

MAXIMILIAN

IN MEXICO

SARA · Y · STEVENSON





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MAXIMILIAN
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EMPEROR MAXIMILIAN.

MAXIMILIAN IN MEXICO

A WOMAN'S REMINISCENCES OF THE
FRENCH INTERVENTION
1862-1867

BY
SARA YORKE STEVENSON, Sc. D.



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FONDO
FERNANDO DIAZ RAMIREZ

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TO THE MEMORY OF
SEÑOR DON MATIAS ROMERO
MINISTER OF MEXICO TO WASHINGTON
1882-1898.

One of the latest survivors of the drama, some episodes of which are herein related.

His approval of five articles on the French Intervention and the reign of Maximilian, which appeared in the "Century Magazine" in 1897, and his earnest request that they be published in a more permanent form, led to the presentation of this volume to the public.

With deepest appreciation of the important part played by this Mexican patriot in checking the aggressive policy of Europe upon this continent, the author here inscribes his name.

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PRELUDE

IN offering these pages to the public, my aim is not to write a historical sketch of the reign of Maximilian of Austria, nor is it to give a description of the political crisis through which Mexico passed during that period. My only desire is to furnish the reader with a point of view the value of which lies in the fact that it is that of an eyewitness who was somewhat more than an ordinary spectator of a series of occurrences which developed into one of the most dramatic episodes of modern times.

Historians too often present their personages to the public and to posterity as actors upon a stage,—I was about to say as puppets in a show,—whose acts are quite outside of themselves, and whose voices express emotions not their own. They appear before the footlights of a fulfilled destiny; and their doubts, their weaknesses, are concealed, along with their temptations, beneath the paint and stage drapery lent them by the historian who, knowing beforehand the dénouement toward which their efforts tended, unconsciously assumes a like knowledge on their part. They are thus often credited

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with deep-laid motives and plans which it may perhaps have been impossible for them to entertain at the time.

To those who lived with them when they were *making* history, these actors are all aglow with life. They are animated by its passions, its impulses. They are urged onward by personal ambition, or held back by selfish considerations. They are not characters in a drama; they are men of the world, whose official acts, like those of the men about us to-day, are influenced by their affections, their family complications, their prejudices, their rivalries, their avarice, their vanity. The circumstances of their private life temporarily excite or depress their energies, and often give them a new and unlooked-for direction; and the success or failure of their undertakings may be recognized as having been the result of their individual limitations, of their personal ignorance of the special conditions with which they were called upon to cope, or of their short-sightedness.

In this lies the importance of private recollections. The gossip of one epoch forms part of the history of the next. It is therefore to be deplored that those whose more or less obscure lives run their course in the shadow of some public career are seldom sufficiently aware of the fact at the time to note accurately their observations and impressions.

These thoughts occurred to me when, at the request of the editor of the "Century," I one night took up my pen, and gathering about me old letters,

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photographs, and small tokens faded and yellow with age, plunged deep into the recollections of my youthful days, and evoked the ghosts of brilliant friends, many of whom have since passed away, leaving but names written in lines of blood upon a page of history. As they appeared across a chasm of thirty years, the well-remembered faces familiarly smiled, each flinging a memory. They formed a motley company: generals now dead, whose names are revered or execrated by their countrymen; lieutenants and captains who have since made their way in the world, or have died, broken-hearted heroes, before Metz or Sedan; women who seemed obscure, but whose names, in the general convulsion of nations, have risen to newspaper notoriety or to lasting fame; soldiers who have become historians; guerrilleros now pompously called generals; adventurers who have grown into personages; personages who have sunk into adventurers; sovereigns who have become martyrs.

They had all been laid away in my mind, buried in the ashes of the past along with the old life. The drama in which each had played his part had for many years seemed as far off and dim as though read in a book a long time ago; and yet now, how alive it all suddenly became—alive with a life that no pen can picture!

There were their photographs and their invitations, their old notes and bits of doggerel sent to accompany small courtesies—flowers, music, a Havana dog, or the loan of a horse. It was all vivid and real enough now. Those men were not to me

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mere historical figures of whom one reads. They fought historic battles, they founded a historic though ephemeral empire; their defeats, their triumphs, their "deals," their blunders, were now matters of history: but for all that, they were of common flesh and blood, and the strange incidents of a strangely picturesque episode in the existence of this continent seemed natural enough if one only knew the men.

Singly or in groups, the procession slowly passed, each one pausing for a brief space in the flood of light cast by an awakening memory. Many wore uniforms—French, Austrian, Belgian, Mexican. Some were dancing gaily, laughing and flirting as they went by. Others looked care-worn and absorbed by the preoccupations of a distracted state, and by the growing consciousness of the thankless responsibility which the incapacity of their rulers at home, and the unprincipled deceit of a few official impostors, had placed upon them. But all, whether thoughtful or careless, whether clairvoyant or blind, whether calmly yielding to fate or attempting to breast the storm, were driven along by the irresistible current of events, each drifting toward the darkness of an inevitable doom which, we now know, was inexorably awaiting him as he passed from the ray of light into the gloom in his "dance to death."

PART I

THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE

1861-62