MAXIMILIAN IN MEXICO

I

EL DORADO

DURING the winter of 1861–62, my last winter in France, one of the principal subjects of conversation in Parisian official circles was our Civil War, and its possible bearing upon the commercial and colonial interests of Europe, or rather the possible advantage that Europe, and especially France, might hope to derive from it.

A glance at M. de Lamartine's famous article written in January, 1864, and reprinted a year or two later in his "Entretiens Littéraires," will help us to understand how far Frenchmen were from appreciating not only our point of view, but the true place assigned by fate to the United States in contemporary history. Nothing could so plainly reveal the failure of the French to understand the natural drift of events on this side of the Atlantic, and account for the extraordinary, though short-lived, success of Napoleon's wild Mexican scheme. In this article, written with a servile pen, the poet-statesman attacked the character of the people of

the United States, and brought out Napoleon's motives in his attempt to obtain, not for France alone, but for Europe at large, a foothold upon the American continent. With a vividness likely to impress his readers with the greatness of the conception as a theory, he showed how the establishment of a European monarchy in Mexico must insure to European nations a share in the commerce of the New World. The new continent, America, is the property of Europe, he urged. The Old World should not recognize the right of the United States to control its wealth and power.

An article by Michel Chevalier, published with the same purpose in view, threatened Mexico with annexation by the United States unless the existing government of the country underwent reorganization.

Both authors were frequent visitors at my guardian's house in Paris, which accounts for the impression made upon my youthful mind by their written utterances at that time. M. Chevalier was a distinguished political economist. He had visited Mexico, and knew the value of its mining and agricultural wealth without sufficiently recognizing the actual conditions to be dealt with, and he fully indorsed the imperial conception. "The success of the expedition is infallible," he said. He explained the resistance of the Mexicans by their hatred of the Spaniards, and demonstrated to his own satisfaction that the burden of the venture must fall upon France, who should reap the glory of its success.

Modern civilization, he urged, includes a distinct branch—the Latin—in which Catholicism shines. Of this France is the soul as well as the arm. "Without her, without her energy and her initiative, the group of the Latin races must be reduced to a subordinate rank in the world, and would have been eclipsed long ago." In comparing upon a map of the world the space occupied by the Catholic nations two centuries ago with the present area under their control, "one is dismayed at all that they have lost and are losing" every day. "The Catholic nations seem threatened to be swallowed up by an ever-rising flood."[1]

When the Mexican empire was planned our Civil War had been raging for nearly two years. From the standpoint of the French rulers, the moment seemed auspicious for France to interfere in American affairs. The establishment of a great Latin empire, founded under French protection and developed in the interest of France, which must necessarily derive the principal benefit of the stupendous wealth which Mexico held ready to pour into the lap of French capitalists,—of an empire which in the West might put a limit to the supremacy of the United States, as well as counterbalance the British supremacy in the East, thus opposing a formidable check to the encroachments of the Anglo-Saxon race in the interest of the

1 "Revue des Deux Mondes," April, 1862, p. 916. It is interesting to find him quoting Humboldt's prophecy that "the time will come, be it a century sooner or later, when the production of silver will have no other limit than that imposed upon it by its ever-increasing depreciation as a value" (April, 1862, p. 894).

Latin nations,—such was Napoleon's plan, and I have been told by one who was close to the imperial family at that time that the Emperor himself fondly regarded it as "the conception of his reign."

Napoleon III labored under the disadvantage of reigning beneath the shadow of a great personality which, consciously or unconsciously, he ever strove to emulate. But however clever he may be, the man who, anxious to appear or even to be great, forces fate and creates impossible situations that he may act a leading part before the world, is only a schemer. This is the key to the character of Napoleon III and to his failures. He looked far away and dreamed of universal achievements, when at home, at his very door, were the threatening issues he should have mastered. The story is told of him that one evening, at the Tuileries, when the imperial party were playing games, chance brought to the Emperor the question, "What is your favorite occupation?" to which he answered: "To seek the solution of unsolvable problems." It is also related that in his younger days a favorite axiom of his was: "Follow the ideas of your time, they carry you along; struggle against them, they overcome you; precede them, they support you." True enough; but only upon condition that you will not mistake the shrill chorus of a few interested courtiers and speculators for the voice of your time, nor imagine that you precede your generation because you stand alone. He dreamed of far-away glory, and his flatterers told him his dreams were prophetic. He saw across the seas the mirage of a great Latin empire in the West, and beheld the

Muse of history inscribing his name beside that of his great kinsman as the restorer of the political and commercial equilibrium of the world, as well as the benefactor who had thrown El Dorado open to civilization. With the faith of ignorance, he proposed to share with an Austrian archduke these imaginary possessions, and to lay for him, as was popularly said in 1862–63, "a bed of roses in a gold-mine." Unmindful of warnings, he pushed onward for two years, apparently incapable of grasping the fact that the mirage was receding before him; and finally found his fool's errand saved from ridicule only by the holocaust of many lives, and raised to dignity only by the tragedy of Querétaro.

