

CHAPTER XII.

Finances—Brandy—Post Office—Revenue—Stamps—Aleavala—Direct
Taxation—War—Army—Fortified places—Marine—Foreign relations.

THE fortune of individuals, the basis of that of the government, amounts: 1stly, to eight millions of piastres, the annual produce of the soil; this produce only includes, grain, vegetables, and fruits; 2ndly, to eight millions of exported goods, such as tobacco, cocoa, indigo, &c. &c.; 3rdly, to two millions of metals, given to foreigners, in payment of merchandize imported.

The total of these sums, being 18,000 piastres, gives, supposing this calculation correct, and the population to be two millions, seven hundred thousand souls,* a sum of 33 *f.* 33 centimes $\frac{1}{3}$ † for each individual, of which the government receives 9 to 10 *f.*; ‡ the remainder goes towards clothing and food. ||

The state of slavery of a great part of the people explains how men can exist upon so moderate an income; on the other hand, their

* M. de Humboldt.

† About 25s sterling.

‡ Between 6 and 7 shillings.

|| See note IV.

extreme sobriety, the simplicity of their dress, the solitary life they lead, the abundance of their fields, and the excellence of the climate, which enables them to gather without difficulty all the fruits of the earth, are means of economy, which prevent them from being conscious of their misery.

A detail of the different branches of the public revenue, will clearly shew the situation of this country, which is certainly not a brilliant one.*

The custom-house duties, which, when simplified, should be punctually paid, are treated with the greatest contempt by all classes of citizens. The contraband trade is carried on with the utmost audacity ; if in the interior it is less active, in the sea-port towns, where it is sure of impunity, it has arrived at the climax of no longer needing concealment. This is the reason why the duties which, fixed under the Spanish government, at 18 per cent for importation, and at 12 per cent for exportation, brought in about eight hundred thousand piastres annually, now only produce two-thirds of that sum, whether from the falling off of trade, or the dishonesty of the officers.

The tobacco revenue at most only pays the expense of collecting it : a short time since the government was obliged to sell all the stock

* See note VII.

of this article, which they had in the depot at Tunja, as it was become useless, and might spoil by remaining too long in the warehouses, the activity of the contraband having completely kept them out of the market.

The duties upon brandy, formerly an object of monopoly, the manufacture of which has now been declared free, have not produced government the advantages it expected ; they have, however, introduced among the inhabitants a fatal passion for spirituous liquors, from the too great facility thus afforded of gratifying it.

The minister of finance imagines he has discovered the cause of the decrease in this branch of the revenue, in the introduction of foreign brandies, the prohibition of them is therefore proposed, and will no doubt be decreed by congress. Fraud alone has injured the revenue arising from licences : every one enjoys the benefit of the law, by manufacturing a less quantity than was intended. It is so very difficult to extend the excise visits into the woods, and among the mountains, that every one distils brandy, and scarcely any body pays the duties.

The post office revenue, is likewise only sufficient to clear the expenses of the establishment ; commerce being inconsiderable, no very active correspondence is kept up. The system established by the Spaniards, from the extremity of Califor-

nia as far Buenos Ayres, is precisely followed in Colombia; every week, a courier sets off for one of the three grand divisions of the republic.

The stamp duty has been rather more productive, on account of the necessity of employing stamps in all petitions. Claims of all kinds being numerous, and fraud impossible, the government has drawn considerable sums from this branch of revenue.

The alcavala is not very productive. The laws upon direct taxation, being ill drawn up, and being neither preceded nor accompanied by a census, and an exact description of property, cannot be carried into execution, and are evaded every instant.

Thus, the new government burthened with a debt of more than forty millions, contracted with the English, and deprived of the greater part of its revenues, is obliged, in order to fill the treasury, to have recourse to forced loans, patriotic gifts, and all those revolutionary measures which, palliating the evil for a time, without curing it, do but increase its virulence.

However, what with the money drawn from the rich, and the property in kind furnished by the lower classes of the community, the government has been enabled to conclude a rather dangerous war waged against it by Morales, and to afford the army of the south pecuniary assistance sufficient to enable it to enter Peru,

where it has found pay, clothing and provisions, which, had it failed to receive in its own country, might have occasioned another convulsion.

These circumstances shew that the members of the government are neither wanting in boldness nor ability. The war minister, especially, is not the least occupied, nor the least embarrassed; it is true he surmounts obstacles, by permitting the soldiers to furnish themselves with the needful at the expence of those it is their duty to defend; besides an army which has nothing like organization, but rather resembles a tribe of Bedouin Arabs than a regular body of troops, is much less expensive than those of Europe.

