

The higher nobility, or *ricos hombres*, were exempted from general taxation, and the occasional attempt to infringe on this privilege in seasons of great public emergency, was uniformly repelled by this jealous body.⁵¹ They could not be imprisoned for debt; nor be subjected to torture, so repeatedly sanctioned in other cases by the municipal law of Castile. They had the right of deciding their private feuds by an appeal to arms; a right of which they liberally availed themselves.⁵² They also claimed the privilege, when aggrieved, of denaturalizing themselves, or in other words, of publicly renouncing their allegiance to their sovereign, and of enlisting under the banners of his enemy.⁵³ The number of petty states, which swarmed over the Peninsula, afforded ample opportunity for the exercise of this disorganizing prerogative. The Laras are particularly noticed by Mariana, as having a "great relish for rebellion," and the Castros as being much in the habit of going over to the Moors.⁵⁴ They assumed the license of arraying

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of the country, not easy to explain on the usual principles of the feudal relation; a circumstance, which has led to much discrepancy of opinion on the subject, in political writers, as well as to some inconsistency. Sempere, who entertains no doubt of the establishment of feudal institutions in Castile, tells us, that "the nobles, after the Conquest, succeeded in obtaining an exemption from military service," — one of the most conspicuous and essential of all the feudal relations. *Histoire des Cortès*, pp. 30, 72, 249.

⁵¹ Asso y Manuel, *Instituciones*, p. 26. — Sempere, *Histoire des*

Cortès, chap. 4. — The incensed nobles quitted the cortes in disgust, and threatened to vindicate their rights by arms, on one such occasion, 1176. Mariana, *Hist. de España*, tom. i. p. 644. See also tom. ii. p. 176.

⁵² *Iidem auctores, ubi supra.* — Prieto y Sotelo, *Historia del Derecho Real de España*, (Madrid, 1738,) lib. 2, cap. 23; lib. 3, cap. 8.

⁵³ *Siete Partidas*, (ed. de la Real Acad., Madrid, 1807,) part. 4, tit. 25, ley 11. On such occasions they sent him a formal defiance by their king at arms. Mariana, *Hist. de España*, tom. i. pp. 768, 912.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, tom. i. pp. 707, 713.

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Their great wealth.

These important prerogatives were of course favorable to the accumulation of great wealth. Their estates were scattered over every part of the kingdom, and, unlike the grandees of Spain at the present day,⁵⁹ they resided on them in person, maintaining the state of petty sovereigns, and surrounded by a numerous retinue, who served the purposes of

⁵⁵ The forms of this solemnity may be found in Mariana, *Hist. de España*, tom. i. p. 907.

⁵⁶ Marina, *Ensayo*, p. 128.

⁵⁷ John I., in 1390, authorized appeals from the seigniorial tribunals to those of the crown. *Ibid.*, tom. ii. p. 179.

⁵⁸ The nature of these dignities

is explained in Salazar de Mendoza, *Monarquía*, tom. i. pp. 155, 166, 203.

⁵⁹ From the scarcity of these baronial residences, some fanciful etymologists have derived the familiar saying of "Châteaux en Espagne." See Bourgoanne, *Travels in Spain*, tom. ii. chap. 12.

a pageant in time of peace, and an efficient military force in war. The demesnes of John, lord of Biscay, confiscated by Alfonso the Eleventh to the use of the crown, in 1327, amounted to more than eighty towns and castles.⁶⁰ The "good constable" Davalos, in the time of Henry the Third, could ride through his own estates all the way from Seville to Compostella, almost the two extremities of the kingdom.⁶¹ Alvaro de Luna, the powerful favorite of John the Second, could muster twenty thousand vassals.⁶² A contemporary, who gives a catalogue of the annual rents of the principal Castilian nobility at the close of the fifteenth or beginning of the following century, computes several at fifty and sixty thousand ducats a year,⁶³ an immense income, if we take into consideration the value of money in that age. The same writer estimates their united

⁶⁰ Mariana, *Hist. de España*, tom. i. p. 910.

⁶¹ *Crónica de Don Alvaro de Luna*, (ed. de la Acad. Madrid, 1784,) App. p. 465.

⁶² Guzman, *Generaciones y Semblanzas*, (Madrid, 1775,) cap. 84. — His annual revenue is computed by Perez de Guzman, at 100,000 *loblas* of gold; a sum equivalent to 856,000 dollars at the present day.

