

PART I.
HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

SECTION II.

Independence—The First Empire under Iturbide.

THE first meeting of the Assembly in the Independent Empire took place on the 15th of September, 1821. On the 28th of the same month an Executive Government was formed, which was composed of men of high order and intelligence.

A deputation was selected to proceed to Spain to offer the Crown of Mexico to Ferdinand VII.

On arrival, this deputation met with a different reception from that which had been anticipated. Ferdinand refused to exchange the Castilian Crown for that of Mexico. The latter being attached to a Constitutional Monarchy was distasteful to him; accustomed as he had been to be assisted solely by his nobles, and in no wise to hold himself answerable to, or to be restrained by, the people of his kingdom.

Don Carlos, the heir presumptive to his brother's throne, also rejected the offer. The deputation succeeded better with Don Francisco de Paulo, who was willing to accept the proffered Crown; but the Cortes refused to ratify, and treated with contempt the "Treaty of Cordova," and thus the mission of the Mexican deputation ended in failure.

The Assembly in Mexico, which had been formed for the purpose of carrying into effect the "Plan of Iguala," became divided in their opinions, and dissensions in the council soon prevailed. Three distinct parties were formed, comprising Iturbide and his followers; the Bourbonists; and the Republicans.

Iturbide was thoroughly opposed to a Republic, believing that such a form of Government was at that time unsuited to the Mexican people. The Bourbonists again desired to be under the domination of the Spanish Court.

But the voice of the people at large was in favour of Iturbide, and his principles and opinions. The Assembly had shown signs of its inefficiency to carry out the details of the "Plan of Iguala." In arranging the electoral districts and the election of Deputies, great injustice was done; the privilege of voting being restricted by the Assembly. The franchise was given to the municipal authorities of the chief towns only, in order to secure their own election. In this *ruse* they were successful, and they were returned to the Congress which was inaugurated on the 24th of February 1822, under the presidency of Don Hipolito Odoardo.

The Congress, composed of all classes, honourable and dishonourable, was in the aggregate sadly deficient in those qualities which should belong to such an assembly. Procrastinating, and neglectful of the urgent necessities of the people, the direst disorder reigned.

In vain did Iturbide endeavour to stir them to more decided action, and the consideration of the great questions which demanded immediate attention. They were indifferent to his appeals.

On the 3rd of April, Iturbide was summoned to attend the Congress and report on the public safety. But on his presenting himself the Deputies refused to hear him; and requested him to leave. He refused; exclaiming, "I cannot abandon my country to the hands of infidels." He then accused some of the members of treachery to their country, and the Congress broke up in great disorder.

On the 11th of April the Deputies dismissed several officers who were friends of Iturbide, appointing in their places others who were his enemies. A resolution was also passed to take the command of the army out of the hands of the Executive.

This act was the prelude to a still more important, yet

unexpected, affair. On the evening of the 18th of May a cry was heard in the streets of Mexico: "Long live Augustin the First—[Iturbide]—Emperor of Mexico!" It proceeded from a small body of soldiers, who were soon joined by others, until thousands of persons were marching and taking up the refrain. As if by magic the whole city presented an animated appearance. Illuminations and gaily-draped balconies enhanced the effect of a scene which was a demonstration of the affection of the people for Iturbide.

He endeavoured to evade the honours which were paid to him; but deferred to the earnest entreaties of his friends, who represented to him that his refusal would be fatal to the interests of the country.

On the meeting of the Congress to discuss the nomination of the future Emperor, in obedience to the popular voice, the Deputies, with the exception of those of the pure Republican party and the Bourbonists, who deemed it prudent not to offer any resistance, were unanimous.

The election of Iturbide as Emperor received the cordial assent of the provincials, who, by their subsequent expressions of enthusiastic approval, ratified the choice of the City of Mexico.

The coronation of Iturbide took place on the 21st of June 1822, and it was fondly hoped that the peace and repose of which Mexico stood so much in need would then be established.

