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***THE HISTORY
OF THE REIGN
OF FERDINAND
AND ISABELLA
THE CATHOLIC
(THE COMPLETE
THREE-VOLUME
EDITION)***

William Hickling Prescott

The History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella the Catholic (The Complete Three-Volume Edition)

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PREFACE

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English writers have done more for the illustration of Spanish history, than for that of any other except their own. To say nothing of the recent general compendium, executed for the "Cabinet Cyclopaedia," a work of singular acuteness and information, we have particular narratives of the several reigns, in an unbroken series, from the emperor Charles the Fifth (the First of Spain) to Charles the Third, at the close of the last century, by authors whose names are a sufficient guaranty for the excellence of their productions. It is singular, that, with this attention to the modern history of the Peninsula, there should be no particular account of the period which may be considered as the proper basis of it—the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella.

In this reign, the several States, into which the country had been broken up for ages, were brought under a common rule; the kingdom of Naples was conquered; America discovered and colonized; the ancient empire of the Spanish Arabs subverted; the dread tribunal of the Modern Inquisition established; the Jews, who contributed so sensibly to the wealth and civilization of the country, were banished; and, in fine, such changes were introduced into the interior administration of the monarchy, as have left a permanent impression on the character and condition of the nation.

The actors in these events were every way suited to their importance. Besides the reigning sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabella, the latter certainly one of the most interesting personages in history, we have, in political affairs, that consummate statesman, Cardinal Ximenes, in military, the "Great Captain," Gonsalvo de Cordova, and in maritime, the most successful navigator of any age, Christopher Columbus; whose entire biographies fall within the limits of this period. Even such portions of it as have been incidentally touched by English writers, as the Italian wars, for example, have been drawn so exclusively from French and Italian sources, that they may be said to be untrodden ground for the historian of Spain. [1]

It must be admitted, however, that an account of this reign could not have been undertaken at any preceding period, with anything like the advantages at present afforded; owing to the light which recent researches of Spanish scholars, in the greater freedom of inquiry now enjoyed, have shed on some of its most interesting and least familiar features. The most important of the works to which I allude are, the History of the Inquisition, from official documents, by its secretary, Llorente; the analysis of the political institutions of the kingdom, by such writers as Marina, Sempere, and Capmany; the literal version, now made for the first time, of the Spanish-Arab chronicles, by Conde; the collection of original and unpublished documents, illustrating the history of Columbus and the early Castilian navigators, by Navarrete; and, lastly, the copious illustrations of Isabella's reign, by Clemencin, the

late lamented secretary of the Royal Academy of History, forming the sixth volume of its valuable Memoirs.

It was the knowledge of these facilities for doing justice to this subject, as well as its intrinsic merits, which led me, ten years since, to select it; and surely no subject could be found more suitable for the pen of an American, than a history of that reign, under the auspices of which the existence of his own favored quarter of the globe was first revealed. As I was conscious that the value of the history must depend mainly on that of its materials, I have spared neither pains nor expense, from the first, in collecting the most authentic. In accomplishing this, I must acknowledge the services of my friends, Mr. Alexander H. Everett, then minister plenipotentiary from the United States to the court of Madrid, Mr. Arthur Middleton, secretary of the American legation, and, above all, Mr. O. Rich, now American consul for the Balearic Islands, a gentleman, whose extensive bibliographical knowledge, and unwearied researches, during a long residence in the Peninsula, have been liberally employed for the benefit both of his own country and of England. With such assistance, I flatter myself that I have been enabled to secure whatever can materially conduce to the illustration of the period in question, whether in the form of chronicle, memoir, private correspondence, legal codes, or official documents. Among these are various contemporary manuscripts, covering the whole ground of the narrative, none of which have been printed, and some of them but little known to Spanish scholars. In obtaining copies of these from the public libraries, I must add, that I have found facilities under the present liberal government,

which were denied me under the preceding. In addition to these sources of information, I have availed myself, in the part of the work occupied with literary criticism and history, of the library of my friend, Mr. George Ticknor, who during a visit to Spain, some years since, collected whatever was rare and valuable in the literature of the Peninsula. I must further acknowledge my obligations to the library of Harvard University, in Cambridge, from whose rich repository of books relating to our own country I have derived material aid. And, lastly, I must not omit to notice the favors of another kind for which I am indebted to my friend, Mr. William H. Gardiner, whose judicious counsels have been of essential benefit to me in the revision of my labors.

