

in America. Their prerogatives are partly founded on the distinction they enjoy in the mother-country; and they imagine they can retain those distinctions beyond the sea, whatever may be the date of their settlement in the colonies. The other class of nobility has more of an American character. It is composed of the descendants of the *Conquistadores*, that is to say, of the Spaniards who served in the army at the time of the first conquest. Among the warriors who fought with Cortez, Losada, and Pizarro, several belonged to the most distinguished families of the Peninsula; others, sprung from the inferior classes of the people, have shed lustre on their names, by that chivalrous spirit which prevailed at the beginning of the sixteenth century. In the records of those times of religious and military enthusiasm, we find, among the followers of the great captains, many simple, virtuous, and generous characters, who reprobated the cruelties which then stained the glory of the Spanish name, but who, being confounded in the mass, have not escaped the general proscription. The name of *Conquistadores* remains the more odious, as the greater number of them, after having outraged peaceful nations, and lived in opulence, did not end their career by suffering those misfortunes which appease the indignation of mankind, and sometimes soothe the severity of the historian.

But it is not only the progress of ideas, and the conflict between two classes of different origin, which have induced the privileged castes to abandon their pretensions, or at least cautiously to conceal them. Aristocracy in the Spanish colonies has a counterpoise of another kind, the action of which becomes every day more powerful. A sentiment of equality, among the whites, has penetrated every bosom. Wherever men of colour are either considered as slaves, or as having been enfranchised, that which constitutes nobility is hereditary liberty—the proud boast of having never reckoned among ancestors any but freemen. In the colonies, the colour of the skin is the real badge of nobility. In Mexico, as well as Peru, at Caracas as in the island of Cuba, a bare-footed fellow with a white skin, is often heard to exclaim: “Does that rich man think himself whiter than I am?” The population which Europe pours into America being very considerable, it may easily be supposed, that the axiom,