

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

SHELTERED behind the barrier of the Pyrenees from the revolutionary storm that was overthrowing the thrones of Europe, and seemingly uninfluenced by the current of ideas that produced it, Spain at the beginning of the nineteenth century differed but little from the Spain of one hundred years before. Repeated attempts to play a leading part in the affairs of Europe had brought upon her discredit and loss; her vast American dependencies, weary of the rigid colonial system, and looking to the example of their more fortunate neighbours, were eager to assert their independence. Yet she was still unwilling to acknowledge, she was in fact unaware, that for two centuries the life had been ebbing from her mighty empire. Her thoughts were fixed on the past, her ideals were those of an age long gone by, her temper was harshly conservative.

A single generation had sufficed to naturalise the Bourbon dynasty that came in with Philip V (1700). It had taken up, and in some respects accentuated, the policy of its predecessors. True it is that, when the elder branch of the royal family died out and the younger was imported from Naples, its first representative, Charles III, was so little acquainted with the temper of his subjects that he rashly bade them change for something more like the habit of other lands the broad-brimmed slouch hats and ample trailing cloaks that gave an air of murderous gloom to Spanish towns. His attempts at reform

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in other matters had been met with contemptuous wonder only; interference with the time-honoured dress, handed down from the heroes of the sixteenth century “cloak and sword” plays, well-nigh cost the meddlesome monarch his throne. Innovators and reformers indeed like this same King and his minister Aranda succeeded at most in enlisting a small number of enthusiastic followers; their spirit failed to penetrate the inert, self-satisfied mass of the nation. So soon as the effort ceased, things fell back into their old state; and another was added to the long list of examples whereby the Spaniard demonstrated that the ways of his grandfather were even better than those of his father.

Thus Aranda and Charles III had dreamed of breaking down the barrier laboriously built by ancestral wisdom to keep the Chosen People of Spain from contamination by the modern spirit of enquiry. But Charles III could not change by decree the ingrained habits of centuries. During his lifetime his work failed of any perceptible effect; his son and successor, Charles IV, swept away all trace of it as far as might be. The importation of any foreign book was punished by very severe penalties. The only periodicals of Spain (1791) were the *Madrid Gazette*, a tiny official sheet, and the police list of *Lost and Found*. The Inquisition still existed; but public opinion now enforced rigid conformity both in Church and State, and was ready unbidden to avenge the slightest deviation from it. It is true that the once vast powers of the Inquisition had been limited and defined; it was bloodthirsty only during its early years, but almost all the leading statesmen of the “libertine” school of the eighteenth century were arraigned before it. It reviewed the conduct of Aranda, Campomanes, Jovellanos, and Florida-blanca, and censured as it thought fit their public and private lives. Not even men so powerful as these dared to question its authority. To have done so would have been to stamp themselves as unfit to rule over Christian people.

The old liberties and partially developed representative

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1]

Decay of the Cortes

3

systems of the former kingdoms of Castille, of Aragon, and of Navarre had been abolished for the most part, or had fallen into disuse. Those of Aragon, Catalonia, and Valencia were formally suppressed early in the eighteenth century in punishment for the part taken by these provinces in the War of Succession. The Parliaments of Navarre and of the three Basque Provinces still controlled local affairs, and, watching jealously over their dearly prized liberties (*fueros*), had hitherto resisted the encroaching policy of the Crown. The Cortes of Castille, once the powerful protector of the rights of the commons, had sunk to the lowest depths of degradation.

The revolt of the Comuneros against the foreign ministers of Charles V was an ill-judged attempt to wrest from a young and a stranger sovereign confirmation of immemorial usages, and to extend vastly the powers of the commons in Parliament. Its overthrow at Villalar (1523) so firmly established the absolute authority of the Crown that for nearly three centuries it was not even questioned. The Parliament that had controlled supplies, granted and taken back the Crown at will, and addressed the Emperor himself as “our hireling,” became the humble instrument of the royal will. Henceforward its claims were scornfully disregarded; and rights accumulated by centuries of active vigilance were ruthlessly overridden. Not only did kings legislate, substituting for the consent of Parliament the formula “valid as though promulgated in Cortes”—for this strong kings had done before Villalar—but they overstepped undoubted constitutional boundaries in repealing by decree laws regularly passed and sanctioned. They prescribed the exact form of mandate or commission to be granted to proctors, thus rendering them unable to defend opposition to the Crown by plea of obedience to instructions. They asserted the right to limit discussion to matters propounded in the royal summons. They insisted on the secrecy of deliberation; they nominated President and Assessors. Finally, when the Cortes had been reduced to unquestioning subservience, the kings ceased

