearing a rough brown jacket, a military cap with a tarnished gold band, and having a heavy sabre pendant at his side from a broad black leather belt, and mounted on a powerful, though not a handsome horse.

The traveller gave him a few quartos. “Heaven will repay you,” said the por-diosero; and kissing the small copper coin, put it into his wallet.

The horseman was followed by a good looking man in a peasant's garb, who bestrode a fine male lightly laden with personal baggage including the alforjas, well stuffed with stomach comforts.

“Antonio, give that poor creature a piece of bread and a draught of wine,” said the horseman as he rode forward.

“Si, señor,” replied Antonio; and halting his mule, he sprang lightly from his back, lifted up the flap of the alforjas or woollen saddle-bags, took out a good sized loaf, opened a long knife which he carried in a side-pocket cut the loaf in

halves, and gave one of them to the por-diosero, who accepted it with humble demeanour, breaking a piece off directly, and eating it with apparent eagerness and appetite. Meantime the muleteer lifted out from the other side of the alforjas a bota or wine skin, and having untied the muzzle, poured some of its contents into a horn cup, and presented it to the por-diosero.

“How good it is!” cried the latter, after having with trembling hand lifted the cup to his lips, and quaffed a portion of the generous liquid.

“What a good man your master is!”

“Indeed he is,” replied the muleteer, “and though only a factor (a commissariat store-keeper), he does much good in these trying times. But he is far in advance. Make haste my good man, and finish the wine. We must travel as far as Logronno to night, to announce the arrival of the convoy, which will start early in the morning from Briones.”

The por-diosero emptied the cup, and returned it, with renewed thanks, to the active and kind hearted peysano, who mounted his mule, and trotted off briskly to rejoin his master.

It was now nearly dark: the spy hobbled along the road, until he reached a spot where there was a path to the left, leading to some sloping vineyards. Turning down it, he continued his seeming pace for about fifty yards; then, after looking cautiously round, he suddenly stood erect, grasped his staff in the centre, and plunged down the slope—still directing his course to the left—with the speed of a vigorous man bent on an urgent mission. In about an hour he descended the Ebro, and having reached its bank, paused a few moments to take breath; then grasping his long staff at the upper end, and feeling his way with it, he advanced into the stream. At first the water only reached his knees, then his waist. Still he waded on, the river deepening more and more every step he took, until, at about the centre, he reached a little island covered with reeds. Here he rested for a few minutes, looking anxiously towards the Alavese shore. He soon perceived a glimmering light, and again entering the stream, made for it.

For a little distance the water reached his armpits, but it gradually shallowed, and he landed in the Carlist country without accident. Before quitting the water, however, he washed his matted hair and beard, his face eyes and hands; and the decrepit looking por-diosero of the Rioja emerged from the Ebro a well-looking man of about thirty, a little above the middle height, full of vigour and spirit, though still covered with tattered garments dripping wet. He stopped for a minute to squeeze the water from those garments, and then, taking long leaps by the aid of his staff, and anon, running swiftly with it balanced in his hand, he soon reached a cottage through whose only window gleamed a bright light—his beacon when fording the river.

“Halo! Francisco,” he cried, knocking sharply at the door with the end of his staff; “open the door; here am I.”

On hearing the well known voice, a man leaped from the bench on which he had been reposing, and unbarred the door. “Welcome,” said the cottager, as his friends crossed the threshold: “go into the alcoba, and doff those wet shreds; you'll find your own garments all ready; meantime I will cast some wood on the fire, and Ramona will get the supper ready; it only requires warming.”

“Thank you, good Francisco; but let your task be to saddle Moro without a moment's delay.”

The blaze crackled, and Ramona, the cottager's wife, bustled about, and took two ollas or earthen pipkins from the cupboard, and laid a coarse but clean cloth on the table, and just as the contents of the pipkins began to bubble, the alcove curtain was drawn aside, and Astuto—that was the name of the newly arrived guest stepped forth clad in the uniform of a Carlist officer.

“Do you bring good news, captain?” enquired Ramona.

“Excellent—but not a moment must be lost. Where is Zumalacarrégu?”

“At La Guardia,” replied Ramona, and removing one of the pipkins from the hearth, she took out a portion of its savoury contents with a wooden spoon, and transferred it to a homely but perfectly clean earthen plate. “Come, Captain Astuto,” she said, “take some of this nice pechero—you must be quite exhausted.”

“Muchas gracias, kind Ramona: pray go and hasten Francisco: tell him to bring the horse to the door instantly.”

Ramona vanished, and Astuto discussed his meal with the avidity and tact of a man accustomed to snatch his food on all opportune occasions.