Scarcely had the Empire of Iturbide been inaugurated, when the ever-restless spirits who, under cover of profuse protestations of attachment to the person of the Emperor, were secretly devising means to overthrow him, unmasked themselves. Of this class Santa Anna was the most conspicuous. He was persistent in urging Iturbide to extreme measures against those who were accused of conspiring against the Empire, and at last the Emperor ordered the arrest of the guilty parties.

The Congress, annoyed by this act of Iturbide, peremp-

torily demanded the release of their colleagues. This was refused, and angry discussions ensued.

The abeyance in which the "Plan of Iguala" was apparently held irritated the people; and they refused to contribute to the expenses of their representatives.

On the 30th of October the Emperor declared the Congress to be dissolved, and soon after convoked another Assembly which was to act only in cases of urgency.

The public mind was again relieved. The commercial prosperity of the country, which had sadly deteriorated during the late wars, was again considered.

But a great evil soon threatened the existence of the Empire. The financial condition of the country was very low; and the revenues, which had been sadly neglected, were insufficient to meet the requirements of the nation. The pay of the army was in arrear, and the various officers of the State could not obtain their salaries.

The fort of San Juan de Uloa, which dominated the town of Vera Cruz, was still occupied by the Spaniards. Santa Anna, under the orders of Echevarri, commanded this province. These generals, who were instructed to capture the fort, disagreed; being jealous of each other. Prompted by Echevarri, and influenced by other complaints against Santa Anna, the Emperor cancelled his commission, but as a recognition of his former bravery he received the Order of Guadalupe, and was made Brigadier-General.

The Republican party had, by this time, become strong, through the intriguing efforts of the agents of the United States. They enlisted Santa Anna into their cause, feeding his ambition by styling him the "Mexican Washington."

Santa Anna returned to Vera Cruz before the fact of his being relieved from his command became known; and seduced the officers to his side by promises of advancement. He was so successful, that on the 2nd of December 1822, he boldly proclaimed the Republic; in which he was supported by Victoria, Guerrero and Nicolas Bravo.

Following up this proclamation, he soon captured the

adjacent towns of Alvarado and Antigua ; but was defeated on attacking Jalapa.

Echevarri, who had received numerous tokens of favour at the hands of the Emperor, was ordered to attack Santa Anna ; but the confidence of his master in his fidelity was ill requited. Echevarri betrayed his cause ; and although commanding a superior force to that of the enemy, he surrendered and made a compact with Santa Anna to overthrow the Empire.

Betrayed by him in whom he had confided, Iturbide, instead of taking the field in person and vigorously endeavouring to crush the rebellion, consented to abide by the decision of the country, as to the future fate of the Empire.

But the provinces had been influenced by the agents of the Republic, and they sided against the Emperor ; but demanded that his person should be respected.

Stung by the base ingratitude of the country, and fearing further resistance would be the cause of bloodshed, he, on the 20th of March 1823, signed his abdication, and transmitted it to Don José del Valle, one of the Deputies who had been imprisoned by the Emperor for conspiracy, but had now been released by the Republicans, and made Minister of Foreign Affairs.

In this document Iturbide desired to retire to a foreign country, and asked that the debts he had contracted during his rule might be liquidated.

It may here be noted that he had scarcely received sufficient during his reign to pay necessary expenses.

These requests were granted, and a pension of £5000 a year was allowed him ; Italy being chosen as his future place of residence.

Accompanied by a guard of honour, the ex-Emperor arrived at Antigua ; from which place he embarked for Europe.

In order to carry out the principles of the Republic, the Congress on the 31st of May, 1823, nominated Generals Victoria, Bravo, and Negrete, as controllers of the executive power.

The abrogation of the decree which placed Iturbide on the throne, destroyed any chance of the "Plan of Iguala" being established in Mexico.

On the 5th of November 1823, the second Congress was convoked under the presidency of Doctor Don Miguel Guridi y Alcocer.