In the plan of the work, I have not limited myself to a strict chronological narrative of passing events, but have occasionally paused, at the expense, perhaps, of some interest in the story, to seek such collateral information as might bring these events into a clearer view. I have devoted a liberal portion of the work to the literary progress of the nation, conceiving this quite as essential a part of its history as civil and military details. I have occasionally introduced, at the close of the chapters, a critical notice of the authorities used, that the reader may form some estimate of their comparative value and credibility. Finally, I have endeavored to present him with such an account of the state of affairs, both before the accession, and at the demise of the Catholic sovereigns, as might afford him the best points of view for surveying the entire results of their reign.

How far I have succeeded in the execution of this plan, must be left to the reader's candid judgment. Many errors he may be able to detect. Sure I am, there can be no one more sensible of my deficiencies than myself; although it was not till after practical experience, that I could fully estimate the difficulty of obtaining anything like a faithful portraiture of a distant age, amidst the shifting hues and perplexing cross lights of historic testimony. From one class of errors my subject necessarily exempts me; those founded on national or party feeling. I may have been more open to another fault; that of too strong a bias in favor of my principal actors; for characters, noble and interesting in themselves, naturally beget a sort of partiality akin to friendship, in the historian's mind, accustomed to the daily contemplation of them. Whatever defects may be charged on the work, I can at least assure myself, that it is an honest record of a reign important in itself, new to the reader in an English dress, and resting on a solid basis of authentic materials, such as probably could not be met with out of Spain, nor in it without much difficulty.

I hope I shall be acquitted of egotism, although I add a few words respecting the peculiar embarrassments I have encountered, in composing these volumes. Soon after my arrangements were made, early in 1826, for obtaining the necessary materials from Madrid, I was deprived of the use of my eyes for all purposes of reading and writing, and had no prospect of again recovering it. This was a serious obstacle to the prosecution of a work requiring the perusal of a large mass of authorities, in various languages, the contents of which were to be carefully collated, and

transferred to my own pages, verified by minute reference. [2] Thus shut out from one sense, I was driven to rely exclusively on another, and to make the ear do the work of the eye. With the assistance of a reader, uninitiated, it may be added, in any modern language but his own, I worked my way through several venerable Castilian quartos, until I was satisfied of the practicability of the undertaking. I next procured the services of one more competent to aid me in pursuing my historical inquiries. The process was slow and irksome enough, doubtless, to both parties, at least till my ear was accommodated to foreign sounds, and an antiquated, oftentimes barbarous phraseology, when my progress became more sensible, and I was cheered with the prospect of success. It certainly would have been a far more serious misfortune, to be led thus blindfold through the pleasant paths of literature; but my track stretched, for the most part, across dreary wastes, where no beauty lurked, to arrest the traveller's eye and charm his senses. After persevering in this course for some years, my eyes, by the blessing of Providence, recovered sufficient strength to allow me to use them, with tolerable freedom, in the prosecution of my labors, and in the revision of all previously written. I hope I shall not be misunderstood, as stating these circumstances to deprecate the severity of criticism, since I am inclined to think the greater circumspection I have been compelled to use has left me, on the whole, less exposed to inaccuracies, than I should have been in the ordinary mode of composition. But, as I reflect on the many sober hours I have passed in wading through black letter tomes, and through manuscripts whose

doubtful orthography and defiance of all punctuation were so many stumbling-blocks to my amanuensis, it calls up a scene of whimsical distresses, not usually encountered, on which the good-natured reader may, perhaps, allow I have some right, now that I have got the better of them, to dwell with satisfaction.

I will only remark, in conclusion of this too prolix discussion about myself, that while making my tortoise-like progress, I saw what I had fondly looked upon as my own ground, (having indeed lain unmolested by any other invader for so many ages,) suddenly entered, and in part occupied, by one of my countrymen. I allude to Mr. Irving's "History of Columbus," and "Chronicle of Granada;" the subjects of which, although covering but a small part of my whole plan, form certainly two of its most brilliant portions. Now, alas! if not devoid of interest, they are, at least, stripped of the charm of novelty. For what eye has not been attracted to the spot on which the light of that writer's genius has fallen?