All this we now know, but in 1861–62 the Napoleonic star shone brilliantly with the full luster cast upon it by the Crimean war and the result of the Italian campaign. It is true that occasionally some strong discordant note issuing from the popular depths would strike the ear and for the time mar the pæans of applause which always greet successful power. For instance, at the Odéon one night, during the war with Austria, I was present when the Empress Eugénie entered. The Odéon is in the Latin Quarter, and medical and law students filled the upper tiers of the house. As the sovereign took her seat in a box a mighty chorus suddenly arose, and hundreds of voices sang, "Corbleu, madame, que faites vous ici?" quoting the then popular song, "Le Sire de Franboisy."

The incident, so insulting to the poor woman, gave rise to some disturbance; and although the

boys were quieted, the Empress soon left the theater, choking with mortification. M. Rochefort, who refers to this incident in his memoirs, adds that as the imperial party came out, another insult of a still more shocking character was thrown at the Empress. This, of course, I did not witness.

Such occurrences were usually treated by the press and the government sympathizers as emanating from youthful hot-brains, or from the lower ranks of the people, and therefore as unworthy of attention. But those hot-brains represented the coming thinkers of France, and the "common" people represented its strength. On the whole, however, in 1862 the more powerful element had rallied to and upheld the government. The court and the army were so loud in their admiration of the profound policy of the Emperor that those who heeded the croakings of the few clear-sighted men composing the opposition were in the background.

It so happened that my lines had been cast among these, and it is interesting now, in looking back upon the expressions of opinion of those who most strenuously opposed French interference in American affairs, to see how little even these men, wise as they were in their generation, appreciated the true conditions prevailing in Mexico. None seriously doubted the possibility of occupying the country and of maintaining a French protectorate. The only point discussed was, Was it worth while? And to this question Jules Favre, Thiers, Picard, Berryer, Glais-Bizoin, Pelletan, and a few others emphatically said, "No!"

II

THE NEW "NAPOLEONIC IDEA"

THE "Napoleonic idea," however, had not burst forth fully equipped in all its details from the Cæsarean brain in 1862. It would be unfair not to allow it worthy antecedents and a place in the historic sequence. As far back as 1821, when the principle of constitutional monarchy was accepted by the Mexicans under the influence of General Iturbide, a convention known as the "plan of Iguala" had been drawn by Generals Iturbide and Santa Anna, and accepted by the new viceroy, O'Donoju, in which it was agreed that the crown of Mexico should be offered first to Ferdinand VII, and, in case of his refusal, to the Archduke Charles of Austria, or to the Infante of Spain, Don Carlos Luis, or to Don Francisco Paulo.

The Mexican embassy sent to Spain to offer the throne of Mexico to Ferdinand was ill received. The king had no thought of purchasing a crown which he regarded as his own by the recognition of the constitutional principle which he had so long fought; and the Cortes scorned to authorize any of the Spanish princes to accept the advances of the

Mexicans. The result of Spain's unbending policy was a rupture which involved the loss of its richest colony.

In 1854 General Santa Anna,[1] then dictator or president for life, had given full powers to Señor Gutierrez de Estrada to treat with the courts of Paris, London, Vienna, and Madrid for the establishment of a monarchy in Mexico under the scepter of a European prince; and Señor de Estrada, with the consent of the French government, had offered the throne of his country to the Duc de Montpensier, who wisely, as it proved, had declined it.

The Crimean war and the downfall of General Santa Anna checked the progress of these negotiations, which were resumed as soon as, peace having been restored, the European powers could turn their attention to their commercial interests in America, which Señor de Estrada represented to them as gravely compromised by the encroachments of the United States in Mexico, and to the grievances urged by their subjects against the Mexican government.[2]

In 1859 General Miramon[3] confirmed the powers given by General Santa Anna to the Mexican rep-

[1] Santa Anna raised the flag of revolt against his benefactor in 1823. Iturbide abdicated, was given a pension of twenty-five thousand dollars, and, at his own suggestion, was escorted to the sea-coast, a voluntary exile, by a guard of honor. From this time Santa Anna had a hand in all the revolutions that followed. He himself subsequently fell before an insurrection of the Liberal party led by the old Indian governor of Guerrero, General Alvarez.

