LETTER XXXII.

POLITICAL HISTORY.

Darkness hangs upon both extremes of Mexican History. The ancient story of that beautiful country is lost in the gloom of tradition;—the detail of her colonial history is buried in Spanish archives;—her revolutionary history is blotted with blood;—her present is uncertain, and her future is impenetrable even to the eye of hope.

I will take the liberty to recall to you, however, some of the prominent events that have recently occurred, and the character and purposes of those to whom the nation owes its origin.

Cortéz was the personification of a period in the development of this Continent. Warrior, orator, statesman, poet, historian;—he blended in himself every requisite for a daring adventurer, and his success may well be esteemed the result of a single resolute mind over a whole Empire of mere physical force. He had the power to conceive and fashion his projects; to lead and control men; to fight; to diplomatize with cunning foes; to speak with fluency and eloquence to multitudes; to sing in sweet verse the lay of knight or lover, and, with becoming modesty and grace, to tell the tale of his own achievements in phrase befitting the ear of an enlightened monarch.* In fact, he was, in every quality, the proper person to lead so bold a band of Spaniards as that which gathered around his standard, when he unfurled it for the conquest of Mexico.

While the love of glory, and the enthusiasm of a bigot in religion, united with the most eminent loyalty to form the chief characteristics of Cortéz, the purposes and temper of those who joined his enterprise are much more questionable.

Spain required a vent for her population, and the new-found world afforded it. People of staid habits and regular morals were not tempted to the perils of an adventurous life; but there were thousands who had neither means nor objects sufficient to retain them on their native soil. Men of mark, but broken fortunes; rakes of old distinction, such as decay in the corrupting atmosphere of courts; noisy and riotous young men; soldiers, half bandit, half warrior; and all the offal of a society dissi-

* See the recent translation of his Dispatches to the Emperor, translated by Mr. Folsom, of New-York.

pated, hopeless and impoverished, and living without those sanctions and restraints that alone make life valuable or useful. Such were the reckless crews that first set forward in the conquest of this hemisphere, without the common sympathies of humanity; regardless of the laws of nature or nations, and, indeed, heedless of everything but the acquisition of treasure or territory, by a warfare that degenerated into the murder of people to whom the name of the Spanish king, or the idea of the Christian's God, had never been revealed, even in their wildest dreams.

Thus was the foundation of the new Empire laid, in the violent destruction of an ancient religion and monarchy.

Families of character and distinction soon came over, and the new domain was rapidly filled with a population willing to take advantage of its resources;—but several things impeded the social and moral progress of New Spain.

It was but a colony; and a colony, too, devoted by the mother country to none of those branches of industry that foster the independent and manly growth of a people, and bring out the mind of a nation. *It was the mine and mint of Spain.*

It was taught to believe, that silver was a sort of vegetable product of the earth, growing like flowers, and to be had for the asking. And thus at the outset of its career, the germ of *industrious self-reliance* and independence, was withdrawn from the fostering policy of the parent State. Commerce, manufactures, and an extensive agriculture,—looking to all parts of the world as its consumers,—were discouraged, and the infant colony was forced to receive from Spain the results of *her* industry, while, in turn, it sent nothing back that indicated genius, talent, activity, enterprise, invention;—or, indeed, anything but that its valleys and hills contained exhaustless quantities of precious metals, which it could drag from their recesses and transmute into coin by the labor of enslaved and ignorant Indians.

Nor was New Spain opened to the *colonization* of other nations, who might have been invited to a healthful and energizing mixture of races. On the contrary, the Spaniards grafted themselves upon the conquered and debased aborigines, and the mongrel blood became dull and indolent.

Although the laws of the Indies were calculated to protect the natives, they, nevertheless, suffered dreadfully under the proscriptive administration of colonial power; and, becoming the victims of avarice, were gradually degraded, step by step, to the helot condition in which we find them at the present day.

"Instead of restraints on the claims of ecclesiastics, the inconsiderate zeal of the Spanish legislators," says Dr. Robertson, "admitted them into America to their full extent, and at once imposed on the Spanish colonies a burden, which is in no slight degree oppressive to society, even in its most improved state. As early as the year 1501, the payment of tithes in the colonies was enjoined, and the mode of it regulated by law. Every

article of primary necessity, toward which the attention of new settlers must naturally be turned, was submitted to this grievous exaction. Nor were the demands of the clergy confined to articles of simple and easy culture. Its more artificial and operose productions, such as sugar, indigo and cochineal, were declared to be *titheable;* and thus the industry of the planter was taxed in every stage of its progress, from its rudest essay to its highest improvement. To the weight of this legal imposition, the zeal of the American Spaniards made many voluntary additions;—they bestowed profuse donations on churches and monasteries, and thus, unprofitably wasted a large proportion of that wealth, which might have nourished and given vigor to productive labor in a growing colony."