I cannot quit the subject which has so long occupied me, without one glance at the present unhappy condition of Spain; who, shorn of her ancient splendor, humbled by the loss of empire abroad, and credit at home, is abandoned to all the evils of anarchy. Yet, deplorable as this condition is, it is not so bad as the lethargy in which she has been sunk for ages. Better be hurried forward for a season on the wings of the tempest, than stagnate in a deathlike calm, fatal alike to intellectual and moral progress. The crisis of a revolution, when old things are passing away, and new ones are not yet established, is, indeed, fearful. Even the immediate

consequences of its achievement are scarcely less so to a people who have yet to learn by experiment the precise form of institutions best suited to their wants, and to accommodate their character to these institutions. Such results must come with time, however, if the nation be but true to itself. And that they will come, sooner or later, to the Spaniards, surely no one can distrust who is at all conversant with their earlier history, and has witnessed the examples it affords of heroic virtue, devoted patriotism, and generous love of freedom;

"Chè l'antico valore——non è ancor morto."

Clouds and darkness have, indeed, settled thick around the throne of the youthful Isabella; but not a deeper darkness than that which covered the land in the first years of her illustrious namesake; and we may humbly trust, that the same Providence, which guided her reign to so prosperous a termination, may carry the nation safe through its present perils, and secure to it the greatest of earthly blessings, civil and religious liberty.

November, 1837.

FOOTNOTES

[1] The only histories of this reign by continental writers, with which I am acquainted, are the "Histoire des Rois Catholiques Ferdinand et Isabelle, par l'Abbé Mignot, Paris, 1766," and the "Geschichte der Regierung Ferdinand des Katholischen, von Rupert Becker, Prag und Leipzig, 1790." Their authors have employed the most accessible materials only in the compilation; and, indeed, they lay claim to no great research, which would seem to be precluded by the extent of their works, in neither instance exceeding two volumes duodecimo. They have the merit of exhibiting, in a simple, perspicuous form, those events, which, lying on the surface, may be found more or less expanded in most general histories.

[2] "To compile a history from various authors, when they can only be consulted by other eyes, is not easy, nor possible, but with more skilful and attentive help than can be commonly obtained." [Johnson's *Life of Milton*.] This remark of the great critic, which first engaged my attention in the midst of my embarrassments, although discouraging at first, in the end stimulated the desire to overcome them.

PREFACE

TO THE THIRD ENGLISH EDITION.

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Since the publication of the First Edition of this work, it has undergone a careful revision; and this, aided by the communications of several intelligent friends, who have taken an interest in its success, has enabled me to correct several verbal inaccuracies, and a few typographical errors, which had been previously overlooked. While the Second Edition was passing through the press, I received, also, copies of two valuable Spanish works, having relation to the reign of the Catholic sovereigns, but which, as they appeared during the recent troubles of the Peninsula, had not before come to my knowledge. For these I am indebted to the politeness of Don Angel Calderon de la Barca, late Spanish Minister at Washington; a gentleman, whose frank and liberal manners, personal accomplishments, and independent conduct in public life, have secured for him deservedly high consideration in the United States, as well as in his own country.

I must still further acknowledge my obligation to Don Pascual de Gayangos, the learned author of the "Mahomedan Dynasties in Spain," recently published in London—a work, which, from its thorough investigation of original sources, and fine spirit of criticism, must supply, what has been so long felt as an important desideratum with the student—the means of forming a perfect

acquaintance with the Arabian portion of the Peninsular annals. There fell into the hands of this gentleman, on the breaking up of the convents of Saragossa in 1835, a rich collection of original documents, comprehending, among other things, the autograph correspondence of Ferdinand and Isabella, and of the principal persons of their court. It formed, probably, part of the library of Geronimo Zurita—historiographer of Aragon, under Philip the Second—who, by virtue of his office, was intrusted with whatever documents could illustrate the history of the country. This rare collection was left at his death to a monastery in his native city. Although Zurita is one of the principal authorities for the present work, there are many details of interest in this correspondence, which have passed unnoticed by him, although forming the basis of his conclusions; and I have gladly availed myself of the liberality and great kindness of Señor de Gayangos, who has placed these manuscripts at my disposal, transcribing such as I have selected, for the corroboration and further illustration of my work. The difficulties attending this labor of love will be better appreciated, when it is understood, that the original writing is in an antiquated character, which *few* Spanish scholars of the present day could comprehend, and often in cipher, which requires much patience and ingenuity to explain. With these various emendations, it is hoped that the present Edition may be found more deserving of that favor from the public, which has been so courteously accorded to the preceding.

March, 1841.

INTRODUCTION.

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SECTION I.

