

MEXICO

AND

HER MILITARY CHIEFTAINS.

CHAPTER I.

MEXICO UNDER THE VICEROYS.

Extent of the viceroyalty of Mexico—Form of government—
Taxes—The clergy—Education—Classes of the people—
Topography—Political divisions.

By far the most beautiful portion of all the possessions of Spain in America, which extended from the mouth of the Sabine, with but few interruptions, except the Brazils, to the fortieth degree of south latitude on the Atlantic, and on the Pacific from the forty-second degree north to the fortieth south, was the viceroyalty of Mexico. It occupied a portion of the globe, towards which nature has been peculiarly beneficent, where every mountain was the seat of mines, and where in contradiction of the rule which condemns to sterility regions which abound in mineral wealth, every fruit of every clime grew in proximity. It was strewn with vast and venerable ruins, which even now astonish the traveller and reveal to him the monumental history of a by-gone people, the great resources and peculiar civilization of whom constituted but a portion of its power. The vice-kingdom of Mexico was of far greater extent

than the old Aztec Empire, and Galvez and Iturrigaray ruled over nations and countries of the existence of which Montezuma and his ancestors were ignorant. It embraced people of many languages and habits, originally with different laws and peculiar creeds, all of which had been annihilated by a long series of oppression and reduced to one level, that of slavery and degradation. How this vast region passed under the dominion of Spain, is an important point in the history of the world, to the elucidation of which some of the most skilful pens and brightest intellects of the age have been employed; but interesting as it is, scarcely comports with the plan marked out for this sketch—though from that conquest resulted the fearful peculiarities of the ante-revolutionary rule, and indirectly the long series of atrocities which finally subsided into the present unsettled mis-government, which so far has borne but the ashes and dust of turmoil and strife, instead of the wholesome fruit of order and free institutions. As it is, however, it seems indispensable to refer to the condition of Mexico under the Spanish rule, and to the events of its first revolution, before we touch upon the men who have influenced its subsequent destinies.

It is the greatest curse of misgovernment that it destroys not only the present happiness of a people, but its future capacities; and it is true that rarely has any people, which has been long oppressed, been able to establish a good government, until it had learned by a series of calamities, that freedom is not an absence of restraint, but a rule, the correct administration of which requires as many sacrifices, or as passive obedience, as the purest monarchy. This is obvious, when we remember that the difference between the freest and most absolute governments is but that in the first, the wishes of the in-

dividual must be sacrificed to the interests of a community, in the second, the interests of a community to the wishes of an individual. The one is not more exacting than the other, though few are able to think this is the case, and hence originates not a few of the errors so fatal to new governments, in the establishment of which it has been necessary to beware of the example of the past not to take advantage of accumulations of its experience. The history of all the revolutions which have yet occurred also teach, that those nations which have been most oppressed have had most difficulty in perceiving what course true wisdom prescribed to them; a more striking evidence of the truth of this can no where be found than in the annals of the Mexican Republic.

Mexico, Peru, Buenos Ayres, Chili, Cuba, and the other Spanish possessions in America were never known as colonies, in the sense attached to that term by England and France. They were not subject to the law of Spain, but were governed by codes prepared to suit what were considered their respective exigencies, and reference was made to the Roman law only in cases for which no provision was made in the several systems ordained for them. Each and all were in fact separate kingdoms, and were called such, with the exception of Cuba, and united formed that empire which enabled the successors of Ferdinand and Isabella to call themselves Kings of Spain and the Indies. At the head of each of these realms, except Chili and Cuba, which were governed by Captains-General, and Quito, at the head of which was always a Presidente, was a Viceroy, representative of royal authority, and, as far as the people were concerned, entirely irresponsible. They were appointed by the *real audiencia de las Indias*, representing the imperial power, residing in Spain, and in many

respects the most peculiar body which ever existed. It was established in 1511, consequently very soon after the discovery of the American continent, and under the *Rois Fainéants* of the house of Bourbon gradually usurped exclusive control of the Indies. As a legislature, it issued all laws and regulations for the government of the Indies; in the exercise of its executive faculties, it made or confirmed all appointments, civil, military, and even ecclesiastical, and ordered or instructed the higher officers, with regard to the performance of their duties; lastly, it was a supreme court of judicature, to which causes involving important questions might be submitted for their final determination. It thus possessed all the powers of the government over these extensive realms. The assent of the monarch was, indeed, necessary to give authority to its proceedings, yet that assent was rarely, if ever, withheld; and as vacancies in its own body were always filled agreeably to its own recommendation, the whole period of its existence might be viewed as the reign of one absolute sovereign, ever sagacious, and ever adding to his stores of experience. The viceroy was but their creature, responsible only to them, and by a most tyrannical provision could only be proceeded against within a very short time after the expiration of the term for which he was appointed—five years. The viceroys were almost always nobles and courtiers, who came to Mexico to restore dilapidated fortunes, and generally returned effete with wealth wrung from the American subjects of their master. It sometimes happened they were willing to remain for longer terms. As these officers could scarcely be presumed familiar with the administration of justice, they were provided with *Fiscales* or administrators of various kinds, whom they were obliged to con-

