

Mercurio Volante or *Diario Mercantil*, was all that was permitted to exist. The Constitution of 1824 proclaimed the new order of things, and was emphatic in declaring that the political freedom of the press should never be suspended, "much less abolished"; and a number of newspapers were early established in every part of the country.

In 1825 the *Aguila Mexicana* was, or tried to appear, the official organ at the national capital. *El Sol*, the conservative paper, was regarded as reactionary and even monarchical; and its motto, *Post nubila Phoebus*, was understood to mean that the weather under the republic was extremely bad but that the sun of Spain would soon return.¹ The *Correo de la Federación* was the radical or Yorkino organ; the *Fantasma* was essentially anti-clerical.²

In the provinces a number of more or less ephemeral publications caused constant irritation to the central government. In one way or another it was possible to control the newspapers of the metropolis, but it often happened that local journals were protected by those who were not at all in accordance with the policies of the President for the time being, so that in general the press of the country was a constant thorn in the side of the successive Mexican administrations. In its way it seems to have represented with sufficient fulness the varying opinions and moods of the relatively small groups whose ideas constituted public opinion.

¹ Beltrami, *Le Mexique*, II, 258. ² Suarez, *Historia de México*, 59, 60.

CHAPTER IV

THE PEOPLE OF MEXICO (CONTINUED)

A most important and striking difference between Mexico and the United States was the entire absence of water communications in the former country. In the United States, at a time when railroads were only just being planned, the main internal routes of commerce and travel were along the great rivers and other water-ways which were a marked feature of the country. The finest steam-boats in the world plied on the Mississippi and the Ohio, the Hudson and the Delaware, Lake Champlain and Long Island Sound. The Erie Canal was the longest in existence, and others were building or projected all over the country. In Mexico, on the contrary, there were practically no navigable rivers, and any extensive system of canals was made impossible by the very slight rainfall of the interior. Even the coasting trade, so active and important along the Atlantic coast of the United States, was all but impossible in Mexico, owing in great measure to the lack of safe harbors.

The internal commerce of the country was therefore carried on by road. But the Spanish colonists had never proved themselves successful road-builders in any part of their great empire. The mule-paths of New Spain—even those connecting the capital with Vera Cruz and Acapulco—were for generations neither better nor worse than those which led from the sea-coast to Bogotá or Quito. It was only in the early years of the nineteenth century that the Vera Cruz road was made into a paved *chaussée* over which heavy coaches and wagons could pass with reasonable safety.

The revolution, however, wrecked this fine road as it wrecked many other solid monuments of Spanish rule. In part, the destruction had been deliberate, but in large part

it was the inevitable result of neglect. The city of Mexico lying in a valley of the great central plateau, the roads from the sea-coast necessarily rose some nine thousand feet, and had long and steep ascents which were always liable to be badly washed by tropical showers.

The British mission, sent in 1823 to Mexico to investigate and report upon the condition of the country, brought with them three carriages from London, but the members of the mission found it impossible to travel in them, and they were dragged empty from the city of Vera Cruz to the city of Mexico.¹ Heavy coaches did manage to carry passengers in some discomfort over the road. Horse-litters, however, were preferable, and in general no one travelled between Mexico and Vera Cruz in any wheeled vehicle if he were able to sit a horse.²

In the rest of the country conditions were worse. A carriage, if it were strong enough, could be driven from Mexico along the central plateau as far as Durango, but it was an unusual feat of endurance. The commerce of the country, with quite negligible exceptions, was carried on by trains of pack animals—generally mules or asses—furnishing a picturesque but extremely costly and inefficient means of transportation.³ The cities were supplied with milk, butter, cheese, fruit, vegetables, poultry, and charcoal by half-naked Indians carrying great panniers on their backs. When it came to moving heavy or bulky articles, such as parts of mining machinery, the difficulties were all but insurmountable.

Commerce was further hampered by a local tax on sales known as the *alcabala*, and which amounted on the average

¹ Ward's *Mexico*, II, 9.