⁶³ The former of these two sums is equivalent to \$438,875, or £91,474 sterling; and the latter to \$526,650, or £109,716, nearly. I have been guided by a dissertation of Clemencin, in the sixth volume of the *Memorias de la Real Academia de la Historia*, (Madrid, 1821, pp. 507-566,) in the reduction of sums in this History. That treatise is very elaborate and ample, and brings

under view all the different coins of Ferdinand and Isabella's time, settling their specific value with great accuracy. The calculation is attended with considerable difficulty, owing to the depreciation of the value of the precious metals, and the repeated adulteration of the *real*. In his tables, at the end, he exhibits the commercial value of the different denominations, ascertained by the quantity of wheat (as sure a standard as any), which they would buy at that day. Taking the average of values, which varied considerably in different years of Ferdinand and Isabella, it appears that the ducat, reduced to our own currency, will be equal to about eight dollars and seventy-seven cents, and the *dobla* to eight dollars and fifty-six cents.

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Their turbulent spirit.

These ambitious nobles did not consume their fortunes, or their energies in a life of effeminate luxury. From their earliest boyhood, they were accustomed to serve in the ranks against the infidel,⁶⁵ and their whole subsequent lives were occupied either with war, or with those martial exercises which reflect the image of it. Looking back with pride to their ancient Gothic descent, and to those times, when they had stood forward as the peers, the electors of their sovereign, they could ill brook the slightest indignity at his hand.⁶⁶ With these haughty feelings and martial habits, and this enormous assumption of power, it may readily be conceived that they would not suffer the anarchical provisions of the constitution, which seemed to concede an almost unlimited license of rebellion, to

⁶⁴ The ample revenues of the Spanish grandee of the present time, instead of being lavished on a band of military retainers, as of yore, are sometimes dispensed in the more peaceful hospitality of supporting an almost equally formidable host of needy relations and dependents. According to Bourgoanne (*Travels in Spain*, vol. i. chap. 4), no less than 3000 of these gentry were maintained on the estates of the duke of Arcos, who died in 1780.

⁶⁵ Mendoza records the circumstance of the head of the family of Ponce de Leon, (a descendant of the celebrated marquis of Cadiz,) carrying his son, then thirteen years old, with him into battle; "an ancient usage," he says, "in that noble house." (*Guerra de Granada*, (Valencia, 1776,) p. 318.)

The only son of Alfonso VI. was slain, fighting manfully in the ranks, at the battle of Ucles, in 1109, when only eleven years of age. Mariana, *Hist. de España*, tom. i. p. 565.

⁶⁶ The northern provinces, the theatre of this primitive independence, have always been consecrated by this very circumstance, in the eyes of a Spaniard. "The proudest lord," says Navagiero, "feels it an honor to trace his pedigree to this quarter." (*Viaggio*, fol. 44.) The same feeling has continued, and the meanest native of Biscay, or the Asturias, at the present day, claims to be noble; a pretension, which often contrasts ridiculously enough with the humble character of his occupation, and has furnished many a pleasant anecdote to travellers.



remain a dead letter. Accordingly, we find them perpetually convulsing the kingdom with their schemes of selfish aggrandizement. The petitions of the commons are filled with remonstrances on their various oppressions, and the evils resulting from their long, desolating feuds. So that, notwithstanding the liberal forms of its constitution, there was probably no country in Europe, during the Middle Ages, so sorely afflicted with the vices of intestine anarchy, as Castile. These were still further aggravated by the improvident donations of the monarch to the aristocracy, in the vain hope of conciliating their attachment, but which swelled their already overgrown power to such a height, that, by the middle of the fifteenth century, it not only overshadowed that of the throne, but threatened to subvert the liberties of the state.

Their self-confidence, however, proved eventually their ruin. They disdained a coöperation with the lower orders in defence of their privileges, and relied too unhesitatingly on their power as a body, to feel jealous of their exclusion from the national legislature, where alone they could have made an effectual stand against the usurpations of the crown. — The course of this work, will bring under review the dexterous policy, by which the crown contrived to strip the aristocracy of its substantial privileges, and prepared the way for the period, when it should retain possession only of a few barren though ostentatious dignities.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ An elaborate dissertation, by the advocate Don Alonso Carillo, on the preëminence and privileges of the Castilian grandee, is append-

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The *cavalleros* or knights.