The soldiers they call grenadiers, dragoons, and hussars, have no uniform like ours; they seldom can boast more than one coat, a shirt and a pair of blue pantaloons; they have neither boots nor shoes; a custom which has the advantage of habituating the soldiers to march over the most rugged roads without inconvenience, and which gives them a terrible superiority over Europeans, whose feet easily wounded when no longer defended by shoes, prevent them from keeping up with the army.

The infantry are armed with guns, the horsemen with lances; and a few, with guns and sabres.

The republic can command fifty thousand stand of arms, all in the most wretched state, of English manufacture, and of the worst quality.

The rations are fixed by law at one pound of meat, one pound of bread, and four ounces of rice per man ; it is very seldom, however, composed of aught but bananas.

The monthly pay of the troops, a third of which is retained by government, has been fixed as follows :

	Piastres.
General in Chief.....	500
General of Division	400
General of Brigade.....	300
Colonel	200
Lieutenant-Colonel.....	150
Chief-of-Battalion	100
Captain	60
Lieutenant	40
Sub-Lieutenant	30
Surgeon	50
Chaplain	40
1st Serjeant	18
2d Serjeant	15
1st Corporal	12
2d Corporal.....	11
Drummer.....	11
Soldier	10

In 1821, there were 22,975 men under arms : subsequently, this number has increased to 32,466 men : 25,750 infantry, 4,296 cavalry, and

2,520 artillery; among the latter are included 400 workmen*.

Each department has a commandant-general, whose staff is composed of a general officer, two adjutants, and two secretaries; the commandants of the provinces and places included in the departments are likewise members of it.

The infantry is divided into battalions: there are twenty-five of the line, and five of light troops: all are composed of eight companies. Each battalion of the line contains one company of chasseurs, one of grenadiers, and six of fusiliers. Each company consists of one hundred soldiers and four officers.

The cavalry includes twenty-four squadrons; the six squadrons which form the president's guard compose a brigade.

Each squadron has three companies for the ancient, and two for the modern tactics: the first have fifty soldiers and three officers; the second, eighty soldiers and four officers.

Of the four squadrons, eighteen belong to the line, under the appellation of dragoons, lancers, and six of light hussars.

The artillery, although upon a more regular footing than the other branches of the service, is in a state bordering upon disorganization; they, however, wear cloth uniforms similar to those of Europe. They are chiefly in garrison in maritime towns.

* Memoria del Ministro de la Guerra.

As to light artillery, it has not been yet established. What is called the engineer corps, is represented by two or three officers.

The president's guard consists of two battalions of infantry, and six squadrons of cavalry. This is a corps, in which are incorporated the soldiers who have most distinguished themselves in the army. During the last war, it was increased by two battalions and one squadron.

What is called the militia, is but a monthly muster of a few wretched Indians, who are arrested on a Sunday, as they leave mass, to be exercised in an art to which they have the utmost repugnance. The town militias are more regularly exercised, and may be considered upon the same footing, as the troops of the line, with this difference, that, being mostly composed of discontented citizens, they are the less to be feared.

The Spaniards kept the fortifications in such excellent order, that, had they been better defended by the Independents, their ramparts would have made them still impregnable; but every thing was wanting, projectiles, men, and an acquaintance with the art of fortification; so that with the Spaniards to attack and take them, was the same thing. It is in these places only that a park of artillery, magazines tolerably well provided, and barracks are to be found; everywhere else, the soldier finds a lodging where he can.

Near Bogota and Quito, the government has two powder-mills; these are, however, inadequate

to its demands; the English supply the deficiency.

The naval force of Colombia is composed of nineteen ships of war*, viz. six corvettes, seven brigs, and six galliots. It is clear, that these cannot be of much service in defending a line of coast a thousand leagues in extent: they, however, rendered important services in the war with Morales, by blockading Maracaïbo. The government is not insensible to its want of a maritime force, and for the purpose of rendering it respectable, has demanded a sum of 4,770,845 piastres, 2 reals; but where is such a sum to be found?

If numbers of English have entered the armies of Colombia, many Frenchmen likewise serve on board their fleet; they have even insured most of its successes, being ably seconded by the mulatto Padilla, the commander-in-chief.

