

*Maximilian in Mexico*

ear—very faintly; but never did the finest harmony born of Wagner's genius so fill a human soul with ecstasy. There was no mistaking it: it was a French bugle. The French were entering Mexico. We were safe, and now might go to bed.

IV

THE FRENCH IN THE CITY OF  
MEXICO—THE REGENCY

THE next morning the town was swarming with red trousers, the wearers whereof were seeking quarters. From our balcony we saw, standing at the corner of the Calles de la Profesa and Espirito Santo, a little group of officers talking together in that half-earnest, half-distract manner so characteristic of men newly landed in a town, whose interest in every trifle gets the better of the topic under immediate consideration.

By their uniforms and demeanor we could judge that one was a general and the others were officers of various rank. As we appeared at the balcony there was a perceptible flutter among them, and some of them began to ogle us as only Frenchmen could whose eyes had not rested upon a white woman for several months. This incident, trifling as it seems, was to become the key-note of our future Mexican existence. The group of officers in quest of suitable quarters turned out to be General Bazaine and his staff, some of whom afterward became our warm friends.



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We now found another source of apprehension. The apartment we had rented, at the corner of the Calle de San Francisco, opposite the Iglesia de la Profesa, was larger than necessary for our small family, and a very spacious room looking upon Mexico's fashionable thoroughfare had been left unfurnished and unoccupied by us. It was obvious that we should be required to give it over for the use of some officer of the invading army, and the matter was naturally not without interest.

Early in the morning of June 5, a carriage drove up, and some middle-aged officers of the administration, in green-and-silver uniforms, applied for quarters. One of them was the paymaster-in-chief of the army, M. Ernest Louët. He was a worthy man, who afterward became a frequent visitor, although his general appearance and peculiar, peak-shaped skull, undisguised by any hirsute covering, were not likely favorably to impress frivolous feminine minds.<sup>1</sup>

We drew a forlorn picture of the rooms, which, as a fact, were utterly unsuited to his purpose. He left without even looking at them, and we had a reprieve.

<sup>1</sup> M. Louët, after the Franco-Prussian war, visited Marshal Bazaine in his Spanish retreat, and obtained from him all the documents relating to the intervention and the empire of Maximilian then in his possession. It was his intention to use them as the basis for an authentic history, which, however, he did not live to publish. The task thus begun by M. Louët was subsequently completed by M. Paul Gaulot, in 1889, under the title, "La Vérité sur l'Expédition du Mexique, d'après les Documents Inédits d'Ernest Louët, Payeur-en-Chef du Corps Expéditionnaire," and divided into three parts: "Un Rêve d'Empire," "L'Empire de Maximilien," and "Fin d'Empire."

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The unfinished condition of the apartments, as well as an abundant expenditure of tact and diplomacy on our part, saved us from other applicants, and we were beginning to flatter ourselves that we should escape this much-dreaded imposition when, late in the afternoon, two young naval officers called, accompanied by orderlies and pack-mules. They presented *billets de logement*, requesting to be given possession. We tried to discourage them, assuring them that the rooms contained no conveniences of any kind, not even furniture: but the young men were evidently easily satisfied; they politely but firmly insisted—their only wish, they said, being to camp under cover.

This annoyed us, and we showed them scant courtesy, not even attempting to disguise the fact that they were most unwelcome. Fate was, however, kind to us when it sent us these men. They turned out to be perfect gentlemen, and completely won us over by their unvarying good breeding under shabby treatment. Before long we were, and remained, the best of friends. As for their orderlies, they soon made love to our Indian maidens, and there is every reason to believe that the interlopers obtained all necessary comforts, after all. So all went well enough in the two ménages.

Indeed, an *entente cordiale* between the population of Mexico and the French army was rapidly established. In a few days the place assumed an unwonted aspect of cheerfulness and festivity. The French officers, who for over a year past had led a life of hardship, were now bent upon pleasure.



