

to pass its principal features under review, in order to obtain a correct idea of her government.

CHAPTER
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The wise administration of the regency, during a long minority, postponed the season of calamity; and, when it at length arrived, it was concealed for some time from the eyes of the vulgar by the pomp and brilliant festivities, which distinguished the court of the young monarch. His indisposition, if not incapacity for business, however, gradually became manifest; and, while he resigned himself without reserve to pleasures, which it must be confessed were not unfrequently of a refined and intellectual character, he abandoned the government of his kingdom to the control of favorites.

The most conspicuous of these was Alvaro de Luna, grand master of St. James, and constable of Castile. This remarkable person, the illegitimate descendant of a noble house in Aragon, was introduced very early as a page into the royal household, where he soon distinguished himself by his amiable manners and personal accomplishments. He could ride, fence, dance, sing, if we may credit his loyal biographer, better than any other cavalier in the court; while his proficiency in music and poetry recommended him most effectually to the favor of the monarch, who professed to be a connoisseur in both. With these showy qualities, Alvaro de Luna united others of a more dangerous complexion. His insinuating address easily conciliated confidence, and enabled him to master the motives of others, while his own were masked by consummate dissimulation. He was as fearless in

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executing his ambitious schemes, as he was cautious in devising them. He was indefatigable in his application to business, so that John, whose aversion to it we have noticed, willingly reposed on him the whole burden of government. The king, it was said, only signed, while the constable dictated and executed. He was the only channel of promotion to public office, whether secular or ecclesiastical. As his cupidity was insatiable, he perverted the great trust confided to him to the acquisition of the principal posts in the government for himself or his kindred, and at his death is said to have left a larger amount of treasure, than was possessed by the whole nobility of the kingdom. He affected a magnificence of state corresponding with his elevated rank. The most considerable grandees in Castile contended for the honor of having their sons, after the fashion of the time, educated in his family. When he rode abroad, he was accompanied by a numerous retinue of knights and nobles, which left his sovereign's court comparatively deserted; so that royalty might be said on all occasions, whether of business or pleasure, to be eclipsed by the superior splendors of its satellite.³ The history of this man may remind the English reader of that of Cardinal Wolsey, whom he somewhat resembled in character, and still more in his extraordinary fortunes.

³ Crónica de Alvaro de Luna, edición de la Academia, (Madrid, 1784,) tit. 3, 5, 68, 74. — Guzman, Generaciones y Semblanzas, (Madrid, 1775,) cap. 33, 34. — Abarca, Reyes de Aragon, en Anales His-

tóricos, (Madrid, 1682,) tom. i. fol. 227. — Crónica de Juan II., passim. — He possessed sixty towns and fortresses, and kept three thousand lances constantly in pay. Oviedo, Quincuagenas, MS.

CHAPTER
I.Jealousy of
the nobles.

It may easily be believed, that the haughty aristocracy of Castile would ill brook this exaltation of an individual so inferior to them in birth, and who withal did not wear his honors with exemplary meekness. John's blind partiality for his favorite is the key to all the troubles, which agitated the kingdom during the last thirty years of his reign. The disgusted nobles organized confederacies for the purpose of deposing the minister. The whole nation took sides in this unhappy struggle. The heats of civil discord were still further heightened by the interference of the royal house of Aragon, which, descended from a common stock with that of Castile, was proprietor of large estates in the latter country. The wretched monarch beheld even his own son Henry, the heir to the crown, enlisted in the opposite faction, and saw himself reduced to the extremity of shedding the blood of his subjects in the fatal battle of Olmedo. Still the address, or the good fortune, of the constable enabled him to triumph over his enemies; and, although he was obliged occasionally to yield to the violence of the storm and withdraw a while from the court, he was soon recalled and reinstated in all his former dignities. This melancholy infatuation of the king is imputed by the writers of that age to sorcery on the part of the favorite.⁴

⁴ Guzman, Generaciones, cap. 33. — Crónica de Don Juan II., p. 491, et alibi.

