

## CHAPTER II.

RETROSPECTIVE VIEW — VENEZUELA NEGLECTED BY THE MOTHER-COUNTRY — THE RELEASES — PRIMITIVE GOVERNORS — FIRST CAUSES OF THE REVOLUTION — POLICY OF THE CABINET OF ST. JAMES IN REGARD TO THE SPANISH COLONIES — ESCAPE OF PICORNELL AND HIS COMPANIONS — REVOLUTION OF GUAL AND ESPAÑA — ITS END — REVOLUTIONARY PROGRESS — MIRANDA — DEATH OF GUEVARA VASCONCELOS.

ON his return to his native country, Bolivar was disposed to live retired from public affairs, occupying himself solely with the cultivation of his farms and to the managing of his patrimonial estates, which were numerous and rich. He judged it more proper to conceal his desire, and dissemble his intent; so as to succeed with more certainty, awaiting for the opportunity, which is the mainspring of all attempts. Everything in this world has its time, and as yet the hour of America had not sounded.

It was then necessary to wait; besides which, a prudent delay contributes much towards furthering its effect.

Let us now review meanwhile the political position of affairs, deriving the necessary matter from the primitive times; and as we are to assist at the final conclusion, let us know the subject with those details, which will render it interesting.

*Nec omnia dicentur, sed maxime insignia.*

Columbus had visited on his third voyage (towards the end of July, 1498) a portion of the coast of Venezuela, from the mouth of the Orinoco River, and Ojeda and Cristobal Guerra in 1499, explored the whole coast. Columbus also discovered, in his last voyage, the land of Cundinamarca, which later on Batidas commenced the conquest of, and which was finally subjugated by Don Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada. The history of the Zipas of Bogota and of the Caciques of Venezuela, does not offer the deep interest as excited by the famous chronicles of Mexico, of Peru, and even Chili. By force of rapine and bloodshed, these fertile regions of South America were destroyed, but not subdued.

The name of Spain was intensely loathed by the Indians;\* and the first con-

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\* How could it be in any other manner? The excesses and cruelties of all classes, committed during the conquest, cannot be reduced to a brief space. After the death of Guacaipuro by the firing of his house, twenty-three caciques were most atrociously impaled; and Tamanaco, the indomitable chief of the Marichee, being defeated and taken prisoner in the battle of Guaira, was condemned (oh, horror!) to die, torn and mutilated, in the interior of a circus, by a blood-hound sent from Spain, and specially recommended for his ferocity. On a cacique being accused of rebellion (which happened at the pleasure of each conqueror) the whole tribe was sacrificed. The prayers and entreaties of a whole people did not suffice; and even in that case, as they had no fear of peril, gave the butchers more thirst for blood, who would place them in files, and

querers, colonists and *encomenderos*, contributed in all their power towards rooting more firmly this hatred, and always maintained a difference of interests, whereas common sense and good policy counselled towards blending them mutually.

Venezuela whose form of government was not constituted into a Captain-Generalcy until the beginning of the year 1781 (that is to say, two centuries after the Conquest), had always been a colony, considered as of little importance by the metropolis, and in accordance was neglected. As it did not incite the rapacity of the enemies of Spain, whose hands and eyes were more impelled with eagerness in pursuit of the gold-laden fleets of Mexico and Peru, and also, as Spain did not value it by reason of its apparent barrenness, Venezuela enjoyed the peace of negligence. She was ceded in 1588 by Charles V. to the *Belsera*, or *Belzarea*, merchants of Augsburg, and the wealthiest traders of those times, to whom he was indebted for considerable amounts; she was held by these Germans, as a hereditary feud for the space of eighteen years, at the conclusion of which a universal cry of indignation was raised against them, on which the Monarch declared the lease at an end, and a lawyer of Segovia, Don Juan Perez de Tolosa, was commissioned as Governor, a man of pacific nature, and friendly to justice, but weak-minded, and without any ideas of progress. There is nothing worthy of mention, during the Governments of Perez de Tolosa, of Bernaldez, of Pimentel and others who followed. The country rendered desolate by the conquest, continued in a state of undecipherable misery and oppression. The negligence on the part of Spain continued, it is sufficiently proved by mentioning, that during the twenty years which elapsed anterior to the establishment of the Guipuscoan Company, there were only five arrivals of vessels from Spain to Venezuela! \* Commerce with the adjoining Colonies was prohibited, as also the intercourse of ideas, strength, capitals of enlightenments and values; business monopolized and sacrificed to a tardy and scant importation from the Peninsula; the natives were compelled to purchase only the Spanish products, and then not even allowed the privilege of buyer, but forced to accept the terms of the vender; a species of refined cruelty and extortion which even Oriental despotism had not imagined. . . . Only arbitrary law was recognized in the civil and military administrations; the people over-taxed, and all at the same time carefully maintained in the most profound ignorance. Such was the condition and such the state in which were plunged the population of Venezuela; sharing the same fate as the more distant ones of

