

SECTION II.

POPULATION.

THE first census ever taken of the population of Mexico, was that made in the year 1793, by the orders of the Viceroy, Count Revillagigedo; by which it appeared, that the number of inhabitants registered amounted to 4,483,529. This was the *minimum* of the population; as, independently of the difficulty with which statistical researches are always attended, it is well known, that, in America, a census was always regarded as the prelude to some new system of taxation, which the natives endeavoured to elude, by diminishing the number of those, upon whom it was to operate. Humboldt adds one-sixth, in order to cover the deficiency, and estimates the total (in 1794) at 5,200,000 souls. He conceives, that, in nineteen years, this population ought to double, according to the average proportion of births to deaths, given by the parish registers in every part of the country, (170 to 100,) unless its progress be checked by pestilence, or famine; and

he regards it as more than probable, that, at the period of his visit, (1803,) it already amounted to six millions and a half.

Since that time, only one very imperfect census has been taken, (in 1806,) which, however, proved Humboldt's estimate to be correct, by giving six millions and a half as the *minimum* (that is, the registered amount) of the population. The civil wars by which the country has since been desolated, must have rendered any considerable increase impossible, not only by the mortality which they occasioned on the field of battle, but by depriving the agricultural population of the means of subsistence: during this contest, the most fertile districts were those that suffered most; and the traveller, who now crosses the plains of the Baxio, would hardly believe, but for the ruins which he sees around him, that they were once thickly peopled, and smiling with cultivation.

Still, the inhabitants, though driven from their ancient seats, were not exterminated; nor is there any reason to suppose that more than three hundred thousand persons altogether perished during the war. The remainder must, according to the ordinary course of things, have gone on increasing. If, therefore, in lieu of supposing the population to have doubled, from 1806 to 1826, (which it certainly has not,) I add one million and a half to the *minimum* of 1806, as the ratio of increase during the last twenty years, and estimate the whole population of Mexico, in

1827, at eight millions, I shall, I think, be making a very moderate computation, and one, in which the census, now forming in the different states, will bear me out.

Before the revolution, this population was divided into seven distinct castes. 1. The old Spaniards, designated as *Gächüpīnēs*, in the history of the civil wars. 2. The Creoles, or Whites of pure European race, born in America, and regarded by the old Spaniards as natives. 3. The Indians, or Indigenous copper-coloured race. 4. The Mestizos, or mixed breed of Whites and Indians, gradually merging into Creoles, as the cross with the Indian race became more remote. 5. The Mulattoes, or descendants of Whites and Negroes. 6. The Zambos, or Chinos, descendants of Negroes and Indians. And, 7. The African Negroes, either manumitted, or slaves.

Of these Castes, the three first, and the last, were pure, and gave rise, in their various combinations, to the others; which again, were sub-divided, *ad infinitum*, by names expressing the relation borne by each generation of its descendants to the White, (Quarteroons, Quinteroons, &c.) to which, as the ruling colour, any approximation was desirable.

The principal seat of the white population of Mexico is the Table-land, towards the centre of which the Indian race is likewise concentrated, (in the intendancies of La Pueblā, Mēxīcō, Guāñajuātō, Ōāxācā, and Vāllādōlid;) while the Northern frontier is inhabited almost entirely by Whites, and de-

scendants of Whites, before whom it is supposed that the Indian population must have retired, at the time of the conquest. In Dūrāngō, New Mexico, and the Provincias Internas, the pure Indian breed is almost unknown; in Sōnōrā it is again found, because the conquerors there overtook the last tribes of the original inhabitants, who had not yet placed the River Gilā (lat. 33 N.) between themselves and the Spanish arms. The coasts are inhabited, both to the East and West, by Mulattoes and Zambos, or, at least, by a race in which a mixture of African blood prevails. It was in these unhealthy regions that the slaves formerly imported into Mexico were principally employed, the natives of the Table-land being unable to resist the extreme heat of the climate.

They have multiplied there in an extraordinary manner, by intermarriages with the Indian race, and now form a mixed breed, admirably adapted to the *Tierra caliente*, but not possessing, in appearance, the characteristics either of the New World, or of the Old.