His complaisance for the favorite, indeed, must be admitted, if we believe Guzman, to have been of a most extraordinary kind. "E lo

que con mayor maravilla se puede decir é oír, que aun en los autos naturales se dió así á la ordenanza del condestable, que seyendo él mozo bien complexionado, é teniendo á la reyna su muger moza y hermosa, si el condestable se lo

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mons.

But the only witchcraft, which he used, was the ascendancy of a strong mind over a weak one.

During this long-protracted anarchy, the people lost whatever they had gained in the two preceding reigns. By the advice of his minister, who seems to have possessed a full measure of the insolence, so usual with persons suddenly advanced from low to elevated station, the king not only abandoned the constitutional policy of his predecessors in regard to the commons, but entered on the most arbitrary and systematic violation of their rights. Their deputies were excluded from the privy council, or lost all influence in it. Attempts were made to impose taxes without the legislative sanction. The municipal territories were alienated, and lavished on the royal minions. The freedom of elections was invaded, and delegates to cortes were frequently nominated by the crown; and, to complete the iniquitous scheme of oppression, *pragmaticas*, or royal proclamations, were issued, containing provisions repugnant to the acknowledged law of the land, and affirming in the most unqualified terms the right of the sovereign to legislate for his subjects.⁵ The commons indeed, when assembled in cortes, stoutly resisted the assumption of such unconstitutional powers by the crown, and compelled the prince not only to revoke his pretensions,

contradixiese, no iria á dormir á su cama della." Ubi supra.

⁵ Marina, Teoría de las Cortes, (Madrid, 1813,) tom. i. cap. 20.—tom. ii. pp. 216, 390, 391.—tom. iii. part. 2, no. 4.—Capmany,

Práctica y Estilo de Celebrar Cortes en Aragon, Cataluña y Valencia, (Madrid, 1821,) pp. 234, 235.—Sempere, Histoire des Cortès d'Espagne, (Bordeaux, 1815,) ch. 18, 24.

but to accompany his revocation with the most humiliating concessions.⁶ They even ventured so far, during this reign, as to regulate the expenses of the royal household;⁷ and their language to the throne on all these occasions, though temperate and loyal, breathed a generous spirit of patriotism, evincing a perfect consciousness of their own rights, and a steady determination to maintain them.⁸

Alas! what could such resolution avail, in this season of misrule, against the intrigues of a cunning and profligate minister, unsupported too, as the commons were, by any sympathy or coöperation on the part of the higher orders of the state! A scheme was devised for bringing the popular branch of the legislature more effectually within the control of the crown, by diminishing the number of its constituents. It has been already remarked, in the Introduction, that a great irregularity prevailed in Castile as to the number of cities, which, at different times, exercised the right of representation. During the fourteenth century, the deputation from this order had been uncommonly full. The king, however, availing himself of this indeterminateness, caused writs to be issued to a very small proportion of the towns which had usually enjoyed the privi-

⁶ Several of this prince's laws for redressing the alleged grievances are incorporated in the great code of Philip II., (Recopilacion de las Leyes, (Madrid, 1640,) lib. 6, tit. 7, leyes 5, 7, 2,) which declares, in the most unequivocal language, the right of the commons to be consulted on all important matters. "Porque en los hechos arduos de nuestros reynos es ne-

cessario consejo de nuestros subditos, y naturales, especialmente de los procuradores de las nuestras ciudades, villas, y lugares de los nuestros reynos." It was much easier to extort good laws from this monarch, than to enforce them.

⁷ Mariana, Historia de España, (Madrid, 1780,) tom. ii. p. 299.

⁸ Marina, Teoría, ubi supra.

