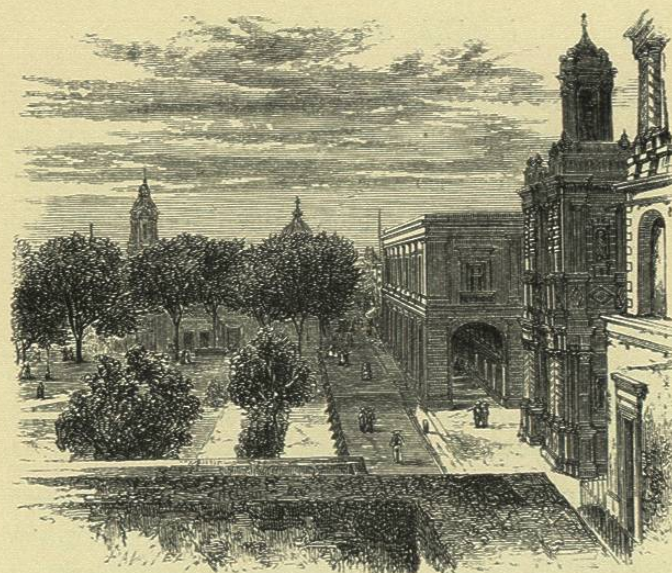


horses been so thoroughly tired out—they had marched forty-eight leagues in sixty hours,—in all probability the Liberal army of the north would have been entirely broken up on that day, and have given no further trouble.

Still the results were excellent. Escobedo lost over sixty men killed, and a great number of wounded and deserters. The *prestige* of the French was immensely increased, and the Mexican Imperialists vastly reassured by the promptness of the affair. It was regarded, and very justly so, as a brilliant success, and due to the skill and energy of De la Hayrie.



WAYSIDE FONDA.



PLAZA AND CATHEDRAL AT ST. LUIS POTOSI.

CHAPTER XII.

LA GUERRE AUX ADOBES.

THE Fates appeared resolved that we should not carry away with us any favourable impressions of Matehuala, for no sooner did we enter the town than down came the rain in torrents, and the streets were speedily converted into perfect quagmires of mud. The only place I can recollect as at all equalling it in dirt, bustle, hurrying of troops, and floundering about of guns and waggons, is Pehtang in 1860, some few days after the landing of the French and

English forces in the north of China; there it was, perhaps, even a trifle worse.

On marching into the town, we heard the first news of the battle of Sadowa and the fight at Custoza. The Liberals were forgotten for the moment, and all conversation seemed naturally to turn upon these colossal engagements in Europe, entirely throwing Mexican questions into the shade. Not that the dissidents were far off, for they had the temerity to pluck up their courage and push on to Cedral in considerable force, as soon as the French outposts retired on Matehuala. As it was the intention, for the time being, at any rate, to hold Matehuala, it evidently became a necessity to strike a vigorous blow in order to deter the enemy from annoying the garrison after the departure of the main columns, which were directed upon St. Luis Potosi and Queretaro. Accordingly, the evening of the same day that General Douay marched out, General Jeaningros being left to protect the town, the Commandant de la Hayrie, who, like Probyn in India, seemed always to be the lucky man in the way when work was to be done, with his regiment, the Bataillon d'Afrique, and a troop of cavalry, started in two columns towards Cedral, one column following a cross-road at the foot of the mountains, and the other, under his own command, taking the direct road along the centre of the great valley.

By this latter route the distance was between five and six leagues, and early in the morning his advanced guard of cavalry surprised the enemy's pickets, driving them through the streets of the town, and cutting off a good number of stragglers. In the end, though, they narrowly escaped being drawn on into a hazardous position, for in the uncertain light they found themselves brought to a standstill by a deep trench newly dug right across the road, and received by a heavy fire from the surrounding houses that occasioned them the loss of several men, and a lieutenant, Perrère, wounded. Fortunately, the infantry and the second column were close at hand, and the Liberals were speedily driven into the open ground behind the town, losing about fifty men, the French force returning to Matehuala.

