

its natural riches; and in Buenos Ayres, wheat was actually used to fill up the holes in the streets, and marshes in the vicinity of the town.\* The inhabitants, whose only wealth consisted in their agricultural produce, were condemned to vegetate in hopeless indigence, debarred from all the advantages of civilization, and reduced to a state but little superior to that of the Indians, at the time of the conquest. I know of few more touching appeals to the feelings, and good sense of a government, than that addressed to the Viceroy of the provinces of the Rio de la Plata, in 1809, by the Apoderado (Agent) of the Landed Proprietors of Buenos Ayres. It contains an admirable *exposé* of the system, by which the interests, both of the Colonies and of the Royal Treasury, were sacrificed to those of a few overbearing European merchants; as well as of the fruitlessness of any endeavours to obtain redress, even in cases where the advantage of the government (if rightly understood) was perfectly in harmony with that of the colonist. I subjoin a few extracts, which will be found in the Appendix.

The reforms which had been gradually introduced into the Colonial System in Mexico, the Havanna, and Peru, did not extend, in the same degree, to these ill-fated countries. The precious metals were so exclusively the object of the attention of Spain, that but little attention was paid to

\* *Vide* Representation of Landholders to Viceroy. Appendix, Letter A.

any of her possessions that did not produce them. She had no idea of creating a balance of trade, by encouraging the natural resources of the colonies; nor of becoming herself the carrier between them and other nations, with whose manufactures she was, indeed, obliged to keep them supplied, but to whom she furnished in return but few of those productions, with which her American possessions abounded. The fact was, that, perhaps with a view of rendering it less difficult to keep the whole of the importations and exportations in her own hands, she never aimed at increasing the number of consumers, but rather contrived to enhance her profits, by limiting the supply. The luxuries of life were only to be obtained by the wealthy: the lower and middling classes could not aspire to a share of them; and it would be curious to be able to point out, in an authentic shape, the very limited number of those, amongst whom the importations of each Colony were distributed. To render the management of this extraordinary system less embarrassing, the channels of communication with the Mother country were reduced as much as possible. Until the year 1700, the whole of the supplies destined for America were introduced through the ports of Portobello, and Veracruz; from the first of which, remittances were made through Panamá, (on the opposite side of the Isthmus,) to the whole line of coast on the Pacific, comprising Güyaquíl, Quito, Chilë, and Përū. During the war of Suc-



cession, the trade with Peru was opened to the French; and many Americans are of opinion, that, to this temporary enjoyment of the sweets of foreign intercourse, the present revolution may be traced. At the peace of Utrecht, (1713,) Great Britain, with the Asiento, (or contract for the supply of slaves,) obtained a direct participation in the American trade, in virtue of the permission, which was granted her, to send a vessel of five hundred tons annually to the fair of Portobello. This privilege ceased with the partial hostilities of 1737, but Spain found herself compelled on the restoration of peace, in 1739, to make some provision for meeting that additional demand, which this comparatively free communication with Europe had created. Licenses were granted with this view to vessels, which were called register-ships, and which were chartered during the intervals between the usual periods for the departure of the galleons. In 1764, a farther improvement was made, by the establishment of monthly packets, to the Havana, Portorico, and Buenos Ayres, which were allowed to carry out a half cargo of goods. This was followed, in 1774, by the removal of the interdict upon the intercourse of the Colonies with each other; and this again, in 1778, by what is termed *the decree of Free Trade*, by which seven of the principal ports of the Peninsula were allowed to carry on a direct intercourse with Buenos Ayres, and the South Sea.

It cannot be denied that these ameliorations were attended with the happiest effect; but still, they were insufficient. The growing importance of the Colonies required more than the Mother country was able to supply; while the concessions which had been made, only rendered the restraints still imposed more insupportable. To receive all their supplies through the medium of the Peninsula would not have been a hardship, had she taken, in return, those products, in which the colonies abounded, and upon which the whole wealth of some of them depended. But this she would only do to a very limited extent.\* Payments in specie were the great object of the Spanish merchant, and to this every other commercial advantage was sacrificed.

