

SECTION III.

RELIGION:—STATE OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL ESTABLISHMENTS IN MEXICO; NUMBER OF BISHOPRICS — OF SECULAR AND REGULAR CLERGY—REVENUES—INFLUENCE—EFFECTS PRODUCED BY THE REVOLUTION—FOREIGNERS, HOW SITUATED.

THE great influence exercised by the Roman Catholic Clergy in every country where their creed prevails, and the power which they possess, of converting that influence into a most formidable political engine, renders an enquiry into the state of the Mexican Church essential to a right understanding of the progress and prospects of the country.

The religion introduced by the Spaniards into New Spain, and propagated amongst the Natives, more by the arms of the first Conquerors, than by the arguments of the Friars who accompanied them, was, of course, that of the Church of Rome; which has been preserved, during the last three centuries, in all the purity of doctrine, but with all the intolerance of spirit, for which the Mother country is so remarkable.

In some respects, however, the situation of Mexico differed essentially from that of Spain: no direct intercourse with Rome ever took place; no Papal Legate or Nuntio was admitted; and no Bull, Rescript, or Indulgence, was allowed to circulate, until it had received the *Regium Exequatur*, or Placet, from the Council of the Indies.

The causes of this extreme circumspection, on the part of Spain, I have explained in the Section which treats of her Colonial Policy, (Book I. Section IV.) It gave a peculiar character to the whole religious system of America, and prepared the way for that spirit of Independence which has been displayed by most of the New States in their intercourse with the See of Rome, since their assumption of a political existence.

But this was not the only effect produced by the application of the ordinary principles of the Colonial System of Spain to the Ecclesiastical institutions of the Colonies. In Mexico, at least, it may be regarded as one of the principal causes of the Revolution. The Secular, or Parochial Clergy, shared in all the disadvantages under which their Creole countrymen were condemned to labour, by the jealous policy of the Mother country.

They were excluded from all the higher degrees of Church preferment, and left to fulfil the laborious duties of parish priests, while the Bishoprics, the Deaneries, and the Chapters of the different Cathedrals, were filled by old Spaniards, many of whom never saw

the country, in which they were destined to hold so conspicuous a station, until they were sent out to enter at once upon its richest benefices.

It is true that some of these new Dignitaries displayed a spirit truly apostolical; while others have left monuments of their munificence, which prove, that they regarded their revenues, not as a patrimony, but as held in trust for the benefit of their adopted country.* Still they were strangers,—they were a privileged *Caste*, they held, what they did hold, to the prejudice, and exclusion of the Natives; and these were offences which no virtues could redeem. They sufficiently account for the fact of so many of the first leaders of the Revolution having been Clergymen: Hidalgo, Morelos, Matamoros, and numberless others, who perished during the war, were all *Curas*, or Parish priests; and the facility with which they induced the lower classes to follow their standards, at a time, when, out of twenty of their adherents, nineteen knew nothing of the rights of the cause in which they were engaged, is no mean proof of the advantages which the Crown might have derived from their support, had it been secured by a timely participation in the honours of their profession.

As it was, they were compelled, like the rest of

* I allude more particularly to the establishment of hospitals, which seems to have been general in all the Bishoprics, and to the construction of the magnificent Aqueduct of Valladolid, which was the work of one of the Bishops of that See.

the Creoles, to seek in the Independence of their country the enjoyment of those rights, of which they had been so long deprived; and although the attempt failed in 1810, and the first Insurrection, (which may be termed the insurrection of the Clergy) was almost suppressed, still, without it, that of the Army in 1821 would never have taken place, and Mexico might have been, to this day, a Province of Spain.