I am particular in relating this affair, because you will see that later on we were obliged to come back from St. Luis Potosi to give assistance to De la Hayrie, who was, after the departure of General Jeaningros, left in command of Matehuala, with a battery of artillery, his regiment, the mounted company of the Bataillon d'Afrique, and the Mexican cavalry of Colonel Quiroga and Máximo Campos, the survivor of the unlucky expedition to Santa Isabel.

For now commenced the period popularly termed

by the French army as *La Guerre aux Adobes* ;*—trenches were dug out, batteries thrown up, and every precaution taken to ensure the outpost towns against any attack made upon them by superior forces. Matchuala, in a very short time, became a small Sebastopol in its way, and Venado (the next town on the road to St. Luis Potosi, and held in second line in support of the former position), under the hands of the Commandant Dormont and Captain Cardin, two officers of *génie*, would, I expect, have given infinite trouble to, and puzzled the brains of, the Liberal chiefs, had they ever attempted to take it.

On the 18th of August, General Douay arrived at Venado, and most certainly nobody counted upon remaining there for a longer period than a couple of days at the very outside, had not all calculations been thrown out, as you will see, by the Belgian corps and their difficulties.

This force was commanded by Colonel Van der Smissen, an exceedingly brave and accomplished officer, who, I am convinced, would always have sacrificed his own private interests to those of the regiment under his orders. Unfortunately many of his officers found themselves placed in an exceedingly disagreeable and false position. They had originally leave of absence from their respective

* 'Adobes,'—bricks made of mud, and dried in the sun.

corps granted to them by the Belgian government for a period of two years, under a very distinct understanding that should they not report themselves in Belgium at the expiration of such period, they would be considered as having definitely accepted service under the Mexican empire, and their places accordingly would be filled up in the regiments to which they belonged. This term of two years was rapidly drawing to a close, and it was with an intense anxiety to arrive at Mexico, give in their resignations, and embark for Europe, that the greater number of the officers started from Monterey, on their downward route.

Matchuala was not by any means over-garrisoned to resist the possible attacks that might be made upon it by the numerous bands springing up almost daily in its vicinity, and the forces of Escobedo; and it was in consequence of this that Marshal Bazaine directed General Douay to send back the Belgians to reinforce De la Hayrie. This order General Douay forwarded to Colonel Van der Smissen, who, with his regiment, was at the moment *en passage* at Venado. On its reception there was a great outcry amongst the officers, ending, eventually, by their demanding, with the exception of the Colonel and two others, permission to resign their grades and leave at once for Belgium; for they foresaw that, their backs once again turned upon

Mexico, it was almost impossible for them to reach their corps within the prescribed leave of absence. As soon as this decision had been arrived at, Colonel Van der Smissen acted very promptly; leaving these officers to await a superior decision at Venado, he immediately mustered his men and marched back towards Matehuala, inveighing bitterly against his desertion, and declaring his intention not to leave the men under his command, even should he, by remaining, lose all further chance of future advancement at home.

You may imagine the dismay of General Douay, when, the day we marched to Venado, we met these 800 men on the road, with only three officers at their head. There was evidently but one course to follow, for the situation was most complicated and difficult, namely, to send a courier on to St. Luis Potosi, from which city there was telegraphic communication with Mexico, and demand the orders of the Emperor and the Marshal on the subject, awaiting, in the meantime, the result at Venado, from which point assistance could readily be rendered to Matehuala, should subsequent circumstances arise in which such aid should become a necessity.

This General Douay decided to do, and at last, after some delay, the decision from the capital arrived.

Powers were given by Maximilian to the General to name first and second lieutenants in the corps from amongst the second lieutenants or non-commissioned officers. Colonel Van der Smissen was to be ordered back to Venado, and a parade was to be held, at which these promotions were to be named,—the officers who had refused to march being directed to proceed to Mexico. They had, as it happened, already left for St. Luis Potosi, for the General very justly thought that should they remain, disagreeable scenes might very possibly arrive on others being named to fill up their places.

The corps returned at once, and at a full dress parade on the plaza the General passed a minute inspection of the men, at the conclusion of which the new officers were severally proclaimed in the name of the Emperor. A day or two later, the regiment left and after all marched upon Queretaro, and did not go northwards, their departure being generally regarded as a *bon débarras*; not that the French looked upon the men as indifferent soldiers, on the contrary, they were exceedingly clean, well disciplined, well armed, and orderly; but all these difficulties concerned with them had been the cause of a tedious delay to all in Venado, and led to our not starting for St. Luis Potosi until the 4th of September, after a long, tiresome sojourn of seven-

teen days in one of the dullest little towns imaginable.