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lege. Some of those that were excluded, indignantly though ineffectually remonstrated against this abuse. Others, previously despoiled of their possessions by the rapacity of the crown, or impoverished by the disastrous feuds into which the country had been thrown, acquiesced in the measure from motives of economy. From the same mistaken policy several cities, again, as Burgos, Toledo, and others, petitioned the sovereign to defray the charges of their representatives from the royal treasury; a most ill-advised parsimony, which suggested to the crown a plausible pretext for the new system of exclusion. In this manner the Castilian cortes, which, notwithstanding its occasional fluctuations, had exhibited during the preceding century what might be regarded as a representation of the whole commonwealth, was gradually reduced, during the reigns of John the Second and his son Henry the Fourth, to the deputations of some seventeen or eighteen cities. And to this number, with slight variation, it has been restricted until the occurrence of the recent revolutionary movements in that kingdom.⁹

The non-represented were required to transmit their instructions to the deputies of the privileged cities. Thus Salamanca appeared in behalf of five hundred towns and fourteen hundred villages; and the populous province of Galicia was represented by the little town of Zamora, which is not even

⁹ Capmany, *Práctica y Estilo*, p. 228. — Sempere, *Hist. des Cortès*, chap. 19. — Marina, *Teoría*, part. 1, cap. 16. — In 1656, the city of Pa-

lencia was content to repurchase its ancient right of representation from the crown, at an expense of 80,000 ducats.

included within its geographical limits.¹⁰ The privilege of *a voice in cortes*, as it was called, came at length to be prized so highly by the favored cities, that when, in 1506, some of those who were excluded solicited the restitution of their ancient rights, their petition was opposed by the former on the impudent pretence, that "the right of deputation had been reserved by ancient law and usage to only eighteen cities of the realm."¹¹ In this short-sighted and most unhappy policy, we see the operation of those local jealousies and estrangements, to which we have alluded in the Introduction. But, although the cortes, thus reduced in numbers, necessarily lost much of its weight, it still maintained a bold front against the usurpations of the crown. It does not appear, indeed, that any attempt was made under John the Second, or his successor, to corrupt its members, or to control the freedom of debate; although such a proceeding is not improbable, as altogether conformable to their ordinary policy, and as the natural result of their preliminary measures. But, however true the deputies continued to themselves and to those who sent them, it is evident that so limited and partial a selection no longer afforded a representation of the interests of the whole country. Their necessarily imperfect acquaintance with the principles or even wishes of their widely scattered constituents, in an age when knowledge was not circulated on the thousand wings of the press, as in our day,

Its consequences.

¹⁰ Capmany, *Práctica y Esti-* des Cortès d'Espagne, chap. 19.
lo, p. 230. — Sempere, *Histoire* ¹¹ Marina, *Teoría*, tom. i. p. 161.

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must have left them oftentimes in painful uncertainty, and deprived them of the cheering support of public opinion. The voice of remonstrance, which derives such confidence from numbers, would hardly now be raised in their deserted halls with the same frequency or energy as before; and, however the representatives of that day might maintain their integrity uncorrupted, yet, as every facility was afforded to the undue influence of the crown, the time might come when venality would prove stronger than principle, and the unworthy patriot be tempted to sacrifice his birthright for a mess of pottage. Thus early was the fair dawn of freedom overcast, which opened in Castile under more brilliant auspices, perhaps, than in any other country in Europe.

Early literature of Castile.

While the reign of John the Second is so deservedly odious in a political view, in a literary, it may be inscribed with what Giovio calls "the golden pen of history." It was an epoch in the Castilian, corresponding with that of the reign of Francis the First in French literature, distinguished not so much by any production of extraordinary genius, as by the effort made for the introduction of an elegant culture, by conducting it on more scientific principles than had been hitherto known. The early literature of Castile could boast of the "Poem of the Cid," in some respects the most remarkable performance of the middle ages. It was enriched, moreover, with other elaborate compositions, displaying occasional glimpses of a buoyant fancy, or of sensibility to

external beauty, to say nothing of those delightful romantic ballads, which seemed to spring up spontaneously in every quarter of the country, like the natural wild flowers of the soil. But the unaffected beauties of sentiment, which seem rather the result of accident than design, were dearly purchased, in the more extended pieces, at the expense of such a crude mass of grotesque and undigested verse, as shows an entire ignorance of the principles of the art.¹²

