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978-1-107-63980-5 - Spain: Its Greatness and Decay (1479–1788)

Martin A. S. Hume

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION.

SECTION I.

THE RULE OF FERDINAND AND ISABELLA.

THE conquest of the weak and divided kingdom of Granada was, perhaps, no heroic feat: but, none the less, it was a momentous crisis in the history of Spain. Europe itself was startled by it; the loss of Constantinople seemed to find its compensation in the fall of Granada; the left wing of Islam had been beaten back upon its African reserves. For Spain the consequences were far-reaching. The task of centuries was complete; she must now seek another. A people which for generations had lived to fight, whose whole social and political organisation had developed out of war, could not lie down to sleep. The union of Castile and Aragon and the acquisition of Granada formed a power of first-rate importance; it was certain to exercise its young strength in fresh expansion.

It is true that to modern notions the union of Castile and Aragon was incomplete; the marriage of their sovereigns was their only tie. The two kingdoms stood back to back, with different characters and different interests; common service against the Moors had not obliterated mutual dislike. Yet the unity of the king and queen was so entire, and the personality of each so strong, that for purposes of external policy Castile and Aragon were already Spain. Portugal

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still preserved her independence, but it had for long seemed likely that Castile would unite with Portugal rather than with Aragon.

The little kingdom of Navarre also formed a breach in Iberian unity. It lay like a pair of saddle-bags across the western Pyrenees, tempting both France and Spain to bestride the ridge. A French house was, indeed, already in the saddle. Queen Blanche, Ferdinand's half-sister, had bequeathed Navarre to her divorced husband Henry IV of Castile, but he failed to hold it against her sister and successor Eleanor, who had married into the house of Foix. Eleanor's heir again had married Madeleine, sister of Louis XI, who acted as regent successively for her two children, Francis Phebus and Catherine. Isabella, with a view to the ultimate absorption of Navarre, had schemed to marry each of these children into her own family, but Madeleine had foiled her plans. At the date of the Conquest of Granada Navarre was ruled by Catherine and her husband, Jean, of the French house of Albret. It seemed unlikely, moreover, that the kingdom, differing in customs, language and ethnology, should gravitate towards Spain.

On the eastern flank of the Pyrenees lay another saddle-state. To the south was Catalonia, to the north its dependent counties, Roussillon and Cerdagne. These latter in the troubled times of John II had been mortgaged to Louis XI; after much sharp dealing and hard fighting they had remained to France. But as Spanish Navarre was Basque, so was Roussillon Catalan, alien to France, full of Catalan if not of Spanish feeling. It had revolted from Louis XI because he had suppressed the inalienable right of private war. Roussillon and Cerdagne, even after their final union to France under Louis XIV, remained Catalan in customs until the days of Arthur Young, who describes them as a Spanish country tempered by the blessings of French administration.

Spain's difficulty has always been that she has so many sides, so many possibilities, so many alternative policies.

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There were causes enough in Navarre and Roussillon for dispute with France. Yet the northern frontier may almost be left out of consideration. At either end of the Pyrenees the country is difficult, incapable in early days of supporting considerable armies. The two nations might skirmish on this side or on that, but they could not close, they could not strike vital blows. If rivals they were to be, the fight must be fought elsewhere.

There remained then three sides to Spain. The Portuguese discoveries pointed to the Atlantic. Where Lisbon led, Cadiz and Seville, Ferrol and Corunna must some day follow. The voyage of Columbus was so nearly coincident with the conquest of Granada that they may be considered in connection. The discovery of America, even though its full bearings were not realised, from the first struck the imagination, turning men's minds westwards, tempting the pent-up energy of a people, whose blood was boiling, to adventure rather than to war, to the sea rather than to the land. Had Castile at this time been united with Portugal instead of Aragon, the world's history might or must have been very different.