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thus destroy them by hundreds. The Spaniards, who found themselves in a world, to them, new and extraordinary, surrounded on all sides by a wild population, in which they were as one to ten thousand, fifty thousand, one hundred thousand, etc., confided that their salvation only consisted in entirely annihilating the Indians. This idea dishonored the conquest; but still they practiced it. They succeeded; causing the disappearance of the American race; and the relics which escaped this deluge of blood, returned, with the most intense hatred of the Spanish cruelties. Let not the royalists with the Don José Domingo Díaz, say that "the aborigines were contented, and loved the easy and paternal government of the king." This is absurd, no one can love oppression or be contented with it. As to the rest of being "easy and paternal," we refer to "Secret Reminiscences of Don Antonio de Ulloa and Don Jorge Juan," competent and truthful persons, who did not fear to expose to the monarch the system of tyranny and of infamous slavery which oppressed the Americans.

\* Annals of the Royal Company of Caracas, p. 28.

New Granada and Ecuador. In truth, no more was necessary towards firing the minds and disposing them for a justifiable rebellion.\*

Whether such rules and dispositions were only derived in their source from weak minds, lost to the true path of principle, or rather, a premeditated design to maintain the Colonies in an impoverished and desolate condition, it is certain that it could not possibly be profitable to Spain in the end; because generations are followed by others; more so, as even in the very hot-bed of slavery, there are always to be found hearts eager for liberty, not wishing the slave more than an opportunity whereby to release himself from the bonds of the master. The reaction was being prepared silently; America panted to shake off the yoke of the metropolis; and, though distant the moment and uncertain its result, observing minds judged the rupture inevitable. As Spain had sown the seeds of debasement and injustice, so should she reap the fruit in war and shame, *for she had sown the wind and so shall she reap the whirlwind.*

The works of Rousseau and Montesquieu—those of Raynal above all others, which had been procured by cunning, and were read during the silent hours of night; and the examples of the French Revolution, an ardent temperance, and the ray of light which illumined the horizon of nations, undoubtedly contributed to precipitate events, firing the hearts and minds of the Americans, always brimming with poetry and enthusiasm. Already from the middle of the past century there had been several attempts at revolution made at Caracas, though unsuccessful. In the year 1749, an insurrection was raised in the vicinity of this Capital, led by Captain Juan Francisco Leon, which had for motto the suppression of the Guizpocoan Company, established by Royal Charter in 1728, which establishment (he declared with reason), was the root of the many evils under which the country labored; but unfortunately the design of Leon fell through, with fatal results; for not only did the Company triumph, but was himself pursued, and declared traitor; his house was razed to the earth, and sown with salt, his children made prisoners and sent to Spain; the unfortunate Leon escaping with his life to the obscurity of a hiding place, his anticipated tomb, where he breathed his last far from his friends in the most abject misery.† Thirty years later on new demonstrations of an insurrection