I can assure you we were very hard put to it to find any amusements to occupy the time during that long halt. De Montholon contrived to build up a dam across the torrent running through the town, and so formed a good-sized pool in which we used to bathe every afternoon,—this and shooting being the only available amusements, the latter sport soon coming to an end, for it did not take many days to scare the hares and rabbits off, too far away from the neighbourhood to make it safe to follow them. A disputed point about the comparative merits of two horses was, however, settled at this time. De Pierres, one of the General's orderly officers, had a thorough-bred English horse, Poisson d'Avril, who had run fairly in France, I being the owner of an exceedingly good Mexican, and I maintained that at a fair difference of weight mine was the best of the two. Accordingly a match was made, the Mexican receiving thirty-four pounds, and the distance being two miles and a half. Every one came out to see the race, which ended in the English horse being beaten half a length,—although he certainly had the best of it for the first mile and a half, much to the astonishment of the "talent," who did not believe any weight would bring them together, all going for Poisson d'Avril.

Still it was frightfully slow work getting through those long days, and we were all delighted to be once more on the move again.

On the 5th we marched to the hacienda of Las Bocas, where the large lake and fine gardens were a refreshing sight to us after the weary, sandy plains, dust, and stunted vegetation of the north; and after breakfasting and taking our siesta under the trees, there was a general rush in the evening into the water,—every one being delighted to take a long swim after the day's work.

This time we avoided the disagreeable halt of Garrabatillas and passed by the large hacienda of Peñasco, arriving on the 7th at the city of St. Luis Potosi, and comparative civilization.

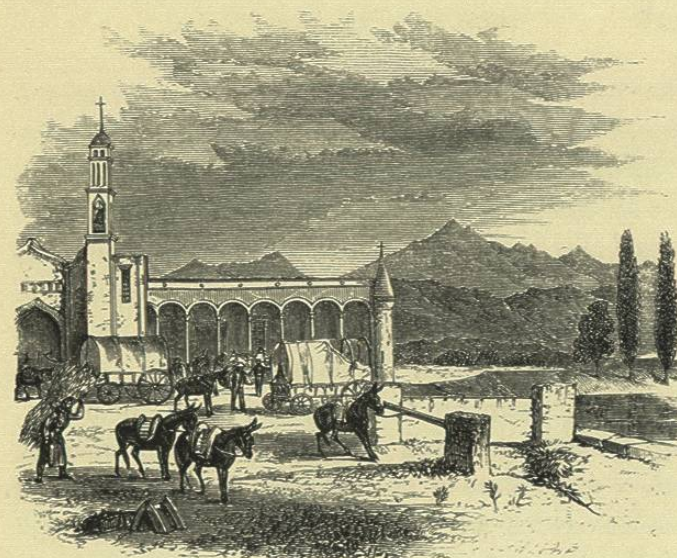
We now began to be exceedingly curious as to the next move we should take, indulging in rather wild speculations as to the probable movements of the Liberals, the increase of Escobedo's forces, the term of the French evacuation, and what steps it was likely Maximilian would take to maintain his precarious position as Emperor of Mexico, for now it became evident to all that he must rely solely on the support and resources of the country, and give up all idea of aid from foreign Powers.

Still, the intelligence we received from the capital seemed to hint the certainty of his being exceedingly unwilling to abdicate, and his inclina-

tions were generally supposed to be in favour of at any rate not giving up the empire without making one more strong effort to keep the power in his hands.



MEXICAN RECRUIT.



HACIENDA OF SOLIS.

CHAPTER XIII.

HARD MARCHING.

WE had a long spell of St. Luis Potosi, for it was the 14th of October before a move was made.

During this period, the position of affairs had not undergone any very important changes. All the north, as far as Matehuala, was of course lost to the empire and in the hands of the Liberals, who, report said, were busily engaged in organizing their forces, and purchasing guns and munitions of war from across the Rio Grande, paying for them with the money they succeeded in screwing out of