² *Ibid.*, 174. In the year 1823 only 76 wheeled vehicles left Vera Cruz for the interior, but 259 litters and 41,980 loaded mules and donkeys. In 1824 the number of wheeled vehicles leaving fell to 56, litters to 223, and mules and donkeys to 29,342. See Lerdo de Tejada, *Comercio Exterior*, App. 30 and 31.

³ An illustration of the prohibitive cost of transportation in Mexico is found in the fact that a barrel of flour from Kentucky could be profitably sold in Vera Cruz for less than the mere freight on the same quantity of flour if sent from points in the State of Puebla, only a hundred and fifty miles away.—(Ward's *Mexico*, I, 36.)

to twelve per cent, although on wines and brandies it was thirty-five and forty per cent. There were also certain small municipal duties levied in several towns for such purposes as support of hospitals and public buildings, and the introduction of water.¹

By the law of August 4, 1824, all imported goods, in addition to customs duties, paid an additional fifteen per cent duty on being sent to the interior, and were relieved from the *alcabala*.² And by the law of December 22, 1824, the several States were empowered to impose a tax of three per cent on foreign articles consumed within their borders.³

The simple wants of the *arrieros*, who accompanied the pack trains, were easily supplied along the roadside, or in rough sheds or barns, but more fastidious travellers found the accommodations at the inns so bad as to render any journey a business of the utmost difficulty and discomfort. Nor was this surprising, for travelling was a sort of recent invention in Mexico. Before the revolution there were no foreigners, and as there was not much but local trade, merchants had small occasion to go or send an agent to any distance. The wealthier Mexicans seldom moved from one place to another. When they did, the hacienda of some friend could almost always be found, and journeys were planned from one such house to another.

At most of the larger villages there was a *meson*, or inn; but an unfurnished room with an earthen floor, often excessively filthy, was all that the majority of these establishments could afford. They were, said one indignant foreigner, neither inns nor houses, and the rooms were nothing but dungeon cells to which light and air penetrated only through the doorway. In some places such a house contained but a single room, which served as an eating and sleeping place both for the innkeeper's family and his guests. In any case,

¹ Lerdo de Tejada, 41.

² Dublan y Lozano, I, 710. This duty, known as *derecho de internación*, was for the benefit of the federal government. It was computed on the appraised value when landed, plus 25 per cent, and was therefore in reality an additional customs duty of 18 $\frac{3}{4}$ per cent.

³ *Ibid.*, I, 748. This tax was known as *derecho de consumo*.

travellers must sleep on the bare floor, unless they were prudent enough to bring their own blankets, or, better still, a hammock or a portable bed that was set high enough to be above the leap of a flea from the floor. Food was not always to be obtained at an inn, and travellers usually carried their provisions with them. Sometimes the proprietor of the *meson* would consent to have his guests' supplies cooked, and a little patience and diplomacy was usually rewarded by the production of fresh tortillas. In the larger cities, like Mexico and Guadalajara, there were some indifferent restaurants. In remote districts and villages where inns did not exist travellers must be content with an Indian hut, or, if they were lucky, they found lodgings in one of the great haciendas, where they could almost always count on the unquestioning hospitality of a thinly settled country.

Not only were the roads bad and the roadside inns uncomfortable, but brigandage was not uncommon. Along the Vera Cruz road, where the most valuable traffic passed, armed escorts were usually furnished to all important people.

Internal commerce could not, of course, flourish in the face of these difficulties, and in consequence an economical independence was created, which characterized many districts. The inhabitants not only raised their own food and built their houses out of whatever material was at hand, but their clothes were made of home-grown cotton or wool, spun and woven by the women.

Foreign commerce was also greatly affected by the same causes, for imported goods in large quantities could hardly be distributed in the interior. Moreover, the country had become accustomed to exist upon its own productions. Before the revolution the colonial policy of Spain had involved with few exceptions the absolute prohibition of trade with foreign countries or by means of foreign vessels. Trade with the other Spanish colonies, except the Philippines, was likewise prohibited, and in that exceptional case only a single ship once in each year was allowed to cross the lonely Pacific between Acapulco and Manila. Even between Old and New Spain there were numerous and embarrassing restric-

tions on commerce, which persisted to the last day of Spanish rule, although from time to time they had been greatly relaxed from the original sixteenth-century monopoly.

