

Charles Maria Bustamente acquired some distinction as an historian. Lorenzo Zaavala and Lucas Alaman published some historical essays and treatises.

Cervantes, de la Llave and Lejarza produced some valuable contributions to natural history (botany), whilst Joseph Maria Bustamente enriched science by geographical, orographical and geognostic researches.

The number of newspapers printed in Mexico is considerable; but few of them are skilfully conducted.

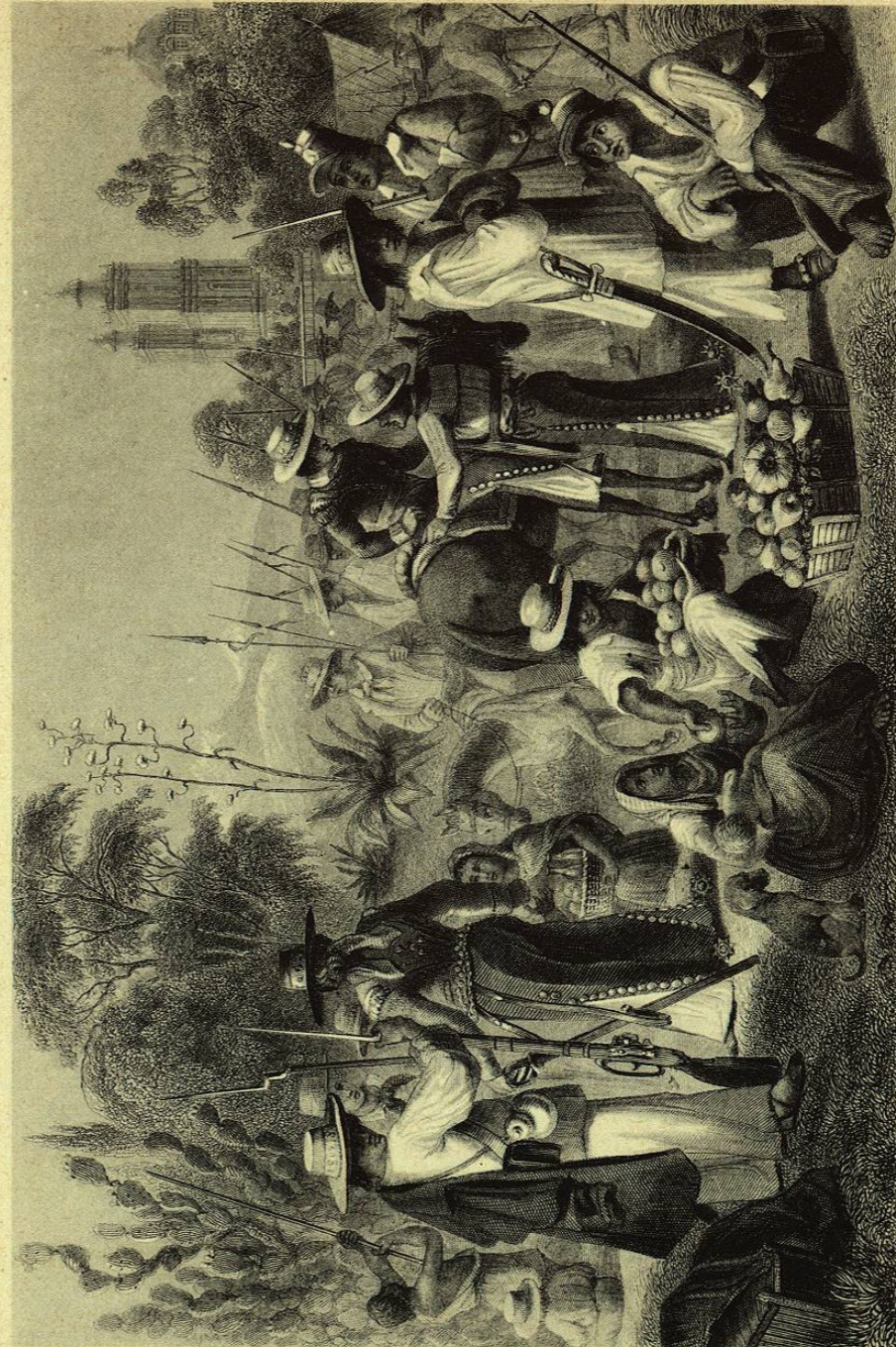
This casual glance at Mexico's literature is far from comprising all that has been published, but merely those things that especially caught our eye, consequent on their being displayed in the shop-windows of the booksellers. Those who visit the capital, will find in a little shop in the Portal de Augustinos, all the novelties of the Mexican muse. Interesting is the collection of popular songs, which represent the poetical element existing amongst the people. These songs pass from mouth to mouth, and are sung to the dancers; the composers are unknown; and as in many parts of Europe, they appear to be spontaneous joyous effusions. The Creole, as well as the Mestizo improvises with facility; he makes love, he teazes in verse, and the wit of the singer excites and enlivens the auditors. The Indian, on the contrary, has no poetry peculiar to himself, and though here and there an Aztec song is heard, it is a mere imitation of the Spanish.