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\* "The tendencies and means of action of the conquest," as Samper observes, with much reason, "could not have been but adequate to its character and its elements." As there was no intention of colonizing but of obtaining gold, it was necessary that it should be sought for and taken at all risks, without considering the morality of the means. Terrible fatality which should be so pregnant with unhappy results! Violence was the only means of the conquest; violence in all its forms. It was called *soldier*, when under that name it fought, wounded, killed, without pity, robbed and destroyed all that was destroyable. It was called *priest, monk*, and as such fanaticized and exiled the consciences, violated without regard the religious worship of the Indians, fired the funeral piles, and preached the extermination of the docile race. It was called *viceroy, governor*, and, invested with this power, laid the foundation of a focus of despotism which suppressed all the spontaneity of social life, and inaugurated a secular era of tyranny and conspiracies, and instituted the monopoly of all the senses, the base of organization and of brutal force the title of all power. Finally, it was called (not to extend further the catalogue) *encomendero*, and as such, transplanted feudality to the New World, made the Indian slave of the soil, a subject to the lash, and expropriated and annihilated.

† In 1811, Don Rodolfo Vassallo, commissioner of public works, asked permission to

were felt, caused by the imposing of the Excise Tax and personal mortgages in the regions of the Oruro and Socorro; Tupac-Amaru, descended from the ancient monarchs of Peru, was proclaimed Inca by the people; and it was only after the lapse of three years, and not without much trouble, could Spain at last succeed in extinguishing this spark of liberty. Amaru was executed and quartered, after having beheld his whole family perish.\*

Towards the end of this century the fermentation was universal; and the mother-country preserved the Colonies only in doubts and at infinite risks. Having declared war to the French Republic (1793), Spain united herself with England to carry on a ridiculous and ruinous war, which finally ended in the shameful treaty of Basilea (1795), and the loss of Santo Domingo, "first conquest of Columbus in America;" afterwards, for an incomprehensible changeableness, she joined with France against England by the treaty of San Ildefonso (18th of August, 1796), a League, the fruits of which were the loss of her fleets at the fatal combat of Cape St. Vincente, and above all, that of the Island of Trinidad, in America, the possession of which the English secured by the treaty of Amiens, in 1802. In this and the other case France first, and afterwards Great Britain, fully revenged themselves of Spain, exciting a revolution in the Costa Firme and the other Colonies; inflaming the minds by revolutionary ideas, and the introduction of such papers and books which were most apt to teach rebellion and justify it to the conscience of the American. Sir Thomas Picton, Governor of Trinidad, had received orders from the Hon. Henry Dundas (after known by the title of Viscount Melville), Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, which authorized him to re-open the commercial relations between the Ports of Trinidad and Costa Firme, and to offer the Venezuelans the general deposit of manufactures of the island for any thing which they would need, concluding his message with this remarkable clause: "As to the hope you entertain of exciting the minds of those persons with whom you are in communication, to encourage the people of Costa Firme in resisting the oppressive authority of their government, they may be certain, that whenever they are in that disposition, they may receive at your hands all the succors from his Britannic Majesty, be it with force, or with arms and munition to any extent. I can also assure you that the views of his Britannic Majesty are only to secure to them their independence, without any pretension towards governing them nor intervening in any manner, neither in the privileges of nations, nor in their political, civil and religious rights."

This communication of the Hon. Dundas has for date 7th of April, and Sir T. Picton published it the 28th of June, 1797.

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destroy the *post of ignominy* which the Spanish Government had caused to be erected on the lot occupied by the house of the unfortunate Leon.

\* The sentence pronounced at Cuzco the 16th of May, 1781, by the Inspector-General of the king, gave Don José Antonio de Areche (a Tartar) orders that Tupac-Amaru be dragged to the place of execution, from whence he shall behold the death of his wife and children; that then his tongue should be cut out, and afterwards be tied by the arms and feet with strong ropes, the ends of which shall be attached to four horses, and thus quartered, each horse pulling in opposite directions; that the body be then burnt, that the head be exposed, that the house of the rebel be razed to the ground, and his possessions be confiscated, and the members of his family be declared criminals forever, and unqualified to receive, etc., etc.

