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PUEBLA AND MEXICO—GENERAL DE LORENCEZ—GENERAL ZARAGOZA

THE health-officers who boarded the steamer at Vera Cruz gave us unexpected and startling news. The French army had been repulsed with serious loss before Puebla. The direct route, by which the trip from Vera Cruz to Mexico via Orizaba—one hundred and ten leagues—could be made in four days,¹ was blocked by the contending armies. If we wished to proceed on our journey, we must do so via Jalapa, a much longer route. The discomforts of this road were, moreover, complicated by the fact that it was now infested by a large number of guerrillas,—one might as well say highwaymen,—who made it difficult for travelers to pass unmolested, unless through some special arrangement. This my companions were confident could easily be settled; but some days might be spent in negotiations, and the health-officers said that the yellow fever was raging as it had not raged for years. The presence of so many foreigners had added to its violence, and the French garrison

¹ It can now be made by rail in ten hours.

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could be maintained only by constant reinforcements.

Upon landing, our little party went directly to the house of Mr. Lelong, the hospitable French banker who in Vera Cruz represented the house of Labadie & Co. Here we remained five days, enjoying every comfort, while the necessary preparations were being made for our somewhat perilous journey to the capital. I then heard for the first time the details of the disaster brought upon the French by General de Lorencez's wilful blindness.

Confident in the élan of his picked troops, and, as one of his officers afterward told me, complacently holding up to himself the example of Cortez, who had conquered the land with as many hundreds as he had thousands, the French general, unable with so small a force to undertake a siege, determined to attempt the assault of the Cerro de Guadalupe. This fort dominated the place, and its possession must, in his opinion, insure the fall of Puebla.

The ill-advised attack was made on May 5, 1862, with twenty-five hundred men. The place was topographically strong. It was defended by General Zaragoza with the very pick of the Mexican army under General Negrete, and was, moreover, supported by the well-manned battery of the Fort de Loretto. To attempt the assault of such a position without the support of artillery seemed madness; and when the general ordered his troops forward it was found that his field-battery, owing to the lay of the land, could not even be brought

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to bear upon the fort at sufficiently close range to reach it. One fifth of the corps of attack was thus uselessly sacrificed.

Some months after these events (September, 1862) I witnessed in the city of Mexico the public obsequies of General Zaragoza,¹ whom this exploit had naturally placed high in the esteem of his countrymen. Upon the elevated catafalque, drawn by a long line of horses draped in black trappings, lay the stately coffin. Tossed at its feet was the French flag; banners, hung everywhere, inscribed with devices recalling his signal service to his country, proclaimed him "the conqueror of conquerors" (*el conquistador de los conquistadores*). The French, it was asserted, had measured themselves with and conquered all the nations of the world, and Zaragoza had conquered the French!

This day is proudly recorded in the Mexican annals as the Cinco de Mayo. The historic importance of a battle is not always to be measured by the numbers of the contending forces, and although its far-reaching significance was at the time scarcely understood, this check must ever be remembered by future historians as the first serious blow struck by fortune at Napoleon III and his fated empire. The honor of France was now involved and must be vindicated. There was no receding upon the dangerous path. No French sovereign could dare to withdraw without avenging the first check met

¹ Much of the credit for the weight of the assault upon the achievement was due to General Cerro de Guadalupe and pre-Negrete, whose command bore the vented its capture.



PORFIRIO DIAZ.

A Mexican general and statesman, born in 1830. He served in the war against the United States in 1847, against Santa Anna in 1854. During the French invasion he was one of the leaders of the defense. He became president in 1877, and except from 1880 to 1884 he has been president ever since, the constitution having been amended so that he could succeed himself.

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with by the French army since Waterloo, and thus was the Emperor rushed on to fulfil his own destiny. To-day the fire from the fort of Guadalupe casts a flash of lurid light upon the beginning of *la débâcle*, and upon the last chapters written at Sedan. During the whole of that fatal day the doomed men marched, as they were ordered to march, upon the Mexican battery. They hopelessly fought, and died heroically; and when night came they beat an orderly retreat, carrying away with them most of their wounded.

General de Lorencez slowly fell back upon Orizaba, where he issued a proclamation¹ to the army, openly laying the responsibility of the disaster upon the false statements made to him by the French representative.

The French army, which fell back upon Orizaba, was in a critical position. Its communications with the coast had been interrupted by the Liberal guerrillas, and it was completely cut off from the seaport and from France. The bridges were destroyed; the convoys of provisions were attacked and burned; anxiety was felt by the commissariat with regard to supplies. The garrisons left by the French on the way had been driven back and hemmed in in the unhealthy region, where the French regiments were fairly melting away, and no courier was permitted to bring news from the seat of war to the French fleet and to the garrison of Vera Cruz.