The Mestizos (descendants of Natives and Indians) are found in every part of the country; indeed, from the very small number of Spanish women who at first visited the New World, the great mass of the population has some mixture of Indian blood. Few of the middling classes (the lawyers, the Curas, or parochial clergy, the artizans, the smaller landed proprietors, and the soldiers,) could prove themselves

exempt from it; and now that a connexion with the Aborigines has ceased to be disadvantageous, few attempt to deny it. In my sketch of the revolution, I always include this class under the denomination of *Creoles*; as sharing with the Whites of pure Spanish descent the disadvantages of that privation of political rights, to which all *Natives* were condemned, and feeling, in common with them, that enmity to the Gachupines, (or old Spaniards,) which the preference constantly accorded to them could not fail to excite.

Next to the pure Indians, whose number, in 1803, was supposed to exceed two millions and a half, the Mestizos are the most numerous caste: it is, however, impossible to ascertain the exact proportion which they bear to the whole population, many of them being, as I have already stated, included amongst the pure Whites, who were estimated, before the revolution, at 1,200,000, including from 70 to 80,000 Europeans, established in different parts of the country.

Of the Mulattoes, Zambos, and other mixed breeds, nothing certain is known.

It will be seen, by this sketch, that the population of New Spain is composed of very heterogeneous elements: indeed, the numberless shades of difference which exist amongst its inhabitants, are not yet, by any means, correctly ascertained.

The Indians, for instance, who appear at first sight, to form one great mass, comprising nearly two-

fifths of the whole population, are divided, and subdivided, amongst themselves, in the most extraordinary manner.

They consist of various tribes, resembling each other in colour, and in some general characteristics, which seem to announce a common origin, but differing entirely in language, custom, and dress. No less than twenty different languages are known to be spoken in the Mexican territory, and many of these are not dialects, which may be traced to the same root, but differ as entirely as languages of Sclavonic and Teutonic origin in Europe. Some possess letters, which do not exist in others, and, in most, there is a difference of sound, which strikes even the most unpractised ear. The low guttural pronunciation of the Mexican, or Aztec, contrasts singularly with the sonorous Otomi,* which prevails in the neighbouring state of Valladolid; and this again is said to be totally unlike the dialect of some of the northern tribes. There is not, perhaps, a question better worthy of the consideration of

* Wherever the Aztec tongue is in use, the letter *r* is unknown, while in the Otomi dialect, it occurs almost in every word. Thus we have Pöpöcätépētl, İstăccihuătl, Tēnōchtītlān, and that unpronounceable word given by Humboldt, and signifying "venerable priest, whom I cherish as a father," Notlazomah-uizteopixcatatzin,—all Aztec, and all without an *r*; while in Valladolid, the prevailing names are Ōcāmarō, Pūrūndīrō, Zitācūarō, and Cīnāpēcūarō, in all of which *r* bears a prominent part.

philosophers, than the elucidation of this extraordinary anomaly, in the history of the Indian race: nothing is known of the mode in which America was peopled, except the fact, that the tide of population has set, constantly, from north to south. Analogies are said to have been discovered between the language of some of the Indians in the southern parts of Chile, and that used by the Aztec race in Mexico; but the intermediate space is filled up by dialects of an entirely distinct character; nor is there the slightest connexion between the Peruvian and the Mexican tongue, notwithstanding the preeminence, in point of civilization, which each of these nations had attained. It would be interesting, indeed, to discover some mode of explaining these singular facts, and pointing out the region, from which these successive swarms of emigrants must have issued, and the Babel, where their confusion of tongues originated. I do not believe that even a probable conjecture upon this subject has yet been made.