The perplexity which this caused the then Captain-General of Caracas, the Field-Marshal, Don Pedro Carbonell, a mild and tractable person, though of little learning, and much attached to his own opinion, cannot be briefly described; already embarrassed by the escape of three political prisoners, Don Juan Mariano Picornell, Don Manuel Cortez Campomanes and Don Sebastian Andres, from La Guayra, persons who had taken part in the conspiracy discovered in Madrid, on the 8d of February, 1796, named of San Blas.\*

This escape, although done under favor of the obscurity of the night (4th June, 1797), could not have succeeded unless protected by the connivance of the officers and garrison of La Guayra. It even so happened. Picornell and his companions of exile, who entitled themselves martyrs of liberty, had excited a feeling of sympathy in the breast of the humane American. Picornell and Campomanes, men of education and persuasion, obtained free intercourse with them and their fellow-prisoners; and thus it was that, "changing the prison into a school, they inculcated the simple and easy principles of the republican political system, and communicated to the breasts of many youths, enthusiastic and anxious for novelties, the desire of seeing them prevail in their own country. With this end in view, they facilitated the escape of the prisoners, so that they should be able to go to foreign parts in search of help, the circumstance of the order of the Government to send Laz to the prison at Panama, having somewhat given impulse to the escape.

Carbonell being unwary, and more remiss in his position than was necessary, affecting a security which he did not feel, he neglected to inquire into the flight of the prisoners; attributing to the skill of these what was really the work of others. Plausible error! which relieved the anxiety of the accomplices and permitted them to proceed to work actively in the revolutionary measures.

In the course of a few days, the conspiracy of Gual and Espafia, as were called its chief promoters, was discovered (18th July, 1797). Caracas was to have been the centre of this conspiracy, inspired by Picornell and Campomanes, and formed by Don Manuel Gual, a retired captain, and formerly Governor of Macuto, Don José M. Espafia, and others, with the view of establishing, in Venezuela, the republican form of government, but dependent on the metropolis, which, also, by the example of France, should change its monarchical organization for that of the popular tribunes; but the conspiracy was detected, and though its authors never entertained the idea of a separation from the government of the Peninsula as before mentioned, Spain never pardoned any attempt of the Americans to manifest their own will, nor tolerated the privilege of private rights, neither any tendency to cast off their miserable condition of slaves, and accordingly chastised severely the attempts of Gual and his companions. Don José Maria Espafia was hung at Caracas (8th May, 1799), his head was placed in an iron cage, and ordered to be exhibited at La Guayra; and the members of the body, mutilated and impaled, were placed on the highways

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\* The republican ideas which ruled in France, began to ferment also in Spain, contributing in great part to it, the disturbances of the court of Charles V. Several republican associations were formed, and which succeeded in fomenting itself into a regular conspiracy, which should have taken place the 8d of February, 1796. Picornell, Campomanes, Andres, and José Laz, were the principal authors of the conspiracy, and were condemned to suffer death as guilty of high treason. The sentence being commuted by the supplications of the French Ambassador, they were destined to penitentiary, and to be confined in cells on some of the unhealthy ports of South America.

for the horror of the passers-by. Five more underwent the same fate; the remainder of the accomplices or suspected, were either exiled or condemned to penitentiary.\*

Don Manuel Gual, who had managed to escape, died at Trinidad (1801) poisoned, as it is said, by a Spaniard named Vallecilla, who obtained a high reward for his crime.

These executions took place during the government of the Captain-General Don Manuel de Guevara and Vasconcelos, who came to relieve Carbonell, with the instruction that he should conclude the process of the conspiracy, and with power at discretion to govern the land, pacify it, and maintain it in obedience to the King.

About this time, Don José Caro, a native of Havana, was soliciting help at Paris in order to revolutionize Peru. Don Pedro Fermín Vargas, a native of El Socorro, published at Jamaica various documents, with the motive of persuading the English Government into protecting the revolution of New Granada. Other South Americans, commissioned by influential persons in Mexico, went to France and Great Britain, in order to occupy themselves toward the independence of that country. Naríño, the Bogotan patriot, interested Tallien in favor of Oundinamarca; O'Higgins received instructions from Miranda for the members of the independence in Chili and Lima; Bejarano came as envoy for Guayaquil; Juan Pablo Frétes, priest, as Madariaga, came to Santiago; Barquijano to Peru; Izardi to Caracas. Poor wandering apostles of liberty!

