

The Ex-Emperor in Exile

Mexico's Agustín de Iturbide in London, 1824

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Agustín de Iturbide was a renowned military man who switched sides at the last minute and led the Army of the Three Guarantees to declare Mexico's independence in 1821. After some months of political wrangling, he pushed past institutionalized niceties and declared himself Emperor Agustín I of Mexico. Iturbide then created a full imperial court and bestowed royal titles on his children in an attempt to instill order and legitimacy through his new national monarchy, which was based on traditional Hispanic foundations. Not surprisingly, this move prompted a negative reaction from the Creole republicans who had not fought a bitter ten-year civil war against the Spanish Bourbons just to place themselves under another crown. Within a year, they forced Iturbide off his self-created throne and sent him to Italy with his large family and a generous pension on the condition that he retire from politics and never return to Mexico. Once in exile, however, the ex-Emperor quickly reneged on the promise and traveled incognito to London, where he spent four months conspiring with friendly politicians, eager merchants, and even more eager bankers. Iturbide optimistically tried to stage a return to Mexico in May 1824 but was captured and executed almost immediately upon landing at Soto la Marina. Iturbide's wife, Ana María Huarte, and their children remained in exile – first in Bath and later in Philadelphia. His memoirs were quickly translated and published posthumously in England, France, and the United States before the end of the year.

Iturbide's four-month stay in London in 1824 was short but significant, both for himself and his family, and also for what it reveals about exile networks and British involvement in the politics and economy of early national Mexico. The exiled ex-Emperor arrived in London at the

exact moment when the British Parliament was debating the political recognition of Spanish American independence, and his presence in the city intruded upon those discussions. Iturbide's machinations complicated the British government's already-tense relations with Spain and the Holy Alliance, while fueling public fury over the disastrous Spanish American loan contracts that had bankrupted so many speculators. Iturbide and his local collaborators knew very well how to engage with public meetings and the press in order to slake the thirst of the mercantile class, with its slurping desire to gain access to Mexican markets and silver. Iturbide's time in London encompassed more than just schemes and intrigues, however; it also cemented his admiration for – and desire to replicate – British culture and its constitution once he recaptured what he viewed as his rightful place as Mexico's leader.¹ Iturbide greatly admired the structure of the British constitutional monarchy, its reputation as a naval power, its industrial energy, and the leadership of George Canning personally. By the time of the ex-Emperor's arrival in London in early 1824, Britain's relationship with the Holy Alliance had broken down completely. There was renewed tension with France, and Ferdinand VII had reasserted authoritarian control in Spain, sending another wave of exiles to London. The sudden appearance of so many foreigners in the city was a visible daily reminder that foreign events were also barometers for domestic politics. Likewise, these events reinforced arguments being made on both sides of contentious issues, such as Catholic Emancipation, the regulation of a free press, the reconfiguration of Britain's role vis-à-vis the United States and the world, and the monarchy's battered reputation in the wake of the Queen Caroline Affair.

Iturbide's activities during these London months also provide a case study of the individual human experience during the Age of Revolutions by demonstrating the sorts of things that he, as an exile, had to negotiate as he moved across languages, borders, geographies, and political divides. The ex-Emperor's experience as an exile in London intensified his own hubris and affected both British and Mexican domestic politics during that crucial year 1824. As he got settled, Iturbide tapped into an existing network of exiles across Italy, France, Germany, Spain, and England to help him secure the necessary residency and transit permits and to deal with his complicated financial status. As he plotted his return to Mexico, Iturbide used this network – with its specialized local knowledge and

¹ On the spread of British constitutionalism during the Age of Revolutions, see also Maurizio Isabella's chapter in this volume.

connections – to gain access to potential supporters, to plant favorable stories in the press, and to provide emotional and cultural solace for himself and his family while resident in an unfamiliar environment. He had the benefit of being from Mexico, and thus he was able to market his unique status as a native to position himself as the possessor of valuable local information and powerful connections that could inform business decisions and give prospective investors an edge. Ex-Emperor Iturbide's personal circumstances as an exile were certainly more privileged than those of most others, but even he could not escape the essential challenge of living in two places and times at once: His body may have been in London, but his heart and mind were back in Mexico, and he was obsessed with returning there again someday.

EVENTS THAT LED TO EMPIRE AND EVENTS THAT LED TO EXILE

Agustín de Iturbide had been a reasonably successful, though not centrally important, royalist military commander in Mexico during a decade-long insurgency marked by acts of distressing brutality on both sides.² In 1820, when Spanish General Rafael Riego headed a popular military revolt, refused to go to America to fight against the patriot forces, and forced Spanish King Ferdinand VII to restore the liberal Cádiz Constitution of 1812, Iturbide correctly read the signs and realized that the tide was shifting against the royalist cause. In order to maintain conservative, Catholic, traditional Hispanic values and to preserve public order, he reached out to insurgent leaders Guadalupe Victoria and Vicente Guerrero and offered to broker a resolution that would end the war and create an independent Mexican state. On February 24, 1821, the former enemies agreed to the Plan of Iguala, which was intended to appeal to the broadest possible constituency. According to the plan, political independence would be declared, but strong cultural ties with

² Iturbide generally has been seen as a negative figure in Mexican history, one who is easy to mock for his hubris and political miscalculations. In the 1980s, historians began to take a more nuanced view, arguing that Iturbide's scope of action was extremely circumscribed by the country's complete bankruptcy and the unwillingness of its elites to pay taxes. Joaquín E. Espinosa Aguirre, "De miliciano a comandante. La trayectoria militar de Agustín de Iturbide," *Tzintzun: Revista de estudios históricos* 69 (2019): 67–99; Timothy Anna, "The Rule of Agustín de Iturbide: A Reappraisal," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 17 (1985): 79–110; Barbara Tenenbaum, *The Politics of Penury: Debts and Taxes in Mexico, 1821–1856* (Albuquerque, NM, 1986).

