

III THORNS

THE details of Maximilian's court once settled, and the code of etiquette to be used adopted, the new sovereign started forth upon a tour of the provinces, to present himself to the loyalty of his subjects. The Empress remained as regent, to govern under the guidance of the commander-in-chief. Ovations had everywhere been prepared, and a semblance of popularity, so dear to Maximilian's heart, was the result. But immense sums were expended, and more precious time was wasted.

Upon his return, Mexican society turned out en masse to do him honor. We all sallied forth in a monster cavalcade by the Paseo de la Vega to meet him some miles out of the city, and escort him back to the palace. All this was pleasant and exciting, but wise heads saw that this was no time for idle pleasure, and some impatience was manifested at this pageantry.

Then began a series of administrative experiments. Many projects were mapped out with a view to placing Mexico abreast of the most advanced countries of the civilized world.

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Among other premature efforts made at this time, when the young Emperor gave fullest flight to his dreams, was a Department of the Navy. Nothing could more clearly demonstrate how whimsical was the mind of the Austrian ex-admiral and how slight was his grasp of the situation. Long-postponed issues, involving vital questions of policy and of administration, were awaiting his decision, and he busied himself with frivolities and with impossibilities. These early days gave the keynote of his three years' reign.

Captain Destroyat, a French naval officer, was made secretary of the navy. As the Mexican government did not own a canoe, and as there was at that time no serious likelihood of its ever owning a battle-ship, this sinecure caused no little merriment among us, and many were the practical jokes of which the hapless cabinet officer was the victim.

His quarters were situated one block below our house, in the Calle de Espiritu Santo. This street, owing to a depression in the level and to bad drainage, was usually flooded, during the rainy season, after every severe *aguacero*. So impassable did it then become that even men were compelled to engage the services of a *cargador* to carry them across "pickaback." When came the first shower after his new dignity had been conferred upon Captain Destroyat, his comrades, bent upon fun, purchased a toy flotilla, which they floated, flying the Mexican flag, down the street. In mock dignity the tiny ships came to an anchor before his

door, much to every one's merriment, excepting, it was whispered, to that of the powers that were, who found a sting in the harmless levity.¹

Maximilian has been uniformly blamed by French writers for frittering away the first precious months of his reign in dreams, or in the settlement of minor details, the triviality of which was in glaring contrast with the gravity of the issues before him. True as this criticism may be in theory, it is perhaps to be regretted—if we consider his Majesty's youth and inexperience, and his absolute ignorance of the conditions which he was called upon to face, as well as of the capabilities and personal history of the men with whom he was to deal—that he did not longer continue to allow others, who had painfully earned a clearer knowledge of the situation, to rule in his name. The French, after a long series of preliminary blunders,

¹ The new Navy Department, although substantial advances were made to it by the French treasury for the purpose of guarding the coast against smugglers, did little to justify its existence. Two years later, when Empress Charlotte arrived in Vera Cruz, about to sail for Europe on the fruitless errand from which she was never to return, there was not one rowboat flying the Mexican flag ready to convey her to the steamer which was lying in port at anchor. A boat belonging to a French man-of-war was placed at her disposal; but the unfortunate woman, then em-

bittered by the treatment received at the hands of the French government, flatly refused to be taken, even over so short a distance, under the French flag; and the incident gave rise to a painful scene. As the Empress was then on her way as a suppliant to the court of the Tuileries, there is every reason to believe that this illogical and almost childish sensitiveness was one of the first symptoms of the cerebral derangement that was so soon to become evident. Other exhibitions of an impaired judgment were related which then seemed incomprehensible.

were just beginning to understand the country when the Emperor arrived and attempted independently to acquire the same lesson, at the expense of the nation, of his party, and of his allies.