The aborigines of Riobamba (in Quito) sublevated, but without any result, and murdered, at Tuquerres and Guaitarilla, the Governor Olavijo. Finally, General Don Francisco Miranda was laboring for the liberty of Venezuela, his country.

All seemed to prognosticate a conflagration in which should be consumed and reduced to ashes the Spanish dominion in America.

Citizens few and far were preparing, by trials of civic virtues; and despotism was stupified, multiplying the executions.

The skillful manœuvres of Miranda were above all others the most serious, because they possessed the excellence of being real. He entered into the combinations of the British cabinet to injure Spain through her colonies; and Pitt in 1797, Lord Seymouth in 1801, again Pitt in 1804, treated with Miranda upon the freedom of South America. Don Francisco Miranda was the most worthy representative, which the world of Columbus could have possessed at that time. Born at Caracas, he had fought alongside of Washington for the independence of North America, and also with Durnouricz for the glory of the French Republic. In communication with the most illustrious men of Europe, he employed on all occasions his talents and influence to realize the project of freeing his country. The cause of the New World was his worship, to it he sacrificed all. But the surprising number and the importance of the events which then took place in Europe, and which engrossed entirely the attention

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\* It is convenient here to mention that in all; policy, government relations, and even justice, were distinct when Spaniards and Americans were treated of. As to clemency, it was never granted to the last. Picornell, Andres, Campomanes, and their companions, declared guilty of high treason and condemned to suffer capital punishment, obtained mercy, and received a commutation of their penalty. *They were Spaniards!* Don José Maria Espana, Serrano, Del Valle, Pino, Rusinol, Moreno, shed their blood on a scaffold. *They were Americans!*

of England, prevented the fomentation of anything fruitful. Miranda left England; and acquiescing to the wishes of many Americans and to his own impatience, he attempted the effort, relying alone on Americans. He prepared an expedition at New York, having been received by the Government and by persons of influence, with demonstrations of warm cordiality. He succeeded in overcoming all difficulties that detained his departure; he sailed, and on the 25th of March, 1806, he arrived at the coasts of Ocumare, having an armed sloop, two transport schooners, muskets, ammunition, and some troops. He thought the Spaniards were ignorant of all, but was deceived; the ambassador of Spain in North America, having forwarded timely advice to Vasconcelos; and on his arrival Miranda was attacked by two armed brigades, coast-guard. The combat took place, and in the end Miranda was compelled to flee to Trinidad, losing the two schooners and sixty prisoners.\*

It was sensible for the Captain-General of Caracas, Don Manuel de Guevara y Vasconcelos, that Miranda should escape—the *insurgent and seditious Miranda*!—and as he was not able to burn him personally, he was burnt in effigy by the executioner, offering \$30,000 as reward for his head, besides \$30,000 which was collected among the Spanish residents as a present to the assassin of Miranda. † But the effigy burnings of Vasconcelos troubled him little, and he proceeded to Barbadoes; the authorities of the island and Admiral Sir A. Cochrane, were interested in the cause by him; he flew to Trinidad, and persuaded the governor to furnish him with help, fitting out a squadron of fifteen vessels, having on board five hundred volunteers, forming three bodies—one of infantry, another of light cavalry, and the last of artillery, under the orders of the Colonels the Count of Rouvray, Kingston, and of Captain Harvey, who had offered their services to Miranda. On the 24th of July, 1806, he set sail from Port of Spain, and set his course towards Coro. He quickly and happily arrived at his destination, but was unable to disembark on account of the heavy surf, produced by strong breezes. Thirty-six hours thus passed awaiting the proper moment, so as to disembark with facility, by which sufficient time was given, so that the Spaniards were able to take the necessary precautions for the defence. Twelve hundred infantry were prepared to impede the attempt