XVII.

MILITARY AFFAIRS IN MEXICO.

One beautiful evening I was strolling leisurely along the promenade de las Vigas on the borders of the great canal, and regarded with delight the golden glow in the west, the reflection of which tinted the snowy peaks of the highlands with purple — when some one seized me by the arm. It was my new acquaintance, the captain with the enormous moustache.

"At length I am so fortunate as to see you again", said he; "for several evenings I have come hither in hopes of meeting you, as I owe you an explanation." — "Not that I am aware of," I returned. "We scarcely exchanged ten words." — "Precisely on that account", he continued. "You have only heard me speak with



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others, and may possibly entertain a bad opinion of me and of my sentiments. Do you recollect my conversation with the licentiate? We cross blades as often as we meet, and are nevertheless the best friends. If he attacks my profession, I fall foul of his; and unhappily much may be said against both. At the same time you must not suppose that I entertain an unfavorable opinion, generally, of the law as a profession. I respect the bench, and acknowledge the talent of many of the judges, but cannot close my eyes to the carelessness, partiality and corruptibility of others, who disgrace their position. The subalterns and scribblers especially should be subjected to the strictest control. This want is intimately connected with the feebleness of the government in general; they are afraid of sweeping measures, and let everything go on in the old way. As for my profession, which your friend the licentiate so severely attacked, I flatter myself I can afford you better information than the majority. We must first look back a few years. The Spaniards always maintained a considerable force in their colonies, chiefly composed of Europeans, but not to the exclusion of the Creoles. The excellent financial position of the American colonies rendered it comparatively easy to keep the regiments on a superior footing; many young Creoles, the sons of Spaniards, served in the hope of advancement; and I myself began my military career as a cadet in a Spanish regiment.

“Early in the present century the idea of a separation from the mother country and the assumption of an independent political existence began to take root. Bolivar’s rising in Caraccas acted like an electric shock; but the numerous Spaniards, possessed of the whole civil and military government, sought by severity to suppress the spirit of independence, even when their own country, occupied by the French, was on the brink of ruin; and they were enabled to carry out their views, as, besides their own troops, they could depend on many of the Creoles, whose interests were intimately connected with those of the government. The strictest terrorism, however, could not long keep down the spirit which had been called forth; it increased daily, and at length, in 1810, the independent party, led by Hidalgo and Allende took up arms against the Spaniards. It was natural, that many of the native officers and soldiers should quit the Spanish ranks and join their countrymen, and it was equally natural that as professional men they should be entrusted with the most important commands.

In the sanguinary struggle which lasted ten years, the leaders frequently changed, for the sword carried off many. The Spaniards brought all their force to bear on the rebellious provinces, in order not to be compelled to relinquish their most valuable possession, and their tactics and discipline succeeded in overcoming the desultory bravery of the undisciplined masses. The popular party, indeed, evidenced undoubted talent in warfare; for instance, the two ecclesiastics Morelos and Matamoros; but they were defeated in pitched battles, owing to the rawness of their troops. A long and wearisome guerilla warfare succeeded, which was wonderfully favored by the steep mountainous country, by the extensive forests, and deep ravines. The champions of independent America were forced to seek shelter in the most inaccessible mountains of the coast, whence they made incursions into the Spanish territory,

attacked their money convoys, or punished individual adherents of the Spanish party. The chiefs of these guerillas, who never submitted, Guerrero, Bravo, Cos, Victoria etc., termed themselves generals; but their sphere of action was very limited. Towards the year 1820 they no longer ventured to quit their mountain retreats, as the arms of the Spaniards had completely subdued the inhabited districts, although the attachment of the Creoles to the cause of independence had taken such deep root, that it could not possibly be eradicated by force.

"Augustin Iturbide, a Mexican by birth, from his youth a soldier in the ranks of the Spaniards, and when victorious often hard towards his countrymen, obtained the command of a division, intended to destroy the remaining insurgents in the Sierra Madre. On the road to Acapulco he took the resolution to free his country. Probably he had long cherished the idea, and a simple song of his soldiers, the tones of which reached his ear one night whilst in his tent, are said to have matured his resolve. He declared himself for independence, overcame the last endeavours of the Spanish party, and gave Mexico her liberty. The sword had effected this revolution, and all who had formerly fought in the cause, took part in it. But there were also many Spaniards in the army, therefore it was determined that all the Spaniards in the country should be regarded as citizens, and that all the officers who desired it, should retain their service, bearing the same rank.