The inferior orders of nobility, the *hidalgos*, (whose dignity, like that of the *ricos hombres*, would seem, as their name imports, to have been originally founded on wealth,) ⁶⁸ and the *cavalleros*, or knights, enjoyed many of the immunities of the higher class, especially that of exemption from taxation. ⁶⁹ Knighthood appears to have been regarded with especial favor by the law of Castile. Its ample privileges and its duties are defined with a precision, and in a spirit of romance, that might have served for the court of King Arthur. ⁷⁰ Spain was indeed the land of chivalry. The respect for the sex, which had descended from the Visigoths, ⁷¹

ed to Salazar de Mendoza's *Origen de las Dignidades Seglares de Castilla*, (Madrid, 1794.) The most prized of these, appears to be that of keeping the head covered in the presence of the sovereign; "prerogativa tan ilustre," says the writer, "que ella sola imprime el principal caracter de la Grandeza. Y considerada por sus efectos admirables, ocupa dignamente el primero lugar." (Discurso 3.) The sentimental citizen Bourgoanne, finds it necessary to apologize to his republican brethren, for noticing these "important trifles." *Travels in Spain*, vol. i. chap. 4.

⁶⁸ "Los llamaron hijosdalgo, que muestra a tanto como hijos de bien." (Siete Partidas, part. 2, tit. 21.) "Por hidalgos se entienden los hombres escogidos de buenos lugares é con algo." Asso y Manuel, *Instituciones*, pp. 33, 34.

⁶⁹ Recop. de las Leyes, lib. 6, tit. 1, leyes 2, 9; tit. 2, leyes 3, 4, 10; tit. 14, leyes 14, 19. — They were obliged to contribute to the repair of fortifications and public works, although, as the statute expresses it, "tengan privilegios

para que sean essentos de todos pechos."

⁷⁰ The knight was to array himself in light and cheerful vestments, and, in the cities and public places, his person was to be enveloped in a long and flowing mantle, in order to impose greater reverence on the people. His good steed was to be distinguished by the beauty and richness of his caparisons. He was to live abstemiously, indulging himself in none of the effeminate delights of couch or banquet. During his repast, his mind was to be refreshed with the recital, from history, of deeds of ancient heroism; and in the fight he was commanded to invoke the name of his mistress, that it might infuse new ardor into his soul, and preserve him from the commission of un-knightly actions. See *Siete Partidas*, part. 2, tit. 21, which is taken up with defining the obligations of chivalry.

⁷¹ See *Fuero Juzgo*, lib. 3, which is devoted almost exclusively to the sex. Montesquieu discerns in the jealous surveillance, which the Visigoths maintained over the honor

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was mingled with the religious enthusiasm, which had been kindled in the long wars with the infidel. The apotheosis of chivalry, in the person of their apostle and patron, St. James,⁷² contributed still further to this exaltation of sentiment, which was maintained by the various military orders, who devoted themselves, in the bold language of the age, to the service "of God and the ladies." So that the Spaniard may be said to have put in action what, in other countries, passed for the extravagancies of the minstrel. An example of this occurs in the fifteenth century, when a passage of arms was defended at Orbigo, not far from the shrine of Compostella, by a Castilian knight, named Sueño de Quenones, and his nine companions, against all comers, in the presence of John the Second and his court. Its object was to release the knight from the obligation, imposed on him by his mistress, of publicly wearing an iron collar round his neck every Thursday. The jousts continued for thirty days, and the doughty champions fought without shield or target, with weapons bearing points of Milan steel. Six hundred and twenty-seven encounters took place, and one hundred and sixty-six lances were broken, when the emprise was declared to be fairly achieved. The whole affair is narrated with becoming gravity by an eye-

of their women, so close an analogy with oriental usages, as must have greatly facilitated the conquest of the country by the Arabians. *Esprit des Loix*, liv. 14, chap. 14.

⁷² Warton's expression. See vol. i. p. 245, of the late learned edition of his *History of English Poetry*, (London, 1824.)

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The clergy.