¹ See proclamation, published in Louët, "La Vérité sur l'Expédition du Mexique," etc. "Rêve d'Empire," p. 72.

The rainy season was near at hand when communication was restored by the arrival at Vera Cruz of General Félix Douay, who landed with reinforcements on May 16.

The five days that we spent in Vera Cruz were anxious days for those who had assumed the responsibility of our little party. Never was there a worse time to travel over a road which at best was unsafe, and yet we could not remain where we were without danger.

I was not allowed to move out of the house, and all I saw of the town was from the balcony, whence, in the cool of the evening, I looked down upon the dull street. Every now and then a passing stretcher supporting a covered human form would remind us that we were in a plague-stricken city, and make us eager to start upon our way.

At last arrangements were completed, terms were made with a small guerrilla band whose chief undertook to see us safely through to Mexico, and on May 27 we began our journey.

The men of our escort, whom we met just out of the city, were a ruffianly-looking set. The chief had received an ugly saber-cut across his face, which added to the forbidding expression of a naturally repulsive physiognomy. They were well mounted, however, and seemed inclined to be civil. We were allowed only an *arroba* (twenty-five pounds) of luggage, and were supposed to have no money with us; but on the night before we left we sewed a few ounces of gold (sixteen-dollar pieces) in unlikely places of our underwear. Thus we left Vera Cruz *à la grâce de Dieu*.

Well it was that we had made terms with this little guerrilla company, and we had ample opportunity of testing the truth of the saying, "There is honor among thieves." All along the road we met armed bands, varying in strength, until, at a village near Jalapa, we fell in with the well-known chief Antonio Perez and his famous *plateados*, two hundred strong, who had won their name and a somewhat doubtful distinction by their successful raids upon convoys of silver. Our escort fraternized with all, and they let us pass unmolested.

I was told that at this period scarcely a stage reached the capital without having been robbed. The passengers were often even despoiled of their clothing, so that newspapers were brought into requisition to serve as garments for the unfortunate victims. When such was the case the doors of the hotel were closed upon the arrival of the coach in the courtyard, and blankets or other coverings were brought down before the travelers could alight with any show of propriety.

To say nothing of our emotions, many and varied were our experiences on that never-to-be-forgotten nine days' journey. Generally we slept in cities or towns, where we were made more or less comfortable; but on one occasion, owing to an accident, we were belated and had to stop overnight at a miserable hamlet, where no accommodation could be procured save such as a native adobe house could afford. This consisted of one large room approached by a shed. In this room the man, his wife, his children, his dogs, pigs, and small cattle lived. A team of mules outside put in their

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heads through an opening and breathed over our cots. The English language cannot be made to describe the atmosphere and other horrors of that night. Cots had been improvised for Mrs. D—and me, but there was no sleep for us, and we envied the men, who took their chances of malaria and preferred sleeping outside to sharing our shelter.

At last we reached the crest of the mountain from which we looked down upon the valley of Mexico, a huge basin encircled by mountains; and there at our feet lay the capital, with its two hundred thousand souls, its picturesque buildings, and the lakes of Chalco and Tezcuco, while to one side the huge snow-capped volcanoes, the Iztaccihuatl and the Popocatepetl, like two gigantic sentries, seemed to watch over the sacredness of this classical spot of Mexican history.

The capital was quiet and peaceful. It seemed utterly shut out from all the excitement created by the invasion, as though, really trusting in its remoteness, its barriers of mountains, its lakes and natural defenses, it defied the foreigner. Was it that Mexico was then so accustomed to transfer its allegiance from one military ruler to the other that even foreign invasion left it indifferent? Or was it the childlike faith in the unknown, the national *Quien sabe?* spirit, virtually carried out at this supreme crisis? However this may have been, very little of the outside conflict seemed as yet to have penetrated the minds of the people. The diplomatic corps entertained our little coterie, which

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included those Mexicans who were willing to mix with the foreign element.

Society danced and flirted, rode in the Paseo, and walked in the Alameda, just as though the Cinco de Mayo had been a decisive battle and General de Lorencez's army had been driven back to its ships.

The bull-fights once in a while gathered in the vast enceinte of the Plaza de Toros the society of the capital. During the winter of 1863 the young men of fashion of Mexico took the Plaza de Toros, and invited Mexican society to a performance. All who took part were amateurs, and it was a brilliant affair. The huge amphitheater, crowded with the well-dressed audience, was in itself a memorable spectacle, and as the sun went down, casting great shadows and oblique rays of light upon the gay assemblage, intent upon the fierce games of the picturesque performers in the arena, one unconsciously dreamed of the Colosseum and of the bloody sports of semibarbarous Rome.