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For several hundred years after the great Saracen invasion in the beginning of the eighth century, Spain was broken up into a number of small but independent states, divided in their interests, and often in deadly hostility with one another. It was inhabited by races, the most dissimilar in their origin, religion, and government, the least important of which has exerted a sensible influence on the character and institutions of its present inhabitants. At the close of the fifteenth century, these various races were blended into one great nation, under one common rule. Its territorial limits were widely extended by discovery and conquest. Its domestic institutions, and even its literature, were moulded

into the form, which, to a considerable extent, they have maintained to the present day. It is the object of the present narrative to exhibit the period in which these momentous results were effected—the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella.

By the middle of the fifteenth century, the number of states, into which the country had been divided, was reduced to four; Castile, Aragon, Navarre, and the Moorish kingdom of Granada. The last, comprised within nearly the same limits as the modern province of that name, was all that remained to the Moslems of their once vast possessions in the Peninsula. Its concentrated population gave it a degree of strength altogether disproportioned to the extent of its territory; and the profuse magnificence of its court, which rivalled that of the ancient caliphs, was supported by the labors of a sober, industrious people, under whom agriculture and several of the mechanic arts had reached a degree of excellence, probably unequalled in any other part of Europe during the Middle Ages.

The little kingdom of Navarre, embosomed within the Pyrenees, had often attracted the avarice of neighboring and more powerful states. But, since their selfish schemes operated as a mutual check upon each other, Navarre still continued to maintain her independence, when all the smaller states in the Peninsula had been absorbed in the gradually increasing dominion of Castile and Aragon.

This latter kingdom comprehended the province of that name, together with Catalonia and Valencia. Under its auspicious climate and free political institutions, its inhabitants displayed an uncommon share of intellectual and moral energy. Its long line of coast opened the way to

an extensive and flourishing commerce; and its enterprising navy indemnified the nation for the scantiness of its territory at home, by the important foreign conquests of Sardinia, Sicily, Naples, and the Balearic Isles.

The remaining provinces of Leon, Biscay, the Asturias, Galicia, Old and New Castile, Estremadura, Murcia, and Andalusia, fell to the crown of Castile, which, thus extending its sway over an unbroken line of country from the Bay of Biscay to the Mediterranean, seemed by the magnitude, of its territory, as well as by its antiquity, (for it was there that the old Gothic monarchy may be said to have first revived after the great Saracen invasion,) to be entitled to a pre-eminence over the other states of the Peninsula. This claim, indeed, appears to have been recognized at an early period of her history. Aragon did homage to Castile for her territory on the western bank of the Ebro, until the twelfth century, as did Navarre, Portugal, and, at a later period, the Moorish kingdom of Granada. [1] And, when at length the various states of Spain were consolidated into one monarchy, the capital of Castile became the capital of the new empire, and her language the language of the court and of literature.

It will facilitate our inquiry into the circumstances which immediately led to these results, if we briefly glance at the prominent features in the early history and constitution of the two principal Christian states, Castile and Aragon, previous to the fifteenth century. [2]

The Visigoths who overran the Peninsula, in the fifth century, brought with them the same liberal principles of government which distinguished their Teutonic brethren. Their crown was declared elective by a formal legislative

act. [3] Laws were enacted in the great national councils, composed of prelates and nobility, and not unfrequently ratified in an assembly of the people. Their code of jurisprudence, although abounding in frivolous detail, contained many admirable provisions for the security of justice; and, in the degree of civil liberty which it accorded to the Roman inhabitants of the country, far transcended those of most of the other barbarians of the north. [4] In short, their simple polity exhibited the germ of some of those institutions, which, with other nations, and under happier auspices, have formed the basis of a well-regulated constitutional liberty. [5]

But, while in other countries the principles of a free government were slowly and gradually unfolded, their development was much accelerated in Spain by an event, which, at the time, seemed to threaten their total extinction—the great Saracen invasion at the beginning of the eighth century. The religious, as well as the political institutions of the Arabs, were too dissimilar to those of the conquered nation, to allow the former to exercise any very sensible influence over the latter in these particulars. In the Spirit of toleration, which distinguished the early followers of Mahomet, they conceded to such of the Goths, as were willing to continue among them after the conquest, the free enjoyment of their religious, as well as of many of the civil privileges which they possessed under the ancient monarchy. [6] Under this liberal dispensation it cannot be doubted, that many preferred remaining in the pleasant regions of their ancestors, to quitting them for a life of poverty and toil. These, however, appear to have been

chiefly of the lower order; [7] and the men of higher rank, or of more generous sentiments, who refused to accept a nominal and precarious independence at the hands of their oppressors, escaped from the overwhelming inundation into the neighboring countries of France, Italy, and Britain, or retreated behind those natural fortresses of the north, the Asturian hills and the Pyrenees, whither the victorious Saracen disdained to pursue them. [8]

