

able trait in the Revolution of America, is the sort of proscription which the name of Spaniard now entails upon those, who formerly found it the only passport to preferment: but the violence of the reaction, is, perhaps, the best proof of the excess of the evils by which it was occasioned.

There can be little doubt, that the Spanish Government fomented this mutual antipathy between the two most influential classes of its subjects, on the same principle that led it to encourage all the distinctions of *caste*, and *colour*, which I have mentioned in the second section of this book. This was not the case, however, with the other abuses which I have had occasion to enumerate: wherever her financial interests were at stake, the Mother country was remarkably vigilant, but then she, but too frequently, took a wrong mode of effecting what she had in view. Instead of attempting a reform, by introducing into the general system something like simplicity, and uniformity of plan, every succeeding year rendered the machinery still more complicated. Whenever abuses were discovered in any office, a new office was established, as the only means of correcting them; thus, wheel within wheel was added, and check upon check introduced, until the action of the whole was impeded, and the confusion became so great, that nothing could remedy it. Mexico, the most important of all the Colonies, only remitted six millions of dollars annually to the Peninsula: the remainder of a revenue of twenty

millions of dollars, was swallowed up, either by the government charges, which (including dilapidations) amounted to eleven millions, or, by remittances to other Colonies, (the Havana and the Philippine Islands,) the revenues of which did not cover the expenditure.

Under such a system as that which I have described, it was not to be expected that much should be done for the improvement of the people, destined to be ruled by it. Spain felt that her power depended in a great measure upon their ignorance.—By disseminating the blessings of education amongst her subjects, she would, virtually, have undermined her own authority, and made them impatient of a yoke, which comparison would have rendered doubly galling. They were, therefore, taught to believe that the fate of all mankind was similar to their own: or rather, that they were pre-eminently fortunate, in belonging to a monarchy so much superior in power and dignity to the rest of the world. Spain was to them the queen of nations: *hablar Christiano*, (to speak a *Christian* language,) was the privilege of those by whom her dialect was used; while English and French, Germans and North Americans, were all involved in one indiscriminate condemnation, as Jews, heretics, and unbelievers, with whom no good Catholic could hold intercourse without contamination.

The Inquisition was constituted the guardian of this belief, and discharged the duty with a zeal,

which proved how fully its importance was felt. The works of Luther were not more rigorously proscribed, than modern histories, or political writings; and, even as late as 1811, by a strange anomaly, the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people was denounced as a damnable heresy in Mexico, at the very time that it was solemnly sanctioned by the Cortes in Spain. Some particular studies, however, were encouraged amidst this general tendency to stifle inquiry; especially scholastic divinity, which was considered a very harmless amusement, and the mathematics. Some attention too was paid to the arts of drawing and sculpture, and, in the mining districts to mineralogy, which, in Mexico particularly, was patronised with kingly munificence: but there can be no doubt that this was done, principally with a view to divert the attention of the Creoles from more dangerous pursuits: the spirit of the system was to exclude information, and to check the progress of the human mind.

Nothing can illustrate this more strongly, than a Royal decree, of 1785, addressed to the Viceroy of Peru, by the *enlightened* Galvez, (as Humboldt deservedly calls him, on account of the many practical reforms which he introduced into the administration of the Colonies,) who was, at that time, President of the Council of the Indies. This decree states, that in consequence of the many representations made to the King, respecting the bad effects produced by the college for the education of noble

Indians, at Lima, the subject had been taken into serious consideration; and that His Majesty, "convinced that, since the conquest, no revolution had been attempted amongst the Peruvians, which had not originated with some one better informed than the rest," had determined that the question should be referred to the Viceroy, with orders to give an opinion, as soon as possible, respecting the propriety of reforming, new-modelling, or entirely suppressing the said college."

Upon the same principle, liberty to found a school of any kind was (latterly) almost invariably refused. The municipality of Buenos Ayres was told, in answer to a petition in favour of an establishment, in which nothing but mathematics was to be taught, that learning did not become Colonies.* The Padre Mier (author of a very curious work on the Mexican Revolution) enumerates various instances of a similar kind. In Bögötā, the study of chemistry was prohibited, though permitted in Mexico: and in New Grēnādā, the works of the celebrated Mutis, though purely botanical, were not allowed to be published. Permission to visit foreign countries, or even the Peninsula, was very rarely granted, and then only for a limited time. A printing-press was conceded, as a special privilege, by the Council of the Indies, and that only to

* *Vide* Brackenbridge, Voyage to South America, by Order of the Government of the United States.

the three Viceroyalties, Mexico, Buenos Ayres, and Peru; to Caracas, and many other considerable towns, it was denied altogether.

