

they laboured, as well as by the injudicious manner in which the justice of their complaints was admitted by the new governments of the Mother country, although not one of those measures was taken, by which the causes of them might have been removed. The State papers of the day furnish abundant proofs of the vacillating policy which prevailed, with regard to American affairs; and, as they have long become the property of the historian, I shall avail myself of them, without scruple, in order to illustrate it.

After proclaiming "a perfect equality of rights, between the American and Spanish subjects of the crown," and declaring the provinces of Ultramar "to be component parts of the Monarchy, and not Colonies or Factories, like those of other nations,"\* the Central Junta gave place to the Regency, which, desirous still farther to conciliate the Creoles, by a decree, dated the 17th May, 1810, conceded to them, under certain limitations, a *free trade*, during the suspension of the usual intercourse with the Mother country. This wise decree, the best possible antidote, (as the author of the "Español" very justly terms it,) against a revolutionary spirit in

\* *Vide* Proclamation, dated Seville, 5th June, 1809; and "Aviso" of 10th January, 1810.

"Considerando que los vastos y preciosos dominios que la España posee en las Indias, no son, propiamente, Colonias, o' Factorías, como los de otras naciones, sino una parte esencial, é integrante, de la Monarquía Española."

the Colonies, was protested against by the merchants of Cadiz, who found means to induce the Regency, very soon after its publication, to repeal it; and the measure was carried into execution, with a violence as impolitic, as the resolution itself was imprudent. On the 27th of June, a second decree appeared, stating, that "Notwithstanding the lively wish of the Regency to conciliate the welfare of the Americas with that of the Mother country, it had abstained from touching upon a point of such delicacy and importance, that the least innovation with regard to it must be preceded by the repeal of the prohibitory laws of the Indies, which could not but be attended with the most serious consequences to the State:" It therefore declared the decree of the 17th of May\* to be spurious, and of no value or effect," and directed "all existing copies of it to be burnt, and its authors to be proceeded against;" but assured the Colonists, at the same time, "that the Regency had not ceased to meditate, and was still meditating upon some mode of relieving the Americas, by other means, from the evils and privations under which they were suffering."†

\* "Apócrifa y de ningún valor ni efecto."

† "Sin que por esto haya dexado de pensar, y piense, el Consejo, en aliviar, por otros medios, a' las Americas, de los males, y privaciones que sufren.

(Signed)

"Castaños,

"Cadiz, 27th June, 1810." "Pedro Bishop of Orense," &c.

This imprudent disavowal of a measure, by which one great cause of the dissatisfaction of the Creoles would have been removed—known, as it was, to have been forced upon the Government by the very men, whose interests it alone consulted—(the merchants of Cadiz,) naturally tended to convince the Colonies that they had but little practical relief to expect from Spain; and that political freedom alone could emancipate them from those commercial restrictions, by which their natural resources had been so long paralyzed.\* It led them to doubt the sincerity (or the value, at least,) of every other concession; to insist upon perfect equality of representation in the Cortes, by which they hoped to acquire, (and would, undoubtedly, have acquired, ultimately,) an equality upon all other points; and, when this was denied them, to seek, by the direct road of independence, those rights which it was almost impossible to withhold, from the moment that they became sensible of their importance.

Vain were the endeavours of the Regency to soothe or cajole them; vain the admission of errors, and the promises of amendment; although the first were carried so far as to allow, "that, for upwards of twenty years, the door to preferment,

\* Things were carried so far, with respect to the Decree of the 17th of May, that the Minister and several clerks of the Colonial department were put under arrest, when it was repealed, in order to induce the public to believe that it had not, in fact, received the sanction of the Regency.

in every class of public employment, had been shut against all persons of information, patriotism, and real merit,\* while it had been opened, by intrigue and court favour, to persons depraved, vicious, or, at best, totally unfit to command." The Colonists were not to be satisfied with words; they thought, and said, that any thing short of specific reforms would be unavailing; and that "the best laws were useless, as long as a Captain-general could affirm, with impunity, that in his government he recognized no authority superior to his own:†" they, therefore, regarded the abolition of offices, inseparably connected, in their minds, with the abuses, the existence of which was admitted, as a first step towards improvement, and this step they determined to take themselves, when they found the Mother country resolved to retain to the last every attribute of her former power.