Spain would be maintained, a limited monarchy would be established, the complex system of castes and racial categories would be abolished, the *fueros* (special privileges of the clergy and the military) would not be touched, Catholicism would be the only permissible religion, the lives of Spanish-born residents and their private property would be respected, and the various armed forces would be incorporated into the Army of the Three Guarantees (union, religion, monarchy). On September 27, 1821 – Iturbide's birthday – the General and his 16,000 troops marched triumphantly into Mexico City as “President of the Regency.”³ Everyone was so relieved that the devastating war was over that they overlooked the staunchness of Iturbide's commitment to maintaining former imperial structures while elevating and enriching his friends and family. Initially, at least, Iturbide was “the Immortal Mexican Hero,” the happy subject of a thousand broadsides, songs, and toasts.⁴

Troubling signs appeared early. Iturbide personally chose the members for the Sovereign Provisional Governing Junta, the body charged with planning elections for a Constitutional Congress and creating appropriate new institutional structures. It was an act of corruption so overt that one contemporary observer, the conservative statesman Lucas Alamán, contemptuously called the Junta, “the *tertulia* [salon] of friends.”⁵ On February 24, 1822, this friendly body granted Iturbide one million *pesos fuertes* worth of confiscated property and twenty square-leagues of prime agricultural land in Texas. Iturbide then hired raggedy crowds and deployed the military to congregate in plazas and agitate for the coronation of “Agustín Primero,” or Agustín the First. A stacked vote came out 64 to 97 in favor of bestowing just such a crown; the sycophantic Minister of State sent a letter to the Bishop of Puebla rejoicing that “the Army and the People, united in the purest sentiments of joy, have proclaimed Señor Don Agustín de Iturbide the Emperor of Mexico.”⁶

³ Will Fowler, “Valentín Gómez Farías: Perceptions of Radicalism in Independent Mexico, 1821–1847,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 15 (1996): 42; Daniel Gutiérrez Ardila, “Iturbide y Bolívar: dos retratos diplomáticos acerca de la cuestión republicana, 1822–1831,” *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 38 (2011), 50.

⁴ An over-the-top example can be found in a pamphlet welcoming the Iturbide family's procession: *Entrada pública en Valladolid de la Sra. Da. Ana Huarte de Iturbide, digna esposa del Inmortal Héroe Mexicano* (Valladolid, 1821).

⁵ Timothy E. Anna, “The Iturbide Interregnum,” in Jaime, E. and Rodríguez, O., eds., *The Independence of Mexico and the Creation of a New Nation* (Los Angeles, 1989), 193.

⁶ Centro de Estudios Históricos, Mexico City (hereafter CEHM-CONDUMEX), XLI-I, f. 1325, Ministro del Estado del Imperio al Illmo. Sr. Obispo de Puebla, May 19, 1822, 2:30 in the morning.

On July 21, 1822, a grand coronation ceremony was held in Mexico City.⁷ The content and format drew heavily on the example of Napoleon's coronation, but it was also intensely Catholic in its rituals and drew on Spanish royal practices, such as the *besamanos* [hand-kissing] to signal obedience, corporately organized processions, and endless salvos, illuminations, and ringing of bells. Iturbide's official title was Agustín, by Divine Providence and the Congress of the Nation, First Constitutional Emperor of Mexico."⁸

Eyewitnesses had mixed reactions. Devoted republicans were contemptuous: Lorenzo de Zavala called it "a ridiculous parody" of European courts, while Vicente Rocafuerte regarded it as a cynical ploy to deceive a gullible public. Carlos María de Bustamante, a historian–publicist who had supported the patriots since the early days, mocked Iturbide as a deluded lightweight who risked being crushed by his jewels and furs. Traditionalists like Alamán were cautiously optimistic, noting that any novelty would require some time to earn the respect of the populace, while conceding that a Catholic monarchy was the true Hispanic preference.⁹ It did not take long for the mask to come off. In a country devastated by a decade of all-consuming civil war, with a military whose soldiers had not been paid for months (years, in some cases), and whose populace groaned under the constant extraction of forced loans, resentment broke out when it came to light that Iturbide's household expenses were five times greater than those of the last Spanish viceroy.¹⁰ By August, Iturbide had ordered the arrest of fifty political opponents, including fifteen members of Congress, and declared martial law to deal with the conspiratorial plots he thought lurked around every corner.¹¹ Alamán thought this

⁷ The plans are detailed in: *Proyecto del ceremonial que para la inauguración, consagración y consumación de Su Magestad el Emperador Agustín Primero, se presentó por la Comisión encargada de formarlo al Soberano Congreso en 17 de Junio de 1822* (Mexico, 1822); and *Ceremonias de la iglesia en la unción y coronación del nuevo rey ó emperador, escritas en latín por D. Andrés Castaldo, y traducidos al castellano* (Mexico, 1822).

⁸ Inmaculada Rodríguez Moya, "Agustín de Iturbide: ¿héroe o emperador?" in Manuel Chust and Víctor Mínguez, eds., *La construcción del héroe en España y México, 1789–1847* (València, 2003), 212.

⁹ David Carbajal López, "Una liturgia de ruptura: el ceremonial de consagración y coronación de Agustín I," *Signos Históricos* 25 (2011): 70–71; Verónica Zárate Toscano, "Agustín de Iturbide: El recuerdo de la consumación de independencia durante el siglo XIX," 1, no. 3 (2021): 565–85.

¹⁰ Timothy E. Anna, *The Mexican Empire of Iturbide* (Lincoln, NE, 1990), 76.

¹¹ Barbara Tenenbaum, "Taxation and Tyranny: Public Finance during the Iturbide Regime, 1821–1823," in Rodríguez, O., ed., *The Independence of Mexico*, 210.

tyrannical act marked the turning point for Iturbide. Even the distant British press took note of the disturbing and rapid turn of events:

Private letters from Mexico mention the affairs of that empire as very uncertain and approaching to a crisis. The conduct and acts of Iturbide had displeased the great body of the people, as well as some of the principal men of the empire; and the consequence had been that various petty insurrections had sprung up which had been suppressed by the soldiery. These were, however, regarded but as the forerunners of a more general stand against the authority of Iturbide; and the merchants and inhabitants were securing their property in expectation of a civil war.¹²

When Iturbide was forced to abdicate on March 19, 1823, and sent into exile, the same crowds who had rejoiced at his arrival enthusiastically serenaded his departure.¹³

On April 8, 1823, the place-holding Supreme Executive Power voted to give Iturbide a comfortable pension of 25,000 pesos per year on the condition that he go into exile in Italy and never return, an offer he accepted without complaint.¹⁴ Shortly thereafter, a maudlin farewell letter penned in Iturbide's name appeared in print. It said: "I leave for Italy, heartlessly banished from my dear native land by an inexorable superior order of the Sovereign Congress. Never would I expect such a reward from the Mexican People themselves, nor any guarantee equal to my services." Not to worry, he assured the public, they should not "imagine that I will try to return from Europe to America with the fatuous and tyrannical design of seating myself anew upon the throne of Anáhuac atop the most horrendous and bloody heaps of rubbish ... I will live out my days in a Christian manner, quietly in the sweet bosom of my family – they who I now shall call my homeland, my fellow citizens, my scepter and my crown, my fortune, my delights – in those foreign lands."¹⁵ And then he packed up and sailed away across a sea of resentment.

Of course, life in exile was never going to be a great hardship for a wealthy and well-connected ex-Emperor from Mexico, the storied land

¹² *Hull Packet and Original Weekly Commercial, Literary & General Advertiser*, February 3, 1823; *Ipswich Journal*, February 1, 1824.

