CHAPTER VII

GREATER STATES AND LESSER

DURING the half century that had elapsed since 1826, the nations of Hispanic America had passed through dark ages. Their evolution had always been accompanied by growing pains and had at times been arrested altogether or unduly hastened by harsh injections of radicalism. It was not an orderly development through gradual modifications in the social and economic structure, but rather a fitful progress now assisted and now retarded by the arbitrary deeds of men of action, good and bad, who had seized power. Dictators, however, steadily decreased in number and gave place often to presidential autocrats who were continued in office by constant reëlection and who were imbued with modern ideas. In 1876 these Hispanic nations stood on the threshold of a new era. Some were destined to advance rapidly beyond it; others, to move slowly onward; and a few to make little or no progress.

The most remarkable feature in the new era was the rise of four states — Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile — to a position of eminence among their fellows. Extent of territory, development of natural resources, the character of the inhabitants and the increase of their numbers, and the amount of popular intelligence and prosperity, all contributed to this end. Each of the four nations belonged to a fairly well-defined historical and geographical group in southern North America, and in eastern and western South America, respectively. In the first group were Mexico, the republics of Central America, and the island countries of the Caribbean; in the second, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay; and in the third, Chile, Peru, and Bolivia. In a fourth group were Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela.

When the President of Mexico proceeded, in 1876, to violate the constitution by securing his reëlection, the people were prepared by their earlier experiences and by the rule of Juárez to defend their constitutional rights. A widespread rebellion headed by Díaz broke out. In the so-called "Plan of Tuxtepec" the revolutionists declared themselves in favor of the principle of absolutely no reëlection.

Meantime the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court handed down a decision that the action of the Congress in sustaining the President was illegal, since in reality no elections had been held because of the abstention of voters and the seizure of the polls by revolutionists or government forces. "Above the constitution, nothing; above the constitution, no one," he declared. But as this assumption of a power of judgment on matters of purely political concern was equally a violation of the constitution and concealed, besides, an attempt to make the Chief Justice President, Díaz and his followers drove both of the pretenders out. Then in 1876 he managed to bring about his own election instead.

Porfirio Díaz was a soldier who had seen active service in nearly every important campaign since the war with the United States. Often himself in revolt against presidents, legal and illegal, Díaz was vastly more than an ordinary partisan chieftain. Schooled by a long experience, he had come to appreciate the fact that what Mexico required for its national development was freedom from internal disorders and a fair chance for recuperation. Justice, order, and prosperity, he felt, could be assured only by imposing upon the country the heavy weight of an iron hand. Foreign capital must be

invested in Mexico and then protected; immigration must be encouraged, and other material, moral, and intellectual aid of all sorts must be drawn from abroad for the upbuilding of the nation.

To effect such a transformation in a land so tormented and impoverished as Mexico — a country which, within the span of fifty-five years had lived under two "emperors," and some thirty-six presidents, nine "provisional presidents," ten dictators, twelve "regents," and five "supreme councilors" — required indeed a masterful intelligence and a masterful authority. Porfirio Díaz possessed and exercised both. He was, in fact, just the man for the times. An able administrator, stern and severe but just, rather reserved in manner and guarded in utterance, shrewd in the selection of associates, and singularly successful in his dealings with foreigners, he entered upon a "presidential reign" of thirty-five years — broken by but one intermission of four — which brought Mexico out upon the highway to new national life.

Under the stable and efficient rulership of Díaz, "plans," "pronunciamentos," "revolutions," and similar devices of professional trouble makers, had short shrift. Whenever an uprising started, it was promptly quelled, either by a well-disciplined

army or by the *rurales*, a mounted police made up to some extent of former bandits to whom the President gave the choice of police service or of sharp punishment for their crimes. Order, in fact, was not always maintained, nor was justice always meted out, by recourse to judges and courts. Instead, a novel kind of lynch law was invoked. The name it bore was the *ley fuga*, or "flight law," in accordance with which malefactors or political suspects taken by government agents from one locality to another, on the excuse of securing readier justice, were given by their captors a pretended chance to escape and were then shot while they ran! The only difference between this method and others of the sort employed by Spanish American autocrats to enforce obedience lay in its purpose. Of Díaz one might say what Bacon said of King Henry VII: "He drew blood as physicians do, to save life rather than to spill it." If need be, here and there, disorder and revolt were stamped out by terrorism; but the Mexican people did not yield to authority from terror but rather from a thorough loyalty to the new régime.

