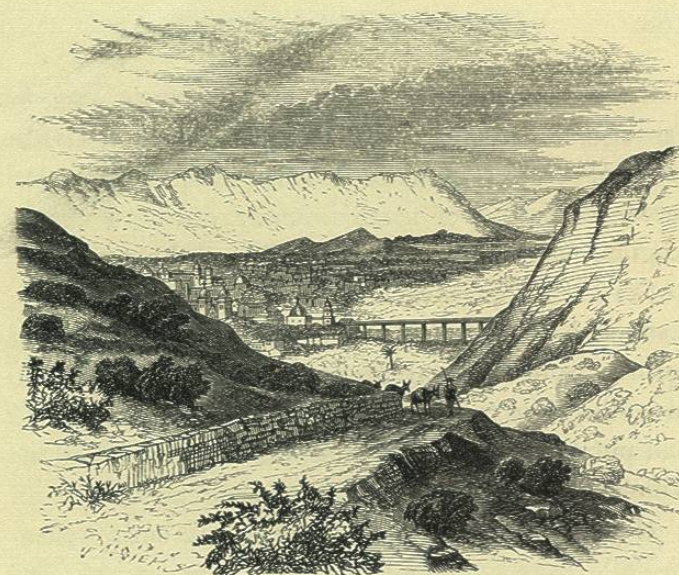


In the meantime, rumours were rife that Maximilian was gone to Orizaba, and would probably abdicate. All seemed to go against him; the Austrians had been defeated by Porfirio Diaz at Carbonera, on the road to Oajaca, and this latter city must evidently be lost in a few days. In fact, it was a regular case of "Tout va mal pour l'Empire Mexicain."



PRESIDIALE.



QUERETARO.

CHAPTER XVII.

GOING BACK.

WE were not sorry to be back at the head-quarters of the division, and the good people of St. Luis welcomed us as heretofore—heartily. The few days we had before us to remain in the city were fully taken up by all the preparations for our final departure, and the time drew rapidly to a close, for instructions had arrived from Mexico, appointing an early day for the move to the south, and regulating the order for the departure of the various corps upon Queretaro.

On the 6th, the column of De la Hayrie passed through, only halting for a day, and on the 8th General Douay was to leave,—a small French force, consisting of some infantry of the Foreign Legion, part of the battery Mailhié, and a squadron of the 12th Chasseurs being left behind under the command of Colonel Guilhem to support the Mexican troops of General Mejia, but only in order to give him time to organize his force to some extent, and put the defences in order, on the completion of which they too were to retire to Queretaro.

Mejia had arrived in St. Luis during our absence at Valle Purissima, and had been entrusted by the Emperor with the command, bringing with him a good reputation as a firm and honest supporter of the Imperial cause. He had certainly not been fortunate, for he had been compelled, as you will remember, to surrender the town of Matamoros to the Liberals, after the defeat of the Austrians and the capture of the great convoy. Still, he had proved himself not only to be a brave soldier, but a clever diplomatist, from his conduct when a United States' negro regiment revolted, crossing the Rio Grande, and sacking Bagdad. The position was then a most difficult one, and it was mainly owing to Mejia's exertions that matters were eventually compromised without any loss of prestige on the side of the Imperialists. In personal appearance he is the reverse

of striking, being very dark, in fact a full-blooded Indian, and born in the Sierra Gorda, where his influence over the people is enormous, and whatever he may order is law, even for the most lawless of its inhabitants. Suffering from constant attacks of fever, thwarted by want of money, and compelled to raise loans to maintain the troops under his orders, his position in command of St. Luis after the departure of the French was by no means an enviable one, and it is scarcely to be wondered at that he soon found himself forced to retire in his turn, when the Liberals advanced upon the city,—for although the population is very mocho, they could actually lend him but little material assistance.

It was not without universal regret that we bade good-bye to the old place, for we had become somewhat attached to it after so long a sojourn, and left many friends behind us.

Davis and Co. gave us a farewell supper the night before our departure, and we did not break up the party until it was time to get into our saddles and be off,—this time without the shadow of an apparent chance of our ever coming back again,—turning our backs for good on the bull-fights, the Alameda, and all the hospitality people had shown us.