Here the broken remnant of the nation endeavored to revive the forms, at least, of the ancient government. But it may well be conceived, how imperfect these must have been under a calamity, which, breaking up all the artificial distinctions of society, seemed to resolve it at once into its primitive equality. The monarch, once master of the whole Peninsula, now beheld his empire contracted to a few barren, inhospitable rocks. The noble, instead of the broad lands and thronged halls of his ancestors, saw himself at best but the chief of some wandering horde, seeking a doubtful subsistence, like himself, by rapine. The peasantry, indeed, may be said to have gained by the exchange; and, in a situation, in which all factitious distinctions were of less worth than individual prowess and efficiency, they rose in political consequence. Even slavery, a sore evil among the Visigoths, as indeed among all the barbarians of German origin, though not effaced, lost many of its most revolting features, under the more generous legislation of later times. [9]

A sensible and salutary influence, at the same time, was exerted on the moral energies of the nation, which had been corrupted in the long enjoyment of uninterrupted prosperity.

Indeed, so relaxed were the morals of the court, as well as of the clergy, and so enervated had all classes become, in the general diffusion of luxury, that some authors have not scrupled to refer to these causes principally the perdition of the Gothic monarchy. An entire reformation in these habits was necessarily effected in a situation, where a scanty subsistence could only be earned by a life of extreme temperance and toil, and where it was often to be sought, sword in hand, from an enemy far superior in numbers. Whatever may have been the vices of the Spaniards, they cannot have been those of effeminate sloth. Thus a sober, hardy, and independent race was gradually formed, prepared to assert their ancient inheritance, and to lay the foundations of far more liberal and equitable forms of government, than were known to their ancestors.

At first, their progress was slow and almost imperceptible. The Saracens, indeed, reposing under the sunny skies of Andalusia, so congenial with their own, seemed willing to relinquish the sterile regions of the north to an enemy whom they despised. But, when the Spaniards, quitting the shelter of their mountains, descended into the open plains of Leon and Castile, they found themselves exposed to the predatory incursions of the Arab cavalry, who, sweeping over the face of the country, carried off in a single foray the hard-earned produce of a summer's toil. It was not until they had reached some natural boundary, as the river Douro, or the chain of the Guadarrama, that they were enabled, by constructing a line of fortifications along these primitive bulwarks, to secure their conquests, and

oppose an effectual resistance to the destructive inroads of their enemies.

Their own dissensions were another cause of their tardy progress. The numerous petty states, which rose from the ruins of the ancient monarchy, seemed to regard each other with even a fiercer hatred than that with which they viewed the enemies of their faith; a circumstance that more than once brought the nation to the verge of ruin. More Christian blood was wasted in these national feuds, than in all their encounters with the infidel. The soldiers of Fernan Gonçalez, a chieftain of the tenth century, complained that their master made them lead the life of very devils, keeping them in the harness day and night, in wars, not against the Saracens, but one another. [10]

These circumstances so far palsied the arm of the Christians, that a century and a half elapsed after the invasion, before they had penetrated to the Douro, [11] and nearly thrice that period before they had advanced the line of conquest to the Tagus, [12] notwithstanding this portion of the country had been comparatively deserted by the Mahometans. But it was easy to foresee that a people, living, as they did, under circumstances so well adapted to the development of both physical and moral energy, must ultimately prevail over a nation oppressed by despotism, and the effeminate indulgence, to which it was naturally disposed by a sensual religion and a voluptuous climate. In truth, the early Spaniard was urged by every motive that can give efficacy to human purpose. Pent up in his barren mountains, he beheld the pleasant valleys and fruitful vineyards of his ancestors delivered over to the spoiler, the