"Iturbide sacrificed to ambition the happiness of his country; for a short time he wore, a crown which had been conferred on him by his satellites; but the regal diadem rendered him giddy, and the soldiers destroyed the ephemeral throne they had erected.

The people now chose the republican form of government, and moreover the federal constitution, after the precedent of the United States. It was an act of justice to endeavour to reward the men, who for upwards of ten years had struggled, exposed to infinite danger and privations, against the Spaniards; but it was an error on the part of government to award them the highest dignities and the largest amount of pay in the standing armies. Most of them had received no military education, indeed, no education whatever; they made themselves ridiculous in the eyes of their subalterns, whose neglect they frequently overlooked, thus rendering the bonds of discipline uncommonly lax. The greater part of the Spanish troops had quitted the ranks after the capitulations of Iguala and Cordova, and had left the country. It was necessary to restore the battalions, and the insurgents who, owing to their camp-life, had taken a dislike to work, but had not become acquainted with discipline, were partly employed as subaltern and as non-commissioned officers. The national-guard was to be the chief defence of the country; but it was so badly organised, whilst the great mass of the population, in consequence of the long and ruinous war, had taken such a dislike to the profession of arms, that the whole institution of the national-guard had become the tool and the butt of the line.

"Thus in the first years of the republic the organisation of the army had become exceedingly faulty; there was a want of discipline, a want of tactics, a want of an educated body of officers, who would have comprehended that to them was

entrusted the safety and defence of a free state. They had no other model than the Spanish army, whose ordonnances were still in force; a circumstance which, when one is acquainted with the history of the Spanish war-department, will scarcely leave room for surprise at the results.

"The history of our country for the last 25 years, presents an unsatisfactory picture of civil commotion, in which the standing army played the pitiful part of assisting sometimes one partisan, sometimes another to gain the upper hand. The imprudent dismissal of the Spaniards, had already deprived the army of many excellent officers, who were, in part, replaced by a worthless set. In the constant party-struggles, each endeavoured to obtain influence by appointing submissive chiefs, without daring to render those whom they had shaken off, their avowed foes. The complete demoralisation of the army dates from the period when Santanna began to take part in the affairs of the republic. This man, who had the opportunity presented him of becoming his country's benefactor, has done incalculable mischief. He is of a thoroughly immoral character, a refined egotist, who only played a part because he knew the weak side of his countrymen, and understood how to profit by it. The welfare of the country is indifferent to him, honour and conscience, fidelity and faith were for him empty words, which he employed as they chanced to suit his interest, and as he always found tools for his egotistic plans, his influence exercised a demoralising influence on all classes of society. By means of a revolt he got the management of affairs into his own hands, and by prudent transactions with his opponents he knew how to gain over that part of the army which was devoted to the government. By advancing the superior officers, by giving commissions for the inferior grades at his own will and pleasure, he created for himself a band of praetorians, who became the willing instruments of his selfish plans.

"At the end of the year 1845 the unanimous voice of the people removed him from the helm, and banished him. During his long dictatorship every branch of the administration had fallen into irreparable disorder. In the government expenditure immense sums had figured every year for the war-department, from 12 to 15 million pesos, and yet there were no warlike stores, the troops were badly clothed, the fortresses dismantled; the army, which ought to have been 36,000 men strong, could scarcely number 10,000. Fabulous as it may appear, the army-register counted 120 generals, and 30,000 officers; all demanded their pay for doing nothing, and this army of vampires was to be fed by the country. In order to conceive the matter, you must be careful not to lose sight of the historical details to which I have already called your attention. There were many old fellows of the Spanish period, many whom the guerilla chiefs changed from peasants into officers at pleasure. In the civic disturbances a number of officers had arisen, each pronunciamento created colonels and generals by the dozen. You laugh? Well then, I must inform you how it is done. It suddenly occurs to some former soldier, perhaps a captain, residing in a village three hundred leagues from the capital, that the government is good for nothing. He speaks about it with Jack and Peter of the same village, reads the newspaper