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They fell gracefully into the Mexican mode of life, and took kindly to the *havanera*, the bull-fights, the Paseo, and the style of flirtation preferred by the Mexican women. For this they soon coined a French word, *noviotage*,<sup>1</sup> and thus expressed the semi-Platonic love-making of indefinite duration and undefined limits which with the natives usually culminates in marriage, after a prolonged term of years, but which with foreigners seldom culminated at all, for lack of time. They "played the bear,"<sup>2</sup> and ogled their chosen one from the street or at the Alameda, or followed her carriage on horseback at the Paseo, according to the most approved Mexican methods; and in exchange for small favors received, they cast a glow of sparkling cheerfulness upon the dull city of Montezuma.

General Forey made his triumphant entrance on June 10. It was a magnificent sight, and one not easily forgotten. As the victorious veteran troops,—many of whom had seen the Crimea, Syria, and Italy,—in their battered though scrupulously neat uniforms, marched through the Calle de San Francisco, laden with their cumbersome campaign outfit, the whole population turned out to see them, and the balconies and windows on the line of march were lined with eager and interested faces.

This was no ordinary pageant. It was serious work, and full of the deepest meaning. These sur-

<sup>1</sup> Derived from *novio*, "be- under his chosen one's window, trothed lover."

<sup>2</sup> The Mexicans call *hacer Voso* up and down, casting longing glances at her—the worse the the mode of courtship by which weather the more ardent the the lover, on horseback, passes love.

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vivors of an army of thirty thousand men had arduously fought their way to this triumph for sixteen months. No one will probably ever know how many of their comrades had dropped on the roadside; and the weather-beaten faces, bronzed by long exposure to the tropical sun, the patched clothes, the long line of ambulances following in the rear, told a story in which little room was left for the imagination. The sight kindled genuine interest and aroused the sympathy of the crowd, and something very like spontaneous enthusiasm thrilled through the air on their passage.

The keys of the city had been solemnly offered to General Forey by General Salas, amid the acclamations of the people. The next day M. de Saligny presented a list of thirty-five citizens destined to form a junta. These were to select three men to act as regents pending the final decision of the people with regard to a permanent form of government. The junta was empowered to add to its numbers two hundred and fifteen citizens, supposed to be taken from all classes, who, with the thirty-five appointed by the French, would compose the assembly of notables upon whom must devolve the carrying out of the farce which it was intended must take the place of a popular expression of the will of the country.

Don Theodosio Lares was elected its president. This junta, in a secret meeting at which two hundred and thirty-one members were present, deliberated upon the form of government to be chosen for the Mexican nation and on July 10, at a pub-