In Spanish times the only port of entry on the Atlantic coast of Mexico was Vera Cruz, and the business of the small number of merchants in that unhealthy town was extremely lucrative. The total amount of their commerce was, however, comparatively small.¹ The inland freight often reached prohibitive figures, and there were many places which might therefore have done a good business if they could have been reached through ports like Tampico or Campeche, but which were practically cut off from all the benefits of foreign trade.² In other localities, only articles of relatively large value and small bulk, principally luxuries like silks or laces, could be profitably imported.

One of the first results of independence was that all foreign commerce fell off to an extraordinary degree, owing chiefly to the total change in methods of doing business. Intercourse with Spain was at an end, and merchants doing business in Vera Cruz or the city of Mexico had no correspondents in other countries through whom to purchase goods. In the same way foreign manufacturers knew of no agencies through which they could sell their wares in Mexico. These conditions were, of course, only temporary, for the ports of the country were opened freely to the shipping of all nations, and it was not long before channels of trade were discovered and freely used; so that by 1825 it is probable that the imports into Mexico were equal to the average of the prosperous years before the revolution broke out in 1810.

Probabilities are all that can be affirmed of the volume of Mexican commerce, and this for two reasons. In the first place, official statistics were always conspicuously inexact;

¹ The imports in 1819 at Vera Cruz amounted to \$10,099,196.—(Lerdo de Tejada, App. 29.)

² As soon as the port of Tampico was opened to foreign commerce the town grew amazingly. A new town came into existence, inhabited almost entirely by foreign merchants, who supplied the wants of San Luis Potosí and all the northern parts of Mexico.—(Berlandier y Chovel, *Diario de Viage*, 222.)

and in the second place, there was always a great and unascertainable amount of smuggling. Humboldt estimated the contraband imports under the Spanish regime at four or five million dollars a year in time of peace, and at six millions a year in time of war.¹ The amount of goods irregularly or illegally imported was largely increased after the revolution, especially with the opening of the northern ports, such as Galveston, Refugio (Copano Bay), Matamoros, and Tampico. A considerable trade rapidly sprang up between these places and New Orleans, so that about 1827 the number of vessels that entered Mexican ports from the United States was believed to be more than the number entering from all the rest of the world.

Ward, who as British minister at Mexico had every opportunity and incentive to ascertain the facts as to the foreign commerce of the country, estimated the total import and export trade of Mexico for 1824 at about \$21,500,000, and concluded that for 1825 the amount would be still greater.² These estimates, however, were probably too low. The total of exports and imports as reported for 1824 by the custom-houses of Alvarado and Vera Cruz alone amounted to nearly seventeen million, and adding the business of other ports and the amount of contraband trade, the total would exceed Ward's figures by a considerable sum. For 1825 the total of reported exports and imports for all Mexican ports was over twenty-four million, and the figures for the three succeeding years were not very different.

The chief articles of export were still the precious metals, which were always subject to an export duty and were therefore smuggled out of the country in such large quantities that exports were understated by the customs authorities even more than imports. It has been estimated that the real value of imports during the four years 1825 to 1828, both inclusive, was not less than eighteen million dollars a year; and that the real value of exports was about the same, making a total of about \$36,000,000.³

¹ Humboldt, *Essai Politique*, II, 730.

² Ward, *Mexico*, I, 325-333.

³ Lerdo de Tejada, 51.

As compared with these figures, the imports and exports of the United States for the fiscal year ended September 30, 1825, were each a little under a hundred millions, the total being \$195,875,463,¹ or rather more than five times that of Mexico.