sult before taking any important step; each might act contrary to the opinion of his *Fiscal*, but the latter had the right to enter his protest, which might afterwards be submitted to the Supreme Council. Such a system carried out correctly would be bad enough, but in its appointments the *real audiencia* seems to have forgotten that they owed any obligation to the people of Mexico, thinking them only beasts of burden bound to eternal vassalage, not only to the Spanish monarch, but to every Spaniard. Long, long after the establishment of this system, scarcely more than thirty years ago, it was gravely asserted in a Spanish legislative assemblage, that "as long as one man lived in Spain, he had a right to the obedience of every American," a paradox more ridiculous than any of the grave sayings of Sir Robert Filmer. In the long list of viceroys appointed to all the Indies (one hundred and sixty in America), but four were born on this side the Atlantic, and the proportion of other officers was quite as small. In 1785 the minister Galvez referred to the fact that a few Mexicans held office in their own country as an abuse. The conduct of the *audiencia* and the officers they sent to America fully authorized the maxim which seems to have actuated the one in their forgetfulness of all humanity, and the other in the hopeless submission to the rule, that GOD IS IN HEAVEN AND THE KING IN SPAIN: from one they inferred there was no limit to their power, from the other no remedy for their wrongs. When we look at this state of things, can we be astonished at the condition of Mexico at the present time? When oppression does not force from its victims the fierce spirit of resistance, it evidently degrades those on whom it weighs; when violence does not struggle with injustice, man is driven to cunning and subterfuge, and habits of fraud take pos-

session of the whole mind, and those who have suffered from the tyranny of others are ever most prone to exhibit their own haughtiness and arrogance. Thus it is, that after expelling the Spanish oppressors, so few Mexicans are found worthy of the power they have won.

As a check on the power of the viceroy, to secure the royal privileges, another officer was appointed an *Intendente*, the duty of whom it was to take care of the collection and application of the taxes, of the revenue of the mines, and the imposts, which were many and vexatious. Subordinate to these in each province was an officer, usually a military commander, called *Intendente de Provincia*, the powers of whom were those of a governor, and who was responsible to the viceroy. The provinces were divided into districts, each of which was superintended by a board called *El Cabildo* or *Ayuntamiento*, the power of appointing which, either rested with, or was controlled by the higher authorities.

The most serious check upon the absoluteness or the ambition of all the executive officers, were the *Audiencias* or high courts of justice, of which one or two were established in every kingdom. They consisted each of a small number, generally between three and eight, of *Oidores* or judges, aided by *Fiscales*, chancellors, notaries, *Alguaziles* or sheriffs, and other officers or agents. On ordinary occasions they were presided over by one of their own number, styled a Regent; the viceroy was, however, *ex-officio*, the President of the *Audiencia* established in his capital.

The taxes we have said were vexatious, and it is a matter of mystery and surprise, how any people submitted so long to such extortion. The chief of these, independent of the odious capitation tax or tribute, levied on the Indians, whether rich or poor, were the

almojarifazgo, or import duty; the *alcabala*, on all sales of estates; the *millione*, on the articles of daily use; and monopolies of all necessities, whether of life or of industry, as salt, tobacco, quicksilver used in mines, &c. That under such a system, so crushing to energy and industry, the people became idle and nerveless, is not to be wondered at; the wonder is, that they existed at all. The worst features of the two worst governments in the world, the Gothic rule, and that of the Spanish Moors, had been combined to form the government of the mother-country, and its worst features had been carefully preserved to oppress the native population of Mexico, in the code sent out to them by the supreme council of the Indies. Why they did not resist centuries before, we cannot imagine, since the military force consisting of regulars, were nearly all Spaniards, and of native militia, neither class, however, at any time very numerous; the government appearing to have but little dread of foreign attacks, and to place full confidence in the organization of its civil powers, for preventing internal disturbances.

The ecclesiastical establishment was an important branch of the government of America, where it was maintained in great splendor and dignity. The clergy presented the same characteristics there, as in other countries where the Roman Catholic religion prevailed exclusively; the inferior members being generally honest, kind, and simple-minded persons, loving and loved by their parishioners, while the high dignitaries were, for the most part, arrogant, intriguing, and tyrannical. The Inquisition exercised its detestable sway, unchecked, in every part of the dominions; occasionally exhibiting to the people of the great cities, the edifying spectacle of an *auto da fe*, in which human victims were sacrificed,

to confirm the faith of the beholders in the power of the archbishop and the viceroy.

Before the revolution, the diffusion of knowledge was studiously prevented. The charge of keeping them in ignorance was committed to the priests, who, with the exception of the Jesuits, executed it with fidelity; the few schools and colleges were directed solely by ecclesiastics, who excluded from the course of instruction every branch of study, and from the public and private libraries every book calculated to strengthen the mental faculties, or to elevate the feelings. In the year 1806, there was but one printing-press at Mexico, from which a newspaper was published, under the immediate direction of the government; and as the Spanish newspapers, the only ones allowed to be imported, were devoted almost wholly to the movements of the court or the church, the inhabitants remained in absolute ignorance of all that transpired elsewhere. A few poems and plays, none of any value, and some works on natural history, or speculations, generally wild and baseless, on the antiquities of those countries, form nearly the whole of their original literature.