It soon became obvious that the young monarch was not equal to the task which he had undertaken, and a feeling of disappointment prevailed. Unendowed with the force and clearness of mind necessary in an organizer, he nevertheless insisted upon all administrative work passing through his own imperial bureau. At the head of this bureau he placed an obscure personal favorite, a Belgian named Eloin, who had risen to favor through his social accomplishments. This man did not speak one word of Spanish, hated the French, despised the Mexicans, and was more ignorant than his master himself of American questions in general, and of Mexican affairs in particular.

While in office he used his power to repress much of the impulse given to enterprise by the French. His narrow views were responsible for a jealous policy which excluded all that he could not personally appreciate and manage. He and the Emperor undertook to decide questions upon which they were then hardly competent to give an intelligent opinion. The Mexican leaders were made to feel that they had no influence, the French that they had no rights. A chill was suddenly felt to pervade the official atmosphere. As a prominent member of the Belgian legation once remarked: "To eat priest for breakfast and Frenchman for dinner, when one has been called to the throne by

the clergy, and must rely upon France for sole support, may be regarded as a dangerous policy." After doing much mischief, M. Eloin was sent abroad upon a mysterious mission. It was rumored that he had gone to watch over his master's personal interests abroad.¹

Indeed, the presence of the personal friends and countrymen of the sovereigns who had accompanied them in their voluntary exile caused a note of discord in the general harmony of the first days of the empire, indicative of the cacophony which

¹ On December 28, 1864, Maximilian entered a protest against the family compact exacted from him by his brother, the Emperor Francis Joseph, on April 9, a few days before his departure from Miramar and communicated to the Reichsrath on November 16th. In this curious document he stated that it was upon the suggestion of the Emperor of Austria that the throne of Mexico had been offered to him; that after the negotiations were closed, when his withdrawal must have brought about the most serious European complications, the Emperor Francis Joseph, accompanied by his most intimate councilors, had come hastily to Miramar to force from him an absolute renunciation of his birthrights; that, having given his word to the Mexican delegation sent to offer him a throne, he had signed this unqualifiable compact, but that experienced diplomats and expert jurists, after studying the question, were of the opinion that

was soon to follow. Prince and Princess Zichy and Countess Collonitz soon returned home, but a number of men remained to occupy lucrative and confidential positions about the person of the monarch.

It was natural that, so far away from their native land, these would-be Mexican rulers, stranded among a people with whose customs and mode of thought they had no sympathy, and of whose traditions they knew nothing, should cling to the little circle of trusted friends who had followed them in their adventure. It was natural also that the Mexicans, seduced by the vision of a monarchy in which *they* hoped to be the ruling force by virtue of their share in its inception and its establishment, should feel a keen disappointment upon finding foreigners, whom they themselves had been instrumental in placing at the head of affairs, not only overshadowing them, but usurping what they deemed their legitimate influence. It was likewise natural that the French, who had put up all the stakes for the game, and who had sacrificed lives, millions, and prestige in the venture, should look to a preponderant weight in the councils of an empire which was entirely of their creating. All this was the inevitable consequence of such a combination as that attempted in Mexico; but apparently it was one which had entered into no one's calculations, and for which no provision had been made. The imperial dream of Napoleon III had been too shadowy to include such humanities.

The original "king-makers" soon became a

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troublesome element in Maximilian's administration. His policy naturally led him to seek supporters among the progressive Mexicans, and to devise the honorable retirement of his early allies from the active management of affairs.

General Almonte from the first was set aside with empty honors.¹ In 1866 he was appointed to replace Señor Hidalgo as representative of Mexico to France. General Miramon and General Marquez were likewise sent away in honorable exile; and by degrees the more conspicuous among the reactionary leaders were put out of the way.

In March, 1864, Maximilian, about to sail from Miramar, had addressed a letter to President Juarez. In this curious document he spoke of himself as "the chosen of the people," and invited him to attach himself to the empire. He even offered him a distinguished place in its administration. This, of course, was haughtily declined by the President. But persevering efforts were made to win over, by promises of preferment, the leading men of the Liberal party. Some declined in noble terms, but others succumbed to the temptation, and for a while a decided tendency was shown to rally around the new order of things. Yet these conditions, favorable as they were, added to the complications of the situation. In a very short time, what with the difficulties arising from the nationalized clergy property, and with the personal disappointment of many of those who had made the empire, Maximilian found the

¹ He was made great marshal, high chamberlain, minister of the imperial household, and high chancellor of the court, minister of the imperial orders.