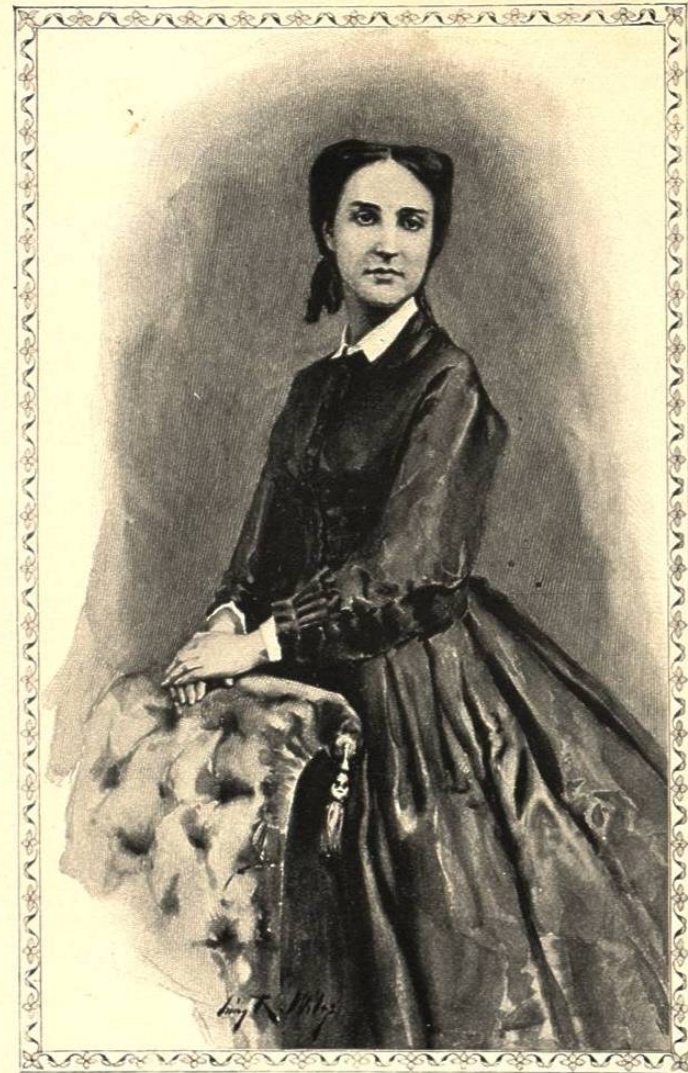


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lic meeting, presented a report in which the republican system was denounced as the cause of the greatest evils which had of late years been the scourge of the country, and monarchy was advocated as the only remedy.

Four articles were voted upon, with only two dissenting voices: (1) The nation adopts as a form of government a constitutional monarchy, hereditary under a Catholic prince. (2) The sovereign will take the title of Emperor of Mexico. (3) The imperial crown of Mexico is offered to his Royal Highness Prince Ferdinand Maximilian, Archduke of Austria, for himself and his descendants. (4) In the case where, owing to unforeseen circumstances, the Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian should not take possession of the throne offered him, the Mexican government trusts in the good will of his Majesty Emperor Napoleon III to designate another Catholic prince to whom the crown shall be offered. A regency, composed of General Almonte, General Salas, and Archbishop Labastida, was forthwith established, under the protection of the French.

It was obvious to all that the performance was enacted for the "benefit of the gallery." Gossip even told how the French had paid for the very clothes worn by some of the so-called "notables" upon that occasion. Nevertheless, the monarchy, by the will of the people, was voted in, and a commission was appointed, consisting of the most distinguished among the reactionary leaders, to wait upon Maximilian of Austria, and to offer him the throne on behalf of the Mexican nation.



EMPERESS CHARLOTTE.



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But although the part played by the French in this comedy was thinly disguised, every one in the capital was now in a good humor. After the severe strain of the past year, the onerous burdens which had been imposed upon the people by the Liberal government in order to carry on the war,—the forced loans raised from the wealthy, the leva by means of which the poor were seized upon and pressed into the army,—a sudden reprieve had come. All responsibility now seemed lifted off the Mexican people and assumed by the French; and the revival of trade under the impulse given by the influx of pleasure-loving foreigners, who freely spent their money, was regarded as an earnest of the prosperity to come. No one seemed disposed to be over-critical as to methods, if only peace and plenty could be assured.

It would seem, however, that Napoleon's instructions to General Forey had not been exactly carried out. According to these, and in order to retain full control of political operations, the general was himself to appoint the provisional government, with General Almonte at its head. After this, tranquillity having been established in the country, he was to call for a popular vote to decide upon the form of government to be adopted and to constitute a national congress.<sup>1</sup>

The French government had repeatedly declared to England and to the world that "no government would be imposed upon the Mexican people." Had

<sup>1</sup> See official letters, November 1, December 17, 1862, February 14, 1863.



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it been honest when signing the provisions of the treaty of London, and later those of the convention of La Soledad, the armed expedition had now reached its end. Indeed, quite enough had already happened to show the French statesmen how illusory had been the promises of the Mexican refugees and the representations of Messrs. de Saligny and Jecker; and now, once more and for the last time, the opportunity was offered Napoleon gracefully to withdraw with the honors of war from the fool's errand on which he had so recklessly embarked.