The Spaniard found a beautiful world,—a land bathed by two oceans, rising from one and sloping to the other,—and on both acclivities possessing all the climates of the world, from the graceful shadow of the palm on the sea-shore, to eternal ice on the mountains overhanging the Valley of Mexico. All these climates (*on the same parallel of latitude,*) produced cotton, sugar, tobacco, rice, cochineal, wheat, barley, corn, wine, and every variety of luscious fruit; while, over all, an eternal spring bent its blue and cloudless skies. And, as if the *surface* of the earth were not sufficient to pamper the most craving appetites of her creatures, nature had veined the secret depths of the mountains with silver and precious materials, in exhaustless quantities. Yet, this prolific richness served but to hasten the destinies of the invaders, and to make them careless, dependent and idle.

The parallel has so frequently been attempted, that it would perhaps be profitless to contrast the settlers of this alluring country with the equally enthusiastic but hardy and toilsome bands who peopled our north. But, it may not be unwise to remember the stability we have attained, on dreary and inhospitable coasts, by the steady march of faith, liberty, and the purity of enterprise; while our southern neighbors, more favored by soil and seasons, have failed in producing the results of social and political peace, under the influence of a different creed, and the corruptions of a monarchical Government.

We have *now*, however, to deal with a *new* people. Mexico has thrown off the dominion of old Spain, and there is no marvel greater, in history, than that an Empire, with enervated character,—oppressed, ignorant, and almost destroyed as was this colony,—should still have had the spirit to discover and assert her rights. She cast aside the allurements of rank; she converted her whole territory into a battle-field; she tore herself from all the fast-rooted allegiances and loyalties of three centuries; she abandoned fortune; she went through fifteen years of civil slaughter,—and, at length, alone, unaided, unsympathized with by the rest of the world, she achieved her independence. For the victory over such obstacles, Mexico deserves praise. She deserves more. She deserves the high and

unqualified respect of the world, and especially of that portion of it which, *par excellence*, pretends to be the fostering parent of human rights and liberty throughout the globe. It proves that she possesses a sense of right, a virtue of endurance, a devotion to principle;—and that, with domestic peace, she would assume among the nations of the earth the high place to which she is entitled, by the genius of her children and the magnificence of her Empire.

Let me now invoke your attention to a brief historical outline of the Mexican Revolution, and its consequences.

It was not until the mother country, herself, became temporarily subjected to a foreign Power, that the war of Independence was successfully commenced in her possessions on this Continent. That war had its origin as much in a desire of independence of France, as of Spain; but it was too late to quell entirely the growing love of liberty, after the restoration of Ferdinand VII. in 1814.

When Spain, in the following year, made her chief effort against her rebellious colonies, by the noted expedition from Cadiz under Morillo, those colonies might still have been within her control if proper means had been resorted to by the directors of her councils. And it is the opinion of distinguished statesmen, that had she succeeded in "reducing the coast of Terra Firma and New Grenada, the provinces of La Plata, divided among themselves, and weakened by the Portuguese occupation of Monte Video, would, in all probability, not have held out against her power."

But there were a thousand things to exasperate the war of Independence. It was not only a war of freedom, but of *caste;* and it is almost impossible to credit the atrocities with which it was prosecuted against the insurgents.

After the first successes of the Mexicans, there was a period of reaction when the Spaniards again obtained a temporary mastery under Calleja, and the annals of the time teem with accounts of the sanguinary vengeance wreaked by that inhuman monster on the victims who fell within his grasp. After he obtained possession of the revolted city of Guanajuato, he caused the inhabitants to be driven into the great Square of the town, and *near fourteen thousand men, women and children were butchered, like cattle, on the spot.* Proclaiming that "powder and ball were too costly to be wasted in their execution," he let loose his soldiery on the defenceless crowd, with an order "*to cut their throats,*"—and it is related, that the fountains and gutters of the city, literally ran with human blood!

These were things to be remembered and to exasperate. There was no longer any hope for the people. There was no disposition to temporize or conciliate. It was submission or death. And the "una salus victis nullam sperare salutem," nerved their arms and forced them into ardent and continued resistance.