¹³ Alamán, *Historia de Méjico*, 5 vols. (México, 1852), 5: 734–35, 749. Barbara Tenenbaum makes a strong argument that Iturbide's lavishness was less of a problem for the economy than wartime destruction, the total shutdown of the mining sector, the declining tax base, and the refusal of elites to permit any tax system to be established. "Taxation and Tyranny," 213.

¹⁴ *Gaceta del Gobierno Supremo de México*, May 15, 1823.

¹⁵ CEHM-CONDUMEX, Fondo XLI-I, f. 1473, *Despedida original del desgraciado Iturbide* (México, 1823).

of silver mines and a romanticized Aztec past. In Italy, Iturbide had access to the country's highest social and political circles, which softened his landing, kept him entertained, and paid his bills. He and his family arrived in Leghorn in September and were immediately offered free lodging at a country house owned by Princess Paulina Bonaparte. The next month, the group journeyed onward to Florence, where the Grand Duke of Tuscany fêted them lavishly.¹⁶ From a distance, though, Iturbide obsessively monitored the state of Mexican politics and talked openly of his rightful place as the country's Father-Savior. To that end, he issued several self-serving pamphlets that underscored his patriotism and devotion to the Mexican people, and he began to write a comeback memoir that was rapidly translated and disseminated throughout Europe and the Americas.¹⁷ Existing in that dual state of being that is common to exiles, Iturbide's body may have been in Italy but his heart and mind stubbornly remained in Mexico. On November 30, the ex-Emperor tossed aside his agreement with the Mexican government to stay out of politics, left Italy, and headed for England, a country that was already home to an extensive and eclectic community of Spanish American residents. He took with him his two oldest sons, Agustín and Ángel, his nephew Charles Malo, the historian Mariano Torrente, and a shadowy religious figure named Father José Ignacio Treviño. Bad weather, Spanish spies, and the unwillingness of French leaders to let Iturbide set foot on their soil forced a series of circuitous detours through Switzerland, Prussia, the Rhine, and Belgium before the ex-Emperor and his entourage arrived at their final destination – London – on New Year's Day 1824.¹⁸

WELCOMED BY A WAITING NETWORK

Iturbide's intentions were an open secret. In early December, his private letters flew ahead to London, and a network of recipient-supporters gave the scoop to the British press. On December 24, the *Morning*

¹⁶ The meeting took place on October 20. Lucas Alamán, *Semblanzas e ideario* (Mexico, 1939), 137.

¹⁷ *Memoirs of Agustín de Iturbide, chiefly concerning the late Revolution in Mexico, written by himself* (London, 1824); *A Statement of some of the Principal Events in the Public Life of A. de Iturbide, written by himself* (London, 1824); *Mémoires Autographes de Don Agustín de Iturbide, Ex-Empereur du Mexique* (Paris, 1824); *Denkwürdigkeiten aus dem öffentlichen Leben des Exkaisers von Mexico, von ihm selbst geschrieben* (Leipzig, 1824).

¹⁸ *Caledonian Mercury*, January 5, 1824.

Chronicle and *Morning Post* both reported that “The Ex-Emperor of Mexico ... set out for England with his sons” and that his wife and daughters would follow after she had sold their personal effects.¹⁹ The news spread quickly; this same private letter from Leghorn was picked up and widely reprinted across the country, appearing in the *Derby Mercury* (December 24, 1823), *Berrow's Worcester Journal* (December 25, 1823), *Royal Cornwall Gazette* (December 27, 1823), and many other newspapers. By the time of Iturbide's arrival, the entire British news-reading public was aware that the ex-Emperor would soon be in their midst. For his part, Iturbide gamely insisted that he was merely a private individual touring the sights to gain useful knowledge and to work on his memoirs. Newspapers repeated this polite fiction, describing his journey merely as “a short visit of curiosity.”²⁰ More-cynical editorialists declared that “Iturbide, *ci-devant* Emperor of Mexico, came to England last week, from Italy” looking to contract with “an English Commercial Company, with a capital of one million” to work the Mexican mines.²¹ On the surface, the ex-Emperor and his entourage did appear merely to be engaging in suitably innocuous tasks that kept them in the public eye; they were the human embodiments of a place long associated with riches, conquest, romance, and drama. In a sort of meta-performance, Iturbide and his eldest son, Agustín, attended the opera several times, knowing full well that they too were part of the show.²² At the time of Iturbide's arrival in London, the British monarchy was recovering from various recent scandals, most notably the Queen Caroline Affair, and journalists responded with reports on the domestic lives of the members of Britain's royal family. This tendency influenced the coverage of Iturbide, as well, with early press articles stressing his primary role as a father and announcing that his wife and daughters in Italy were selling their furniture in preparation for the family's reunion in London.²³

Obviously, the presence of an ousted Mexican emperor in London could never be apolitical. Iturbide surfaced in the British capital at the exact moment when the Cabinet was wrestling with the issue of whether to recognize the Spanish American countries as independent. The Holy

¹⁹ *Morning Chronicle*, December 24, 1823.

²⁰ *Aberdeen Journal*, January 7, 1824; *Derby Mercury*, January 7, 1824; *Caledonian Mercury*, January 8, 1824; *Leeds Mercury*, January 10, 1824.

²¹ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, January 10, 1824.

²² *Morning Post*, January 26, 1824.

²³ *Morning Chronicle*, January 25, 1824.

Alliance was siding with Spain's autocratic King Ferdinand VII to resist liberalism and liberation movements everywhere, and the debt bubble was making and unmaking fortunes most painfully. Iturbide, now the local face of a distant problem, could never be a neutral character. And, despite his promise to the Mexican Congress to retire from politics, the ex-Emperor clearly had come to London to angle for high-level backers to support his return. Exiled monarchs and disgraced politicians always dream of "The Return."²⁴ In fact, one of Iturbide's very first actions in Britain was to send a note to Foreign Secretary George Canning, in which he praised "Your Excellency's talents and virtues" and expressed a deep desire to make his personal acquaintance. Iturbide took pains to stress that he was addressing Canning in his private capacity as a traveler, but it was clear that he felt that a person of his stature was entitled to ask Britain's top diplomat to set a date and time for a meeting.²⁵ The Foreign Secretary, of course, quickly realized the thorny nature of that request and was unwilling to grant the equivalent of official recognition to Mexico by agreeing to give its ex-Emperor an official interview. He took two full days to compose a reply. Unfortunately, Canning said, he would be in the country for a few days and thus any possibility of an interview would have to wait at least until the following week.²⁶ The exchange demonstrates much about the ambiguity of an elite exile's condition; Iturbide, as ex-Emperor, was still legally permitted to be addressed as His Excellency, but he was nonetheless shut out from meetings with politicians to whom he considered himself equal because of the awkward political moment. In exile, Iturbide's identity was fraught, contingent, and liminal. He was used to wielding military and political power, but exile had reduced him to begging for access. He had occupied a central position in Mexico but was a marginal figure in London. As ex-Emperor, he had sidelined liberals and republicans and richly

²⁴ There is a significant body of literature on exiled monarchs, albeit one with a pronounced individual and biographical focus. See, for example, Robert Aldrich, *Banished Potentates: Dethroning and Exiling Indigenous Monarchs under British and French Colonial Rule, 1815–1955* (Manchester, 2018); Ronit Ricci, ed., *Exile in Colonial Asia: Kings, Convicts, Commemoration* (Honolulu, HI, 2016); Patricia Tyson Stroud, *The Man Who Had Been King: The American Exile of Napoleon's Brother Joseph* (Philadelphia, PA, 2014); Philip Mansel and Torsten Rott, eds., *Monarchy and Exile: The Politics of Legitimacy from Marie de Medicis to Wilhelm II* (New York, 2011).