[2] Compare Abbé Domenech, "Histoire du Mexique," vol. ii, p. 360.

[3] General Miramon was barely twenty-six when he rose to the first rank in Mexican politics. Of Béarnese extraction, his father's family passed over to Spain in the

From a photograph by Ladry Disderi.
NAPOLEON III.

EUGÉNIE.

From a photograph by Braun, Clément & Co.
DUC DE MORNY.

resentative; and then it was that, for the first time, the Emperor commended to his attention the Archduke Maximilian.

It were also unfair not to admit that the varying success of the conflict between the two factions struggling for supremacy in Mexico was likely to deceive the European powers, and made it easy for men whose personal interests were at stake to misrepresent the respective strength of the contending parties and the condition of the country. But no leader of men has, in the eyes of history, a right to be deceived either by men or by appearances; and granting that Napoleon might at first have been misled, he had timely warning, and the opportunity to withdraw, as did the Spaniards and the English, without shame, if without glory.

AFTER Mexico, led by the patriots Hidalgo and Morelos, had thrown off the Spanish yoke, it became for forty years the scene of a series of struggles between contending factions which reduced the country to a state of anarchy. Once rid of their Spanish viceroys, the Mexicans found themselves little better off than they had been under their rule. For centuries the Mexican church had played upon the piety of the devout for the furtherance of its own temporal interests, until one third of the whole wealth of the nation had found its way into

eighteenth century. His grandfather had gone to Mexico as aide-de-camp to one of the viceroys. Miguel Miramon had served in the war against the United States. He was a brilliant officer, bold, vigorous, original. During his term of office he had on his side the clergy, the army, the capital.

its hands. It was against the clergy, and against the retrogressive policy for which it stood, that in 1856 a wide-spread revolutionary movement was successfully organized, as a result of which, in 1857, a liberal constitution was drawn up and accepted by the people.

The clerical or reactionary party, although it counted among its adherents many of the best old Spanish families composing Mexico's aristocracy, would probably soon have ceased to be a serious practical obstacle in the way of reform had it not been for the wealth of a corrupt clergy, by means of which its armies were kept in the field. Be this as it may, the reign of constitutional order represented by President Comonfort in 1856 was short-lived. General Comonfort abdicated in 1858. Benito Juarez, by virtue of his rank of president of the Supreme Court, then became constitutional president *ad interim*.

By a pronunciamiento General Zuloaga, with the help of the army, took possession of the government and of the capital, while Juarez maintained his rights at Querétaro. War raged between the two parties, with rapidly varying success. A letter dated November 19, 1860, written by my brother, a young American engineer who had gone to Mexico to take part in the construction of the first piece of railroad built between Vera Cruz and Mexico, gives a concise and picturesque account of the situation:

> Things look dark—so dark, in fact, that for the present I do not think it advisable to risk any more money here. There is a fair prospect of the decree of Juarez being annulled. If so, our bonds go overboard. There is a prospect of Juarez signing a treaty. If so, our bonds go up 15 or 20. It is *rouge et noire*—a throw of the dice. The Liberals have been beaten at Querétaro, where Miramon took from them twenty-one pieces of artillery and many prisoners, among them an American officer of artillery, whom he shot the next day, *as usual*. Oajaca has fallen into the hands of the clergy. The Liberals under Carbajal attacked Tulancingo, and were disgracefully beaten by a lot of ragged Indians. They are losing ground everywhere; and if the United States does not take hold of this unhappy country it will certainly go to the dogs. There is a possibility of compromise between Juarez and Miramon, the effect of which is this: the constitution of '57 to be revised; the sale of clergy property to their profit; the revocation of Juarez's decree of July about the confiscation of clergy property to the profit of the state; religious liberty, civil marriage, etc.

A gloomy picture, and true enough, save in one respect. The Liberals might be beaten everywhere, but they were not losing ground; on the contrary, their cause rested upon too solid a foundation of right and progress, and the last brilliant exploits of General Miramon were insufficient to galvanize the reactionary party into a living force.

