

Anne Soulard, Tiffany Vergon, Charles Aldarondo and the Online Distributed

Proofreading Team

HISTORY OF THE REIGN OF FERDINAND
AND ISABELLA, THE CATHOLIC.

BY WILLIAM H. PRESCOTT.

IN THREE VOLUMES. VOL. I.

TO THE HONORABLE WILLIAM
PRESCOTT, LL.D., THE GUIDE OF MY YOUTH,
MY BEST FRIEND IN RIPER YEARS, THESE
VOLUMES, WITH THE WARMEST FEELINGS
OF FILIAL AFFECTION, ARE RESPECTFULLY
INSCRIBED.

PREFACE

TO THE FIRST EDITION.

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

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literal version, now made for the first time, of the Spanish-Arab chronicles, by Conde; the collection of original and unpublished documents, illustrating the history of Columbus and the early Castilian navigators, by Navarrete; and, lastly, the copious illustrations of Isabella's reign,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

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

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