COMTE DE THUN DE HOHENSTEIN.
Commander of the Austro-Belgian forces

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men upon whose invitation he had come to Mexico turning away from him. Moreover, the influence of M. Eloin's policy had inaugurated the long series of misunderstandings between the court and the French quartier-général, which ultimately led to complications at first by no means unavoidable. "Non es emperador, es empeorador," was the pun popularly repeated by Mexican wags.¹ Six months had not elapsed since the regent Almonte had turned over to the young Emperor the quasi-consolidated empire conquered by Marshal Bazaine, and thinking men already foresaw the end. Never did the tide of success turn so rapidly.

In October, 1864, Comte de Thun de Hohenstein had been sent to Paris to negotiate for the transportation of some four thousand Austrians for the army of Maximilian in Mexico. Belgians were also rapidly enlisting under Colonel Van der Smissen; and shortly afterward Austro-Belgian auxiliary troops, numbering, from first to last, some eight thousand men, were transferred to Mexico.² These soon developed into an additional source of difficulty.

The officers of the Austrian contingent had not forgotten the yet recent encounters with the French army at Solferino and Magenta, and, no doubt at first unconsciously, an unconciliatory spirit was manifested in every difference which arose between the French and their present allies.

¹ "Ce n'est pas un empereur; au Mexique," p. 42 (Paris, 1879). c'est un empireur." Compare ² See Galignani, October 14, Masseras, "Un Essai d'Empire 1864.

Comte de Thun, the commander of the Austrian corps, felt more than restless under Marshal Bazaine's authority. Eventually, in 1865, Maximilian, whose confidence he enjoyed, further complicated the situation by establishing alongside of the War Department a military cabinet, through which the Austro-Belgian contingents were independently administered. This broke up all chance of uniform action in military matters. It placed the auxiliary troops beyond the jurisdiction of the French commander, who, under the terms of the treaty of Miramar, was to be regarded as the commander-in-chief.

The same lack of unity that existed between the imperial army and the French was also found to exist between the foreign mercenaries and the Mexican troops.

To the natives these foreigners, although countrymen of their sovereigns, were interlopers and rivals. Their very presence defeated the object of their Emperor's futile attempt at a show of Mexican patriotism. The position of the French was a well-defined one. They were there for a purpose, spent their money freely, fought their battles victoriously, and would some day go back to France. But the Mexicans hated these foreigners, and the confidential offices held by impecunious Belgians and Austrians in the government and about the person of the chief executive added to the instinctive suspicion with which their permanent residence in the country was regarded.

Under the then existing conditions, where so

many irreconcilable interests were in presence, it is not to be wondered at if little harmony prevailed amid the various conflicting elements gathered together by fate for the enactment of this fantastic scene.

The attitude of the United States toward the empire had been unmistakably emphasized on May 3, 1864, by the departure of our minister, the Hon. Thomas Corwin, who left, ostensibly on leave of absence, as soon as the approach of the new sovereigns was heralded.

His was an interesting personality. Tall, stout, and somewhat awkward in his gait, his double chin was lost between the exaggerated points of the stiff white collar so characteristic of our American statesmen at that time. His kindly smile and natural charm of voice and manner, however, soon attracted and held those who at first found him unengaging. With all his attainments he had preserved unspoiled a certain natural modesty, which led him to attribute his advancement to accident or fate. He once told me that he owed all his success in life to the fact that, as a country boy in Ohio, while driving his father's cart downhill at day-break, he fell asleep and was jolted off his seat, breaking his leg. During the weeks of enforced seclusion that followed he taught himself to read, and developed a studious turn of mind, which, his leg having been permanently weakened by the accident, led him to seek a situation in a lawyer's office. From these humble beginnings he rose to the place he then occupied as one of our foremost orators and,

since 1861, as minister to Mexico,¹ so that, he merrily added, he owed his fortune to a broken leg. Such men, however, are in no need of accidents to rise; Mr. Corwin could not help doing so from the innate buoyancy of his brilliant personality.

