

## LETTER XXIX.\*

MEXICAN POLITICS.

*Mexico, 12th April, 1851.*

IN judging of the character of Mexico and the Mexicans, we ought never for a moment to lose sight of their origin, nor of the religious, moral and political elements which they possessed, as a people, when they asserted their right to govern themselves as an independent nation.

The fact that Mexico was the spoilt child of Spain, the mother country, will go far to explain the miseries and misfortunes to which the ex-colony has been subjected, since it commenced to govern its own house. The colonial policy of Spain consisted a great deal too much in degrading the *status* of the creole; in encouraging his religious superstition; in restricting him to scholastic studies; without qualifying him to wield political

\* See Note to Letter XXV.

power; in deadening his aspirations to fulfil the duties of public life; in emasculating his understanding; in tacitly conniving at his immoral pursuits, and in passively leading him to sink into vicious and degrading habits. All this was accomplished by a wickedly selfish policy on the part of the Spanish government, *not* of the Spanish people: and it was then cruelly alleged that the absence of all the requisite qualities towards enabling the Creole to take a part in the management of the state, was ample reason for his being carefully excluded from any share in the government of his own country.

In this system, the Spanish government was more or less fatally successful throughout its widely extended colonies, and most pre-eminently so in Mexico. Under the rule of the mother country, the Mexican Creoles were sunk into an abject superstition; were left to mean and frivolous pursuits; were unchecked in a career of immorality, and were constrained to breathe an atmosphere so impure, that many of the better tendencies of the mind withered away under its influence; so much so, that the Mexicans generally scouted the idea of making any positive sacrifice whatever to those

higher principles of our nature, which establish, both in our belief and our regard, a standard of public virtue. The public weal was a *beau idéal* to talk of—a metaphysical proposition to write about—and no more: public life was public selfishness, without any due moral restraint to keep it within bounds.

It was clear, therefore, that Mexico required a positive regeneration to be able to take her place among the nations; and it is painful to be obliged to confess at once, that if regeneration of public men has set in at all, the flow of the tide is as yet scarcely perceptible. Hence the deplorably low point at which the country stands; hence the territorial aggressions and spoliations to which she has been compelled ignominiously to submit; hence the dilapidation of her public treasury; the venality of many of her public servants; her unpaid and accumulating debts; her universal misgovernment; her external as well as her *border* feebleness; in short, almost the approaching dissolution, if active remedies be not applied, of her social and political existence.

Many pithy illustrations could I give you of my melancholy reading of Mexican misrule, were that

necessary. But unhappily that misrule is too notorious; and it is neither my wish, nor is it within my province invidiously to pick out individual example, much less to wound individual feelings. My ardent desire is to rouse the attention—to alarm the pride of all Mexicans who wish to preserve their name: to make them open their eyes to the fact that they are fast sinking as a nation; and to tell them, that if they do not rouse themselves from their lethargy—if they make not a steady and serious effort at regeneration—their days, as an independent nation, are numbered—that they will ere long be talked of, and thought of, as one of the things that *were*.

I need not point out to you, but it may be well to record for the benefit of the Mexicans, with the authority of a leading journalist,\* that there are two or three ways in which a nation may rise. First. By a rational education of the people, teaching and inculcating right principles; struggling for the advancement of morality; encouraging true religion, by exploding the vain and worn-out forms of an antiquated superstition; and finally, by proclaiming to *all* classes, that

\* *The Times*.

individual vice can only lead to national degradation. Secondly. By adopting liberal public measures; by repressing public abuses; by encouraging patriotic public men; by reducing the public expenditure to the public income; by rigorously denouncing public delinquents, and as rigorously punishing public crimes. Thirdly. By adopting a cosmopolitan policy, giving every encouragement to foreigners to trade with Mexico, and to settle in it, mixing their interests with those of the Mexican people, through a steady and well-regulated system of immigration, and through the introduction of foreign capital. Fourthly. By entering into the strictest alliance and the closest friendship with those nations whose interests are involved, to a greater or less extent, in the prosperity and nationality of Mexico.

I have already said, that the great power to which Mexico ought to look as her natural ally, is England. It is with England that Mexico ought to put forward every effort to draw closer and closer together the links of international friendship. I speak not as an Englishman—I speak as the friend of Mexico. The latter ought to appeal, in every possible way, to the sympathies, and

engage in every form the interests of the former, towards leading her to uphold the power, nationality, and integrity of Mexico. In point of fact, no nation is already so deeply interested in doing so as England, both in a political and mercantile point of view. Mexico is of high importance to Great Britain, and from no nation on the globe could the former draw greater and more material advantages, if she chose to seek them, than from England. She has no annexation views; and Mexico ought to seek her as a barrier, to oppose, on the part of others, this detestable and hypocritical mode of national robbery. This is truly an important, if it be not the whole, question for Mexico at present; while it ought assuredly not to be viewed with indifference by us politically, when all the bearings of the case are taken into account; and, indeed, I am so well satisfied of the importance of which *independent* Mexico is to England, that I shall more particularly enquire, in my next, into what ought to be the policy of the two countries in regard to each other. I am much mistaken if that enquiry do not strengthen the conviction, among those in England conversant with the subject, that the one nation ought to vie with the

other in hastening to cement the closest political union.