²⁵ West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds (hereafter WYAS), Canning Manuscripts, bundle 132, Agustín de Iturbide to George Canning, January 13, 1824.

²⁶ British Library, London (hereafter BL), George Canning Papers, Add MS 89143/2/22/7, Canning to Iturbide, January 15, 1824.

rewarded his friends, yet the vagaries of his present condition meant that he had to take whichever friends he could get and was reduced to selling off his wife's jewelry and art collection to keep the family housed. Small wonder that he wanted to return home.

Undaunted, Iturbide continued filling his address book with contacts and meetings set up with the help of a self-interested network of Spanish and Spanish American exiles. He met speculators who were eager to get an inside deal on a potential Mexican fortune, unemployed soldiers looking for a cause and a paycheck, and a gaggle of newspapermen and publishers who correctly gauged the reading public's appetite for mystery and money. Iturbide sought out José María Blanco White, a long-time Spanish liberal exile who had established a significant publishing profile on Spanish and American affairs in London, and who confidently presented himself as a potential collaborator.²⁷ Blanco White was a complicated character, at once besotted with English norms and culture and, at the same time, intensely unhappy living outside his homeland.²⁸ His books and journals were widely read among English- and Spanish-speaking audiences on both sides of the Atlantic, which meant that he had the potential to become a key ally in any attempt to frame a return to Mexico. Iturbide obviously solicited some advice about how to position himself to maximize positive public opinion; just three days later, he wrote to Blanco White asking for comments on the papers he had left for his perusal.²⁹ They obviously had much to discuss, because only a few days later, Iturbide was already talking about the urgency of placing items in the press. Blanco White provided Iturbide with a letter of introduction to William Jacob, an odd speculator–optometrist with a long history of lobbying for British intervention in Mexico. As an exile, Iturbide operated at a significant disadvantage in his host context because he was unaware of the various histories and backstories of the various people who flocked to his side. He was unfamiliar, for example, with the Cabinet's internal tensions over issues such as Catholic Emancipation, and with the King's open hostility to the possibility that his government might recognize any of the Spanish American republics. Nevertheless, Iturbide took what enthusiasm he could get and declared this connection

²⁷ Harris Manchester College, Oxford University (hereafter HMC), Joseph Blanco White Papers, BW 2, 39–40, Iturbide to Joseph Blanco White, January 18, 1824.

²⁸ Martin Murphy, *Blanco White: Self-Banished Spaniard* (New Haven, CT, 1986); *The Life of the Rev. Joseph Blanco White: Written by himself; with portions of his Correspondence*, John Hamilton Thom, ed. (London, 1845).

²⁹ HMC, Joseph Blanco White Papers, BW 2, 37–38, Iturbide to White, January 21, 1824.

to be most useful because of what he saw as Jacob's "literary and political knowledge" and "good judgement."³⁰

Iturbide's very public presence in the city attracted lots of attention from small-time schemers like Jacob, as well as others who thought they had financial claims to press on the Mexican government. In one example, Charles Elliott, who had joined Francisco Javier Mina in a failed 1817 expedition to liberate Mexico, wrote to Iturbide on January 12 in a state of great penury and distress to "express his Zeal, Fidelity & Attachment to your Royal Person and devotedness to your Cause." In exchange for some monetary support, Elliott promised, "your Memorialist is at all times willing to draw the Sword and shed the last drop of his Blood in defence of your Royal Person."³¹ Colombian expatriate Juan García del Río had come to London as an agent of José de San Martín and sought out the ex-Emperor to express his "sentiments of profound respect and sincere estimation" and to favor him with two gold medals and four in silver, struck to commemorate Peruvian independence.³² San Martín had also been suspected by his enemies of harboring monarchist dreams, so correspondence between del Río and Iturbide likely flowed easily and brought the sort of comfort that comes from speaking one's native language with a peer. Meanwhile, across the ocean, the Mexican government was receiving regular reports from its own network of spies and authorizing its own agent, General José Mariano Michelena, to hustle over to London to block the ex-Emperor's machinations.³³

BRITISH VENTURE CAPITALISTS AND THEIR INTEREST IN INFORMAL EMPIRE

Along with these hapless and hopeful individuals came the entrepreneurs and bankers, carried on the enormous wave of money flowing around the city's investment houses, all looking to capitalize on early access to Mexico's famed silver mines and markets for manufactured goods. As chance would have it, at the same time as Iturbide was making the rounds

³⁰ HMC, Joseph Blanco White Papers, BW 2, 35–36, Iturbide to White, January 28, 1824.

³¹ University of Texas at Austin, Nettie Lee Benson Library (hereafter NLB), Hernández y Dávalos Collection, HD 17-1.3761, Charles Elliott, "To His Imperial Majesty Augustin I, Emperor of Mexico," January 12, 1824.

³² NLB, Hernández y Dávalos Collection, HD 17-2.3863, Juan García del Río to Iturbide, February 9, 1824.

³³ NLB, Hernández y Dávalos Collection, HD 17-3.4009, José Mariano Michelena to Ministro de Relaciones, April 13, 1824.

in London, several mining companies were incorporating themselves and seeking to receive exclusive contracts from anyone they perceived to be in a position to grant them.³⁴ For example, the Association for Assistance in Working the Mines of Mexico and Other Parts of Spanish America was established in January 1824 and capitalized with the astonishing sum of one million pounds; its board of directors included familiar names in high finance, like David Barclay, Charles Herring, J. D. Powles, and three Members of Parliament.³⁵ It eventually became better known as the Anglo–Mexican Mining Association and had a contract to work the Valenciana mine in Guanajuato. Its first directors meeting was held on February 26, less than two months after Iturbide arrived in search of material support.³⁶ As a General and ex-Emperor, Iturbide could trade on his former status, his insider's knowledge of the country, and his personal popularity with the not-insignificant royalist and military constituencies back in Mexico to offer British bankers privileged access to mines and markets; in return, the venture capitalists could provide Iturbide with much-needed material support.