They conquered. I will not go over the whole detail of the Revolution. On the 24th of February, 1822, the Plan of Iguala was declared. Shortly

afterward, Iturbedé ascended the Imperial throne, to enjoy a short and troubled reign; and it was, perhaps, by the false direction given to public sentiment and the ideas of the masses at this early moment of Independence, that we may attribute the subsequent disorders of the Republic. It is true, that Mexico was not then prepared for perfect democracy; but as the nation required a patriotic direction, efforts should have been made, under proper checks and balances, to win the minds of the people to a love of those free institutions which the pure and intellectual men of the country have been ever desiring. Dissatisfied as the Mexicans were with the administration and principles of Iturbedé, they resorted to no acts of violence against an individual who had so signally aided them in their recent conflict. They provided an ample support for himself and family, after his dethronement, and on the eleventh of May, 1823, he sailed for Leghorn.

It is at this period that, in fact, commences the portion of Mexican history with which it is our chief interest to deal. The war of Independence, as we have seen, was a war of escape. It settled no principle,—established no system. And when the old order of things had entirely disappeared, the question rose as to what should be the government hereafter. Independence had opened the rest of the world to the inspection of the Mexicans. They beheld the progress of art, civilization, and freedom among their immediate neighbors at the north, and they resolved to adopt our system.

After the departure of the Emperor, the Government remained provisionally in the hands of Bravo, Victoria, and Negrete; and a National Representative body, after a session of fourteen months, formed a Constitution, (proclaimed on the 4th of October, 1824,) by which the sixteen original States were united in a *Federal Republic*.

On the 1st of January, 1825, the first Congress under this Constitution assembled in the City of Mexico, and General Victoria was installed as President of the Republic. During the administration of this person, the spirit of discontent already broke forth among the ambitious spirits of the country, and there were several "*Pronuncimientos*," or declarations of distinguished men, seconded by portions of the military, intended to excite revolutionary movements against the existing Government.

The first of these *gritos* was headed by Robato and Colonel Staboli, and designed, as they declared, to deprive every *Spaniard* throughout the country, of public employment. The next, was by Padre Arénas, against the Federative System, and in favor of Centralism;—and another, (also against *federation*,) called the "Plan of Montanyo," was made at Tulancingo, but soon suppressed by Guerrero.

Upon the whole, however, the administration of Victoria passed off with some degree of popularity, until near its close, when the two great parties of the country became embodied and powerful in the associations known as the *Escossaises* and *Yorkinos*, or, Scotch and York lodges.

The *Escossais*, or Scotch party, was decidedly in favor of the establishment of a political power with central strength, if not, indeed, of bringing

the country back again to its ancient allegiance. Its rival party, or *Yorkino*, meanwhile, was as positively opposed to all foreign interference, central rule and monarchial tendencies, as it was devoted to Federation and Republicanism.

The influence of State Rights and Federation were known to be hostile to the centralization and efficacy of arbitrary powers; and there is but little doubt, that the aristocratic faction was favored in its operations by those European powers and their emissaries, who sought to gain by intrigue an influence on this Continent which they had lost in the recent wars. It is alleged, by some, that this was perceived by the Minister who so ably represented us at that period, with the new Republic; and he is charged with having procured the charter for the opposing *lodge*, and with fostering and stimulating the designs and leaders of the democratic party. It is not necessary for me to treat of the propriety with which a foreign Minister could interfere in the domestic strifes of the Government to which he is accredited, nor do I believe that Mr. Poinsett ever stepped beyond the limits of his official duties and rights in regard to these matters in Mexico. Yet I cannot but think it was both his right as a man, and his duty as a diplomatist, (faithfully representing a republican nation near another Republic on the American Continent,) to do all in his power, lawfully, to cherish and vivify the spirit of freedom in the country to which he was accredited, and to overcome the efforts of European powers for the establishment of a state of things directly hostile to American principles and interests. It is unnecessary for me to pursue this subject further, as the wisdom of such diplomacy must be evident to all who know the difficulties and temptations with which a young, inexperienced, and distracted Republic is surrounded at the outset of its political existence.

But the term of Victoria's administration was not to end without some signal opposition to himself personally. In December, 1827, General Bravo denounced the President as connected with the Yorkinos. He took arms against the Government, proclaimed himself in open revolt, and was speedily subdued and banished; but the seed of discord had been already deeply sown; and in the election which subsequently occurred, Gomez Pedraza, who was the candidate of the Escossais, obtained the Presidency by a majority of but *two* votes over Guerrero, his competitor. Thus, amid the most angry excitement of embittered parties, terminated the first chief magistracy of the new Republic.

It should be recollected, that during this administration Iturbedé had returned from his banishment, and was shot almost immediately after landing. It is the general impression, that this act was not desired by the Government, and that the execution of the illustrious patriot was alone owing to the indiscreet zeal of his captor.

Scarcely had Pedraza been elected, when symptoms of discontent were manifested among the liberals. The Yorkinos had been foiled most un-