holy places polluted by his abominable rites, and the crescent glittering on the domes, which were once consecrated by the venerated symbol of his faith. His cause became the cause of Heaven. The church published her bulls of crusade, offering liberal indulgences to those who served, and Paradise to those who fell in battle, against the infidel. The ancient Castilian was remarkable for his independent resistance of papal encroachment; but the peculiarity of his situation subjected him in an uncommon degree to ecclesiastical influence at home. Priests mingled in the council and the camp, and, arrayed in their sacerdotal robes, not unfrequently led the armies to battle. [13] They interpreted the will of Heaven as mysteriously revealed in dreams and visions. Miracles were a familiar occurrence. The violated tombs of the saints sent forth thunders and lightnings to consume the invaders; and, when the Christians fainted in the fight, the apparition of their patron, St. James, mounted on a milk-white steed, and bearing aloft the banner of the cross, was seen hovering in the air, to rally their broken squadrons, and lead them on to victory. [14] Thus the Spaniard looked upon himself as in a peculiar manner the care of Providence. For him the laws of nature were suspended. He was a soldier of the Cross, fighting not only for his country, but for Christendom. Indeed, volunteers from the remotest parts of Christendom eagerly thronged to serve under his banner; and the cause of religion was debated with the same ardor in Spain, as on the plains of Palestine. [15] Hence the national character became exalted by a religious fervor, which in later days, alas! settled into a fierce fanaticism. Hence that solicitude for the purity of the

faith, the peculiar boast of the Spaniards, and that deep tinge of superstition, for which they have ever been distinguished above the other nations of Europe.

The long wars with the Mahometans served to keep alive in their bosoms the ardent glow of patriotism; and this was still further heightened by the body of traditional minstrelsy, which commemorated in these wars the heroic deeds of their ancestors. The influence of such popular compositions on a simple people is undeniable. A sagacious critic ventures to pronounce the poems of Homer the principal bond which united the Grecian states. [16] Such an opinion may be deemed somewhat extravagant. It cannot be doubted, however, that a poem like that of the "Cid," which appeared as early as the twelfth century, [17] by calling up the most inspiring national recollections in connection with their favorite hero, must have operated powerfully on the moral sensibilities of the people.

It is pleasing to observe, in the cordial spirit of these early effusions, little of the ferocious bigotry which sullied the character of the nation in after ages. [18] The Mahometans of this period far excelled their enemies in general refinement, and had carried some branches of intellectual culture to a height scarcely surpassed by Europeans in later times. The Christians, therefore, notwithstanding their political aversion to the Saracens, conceded to them a degree of respect, which subsided into feelings of a very different complexion, as they themselves rose in the scale of civilization. This sentiment of respect tempered the ferocity of a warfare, which, although sufficiently disastrous in its details, affords examples of a

generous courtesy, that would do honor to the politest ages of Europe. [19] The Spanish Arabs were accomplished in all knightly exercises, and their natural fondness for magnificence, which shed a lustre over the rugged features of chivalry, easily communicated itself to the Christian cavaliers. In the intervals of peace, these latter frequented the courts of the Moorish princes, and mingled with their adversaries in the comparatively peaceful pleasures of the tourney, as in war they vied with them in feats of Quixotic gallantry. [20]

The nature of this warfare between two nations, inhabitants of the same country, yet so dissimilar in their religious and social institutions as to be almost the natural enemies of each other, was extremely favorable to the exhibition of the characteristic virtues of chivalry. The contiguity of the hostile parties afforded abundant opportunities for personal rencounter and bold romantic enterprise. Each nation had its regular military associations, who swore to devote their lives to the service of God and their country, in perpetual war against the *infidel* [21] The Spanish knight became the true hero of romance, wandering over his own land, and even into the remotest climes, in quest of adventures; and, as late as the fifteenth century, we find him in the courts of England and Burgundy, doing battle in honor of his mistress, and challenging general admiration by his uncommon personal intrepidity. [22] This romantic spirit lingered in Castile, long after the age of chivalry had become extinct in other parts of Europe, continuing to nourish itself on those illusions of fancy, which were at length dispelled by the caustic satire of Cervantes.