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\* The prisoners taken from Miranda were judged at Puerto Cabello. Ten were hung, the sentence ordering they be beheaded after death; and of the remaining fifty, thirty-five were condemned to the jails of Cartagena, and fifteen to those of Puerto Rico. At this critical epoch for the independence of South America, the Government of France gave a remarkable example of their inconstancy and fatal versatility. But little time had elapsed, when they had taken a deep interest in fomenting in Venezuela republican ideas, and to help towards verifying a change in favor of liberty and of the peoples' rights; and now they offered themselves to serve as an immediate and efficacious means for riveting still more forcibly the chains of slavery, and to sustain the most revolting despotism; help in the shape of French troops were sent from Guadalupe to Guevara Vasconcelos, and these were the forces on which terrorists reposed most confidence. Behold what are the principles of justice and of right displayed by the European cabinets!

† It seems incredible that in the nineteenth century there should be men who would adopt these corrupting and infamous means of combating their enemies. But the history of the Hispano-American revolution redounds in examples given by Peninsular chiefs, who despised, all at a time, religion, the rights of persons, philosophy, and all humane and civilised customs.

of Miranda; notwithstanding, his volunteers landed in spite of the fire of royal howitzers. Fortunate in his undertaking, Miranda took possession of La Vela, capturing several cannon and other military equipments (8d of August), and afterwards entered the city of Coro, where he remained from the 4th to the 8th. But meeting with no sympathy from the population, no act of co-operation on the part of that people, who demonstrated such indifference as to weaken the heart of the most enthusiastic and persevering man.

What motive could the citizens of Coro have had, that they should not have aided Miranda, who brought them Liberty? Perhaps the circumstance of his army being composed of strangers; and, more probable, these people not being as yet prepared, that, surprised, they could form no opinion of what should be more convenient for them, or else did not understand the importance of their doubt and coolness. The consequence was that Miranda, discouraged, returned to La Vela, and from thence dispatched an officer to solicit reinforcements from Sir Eire Coote, commanding the military forces at Jamaica, to Decres, the admiral of the station; but in vain, as in nothing, they replied, could they assist him.

When the officer returned from Jamaica he met Miranda at Oruba, to which place he had removed, so as not to expose his fleet to the gales, which were frequent during that season there, and also with the purpose of landing in the river of La Hacha, where he expected to receive from the people greater proofs of enthusiasm. The answer of the authorities at Jamaica completed his chagrin; he believed himself abandoned, and desisted from all attempts upon the coasts of Costa Firme, discharging his troops and embarking for Trinidad with a few friends. From this point he proceeded to London, carrying with him such bitter disappointments, and in the persuasion that he should die without seeing his country free.

The attempts of this veteran amongst the patriots of South America, though unsuccessful, kept in expectation, however, the hopes of independence. And in the hearts of the Americans returned the desire of emancipation; and those who were not disheartened by the appearance of affairs until then, manifested in dark and mournful colors.

On the 7th of October of the following year (1807), the Captain-General Vasconcelos, died suddenly, leaving ample traces and examples of his cruelty. His government was hateful, although he affirmed that it was the state of the times which caused so much severity and rigor in punishing. As it was, the salvo of cannon announced his death, and none wept nor regretted him. It is even rumored that several young men insulted his remains whilst in the tomb.\*

Vasconcelos was succeeded temporarily, according to the law, by the Viceroy, Don Juan de Casas, a colonel of infantry, an honorable man, but "weak and inexpert," as Diaz writes. Such a qualification from an enemy so intense to our liberty, signifies, undoubtedly, that Casas was humane, and mayhap little inclined to the persecution of the Americans.

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\* In the list of governors and captain-generals which are to be found at the end of the second volume of the history of Baralt, and which Restrepo copied, it is related that Vasconcelos died of pleurisy. This is not exact. Captain-General Vasconcelos died at the age of eighty-five years, after having degraded his old age by excesses unworthy of a man of self respect. According to the *Gazette*, of Caracas, No. 88, he left this life suddenly in a burst of passion. His death caused a profound impression in this capital, as it was looked upon by the ladies as a heavenly chastisement.