The exclusion of foreigners from concurrence, in a market thus organized, was essential to the very existence of the system pursued. Their willingness to receive produce in lieu of silver, in exchange for their manufactures, and to be contented with a moderate rate of profit upon those manufactures, provided they could dispose of them in sufficient quantities, would have rendered competition, on the part of Spain, impossible; at the same time that it must have increased the difficulty of keeping the Colonies in subjection, by augmenting their resources too ra-

\* A return of the importations and exportations from the colonies, would prove how very small was the amount of colonial produce exported from each, (with the exception of the Havana,) and how constant the drain of specie.



pidly. The whole attention of Spain was therefore directed to this point. For a long time, she claimed a right to an exclusive dominion over the vast oceans, which surrounded her American possessions; and this right she asserted, to the utmost extent, wherever she was enabled to do so by a superiority of maritime force.

Few are, I believe, aware of the length, to which these pretensions were carried. I shall therefore subjoin, in order to illustrate them, some extracts from a correspondence which took place, as late as 1790, between Don Teodoro de Croix, then Viceroy of Peru, and the Governor of the Island of Juan Fernandez, who was disgraced, and narrowly escaped a severer punishment, for having, in that year, allowed a vessel from the United States, which had lost her rudder, and been otherwise damaged by a storm, to put into the harbour for a few days to refit.

The Viceroy expresses, in very strong terms, his displeasure at the negligence of the Governor, in allowing the vessel to leave the Island, "without having even attempted to seize her; and his surprise at the Governor of any of the King's Islands being so ignorant, as not to know, that any foreign vessel sailing in the South Sea, without a Spanish license, was to be treated as an *enemy's* vessel, although the country, to which she belonged, might be at peace and amity with Spain."

This doctrine met with the entire approbation of

the Audiencia of Peru; and a circular was immediately addressed to all governors of islands, and commandants of forts, or towns, situated upon the coast of the Pacific, instructing them, "in the event of any foreign vessel entering their harbours, to endeavour, to the best of their abilities,\* to detain her, until a favourable opportunity should present itself for seizing her, with her crew, and to transmit to the capital the earliest possible intelligence of the result."

This correspondence was found in the archives of the Viceroyalty at Lima, and published by the Independent party, when it obtained possession of the capital, together with the decree respecting the college for noble Indians, which I have already quoted.

Like the letter of the Viceroy Calleja, and the representation of the Mexican Audiencia to the Cortes, to which I shall have occasion to allude in the next book, I see no reason to question their authenticity; and, where this is the case, nothing tends to throw so strong a light upon the causes of a revolution, as such documents. They are better than a thousand theories, the result merely of private opinions, more or less warmly expressed; for, without pretending to establish any system, they enable every one to form his own upon a basis, the stability of which there is no reason to doubt.

\* Literally, "with suitable discrimination, art, and prudence—con la sagacidad arte, y prudencia, convenientes."



It is with this view, and not with any wish to place the conduct of the Spanish government in an unfavourable light, that I have introduced them into this sketch. The errors of Spain have brought with them their own punishment. Even during the days of her power, they were chiefly detrimental to her own interests; for, in attempting to exclude foreign trade entirely, she only reduced smuggling to a system, by which the revenue was defrauded, without the interest of the Creoles being materially advanced; since produce could not be exported, where no legal communication could be held.

With regard to the other parts of her Colonial Policy, it must always be recollected, that its spirit was originally mild; the evils which grew out of it, were, perhaps, the inevitable consequence of despotic institutions, transplanted to regions so distant, that there could be no check to the abuse of delegated power. There was no want of excellent laws in the folios in which the code of the Indies was contained; but the facility with which they were evaded, and the constant impunity of those by whom they were infringed, rendered them unavailing. What wonder then, that under such circumstances, a remedy should have been sought in a total change of institutions, or that a system should have been adopted the very opposite to that which had before prevailed?

## BOOK II.

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