Among the numerous measures of material improvement which Díaz undertook during his first term, the construction of railways was the most

important. The size of the country, its want of navigable rivers, and its relatively small and widely scattered population, made imperative the establishment of these means of communication. Despite the misgivings of many intelligent Mexicans that the presence of foreign capital would impair local independence in some way, Díaz laid the foundations of future national prosperity by granting concessions to the Mexican Central and National Mexican companies, which soon began construction. Under his successor a national bank was created; and when Díaz was again elected he readjusted the existing foreign debt and boldly contracted new debts abroad.

At the close of his first term, in 1880, a surplus in the treasury was not so great a novelty as the circumstance — altogether unique in the political annals of Mexico — that Díaz turned over the presidency in peaceful fashion to his properly elected successor! He did so reluctantly, to be sure, but he could not afford just yet to ignore his own avowed principle, which had been made a part of the constitution shortly after his accession. Although the confidence he reposed in that successor was not entirely justified, the immense personal popularity of Díaz saved the prestige of the new

chief magistrate. Under his administration the constitution was amended in such a way as to deprive the Chief Justice of the privilege of replacing the President in case of a vacancy, thus eliminating that official from politics. After his resumption of office, Díaz had the fundamental law modified anew, so as to permit the reelection of a President for one term only! For this change, inconsistent though it may seem, Díaz was not alone responsible. Circumstances had changed, and the constitution had to change with them.

Had the "United Provinces of Central America," as they came forth from under the rule of Spain, seen fit to abstain from following in the unsteady footsteps of Mexico up to the time of the accession of Díaz to power, had they done nothing more than develop their natural wealth and utilize their admirable geographical situation, they might have become prosperous and kept their corporate name. As it was, their history for upwards of forty years had little to record other than a momentary cohesion and a subsequent lapse into five quarrelsome little republics — the "Balkan States" of America. Among them Costa Rica had suffered

least from arbitrary management or internal commotion and showed the greatest signs of advancement.

In Guatemala, however, there had arisen another Díaz, though a man quite inferior in many respects to his northern counterpart. When Justo Rufino Barrios became President of that republic in 1873 he was believed to have conservative leanings. Ere long, however, he astounded his compatriots by showing them that he was a thoroughgoing radical with methods of action to correspond to his convictions. Not only did he keep the Jesuits out of the country but he abolished monastic orders altogether and converted their buildings to public use. He made marriage a civil contract and he secularized the burying grounds. Education he encouraged by engaging the services of foreign instructors, and he brought about a better observance of the law by the promulgation of new codes. He also introduced railways and telegraph lines. Since the manufacture of aniline dyes abroad had diminished the demand for cochineal, Barrios decided to replace this export by cultivating coffee. To this end, he distributed seeds among the planters and furnished financial aid besides, with a promise to inspect the fields in due season

and see what had been accomplished. Finding that in many cases the seeds had been thrown away and the money wasted in drink and gambling, he ordered the guilty planters to be given fifty lashes, with the assurance that on a second offense he would shoot them on sight. Coffee planting in Guatemala was pursued thereafter with much alacrity!

Posts in the government service Barrios distributed quite impartially among Conservatives and Democrats, deserving or otherwise, for he had them both well under control. At his behest a permanent constitution was promulgated in 1880. While he affected to dislike continual reëlection, he saw to it nevertheless that he himself should be the sole candidate who was likely to win.

Barrios doubtless could have remained President of Guatemala for the term of his natural life if he had not raised up the ghost of federation. All the republics of Central America accepted his invitation in 1876 to send delegates to his capital to discuss the project. But nothing was accomplished because Barrios and the President of Salvador were soon at loggerheads. Nine years later, feeling himself stronger, Barrios again proposed federation. But the other republics had by this time learned

too much of the methods of the autocrat of Guatemala, even while they admired his progressive policy, to relish the thought of a federation dominated by Guatemala and its masterful President. Though he "persuaded" Honduras to accept the plan, the three other republics preferred to unite in self-defense, and in the ensuing struggle the quixotic Barrios was killed. A few years later the project was revived and the constitution of a "Republic of Central America" was agreed upon, when war between Guatemala and Salvador again frustrated its execution.