It is in favour of all these foreigners that a law has been introduced, which grants them, at the expiration of two years' residence in the country, the rights of citizenship; and, at the end of six months only, the same privileges to those who marry there, or who purchase land to the value of six thousand piastres.

The power of England in America is without a rival; no fleets but hers are to be seen; her merchandizes are bought almost exclusively; her

* Memoria del Señor Castillo.

commercial agents, clerks, and brokers, are every where to be met with, and her soldiers have contributed in Colombia, to the success of the cause of independence.

This connexion with England is not of recent formation, it may be dated almost from the time of the establishment of the Spanish colonies ; for, in proportion as the mother country added to the number of its prohibitive laws, the audacity of the English smugglers increased *. The Americans, therefore, have constantly preserved their relations with England ; Spain herself has rendered them more active at different periods, especially in 1796, by laws which openly authorized them. When the revolution burst forth, the ravages committed by English admirals and privateers, and the attack upon Carthagena by Vernon, in 1740, were therefore less thought of than the assistance which might be expected from that country.

Every kind of succour was afforded, and upon credit ; arms, soldiers, ships, all arrived in America. Dear and expensive favours ! Momentary circumstances imparted a degree of value to them ; it was forgotten, that India had been subjected by receiving similar ones, and that Buenos Ayres, in 1806, had seen the British standard floating upon its ramparts.

The antipathies of religion and nationality

* See Ulloa.

were surmounted *. Gratitude exercised its sway over the people, and they received the heretics like brothers. As soon as these were in the country, they placed their counters every where, laid them out with the greatest art, and dispersed their goods, fashions, dresses, in every direction, in order that they might introduce themselves into the country without exciting attention. Their uniform was adopted in the army, with the exception of the sanguinary colour of their coats, to which that of the French uniform was preferred; Colombia had English newspapers to direct its political opinions, and British ships to protect its commerce.

The Colombians had met with a very generous reception at Jamaica; they there imbibed the English manners, and witnessing the opulence of that island, easily imagined what the English colossus must be.

The first sentiment of the patriotic travellers was admiration; the second, fear.

The English perceived it; they promised the Colombians, alarmed at the last revolution in Spain, to protect them, and to lend them their support and assistance. By way of obtaining the

* Besides, the English and the Americans of the United States, who every where display so inveterate an animosity against the ceremonies of the Catholic worship, assist at their celebration in Colombia with a punctuality and a devotion equal to that of the most zealous Catholics.

guarantee, the latter considered themselves too fortunate in abandoning to their benefactors all the revenues of the state, so that salt-mines, emeralds, pearls, steam-boats, and loans, were mutually interchanged by both parties.

These were not the kind of relations which the nation was desirous of establishing with Europe; all its wishes were with France: first, because it was under no pecuniary engagements with her, and, secondly, because it was much more intimately connected with her by language, literature, manners, customs, and especially, by religion.

The name most often pronounced by Spanish Americans is that of Rome. The clergy seems determined not to separate itself from the Romish church; but, should the papal indecision be still further prolonged, it may create an impatience amongst the priests, who have, for a long time, been expecting the bulls of nomination. (*Bulles d'institution.*)

The United States expected, from their proximity to the Colombian republic, to have held the first rank among the powers friendly to this new state; they have been strangely deceived; the English have made them range themselves after the new independent states, so that they find themselves nearly in the same degree of consideration as Peru, Chili, and Buenos Ayres.

The empires of Mexico and Brazil at one

time inspired jealousies and fear ; but the fall of the first, and the distance of the second, have dissipated every apprehension.

The actual situation of Colombia, therefore, as is every where the case after civil wars, is not very brilliant ; but, notwithstanding the disasters which have embrued with blood the cradle of this republic, the public worship is still surrounded with pomp and magnificence ; its ministers, thanks to the piety of the faithful *, are well provided for, and are enabled to alleviate the afflictions of the poor. In fact, there are few livings, the income of which is below a thousand piastres, while a great number are worth more than twice that sum. Many bishoprics produce from sixty to eighty thousand piastres annually.

The clergy then, in general, are rich and powerful ; it is calculated that the tithes of the seven bishoprics produce eight hundred thousand piastres yearly †, and that church property forms four-sixths of that of the republic.

Although secretly attached to the Spaniards, the ecclesiastics are never seen at the head of popular movements ; aware of their true interests, they live far from the troubles which might compromise the existence of the body to which they belong.

* See Note IX.

† Pombo, 1811.