There was yet another alternative. Long before the conquest of Granada Spanish and African adventurers had raided each other's shores. Spain until the present century has had to feel only too acutely that she has a southern seaboard. Her own Moors had not been exterminated; many had sought shelter with their African brethren and so added to their strength. Here chronic hostility was intensified by recurrent outbursts of fanaticism. Was it not then the obvious policy of Spain to follow up her conquest of Granada, to break the forces of Islam which were forming anew upon the opposite coast? With a huge Moorish population, imperfectly Christianised in the old kingdoms, and professedly Mussulman in Granada, could Spain risk the chances of a reaction, and that with the power of the Osmanli advancing by leaps and bounds in the eastern Mediterranean? Nor was this all. Sicily is by

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situation and tradition almost as much African as European. Her southernmost shores lie below the northernmost point of Africa. Thrusting herself athwart the Mediterranean, she must be either a basis of operations against the Turk and Moor, or the objective of their common attacks. No power that holds Sicily can afford to neglect Tunis. Further east again the kings of Aragon had long-dormant claims on Athens, and even on Salonica, claims that as a crusading power they might one day make good against the Turkish conquerors of Greece, or as a South Italian power against the commercial monopoly of Venice.

If the glance of Castile wavered, that of Aragon looked steadily eastward. The conquest of the Balearic isles had been but a stepping-stone to Sardinia. Early in the 15th century Alfonso had all but conquered Corsica, and had reduced Genoa to the last extremities. Pressure on the north of Italy had only been relieved by diversion to the south, where the warlike king on a dubious title won and held the kingdom of Naples. Although he left this to his bastard, and not to his brother John II of Aragon, the legitimate heir, yet there was now in southern Italy an Aragonese dynasty strengthened by the importation of Aragonese nobles and ecclesiastics. Moreover across the straits lay Sicily, Aragonese for more than two centuries. If therefore Isabella allowed her husband to direct her European policy it was certain that Spain would exercise her united strength upon the neighbouring peninsula.

As if these problems were not enough, within a few years of the conquest of Granada the Catholic kings must add another. The marriages of two princesses to the heirs of England and the Netherlands were destined to force Spain to play the leading part in the religious conflict of the future; she must pick up the glove as champion not only of Cross against Crescent, but of the Faith against the heretic.

The history of Spain is therefore the tragic result of an embarrassing wealth of alternative policies. It was impossible

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that a country with no common feeling or constitutional unity between its principal sections, containing an alien race fundamentally opposed in faith and customs, herself sparsely populated, her material resources undeveloped, should permanently succeed in all the tasks imposed upon her by nature or ambition. That she sank after a century and a half of greatness need excite no wonder. Marvellous rather was the tenacity which held its grip so long. Into the 18th century Spain retained her hold of a moiety of the Netherlands; only in the 19th Spanish princes lost the two Sicilies and Parma. Cuba and the Philippines till 1898 represented her Colonial Empire in the Western and Eastern Indies; in most of the States of Southern and Central America handfuls of Spaniards still control at pleasure the masses of industrious emigrants from other European states. In Africa the Spanish flag still flies in somewhat fitful triumph over her first conquest, Melilla. Christendom, all deductions made, has reason to be grateful to the conquerors of Lepanto, to the missionaries of the Indies. Catholicism must place to Alba's credit the long-untainted orthodoxy of the Belgian provinces. It was not when Spain was at her height, but when her decline was already obvious, that a French writer in Richelieu's service stated that Spain surpassed all nations in the art of government. If by this phrase be meant, not the gift of administration, but the power to rule, it may pass muster.

It is difficult to apportion between Ferdinand and Isabella the glories of their reign. Spanish writers, being at once courteous and Castilian, exalt their queen at the expense of her Aragonese partner. Italian contemporaries speak only of Ferdinand. This is natural, for European policy was his especial field; whatever troubles occurred at home upon Isabella's death, his success abroad scarcely received a check. As here the husband led the wife, so did the little kingdom of Aragon lead the larger sister nation. From Ferdinand's reign dates the long conflict between the French and Spanish

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peoples. But this quarrel was not Castilian. The thoughts of Castile had been turned south and west, to Granada and Portugal; her relations with France had almost invariably been friendly. But Aragon had been opposed to France in Roussillon and in Navarre; it had contested with the French crown the possession of Genoa, with the French house of Anjou that of Sicily and Naples.