The French army was now in Mexico. The commander-in-chief and the French minister might dictate their terms to the enemy from his fallen capital, and then retrace their steps homeward.

But this was not to be; unwilling to recognize his own error, Napoleon III preferred attributing to the mismanagement of his agents the difficulties that had sprung up on every side, and he resolved to persevere in his original intention. As for General Forey, whether his dullness of perception failed to grasp the true drift of his master's mind, or whether he was unable to steer his way through the tortuous policy which he was called upon to further, he seemed to regard his mission as fulfilled. After he had established the native provisional government, he complacently rested in the enjoyment of his new title of Marshal of France, apparently overlooking the fact that outside of the capital the national party held the country as absolutely as ever. He issued a decree confiscating the property of all Liberals who did not lay down

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their arms, and allowed the regency, which was composed of three clerical leaders,—General Almonte, of whom Marshal Bazaine was wont to say that he meant well, but *il se prend trop au sérieux*, General Salas, a conservative old fossil unearthed for the occasion, and Archbishop Labastida,—to foreshadow an era of reaction and retrogression.

A decree (1863) intended to stop the exporting of gold, and another confiscating the property of political adversaries, created so much uneasiness that the French government was obliged to interfere and enforce their repeal. An ordinance compelling every one to kneel in the street upon the passage of the eucharist created loud dissatisfaction among the liberal-minded; and ordinances forbidding work on Sunday without the permission of the parish priest, and suspending work in the erection of buildings upon land formerly belonging to the clergy, had eventually to be repealed.

Religious processions had been forbidden by the Liberal government. One of the first mistakes made by the commander-in-chief was to allow the clergy to celebrate in June the Fête-Dieu, that should have been celebrated in May, but had been omitted, as Juarez was then in possession of the city. Not only did General Forey consent to this, but he and his officers attended the procession, an act which excited the sarcasm of the Liberals and gave substance to the fear that the French protectorate meant reaction.

The priests and clericals fully believed that their turn to govern had come. They actually notified



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the tenants of former clergy property not to pay rent to their landlords, as the sales of such property had been the work of Satan, and were now to be annulled, and that if they paid their rent they must eventually be called upon to pay it over again to the church, the rightful owner.

Meanwhile Maximilian's faith had been shaken by the refusal of England to guarantee the empire. When, in the autumn of 1861, the negotiations secretly carried on with regard to the establishment of a Mexican monarchy had at last assumed a tangible form, and serious propositions had been made to the Archduke Maximilian by M. Gutierrez de Estrada (the representative of the reactionary party in Mexico, acting at the instigation of Napoleon III), the archduke, with the approval of his brother Emperor Francis Joseph, had acquiesced under two principal conditions: "(1) The support, not only moral, but material and efficient, of the two great powers (France and England); (2) the clearly expressed wish of the Mexican people."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See note drawn up under his supervision by his secretary, the Baron de Pont, bearing date September 27, 1861, published in "La Vérité sur l'Expédition du Mexique," *loc. cit.*, pp. 8, 9, and compare M. de Kératry, "L'Empereur Maximilien," etc., pp. 8, 9. It has been said that the project was submitted to Maximilian three years before the treaty of Miramar was signed (see Charles d'Héricault, "Maximilien et le Mexique," p. 23), and I heard it asserted, while in Mexico, that the

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French diplomacy had failed in its efforts to secure British concurrence. Maximilian now showed himself unwilling to regard the invitation of the junta assembled in the capital as sufficient to constitute a claim to the imperial crown. He insisted upon a similar expression of feeling from the other large centers of population in the country, and stated his readiness to accept the trust "when the vast territory should have been pacified." This meant the conquest of the country, neither more nor less.