On December 22, 1860, Miramon was finally defeated at Calpulalpan by General Ortega, and shortly after left the country. On December 28 the reforms prepared in Vera Cruz by Juarez, proclaiming the principles of religious toleration, and decreeing the confiscation of clergy property, the abolition of all

religious orders, and the institution of civil marriage, etc., were promulgated in the capital by General Ortega; and on January 11, 1861, Juarez[1] himself took possession of the city of Mexico. The Liberals were triumphant, and the civil war was virtually at an end.

The defeated army, as was invariably the case in Mexico, dissolved and disappeared, leaving only a residuum of small bands of guerrillas. These preyed impartially upon the people and upon travelers of both parties. Leonardo Marquez almost alone remained in the field and seriously continued the conflict. The principal leaders fled abroad, especially to Paris, where they made friends, and planned a revenge upon the victorious oppressors of the church, whose outrages upon God and man were vividly colored by religious and party hatred. Among these were men of refinement and good address, scions of old Spanish families, who, like M. Gutierrez de Estrada, found ready sympathy among the Emperor's entourage. As a rule, none but "hopelessly defeated parties seek the help of foreign invasion of their own land"; but the Empress Eugénie, who, a Spaniard herself, was a devout churchwoman, lent a willing ear to the stories of the refugees, impressively told in her own native tongue. To reinstate the church, and to oppose

[1] Benito Pablo Juarez was of Indian birth, and as a boy began life as a *mozo*, or servant, in a wealthy family. His ability was such as to draw upon him the attention of his employer, who had him educated. He soon rose to greatness as a lawyer, and then as a member of the National Congress, governor of Oajaca, secretary to the executive, and president of the republic.

the strong Catholicism of a Latin monarchy to the Protestant influence of the Northern republic, seemed to her the most attractive aspect of the projected scheme.

The struggle that had been carried on for so many years in Mexico with varying vicissitudes was not purely one of partizan interest based upon a different view of political government: it was the struggle of the spirit of the nineteenth century against the survival of Spanish medievalism; it was the contest of American republicanism against the old order of things, religious and social as well as political; of progressive liberalism against conservatism and reaction.

The French intervention as planned by Napoleon III was, therefore, a glaring paradox, and betrays his absolute ignorance of the conditions with which he was undertaking to cope. As a matter of fact, the party upon whose support he relied for the purpose of developing the natural resources of Mexico, and of bringing that country into line with European intellectual and industrial progress, was pledged by all its traditions to moral and political retrogression.

The enterprise, undertaken under these conditions, bore in itself such elements of failure that nothing save the force of arms and a vast expenditure of life and money could, even for a time, make it a success. Unless the French assumed direct and absolute control of Mexican affairs irrespective of party—and this contingency was specifically set aside by the most solemn declarations—they must

sooner or later come into direct antagonism with allies who were pledged to the most benighted form of clericalism, and into real, though perhaps unconscious, sympathy with their opponents who stood arrayed upon the side of progress.

It was not long before the pretensions of the church and party complications caused a breach between the Corps Expéditionnaire and its original supporters, which placed the French in the unlooked-for, and by them much deprecated, attitude of invaders and conquerors of the land, equally hated by ally and foe. And yet at the outset one aspect of the situation was favorable to the success of the French undertaking.

The sweeping reforms carried out by Juarez during his brief undisturbed occupation of the country had greatly smoothed the way for the French in their self-imposed task of Mexican regeneration. The new laws had already been enforced regulating the relations of church and state. The confiscation of clergy property, the breaking up of the powerful religious orders, and religious tolerance, all had been proclaimed, as well as the freedom of the press.

Spanish influence, which in these struggles had been exercised strongly against reform, had been abruptly brought to an end by the summary dismissal of Señor Pacheco, the Spanish minister, and the Archbishop of Mexico had been exiled.

III

M. DE SALIGNY AND M. JECKER

ONE of the first problems, and quite the most important, to be faced by President Juarez, upon his establishment in the capital, had been the raising of funds with which to carry on the expense of the Liberal government. As a measure the throwing upon the market of the nationalized church property recommended itself. There was, however, but little confidence, and still less ready money, in the country after many years of civil strife. So much real estate suddenly thrown upon the market depreciated property. The easy terms of sale—a third cash, the balance to be paid in *pagares*—tempted speculators and gave rise to many fraudulent transactions, and the measure brought little relief to the government.

Although in March, 1861, President Juarez had signed a convention adjusting anew the pecuniary claims of the French residents, on July 17 Congress found itself compelled to suspend payment on all agreements hitherto entered into with foreign powers. The very next day the representatives of France and Great Britain entered a formal protest