It was the policy of Spain to promote a constant rivalry between the different classes of inhabitants in her colonies, by creating little imaginary shades of superiority amongst them, which prevented any two from having a common interest. Of the causes of the enmity, which prevailed between the Creoles and the Gachupines, I shall have occasion to speak, more at large, in treating of the Colonial policy of

the mother country:* amongst the rest, rank, as originating in a closer, or more remote, connexion with the master colour, was the subject of contention. Whiteness of the skin was the general criterion of nobility; hence the expression so frequent in a quarrel, "es posible que se crea V. mas blanco que yo?" (Is it possible that you think yourself whiter than I am?) But the King reserved to himself the power of conferring the honours of whiteness upon any individual, of any class, which was done by a decree of the Audiencia, comprised in the words, "let him be considered as white;" (que se tenga por blanco)—and the greatest pains were taken to impress the people with the importance of these distinctions, which, in fact, amounted to a patent of nobility. For a long time they, certainly, had the effect of keeping the different mixed breeds at variance with each other; each was afraid of losing caste by an alliance with his inferior, while the white Creole, proud of the purity of his own blood, was supposed to look down upon the rest of his countrymen, with a contempt, very similar to that which was entertained by the old Spaniard for himself.

So prevalent was this feeling in 1803, that Humboldt, a most intelligent and philosophical observer, expresses his apprehensions that a Creole govern-

* Vide 4th Section of this Book.

ment, (if one should ever exist,) would attempt to establish a still stronger line of demarcation between themselves, and the Castes, than that drawn by a government, which had no interest in favouring either party, and only aimed at keeping down all. The events of the last seventeen years have proved these fears to be unfounded. From the first breaking out of the Revolution, the Creoles were obliged to court the alliance of the mixed classes, and in all their proclamations we find them representing their own cause, and that of the Aborigines, as the same. The distinctions of castes were all swallowed up in the great, vital distinction, of *Americans*, and *Europeans*; against whom, supported, as they were, by the whole force of Spain, and holding, as they did, almost all the public employments in the country, nothing could have been done except by a general coalition of the natives. Hence the apparent absurdity of hearing the descendants of the first conquerors, (for such the Creoles, strictly speaking, were,) gravely accusing Spain of all the atrocities, which their own ancestors had committed; invoking the names of Moctezuma and Atâhualpa;* expatiating upon the miseries which the Indians had undergone, and endeavouring to discover some affinity

* Vide the Cuadro Historico of Carlos Bustamante, passim; and the first Manifesto of the Congress of Buenos Ayres, in which the massacre of Caxamalca is introduced, as one of the pleas of independence.

between the sufferings of that devoted race and their own.

It is consoling to reflect, however, that this necessity of identifying themselves with the Aborigines, however absurd as argument, has led to good practical results. Castes can no longer be said to exist in Mexico, nor, I believe, in any other part of Spanish America: many of the most distinguished characters of the revolutionary war belonged to the mixed breeds; and, under the system now established, all are equally entitled to the rights of citizenship, and equally capable of holding the highest dignities of the state. Several *Curas*, of pure Indian extraction, have already been deputies; and I am acquainted with one young man, of distinguished abilities, who is a member of the supreme tribunal of justice in Durango. General Guerrero, too, who, in 1824, was one of the members of the Executive Power, and who is now a candidate for the Presidency, has a strong mixture of African blood in his veins, which is not considered as any disparagement. This is no slight indication of the amelioration, which a little time may be expected to produce. Rescued from political degradation, and awakened to a sense of a political existence, I shall not, I trust, be regarded as a theorist, for supposing that a sensible improvement will take place, and that many of the most valuable members of the community will, hereafter, be found amongst those very classes, who

were formerly excluded from any share in the direction of the affairs of their country.

I cannot conclude this sketch of the population of Mexico, without remarking upon one great advantage which New Spain enjoys over her neighbours, both to the North and South, in the almost total absence of a pure African population. The importation of slaves into Mexico was always inconsiderable, and their numbers, in 1793, did not exceed six thousand. Of these many have died, many have been manumitted, and the rest quitted their masters in 1810, and sought freedom in the ranks of the Independent army; so that I am, I believe, justified in stating, that there is now hardly a single slave in the central portion of the republic.