Napoleon apparently did not hesitate. Trusting in the love of warlike achievement so strong in the French people, he pushed ahead along his dangerous path. That even now he clung to the practicability of his original plan is shown by the almost naïve manner in which, on September 12, 1863, he wrote to General Bazaine that "the *principal* object at present was to pacify and organize (!)" the country by calling upon all men of good will to rally around the new order of things and by preventing the enactment of reactionary measures. He then still hoped and believed that the return to France of the outlay caused by the expedition could be guaranteed by means of a great loan raised in Mexico—when organized and restored to prosperity. He constantly urged upon his agents the organization of the finances of the country and of the Mexican army.

Immediately upon the arrival of the French, Napoleon had sent a financier, M. Budin, to put order into the country's resources. M. Budin was a commonplace, middle-aged little man, of medi-



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ocre ability, whose personality was not calculated to impress one with an idea of intellectual force. I was told, by those who were in a position to judge of his ability as a specialist, that, although a first-class administrative officer, he was lacking in initiative, and was in no way qualified to extricate Mexico from financial difficulties. His attainments were those acquired in the daily routine of an upper clerk's well-defined duties, and his mind was of narrow scope, ill fitted to adapt itself to the entirely new problems set before it. He had been paymaster of the French army during the Crimean and the Italian wars, and afterward *receveur-général de la Savoie*. He brought with him a mining engineer and a staff of custom-house and revenue officers.

He did not distinguish himself, one of his earliest acts being to urge the promulgation of the above-mentioned decree sequestrating the property of all who were then opposed to the new order of things. He also reinstated the old method of administering justice, which was a disappointment to the progressive element. To be sure, Maximilian, upon his arrival, treated him coldly, and did not help him to make a success of his mission. His place was successively filled by M. de Maintenant and by M. Corta, who were not more successful in bringing the revenues of the empire up to its requirements. M. de Bonnefons, a fourth financier, sent in 1865, fell ill and was compelled to return to France. The year following his arrival, he, in turn, was replaced by M. Langlais.

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On July 16, 1863, the Emperor had promoted General Forey to the rank of marshal, and had thus softened the recall of his incompetent, though faithful, servant.

The newly made marshal celebrated this promotion by a ball, at which a trifling incident occurred which made an impression upon me, and which, no doubt, General Forey remembered for some time. He was a very heavy man, of full habit, tall, with a short neck and red complexion, all the more ruddy by contrast with his gray hair and mustache. While waltzing past the general, I saw the light chair upon which he sat suddenly give way with a loud crash under his ponderous weight, and down came the commander-in-chief hard upon the floor. Rumors of his probable downfall were already reaching us, and the appositeness of the situation appealed to us. I jokingly whispered to my partner, a young officer on his staff: "Mon général, vous avez fait la culbute." We both thoughtlessly laughed, and were caught in the act by his Excellency at the moment when, helped to his feet, unhurt, by the bystanders, he was endeavoring to veil under an assumption of increased dignity his consciousness of the absurdity of the accident. He flushed up angrily, and, I was afterward told, never quite forgave the young man for his share in our disrespectful mirth.

He was most unpopular. His whole conduct, since his arrival in Mexico, had been characterized by weakness, indecision, and lack of judgment, and he had shown himself in every respect unequal to



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the difficult task before him. Colonel Loizillon says that, on the way to Puebla, when the generals assembled in council of war differed, instead of deciding the question the commander-in-chief would adjourn, beseechingly saying: "Mon Dieu, tâchez donc de vous entendre"<sup>1</sup> ("Gentlemen, do try to come to an understanding"). He had allowed himself to be deceived by the French minister to Mexico with the glaring facts before his eyes. As a military chief, his procrastination had given the Mexicans the time they needed fully to organize their defense; and had it not been for General Bazaine's energy and military capacity in urging and successfully carrying out the attack upon the fort of San Xavier, the siege of Puebla, already prolonged far beyond the limits of all likelihood, might have cost the French a still greater expenditure of time and human life. Indeed, it was the openly expressed opinion of many French officers that to famine was principally due the fall of Puebla. "Sans cela nous y serions encore," they would say.

