

Spain, others desired annexation to Louisiana, and submission to Spanish domination. Some there were who advised a war with Spain as affording a pretext for seizing New Orleans, while a fourth suggested that congress should be prevailed on to show preparation for war, and by alarming their apprehensions, 'extort from the cabinet of Madrid what it persisted in refusing.' The fifth and last suggested that France should be solicited to procure a retrocession of Louisiana, and to extend her protection to the inhabitants of Kentucky.¹

"The extension of its American possessions, and the control of trade, had long been the desire of the Spanish crown. The occasion was opportune and did not escape the superior vigilance of its public servant. The obstruction to navigation, which had purposely been thrown in the way of the inhabitants of the upper country, seemed now to have produced the desired result; and Miro, the governor of Louisiana, flattered himself, from the discontent which appeared everywhere prevailing, that at no distant day he could report to the cabinet the dismemberment of Kentucky from the Union, and its voluntary acknowledgment of Spanish domination.

"General James Wilkinson was at that time one of the leading men of the district. He had been a successful soldier in the Revolution and greatly distinguished himself by his unflinching courage and superior military tact. Like many of his compatriots, at the close of the war he had been left with limited pecuniary resources, and found it necessary to turn his attention to other pursuits. Still comparatively young, with a vigorous constitution, and superior intellectual attainments, he hoped soon to establish an independence of fortune, and elevate himself to a distinguished civic position. With a remarkably discriminating judgment, few men better understood the motives which influence human action, and none more successful in wielding that knowledge to his own advantage.

"In the fall of 1787, having laden a boat with tobacco [from Kentucky] he descended to New Orleans with the ostensible purpose of making arrangements with the Spanish authorities by which to secure to the inhabitants of the upper waters the free navigation of the river, and a market for their products. Scarcely had he landed, however, before he found himself surrounded by a retinue of officers, who informed him that they were directed to seize upon his cargo, which had been confiscated to the government, and that he himself was required to appear before the governor. Miro soon discovered that the individual of all others whom he could have most desired for the furtherance of his objects, was then in his presence a suppliant for his favor. He found in Wilkinson a man of ripe experience and extensive influence. Insinuating in address, bold but reserved, with a ready familiarity in the passing affairs of foreign governments

¹ Martin's History of Kentucky, vol. ii., p. 101.