

OUR TABLE.

THE WAR IN SYRIA—BY COMMODORE NAPIER.

THE author of this history has been for many years a favourite of Fame, by whom his many sterling and striking qualities, have been accorded their full meed of praise. Since the storming of Beyrout, a new laurel has been added to his crown, and a new lustre thrown around the former successes of his energetic, daring, and enthusiastic character. He is what the mind naturally pictures to itself, as the free and dauntless sailor—the indomitable defender of the glory which has been bequeathed to England by the heroes of the deep, whose prowess won for the Ocean-isles the proud distinction of the Empire of the Sea.

Sir Charles now appears before us in a new character—that of the historian of a war in which he played the most conspicuous part. The book is stamped with the impress of its author's nature. It is written in a frank and manly strain; the greatest fault of which, is, that the author, being his own historian, has leaned too much to self—has taken the place of some other writer, and drawn his own character, perhaps with truth, but in a manner which would have come better from some other source. The trumpet which proclaimed his prowess has been ringing in his ears, and he has not been able to withstand the strong temptation which prompted him to give it a more enduring place in the pages of his own book. He has also treated in rather a cavalier manner, some of the higher officers with whom he was associated, and under whose command he *nominally* was. We say *nominally*, because he acted during the campaign, more as a chief than as a subordinate, fearing the wrath of his superiors as little as he did the fire of the enemy, when he saw clearly before him the course by which the objects of the expedition could be secured. The course pursued by Sir Charles Napier would be dangerous to follow—as a precedent, it might lead to the most unhappy consequences; but, in his case, the dazzling character of his success completely hid the perilous path by which that success was attained.

It will be remembered that after the fall of Acre, the Commodore entered into a convention with Mehemet Ali for the evacuation of Syria. It will be remembered, also, that his diplomacy was not admired either by Admiral Stopford, or by Sir Charles Smith, the Commander of the Troops, both of whom protested against the arrangement into which he entered. In the mean time, however, he had sent a copy of the convention to England, and the contents of it, being approved of by the Foreign Office and the Admiralty, the Commodore was furnished with a weapon to revenge himself upon his superiors, who had characterized the agreement made with Mehemet, as “hasty and unauthorized,”—an opinion which Sir Charles Smith had conveyed to him, in the following letter:—

“Head-quarters, Beyrout, 30th November, 1840.

“Sir—Had you fortunately abstained from honouring me with your letter of the 27th instant, I should have been spared the pain of replying to it. I am not aware that you have been invested with special powers or authority to treat with Mehemet Ali as to the evacuation of Syria by the Egyptian troops; and if you have such special powers and authority, you have not taken the trouble of acquainting me therewith.

“The convention into which you have entered had been, as relates to the advanced stage of military events in Syria, more than attained by the retreat of Ibrahim Pasha. If therefore you have, unknown to me, had authority to treat, I must decline to be a party to recommending the ratification of the said convention; and if unauthorized to treat, such convention is invalid, and is by me protested against, as being highly prejudicial to the Sultan's cause, in as far as it has or may have relation to the operations of the army under my command. It is needless for me to add, that a copy of this protest shall be forwarded to Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

“I have, &c.

“C. F. SMITH, Major-General, Commanding the Forces in Syria:
“Commodore Napier, C.B., H. M. S. Powerful.”

To this missive, received shortly after the convention was transmitted to England, Napier made no immediate reply. But, on being armed with the approval of the Government, he sent to the Commander of the Troops the subjoined epistle, which, though written with calm equanimity, betrays the pleasing sense which the Commodore entertained of his triumph over his chagrined and disappointed rival:—

“H. M. S. Powerful, Marmoorice, 6th January, 1841:

“Sir—Had I unfortunately abstained from writing to you, and the Admiral had quitted the coast, you would have had just cause to have complained of my want of courtesy.