The character of the exports of the two countries was very different, for while agricultural products, such as wheat, flour, rice, corn, cheese, bacon, cotton, and tobacco, formed by far the larger part in value of the exports from the United States, the agricultural exports from New Spain had been always of trifling amount, for the country always consumed almost all that it produced. Indeed, the methods of cultivation had not much changed since the Spanish conquest. Cortés found the land well cultivated, "the extreme dryness being relieved by the canals with which the land was partially irrigated"; and in three hundred years there was no material variation in the crops or the people. The banana, the useful maguey plant, Indian corn, cotton, and tobacco remained the chief products of the soil.² The collection and preparation of cochineal became an important industry during Spanish times, but the modern uses of India-rubber and sisal-hemp were hardly known.

The Spanish conquerors introduced wheat, barley, coffee, and sugar. Mexico, however, never competed with the United States in wheat or flour, or with the other European colonies in sugar and coffee. The olive and the vine were also planted, but their cultivation was restricted by law that they might not compete with the Spanish-grown product.

A far more important result of the conquest was the introduction of domestic animals. In the northern parts of the country, particularly, sheep, cattle, horses, and mules were raised in enormous numbers. The herds on some of the great estates were of astonishing magnitude. Thus in

¹ Pitkin, *Statistical View of the Commerce of the U. S. of America*, 66. These figures include very large amounts of foreign goods re-exported. The average annual value of goods imported for domestic consumption was estimated at under \$60,000,000, and the average annual amount of domestic exports at \$53,000,000.—(*Ibid.*, 480.)

² Prescott, *Conquest of Mexico*, I, 131-137; Humboldt, *Essai Politique*, II, 351-447; Ward, *Mexico*, I, 31-68.

1826 the hacienda de la Sarca in Durango had a stock of 200,000 sheep and 40,000 mules and horses; that of Ramos had 80,000 sheep; that of Guatinapé, 40,000 oxen and cows. On the breeding estates of the Marqués de Guadalupe in Zacatecas there were 18,000 horses and brood mares. The hacienda of El Jaral in San Luis Potosí was said to possess at least three million head of live stock, and to send thirty thousand sheep a year to market.¹

What with the difficulties of internal transportation, and the fact that the Spanish peninsula was the only country with which commerce was permitted, it was obviously impracticable during the colonial period to develop any export trade in food supplies. The only customers of the farmers were in the large Mexican cities, including the great mining centres where the vast numbers of animals employed necessitated a very considerable consumption of food for horses and mules. The forage crops were, however, much exposed to injury by drought, and therefore a dry season always led to the destruction of large numbers of animals employed in mining, and this in turn to a reduction in the annual output of the mines.

Manufacturing was even more hampered by Spanish policy than agriculture. The early colonial policy of all European governments had been unfavorable to the establishment of manufactures in their dependencies, for the accepted commercial principles limited the functions of a colony to the supplying of raw materials to the mother country, and the consumption of her manufactured articles. The whole traffic was required to be carried on under the national flag. Spain did not differ from England or France or Holland in her theories—she was only more rigid and consistent in applying them.

But even Spain could not be consistent at all times and in all places. If the law had compelled Mexico to be clothed only in Spanish garments, Mexico would have gone naked. Humboldt correctly summed up the situation by saying that if populous cities are built at great distances from the coasts,

¹ Ward, *Mexico*, II, 218-391.

behind mountain ranges, and if many millions of inhabitants can obtain European goods only after they have been carried on mule-back, sometimes five or six months' journey, through tropical forests and waterless deserts, local manufactures must of necessity exist.¹ The force of circumstances therefore compelled the Spanish government to tolerate what it could not prevent, and thus in New Spain a limited manufacturing industry existed, which supplied most of the simple needs of the people but furnished no goods for export.

Coarse woolen and cotton fabrics, hats, saddlery and harness, soap, furniture, toys, pottery, and cigars made up almost the entire list. To these might be added the manufacture of silverware, which was in demand in the churches and in the wealthier households, where fine porcelain and glassware—difficult to carry safely over mountains on mule-back—were not much used.