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to summon them except for the formal purpose of hearing the royal will with regard to the succession to the throne. During the eighteenth century the Cortes of Castille met only six times. Exempt from direct taxation, the nobility and clergy had long ceased to attend. So little importance was attached to Parliament that Aragon, Catalonia, and Valencia bore a century of disfranchisement without protest. The forms of Cortes observed were unsuited to the actual condition of the realm. Only thirty-eight cities and towns had the right of representation. These rights, with only one or two exceptions, dated from the fifteenth century. Toro, hardly more than a village, had a vote in the Cortes; great cities of Andalusia had none. At last even the right of petition was denied to the now merely formal assembly. When the Cortes, summoned to transact the King's business with regard to succession, sought to be allowed to lay their views before him, Campomanes replied in his master's name that after dissolution the King would consent to receive such petitions as the several members might wish to present. The Cortes of 1789, the only Parliament summoned during the reign of Charles IV, were ordered to petition the King that he would confirm as laws his decrees already in force. They humbly obeyed. As to supply, the Cortes had lost all control over it. The amount and the incidence of taxation, saving only the privileges of the nobles and clergy, were determined by the King. Even so far back as 1579 the proctors had adopted the formula of offering "on their knees" the sums wrung from them by bribery or intimidation.

Having got rid of his Parliament, the King was in fact entirely irresponsible. He was assisted, when he required assistance, by a Council of sixteen members, chosen by himself. The Council of Castille was generally made up of members of the royal family, ecclesiastics, great nobles, and a few lawyers. A kind of Inner or Privy Council nominated from among the Councillors of Castille was called the Royal Chamber (*Cámara Real*). It included the Secretaries of State, generally five in

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1]

Royal autocracy

5

number and attached severally to the departments of Foreign Affairs, War, Justice, Marine, and Finance. These secretaries or ministers were popularly known as *covachuelistas* or cave-dwellers, owing to the fact that their offices were situated in the vaults of the palace. They were thus immediately under the hands of the master to whom alone they were responsible. Appointed and dismissed with as little ceremony as officers of the Household or other servants, they had no legal standing; they were merely machines to prepare business for the King's decision. This in turn was often swayed by a *camarilla* or "little chamber," the favourites and associates of the King, a motley assemblage of persons, male and female, lay and ecclesiastical, high and low, bishops and buffoons. The whole executive and judicial magistracy was appointed directly by royal warrant, often from among the creatures of the *camarilla*. The *corregidor*—originally, as the name implies, a magistrate ruling in conjunction with the municipal body—and the captain-general exercised the royal authority in city and province; they had grasped the whole powers of the once independent municipal and provincial assemblies. Wherever the court lodged, all local authority was for the time superseded by that of the Household judges (*alcaldes de casa y corte*). The almost anarchical charters and privileges that had been granted, as conditions of the reconquest of the land from the Saracens, lasted in their entirety only until the reconquest was complete. Then one by one they were taken back, until the whole land, with the exception of the Basque Provinces and Navarre, was subjected to a centralisation so harsh that no power save that of the Church was left to balance that of the King.