Two distinct parties were then formed ; the Centralists and the Federalists ; the former being composed of the Bourbonists, who wished for a centralised or autocratic government ; the latter of the old insurgents, the Republicans and the Iturbidists. The sentiments of the Federalists were in accordance with the feelings of the people, and Democracy became the ruling power.

The national exchequer was very low, and recourse was had to foreign countries for loans to meet the exigencies of the country.

The conflicting policies of these factions kept the nation in a troubled state. Presidents were deposed and fresh governments were established in rapid succession.

In the meantime Iturbide, weary of exile, determined to regain possession of the Mexican throne. Arriving in England, he was earnestly solicited by his countrymen there to return to Mexico.

He was ignorant of the existence of a decree which had been passed on the 8th of April, 1824, by which he was outlawed ; and he embarked on the 11th of May for Soto la Marina, at which port he arrived on the 14th of July, and despatched an aide-de-camp to General la Garza, who was commander of that district, soliciting permission to land ; which was immediately granted.

As soon as Iturbide stepped on shore, he was arrested and lodged in the prison of the town. It was then that he was first made acquainted with the purport of that fatal decree ; being now informed by the Alcalde of its existence, and that he had but three days to live. This news did not disconcert him ; he declared he was not come to oppose the Republic, appealing to the absence of any army as a con-

firmation. He begged to be sent before the Congress which was then sitting at Padilla; and that his chaplain, who had accompanied him to Mexico, should be allowed to attend him.

La Garza, fearful of incurring the responsibility of carrying into effect the decree, determined on granting his request; and immediately sent a letter to the Congress, informing them of the return of Iturbide, and of his intention to bring him before them.

This news created great consternation. The remembrance of the services rendered by Iturbide to the country, seriously affected them, and they endeavoured to evade, if possible, the spirit of the Act; but unhappily without avail. Only six deputies remained in session, who ordered the immediate execution of the unfortunate Emperor.

At six in the evening, he was conducted to the place of execution, accompanied by his chaplain, to whom he entrusted the rosary which had hung on his neck, to be given to his eldest son, also a letter for his wife.

Distributing among the firing party the contents of his purse, he addressed these words to the crowd in a firm and distinct tone:—

“Mexicans! At the moment I am about to die, I commend to you the love of your country and the observance of our holy religion; it is that which must conduct you to glory. I die for having come to your aid; and I die content, because I die amongst you. I die with honour,—not as a traitor. I would not leave that stain to my children and to posterity. No; I am not a traitor! Observe subordination and be obedient to your chiefs. In executing their orders you accomplish the will of God. My words are not inspired by vanity, I am far from possessing it.” At the conclusion of this address, he desired the adjutant, Castillo, to fire; and immediately fell, pierced by five bullets.

He was buried in the cemetery of Padilla, without any solemnity; but his death has been a lasting sorrow to the nation.

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SECTION III.

The Republican Era.

THE Republics which succeeded on the fall of Iturbide were remarkable for the constant change of Presidents through national dissensions, of which the clergy were credited as being the chief cause.

The clergy had obtained a great hold on the country, and were continually in opposition to the wishes of the people.

Possessed of enormous wealth which they had gradually accumulated; and having the army on their side, the whole country was virtually in their hands.

This state of affairs continued up to 1847, when on the invasion of the country by the United States, the inefficiency of the executive was proved, and a Government succeeded which introduced several reforms both clerical and military.

In 1853 Santa Anna was proclaimed Dictator; the result of a revolution in which the clergy took a prominent part; and the despotic rule which followed the proclamation of Santa Anna as Dictator was the result of a combination between the clergy and the army.

The people became dissatisfied; and in the same year the standard of rebellion was raised by Ignacio Comonfort in the State of Guerrero; this insurrection soon became general, and terminated in the complete overthrow of Santa Anna and the clergy.

In 1855 Comonfort became President, but after two years of turbulent rule he found himself unable to carry on