The *fatal* influence of the Clergy is frequently insisted upon, both in Calleja's letter to the King, and in the representation of the Audiencia to the Cortes, to which I have so often had occasion to allude, (*Vide* Appendix;) and there is no doubt that the fact of so many Curas being engaged on the Independent side, could alone have destroyed the efficacy of those spiritual weapons, of which the Viceregal Government, endeavoured to avail itself at the commencement of the contest. Excommunications fell harmless when directed against persons, whose sacred character acted as a shield against them; and Hidalgo was not less respected, or less implicitly obeyed, by his followers, because declared, both by the Inquisition and by the Bishop of Valladolid, to be no longer within the pale of the Church, although such a denunciation, if directed against a layman, might have been attended with the most serious consequences.

The Court of Madrid saw its error when too late, and the elevation of Don Antonio Perez (a

Creole,) to the Bishopric of La Puebla, in 1815, proves how willingly it would have retraced its steps. But it was no longer time for conciliation: notwithstanding their privileges, as servants of the altar, a number of priests had sealed, with their blood, their new political creed; others were noted as wavering; others as notoriously disaffected; the passions of all were excited, and it was soon evident that a good understanding between the Crown and the Parochial Clergy was impossible.

The Old System was therefore pursued, and, up to 1820, all benefices were conferred upon *Gachupines*; a circumstance which not a little facilitated the changes which the following year was destined to produce.

It is a singular fact, that, after taking so prominent a part in the struggle which preceded the Revolution, the Mexican Clergy should be almost the only class of Creoles that has derived, as yet, no advantage from the event. In the Army, the Congress, the Government-offices, and the Law, *Natives* were substituted at once for the Spaniards, whom the Viceregal Government had employed; but the different tenure by which Ecclesiastical preferments are held, prevented this change from extending to the Church. Nor was this the only difficulty to be surmounted: the separation from Spain had broken the link, by which Mexico was connected with the See of Rome; and the establishment of a direct intercourse, at a moment, when the possession of an

independent existence by New Spain was not admitted by any European Power, and was loudly denied by the Mother country, was found to be by no means an easy task.

To trench too suddenly upon the privileges of the Holy See, and to attempt to exercise, at once, the right of Patronage formerly vested in the King, without the possibility of obtaining the confirmation of the Pope, was thought too dangerous an experiment in a country, where a compliance with the popular prejudices of the day rendered it necessary to insert, as the third article of a Constitution, (liberal enough in every other respect,) a declaration that the exercise of no religion but that of the Church of Rome should be tolerated within the territories of the Republic.

Under these trying circumstances, great prudence was necessary, and great moderation has been shown. The clergy, in every instance, have preferred the interests of the order in general, to any prospects of individual advancement.

Far from insisting upon hasty, or premature changes, the old Spanish Dignitaries have not only been allowed to retain undisturbed possession of their preferments, but even vacancies have not been filled up, in the hope that the speedy conclusion of a Concordat with the See of Rome would give the Government a *right* of Patronage, to which not even the most zealous Catholics could object.

Of the probability of such an arrangement there

is not, at present, any appearance; the Pope not having yet consented to receive a Mexican Minister in his public capacity. But the six years which have elapsed since the declaration of Independence, have rendered the concurrence of His Holiness no longer of such vital importance. The country has been prepared, gradually, for a change, which cannot now be much longer deferred; and should there be any farther delay on the part of the Court of Rome, the situation of the Mexican Church is such, that the Government, in assuming the right of presentation to all vacancies, will not only be supported by the Clergy, but will set the stamp of law upon the general wish of the nation.

A short view of the present state of the Ecclesiastical establishments of New Spain will place this point in a clearer light.

The Republic is divided into one Archbishopric, (that of Mexico,) and the nine Bishoprics of La Puēblă, Guădălăjără, Văllădōlīd, Dŭrăngō, Mōntērēy, Ōăjăcă, Yŭcătān, Chiăpă, and Sōnōră.

All these, with the exception of Sōnōră, have Cathedral Churches and Chapters, (Cabildos Ecclesiasticos), which, with the Collegiate Chapter of Guadalupe,* contain *one hundred and eighty-five* Prebendaries and Canonries, formerly in the gift of the King.

* A drawing of the Church of Guadalupe, about a league from the Capital, is annexed.

