

I

“A CLOUD NO BIGGER THAN A
MAN'S HAND”

ON March 10, 1865, the Duc de Morny died. He had been the moving spirit in the Mexican imbroglio, and it would be difficult to believe that the withdrawal of the prompter did not have a weakening effect upon the performance. His death, by removing one of the strongest influences in favor of the intervention, not only in the Corps Législatif and at court, but in the financial world, was certainly one of the many untoward circumstances which helped to hasten the end.

In France, the elections of 1863 and 1864 had added strength to the opposition. It now insisted upon being heard. Not only had the discussions of the budget in the Chamber of Deputies brought out with painful clearness the weight of the burden assumed by France, but private letters written by intelligent officers were gradually enlightening public opinion upon the true condition of affairs in Mexico. Some of these letters had even found their way to the Tuileries.

Public feeling was beginning to express in un-

compromising tones the conviction that the government must relinquish an onerous task, the impossibility of accomplishing which was becoming patent. It was even openly suggested that the Tuileries must combine with Washington for the purpose of establishing in Mexico a form of government acceptable to the latter.¹

The writer of M. de Morny's obituary notice in the "Revue des Deux Mondes"² boldly asked whether the duke, who was always fortunate, and to whom success had become a habit, had not died opportunely. He left the question for the future to decide. The answer was not long delayed.³

The inauguration of the Mexican empire had been officially announced to the chambers by the government in the following terms: "The results obtained in 1862 and 1863 by our Corps Expéditionnaire in Mexico have, in 1864, received a solemn consecration under the protection of the flag of France. A regular government has been founded in that country, heretofore for more than fifty years delivered up to anarchy and intestine dissensions. In the beginning of the month of June the Emperor Maximilian took possession of the throne, and, sustained by our army, he inaugurated in all security an era of peace and prosperity for his new country."

¹ See "Revue des Deux Mondes," 1865, vol. lviii, p. 776; also vol. lvii, pp. 768, 1018. government in the Corps Législatif, still affirmed that "France would continue to protect Mexico

² *Ibid.*, 1865, vol. lvi, p. 501. until the full consolidation of its

³ And yet M. Rouher, in April, 1865, speaking for the French government in the Corps Législatif, still affirmed that "France would continue to protect Mexico until the full consolidation of its undertaking" (*ibid.*, vol. lvi, p. 1065).

Jules Favre pertinently asked: "Since Maximilian is established; since Maximilian is the Messiah announced in all time past; since he is really the man both for the Indians and the Spaniards, who receive him with acclamation; since he meets on his passage only with bouquets from the señoritas—let our soldiers return. What have they to do in Mexico? They are not needed, and can only be an obstacle in the way of that entire unanimity of feeling that exists between the prince and the nation." He stated that rumors were reaching France of fierce battles, of martial law, of prisoners of war shot, of villages burned, holding up as an example San Sebastian, in Sinaloa, a town of four thousand souls, which had been entirely burned and destroyed by General Castagny during his campaign against Romero and in the name of Emperor Maximilian,¹ and then he proceeded to show the ghastly farce that had been enacted behind these words, in the light cast upon it by the blaze of the ill-fated town:

"Why this discrepancy between the official statements as to the pacification of Mexico, the unanimous consent to Maximilian's elevation to the throne, and the facts, *i.e.*, the country under martial law, and the French army, marching, torch in hand, protecting one party and punishing the other by the wholesale destruction of life and property? Why did such contradiction exist between the

¹ "Mexicans! I have come in the name of the Emperor Maximilian into the state of Sinaloa, to establish peace therein, to protect property, and to deliver you from the malefactors who oppress you under the mask of liberty," said General Castagny in his proclamation.

official statements as to universal suffrage, the freedom of the press, the unanimity of sentiment in Mexico, and the fact that journalists were being brought, in the name of the Emperor, before a council of war and condemned to various penalties for having expressed their criticism of such wholesale executions?"

He resumed by calling attention to the renewed postponement of the ministry's promises with regard to the withdrawal of the army, and to its broken pledge that it would retire when Maximilian's throne was established and a proper impetus had been given to the work of regeneration. For the accomplishment of these ends, said the orator, a sacrifice of forty thousand men and a yearly expenditure of four or five millions would be needed for ten years to come.

In words which now sound prophetic he eloquently referred to Napoleon I and to his Spanish campaign, likewise undertaken under the pretense of regenerating a nation. "The mighty man who had conceived such projects," he cried, "all know where they led him. On April 14, 1814, the sentence of deposition thus expressed the motives of the Senate for deposing him: 'WHEREAS, Napoleon Bonaparte has undertaken a series of wars in violation of Article L of the Constitution of the 22d Frimaire, year 8, which provides that declarations of war must be proposed, discussed, and promulgated like laws; WHEREAS, The liberty of the press, established and consecrated as one of the rights of nations, has been constantly subject to the arbitrary

ensorship of the police," etc., and as he closed his argument he said:

"After a thorough study of all the facts in the case, political, military, and financial, it is impossible for any one seriously to believe that the government of Maximilian can exist without our army. With our army, I acknowledge it, his throne would rest upon an agreement, it would last as long as our assistance should be extended to it, but if you withdraw this assistance it is evident that it will be overthrown. If, therefore, you wish to establish it firmly, our army must remain in Mexico: the Chamber should understand this thoroughly."