The Church and the great rulers still exercised separate jurisdiction over their own vassals. Their large estates, held in mortmain or entail, had since the fifteenth century been a source of anxiety, irritation, and envy, to kings and commons alike. Three-fourths of the land enjoyed partial exemption

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from taxation because of the noble or ecclesiastical status of its owners. The remaining fourth was burdened with two-thirds of the whole direct taxation. The revenues of the Church were more than double those of the Crown. Throughout the eighteenth century repeated efforts were made to set free, or at any rate to check addition to, the enormous inert mass of property. Partial measures were occasionally approved by the Curia. For a time property left in mortmain or entail was taxed by the State fifteen per cent. For a time the law forbade the transmission of estates subject to these legal restrictions. In 1807, when Spain had assumed the attitude of champion of the Pope against Napoleon, permission was granted to convert to secular uses one-seventh of the landed estates of the Church. The French invasion prevented the execution of the measure. The number of those who lived on Church revenue and claimed ecclesiastical privilege was reckoned, at the end of the eighteenth century, at nearly two per cent. in a population of about ten millions. Ecclesiastical courts claimed jurisdiction in all cases connected even remotely with the interests of the Church. The very memory of old liberties, and of the boldness of the commons of a former age in resisting encroachments by Crown or Church had become hateful to the ruling classes. In 1806 the laws of Spain were recodified in the *Novísima Recopilación*. The reformed code contained no mention of existing but obsolete laws, concerning the necessity of the consent of the Cortes to the validity of legislation, the statutory limitation of the powers of the Inquisition, and the long disregarded principle that supply can be raised only with consent of Parliament and for valid cause.

Spain's mighty colonial empire had been handed down with hardly any loss since the time of its acquisition in the sixteenth century. From California and Florida to the Antarctic Ocean her dominions were broken only by the Portuguese possession of Brazil. This huge region was divided into four viceroyalties, Mexico or New Spain, New Granada, Peru, and Buenos Ayres.

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I]

The Spanish colonies

7

Guatemala, Caracas, and Chile were ruled by captains-general, inferior but not subject to the viceroys. The Indies, as they were still called, contributed from their surplus about two million pounds a year, one-fourth of the total revenue, to the Spanish treasury. Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippine Islands were still a source of expense. The viceroys and captains-general exercised in their several provinces the absolute powers of the King whom they represented, and were assisted by deliberative councils modelled on the Council of Castille. The relations between Church and State were much the same abroad as at home, except that the kings maintained the right of nominating to all benefices in the regions where their ancestors had planted the Faith. The colonies were, in fact, Greater Spain. During the centuries that had elapsed since they were peopled from various provinces of the Peninsula, the predominance of one or other of the ethnological elements included under the common name of Spaniard, widely varying environment, and greater or less intercourse with native American or imported African populations, had produced well-marked differences of type, differences which still distinguish the Peruvian (for instance) from the Venezuelan, and the latter from the Cuban. For nearly three centuries the whole trade of the Indies had been restricted not merely to Spain and Spaniards, but to certain privileged ports and to holders of the royal licence. Charles III took off some of the more irksome restrictions while endeavouring still to confine the trade to Spaniards and Spanish ports. But Spain had lost the power of effectually defending her rights. The privateers, English, French, or Dutch, hung on the flank of the treasure fleet as it sailed periodically from Vera Cruz; the smuggler haunted the creeks of the vast coast-line, and at times turned pirate and preyed upon a population long unused to initiative in self-defence. The battle of Trafalgar finally ended the exclusive Spanish colonial system, and broke down the bridge between Spain and America.

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In spite of bad government and disastrous wars, the eighteenth century was for the most part a period of peace and prosperity. The Bourbon kings before Charles IV were prudent rulers. At the end of the reign of Charles III the national debt amounted only to about twenty million pounds, or two and a half years' revenue. The exchequer bills (*vales reales*) found ready acceptance at par. Before the end of the next reign the debt had quadrupled and the national credit declined owing to the war with England and the extravagance of a madcap favourite. But Spain was still feeling, economically and socially, the exhaustion of past efforts and losses. She had lavished her strength as champion of the Church in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The most energetic part of her population had quitted her to spread the Spanish race and Spanish civilisation in America. The expulsion of Jews and Saracens had indeed added religious to political unity, but it had deprived the land of most important trading, industrial, and agricultural classes. These evils were aggravated by a false economic policy. The floods of gold and silver poured from America had raised prices in the Peninsula to a level far above that of other European countries. Every effort was made to retain the precious metals within the borders of Spain, in the belief that a country full of gold and silver is a rich country. The export of gold or silver was forbidden under the severest penalties. The Spaniards were now too rich as well as too proud to work. Industry sank to the lowest ebb consistent with the degree of civilisation then attained. To seek gold abroad, or to starve at home, was profitable or honourable: to engage in commerce or manufacture was to forfeit all claims for generations to the highly prized distinction of noble blood. Trade too was fettered by innumerable vexatious restrictions, monopolies, and privileges; by awkward and oppressive fiscal arrangements; and by arbitrary interference to check the continual rise of prices in obedience to economic law. Smuggling was more profitable,