to them, shews letters from friends of consequence, which also blame the minister, and harangues his gossips that it is for them to change matters. They are content, and beat up proletarians for their scheme, rascals who prefer spending money to working, and know well enough that little is to be risked in such matters. A discontented colonel is known; he is informed that the country looks up to him as her liberator and he is requested to place himself at their head. If he be one of the right sort, he comes with some of his confidants, a consultation is immediately held, and the plan for reforming the world is concocted. The same night the town-hall is taken possession of, the aldermen are sent for, are made acquainted with the intentions of the revolutionists, and compelled to do homage. On this the tax-gatherer is obliged to hand over all he has in his strong-box, and should it be little, a forced loan is raised from the disaffected shopkeepers of the place, the alarm-bell is rung, rockets are sent up, and when all the inhabitants are assembled in the market-place, they are informed of what has taken place. Now follow loud cheers for the patriots, especially for the general-in-chief, as he is dubbed; a proclamation is then put forth, addressed to the whole nation, which is, of course, read with applause, and as soon as a sufficiently animating quantity of spirits have been drunk, it is resolved to march upon the next market-town. All hasten to fetch their arms and horses; the women howl and refuse to let their husbands depart; and indeed, with many of them no great amount of persuasion is requisite. They slip out at the back-door to the forest till the tumult is over. At length, after midnight, the patriotic army is ready to march. Though few, they are full of courage; the bottle is passed round once more at the expence of the regiment, and the heroes vanish in the darkness.

"If all goes well; several villages are surprised and join the rebels; when the principal village of a district has given in its adherence, a provisional government is appointed, and the army (200 men perhaps) organised, armed and drilled, the newspapers are full of it, a detachment of fifty soldiers are sent out against them by the prefect, but return with all speed at sight of the superior numbers of the foe. The prefect packs up his archives and hastens off, whilst every one seeks to conceal his property of all kinds. Men who can be depended on are sent to treat with the insurgents, to sound them, and to promise to join them, in order to gain time.

"Meanwhile fleet messengers are sent off to the provincial government, and to the federal government. The provincial authorities complain that they have neither money nor arms to put down the increasing movement, presume that the conspiracy has far-extending ramifications, talk of a certain party, who are waiting for the favorable moment only, and request speedy assistance from the capital. If the pronunciados were energetic men, they might generally march half way across the country, before meeting with any organised resistance; but they decline going far, merely look round to see where they can lay their hands on some public funds, and guard against a surprise. They have great difficulty in keeping their men together, who have all sorts of scruples ready, when the excitement is at an end. I know

of an instance, where the whole quota of a village declared to their chief, that they must now return home to have their shirts washed!

"At length information is brought that the government troops have marched. A council of war is held, it is resolved to occupy a strong position, to withdraw to the mountains, nevertheless they remain for the present in the village. A well combined attack, would in a general way settle the whole affair, and place them all at the mercy of the government; but first milder measures must be attempted. The blood of citizens must not be shed, and those who have strayed must be reclaimed. The rebels proudly reject all advances; some of the outposts fire on each other from a distance of a thousand yards; a dozen of the government soldiers desert; this is a bad omen, and prudence is the mother of wisdom. Some honest people of the neighbourhood offer their mediation, which is accepted; and the end of the story is, that after several bootless marches, after wasting a tolerable quantity of powder, an agreement is come to, according to the terms of which the chiefs of pronunciados lay down their arms, and acknowledge the authority of the government, retain the rank, dignity and pay which they have conferred on themselves, keep what they have stolen from the state, dismiss their army, and are all completely amnestied. "This is the way in which the pronunciamentos are usually managed, by which means the army is supplied with a vast number of excellent colonels, and even generals, with whom Santanna, sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other, has done a good deal of profitable business. The impunity of such crimes has brought much misfortune upon the country, and will bring much more if the government does not make itself respected.

"Much as the number of officers was increased by this means, it fades into utter insignificance when compared with the great deeds of Santanna. According to official documents, he signed 13,000 commissions while at the head of affairs. Among them were many which were given by him on birthdays etc., partly to mere children, the little boys of his adherents, on their being breeched, when the little monkey was furnished with an officer's uniform. This was chiefly done in order to strengthen his party, but frequently also as a reward for services received (as with you in Europe, where I understand that orders are given in a similar manner). A good German shoemaker, for instance, made His Excellency a wonderful boot for his club-foot. The artist was rewarded according to his deserts with a captain's commission; for he had helped to put the first man in the republic on his legs. The cobbler now determined not to stick to his last, but to strut about with his plumed hat and sabre. The shoe-shop, however, was still carried on, although the *captain* had so much to do with his comrades in the coffee-houses and guard-rooms, and had such difficulty in quenching the thirst thereby given rise to, that the *master* had no time to cut out, or to look after his journeymen. The customers complained of corns, of bad workmanship, and gave their orders elsewhere; and ere long the respected, thriving German shoemaker had become a poor vagabondising Mexican captain."