To guard against the importation of books, was, as I before observed, the special province of the Inquisition; and the whole ingenuity of this odious tribunal was exerted, in order to check it: not only were vessels subjected to a vigorous examination upon their arrival in port, but the captains were rendered, personally, responsible for the correctness of the list of the books on board, which they were compelled to give in. In the interior, domiciliary visits were resorted to, and denunciations encouraged amongst members of the same family; with what success, may be inferred from the fact, that, as late as 1807, a Mexican, called Don Jose Roxas, was denounced by his own mother, for having a volume of Rousseau in his possession, and confined for several years in the dungeons of the Holy Office. He was fortunate enough to effect his escape, but died, in 1811, at New Orleans.* These instances of extreme severity, however, were rare, and were less felt, because, in theory at least, the jurisdiction of the Inquisition was as extensive in the Mother country as in the Colonies. In practice, its prohibitions were disregarded in both, by the higher classes, who were, in general, acquainted

* *Vide* Brackenbridge, who lived in the same house with him, and was in the possession of his papers after his death.

with all the most violent publications of the earlier days of the French revolution, to the study of which, the very anxiety that was shown to exclude them, gave an additional zest.

The first proclamations of all the new Juntas bear evidence of the extent to which this passion was carried; they are mostly mere transcripts, of the rights of man, with as little real tendency to improve mankind as the original; for they invariably led to the adoption of some impracticable theory, and pointed out the overthrow of all existing institutions, as the first step towards amendment.

It is curious to observe how little progress was made by any of the New States, after the first declaration of their independence, until experience had taught them a sounder doctrine, and led them to model their institutions upon those of the United States; which, with some slight variations, will, in all probability be adopted, ultimately, by the whole of Spanish America.

It now only remains for me to terminate this sketch of the Colonial Policy of Spain, by an account of the commercial restrictions which she imposed upon her American subjects, and which I consider as the great cause of the Revolution. It is in the endless grievances, vexations, and abuses, to which these restrictions gave rise, that we must seek the seeds of that discontent, by which the minds of all classes were indisposed towards the Mother country.

The political preference given to Europeans, might rankle in the breasts of those Creoles, who, from their birth or fortune, conceived themselves to be entitled to a share of that authority which the old Spaniards engrossed; but it was a matter of indifference to the great mass of the people. The commercial monopoly of Cadiz, on the contrary, came home to all; and, from the enormous price to which every article of European produce was raised by it, it bore hardest upon those least able to support it. Like the insolent air of superiority affected by the Europeans, it created a degree of irritation, which nothing but prudence, lenient measures, and timely concessions, on the part of the Mother country, could have calmed; and these (unfortunately) were words, which the vocabulary of Spain did not acknowledge.

“*Des principes d'après lesquels on arrache la vigne, et l'olivier, ne sont guère propres à favoriser le commerce on les manufactures*”:—such is the manner in which Humboldt commences his account of the trade of New Spain, and nothing, certainly, can be more appropriate than such an introduction, to such a subject. If a system of absolute prohibition could ever prove a good one in the end, or ever be made to answer, by the greatest strictness in enforcing it, the policy of Spain might be held out, as an object of admiration to all future ages. From the first, she reserved to herself the exclusive right of supplying all the wants of her Colonies. No fo-

reigner was permitted to trade with them, or foreign vessel to enter their ports;—no American could own a ship. In Spain itself, the trade was confined, for upwards of a century, to the single port of Seville, from which every vessel chartered for America was ordered to sail, and to which it was compelled to return. Death was the penalty denounced against any infringement of these stern laws; and a formidable establishment of Guarda Costas was maintained, for the express purpose of enforcing them.

In order to increase the wants of the Colonies, they were forbidden to manufacture any article that the Mother country could supply; and were even compelled to forego the advantages, which they might have derived from the superior fertility of their own soil, and to draw from Spain necessaries, with which Nature furnished them almost at their own doors. The cultivation of the vine and the olive, for both of which the climate of America is admirably adapted, was prohibited; and even the growth of the more precious articles, of what we term colonial produce, (as cacao, coffee, and indigo,) was only tolerated, under certain limitations, and in such quantities as the Mother country might wish annually to export. Nothing could exceed the distress, to which those parts of the Spanish dominions, which were not enriched by veins of gold or silver, were reduced by these regulations. The whole coast of Venezuela was sunk in poverty, in the midst of