Alfonso’s position made him dependent upon the support of the citizens against the great lords, so that he was not likely to aim at diminishing the power of the former class. Another important event of the reign was the granting by the cortes, for the expenses of the Moorish war, of the *alcavala,* a tax of a twentieth upon every sale of real or personal property. This tax, one of the most ruinous that can be conceived, illustrates the want of economical insight in the 14th century, and was destined in later times to seriously impede the industrial and commercial development of Spain.

The atrocities of Alfonso XI.’s reign sink into insignifi­cance when compared with those committed by his son and successor, Pedro I. (1350-1369). The story of the latter’s rule is mainly derived from the narrative of his avowed enemies, but there is no reason to doubt the substantial accuracy of the charges which have given him the name of “ The Cruel.” Some of his actions may perhaps be attri­buted to a politic desire to destroy the ascendency of the great nobles, whom the princes of the royal house had often headed against the crown ; but most of them can only be explained by a thirst for bloodshed which almost amounted to mania. He ascended the throne at the age of sixteen, and was at once urged by his mother Maria of Portugal to avenge the wrongs which she had endured at the hands of her rival, Eleanor de Guzman. The unfortunate Eleanor was strangled in prison, and her sons could only secure safety by flight. The eldest, Henry of Trastamara, found a refuge first in Portugal and afterwards in France. A wife was now found for the young king in Blanche, daughter of the duke of Bourbon, in the hope of strengthening his throne by a French alliance. But Pedro had formed a connexion with Maria de Padilla ; and, when he was at last induced to go through the marriage ceremony with Blanche, he quitted her immediately to return to his mistress, whose brothers he advanced to the chief offices of state. A conspiracy of nobles, headed by Alfonso of Albuquerque, lately the king’s favourite, was suppressed with ruthless severity. Pedro now concluded a second marriage with Juana de Castro, although Blanche was still living, but he again returned to Maria de Padilla. Another conspiracy, backed up by the pope and the French king, was more successful. After standing a long siege in Tordesillas, Pedro was compelled to concede the demands of the coalition and to acknowledge Blanche as his lawful queen. But his submission was only feigned. Seizing the opportunity of a hunting-party to escape from the imprisonment in which he was kept at Toro, he rallied a mercenary army round him and took terrible vengeance upon his opponents (1355-56). Henry of Trastamara, who had joined in the rising, escaped to France, where he took part in the war against the English. It would be wearisome to catalogue the long list of cruelties, begin­ning with the murder of the unfortunate Blanche of Bour­bon, of which Pedro was guilty during the next ten years. It seems almost incredible that such a monster should have been allowed to reign in a country which had already shown so much independence as Castile. But several causes combined to secure him against deposition. In the first place, it was upon the nobles and the Jews that his hand fell with such severity, while to the citizen class he was on the whole a lenient ruler. This explains why it was that the cortes made little or no opposition when he endeavoured to secure the succession to his own children. In 1362 he solemnly swore that he had been lawfully married to Maria de Padilla, and his four children by her were recognized as heirs to the crown. His son Alfonso, however, died in the same year, and only two daughters, Constance and Isabella, survived their father. Another point in Pedro’s favour was the outbreak in 1356 of a war

with Aragon, which lasted almost without intermission for the rest of the reign, and in the course of which the Aragonese king was joined by Henry of Trastamara. Much as the Castilian nobles hated Pedro, they hated Aragon still more, and they were unwilling to accept a king who might seem to be forced upon them by the neighbouring kingdom. This war was in a way harmful to the interests of both kings. They were both eager to depress the powerful nobles in their territories, but their continued hostilities only enabled these nobles to extend their power. On more than one occasion this community of interest was on the verge of leading to an agreement which would probably have excluded the house of Trasta­mara for ever from Castile, but each time national and personal enmity combined to revive the quarrel. Though Castile was larger and possessed of more resources than its rival, the presence of a large number of Castilian exiles in Aragon made the combat fairly even. But in 1365 Henry of Trastamara obtained new and more formidable auxiliaries. Charles V. of France, who was now beginning to reorganize that country after the English wars, was only too glad to allow the disorderly bodies of disbanded soldiers to seek employment in Spain under the leadership of Bertrand du Guesclin. To these formidable enemies Pedro did not venture to offer resistance, and fled to Bayonne, while his half-brother Henry was everywhere acknowledged as king (1366). But Pedro succeeded in convincing the Black Prince of the justice of his cause and of the impolicy of allowing the French king to gain over­whelming influence in the Peninsula. Before the end of the year Edward’s army had crossed the Pyrenees, a number of English mercenaries in Du Guesclin’s service deserted to the banner of their old leader, and in April 1367 was fought the great battle of Najera or Navarrete, near Logrono. Du Guesclin was taken prisoner ; Henry of Trastamara fled to France ; and Pedro was restored to his throne. But the Castilian king had learnt no wisdom from adversity. His barbarity disgusted his allies, who were further alienated by his failure to furnish his promised supplies. The fever had already begun to decimate his troops and to weaken his own health when the Black Prince quitted Castile. His departure gave another opportunity to Henry of Trastamara, who had obtained fresh reinforcements from Charles V. In 1369 the battle of Montiel was decided in Henry’s favour. Pedro was taken prisoner, and was killed in a personal struggle with his rival, into whose tent he was brought. His two surviving daughters had been left as hostages at Bordeaux, and were married to two brothers of the Black Prince, —John of Gaunt, and Edmund Langley, duke of York.

Henry II. (1369-1379) was of illegitimate birth, and his marriage with the heiress of the La Cerdas was hardly sufficient to remove all doubts as to his claim to the succession. But within his kingdom he met with little opposition. The Castilians were glad to settle down under an orderly government after the late reign, and the few malcontents exiled themselves to join the foreign claimants of the throne. The most important of these was Pedro I. of Portugal, whose grandmother belonged to the legitimate line of Castile, and John of Gaunt, who came to Spain to vindicate the rights of his wife Constance. Pedro I. proved for a time a formidable enemy. He allied him­self with the Moors, who seized the opportunity to recover Algesiras, and with the king of Aragon, who annexed the border districts of Castile. But Pedro was an incapable warrior, and soon abandoned his own claim to obtain the English support by acknowledging John of Gaunt. But this enabled Henry to renew his alliance with France, and with the help of French troops he invaded Portugal, besieged Lisbon, and compelled Pedro to make peace.