In Texas, (on the Northern frontier,) a few have been introduced by the North American settlers; but all farther importations are prohibited by law; and provision has been made for securing the freedom of the offspring of the slaves now in existence. The number of these must be exceedingly small, (perhaps not exceeding fifty altogether;) for, in the annual solemnity, which takes place, in the capital, on the 16th September, in commemoration of the proclamation of the Independence by Hidalgo, at Dolores, a part of which was to consist in giving freedom to a certain number of slaves, which is done by the President himself, the greatest difficulty was found, in 1826, to discover persons, on whom to bestow the boon of liberty, and I much doubt

whether any can have been forthcoming in the present year.

The advantages of such a position can only be appreciated by those, who know the inconveniences, and dangers, with which a contrary order of things is attended. In the United States, where the Slaves, Mulattoes, and Free Blacks, constitute more than one-sixth of the whole population,* they are a constant source of disquiet and alarm. In a country, where civil liberty is incessantly invoked, and where every thing is done in its name, and for its perpetuation, they are a proscribed, and degraded caste; nor can they hope for any amelioration of their lot. Slavery rests upon the supposed natural inferiority of the slave to his master: to admit the manumitted slave to a participation of political rights, in common with his former lord, would destroy this basis altogether; and the Free Black is, therefore, not only exiled from the society of the Whites, but excluded most carefully from power; not by law, indeed, but by virtue of common usage; for the law, in general, does not recognize any difference of colour, or establish any distinction, except that of slave-owner and slave.† The consequence is, that

* By the census of 1810, the total population amounted to 7,239,903 inhabitants, of whom, 1,377,810 were blacks, either free or slaves; by that of 1820, the total population was 9,638,226, of whom 1,538,118 were slaves, and 233,557 free people of colour.

† In some states this is not the case: in South Carolina,

the hostility existing between the free blacks, and the whites, in the United States, is even more inveterate than that of slaves towards their masters; and that, in some of the States, (Virginia especially,) it has been thought necessary to enact laws, by which all manumitted slaves are compelled to quit the commonwealth; while in others it is forbidden, under heavy fines, and even corporal punishments, to teach a slave to read or write.*

Mexico is exempt from all these evils. In her territory, the African race is already amalgamated with the Indigenous; and when education shall have prepared its descendants for exercising the higher rights of citizenship, there is neither law, nor custom, to prevent them from attaining the first offices in the state. In the mean time, they furnish the *Tierras calientes* with a most useful race of labourers, who, from not being liable to the Vomito, (or Vera Cruz fever,) perform most of the drudgery in the towns upon the coast, and cultivate, in the interior, those productions, which are peculiar to the *Tierra caliente*.

However the question of free labour may be agitated elsewhere, in Mexico it is already decided.

instance, the free people of colour are ineligible *by law* to any public situation. A Senator, or Representative, must be a free *white* man, uncontaminated by any mixture of African blood.

—Vide Mellish's United States, p. 275.

* Vide Mr. Politica's Sketch of the Internal Condition of the United States, from which many of the above observations are borrowed.

The sugar, coffee, and indigo, which abound in many parts of the country, and which, though not at present exported, are raised in sufficient quantities for a very large home consumption, are all cultivated by free men. There is not a single slave in the valley of Cuernāvaca, or in the environs of Ōrízavā and Cōrdōvā, which are the great marts for sugar, and coffee. The whole labour is performed there by the Indians, and mixed breeds, and a want of hands is seldom, or ever, known. I shall give, upon this subject, some additional details in the following section, which treats of the productions of the Mexican soil. Here, it only remains for me to add, that in the New World, as in the Old, Great Britain has done all that in her lay towards ameliorating the condition of the African race. The abolition of the slave-trade was made a *sine qua non* condition of her intercourse with the New American States. It is pleasing to reflect on the readiness, with which this wish was complied with in Mexico: I have no doubt, however, that it will bring with it its own reward, as policy is hardly less interested than humanity in the removal of those laws, which, by perpetuating the distinction of master and slave, endanger the safety of the whole body politic, by setting the interests of one portion of society in direct opposition to those of all the rest.