The influence of the ecclesiastics in Spain may be traced back to the age of the Visigoths, when they controlled the affairs of the state in the great national councils of Toledo. This influence was maintained by the extraordinary position of the nation after the conquest. The holy warfare, in which it was embarked, seemed to require the coöperation of the clergy, to propitiate Heaven in its behalf, to interpret its mysterious omens, and to move all the machinery of miracles, by which the imagination is so powerfully affected in a rude and superstitious age. They even condescended, in imitation of their patron saint, to mingle in the ranks, and, with the crucifix in their hands, to lead the soldiers on to battle. Examples of these militant prelates are to be found in Spain, so late as the sixteenth century.⁷⁴

Influence of
the papal
court.

But, while the native ecclesiastics obtained such complete ascendancy over the popular mind, the Roman See could boast of less influence in Spain than in any other country in Europe. The Gothic liturgy was alone received as canonical until the

⁷³ See the "Passo Honroso" appended to the *Crónica de Alvaro de Luna*.

⁷⁴ The present narrative will introduce the reader to more than one belligerent prelate, who filled the very highest post in the Spanish, and, I may say, the Christian church, next the papacy. (See Alvaro Gomez, *De Rebus Gestis a Francisco Ximeno Cisnerio*, (Com-

pluti, 1569,) fol. 110 et seq.) The practice, indeed, was familiar in other countries, as well as Spain, at this late period. In the bloody battle of Ravenna, in 1512, two cardinal legates, one of them the future Leo X., fought on opposite sides. Paolo Giovio, *Vita Leonis X.*, apud "*Vitæ Illustrum Virorum*," (Basiliæ, 1578,) lib. 2.

eleventh century;⁷⁵ and, until the twelfth, the sovereign held the right of jurisdiction over all ecclesiastical causes, of collating to benefices, or at least of confirming or annulling the election of the chapters. The code of Alfonso the Tenth, however, which borrowed its principles of jurisprudence from the civil and canon law, completed a revolution already begun, and transferred these important prerogatives to the pope, who now succeeded in establishing a usurpation over ecclesiastical rights in Castile, similar to that which had been before effected in other parts of Christendom. Some of these abuses, as that of the nomination of foreigners to benefices, were carried to such an impudent height, as repeatedly provoked the indignant remonstrances of the cortes. The ecclesiastics, eager to indemnify themselves for what they had sacrificed to Rome, were more than ever solicitous to assert their independence of the royal jurisdiction. They particularly insisted on their immunity from taxation, and were even reluctant to divide with the laity the necessary burdens of a war, which, from its sacred character, would seem to have imperative claims on them.⁷⁶

Notwithstanding the immediate dependence thus established on the head of the church by the legis-

Corruption
of the clergy.

⁷⁵ The contest for supremacy, between the Mozarabic ritual and the Roman, is familiar to the reader, in the curious narrative extracted by Robertson from Mariana, *Hist. de España*, lib. 9, cap. 18.

⁷⁶ *Siete Partidas*, part. 1, tit. 6. — Florez, *España Sagrada*, tom. xx. p. 16. — The Jesuit Mariana

appears to grudge this appropriation of the "sacred revenues of the Church" to defray the expenses of the holy war against the Saracen. (*Hist. de España*, tom. i. p. 177.) See also the *Ensayo*, (nos. 322-364,) where Marina has analyzed, and discussed the general import of the first of the *Partidas*.

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lation of Alfonso the Tenth, the general immunities secured by it to the ecclesiastics operated as a powerful bounty on their increase; and the mendicant orders in particular, that spiritual militia of the popes, were multiplied over the country to an alarming extent. Many of their members were not only incompetent to the duties of their profession, being without the least tincture of liberal culture, but fixed a deep stain on it by the careless laxity of their morals. Open concubinage was familiarly practised by the clergy, as well as laity, of the period; and, so far from being reprobated by the law of the land, seems anciently to have been countenanced by it.⁷⁷ This moral insensibility may probably be referred to the contagious example of their Mahometan neighbours; but, from whatever source derived, the practice was indulged to such a shameless extent, that, as the nation advanced in refinement, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it became the subject of frequent legislative enactments, in which the concubines of the clergy are described as causing general scandal by their lawless effrontery and ostentatious magnificence of apparel.⁷⁸

Their rich
possessions.

Notwithstanding this prevalent licentiousness of the Spanish ecclesiastics, their influence became every day more widely extended, while this ascendancy, for which they were particularly indebted in that rude age to their superior learning and capacity,

⁷⁷ Marina, *Ensayo*, ubi supra, by Sempere, in his *Historia del Luxo*, tom. i. pp. 166 et seq.

⁷⁸ See the original acts quoted