Such was the state of affairs at the commencement of 1810: I have quoted documents of a later date, in order the better to illustrate it; and they

\* Lest these terms be thought too strong, I subjoin the passage in the original, as contained in a Circular of the Regency, dated, Isla de Leon, 15th February, 1810. "Convencido el Cousejo," &c. "de que el favor, la intriga, y la inmoralidad, al mismo tiempo que han tenido cerrada la puerta, de veinte años a' esta parte, para toda clase de empleos, a' los sujetos de *luces, patriotismo, y verdadero merito*, la han franqueado a' una porcion de personas, *depravadas, inmorales, o' ineptas* quando menos."

† *Vide* Observations of Junta of Caracas, on the above Circular, dated 20th May, 1810.

render sufficiently intelligible the unanimity which characterized the first proceedings of the Creole Insurgents. Throughout the whole Continent of America, the same causes were everywhere in operation; and, with little or no difference in point of time, they every where produced the same effects: in Cáracas, Būenos Ayres, Bōgōtā, Cārthāgēnā, Chīlē, Upper Peru, and Mexico, by one simultaneous movement, the people deposed the European Authorities, and transferred the reins of Government to Juntas, composed almost exclusively of Native Americans.\*

These Juntas assumed the title of "Guardians and Preservers of the Rights of Ferdinand VII."† In some, Europeans were at first admitted: in others, the Viceroy himself, (where not personally obnoxious,) was invited to preside.‡ In all, the most amicable sentiments towards Spain were expressed,

\* The revolution of Cáracas took place on the 19th of April, 1810; that of Buenos Ayres, 25th May; of New Grenada, 3d July; of Bōgōtā, 20th July; of Cārthāgēnā, 18th August; of Chīlē, 18th September; of Mexico, 16th September.—*Vide* "Representation of American Deputies to the Cortes," dated 1st August, 1811. Appendix.

† Junta Conservadora, or Cuerpo Conservador, de los Derechos del Señor Don Fernando 7<sup>mo</sup>.

‡ As at Buenos Ayres, where the Congress was convoked, and a Provisional Government formed, at the suggestion of the Viceroy, Don Baltasar Hidalgo de Cisneros.—*Vide* his Proclamation of 18th May, 1810.

and assurances given of a readiness to assist her in her struggle against the forces of her invader.

It is difficult now to ascertain how far these professions of attachment to the Mother country, on the part of the new Governments, were sincere. Many of their members, undoubtedly, aspired to independence from the first; but the majority would have been satisfied with moderate reforms; and it was, perhaps, the necessity of conciliating these, as well as the great mass of the people, (who certainly were not prepared to throw off their allegiance at once,) that forced the bolder spirits to temporize, and to disguise their real designs, under the mask of devoted loyalty. Be this as it may, the good understanding which the Creoles seemed to court, was but of short duration. The jealousy excited amongst the Europeans, by the loss of an authority which they regarded as their patrimony, their irritating language, and the violence of their conduct wherever the presence of European troops gave them even a momentary ascendancy, soon showed the real nature of the conquest. Contempt, and domineering habits, on the one side, begot hatred, and obstinate resistance on the other: rigour led to reprisals, reprisals to habitual cruelty; and thus the war acquired, very soon after its commencement, that sanguinary character, which nothing but private animosity, engrafted on a public quarrel, can explain, and which not even that can excuse.

It is a curious fact, that the importance of these great events was not, at first, felt in the Peninsula; or if felt, was, at least, greatly underrated. So little was the character of the Creoles known, and so high the opinion entertained of the superior resources of Spain, that neither the Regency, nor the Cortes, which met, (as I have already stated,) in September, 1810, would ever take the subject into serious consideration.

The First thought to quell the spirit of insurrection in Vēněžüělă, (where the flame first broke out,) by sending there a Royal Commissary, (Don Antonio Ignacio Cörtävărriă,) armed with extravagant powers,\* whom the Junta of Caracas, of course, refused to receive: and the Second† passed days and weeks in discussing the mode in which the Americans were to be represented in the National assembly, and fixed it, at last, upon a basis to which the Colonists refused their assent. The whole coast of Vēněžüělă was subsequently declared to be in a state of blockade,‡ without a single ship of war

\* His commission empowered him "to assume the Regal power in its fullest extent:—to remove, suspend, or dismiss the Authorities of every rank and class; to pardon or punish the guilty, at pleasure; to make use of the monies belonging to the Royal Treasury; and to give orders, which were to be obeyed as emanating directly from the King's own person.—*Vide* Commission, dated 1st August, 1810

† *Vide* Sessions of Cortes, of 9th, 10th, 11th, 14th, and 16th January, 1811.