The profession of letters itself was held in little repute by the higher orders of the nation, who were altogether untinged with liberal learning. While the nobles of the sister kingdom of Aragon, assembled in their poetic courts, in imitation of their Provençal neighbours, vied with each other in lays of love and chivalry, those of Castile disdained these effeminate pleasures as unworthy of the profession of arms, the only one of any estimation in their eyes. The benignant influence of John was perceptible in softening this ferocious temper. He was himself sufficiently accomplished, for a king; and, notwithstanding his aversion to business, manifested, as has been noticed, a lively relish for intellectual enjoyment. He was fond of books, wrote and spoke Latin with facility, composed verses, and condescended occasionally to correct those of his loving subjects.¹³ Whatever

Its encouragement under John II.

¹² See the ample collections of Sanchez, "Poesías Castellanas anteriores al Siglo XV." 4 tom. Madrid, 1779-1790.

¹³ Guzman, Generaciones, cap. 33. — Gomez de Cibdareal, Centon Epistolario, (Madrid, 1775,) epist. 20, 49. — Cibdareal has given us a specimen of this royal criticism, which Juan de Mena, the subject of it, was courtier enough to adopt.

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might be the value of his criticisms, that of his example cannot be doubted. The courtiers, with the quick scent for their own interest which distinguishes the tribe in every country, soon turned their attention to the same polite studies;¹⁴ and thus Castilian poetry received very early the courtly stamp, which continued its prominent characteristic down to the age of its meridian glory.

Marquis of
Villena.

Among the most eminent of these noble *savans*, was Henry, marquis of Villena, descended from the royal houses of Castile and Aragon,¹⁵ but more illustrious, as one of his countrymen has observed, by his talents and attainments, than by his birth. His whole life was consecrated to letters, and especially to the study of natural science. I am not aware that any specimen of his poetry, although much lauded by his contemporaries,¹⁶ has come down to us.¹⁷ He translated Dante's "Commedia" into

¹⁴ Velazquez, *Origenes de la Poesía Castellana*, (Málaga, 1797,) p. 45. — Sanchez, *Poesías Castellanas*, tom. i. p. 10. — "The *Cancioneros Generales*, in print and in manuscript," says Sanchez, "show the great number of dukes, counts, marquises, and other nobles, who cultivated this art."

¹⁵ He was the grandson, not, as Sanchez supposes (tom. i. p. 15), the son, of Alonso de Villena, the first marquis as well as constable created in Castile, descended from James II. of Aragon. (See Dormer, *Enmiendas y Advertencias de Zurita*, (Zaragoza, 1683,) pp. 371-376.) His mother was an illegitimate daughter of Henry II., of Castile. Guzman, *Generaciones*, cap. 28. — Salazar de Mendoza, *Monarquía de España*, (Madrid, 1770,) tom. i. pp. 203, 339.

¹⁶ Guzman, *Generaciones*, cap. 28. — Juan de Mena introduces Villena into his "Laberinto," in an agreeable stanza, which has something of the mannerism of Dante. "Aquel claro padre aquel dulce fuente aquel que en el castolo monte resuena es don Enrique Señor de Villena honrra de España y del siglo presente," &c. Juan de Mena, *Obras*, (Alcalá, 1566,) fol. 138.

¹⁷ The recent Castilian translators of Bouterwek's *History of Spanish Literature* have fallen into an error in imputing the beautiful *cancion* of the "Querrela de Amor" to Villena. It was composed by the Marquis of Santillana. (Bouterwek, *Historia de la Literatura Española*, traducida por Cortina y Hugalde y Mollinedo, (Madrid, 1829,) p. 196., and Sanchez, *Poesías Castellanas*, tom. i. pp. 38, 143.)

The mistake into which Nicolás