Seven of the Bishoprics, and *Seventy-nine* of the benefices attached to the Cathedrals, are now vacant. Some of the Chapters are reduced to two or three individuals; many of whom are old, and unable to execute the duties of their situations. Of the three remaining Bishops, (those of La Puēblă, Yŭcătān, and Ōăxăcă,) One (the Bishop of Yucatan), is absolutely in his dotage; and the other two, from their position in the Southern part of the Republic, are unable to ordain those who wish to enter into orders in the North, without compelling them to undertake a journey of three or four hundred leagues, in order to undergo the necessary examinations. The Primate, Don Pedro Fonte, Archbishop of Mexico, has, from political causes, forsaken the country, and is now residing in Spain, as are the proprietors of a number of other inferior benefices, the annual income of which, (amounting to 371,148 dollars) has been sequestered by the Government. The Parochial Clergy distributed amongst the 1194 parishes, into which the country is divided, are those who suffer most severely from the present disorganization of the Church. They are not only deprived by it of the preferment to which their services entitle them, but many, who accepted in 1821, livings in *Tierra Caliente*, or other unhealthy districts, upon an understanding that they were to be held, (as before the Revolution) for a short term of years, are compelled still to retain their situations, until the

exercise of the right of Patronage enables the Government to relieve them.

Under these circumstances, it is not extraordinary that the inconveniences of a dependent existence should be so strongly felt, as to create a very general desire for emancipation; and should the Pope neglect the present opportunity, or insist upon onerous conditions in the Concordat, which the Government is still desirous to frame, he will find, when too late, that he has no longer any hold upon the country, and that the *Colonial Policy* of Rome will not be more patiently endured, than the *Colonial Policy* of the Court of Madrid.

The total inefficacy of Spiritual arms in the New World has been very recently proved by the reception given to the Circular Bull or *Enciclica*, addressed by the Court of Rome to the Archbishops, Bishops, and Clergy in general of the Americas, on the 24th of September, 1824, exhorting them, "to be silent no longer; but to unite in leading back their flocks to the path of the commandments of that Lord, who places Kings upon their thrones, and connects, by indissoluble ties, the preservation of their rights and authority, with the welfare of His Holy Church."*

The Government of Mexico, convinced that, in a

* *Vide* Enciclica, as published in the Madrid Gazette of the 10th February, 1825, and in that of Mexico, July 6, of the same year.

discussion of this nature, reason and common sense were in its favour, was not deterred from entering upon it by any fears of the intrigues of the Old Spaniards, the prejudices of the people, or the supposed infallibility of the Pope. The Bull was communicated to the nation at large, as soon as received, in the Government Gazette; and there was certainly nothing that savoured either of bigotry, or superstition, in the notes by which it was accompanied. They contained no affectation of humility, no expressions of an eager desire to be reconciled to the Holy See, but entered boldly into the question of the Pope's Spiritual and Temporal Sovereignty; declared the two to be incompatible; and even hinted, very distinctly, that any farther attempt, on the part of his Holiness, to exercise authority in the affairs of this world, would not only prove unsuccessful, but must lead to the loss of his Spiritual jurisdiction likewise. This manly stand, on the part of the Government, against the encroachments of the Holy See, was received with universal approbation. The Legislatures of the States, the Bishops, and the Cathedral Chapters, all expressed their concurrence in the doctrines laid down in the Circular of the Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs: Pastorals were addressed by them, upon the subject, to their respective flocks; and as the influence of the Government and the Church were thus thrown into the same scale, the *Enciclica* not only failed in creating the desired impression, but produced an

effect diametrically opposite to that which was intended.

Not the slightest difference of opinion appeared amongst the natives; and as the President, (who was then armed with extraordinary powers) took advantage of the most critical moment to banish to California two old Spaniards, (the Editors of the *Filantropo* newspaper at Tampico,) who had endeavoured to circulate, surreptitiously, copies of the Bull amongst the inhabitants of New Leon and San Luis, the other Spanish residents were effectually deterred, by this rigorous measure, from making any attempt to excite the lower classes, in the name of Religion, to rebellion against the constituted authorities.