After the fall of Granada the Catholic kings were prepared to devote themselves to internal organisation. Any superfluous energy might well have been employed on African conquest or American discovery. At this moment their hands were forced by the ambition of their more powerful neighbour. The Granada of France was Brittany; the marriage of the young duchess with Charles VIII was the equivalent of the "last sigh" of the fallen Boabdil. Ferdinand had employed both arms and diplomacy to preserve the independence of Brittany, but in vain. The marriage took place in 1491, and the French king had thus a start of just a year. The long-deferred intervention in Italy was now possible. Charles VIII would enforce the claims, which the house of Anjou had bequeathed to the Crown, against the Aragonese occupants of Naples. Meanwhile Granada fell, and Charles realised that he must buy the abstention of the legitimate line of Aragon. By the treaty of Barcelona, Roussillon and Cerdagne were ceded to the Catholic kings' engagement that they would give no aid to the enemies of France, saving the Pope, that they would suffer no intermarriage with the houses of Hapsburg, England or Naples. Thus Aragon recovered her lost provinces, and Spain once more had a foothold on soil geographically French.

To Ferdinand, half a treaty, his own half, was always better than the whole. Before Charles VIII left France, and again when he marched out of Rome towards Naples, protests were presented by Ferdinand's envoys. No sooner was Naples taken than Ferdinand elaborated the league of Venice which cost the French king his conquests. Coincident with this

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was the double marriage of his children with the house of Hapsburg, and the marriage of his sister to the restored Aragonese king of Naples. Even before Charles VIII died, Ferdinand opened negotiations for a partition of the Neapolitan kingdom (1497). Early in the reign of Louis XII this actually took effect (1500). The spoilers soon quarrelled, for thieves are singularly sensitive as to their own proprietary rights. Gonsalvo's military skill and Ferdinand's diplomatic lack of scruple decided the contest in favour of Spain. Within eleven years Spain had won Granada, Roussillon and Naples.

Upon Isabella's death Ferdinand's administration in Castile was threatened by his son-in-law Philip, who was supported by his father the Emperor Maximilian. For protection Ferdinand turned to France; he married Germaine de Foix, the French king's niece; upon the child, who was only born to die, were settled the rights of the two crowns in Naples. This new friendship led naturally to the partition treaty of Cambray. In this Louis XII seemed to have the lion's share; to his Duchy of Milan were assigned the wealthy cities of Venetian Lombardy from the Adda to the Mincio; while to Ferdinand fell only the towns on the Apulian coast which Venice held in compensation of her expenses in the war of 1495–6. No sooner had Ferdinand obtained the cession of these towns than he formed a fresh combination against France. He won to his side the very Pope, the prime mover of the League of Cambray, and Venice the professed enemy. The result was the expulsion of the French from Lombardy. Meanwhile Ferdinand had utilised the difficulties of Louis XII to occupy the Spanish territories of his ally the king of Navarre. Thus he had closed the second gate through the Pyrenees. Navarre retained its separate Cortes, its legal customs, its financial independence. But, notwithstanding that its earlier relations had been with Aragon, Ferdinand cleverly incorporated it with the crown of Castile, thus pledging the more powerful kingdom to the maintenance of his conquest.

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In Italy it was already clear that the Spaniards would not be content with Naples; they soon felt their way up both coasts of the peninsula. In 1505 Gonsalvo de Cordova assumed the protectorate of Pisa during her revolt against Florence; in 1512 at Ravenna the Spaniards barred the French advance southwards through Romagna. Two years later a Spanish army fired on Venice from the shores of her lagoon, and in retreating scattered the powerful Venetian forces near Vicenza. If the Swiss had the main share in expelling the French from Lombardy, and if the new native Duke, Maximilian Sforza, sat uneasily on Swiss pikes, yet a Spanish force lurked round Verona. When Francis I at Marignano (1515) beat these selfsame Swiss, this Spanish *corps* was watching the passage of the Po at Piacenza. The Swiss defeat was to none more profitable than to their Spanish ally. Henceforth Lombardy must be the battlefield between France and Spain.

