

PUEBLA DE LOS ANGELES.

## CHAPTER XX.

ADIOS !

AT Aculingo, descending the Cumbres, we met the Austrian convoy just halted. It consisted of the greater part of the men who had elected to return to Europe, French troops of every regiment, long trains of carts, heavy guns laden on waggons with teams of mules almost too long to be manageable, and confusion reigning everywhere. In Orizaba, too, the numbers of soldiers about in the streets, and the works being thrown up round the town, showed

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that the evacuation was going on rapidly, and that ere long this would, in its turn, become the outpost and cover the embarkation at Vera Cruz.

After my eighteen hours' diligence travelling, I was dead beat, and should like to have gone quietly off to bed; but meeting General Clinchant, had to take a walk with him after my dinner and give him the last news from Mexico, for now that the 'Estafette' had been stopped there was very little information to be got from any source whatsoever.

Breakfasting the next day at Cordova, finding Paso del Macho almost deserted,—the Contre-Guerillas being absent on an expedition,—by dark the same evening, the 7th, I found myself at Vera Cruz, in sight of the sea again, and my journeyings almost at a close.

Yet I had to wait until the 13th, before any steamer left for the Havana; by a curious chance it happened to be the 'Impératrice Eugénie' again, not so comfortable as she was the first trip I had taken in her, for she carried a large detachment of French troops, the first returning to France from Mexico, and was so crowded, that it was next to impossible to take even a short constitutional walk on the deck, without falling over half-a-dozen people's legs.

During the six days I passed in the town, no particular news arrived from the capital; but on the very day of my arrival, the Contre-Guerillas,

now under the command of the Marquis de Gallifet, Colonel du Pin being named Commandant of Vera Cruz, had a very brilliant affair at Medellin, a town only a few leagues distant. The corps was stationed at Paso del Macho and Soledad, on the line of rail, and were, in fact, protecting it from the Liberals, who were very fond of interfering with the trains, and occasioned a great deal of delay and annoyance. M. de Gallifet had been waiting for some time, in order to strike a blow that might prevent any further trouble; and at last, hearing that a considerable band had collected at Medellin, started off immediately, surprising them completely, and driving them out with very severe loss, he having one officer and a few men wounded. This, I think, was about the last affair of the French with the dissidents, and closed the Expedition to Mexico with a success.

On the 11th, the Austrian convoy reached Paso del Macho, and on the 12th, De Montholon arrived with the pleasing intelligence that all my heavy baggage had been stolen the night before. This was certainly annoying, considering that it had been sent, for safety, with the troops; but it was no good complaining over the loss, and the only light to regard it in, was to think of the comparative pleasure of having but one portmanteau to look after for the future! Still, it was bad luck, after

escaping all through one's journeyings to the north, to be cleaned out the day before bidding adieu to Mexico.

On the 13th we steamed off, with fine weather to accompany us, to the Havana, our last view of the country being the snow-clad Peak of Orizaba, towering far above the line of mountains enclosing the Tierra Caliente; we did not lose sight of it until far out to sea, and all other traces of land had long faded away in the distance.

It will be long before I shall forget the days so pleasantly passed away in Mexico, and longer still before the recollections of the many good friends I met there are effaced from my memory. I can do no better than to quote from an article lately published in the '*Courrier des États-Unis*', in order to do justice to the French; I am sure, whoever has been in the country during the occupation, will agree with the writer, who by no means exaggerates. Speaking of the army, he says:—

"*Au Mexique, ni éclat, ni grandeur, ni renommée à acquérir. Le courage y était sans retentissement et l'héroïsme obscur; pas de ces rencontres qui tiennent une place dans l'histoire et fixent l'attention des peuples; un sacrifice perpétuel non-seulement du bien-être et de la vie, mais aussi de l'amour militaire et de ce sentiment de*

la gloire personnelle ou collective si cher à tous les soldats.