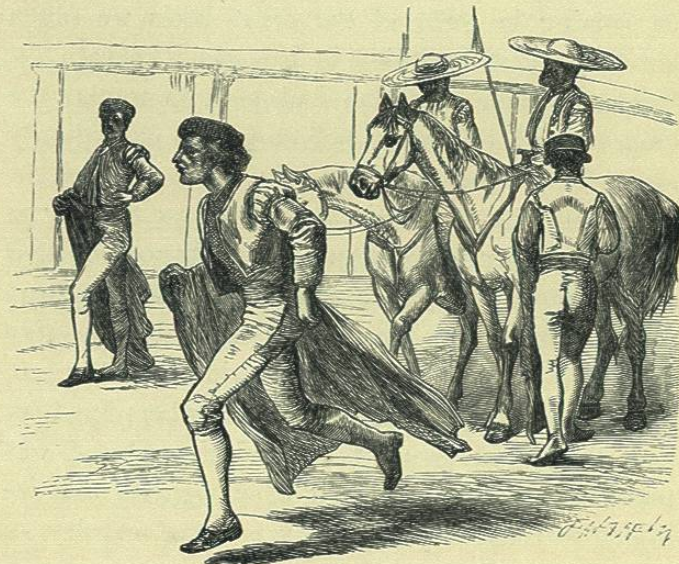
There was nothing out of the way to record on our backward journey, the distance between St. Luis

and Queretaro being marched in seven days, and the halts almost identical with those we had made on our way northwards in May and June. Every one had an idea that, at any rate for some little time, we should be stationary at Queretaro, and on the 14th, when we arrived, made up our minds for a delay of at least a few days. Here we found General Jeaningros, who gave a grand breakfast to General Douay and his staff, that lasted until between three and four o'clock, and was not calculated as a good foundation for a start the next day. However, start we did, and went as far as Colorado, encamping and passing a bitterly cold night. The 16th we reached San Juan del Rio, catching up the column De la Hayrie, and the 17th marched into Arroyo Sarco. Here we found very evident signs of the times; the telegraph wire cut on both sides, between Mexico, and also between St. Luis and the post. Not contented, apparently, with doing this, the bands in the neighbourhood had collected, and menaced the little garrison several times, by forming in force on a hill upon the further bank of the river. We heard, besides, the report, pretty generally received as true, although always contradicted by the Estafette, that the United States had come to an understanding with France as to the future of Mexico, and the only hitch in the business was occasioned by the refusal of Maximilian to abdicate.

In fact, there was no *canard*, however ridiculous and far-fetched, that did not meet with a good number of people always ready to vouch for its truth, and prove mathematically its probability.

Our next halt was at La Cañada, one of the haciendas belonging to the family of the Iturbides, very well kept, and picturesquely situated at the foot of the mountains. Passing through Tepeji del Rio, we encamped the 19th at San Miguel, hurrying on as fast as we could past Cautitlan, and reaching Tlalnepantla the following day. On this line of march, as we came upon the presa of San Miguel and mounted the chain of hills beyond it, on coming in sight of the great lakes we saw a strong body of guerillas in the plain beneath us. Evidently their intention had been to waylay the *diligence* with the mails, and they were exceedingly astonished to see a French column on the road,—making the best of their way off across country as if the devil was after them. The chances are that these were the very men who had robbed the correspondence from Mexico for several successive days, and who, gradually increasing in strength, eventually attacked the post at Cautitlan; but they had too good a start of us, and the ground was too dangerous, to render it even possible that we could do them any harm by sending cavalry in their pursuit.

At Tlalnepantla we received the order to halt for a day, and on the 22nd marched into Mexico, our work in the north of the country being over. General Jeaningros remained in command at Queretaro, and after a short delay Colonel Guilhem's force evacuated St. Luis Potosi, soon followed by Mejia. This was the French position until just before the departure of the troops from Mexico. Then the garrison of Queretaro retired on the capital, leaving Miramon to watch over the protection of the Imperial cause; Maximilian himself soon after taking the field, and assuming supreme command of all his forces.



THE QUADRILLA AT A MEXICAN BULL-FIGHT.



MEXICO; FROM PHOTOGRAPH BY C. AUBERT.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN DUBIIS.

DURING the month of December, reports were current that Maximilian, still at Orizaba, would very shortly abdicate; and certainly, judging from the outward appearance of events, it seemed to be the only prudent course left for him to adopt.

Looking back, the retrospect of 1866 was the reverse of cheering. Not a single step had been made in advance; on the contrary, there was a steady loss of territory, power, and prestige to be recorded, commencing from the date of the loss of Matamoros, and continuing in an unbroken series