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[More information](#)

1]

Economical conditions

9

and hardly more risky, than manufacturing. The country population flocked to the towns ; bread was fearfully dear ; the Government sought the remedy in fixing its price at such a figure that it was impossible to produce it with profit. Agriculture, Spain's one important industry, languished. Vast tracts once rich in corn, wine, and oil had fallen out of cultivation ; and the great *despoblados* had been formed. So unsafe was the country that the tillers of the soil lived—nay, still live—huddled in large walled villages miles distant from their fields. Free grants of land failed to keep the peasantry on the soil which had once supported thousands. The poor, proud gentry of the country starved in their homes, but made no effort to improve their lot ; the lean, brown ploughman suffered want in the midst of possible abundance.

The social tyranny under which the nation laboured was worse even than the political. The influence of the clergy suppressed the natural manifestation of innocent gaiety. Religious observances varied by love intrigue were the only occupations of the leisured class. Of religion itself the gentler aspects were thrust into the background. The natural gravity and austerity of the national character had degenerated into gloomy harshness. The Spaniards were the Puritans¹ of Catholicism. The despotism, religious, political, and social, that had overspread the land, was acquiesced in by the people. Spain desired no other lot than that which she enjoyed under her Bourbon kings. When the foreign invader set her free she cast him forth from her boundaries by an heroic effort ; then she carefully sought out the broken links of her old chain and rivetted them again upon her limbs. The dreary stagnation of national life extended to the arts. The voice of poetry was hushed or had sunk to a feeble piping. Quintana, who afterwards sounded the trumpet note that roused the land

¹ A disputable statement. The Jansenists in France were the real Puritans of Catholicism ; the Spaniards were the Terrorists. [J. F.-K.]

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[More information](#)

10

Introductory

[CH.

against the French, found his first and freshest inspiration in a compliment to Godoy¹. Books were rare and for the most part trivial. Trivial also were the subjects of the sister arts. Goya, the painter, and Ramón de la Cruz, the playwriter, have portrayed to perfection the low life of the capital, the picturesque *manolos* and *manolas*. Their works, the best of their age, are most valuable to the social historian. They are as good as their theme admits. The courtly grace and rich fantasy of Velazquez and Lope de Vega, the deep spirituality and refinement of Calderon and Murillo, seemed to have perished out of the land of their birth. The very handicrafts, such as those of goldsmith, potter, and weaver, once unerring in skill and in taste, now produced for a coarser age only the coarsest wares.

Spain was the last of the continental nations to fall under the grip of Napoleon. Not until 1808 did he find leisure to undertake to implant in the Peninsula the principles of the French Revolution. Thanks to the folly and baseness of her rulers she was easy to seize; thanks to the heroic spirit of her people she was impossible to hold. Before the great struggle her nominal ruler was Charles IV, a good-natured man of mean abilities, dominated by his wife, a headstrong and sensual woman. The King's interests were divided between the pompous ceremonies of religion, the pleasures of hunting, and the humble crafts of the locksmith and clockmaker. The cares of government were left to Manuel Godoy, an ex-lifeguard, who owed to a handsome figure, a dashing manner, and a certain plausible audacity the unbounded confidence of the King as well as the criminal attachment of the Queen. He was the most trusted counsellor in matters affecting the nation or the royal family—universal minister, high admiral, commander-in-chief, and

¹ Strictly speaking this is not the case. Quintana's first volume of poems was published in 1788, when he was 15. His ode on the Peace was written in 1795; and the compliment to Godoy is indirect. [J. F.-K.]