The work of Baron Humboldt, and the admirable reports presented to Congress in 1826, and 1827, by the Mexican Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs, Don Miguel Ramos Arizpe, enable me to institute a comparison, founded upon the most authentic data, between the condition of the Mexican Church before the Revolution and at the present day.

In 1802, the number of Ecclesiastics, Secular and Regular, in New Spain, was estimated at ten thousand, or at thirteen thousand, including the lay-brothers of convents, and other subordinate hangers-on of the Church. The Secular Clergy was composed of about five thousand Priests (*Clerigos*); the Regulars, wearing the habits of different Orders, of nearly an equal number, of whom two thousand five hundred (including lay-brothers) resided in the convents of

the Capital alone. There were only nine bishops, including the Primate, the See of Chiapa not being then considered as annexed to Mexico. Their revenues were supposed to be:—

	Dollars.
Those of the Archbishop of Mexico . . .	130,000
Of the Bishop of La Puebla . . .	110,000
Valladolid . . .	100,000
Guadalajara . . .	90,000
Durango . . .	35,000
Monterey . . .	30,000
Yucatàn . . .	20,000
Oaxaca . . .	18,000
Sonora . . .	6,000
Total . . .	439,000

This income was produced, principally, by that portion of the tithes, which was destined for the subsistence of the Clergy. The annual average amount of these, (upon a term of ten years given by Humboldt) appears to have been, in the year 1790:—

In	Dollars.	Reals.
Mexico . . .	708,287	7
La Puebla . . .	350,888	3
Valladolid . . .	323,940	
Oaxaca . . .	86,323	5
Guadalajara . . .	257,910	6
Durango . . .	108,031	3
Total . . .	1,835,382	

collected in the six principal Bishoprics. From the others, there seem to have been no regular returns. In addition to this revenue, the Clergy possessed an immense capital in specie, which had accumulated, during three centuries, under the denomination of *Capitales de Capellanias, y Obras Pias*, arising partly from bequests, and partly from surplus income; the whole of which was supposed, in 1805, to amount to *Forty-four millions and a half* of dollars. This capital, which was lent upon mortgage to the landed proprietors of the country at a very moderate interest, and secured upon their estates, was distributed amongst the different Bishoprics in the following proportions:—

	Dollars.
Mexico	9,000,000
La Puebla	6,500,000
Valladolid	4,500,000
Guadalajara	3,000,000
Durango, Monterey, and Sonora	1,000,000
Oaxaca and Merida	2,000,000
Obras Pias, belonging to the Regular Clergy	2,500,000
Funds of dotations of churches, convents, and nunneries	16,000,000
Total	44,000,000

The landed property of the Church (*bienes raices*) bore no proportion to its Capital in specie. Its

whole value was not supposed to exceed two and a half, or three millions of dollars; and this advantage will be duly appreciated by those who have seen the effects of territorial influence on the part of the Clergy, combined with that of religion, exemplified in the Peninsula.

In 1826, the number of the Secular Clergy was estimated at 3473, and in 1827, at 3677. The number of those who took orders during each of these years is not supposed to have amounted to one-fourth of those who were ordained in 1808.

The Regular Clergy is divided into fourteen Provinces, possessing 150 Convents, which contained, in all, 1918 Friars; so that the whole of the Secular and Regular Clergy of the present day does not much exceed *one-half* of the number known to exist in 1803 (100,005,595).

The capitals of the Church have diminished nearly in an equal proportion. Of the forty-four millions, which they originally possessed, a part was seized by the Spanish Government in 1805, and 1806, under the administration of the Prince of the Peace, in order to form a Sinking-fund for the redemption of Royal Vales; a part was embargoed by the Authorities in order to meet the exigencies of the moment during the Revolution; and another part swallowed up by those charged with the administration of the funds, (*los Directores de Obras Pias, &c.*) amidst the general disorder and confusion that ensued. In 1826, Mr. Ramos Arizpe valued the whole remain-