The first effects of independence were, necessarily, disastrous to the manufacturing interests. Not only had factory buildings been damaged or destroyed during the civil wars, but the removal of colonial restrictions also had its effect. When new ports were freely opened to commerce and when shorter routes to the interior were made available for the carriage of imported goods, trade from foreign countries grew and domestic production fell off. It is therefore not surprising to find that the annual value of manufactured products was estimated at only one-half what it was before the revolution.² As usual, there was no means of forming any accurate judgment on the subject. Humboldt, without expressing any opinion of his own, says that the value of the manufactures of New Spain was estimated at seven or eight million dollars a year,³ and on this basis the manufacturing output of the Mexican republic in 1825 might perhaps be put in the neighborhood of four millions a year. In the United States at that time it was probably as much as two hundred and fifty millions a year.⁴

The one industry of Mexico that had furnished any sub-

¹ Humboldt, *Essai Politique*, II, 664.

² Poinsett, *Notes on Mexico*, 102.

³ Humboldt, *Essai Politique*, II, 665.

⁴ Pitkin, 461-530, *passim*.

stantial quantity of exports during Spanish times was the mining of precious metals. It was this alone which enabled New Spain to pay tribute for so many centuries, and it was this which, coupled with Spanish secrecy, attracted the attention and inflamed the imagination of the world. For years the belief in the prodigious wealth of Mexico was as universal as it was vague and mistaken.

The statistics of production were most meagre and unsatisfactory, but it seems safe to conclude that before Mexican independence was achieved the precious metals made up at least three-fourths in value of the total exports. In addition to this, over eight million dollars a year used to be shipped for account of the royal Treasury, and thus the proportion of the precious metals was brought up to perhaps seven-eighths of the whole export trade.¹

The quantity of gold mined was probably about a million dollars a year on the average. The production of silver was probably not far from twenty-three million dollars a year during the peaceful times preceding the outbreak of the revolution in 1810.²

The methods employed were both primitive and extravagant. The permanent works were constructed upon a scale which was described as wonderful and imposing, and which was obviously impossible in a country where labor was not abundant and extremely cheap. Thus the dimensions of the principal shafts were often excessive. In some cases they were octagons from twenty-two to twenty-seven feet across, sunk to very great depths.³ The ore was brought up on men's shoulders, the half-breed Indian workmen carrying incredibly heavy loads.⁴ Water was pumped by a primitive arrangement of leather buckets worked by mules. At the Candelaria mine in Durango the water was brought up in buckets on men's shoulders from a depth of nearly seven

¹ Ward, I, 318, note.

² Humboldt estimated the total annual product in 1803 at slightly over \$23,000,000.—(*Essai Politique*, II, 580.) Ward, whose sources of information appear to have been good, estimated the average production of the precious metals for the fifteen years from 1796 to 1810 at \$24,000,000—of which a little less than five per cent was gold.—(Ward, I, 365.)

³ Ward, II, 203-207.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 211, 215.

hundred feet. At the reduction works the processes of crushing, washing, and amalgamation were carried out chiefly by men and mules.¹

The rising of 1810 wrought swift disaster to the mining industry. The fury of Hidalgo's followers, who were chiefly recruited near the mining districts, was first directed against the tangible property of Spanish capitalists at the great mines, and their machinery and reduction works were ruthlessly wrecked. As the principal veins had been explored in the course of centuries to very great depths, the destruction of pumping machinery made it impossible to keep the lower levels free of water, and for many years some of the most productive workings were necessarily abandoned on that account alone. In addition the loss of confidence which naturally discouraged bankers from making advances to mine-owners, and the extreme difficulty of procuring steady labor, combined to hamper the carrying on of mining operations. At the end of a few years many workings were in a condition of absolute ruin, shafts had fallen in, timbering had rotted and given way, buildings and machinery had been destroyed or had been so neglected as to be beyond repair. In one mining town after another, the traveller heard the same tale of ruined buildings and machinery, or of rising water and falling population.²

For the fifteen years that immediately succeeded the outbreak of the revolution—that is to say from 1811 to 1825, both inclusive—it is probable that the average production of the precious metals had fallen to about eleven million dollars a year. In some years, as in 1811 and 1812, and again in 1823 and 1824, it fell to almost nothing.³

The result of this blow to the principal industry of the country was extremely far reaching, for not only were great numbers of men thrown out of work, but there was also a great diminution in the demand for agricultural products due to the reduction in the numbers of both men and animals

¹ *Ibid.*, 196-199.