The moment the horse appeared, Astuto mounted, and rode off at a sharp pace in the direction of La Guardia, a town in Alava, about two leagues off, and whither it had been preconcerted that Zumalacarrégu should repair with his forces, and station them in the town or its vicinity, in order to be at hand in case the fruits of Astuto's spying mission should render it expedient to make a dash on the enemy's territory. The captain rapidly traversed the five or six miles between Francisco's cottage and La Guardia; and proceeding direct to Zumalacarrégu's quarters, he in a few words imparted to his chief the valuable intelligence he had collected. Military clothing was much wanted in the Carlist army; here, then, was an unforeseen opportunity of obtaining a supply from the Christians themselves. Orders were instantly issued for the troops to be got under arms quietly, not only in La Guardia, but in the villages and hamlets, where several battalions were lodged; the whole force being about five thousand active, willing, brave men, whom nothing would so much delight as to make a

successful foray in the enemy's country. By daybreak the whole five thousand men were within a mile of the Alavese bank of the Ebro, in the direction of a place where it was at that period fordable, and nearly opposite to the town of Cenicero, in that part of Old Castile called La Rioja, already mentioned. The ford is called El Vado de Tronconegro. The troops were carefully concealed behind some hillocks, and among the brushwood, where they were ordered to lie down.

Early on the same morning the Christo convoy, protected only by a company of caadores, or light infantry, and about a hundred cavalry, left Briones, a small town on the high road from Miranda, in conformity with the statement of the muleteer to the Carlist spy the evening before. The escort was commanded by a brave and active officer, Colonel Amor, who, although he was aware that El Vado de Tronconegro was passable at that time, in consequence of the low state of the Ebro, had not the slightest idea that Zumalacarrégu was laying in wait for him, with so overwhelming a force, on the opposite side of the river. All went on well during the march from Briones to Cenicero; but soon after the convoy had passed through that town, the Carlist commander in chief arrived on the opposite bank the Ebro, and immediately led the way to the ford of Tronconegro. It was a strange scene when the bold and crafty Zumalacarrégu, clad in black sheep-skin zamarra, with a scarlet boyna, or Basque bonnet on his head, a long sabre pendant from his loins, and mounted on a charger, full of fire and spirit, but perfectly under command, advanced into the waters of the Ebro, followed by his staff, all in similar costume, their boyas only being of varied colours—blue, red, and white. The troops, wading up to their waists, and holding their muskets over their heads, soon formed a living chain across the Ebro, emerging in succession on the Castilian shore with the utmost alacrity, and fording rapidly close to Cenicero.

The inhabitants beheld this sudden and unlooked for invasion with dire alarm. They knew how hateful they had rendered themselves to the Carlists by the numerous proofs they had given of their warm attachment to the constitutional cause; about fifty of the most respectable men in the place had enrolled themselves as Urbanos, or national guards; and the church had been fortified: in short, Cenicero was one of the most compromised of the towns in La Rioja. Large bodies of the queen's troops were frequently stationed there; but at this critical moment it was protected only by the fifty Urbanos against an army of facciosos amounting to 5,000 resolute men. Before the Carlist column entered Cenicero the fifty Urbanos threw themselves into the fortified church, firmly resolved to defend that important post to the last.

Zumalacarrégu, having thus entered Cenicero without opposition, passed rapidly through the town with his main force, leaving a battalion with peremptory orders to take the church, no matter at what sacrifice. Relying upon the accomplishment of this object by a strong battalion against fifty armed civilians, thus securing a strongly fortified point to fall back upon in case of need, Zumalacarrégu hastened forward on the high road to Logronno, in pursuit of the convoy.

The church of Cenicero is a strong edifice of considerable extent, with a lofty tower. It stands near the extremity of the town, overlooking the Logronno road; and is approached thence by a rather steep ascent, after passing a few small houses at its foot. It has two gates, one on the north, the other on the south. The former had been walled up with strong masonry, and the other was protected by a tabor, or stone redoubt, in a semicircular form, masking the gate, and affording room inside the semicircle for a party of men, who could fire through twelve or fourteen loopholes in the wall of the tabor, which was about seven feet in height, but not roofed, as there was no fear of attack from those who might occupy the church and its tower. These were the outward defences of the church, into which there was a retreat from the tabor by the gate which it protected. The principal internal fortification was the tower, the entrance thereto being through a small door, opening on a winding stone staircase. Six of the stone steps had been removed, and their place supplied by a ladder, which could be drawn up, in case a hostile force should gain possession of the church.

The Carlist battalion attacked the church vigorously. Tiradores, or sharpshooters, were planted in all directions, firing at the belfry, with a view of preventing the Urbanos from annoying the besiegers from that commanding post. Forceful possession was taken of the houses in front the southern gate; the mattresses were dragged off the beds, and, being stuffed into the open windows, formed parapets from behind which volleys of musketry were poured upon the roofless tabor; but the bullets generally struck against the wall of the church, became flattened, and fell harmless at the feet of the brave Urbanos, who, watched through the loopholes, picked off every faccioso who might venture to raise his head above the mattress barricades opposite.

