

SECTION II.

COMMENCEMENT OF REVOLUTION IN MEXICO,
FROM 1810 TO THE DEATH OF MÖRELÓS.

MANY of the causes of disaffection which I have pointed out as existing generally throughout the Spanish Colonies, did not extend to Mexico by any means in the same degree as to the rest. Her superior population gave her importance, while her mineral treasures, and her vicinity to the Peninsula, ensured to her a constant supply of European manufactures. The very process too, by which these treasures were drawn from the bosom of the earth, gave value to the landed property of the Interior, from the intimate connexion that must always subsist between mining and agriculture; and this concurrence of favourable circumstances diffused a degree of prosperity throughout the country, which few Colonies have ever attained, none, certainly, exceeded.

This prosperity, however, was due to the natural resources of the country alone; the government could not check, but did little to encourage it:

for all the abuses inherent in the Spanish system,—the monopoly of the Mother country, the preference given to Europeans for all public employments, and the corruption which prevailed, both in the administration of justice, and in the collection of the revenue,—existed to as great an extent as in any other part of South America; and were perhaps only felt the more, because Mexico had already acquired that consciousness of strength, which, sooner or later, must, under any circumstances, have proved fatal to the dominion of Spain in the New World. Humboldt describes the irritation which was occasioned amongst the higher classes of the Creoles in 1803, by the political insignificance to which they were condemned; and from what he says of “the sullen hatred with which they regarded the Mother country, and the contempt in which they held her once formidable resources,” it seems evident that, even at that early period, the germ of all that has since taken place existed, and only required a favourable opportunity to call it into action. Still, in Mexico as elsewhere, these feelings were confined to a comparatively small circle; for the same intelligent observer adds, “that the great majority of the people were indifferent to political rights, and not at all likely to join in any effort to acquire them.” I believe this picture to have been perfectly correct, although it is difficult to reconcile the apparent apathy of the people, with the energy which it displayed a few short years afterwards, in its

struggle for those rights, which it was supposed to be incapable of appreciating; unless, indeed, we allow that there are, in nations as in individuals, particular periods, at which a general fermentation takes place throughout the system, rendering intolerable the pressure of some evil, which has been long, and patiently supported, and inspiring an irresistible longing for the attainment of some particular blessing, the importance of which has not been before so acutely felt.

Some great moral change of this description must have taken place in Mexico, at the commencement of 1810, to render so general that disposition to rise against the established order of things, which was displayed in every part of the country, the moment that the standard of insurrection was unfurled. Men unconnected with the capital, or with politics; landowners resident upon their estates in the most remote provinces; *Curas*, whose lives had been passed in the midst of their parishioners; and young men educated for the law, or the church, and just emerging from the university;—all flew to arms, and embarked at once in a contest, for which no one conceived them to be prepared. Nor were the feelings which led to this step, light, or evanescent, in their nature. The war was carried on for years under most unfavourable circumstances, by the Insurgents, with a spirit that set all attempts to reduce them at defiance; and we shall see one of the most distinguished supporters of the cause of Spain (the

Viceroy Calleja) confess, in 1814, (at the very moment when his arms had given him a temporary ascendancy,) that this spirit remained unchanged, and could be restrained by nothing but an immense superiority of force. But a rapid outline of the Revolution itself, will best explain its character, and progress.

The government of Mexico, at the commencement of 1808, was entrusted to Don José Iturrigaray, whose authority as Viceroy, supported by a host of European officers, and settlers, whom the riches of the Colony attracted, appeared to be as firmly established as at any former period.

The country was flourishing, and tranquil; mines, and agriculture affording to the whole population, (which did not exceed seven millions,) occupation and wealth: nor did any thing announce the approach of that storm, by which the whole fabric of society was so soon to be overthrown.

The first symptoms of agitation, appeared upon the receipt of the disastrous tidings from the Peninsula, which announced the occupation of the capital by the French army, and the captivity of the King.

The Viceroy, uncertain as to the line which he ought to pursue, and doubtful (it is said) of the fidelity of many of the old Spaniards about him, communicated this intelligence in the Government Gazette, without a single comment to guide the feelings, which it was so well calculated to excite. A very few days, however, convinced him of his

error, and he issued a second proclamation, soliciting the support of the people, and declaring his determination to preserve, to the last, his fidelity to his, and their, Sovereign.

This declaration was received with enthusiasm. It was the first time that the *people* of Mexico had been taught to consider their voice of any importance, and they availed themselves of the opportunity with an eagerness, which proved, that they felt the value of the right, which they were called upon to exercise.

The Ayuntamientos, every where, became the organs of the people, and addresses poured in from every quarter, in which provinces, towns, and even villages, expressed their devoted loyalty, and their resolution to support the authority of the representative of their captive Sovereign.

This interchange of congenial sentiments, created a kindly feeling between the Viceroy and the Creoles: and advantage was taken of his wish to conciliate them, by the Ayuntamiento of the Capital, composed of men of the first influence and respectability in the State, to propose the creation of a *Junta*, in imitation of the Mother country; and even the convocation of a National Mexican assembly, to be composed of deputies from the different provinces.