² Ward, II, 110-341; Poinsett, *Notes on Mexico*, chap. XII, 156-177; Lyon, I, 301; II, 149, 153.

³ Ward, I, 362-374.

to be fed. These reached surprising figures. Thus at the Barranco mine at Bolanos, in the state of Jalisco, twenty-two hundred mules and four hundred men were employed in pumping alone.¹ In the great Valenciana mines near Guanajuato over three thousand men were employed and fourteen thousand mules.² At Tlalpujahuá, in the state of Michoacán, about two thousand horses and mules and more than two thousand men were required.³ At the Veta Grande of Zacatecas there were more than twelve hundred horses and mules.⁴

For these armies of men and beasts the supplies of food were naturally drawn from the nearest farming districts, and the moment that the activity of the mines was checked the price of agricultural products fell off, and the prosperity of the rural population with it. On the other hand, when mining operations were resumed the demand for horses and mules, for maize and barley, instantly increased.

The termination of Spanish rule in Mexico and the opening of the country to foreigners were almost immediately followed by a great influx of foreign miners, or mining speculators, mostly English and German, attracted by the vague and often mythical accounts of the extraordinary riches of the Mexican mines, which were now at last to be opened to the enterprise of Europe. The further away, the greater seemed the prospect of enormous and quick returns. In London the shares of newly formed Mexican mining companies rose to high figures, and for a short time were the subject of excited speculation. Writing of the conditions in Great Britain in the winter of 1824-1825, a recent author says:

"The English people were at this moment suffering from one of those attacks of speculative mania to which they are subject. Some years of great national prosperity had preceded, and for the capital then accumulated and now seeking investment a new outlet had been found in the revolted colonies of Spain. Canning's foreign policy, of which these colonies were the pivot, helped to give an air of respect-

¹ Lyon, I, 315. Ward puts the number of mules employed for this purpose at 5,000.—(Ward, I, 425.)

² Ward, II, 190, 200.

³ *Ibid.*, I, 427.

⁴ Lyon, *Mexico*, I, 255.

ability, or even of patriotism, to the schemes of company promoters, and presently all the phenomena of the South Sea Bubble were reproduced. The old stories of the mineral riches of the New World were revived, companies were formed in great numbers to exploit them, and the shares were eagerly bought by a credulous public."¹

The promoters of course contended, and with some reason, that the introduction of improved modern methods would result in a great increase in the output of the mines, but there were a number of other elements they did not take into account. Worn-out old workings were sold by shrewd Mexican owners to eager customers at extravagant prices, and even where the quantity and quality of the ore were satisfactory, the difficulty of transporting machinery from the sea-coast, the want of fuel (for there was no known coal and little timber), the dislike of the native miners to changes in their traditional methods, and the unexpectedly costly outlay for preliminary work in re-establishing drainage and restoring ventilation and facility of access to the mines, absorbed all the product. Mining shares in London fell, and the reaction from the exaggerated belief in the wealth of Mexican mines led to a distrust of all Mexican investments both in Great Britain and elsewhere.

The long and destructive civil war, which had been followed by a complete upsetting of all the relations of trade with foreign nations,² had necessarily been accompanied by disaster to the public revenues, as well as by the very great changes in industrial and economic conditions above noted. It is therefore not surprising to find that from the very beginning of the war of independence there were serious deficits in the annual budgets of both the colonial and the independent governments.

Before the revolution the country had annually furnished

¹ Money-penny's *Disraeli*, I, 55. Disraeli's first appearance as an author was in writing pamphlets to "boom" Mexican mining shares. He himself invested in them, and lost more than he could afford.

² By a decree of Oct. 8, 1823, Spanish vessels were excluded from all Mexican ports, and the importation of all articles manufactured or grown in Spain was prohibited; and by a previous decree of Nov. 5, 1822, exports to Spain were forbidden.—(Lerdo de Tejada, 30.)