In Brazil two great movements were by this time under way: the total abolition of slavery and the establishment of a republic. Despite the tenacious opposition of many of the planters, from about the year 1883 the movement for emancipation made great headway. There was a growing determination on the part of the majority of the inhabitants to remove the blot that made the country an object of reproach among the civilized states of the world. Provinces and towns, one after another, freed the slaves within their borders. The imperial Government, on its part, hastened the process by liberating its own slaves and by imposing upon

those still in bondage taxes higher than their market value; it fixed a price for other slaves; it decreed that the older slaves should be set free; and it increased the funds already appropriated to compensate owners of slaves who should be emancipated. In 1887 the number of slaves had fallen to about 720,000, worth legally about $650 each. A year later came the final blow, when the Princess Regent assented to a measure which abolished slavery outright and repealed all former acts relating to slavery. So radical a proceeding wrought havoc in the coffee-growing southern provinces in particular, from which the negroes now freed migrated by tens of thousands to the northern provinces. Their places, however, were taken by Italians and other Europeans who came to work the plantations on a coöperative basis. All through the eighties, in fact, immigrants from Italy poured into the temperate regions of southern Brazil, to the number of nearly two hundred thousand, supplementing the many thousands of Germans who had settled, chiefly in the province of Rio Grande do Sul, thirty years before.

Apart from the industrial problem thus created by the abolition of slavery, there seemed to be no serious political or economic questions before the

country. Ever since 1881, when a law providing for direct elections was passed, the Liberals had been in full control. The old Dom Pedro, who had endeared himself to his people, was as much liked and respected as ever. But as he had grown feeble and almost blind, the heiress to the throne, who had marked absolutist and clerical tendencies, was disposed to take advantage of his infirmities.

For many years, on the other hand, doctrines opposed to the principle of monarchy had been spread in zealous fashion by members of the military class, notable among whom was Deodoro da Fonseca. And now some of the planters longed to wreak vengeance on a ruler who had dared to thwart their will by emancipating the slaves. Besides this persistent discontent, radical republican newspapers continually stirred up fresh agitation. Whatever the personal service rendered by the Emperor to the welfare of the country, to them he represented a political system which deprived the provinces of much of their local autonomy and the Brazilian people at large of self-government.

But the chief reason for the momentous change which was about to take place was the fact that the constitutional monarchy had really completed its work as a transitional government. Under that

régime Brazil had reached a condition of stability and had attained a level of progress which might well enable it to govern itself. During all this time the influence of the Spanish American nations had been growing apace. Even if they had fallen into many a political calamity, they were nevertheless "republics," and to the South American this word had a magic sound. Above all, there was the potent suggestion of the success of the United States of North America, whose extension of its federal system over a vast territory suggested what Brazil with its provinces might accomplish in the southern continent. Hence the vast majority of intelligent Brazilians felt that they had become self-reliant enough to establish a republic without fear of lapsing into the unfortunate experiences of the other Hispanic countries.

In 1889, when provision was made for a speedy abdication of the Emperor in favor of his daughter, the republican newspapers declared that a scheme was being concocted to exile the chief military agitators and to interfere with any effort on the part of the army to prevent the accession of the new ruler. Thereupon, on the 15th of November, the radicals at Rio de Janeiro, aided by the garrison, broke out in open revolt. Proclaiming the

establishment of a federal republic under the name of the "United States of Brazil," they deposed the imperial ministry, set up a provisional government with Deodoro da Fonseca at its head, arranged for the election of a constitutional convention, and bade Dom Pedro and his family leave the country within twenty-four hours.

On the 17th of November, before daybreak, the summons was obeyed. Not a soul appeared to bid the old Emperor farewell as he and his family boarded the steamer that was to bear them to exile in Europe. Though seemingly an act of heartlessness and ingratitude, the precaution was a wise one in that it averted possible conflict and bloodshed. For the second time in its history, a fundamental change had been wrought in the political system of the nation without a resort to war! The United States of Brazil accordingly took its place peacefully among its fellow republics of the New World.