Besides the ordinary bull-fight, there were many exercises of horsemanship and with the lasso that did credit to the skill of the young gentlemen. Moreover, as these men, who were all wealthy, rode their own spirited horses, the performance presented none of the most revolting features of the usual bull-fight, where the poor, miserable hacks, too jaded to obey the rein, are generally gored, and soon turn the arena into a slaughter-house, the sight of which it is impossible for an Anglo-Saxon to endure.

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Our box was sent us by Don José Rincon Gallardo and his brother Don Pedro, who belonged to the élite of Mexican society and were among the prime movers in the affair. When Mexico fell into the power of the enemy, these young men joined the Liberal army in defense of their native land, and later we will find the first at Querétaro earning honorable distinction amid events the memory of which can never fade from the pages of history.

It was a curious, easy life in the midst of what to us now would seem perilous conditions. No man, in those days, ventured out of an evening to pay a call without being well armed, and our little anteroom assumed, after eight o'clock, the appearance of an arsenal. Nor were these precautions unwarranted. To give but one instance: The secretary of the Prussian legation, a nephew of the minister, Baron Wagner, having excited certain animosities, was more than once waylaid and attacked in the street after dark. He was a fine specimen of the Teutonic race, a tall, powerful man, and generally carried brass knuckles. After the first attack he made it a point at night to walk in the middle of the street, so as to avoid too close a proximity with corners and dark angles of doorways, regarding them as possible ambushes. As he was fully prepared, he more than once escaped without harm. But one night, when, for some unknown reason, he carried a revolver, he was assaulted from behind. Before he could cock his weapon and turn to face his would-be assassins, he had received several stabs in the back, and was

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left as dead upon the street. He lay for weeks between life and death.

This had happened in the spring of 1862. A short time after my arrival, having just recovered, he called to take leave of my family before returning to Germany. His faith in the superiority of brass knuckles over the revolver, in case of sudden attack, was not to be shaken.

Many and strange were the stories told me when I arrived in that land destined by nature to be a paradise, but of which the inhabitants were then making a Tartarus. To the horrors then perpetrated by robbers or highwaymen, justice could be done only by the pen of a Poe.

Kidnapping was not infrequent, and the cruel ingenuity displayed by the bandits to keep safely their victim pending the negotiations for a ransom was often blood-curdling. I might fill a small volume with such anecdotes, but the terrible fate of two *hacendados*, kidnapped in the interior of the country, may suffice to give an idea of the tax which living in Mexico at that time might levy upon the emotions of a young girl fresh from Paris.

The two unfortunate men had been captured by one of those small bands which in war-times were called guerrillas, but which we should ordinarily call banditti. They were dragged from place to place about the country by their captors, who kept them under strict surveillance. One evening, as they were approaching a town, the prospect of a riotous night spent over pulque and monte at some *fonda* excited the imagination of the men,

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and, as no one would consent to be deprived of the anticipated pleasure for the sake of mounting guard over the prisoners, it was decided that the miserable victims should be, for safe-keeping, buried up to their necks in the earth. Surely they could not escape, and would be there next morning awaiting the return of their captors. And so they no doubt would have been, but for the coyotes, which, allured by the easy prey delivered up to them by the devilish ingenuity of those human fiends, came during the night and devoured the heads of the helpless victims. Who can ever realize the mental and physical anguish in the midst of which those two wretched lives came to an end?

Sometimes there was a touch of weird humor in the manner in which such outrages were perpetrated. One night a wealthy family in Mexico drove home in their carriage from a party. They stopped at their porte-cochère, which was opened by their servant, and closed tight behind them as they drove in. Two men, however, had fastened on to the carriage behind. They overpowered the *portero* as he barred the door, while the noise of the carriage rolling on the flags of the patio smothered the sound of the scuffle. They opened the door to their accomplices, and easily overcame family and servants, all of whom were bound hand and foot. Then the robbers ransacked the premises, and having packed all the valuables into the carriage, one of them took the coachman's clothes, mounted on the box, and coolly drove off in style—carriage, horses, and all.



MATIAS ROMERO.

A Mexican diplomat and statesman, born in 1837.
Late minister to the United States.

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In a wild, sparsely populated country like Mexico in 1862, where communication was difficult, where the police of even large cities, when not in direct sympathy with the malefactors, were overawed by them, and where forty years of civil war had hardened men to the sight of blood, it is not to be wondered at if impunity had multiplied such occurrences and destroyed all sensibility with regard to human suffering.

Much excitement was created both in France and in the United States, during the French intervention, by the relentless spirit with which the conflict was conducted between the opposing parties, and by the wanton destruction of life and property which characterized the struggle. But when one realizes that the Mexican armies at that time were on both sides to a great extent made up of such predatory material, and that even their officers were frequently little more than chiefs of guerrillas, who rallied sometimes under one flag, sometimes under the other, but in either case were always ready for rapine, the brutal character of the conflict can scarcely excite surprise.