“Toujours à la poursuite d'un ennemi insaisissable, ils luttaient plutôt contre la nature et les souffrances physiques que contre des hommes, et leur force morale n'en fut jamais ébranlée. Qui ne se souvient des courses prodigieuses du régiment du colonel Potier dans le Michoacan ? Qui ne se rappelle cette marche étonnante du colonel Jeaningros volant au secours de Monterey et faisant trente-six lieues (quatre-vingt-dix milles) en trente-huit heures ? L'incroyable expédition de Chihuahua, tentée et accomplie par huit cents hommes, au milieu du désert, en pleine saison des pluies, sans chemins, sur des terres détrempées, est restée dans toutes les mémoires.

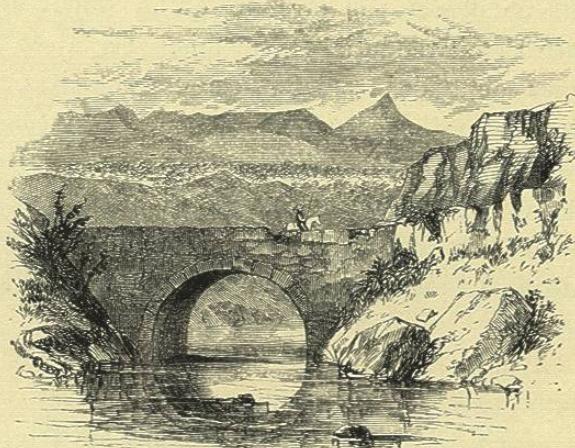
“Nos soldats n'avaient même pas la consolation de penser qu'on leur savait gré de leur résignation dans leur patrie. Ils savaient tous combien l'entreprise était impopulaire, et eux-mêmes n'éprouvaient certainement pas d'enthousiasme pour l'expédition dont ils étaient chargés. Ils n'ignoraient pas que des orateurs n'avaient pas craint d'exalter leurs adversaires à leurs dépens. Quel sentiment les a donc soutenus, et leur a permis de donner ce grand exemple d'héroïque abnégation ? Le sentiment du devoir développé à sa dernière puissance et la foi au drapeau. On peut railler le fanatisme

du pavillon et définir le drapeau une loque bariolée, mais pour nos soldats il était l'emblème de leur pays, l'honneur même de la patrie remis à leur garde. D'autres pouvaient faillir ; eux avaient conscience de leur mission et aimaient mieux périr que d'y manquer. De là les mille traits héroïques que nous pourrions citer et qui sont passés presque inaperçus. De là ces détachements surpris et exterminés tout entiers plutôt que de se rendre, car il ne devait pas être dit qu'un soldat de la France s'était rendu à ses ennemis. De là ces faits d'armes dont des soldats, des sous-officiers, des lieutenants ont été les héros à peu près inconnus, et qui égalaient les exploits les plus vantés. De là la fin de ce lieutenant-colonel Fistié, qui, ayant vainement cherché la mort dans le combat, préférait le suicide à l'idée d'abandonner le poste confié à ses soins.

“Lorsque les passions politiques et nationales seront apaisées, lorsqu'on pourra repasser et écrire d'un esprit calme et reposé l'histoire de l'expédition du Mexique, il n'y aura qu'une voix pour rendre hommage aux soldats de la France qui y ont pris part. L'armée du Mexique n'a rien à envier à celles de Crimée et d'Italie. Si ses hauts faits son restés dans l'ombre, elle n'en a que plus de mérite.”

Yet it is generally said that the Expedition to

Mexico ought to be regarded as a mistake by the French nation. Perhaps so; at any rate, the mistake is brilliant enough to outshine many similar undertakings looked upon as great successes.



BRIDGE AT PASO DEL MACHO.

## POSTSCRIPT.

It is difficult to write calmly with regard to the recent events, reported, *via* New York, as having taken place in Mexico.

Although all information derived from Matamoros and Brownsville is invariably to be received with distrust, it would appear that there is now little doubt to be cast on the authenticity of the news that Queretaro has been captured by the Liberals, the Imperial cause lost, and that the brave, unfortunate Maximilian has been executed by the cowardly Juarez and his followers.

On the determination of the Emperor to fight for his Crown, unassisted by foreign support, on the departure of the French troops, the Church party rallied bravely to his side and rendered the most unqualified support, but even the acuteness of their leaders was at fault with regard to the fidelity of their colleagues.