On April 4 the Senate and House of Representatives at Washington had passed a unanimous resolution in opposition to the recognition of a monarchy in Mexico, as an expression of the sentiment of the people of the United States. Secretary Seward, in forwarding a copy of the resolution to Mr. Dayton, our minister to France, had, however, instructed him to inform the French government that "the President does not at present contemplate any departure from the policy which this government has hitherto pursued in regard to the war which exists between France and Mexico."²

Notwithstanding the small encouragement which such an attitude gave him, one of the earliest acts of Maximilian was to send Señor Arroyo to seek an interview with the head of the United States government, with a view to the recognition of the empire. Señor Arroyo was not even granted an audience. In July, 1865, another attempt was made by Maximilian with the same object in view.

Among the chamberlains of the Emperor at that time was a son of General Degollado, a Liberal leader who had been killed at Las Cruces, while fighting for the republic against General Marquez

¹ He now left American affairs ² See "Diplomatic Correspondence," 1865, Part III, p. 357.
in the charge of his secretary of
legation, his son William Corwin.

in 1861. Young Degollado had lived in Washington, and there had married an American woman. His attainments were mediocre and his personality was colorless, but his wife was ambitious and energetic. She was eager to see her husband come to the front, and, setting aside family traditions, did her best to encourage the imperial court in the idea that the United States government, if properly approached, might be brought to consider the recognition of the empire. She was a good-looking, pleasant woman, who readily made friends, and the couple were put forward as likely to bring the undertaking to a favorable conclusion.

It had at first been suggested that an envoy extraordinary be sent in full official pomp to Washington. General Almonte had been spoken of for the mission, and Mr. and Mrs. Degollado were to have accompanied him as members of the embassy. Señor Ramirez, the minister of state and a moderate Liberal of high standing and ability, realized, however, that the imperial government, in following such a course, must publicly expose itself to a slight. He therefore urged upon Maximilian a modification of the plan, and it was arranged that Mr. and Mrs. Degollado should go in a semi-official manner to prepare the ground and to feel the way.

Mrs. Degollado was much excited over the prospect, and even seemed sanguine of success. It was hinted that Mr. Corwin, then in Washington, was lending himself to certain intrigues designed to facilitate the negotiations.

The Emperor's agents arrived in Washington on July 17, 1865. M. de Montholon, who since 1864 had been minister of France to Mexico, endeavored to obtain an audience for "the chamberlain of Maximilian" as bearer of a letter from the Emperor of Mexico to the President.¹ But the mission proved a failure, and only added one more to the many abortive attempts made during those four years to "solve the unsolvable problem."²

On January 1, 1865, President Juarez issued from Chihuahua a proclamation in which he confessed defeat, but in dignified tones asserted the righteousness of the national cause, in which he put his trust, and appealed to the nobler ideals of his countrymen.

At that moment, to the superficial observer, and in the capital, the empire seemed an accomplished fact. The country at large, although by no means pacified, was nominally under imperial rule. Almost alone, in the south, General Porfirio Diaz held his own at Oajaca, and remained unsubdued.