Thus patriotism, religious loyalty, and a proud sense of independence, founded on the consciousness of owing their possessions to their personal valor, became characteristic traits of the Castilians previously to the sixteenth century, when the oppressive policy and fanaticism of the Austrian dynasty contrived to throw into the shade these generous virtues. Glimpses of them, however, might long be discerned in the haughty bearing of the Castilian noble, and in that erect, high-minded peasantry, whom oppression has not yet been able wholly to subdue. [23]

To the extraordinary position, in which the nation was placed, may also be referred the liberal forms of its political institutions, as well as a more early development of them than took place in other countries of Europe. From the exposure of the Castilian towns to the predatory incursions of the Arabs, it became necessary, not only that they should be strongly fortified, but that every citizen should be trained to bear arms in their defence. An immense increase of consequence was given to the burgesses, who thus constituted the most effective part of the national militia. To this circumstance, as well as to the policy of inviting the settlement of frontier places by the grant of extraordinary privileges to the inhabitants, is to be imputed the early date, as well as liberal character, of the charters of community in Castile and Leon. [24] These, although varying a good deal in their details, generally conceded to the citizens the right of electing their own magistrates for the regulation of municipal affairs. Judges were appointed by this body for the administration of civil and criminal law, subject to an appeal to the royal tribunal. No person could

be affected in life or property, except by a decision of this municipal court; and no cause while pending before it could be evoked thence into the superior tribunal. In order to secure the barriers of justice more effectually against the violence of power, so often superior to law in an imperfect state of society, it was provided in many of the charters that no nobles should be permitted to acquire real property within the limits of the community; that no fortress or palace should be erected by them there; that such as might reside within its territory, should be subject to its jurisdiction; and that any violence, offered by them to its inhabitants, might be forcibly resisted with impunity. Ample and inalienable funds were provided for the maintenance of the municipal functionaries, and for other public expenses. A large extent of circumjacent country, embracing frequently many towns and villages, was annexed to each city with the right of jurisdiction over it. All arbitrary tallages were commuted for a certain fixed and moderate rent. An officer was appointed by the crown to reside within each community, whose province it was to superintend the collection of this tribute, to maintain public order, and to be associated with the magistrates of each city in the command of the forces it was bound to contribute towards the national defence. Thus while the inhabitants of the great towns in other parts of Europe were languishing in feudal servitude, the members of the Castilian corporations, living under the protection of their own laws and magistrates in time of peace, and commanded by their own officers in war, were in full enjoyment of all the essential rights and privileges of freemen. [25]

It is true, that they were often convulsed by intestine feuds; that the laws were often loosely administered by incompetent judges; and that the exercise of so many important prerogatives of independent states inspired them with feelings of independence, which led to mutual rivalry, and sometimes to open collision. But with all this, long after similar immunities in the free cities of other countries, as Italy for example, [26] had been sacrificed to the violence of faction or the lust of power, those of the Castilian cities not only remained unimpaired, but seemed to acquire additional stability with age. This circumstance is chiefly imputable to the constancy of the national legislature, which, until the voice of liberty was stifled by a military despotism, was ever ready to interpose its protecting arm in defence of constitutional rights.

The earliest instance on record of popular representation in Castile occurred at Burgos, in 1169; [27] nearly a century antecedent to the celebrated Leicester parliament. Each city had but one vote, whatever might be the number of its representatives. A much greater irregularity, in regard to the number of cities required to send deputies to cortes on different occasions, prevailed in Castile, than ever existed in England; [28] though, previously to the fifteenth century, this does not seem to have proceeded from any design of infringing on the liberties of the people. The nomination of these was originally vested in the householders at large, but was afterwards confined to the municipalities; a most mischievous alteration, which subjected their election eventually to the corrupt influence of the crown. [29] They assembled in the same chamber with the higher orders of

the nobility and clergy; but, on questions of moment, retired to deliberate by themselves. [30] After the transaction of other business, their own petitions were presented to the sovereign, and his assent gave them the validity of laws. The Castilian commons, by neglecting to make their money grants depend on correspondent concessions from the crown, relinquished that powerful check on its operations so beneficially exerted in the British parliament, but in vain contended for even there, till a much later period than that now under consideration. Whatever may have been the right of the nobility and clergy to attend in cortes, their sanction was not deemed essential to the validity of legislative acts; [31] for their presence was not even required in many assemblies of the nation which occurred in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. [32] The extraordinary power thus committed to the commons was, on the whole, unfavorable to their liberties. It deprived them of the sympathy and co-operation of the great orders of the state, whose authority alone could have enabled them to withstand the encroachments of arbitrary power, and who, in fact, did eventually desert them in their utmost need. [33]

But, notwithstanding these defects, the popular branch of the Castilian cortes, very soon after its admission into that body, assumed functions and exercised a degree of power on the whole superior to that enjoyed by it in other European legislatures. It was soon recognized as a fundamental principle of the constitution, that no tax could be imposed without its consent; [34] and an express enactment to this effect was suffered to remain on the