This suggestion was not unfavourably received by Iturrigaray, but was protested against by the Audiencia, as contrary to the privileges, both of the

Crown and of the Europeans. Disputes ran high between the Municipality and this body, during the months of July and August, and the beginning of September (1808), when the Audiencia, finding that the Viceroy was inclined to side with their opponents, and to admit the Creoles to a share in the government, determined to arrest, and depose him, in order to cut short a project, which they regarded as fatal to their own authority. This resolution, the principal promoters of which, were the Oidores Aguirre and Bataller, was carried into execution on the night of the 15th of September, when Iturrigaray was surprised in bed, in his own palace, by a band of Europeans, (mostly merchants,) headed by Don Gabriel Yermo, a rich Spaniard, the proprietor of some of the finest sugar estates in the valley of Cuernavaca. No resistance was made by the guards, who would not fire upon their countrymen, and at midnight the Viceroy was conveyed to the prisons of the Inquisition, while his Wife and Family were confined in a neighbouring convent.

To the populace, a suspicion of *heresy* was assigned as the cause of this measure; while, to the better informed, the Audiencia attempted to justify it, by one of the laws of the Code of the Indies,*

* Seg. 36. tit. 15. lib. 2. which says, "Que excediendo los Vireyes de las facultades que tienen, las Audiencias les hagan los requerimientos que conforme al negocio pareciere, sin publicidad; y si no bastase, y no se causase inquietud en la tierra, se cumpla lo proveido por los Vireyes, ó Presidentes y avisen al Rey."

by which it is provided, that in cases where the Viceroy exceeds his powers, the Audiencia has a right of interference, in order to preserve the tranquillity of the country. But all attempts at concealment were vain: the Creoles knew that the removal of Iturrigaray implied their exclusion from power, and they consequently regarded his cause as their own. These feelings were rather confirmed, than checked, by the pains which were taken by the Audiencia to repress them. Juntas of public security were formed by its orders, and armed bands of Spaniards organized, who, under the curious denomination of *Patriots*, exercised a most rigorous surveillance over all whose opinions were suspected of being favourable to the imprisoned Viceroy. Many persons of note were arrested, who had voted in favour of a Mexican Junta in the Ayuntamiento, of whom some were banished to the Philippine Islands, and others sent to Spain, to be there tried, or confined in the Castle of St. John of Ulloa. The Viceregal authority was confided, for the time, to the Archbishop Lizana, and an account of all that had taken place transmitted to Spain, for the approbation of the Central Junta.

But although the Mexicans submitted at the moment to these innovations, they were far from viewing them with indifference. The moral change which a few months had produced was extraordinary; they had learnt to think, and to act; their old respect for the King's Lieutenant was destroyed

by the manner in which his authority had been thrown off, and his dignity profaned by his countrymen; and they felt that the question was now, not one between their Sovereign and themselves as subjects, but between themselves, and their *fellow*-subjects, the European Spaniards, as to which should possess the right of representing the absent King.

The insolent manner in which this right was claimed, as exclusively their own, by the Europeans, increased not a little the general irritation. The Ayuntamiento of Mexico was told by the Audiencia, in reply to some remonstrance in favour of the Viceroy, "that it possessed no authority, except over the leperos (*lazzaroni*), of the capital;" and it was a favourite maxim with the Oidor Bataller, "that while a Manchego mule, or a Castilian cobbler remained in the Peninsula, he had a right to govern the Americas."

These sentiments were re-echoed by all the Europeans, both in the Capital, and in the principal towns of the Interior: they every where formed *Patriotic* associations for the defence of what they termed their *rights*, and armed themselves against the Natives, whose spirit these very precautions contributed to arouse. The Archbishop, whose moderation and conciliatory policy accorded but little with these views, was allowed to retain the reins of government but a short time. He was replaced, in 1809, by the Audiencia, to whom the supreme authority was entrusted by the Central Junta; and

by the violence and arrogance of this body matters were soon brought to a crisis. In every part of the country, a feeling of hostility towards the Europeans spread, and with it an impatient desire to shake off their yoke. In some places, (as at Valladolid,) attempts were made to concert insurrectionary movements, as early as May 1809, which were checked by the arrest of those principally concerned in the project. But nothing was gained by this; discontent had become too general to be repressed entirely, and to check it at one point, only gave it a tendency to break out, with additional violence, at another. The scene alone was changed from the province of Michoacán, to that of Guanajuato, where the famous Cura Hidalgo was destined first to rouse into action the excited feelings of his countrymen.