General Courtois d'Hurbal, who had been sent against him, had so far been unable to deal with him. The commander-in-chief resolved once more to take the field in person. As a result, Oajaca shortly afterward was taken, and General Diaz, at

¹ "Diplomatic Correspondence," 1865, Part III, p. 484. and were to be sent to Washington armed with a fund of \$2,000,-

² According to Prince Salm-000 in gold. He states that the Salm, yet another attempt was news of the Empress's illness, and planned in the fall of 1866, in the consequent failure of her mission abroad, prevented the carrying out of the scheme.

last forced to surrender, was made prisoner, and transferred to Puebla for safe-keeping.¹

From Mexico to the coast the country was quiet, and things were apparently beginning to thrive. But if to the residents of the capital the national government was a mere theoretical entity, in the interior of the country, and especially in the north, the small numbers of the French scattered over so vast an expanse of territory were obviously insufficient to hold it permanently. In order to please Maximilian, they traveled from place to place, receiving the allegiance of the various centers of population;² their battalions multiplied their efforts, and did the work of regiments. But the predatory bands now fighting under the republican flag were, like birds of prey, ever hovering near, concealed in the sierras, ready to pounce upon the hamlet or the town which the French must perforce leave unprotected, and wreaking terrible vengeance upon the inhabitants.

¹ He, however, boldly managed his escape a few months later, and again took the field at the head of a band of fourteen men. These increased in number, snowball fashion, as other guerrillas gradually rallied around the distinguished chief; and, at the head of an army, he in time reappeared in Oajaca. After defeating the Austrians, in whose keeping the state had been left, he reentered the city in October, 1866.

² As Colonel de Courcy cleverly remarked, some of these regiments "brought back eighteen hundred leagues of country on the soles of their boots."

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At this time there were some fifteen thousand French residents in the country, and these naturally suffered most both in life and property, especially toward the last.¹

Whether the small guerrillas fought under one flag or the other, the result was much the same to the people, who had to submit to the alternate exactions of both parties.

No wonder if the intervention grew in unpopularity. In certain parts of the country, as in Mazatlan, the French had to resort to force to constitute an imperial administration. It was made a penal offense to decline an office, and the reluctant Mexicans were compelled to serve against their will.

The war then waged was a cruel war, a war without mercy. Woe to the small detachment that allowed itself to be surprised and overpowered! It was sure death, death often embittered by refinements of cruelty and generally dispensed in the most summary manner, with little of the formality that obtains among civilized nations. To give but one instance: One of the most popular among the Austrian officers was Count Kurtzroch, a man of ancient lineage and of unexceptionable breeding. He and his friend Count von Fünfkirchen were favorites in the small foreign coterie, the center of which was at San Cosme, and they did not seem to be involved in the national feuds. During the campaign of 1865

¹ The wholesale hanging which was ordered by the empire might have taken place at Hermosillo in the autumn of 1866 was sufficient evidence of what those compromised by the empire might have to face, and only those who were forced to do so by imperative business interests remained.



COUNT VON FÜNFKIRCHEN.
Captain Austrian cavalry, Imperial Guard.

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he, with a small corps of Austrians, was defending a town in the interior against the Plateados, a far superior force. Hard pressed, the Austrians retreated, fighting at every step until they reached the church, in which they intrenched themselves and prepared for a siege. They hoped that relief might reach them, but the Mexicans set fire to the church, and the trapped men were forced to surrender. During the struggle Count Kurtzroch had been wounded in the legs. Unable to walk, he was carried out by his comrades on an improvised stretcher. As the defeated band filed before the victors, the leader, Antonio Perez, approaching the wounded man, asked his name, and, drawing his revolver, deliberately shot him dead as he lay helpless before him. This is but one of many such acts, and I mention it only because I knew and liked the man, and the details of the story naturally impressed me when, upon my inquiring about our friend, Count Nikolitz, a brother officer, after his return from the campaign, gave me the above details of his death.

At the beginning of the year 1865 martial law was proclaimed. By this measure Marshal Bazaine sought to check not only brigandage, but the military disorganization which the then prevailing state of things must inevitably create. In this effort he found but little support on the part of the imperial government. Indeed, Maximilian insisted upon all actions of the courts martial being submitted to him before being carried out. Much acrimony arose on both sides in consequence of this interference.

