

SPAIN SINCE 1815

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IT is difficult to include within the limits of a single lecture such an important period as that from 1815 down to the present day. Only a summary view of it can be offered by a lecturer who must naturally keep within certain bounds.

In the spring of 1814 King Ferdinand VII returned to Spain after his imprisonment at Valençay. During the period of the Peninsular War, called by Spaniards the War of Independence, extremely important events in the political history of the country had taken place. The Cortes, the Convocation of which Ferdinand VII himself while in Bayonne had ordered by a Decree of May 5th, 1808, at last assembled, although in a very different state from that which the monarch may have foreseen, for he doubtlessly believed it would retain its former legal form. Neither did the

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counsels of those prevail, who like the illustrious Jovellanos, because they thought it would be difficult for the Cortes to assemble according to the old Spanish usage, inclined to the constitution of two Chambers, having England's example before their mind's eye.

The Cortes which finally did assemble in Cadiz was an imitation of the French Constituent Assembly and those who were Deputies to it did not answer to the general political feeling of the nation but were under the influence of the Encyclopaedists of the eighteenth century and of the example of the French Revolution. This was the reason why in the middle of all their undeniable patriotism these Deputies proclaimed abstract principles and theories and wanted to put them into practice in spite of the country not being prepared for them and the fact that it was not the general will of the people that they should prevail. In this way when Ferdinand VII on his return, at the request of a great number of the ordinary Deputies to the Cortes of 1813,

issued the Decree of May 4th, 1814, he undoubtedly gave satisfaction therewith to the majority of Spanish opinion. It was a grave error on his part that, not taking into account the patriotism of the men who had formed these Assemblies during his absence and looking only at their mistakes and at the attacks made on what he considered as his imprescriptible rights, he proceeded to imprison the most important Liberals of that period, and, not having obtained a sentence proportionate in his opinion to their delinquencies from the Tribunal set up to judge them, he punished them administratively by long terms of imprisonment or banishment.

On the other hand Ferdinand VII did not fulfil the promises made by him in the above-mentioned Decree, as he did not convoke the Cortes as he had offered to do according to the ancient public usage. It is thus that the period 1814–1820 has passed into history as an arbitrary period and one of obscurantism and bad Government, and not without reason. It is from

this period that the widespread expression “Camarilla Governments” dates. It was in truth supposed that the King was ruled, not by the opinion of the Ministers who changed frequently but by that of a coterie which had its meetings in rooms not far from the Camara Regia, was composed of persons without responsibility, some of them being persons of lowly station, and succeeded anyway in intervening directly in the Government of the country.

The exact history of this period has not yet been really impartially and well investigated. It can, however, be affirmed that Ferdinand VII was not entirely controlled by his camarilla, but that this coterie often did succeed in interpreting the feelings and caprices of the monarch, and that he in his turn made use of the information obtained by means of this society for deciding the fate of his real Ministers.

It cannot be said either that the path taken by those who desired to overthrow the absolute Government of 1814–1820 was very much more reasonable or patriotic.

During the period of the French invasion the French armies had introduced some Masonic Lodges into Spain, which, although the invaders were expelled and those Spaniards who had joined the Napoleonic cause remained exiled, sprang up again under divers forms and with divers rites. The complete and without doubt curious influence exercised by the Masonic Societies on the happenings of that period still remains to be thoroughly studied, but it is evident that it penetrated into the rank and file of the Army and was an important factor in the political events of the time. For instance, as a result of the French invasion, Spanish power in America had considerably diminished and many of the kingdoms which formed that immense continent were in 1815 being undermined by ideas of risings and emancipation, if they were not in a state of complete rebellion. That is why it was necessary, after the return of Ferdinand VII, to think of the obligation to send help to the scanty armies which Spain had over there, awaiting the despatch

of numerous forces to aid the Viceroy and “Captain generals” to overcome the insurrection. But if this idea was prevalent in Government spheres through the stern necessity which made itself felt, it was not thus in the Army, where there was a silent revolt concerning the crossing of the ocean and leaving the metropolis, fostered no doubt by the influence of some American personalities who desired to prevent troops being sent to America. Other influential elements in this action of the Masonic Lodges might have existed, but that these latter played an important part in the work of the demoralisation of the army, in order to prevent it being embarked for America, is a fact about which those who are thoroughly acquainted with this period entertain no doubts whatever. For example, when finally in 1819 it had become possible to get a sufficiently large army together from the towns of the present province of Cadiz, several conspiracies took place (in which some persons even took part of whose monarchical tendencies there had been no doubt), so that the de-

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parture of the troops was delayed until at the beginning of 1820 the political movement openly broke out, which expressed the aspirations of the revolutionaries and which was aided by the resistance of the military elements against leaving the Peninsula. On the other hand, in what concerned the external affairs of Spain she did not see her just desires satisfied, as shewn in the meetings of the Vienna Congress, for Spain, after having been one of the most important bulwarks raised against the Napoleonic domination, did not obtain the consideration which certainly was due to her, either on account of the supineness of her representative at the Congress, or the want of real interest shewn by the Government of Ferdinand VII, or because of the unjustified forgetfulness of the Powers, some of which had bowed down before the Vienna Court, or perhaps on account of all these three reasons.

The ideas of the Holy Alliance must certainly have been agreeable to the Government circles, and with greater reason still

to the King, who understood nothing of government except under the absolute forms which he considered as traditional, though they were without historical foundation.

Among the members of the “camarilla” there was a man of obscure origin who had found means of getting into the Russian Embassy. Ugarte (this being his name) succeeded in convincing the Court of the propriety of following the inspirations of the Muscovite Empire, and the Bailiff Tattischeff who represented that Court in Madrid became the most influential person as to external affairs with the Government of Ferdinand VII in the period from 1814 to 1820. One circumstance, however, contributed to diminish the prestige of the Russian Envoy and that was the acquisition of various ships, which were to aid the despatch of troops to America, from the Muscovite Government. These damaged frigates, the wood of which was rotten and which were of no service in the end, were remembered for many years to the discredit of the Bailiff and of the Government which

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had let themselves be thus taken in and be induced to spend such large sums in spite of the pitiful state of the Spanish Treasury.

In January 1820 the first constitutional movement commenced which made the name of an obscure Major famous, called **Rafael Riego**. He was attached to the Asturias Regiment and had been one of those encamped near Cadiz in order to embark for America, but, undermined though the Army was, Riego together with other conspirators was not able to make more than a very small part of the Army join their cause, and it is certain that with another Government, a more energetic one and one more justified in public opinion, the movement would have proved an abortive one right from the commencement; but the want of serenity and energy in Ferdinand VII's Councils and the complicity of the Field-Marshal of Andalusia himself, the Irishman O'Donnell, the uncle of the still more famous General of the same name, placed the Government in a very difficult situation. But even then, if

the movements which took place in La Coruña in Aragon and later in Madrid had not sprung up, it is possible that the conspiracy might have been put down.

In view of these outbreaks Ferdinand VII on March 6th, 1820, agreed to convoke the Cortes in a form which would have to be prescribed later; but the following day, March 7th, precipitated thereto by the course of events and principally by the disagreement existing among those surrounding him, he promulgated a new Decree in which he accepted again the Constitution of 1812, which he had annulled on May 4th, 1814.

The second constitutional Government did not last more than three years in Spain and, to tell the truth, the errors committed were on a parallel with those of the absolute Government which had been replaced. The "clubs" and patriotic Societies stultified the efforts of these men who in good will had desired to give Spain an ordered Government and one which was sincerely constitutional. Soon after the establishment

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