Manufacturers were not far behind the bankers and miners in their enthusiasm or lobbying activity. Messrs. Hartley, Green & Ruperti operated a ceramic factory and had a satellite office in Mexico. In early 1824, they pushed hard to get the British government to inquire about removing obstacles to the textile trade, mainly in the form of bothersome customs duties; their request came in the form of a list of twenty-eight mercantile firms in the Midlands whose interests they claimed to represent.³⁷ In a similar vein, the Goldschmidt banking and investment house also tried to blur the lines between its own business interests and government-sanctioned activity when it offered to be the conduit for Foreign and Admiralty Office dispatches to Mexico.³⁸ And, throughout the early part of 1824, another

³⁴ For excellent overviews of British speculators' long involvement in Mexican silver mines, see John Tutino, *Mexico City, 1808: Power, Sovereignty, and Silver in an Age of War and Revolution* (Albuquerque, NM, 2018); Carlos Marichal, *Bankruptcy of Empire: Mexican Silver and the Wars between Spain, Britain, and France, 1760–1810* (New York, 2007).

³⁵ The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA), Foreign Office (FO), 50/8, 127–28. The three directors who were also sitting Members of Parliament were Matthias Attwood, Stewart Marjoribanks, and William Thompson.

³⁶ Benjamin Disraeli, *An Inquiry into the Plans, Progress, and Policy of the American Mining Companies*, 3rd ed. (London, 1825), 24.

³⁷ TNA, FO, 50/8, 5, Messrs. Green & Hartley to Joseph Planta, January 30, 1824. Their local Mexican agent, Guillermo Drusina, was a native of Hamburg. David W. Walker, *Kinship, Business and Politics: The Martínez del Río Family in Mexico, 1823–1867* (Austin, TX, 1986), 85.

³⁸ TNA, FO, 50/8, 13, B. A. Goldschmidt to Planta, February 6, 1824.

group of business interests were actively lobbying the government to set up and subsidize a regular packet mail service to Mexico and Colombia. Dr. Mackie had just returned from heading up the first British mission to Mexico and was in the process of debriefing the government and claiming reimbursement for his expenses and reports.³⁹ Mexico clearly was on everyone's mind in 1824 and Iturbide, as a famous and well-connected exile, had as much to offer British notables as they had to offer him.

Iturbide's closest collaborator was Francisco Borja Migoni, a long-time London resident of ambiguous status who had been presenting himself as the financial agent for the Mexican Empire.⁴⁰ In this role, he had considered himself empowered to contract loans against the security of Mexico's Customs House and various silver mines, making deals with abandon. Now that Iturbide had arrived on scene, Migoni used the presence of the ex-Emperor and the whiff of legitimacy he imparted to dangle prospects before speculators and bankers who were all too ready to believe his promises. A British merchant house in Mexico operated as a backchannel, reporting that Migoni had met with President of the Board of Trade William Huskisson several times in February and was attempting to shore up his position by advising the Minister that "until I present to Your Excellency a plan of subsidies communicated to me by this [the British government] you will please not to compromise yourself // for a new Loan // with the understanding, that I shall be able to communicate to you the nature of the above plan in a few days hence."⁴¹

Iturbide himself upped the ante when he crafted an exposition to the Mexican Congress – very clearly dated from London on February 13, 1824 – in which he offered them his services as "a simple soldier" bringing with him arms, munitions, uniforms, and money to defend the country against a rumored Spanish invasion backed by the Holy Alliance.⁴² From his European vantage point, Iturbide blamed his exile on the "mistakes and passions of some individuals," never once doubting that "on the part of the Mexican people, I encounter nothing but motives of recognition and eternal gratitude," completely ignoring the very material fact that he

³⁹ These documents are reprinted in *La Diplomacia Mexicana*, 33 vols. (México, 1912), 2: 97–129.

⁴⁰ Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City (hereafter AGN), LE-1612 (13), 129, Supremo Poder Ejecutivo to Francisco de Borja Migoni, August 6, 1823.

⁴¹ BL, Add MSS 38745, 294–295, Messrs. Green & Hartley to Mr. Baddiel, May 7, 1824.

⁴² Agustín de Iturbide, *Exposiciones dirigidas al Soberano Congreso General de la Nación* (México, 1824). The letter was reprinted for the public in *Gaceta del Gobierno Supremo de la Federación Mexicana* 3 (1824): 241–42, in Biblioteca Nacional, Mexico City, Colección Lafragua, vol. 1392, nos. 32 and 33.

had accepted a pension on the condition that he would remain in Italy and not attempt to make a return to Mexico. The ex-Emperor's audacity went even further; he suggested that Admiral Thomas Dundonald, Lord Cochrane, might be willing to accompany him in taking over the naval defenses at San Juan de Ulúa, Veracruz.⁴³ When he wrote to Cochrane, Iturbide spoke in the name of the Mexican nation, flattering the Admiral, offering him the leadership of a new navy, promising that he would be richly compensated for his services, and stressing that they had to act as quickly as possible.⁴⁴ Time operates differently in an exile's world; everything is simultaneously urgent and painfully drawn out. Clearly, the man did not see himself remaining in exile permanently.

THE EXILE'S DESIRE TO RETURN: THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Iturbide's short letter to the Mexican Congress announcing his intention to breach their agreement and return to reassert his claim to legitimate rule was not a document likely to make things easier for his British hosts. The newly established Congress was none too pleased with the news, either. At the end of April, upon receiving a copy of the ex-Emperor's plans to return, the Supreme Executive Power and the General Constitutional Congress signed a joint proclamation declaring him to be "a traitor and outlaw" who would be considered an enemy of state if he ever attempted to return. Anyone who spoke favorably of the disgraced figure would likewise be considered a traitor.⁴⁵ A flurry of debates followed in which legislators reminded each other of the bargain struck with Iturbide in September 1823 in which the ex-Emperor promised never to return. They also moved to withhold the remaining 12,500 pesos of his pension because he had violated his agreement. Deputies Carlos María de Bustamante and Servando Teresa de Mier vigorously reminded their peers that Iturbide had been a murderous, vicious general in the 1810s, had supported independence insincerely and opportunistically, and now, with this dishonorable suggestion, had revealed his fundamentally untrustworthy nature for all to see.⁴⁶ At the very moment that the Congress was writing a new constitution cementing

⁴³ Alamán, *Semblanzas*, 138–39.

⁴⁴ Southern Methodist University, DeGolyer Library, Dallas (hereafter DGL), Agustín de Iturbide Papers 1822–24, Iturbide to Thomas Dundonald, Lord Cochrane, May 6, 1824, copy.