I remember once hearing the marshal refer to a controversy that was then going on between himself and the Emperor with regard to prisoners taken by him at Oajaca, and who, he felt, should be exiled. Maximilian, unmindful of the prolonged effort which it had cost to subdue these men, insisted upon releasing them, and eventually did so. The marshal bitterly complained of his weakness, gave other instances of his untimely interference with the course of justice as administered by the military courts, and excitedly declared that he was tired of sacrificing French lives for the sole apparent use of giving an Austrian archduke the opportunity "to play at clemency" (*de faire de la clémence*). Such difficulties steadily widened the breach between the court and the French military headquarters.

In the autumn of 1865, the news having reached him that President Juarez had passed the border and left the country, Maximilian, elated by the event, and exaggerating its bearing upon the political and military situation, issued the famous decree of October 3, now known in Mexican history as the *Bando Negro* ("black decree"). In this fatal enactment he assumed that the war was at an end, and, while doing homage to President Juarez himself, attempted to brand all armed republicans as outlaws who, if taken in arms, must henceforth be summarily dealt with by the courts martial, or—when made prisoners in battle—by the military leader, and shot within twenty-four hours.¹

¹ See Appendix A.

This extraordinary decree was greeted with dismay in the United States. It outraged the Mexicans, and excited the vindictiveness of the Liberal party. At the time such men as General Riva-Palacio and General Diaz were still in the field, and some of Mexico's most illustrious patriots were thus placed under a ban by the foreign monarch.¹

It has been claimed that Marshal Bazaine entered an earnest protest against the measure, the harshness of which he regarded as impolitic; that he urged its inexpediency, and personally objected to it as likely to weaken the authority of the military courts; that he, moreover, observed that it opened an avenue to private revenge, and delivered up the prisoners of one faction into the hands of another, a course which could not fail to add renewed bitterness to the civil war now so nearly at an end.² But although the famous decree certainly was the spontaneous act of the Emperor, and of his ministers who signed it, there can be no doubt that it

¹ General Diaz's record is well known and requires no comment here. General Riva-Palacio was a patriot and a gentleman. He was a man of parts, and had achieved some reputation as a poet and dramatic author. At the outbreak of the war he organized and equipped at his own expense a regiment, and was with General Zaragoza at Puebla. His division was one of the finest in the Mexican service, and, throughout the war, he loyally conducted his military operations in strict accordance with recognized usage. He cared for the wounded, exchanged prisoners, and, at the last, even went so far as to extend his protection to small detachments of French troops making their way to the Atlantic coast from the shores of the Pacific. See note from Marshal Bazaine, quoted in a letter from Mr. Bigelow to Mr. Seward, February 12, 1866 ("Diplomatic Correspondence," 1866, Part I, p. 281).

² See M. de Kératry, *loc. cit.*, p. 84 et seq. See also debate in Chamber of Deputies, "Moniteur Universel" (Paris), Jan. 28, 1866.

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embodied the policy of repression urged by the marshal, and that, if he cannot be held responsible for its form, in substance it was approved by him.¹ Whatever may have been its origin, when, shortly afterward (October 13, 1865), Generals Arteaga and Salazar, with others² who, at the head of small detachments, were holding the country in the north against General Mendez, were taken by the latter, and shot, under the decree of October 3, such a clamor of indignation was raised at home and abroad as must have demonstrated his mistake to the young Emperor. This mistake he was soon to expiate with his own blood.

¹ See Louët, "La Vérité sur l'Expédition du Mexique," etc., Part II, "L'Empire de Maximilien," by P. Gaulot; also Prince Salm-Salm's "My Diary in Mexico," etc., in which the author states that he was told by Maximilian that the decree was drafted and amended by Marshal Bazaine, who urged its enactment. In the memorandum drawn up for his lawyers, and published by Dr. Basch in "Erinnerungen aus Mexico," Maximilian says: "Bazaine dictated himself the details before witnesses."

² Colonels Villagomez, Diaz Paracho, and Pedro Mina were among those who were shot. General Mendez was one of the

PART IV
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THE AWAKENING