Ferdinand relied less on arms than on diplomacy. Truly marvellous was his power of combination. He had already united Maximilian of Austria and Henry VII of England in defence of Breton autonomy, enabling Henry to enter the coalition by filching from France her traditional ally Scotland, for the marriage of James IV and Margaret Tudor set England temporarily free. Whenever the restless French king moved he found himself checked by Ferdinand's combinations. After the conquest of Naples Charles VIII was confronted by Ferdinand, Maximilian, the Pope, Venice and Milan (1495). The success of Louis XII in Venetian Lombardy was nullified by the coalition of Spain, England, the Swiss, the Papacy and Venice (1511). If France detached Venice from this Holy League, Ferdinand drew over Maximilian to his side. Making a peace with France in 1513, he threw Henry VIII and Maximilian against her at Guinegate, and hurled the Swiss on Dijon. The last act of his life was a coalition which should check Francis I in the full tide of victory after Marignano (1515).

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In these combinations marriage was naturally the chief resource. The matches made by Ferdinand's children would be alone sufficient to prove the prominence of Spain in European politics. Great importance was, indeed, still given to Pan-Iberian projects. The eldest Infanta, Isabella, was married to John II of Portugal (1490), and on his death to his brother Emanuel (1495). When the Spanish Infante, Juan, died (1497) it seemed likely that Isabella's son, Miguel, would unite the crowns of Spain and Portugal. But in these Portuguese marriages passing-bells followed fast on wedding peals. Miguel scarcely survived the birth which proved his mother's death (1497), and for two more generations the union with Portugal was deferred.

Other marriages were purely diplomatic; they were intended to consolidate the anti-French coalitions. Thus the negotiations for the alliance of Prince Arthur and Catherine date from the days when Spain and England had common concern in the defence of Brittany (1486). Catherine was sent to England when Louis XII had increased his power by the occupation of Milan. Her marriage with her deceased husband's brother is contemporaneous with the conflict of France and Spain for Naples. So too the League of Venice against France had caused the double marriage of Maximilian's heir Philip with Ferdinand's second daughter, Juana, and of the Infante Juan with Philip's sister, Margaret. In these complicated matrimonial schemes Ferdinand overreached himself. He was no Maximilian, he had no dreams of universal dominion for his family, his range of vision was limited by the practical and the possible. Yet the successive deaths of Juan, Isabella and Miguel left Juana the heiress to the crowns of Spain; her child must inherit the possessions of Hapsburgs and Burgundians, and a claim, already quasi-hereditary, to the Empire.

Ferdinand was not only the most successful statesman of his age; he may claim to be founder of a school. This school

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is often regarded as Italian, but it is pre-eminently Spanish, and more particularly Aragonese. If Machiavelli wishes for a type of unscrupulous statesmanship he turns to Spain. His hero is Cæsar Borgia, a Valencian; his ideal of successful villainy is Ferdinand of Aragon. "There is a certain prince of the present time," he writes, "who never preaches aught but peace and good faith, and yet of both he is the greatest foe." Guicciardini again and again returns to the same theme, "I am convinced that above all other men he is a master of pretence." The tale is told of Ferdinand himself that when Louis XII complained that he had twice been deceived, the Aragonese exclaimed, "The drunkard! he lies. I have cheated him more than ten times." This precise quality Guicciardini in his first embassy attributed to the whole Spanish nation, "In profession and in externals they are most religious, but not in practice; they are men of infinite ceremonies, which they perform with much reverence of manner, with great humility of phrase, with honourable titles and kissings of hand; everyone is their lord; they are at everyone's command; but they are men to keep at arm's length, and to trust but little." In Ferdinand's school were trained the least scrupulous diplomatists of Charles' reign, such as Juan Manuel and Hugo de Moncada; Ferdinand hated the former because he was too like himself. Every student of the age of Philip II can lay his hand upon the later exponents of the great master's principles. The home of Machiavellism was not Italy but Spain.

For Ferdinand Africa was but a "jumping off" spot for Italy; for his minister Jiménez it was the chief object of external policy. At his own expense the Cardinal undertook the conquest of North Africa. Under his auspices Algiers was blockaded by the possession of Peñon; Oran, Bugia, even distant Tripoli, were won for Spain. Had he received his master's hearty support he might have realised Isabella's dream and conquered the great Moorish kingdom of Tlemcen.