⁴⁵ *El Sol*, April 30, 1824.

⁴⁶ *Águila Mexicana*, May 8, 1824.

Mexico's independent existence as a republic, the threat of potential civil unrest posed by the exiled ex-Emperor's return to foment civil unrest was most unwelcome. His status abroad was rendered ambiguous, and his ability to unify support around himself was undermined.

The Mexican government decided to send a deputy named José Mariano Michelena to London on a fact-finding mission to investigate Iturbide's actions and confirm his true intentions. The distance and timing meant that the two men never encountered each other. Michelena left Veracruz on March 10, 1824, and therefore did not arrive in London until after Iturbide had departed.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the Mexican Congress already had an extensive network of spies and informants in London who kept them abreast of the exile's machinations. From the time they received copies of his February manifesto, the possibility of Iturbide's return became a frequent source of speculation. Congress debated whether to include Iturbide in "the mass of citizens" eligible for the general amnesty being offered to royalists and European Spaniards. Deputy Juan de Dios Cañedo forcefully argued for the majority that common sense dictated that Iturbide was not welcome to return, just as Napoleon had been excepted from the amnesty granted to regular French folks in exile after 1815.⁴⁸ Notwithstanding all the evidence to the contrary, Iturbide continued to believe that the Mexican people were clamoring for his return. He wrote to his friend Antonio Gama asking for "a blessing for an honorable family that finds itself exiled two thousand leagues from his homeland all because the father, due to his honor and love of country, prefers that condition to shedding a single drop of blood in his cause."⁴⁹ The ex-Emperor should not have been so sanguine. He would be dead at their hands within three months.

Like most exiles, Iturbide became focused on the health and education of his children in an unfamiliar environment. In fact, his friend Michael J. Quin remembered fondly that:

[Iturbide's] heart was softened in early life by an affection for the lady who is now the mother of a numerous family. It is in the circle of that family, while his children are around him, that Iturbide is seen most delighted.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Águila Mexicana*, March 9, 1824.

⁴⁸ *Águila Mexicana*, March 10, 1824.

⁴⁹ Iturbide to Antonio Gama, March 8, 1824, in Magnus Mörner, "Una carta de Iturbide de 1824," *Historia Mexicana* 13 (1964): 596–99. Original in the National Archives of Sweden.

⁵⁰ Michael J. Quin, "Editor's introduction," in *A Statement of Some of the Principal Events in the Public Life of Agustín de Iturbide, Written by Himself*, Michael J. Quin, ed. (Washington, DC, 1971), xxii.

Concerned with the unhealthy conditions in London, and keen to consolidate his public-facing status by associating himself with the aristocratic circles who tended to congregate at Bath, Iturbide moved his wife and youngest children there in mid-March.⁵¹ There, in a picturesque society town populated with many prominent foreigners of ambiguous rank and status, Iturbide hoped to keep his family away from the capital's bad influences.⁵² Ranging in age from four to seventeen years of age, Iturbide's nine children included: Agustín, María Sabina, Juana de Dios, Josefa, Ángel, María del Jesús, Salvador, and Felipe.⁵³ The ex-Emperor found comfort in the conservative monarchist circles in Bath and sought an English education to create what he called "the moral security" necessary to build character in his children. There in Bath, sitting in drawing rooms among an assortment of exiled French, Tuscan, Greek, and Hungarian nobility, Iturbide joined his cause with others who wanted to turn back the advance of republics in their various homelands during the Age of Revolutions.

Iturbide paid the greatest attention to his oldest son and heir apparent, Prince Agustín Gerónimo José María de la Concepción Ramón Iturbide y Huarte. He kept the sixteen-year-old boy with him in London and made sure to expose him to its many technical wonders and sensory delights. Passing days together in the bustling capital, Iturbide and Agustín marveled at "the amazing traffic of coaches and persons of all classes walking in the streets."⁵⁴ But as an ex-Emperor and a patriotic father, Iturbide's main priority was to ensure that his heir was kept physically safe and that he received the best education possible in preparation for eventual service to his country. After a brief period at Mr. Collins's boarding school in Ealing, northeast London, Iturbide transferred his

⁵¹ The Iturbides' relocation to Bath was widely reported in the newspapers. *Treuman's Exeter Flying Post*, March 18, 1824; *Liverpool Mercury*, March 26, 1824; *Leeds Mercury*, March 27, 1824; *Aberdeen Journal*, April 7, 1824.

⁵² The Iturbide children's experiences are described in Karen Racine, "The Childhood Shows the Man": Latin American Children in Great Britain, 1790–1830," *The Americas* 72 (2015): 287–91.

⁵³ A ninth child, Dolores, lived only a short time after her birth in 1819. Dates and details for the Iturbide children are found in José María Navarro Méndez, "La mujer del emperador. Ana María Huarte de Iturbide. Un perfil histórico, 1786–1822," *Legajos, Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* 8, no. 16 (2018): 11–34. A branch of the Iturbide family resides in Mexico and still asserts its claim to the Mexican throne. See Charles Mikos de Tarrodhaza, Teodor Amerlink y Zirion, and David Williamson, *The Imperial House of Mexico: The House of Iturbide* (London, 1994). I thank Timothy Anna for sharing this information.

⁵⁴ NLB, Hernández y Dávalos Collection, HD 17–1.3753, Iturbide to José Antonio López, January 8, 1823. Instructions for his daughters are given in HD 17–2.3880.

son to the prestigious, Benedictine-run Ampleforth College where, as late as 1826, young Iturbide had returned to live as a “parlour boarder” (a privately-supported young-adult resident).⁵⁵ Ampleforth was a small school – just forty or fifty students enrolled each year – closely associated with the nearby Ampleforth Abbey.⁵⁶ There are hints that Iturbide may have received his introduction to the College from the former Spanish Ambassador to London, the Duke of San Carlos, whose son had attended the College a few years earlier.

With his heir settled in London and his wife and younger children in Bath, Iturbide continued to make the rounds, meeting with anyone who might be able to support him in his quest to return to Mexico and reclaim his throne. In April, he offered to travel to Chatham to meet Sir Charles William Pasley, an experienced soldier from the Peninsular Wars and noted military engineer.⁵⁷ He heard that José de San Martín, the famous Liberator of Argentina, Chile, and Peru had passed by on his way to Belgium and sincerely regretted missing the opportunity to meet a man who, like himself, had favored constitutional monarchies in the wake of the empire’s collapse.⁵⁸ He also visited with Basil Hall, a Royal Navy Captain and author of a current bestselling travel account of his voyage to South America, who said, “I had the satisfaction of conversing with Iturbide himself in London, just before he sailed for Mexico, where he lost his life; and I was gratified to learn from his own mouth, as far as his motives and conduct were concerned, he was perfectly satisfied with the accuracy of my statements.”⁵⁹

On May 12, Iturbide made a final overture to George Canning, this time to inform him of his decision to take up his destiny and return to Mexico. He was, he said, answering the call as a simple soldier anxious to solidify his country’s happiness. Obviously assuming that he would be

⁵⁵ NLB, Hernández y Dávalos Collection, HD 17–2.3894, Iturbide to his banker, Mr. Fletcher, March 3, 1823. There was an initial payment of £200 for the acquisition of provisions and supplies, and arrangements were made for annual support to the amount of £120.