The incomplete outline here given of the system by which Mexico was governed, at the time when that system was the most liberal, and perhaps, in general, the most liberally administered, may serve to afford some idea of the evils to which it was subjected before its separation from Spain—evils by no means productive of proportional advantage to the oppressors. A more minute review of the history of Spanish supremacy in America, would serve to show that, throughout the whole period of its existence, the wishes and welfare of the inhabitants were sacrificed to the interests, real or supposed, of the monarch or of his European subjects.

To secure these interests permanently was the great object of the government, and, unfortunately for America, they were considered as being confined within very narrow limits; in fact, it had long been established as a principle, that to supply Spain with the greatest quantity of the precious metals, and to gratify her nobility and influential persons with lucrative situations for themselves or their dependants, were the only purposes for which these countries could be rendered available without endangering the perpetuity of the dominion over them.

The people were divided into seven great classes; 1st, The old Spaniards, known as Guachupines in the history of the civil wars; 2d, the Creoles, or whites of pure European race but born in America; 3d, the Indigenos, or Indians; 4th, the Mestizos, of mixed breeds of whites and Indians, gradually merging into Creoles as the Indian parentage became more and more remote; 5th, the Mulattoes, or descendants of whites and negroes, and 7th, the African Negroes; of these classes, the last named was very small, and the others were intermingled, so as to produce crosses, to be defined by no possible degree of anthropological science. The white population was chiefly collected in the table land, near the centre of which the Indian race also concentrated (near Puebla, Oaxaca, Mexico, Guanajuato, and Valladolid); while the northern frontier was inhabited almost entirely by whites, the Indian population having retired before them. In Durango, New Mexico, and the interior provinces, the true Indian breed was almost unknown. In Sonora it again appears. The coasts both of the Gulf and the Pacific, to the south, were inhabited by a race, in which there was a great mixture of African blood, from the fact, that to these unhealthy provinces, the few slaves imported into Mexico were sent,

There they have multiplied with the fecundity peculiar to the descendants of African parentage, and now form a mixed breed, peculiar to the *tierra caliente*, and unlike any other in the world. The mestizos are found every where, from the fact that but few Spanish women emigrated early to America, and the great mass of the population is of this class; and now too that a connexion with the aboriginal race confers no disadvantage, few pretend to deny it. The pure Indians in 1803 exceeded two millions and a half, and next to them are the mestizos. At the time of the revolution the pure whites were estimated at one million two hundred thousand, of whom eighty thousand only were Europeans. These distinctions were, however, soon annihilated, and at an early day in the revolution the only distinction known was of Americans and Europeans.

The events of the present war have so universally directed attention to Mexico, that its geography and topography are well known, and will excuse any more minute allusion to it than the following. The Cordillera of the Andes, after passing along the whole western coast of South America and through the Isthmus of Panama, immediately on entering the northern continent is divided into two branches, which leave between them an immense *plateau*, the central point of which is seven thousand feet above the level of the sea. This elevation towards the eastern coast gradually subsides to a level with the ocean, but on the west maintains itself in its stern rigidity till it becomes lost in the ices of the north. This table land presents some rare vegetable phenomena. On the coast its tropical latitude exhibits itself in its productions, but the rarefaction of the air attendant on elevation gradually neutralizes this, until at the central points we find growing the productions of colder climes.

Thus Mexico, Guanajuato, and Zacatecas, enjoy a far different temperature from that of Vera Cruz, Tampico, and other cities on the coast. On the ascent from Vera Cruz to Mexico, Humboldt says that climates succeed each other by stories, and in the course of forty-eight hours we pass through every variety of vegetation. The tropical plants are succeeded by the oak, and the salubrious air of Jalapa replaces the deadly atmosphere of Vera Cruz. The sky is generally cloudless and without rain, and a succession of hills, seemingly at some remote day the boundaries of lakes, are now the limits of extensive plains or *llanos*. The country is barren because it is dry, and every stream is accompanied with fertility. The first of these stories is called the *tierra caliente*, or hot, where the fruits and diseases of the tropics are produced; the *tierra templada*, or temperate, a term needing no explanation; while far beyond the city is the *tierra fria*, where the vegetation is alpine and the hills are covered with eternal snow.

The present states of Mexico are nineteen in number: Yucatan, Tabasco, Chiapas, and Oaxaca, Vera Cruz, Tamaulipas, St. Luis de Potosi, New Leon, Coahuila, Puebla, Mexico, Valladolid, Guadalajara, Sonora, Sinaloa, Guanajuato, Queretaro, Zacatecas, Durango, Chihuahua, New Mexico, and the Californias. In several instances two of these are united to form one state. Thus was the country divided previous to the revolution, and so it has continued; with the exception only, that the governments of the *Intendentes de provincias* have now become states, and that some of the southern provinces have (as now they may) occupied a position difficult to define, now claiming to belong to Central America, now to Mexico, and again to be independent.