Meanwhile Argentina, the great neighbor of Brazil to the southwest, had been gaining territory and new resources. Since the definite adoption of a federal constitution in 1853, this state had attained to a considerable degree of national consciousness under the leadership of able presidents

such as Bartolomé Mitre, the soldier and historian, and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, the publicist and promoter of popular education. One evidence of this new nationalism was a widespread belief in the necessity of territorial expansion. Knowing that Chile entertained designs upon Patagonia, the Argentine Government forestalled any action by conducting a war of practical extermination against the Indian tribes of that region and by adding it to the national domain. The so-called "conquest of the desert" in the far south of the continent opened to civilization a vast habitable area of untold economic possibilities.

In the electoral campaign of 1880 the presidential candidates were Julio Argentino Roca and the Governor of the province of Buenos Aires. The former, an able officer skilled in both arms and politics, had on his side the advantage of a reputation won in the struggle with the Patagonian Indians, the approval of the national Government, and the support of most of the provinces. Feeling certain of defeat at the polls, the partisans of the latter candidate resorted to the timeworn expedient of a revolt. Though the uprising lasted but twenty days, the diplomatic corps at the capital proffered its mediation between the contestants,

in order to avoid any further bloodshed. The result was that the fractious Governor withdrew his candidacy and a radical change was effected in the relations of Buenos Aires, city and province, to the country at large. The city, together with its environs, was converted into a federal district and became solely and distinctively the national capital. Its public buildings, railways, and telegraph service, as well as the provincial debt, were taken over by the general Government. The seat of provincial authority was transferred to the village of Ensenada, which thereupon was rechristened La Plata.

A veritable tide of wealth and general prosperity was now rolling over Argentina. By 1885 its population had risen to upwards of 3,000,000. Immigration increased to a point far beyond the wildest expectations. In 1889 alone about 300,000 newcomers arrived and lent their aid in the promotion of industry and commerce. Fields hitherto uncultivated or given over to grazing now bore vast crops of wheat, maize, linseed, and sugar. Large quantities of capital, chiefly from Great Britain, also poured into the country. As a result, the price of land rose high, and feverish speculation became the order of the day. Banks and other institutions

of credit were set up, colonizing schemes were devised, and railways were laid out. To meet the demands of all these enterprises, the Government borrowed immense sums from foreign capitalists and issued vast quantities of paper money, with little regard for its ultimate redemption. Argentina spent huge sums in prodigal fashion on all sorts of public improvements in an effort to attract still more capital and immigration, and thus entered upon a dangerous era of inflation.

Of the near neighbors of Argentina, Uruguay continued along the tortuous path of alternate disturbance and progress, losing many of its inhabitants to the greater states beyond, where they sought relative peace and security; while Paraguay, on the other hand, enjoyed freedom from civil strife, though weighed down with a war debt and untold millions in indemnities exacted by Argentina and Brazil, which it could never hope to pay. In consequence, this indebtedness was a useful club to brandish over powerless Paraguay whenever that little country might venture to question the right of either of its big neighbors to break the promise they had made of keeping its territory intact. Argentina, however, consented in 1878 to refer certain claims to the decision of the President

of the United States. When Paraguay won the arbitration, it showed its gratitude by naming one of its localities Villa Hayes. As time went on, however, its population increased and hid many of the scars of war.

On the western side of South America there broke out the struggle known as the "War of the Pacific" between Chile, on the one side, and Peru and Bolivia as allies on the other. In Peru unstable and corrupt governments had contracted foreign loans under conditions that made their repayment almost impossible and had spent the proceeds in so reckless and extravagant a fashion as to bring the country to the verge of bankruptcy. Bolivia, similarly governed, was still the scene of the orgies and carnivals which had for some time characterized its unfortunate history. One of its buffoon "presidents," moreover, had entered into boundary agreements with both Chile and Brazil, under which the nation lost several important areas and some of its territory on the Pacific. The boundaries of Bolivia, indeed, were run almost everywhere on purely arbitrary lines drawn with scant regard for the physical features of the country and with many a frontier question left wholly unsettled.