⁵⁶ Ampleforth Abbey, Yorkshire, “The Nihill Diary (January–June 1816)” and the “Order of the Annual Examination” (July 31, 1827).

⁵⁷ BL, Add MS 41963, 278, Iturbide to General Sir Charles William Pasley, April 9, 1824. For more on the pool of British soldiers who were eager to seize the opportunities offered by the Age of Revolutions, see the chapter by Maurizio Isabella in this volume.

⁵⁸ Iturbide to José de San Martín, May 10, 1824, in José de San Martín, *Su correspondencia, 1823–1850* (Madrid, 1911), 347.

⁵⁹ Basil Hall, *Extracts from a Journal, written on the Coasts of Chili, Peru, and Mexico, in the Years 1820, 1821, 1822*, 2 vols. (London, 1840), 2: 282n.

restored to full power, the ex-Emperor promised Canning that his first act would be to establish fixed bases for solid relations with Great Britain that would serve their mutual interests. Iturbide also promised that he had no intention of “compromising the high politics of this [your] Government in any way.”⁶⁰ Obviously, it was a bit too late for that. He departed for Mexico without having managed to meet with the leery Foreign Secretary, who certainly was anxious to consolidate Britain’s access to Mexico’s resources and to block the rising power of the United States in the region, but who also had more reliable information networks and better political sense than to back a haughty, easily ousted, and unpopular self-crowned monarch who had washed up on their shores. At that moment, Canning’s foreign policy strategy was complicated. He was attempting to create an entente with the United States government as a bulwark against Spanish colonial irredentism and renewed French ambition in the Western Hemisphere while simultaneously expanding British economic influence, and Mexico – situated as it was right on the American border – was a particularly delicate diplomatic needle to thread.⁶¹

Nevertheless, the ever-optimistic Iturbide left a letter with his friend Michael J. Quin, hoping a local might succeed where a foreigner had failed. On May 15, Quin sent Canning a short note asking him to fix an early time for an interview, because he had in his possession a “private and confidential letter, addressed to you ... It is of some public importance, perhaps, that you should be made acquainted with its contents as soon as possible.”⁶² Not one to be lured so easily, Canning did not take the bait. He told Quin to transmit the letter to him via the Foreign Office, under cover marked “Private,” where he would be sure to receive it safely. As the Foreign Secretary said bluntly:

Mr. C (without meaning any disrespect to Mr. Quin) objects to receiving a Letter of a confidential nature for an Interview, with a Gentleman whom he has not the honour of knowing ... If Mr. Q is commissioned to add anything to the contents

⁶⁰ WYAS, Iturbide to Canning, Canning Manuscripts, bundle 132, May 12, 1824.

⁶¹ Eric Van Young, *A Life Together: Lucas Alamán and Mexico, 1792–1853* (New Haven, CT, 2021), 221–22; Sara Medina Calzada, “The Felon King: Ferdinand VII in British Print Culture, 1814–1833,” *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 96 (2019), 957–58; Marco Antonio Landavazo, “La reconquista, el príncipe y la isla: Gran Bretaña y el reconocimiento español de la independencia de México,” in Will Fowler and Marcela Terrazas, eds., *Diplomacia, negocios y política: Ensayos sobre la relación entre México y el Reino Unido en el siglo XIX* (México, 2018), 45–77; Norihito Yamada, “George Canning and the Spanish Question, 1822–1823,” *The Historical Journal* 52 (2009): 354.

⁶² BL, George Canning Papers, Add MS 89143/2/22/7, Michael J. Quin to Canning, May 15, 1824.

of the Letter, Mr. C must request that this may be done in writing—as Mr. C knows by experience that nothing is so likely to lead to misunderstanding & confusion as a written communication accompanied by a verbal commentary.⁶³

Quin had no choice but to give up the idea of a private conversation and duly passed on the letter later that same afternoon.

As Iturbide's friend and publicist, Quin also provided his own revealing gloss on Iturbide's actions, motivations, and political sentiments. Quin admitted to Canning that indeed he had been given additional verbal instructions, which were the following:

that if events shall give General de Iturbide a leading influence in Mexico, as is perhaps not wholly improbable, it is his intention to contribute all that influence towards the establishment of a constitution there similar as far as the circumstances of that country will permit, to the constitution of England: that it is his anxious wish to cultivate the closest political and commercial relations with Great Britain, and that he entertains a confident hope that as soon as he can make it appear to you that the government is consolidated, and Mexico redeemed from the discord which at present distracts it, you will not be slow to recognize the independence of that Country.⁶⁴

As the General's close friend, Quin wanted to reassure Canning that “during his sojourn in England he carefully examined our institutions, he went away willed with admiration for them, and with the most cordial feelings of Kindness towards the Country which they adorn ... You, Sir, would have recognized in him a kindred greatness of soul, and a kindred devotion to the welfare of mankind.” Quin must have been hurt by his inability to secure a face-to-face meeting, because in his closing salutation, he permitted himself one small jab at Canning, observing that the “tone of your note, in which, however, I see great practical wisdom, and a salutary habit of precaution induces me, in my own behalf, to take the liberty of reminding you that I have already had the honour of an interview with you, when I returned from Spain with dispatches for you, about this time twelve months.”

Despite his very public activities during the early months of 1824, when the momentous time came, Iturbide's actual departure was cloaked in secrecy and misdirection. Some people dismissed it as just another rumor intended to manipulate the stock market.⁶⁵ A few newspapers reported hearing that “the Ex-Emperor Iturbide, after having privately

⁶³ BL, George Canning Papers, Add MS 89143/2/22/7, Canning to Quin, May 15, 1824.

⁶⁴ BL, George Canning Papers, Add MS 89143/2/22/7, Quin to Canning, May 15, 1824.