‡ Decrees of Regency, of 21st August, 1810.

being upon the spot to enforce the decree; and by this impolitic mixture of arrogance and weakness, the Colonies were irritated, not intimidated, and the hope of a reconciliation rendered every day more distant.

Of the possibility of such a reconciliation, in the first stages of the Revolution, no reasonable doubt can be entertained; although nothing less than a recognition of the legitimacy of the American Juntas, and the admission of their deputies to the Cortes, on the same terms, and in the same ratio, as the deputies of the Peninsula,\* could have effected it. But these were conditions that suited not the temporizing policy of Spain. The equality, which she proffered to her American subjects, was an equality merely of words;—an equality, which was, somehow or another, to subsist in concert with all those abuses, of which the Creoles most complained: the prohibitory system was to be maintained in all its purity; Viceroy, Audiencias, and all the paraphernalia of the Royal Government were to be kept up, †

\* The Castes, or mixed breeds, and more especially those in any way contaminated by a mixture of African blood, were not allowed to vote in the elections; and consequently, the number of deputies to be returned by each Colony, depended upon its *White* population alone. This regulation ensured to the European deputies a permanent majority in the Cortes.

† *Vide* Terms proposed in a Proclamation of Cortavarria's, dated Puerto Rico, 7th Dec. 1810, which may be taken as a criterion for the rest, and which amount to the re-establishment of things in *statu quô*, and nothing more.

with powers only the more formidable because, under the supposed reign of the law, no legal bounds were prescribed for them: their re-admission into the Colonies was insisted upon, as a preliminary to any accommodation;\* and yet, although these onerous conditions were not accompanied by any one practical concession, the Creoles were assured "that they were Spanish citizens, inhabiting one of the component parts of the Monarchy, and equal in rights to their brethren of the Peninsula."†

From such a system as this, nothing good could result. Had the demands of the Creoles been fairly met, some arrangement might have been possible; but dissimulation only gave rise to distrust, and thus, amidst reciprocal assurances of the most amicable intentions, preparations were made for an appeal to arms, by which it was but too soon evident that the question must ultimately be decided.

In this war of words I do not mean to accuse either party of unnecessary hypocrisy; there was perhaps as much of the good faith, which both professed, on the one side, as on the other, (and this is not saying much for the aggregate;) but each

\* *Vide* Correspondence between the new Viceroy Elio, and the Junta of Buenos Ayres, 15th January, 1811, in which the dissolution of the Junta, and the immediate recognition of Elio, as Viceroy, are required.

† *Vide* proclamations of Regency, *passim*; and particularly those already referred to.

was desirous to make out a case, and with this view the Cortes held out hopes, which they never intended to realize,\* while the Colonies replied by professions of a fidelity, which they could hardly pretend to feel. In point of fact, from the commencement of 1811, independence on the one side, and the re-establishment of the old system, with as little modification as possible, on the other, were the real objects in view.

The Spaniards urge, that this state of things was the natural consequence of the first steps taken by the Insurgents, which could lead to nothing but the emancipation of the Colonies, and were consequently opposed, from the outset, by the Mother country.

This is perhaps true; but it is not less so, that, until driven to it by actual hostilities on the part of Spain, the war-cry of Independence was not

\* I do not wish to animadvert upon the conduct of the Cortes with unnecessary severity. They have fallen themselves "from their high estate," and their misfortunes are their protection. But, in considering the feelings of the Americans towards this assembly, it must not be forgotten that the Cortes were the first to sanction the barbarous principle that, "with rebels, and Insurgents, no engagements were binding." They approved of the violation of the capitulation of Caracas, by Monteverde, in 1812; the first of a long series of similar breaches of the public faith; and, with such facts as this before them, it was hardly to be expected that the Americans should place much confidence in their professions of amity, equality, and brotherly love.