General Forey's elevation had been due mainly to the fact that he was one of the men who had served Napoleon in 1851 in the *coup d'état*. Indeed, many of the Emperor's most glaring failures were due to the same cause,—*i. e.*, loyalty to individuals,—which led him to place in responsible positions men of small merit and of less principle who had stood by Cæsar and his fortunes.

In France the effect of the general's incapacity

<sup>1</sup> "Lettres sur l'Expédition du Mexique," p. 101.



COLONEL VAN DER SMISSEN.  
Commander of the Belgian contingent.



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had been serious. The delay that had occurred in bringing about a result announced as easy of accomplishment had furnished sharp weapons to the opposition. It had forced the government to ask the Chamber of Deputies for large appropriations to conduct the war upon a serious scale. It was no longer a military parade from Vera Cruz to Mexico to present the French flag to the enthusiastic gratitude of the Mexicans: it was a fighting army of thirty-five thousand men to be maintained across the seas at the expense of France.

The French leaders may be said to have displayed, in their Mexican venture, the same lack of administrative efficiency and of military organization, the same insufficient knowledge of and preparation for the task to be performed, as so conspicuously appeared at the very outset of the Franco-Prussian war. It is impossible to read the accounts of the various campaigns since published without recognizing the presence, in victory over an unorganized enemy, of the elements of the later failure when the same men were arrayed against the strongly organized German forces.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting, in this connection, to find that the same conditions existed in France at the time of the Crimean war. General Bosquet, one of the heroes of that expedition, in his letters constantly denounced the administration for its lack of preparation. Under date of January 14, 1854, he says: "Imagine that they have not yet made any preparation. The cavalry has neither horses nor men; neither has the artillery. No orders have been given about harness, or about any new material." And in another letter, written on the eve of his departure for the seat of war, he repeats the same complaints. Marshal St. Arnaud, the commander-in-chief, wrote from Gallipoli to the Emperor that the army lacked the very necessities of life: "One cannot make war,"



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With characteristic patriotism, the Chamber voted the appropriations necessary to vindicate the honor of the French flag; but the government was condemned to hear many unpleasant truths.

As for M. de Saligny, he had turned the French legation into a business office, in which the guaranty of France was traded upon to cover the most doubtful transactions. Napoleon had at last recognized his true character, and now—too late, alas!—recalled him from his post. “De gré ou de force, quand même il aurait donné sa démission,” he had written to General Bazaine.<sup>1</sup>

But this unforeseen contingency greatly disturbed the French minister in his operations. His accomplices, the clerical leaders and others, worked for him, and moved heaven and earth to have his recall reconsidered. They failed; but to make up for his disappointment the Mexican National Assembly voted him a national reward of one hundred thousand dollars. Although Marshal Forey had not yet left the country, General Bazaine remonstrated with General Almonte, who, however, resented his interference.

Both M. de Saligny and Marshal Forey enjoyed too much playing the leading rôle to depart willingly. They lingered on, much to the amusement of the onlookers, until General Bazaine grew impatient at the awkwardness of his own position. The ridiculous side of the complication was seized

he said in a note dated May 27, <sup>1</sup> November 1, 1863. See Louët, “without bread, shoes, kettles, *loc. cit.*, “Un Rêve d’Empire,” and water-cans.” p. 208.

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upon by the wags of the army; bets were taken, and a song the refrain of which was, “Partiront-ils, partiront-ils pas,” was popularly sung everywhere, the innumerable verses of which showed the inexhaustible interest taken in the subject.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Plus rapide que l’éclair  
Un bruit circule en ville;  
La joie, la gaieté sont dans  
l’air;  
On s’aborde, on babille;  
Soldats et pékins

Se serrent la main  
En disant, ‘Quelle chance!’  
Tout bas on redit,  
Forey, Saligny  
Sont rappelés en France,”  
etc.