Eight facciosos were killed, and only one Urbano wounded (in the finger), during this attack and defence, which lasted until two in the afternoon; at which hour Zumalacarrégu returned with the bulk of his force, after capturing six of the eight waggons at about a league from Logronno. The two others, being considerably in advance, escaped, and succeeded in entering the city, whose walls Zumalacarrégu did not venture to approach.

There was a skirmish between the slender escort of the convoy and the advance of the

overwhelming Carlist force. Colonel Amor defended his charge to the uttermost, killing a Carlist officer and two soldiers with his own hand but he was at last forced to retire to Logronno.

When Zumalacarrégu found that the gallant little civic garrison of the fortified church of Cenicero still held out, and that several of his men had been killed and wounded, his fury exceeded all bounds.

He sent for the cura, and ordered him to go instantly to the church, and summon the Urbanos to a parley.

“Tell them,” cried Zumalacarrégu, with that vehemence of voice and gesture which all knew were unequivocal signs of his determination to fulfil his threats—“tell them that I demand immediate surrender, and that, in case of refusal, they shall all be shot upon being made prisoners, which they will inevitably be in a few hours.”

The cura wended his way to the church with an anxious heart. He was a pious and exemplary clergyman, and was beloved by his parishioners, in whose constitutional sentiments he fully participated.

Orders were given to the Carlists to cease firing during the conference; and the Urbanos drew back their musket barrels from the loopholes, of their own accord, the moment they perceived the venerable curate.

He advanced to the redoubt, and delivered his message. His benevolent heart dictated to counsel submission, seeing that Zumalacarrégu had so large a force, and being anxious to save the lives of this meritorious fraction of his flock, now in such imminent peril; and yet his tongue refused to give utterance to words of persuasion to surrender a post of such vital importance to the national cause.

“Tell Zumalacarrégu,” answered the gallant Urbano, “that we will resist until the death; that we would prefer being crushed under the ruins of our church, to making terms with a rebel.”

Zumalacarrégu was seated on a stone bench outside the gateway of a house at the other extremity of the town whilst the cura was parleying with the Urbanos. His troops were so stationed as to guard against a surprise, and his advanced posts were pushed as far as Montalvo, a picturesque village a league off, on the Miranda road; scouts being despatched both in that direction and towards Logronno, to ascertain if any large body of the queen's forces was on its way to attack him.

On the cura's approach, Zumalacarrégu started up, crying—“Have they surrendered?”

“No, señor.” And the cura stated the noble reply of the Urbanos in their own emphatic words.

Zumalacarrégu's rage was terrific. Stamping his feet, he threatened the cura with death; and, infuriated at being thus foiled by a handful of civilians, he ordered his officers to proceed with parties of soldiers and seize all the female relatives of the brave men who were defending the church. His mandate was speedily carried into effect, and the trembling women were brought before him.

Zumalacarrégu fixed his piercing eyes on them for a few moments, without speaking a word; then turning to a man who stood by his side—one of the few inhabitants of Carlist principles—he communed with him in an under tone.

Amongst the women was the mother of two of the Urbanos. She stood watching, with anxious glances, the gestures of her neighbour, who, whilst conferring with Zumalacarrégu, had more than once furtively directed his attention towards her. At length the Carlist chief bade the mother approach.

“Senora,” he said, with a ghastly sneer, “I presume that your sons, who are firing upon my men from the church yonder, would be sorry to hear that their mother had been shot?”

The poor woman covered beneath the flash of deadly light which fell upon her wan countenance, as Zumalacarrégu uttered these cruelly sarcastic words; but almost immediately recovering her serenity, she replied, with a calm dignity worthy of a Roman matron—“Senor, my sons love their mother.”

“Very well, I doubt it not,” said Zumalacarrégu, still leaning on his sword, his boyna-covered head bent slightly toward the mother, and regarding her with eyes whose dark balls had a deadly expression—“very well; we will put their affection to the proof. Go with that officer, and tell your sons and companions that, unless they yield instantly, you shall be shot; not only so, but all the female relatives of the other fellows who call themselves Urbanos, shall also have their anxieties put an end to by CUATRO TIROS* Go and fulfil your mission.”

The stern Carlist chief resumed his seat on the stone bench, and the mother accompanied the officer, a rough-looking man, wearing a very shaggy black zamarra, and a white boyna ornamented with a gold tassel. They were escorted by a file of Carlist soldiers, not two of whose half-military half-peasant costumes were alike. There was also a trumpeter, a lad about sixteen, dressed in a blue velvet jacket with silver bell buttons, loose coarse linen trousers, a flannel red boyna covering his bushy head, and his hair hanging in thick meshes on each side of his sunburnt face.

When arrived within a short distance of the church, the little trumpeter sounded a parley, by order of the officer. The firing on both sides ceased, and the mother advanced, followed by the officer and the Carlist guard.

“Go forward and deliver your message,” said the officer roughly.

The space between one edge of the semicircular redoubt and the other was about twenty feet. That is, four shots, the mode of military execution in Spain being, that four soldiers fire together on the victims.