⁶⁵ *Examiner*, May 16, 1824.

left this country, lately sailed from a French port for Mexico with the view of *joining the Royalist forces!!* It is added that his Ex-Imperial Majesty has been provided with a large sum of money and with the disposal of numerous orders, decorations, and other favors and rewards from the King of Spain, to be bestowed upon the adherents to the cause of the Mother Country in South America.”⁶⁶ Other editors debunked these same “foolish reports [that] are in circulation that Iturbide, the late Emperor of Mexico, has secretly left England to head the Royalist party which he was the principal means of overthrowing in that country. The public have been so easily duped of late by intelligence relating to the new transatlantic states that the fabricators deem no device too gross or palpable.”⁶⁷ The *Morning Chronicle*, usually a reliable source for Spanish American news, assured its readers “much nonsense has been lately said about Iturbide ... We, however, are now at liberty to state that his first destination is not Demerara, but New Orleans.”⁶⁸ The reports were all wrong. Although he left behind a florid declaration of a patriotic obligation to forsake his own comfort and heed his fellow citizens’ call to return and save the country, the truth is that Iturbide acted on his own accord and in his own interest.⁶⁹

As he set out aboard the *Spring*, Iturbide left a set of proclamations about his destiny, one directed at his son Prince Agustín, who had relocated to a Jesuit school at Stonyhurst, and the other to the Mexican nation. In both cases, he spoke as a father and a virtuous man who did not seek power but rather was willing to sacrifice himself and his comforts in order to answer the people’s call.⁷⁰ While Iturbide was basking in self-adoration, a very different letter was being sent across the ocean from a Mexican resident in London who felt obliged “not to keep my mouth shut for an instant while the shots of the former oppressor aim for that republic to re-establish his odious domination, and plant the colossus of his despotism upon ... [a land] that today, without a doubt, enjoys its liberty under a philanthropic national government.”⁷¹ On July

⁶⁶ *Trewhman's Exeter Flying Post; or, Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser*, May 20, 1824.

⁶⁷ *Caledonian Mercury*, May 17, 1824.

⁶⁸ *Morning Chronicle*, May 31, 1824.

⁶⁹ DGL, Agustín de Iturbide Papers 1822–1824, Agustín de Iturbide, “Proclama a los Mexicanos al pretender el volver a México con motivo de una guerra extranjera,” 1824, copy.

⁷⁰ CEHM-CONDUMEX, Fondo LXXII–2, f. 159, Iturbide, “Proclamation on board the *Spring*, June 1824.”

⁷¹ Biblioteca Nacional de México, Colección Lafragua, vol. 139, no. 31, *Planes del Sr Iturbide para la nueva conquista de América* (Mexico, 1824).

15, Iturbide disembarked at Soto la Marina and was swiftly arrested by the Mexican authorities, who were waiting for him. He was executed by firing squad four days later on July 19, 1824, without so much as a summary trial.⁷²

The short exile of the ex-Emperor Iturbide in London had reverberations that rippled out beyond his immediate actions and moment. Indeed, the quixotic character served as a lightning rod for several ongoing debates in domestic politics that turned out to be connected to foreign affairs, as well. For example, religious tolerance, Catholic Emancipation, and the Irish Question were bound up with the rising Catholic conservative revanchism in Spain, France, and elsewhere in the Mediterranean world. British bankers, manufacturers, and import/export companies were pushing hard to gain access to Latin American markets but wanted government and diplomatic guarantees to ensure stability. Many of these same groups were active in the abolitionist movement at the same time and looked to Spanish Americans as allies and test cases for their cause. Major John Cartwright, the longtime radical and advocate of Parliamentary reform and British-style constitutionalism abroad, had been preoccupied with Iturbide and Mexican events even as the end of his long life approached.⁷³ His last written words were a call to the Spanish people to recognize their universal nobility. As Cartwright saw it:

It was Almighty God who in forming Spaniards for such felicity, made them *men*. It was a succession of tyrants, who, for reducing them to slaves, made them cavaleros, hidalgos, grandees, and taught them the contemptible nonsense of family blood. Virtue alone is true nobility: patriot services for establishing common right and universal freedom, are alone legitimate titles to public trust and distinctions.

As she edited his memoirs, Cartwright's niece inserted a note to the effect that "General Michelena (the Mexican minister) having about two

⁷² Archivo General y Real de Simancas, Valladolid, Estado 8.267, undated notice. After his execution, Iturbide's distraught wife and children went to live in Washington, DC, where they were supported by the Spanish American community and a charity supported by the Catholic Church. On December 3, 1833, President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna issued a decree that restored the widow's pension and permitted her family to return to Mexico, with the exception of the oldest son and namesake who was considered a threat to public order. See "Decreto que el Presidente Antonio López de Santa Anna, a favor de la familia Iturbide Huarte. November 3, 1833," *El Fénix de la Libertad*, November 7, 1833.

⁷³ Major John Cartwright, *Diálogo político entre un italiano, un español, un francés, un alemán, y un inglés* (London, 1825); *The English Constitution, produced and illustrated* (London, 1823); *Military Hints to the Greeks* (London, 1821).

days before his death, sent a kind of message to inform him that the scheme of Iturbide had failed, and that the liberty of Mexico might be considered as established, he exclaimed with fervor, 'I am glad, I am very glad!' These were almost the last words he ever spoke: his voice after became nearly inaudible, but he was perfectly sensible to the last and appeared absorbed in mental prayer."⁷⁴ Even Baron Alexander von Humboldt became embroiled in the fallout from Iturbide's exile days in London, being persuaded to write a letter to President Guadalupe Victoria soliciting the release of Charles Beneski, the ex-Emperor's adviser, aide-de-camp, and chief scribe, who had been held as a prisoner since the landing; Humboldt downplayed any treasonous intent and suggested that the young man had "been induced, by an error of political opinion, to follow the fortunes of Iturbide." The Mexican government was aware of its public image and released Beneski on anticipation of the letter's arrival.⁷⁵

Mexican ex-Emperor Agustín de Iturbide's four-month stay in London in 1824 demonstrates how exiles and their networks shaped British involvement in restructuring political and economic life in early national Mexico. Iturbide's London-based activities during these months also provide a specific case study of the exile experience during the Age of Revolutions. As an exile, Iturbide had to operate in different languages, climates, and cultures, relying on the advice and kindness of his hosts and new acquaintances, many of whom had their own motives for seeking out a relationship. He was a vector for the dissemination of first-hand information about the current state of Mexico's politics and economy, and, in this capacity, he not only stoked the interests of British investment banks, mining companies, and merchants but also expedited the founding of specific companies that exploited the direct connection that he provided. The nature of Iturbide's experience as an elite political exile in London magnified his own sense of destiny and intensified his desire for return. Four short months in that crucial year of 1824 set in motion a series of events that ended any realistic chance that the Mexican Empire would be restored, while at the same time opening a wedge of opportunity for British banking, merchant, and mining interests to position themselves at the center of a new informal empire.

⁷⁴ *The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright*, 2 vols. (London, 1826), 2: 280–83. The anecdote was regularly trotted out in radical circles for years afterward. See, for example, *Examiner*, July 2, 1826.

⁷⁵ *Morning Chronicle*, July 19, 1825.