I have been looking into some of the ministerial reports to Congress, mentioned in my last. They contain many melancholy proofs of the present disjointed state of affairs here. The ministers, Gonzaga de Cuevas, of the Home and Foreign departments, and Piña y Cuevas, of the Financial, seem to have made up their minds, on the opening of Congress, to lay open, with an unflinching hand, the deeply-seated wounds of the commonwealth, as far as their parts (of course the most important) of the administration went; and they clearly shew how dangerous are the diseases of the body politic of Mexico. But I applaud their spirit, in looking fairly in the face the evils against which the nation has to combat. It is the surest way to cure those evils; and I therefore hope that, since the publication of these remarkable reports of the ministers, the Mexicans have been seriously pondering over the present aspect of their affairs.

The principal political event which has taken place here since I addressed you by the last packet, is the retirement of Señor Piña y Cuevas from the

ministry of Finance, and the nomination, in his stead, of Don Francisco Arrangoiz. This gentleman is said to have very high and honourable principles, but that his talents lie more in diplomacy than in finance. To make up for this, he is said to have much energy of character, and good general abilities. The task he has in hand is no easy one; and we have yet to judge how far he will accomplish it. In the meantime, the retirement of Señor Piña y Cuevas is generally regretted; and it is certain that in him the foreign creditors of Mexico have lost an able and consistent advocate. It is to be hoped that Señor Arrangoiz will faithfully carry out the policy initiated by his predecessor. I send you a paper of the 10th, the leading article of which is calculated to do much good here. I also send you Señor Piña y Cuevas's *exposé* of his financial course, including a justification of his measures, and winding up with the insertion of a letter from "the Mexican Commissioner," applauding the same, as far as they affected the foreign creditors represented by him.

The three millions of dollars of indemnification money due next month, are now pretty well spent; but I believe some part of what has not yet been

appropriated, will be applied to the payment of over-due dividends on Mexican foreign bonds.

The Congress, whose ordinary session closes on the 15th, has voted "extraordinary sittings" for thirty days more, and it will therefore be finally prorogued on the 15th of May. I am afraid they will not have that of which they stand in so much need—a member of the Senate to sum up the labours of the session, after the fashion of Lord Lyndhurst in the House of Lords. I was saying so to a humorous and somewhat satirical Mexican friend, himself a deputy, and he quietly remarked, that the summing up here was indeed a very simple task, and might be thus fulfilled by the "speaker":—

"Señores—Hemos ocupado nuestras sillas por tantos dias—hemos recibido tantos Duros—El Erario ya no puede mas. Levantemos pues la sesion."—"We have occupied our seats for so many days—we have received so many hard dollars—the treasury is now empty. Let us therefore adjourn."

There are still a good many straggling parties of North Americans passing through this for California. They go in parties of tens, twenties and thirties; their long lank bodies on little Mexican

horses, their rifles across the pommel of their saddles, and their wide-awakes on their heads. They always seem to me to say to themselves, as they go out of the city: "Good by to you, Mexico, *for the present.*" In California, the rains have interrupted the golden harvest, but the work will recommence towards the end of May. Meantime, the accounts we receive represent the state of the Gold-seeking Society to be greatly disorganised.

Here public tranquillity is no farther interrupted, than in so far as on the great highways unhappy diligence passengers are concerned. They continue, as usual, every now and then to be waylaid and robbed with impunity. Hitherto these robbers have called themselves "Cavalleros," and they have generally been civil gentlemen of the road. But a French friend of mine was, the other day, not only robbed, but maltreated; and one person was so much bruised and wounded, as to be unable to come on to the capital. The robbers allege that they pursue this new system in self-defence, seeing that some of the public authorities had commenced shooting their comrades, when taken and convicted as highwaymen!

On the north, the Indians are giving trouble to the government on a larger scale; but we are promised a quick termination of this internal source of annoyance and complaint. I have little doubt, that, as in the case of Yucatan, the Indians are goaded on to commit excesses by ill usage. They are also excited to rise by lawless hordes of desperate villains, and convicted felons, who rove about in those distant quarters beyond reach of the feeble arm of Mexican law or government.

Before I conclude this letter, I think it proper to bring under your notice a fact, which, however, only constitutes part of a system very disgraceful to the English name, and which is naturally retorted upon us here, when we hold forth upon the smuggling system of Mexico. Her Majesty's ship of war, "Calypso," has recently left the West Coast of Mexico with about two millions and a half of dollars, from which the English Bondholders (for the duty is specially made over to them), ought to have derived a sum of about 150,000 dollars; and I have been informed, that as yet all the duty collected from this enormous shipment of specie, amounts to 113 dollars!

## LETTER XXX.

"LA SEMANA SANTA."

*Mexico, 13th April, 1851.*

ON Saturday, the 7th, the *Semana Santa*, or "Passion Week," came to a close; and although, after all that has been said about it, and so well said, I am unwilling to give you any very detailed account of this momentous part of the year in all Catholic countries, and especially in Mexico, yet I must not pass it over wholly without notice.

*Jueves Santo*, "Holy Thursday," is remarkable in one point of view; it is impossible to say whether it is most markedly *the* day of the year of the highest or of the lowest classes. The former pour into and occupy the streets and the churches during the whole day and night—the ladies all dressed out in the most gorgeous manner; and they are jostled and confounded, without doors