Don Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, was a man whom the Spaniards themselves allow to have possessed many superior acquirements.* His reading was extensive, and in the little town of Dolores, of which he was Cura, he had given proofs of great activity and intelligence, by encouraging different manufac-

* *Vide* Appendix, 37th paragraph of the Representation of the Audiencia to the Cortes, in which Hidalgo, although designated as a "man without honour, or religious principle," is admitted to have possessed "sufficient acuteness, and knowledge of mankind, to calculate not only upon the assistance of the troops, whom he had seduced, but upon the powerful aid of the ambition, the vices, and the ignorance of his countrymen."

tures amongst his parishioners, and introducing the cultivation of the silk-worm; in which, in the year 1810, they had made a very considerable progress. He had likewise planted vineyards to a great extent in the vicinity of the town; but this attempt to increase the resources of his curacy was rendered abortive, by a special order from the Capital, prohibiting the inhabitants from making wine, by which they were reduced to the greatest distress.

Thus, private motives for discontent were added to those which he shared in common with the rest of his countrymen; and this may account for the stern, inexorable spirit, with which he began the contest, and which, being met by a spirit equally stubborn, and unrelenting, on the part of the Spaniards, gave at once to the revolution that sanguinary character, by which it is distinguished throughout.

To form a party willing to join him in the enterprise which he meditated, was no difficult task, since the minds of his countrymen were so well prepared for it beforehand. Indeed, so little caution does he seem to have observed, that his projects were discovered before they had come to maturity, and orders issued for the arrest of himself and his associates, Allende, Aldama, and Abasolo, three Creole officers in garrison at Guanajuato, who were amongst the first converts to his opinions.

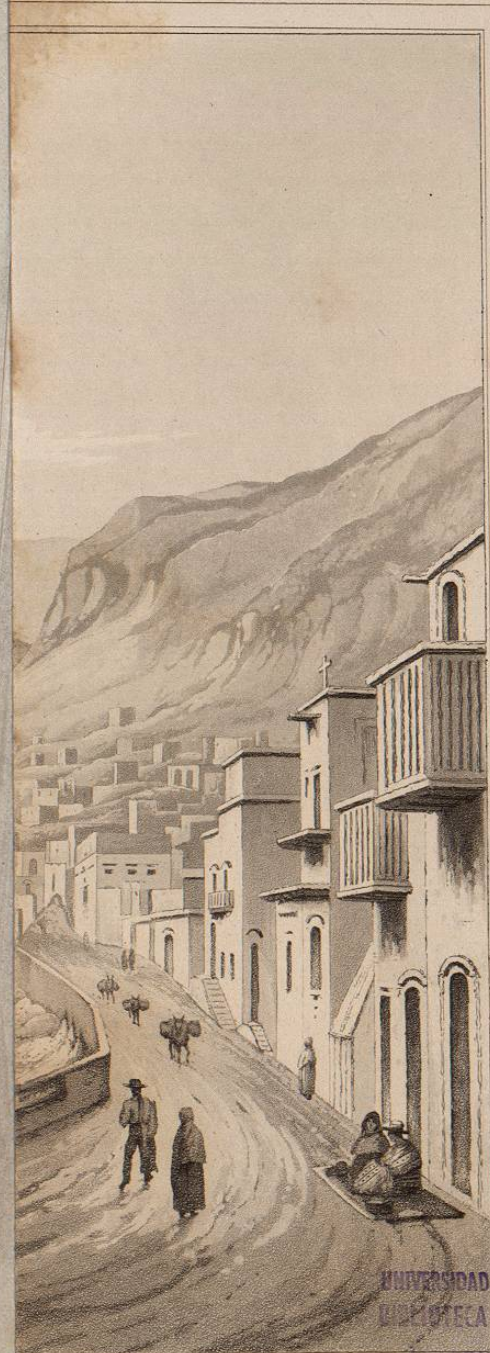
This premature disclosure might have discouraged a man of less determination than Hidalgo;

but with him it produced no other effect than that of hastening the execution of his plan.

Having been joined by Āllēndē, on the 13th of September, 1810, and secured the co-operation of ten of his own parishioners, on the morning of the 16th of September, just two years after the arrest of Ītūr-rīgārāy, he gave the signal for revolt, by seizing and imprisoning seven Europeans, resident in the town of Dōlōrēs, whose property he immediately distributed amongst his followers. The rapidity of his progress after this first exploit seems quite incredible.* The news of it spread in every direction, and was every where received with the same enthusiasm. Within twenty-four hours, Hīdālgō's force became so considerable, that, on the 17th of September, he was enabled to take possession of Sān Fēlipē, and, on the 18th, of Sān Mīgūel ēl Grāndē, (towns each of 16,000 inhabitants,) in both of which places the confiscated property of the Europeans afforded him the means of increasing the number of his own partizans.

Guānjūatō, the capital of the Province, and the emporium of the treasures of the Spaniards in that part of the country, was his next object; but, as he was aware of the activity, and decided character of the Intendant Rīañōn, (a magistrate respected still

* "The flame which Hildago lighted at the little town of Dolores, spread through the country with the rapidity of atmospheric plague."—*Vide* Appendix, 42nd paragraph of Representation.



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