Only thirteen members of the Chamber voted against the appropriation for the maintenance of the Corps Expéditionnaire; but it has been pointed out, and it is only fair to believe, that many voted for it who, as Frenchmen, felt that the government, blameworthy as it might be, should not be compelled suddenly to abandon an adventure in which the honor of France was involved. French patience, however, was fast nearing its limit, and when, in 1864, Maximilian accepted the crown, he must have realized that French support could not be indefinitely counted upon.

The millions raised through the Mexican loans had been carelessly administered and lavishly spent. What with the expenses of the court, extensive alterations in the imperial residences, especially in Chapultepec, and the outlay incidental to the pageants and ovations of the Emperor's journeys in

the provinces, the relief brought by the loans had been brief.

Confidence was waning. The incapacity of Maximilian was becoming generally recognized, and the difficulties inherent in the situation were everywhere growing clearer.

Maximilian had alienated Rome, whose censure he had drawn upon himself by his effort to conciliate the moderate party. He had aroused the resentment of the priests and brought upon himself the remonstrances of the bishops, and had set aside, or sent to foreign posts, the leaders of the party to whom he owed his crown. Yet he had not succeeded in winning over from the Liberal party any very important adhesions to his government.

Cardinal Antonelli, in a letter dated December 27, 1864, after setting forth the grievances of the holy see, stated that the Holy Father hoped that Maximilian in abandoning the course marked out in his letter to the minister, Señor Escudero, would "spare the holy see the necessity of taking proper measures to set right in the eyes of the world the responsibility of the august chief of the church—measures of which the least, certainly, would not be the recall of the pontifical representative in Mexico, in order that he may not remain there a powerless spectator of the spoliation of the church and of the violation of its most sacred rights."¹

It is difficult to understand why Maximilian had not negotiated the terms of a concordat with the holy see when he went to Rome to receive the

¹ "Diplomatic Correspondence," 1865, Part III, p. 623.

Pope's blessing before leaving Europe for his new dominions. The adjustment of existing differences between church and state formed the most urgent as well as the most vital issue to be met by the young Emperor, as upon the settlement of the vexed question of ownership in clergy property must depend the restoration of business confidence and of prosperity in the empire. The pretensions advanced by the papal nuncio sent by the Vatican to arrange for a concordat now proved so exorbitant that Maximilian had been compelled to decline to consider them, and he and the holy see had failed to come to terms. The final and official rupture with Monsignor Meglia took place in December, 1864. It was made public in a decree issued by Maximilian which proclaimed that papal bulls should not receive exequatur until approved by the chief executive.

The fact was that the party through which the French and Maximilian had been called to Mexico was the unpopular retroactive party; that, in order to exist, Maximilian had been obliged to recognize the measures enacted against his own partizans by the national party; that in so doing he had disappointed the priests; that in setting aside the leaders of the clerical party he had estranged his strongest adherents; and all this without making any serious headway with his antagonists, who would have no emperor, no monarchy, no foreigner.

The success of the intervention was now clearly seen to depend upon a war systematically con-

ducted against an enemy that represented a national sentiment.

On January 23, 1865, the governments of Chili, Bolivia, Salvador, Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela formed a defensive alliance against exterior aggression and for the guaranty of their respective autonomy. The treaty was signed in Lima by the representatives of the nations interested.

But a far more serious danger was threatening the empire in the North. On April 9, 1865, General Lee surrendered to the Federal army. The Civil War in the United States was at an end, and the French were beginning to understand that the Northern republic, whose unbroken unity stood strengthened, could no longer remain a passive spectator of the struggle taking place at its frontier.

The scene of military interest suddenly shifted to the Rio Grande, and the incidents happening on the border deserved more attention than Maximilian seemed at first inclined to bestow.

The interests of the national party were represented in Washington by Señor Romero, who, with consummate tact and ability, made the most of every opportunity. The service rendered by him to the cause of republicanism and of Mexican independence was second to none in importance. No detail seemed too trifling to be turned to account in his effort to strengthen the Mexican cause with our government.

A rumor reached us that President Juarez had succeeded in raising a loan in the United States. The ranks of the Liberal army were receiving im-

portant reinforcements from the officers and men of General Banks's command, who passed the border in large numbers to take part in the attack of General Cortinas at Matamoros. Already, in January, 1865, the impulse given to the Republican party in the North vibrated throughout the land. Soon resistance everywhere appeared in arms once more. Both General Mejía and Admiral Cloué, then in command of the French Gulf Squadron, complained that the United States army afforded protection to the Juarists.

Recruiting-offices had been opened in New York, which, although not countenanced by the government, must have furnished valuable auxiliaries to the Liberals. Alarming rumors reached France and Mexico with regard to the extent of the movement.

On the other hand, the negotiations then being carried on between Napoleon and Maximilian, with a view to securing the Mexican debt to France by a lien upon the mines of Sonora, were causing uneasiness in the United States, and gave rise to considerable diplomatic correspondence.¹

It required no wizard to foretell the issue. After the surrender of General Lee, a Confederate army-corps, twenty-five thousand strong, acting through General Slaughter, had opened negotiations with Marshal Bazaine, with a view to passing the border and settling in northern Mexico, provided suitable terms were granted by the Mexican government to

¹ See, in this connection, "Dip- letter of Secretary Seward ad-
lomatic Correspondence," 1865, dressed to Mr. Bigelow, Febru-
Part III, pp. 357-363, 417, and ary 17, 1865.

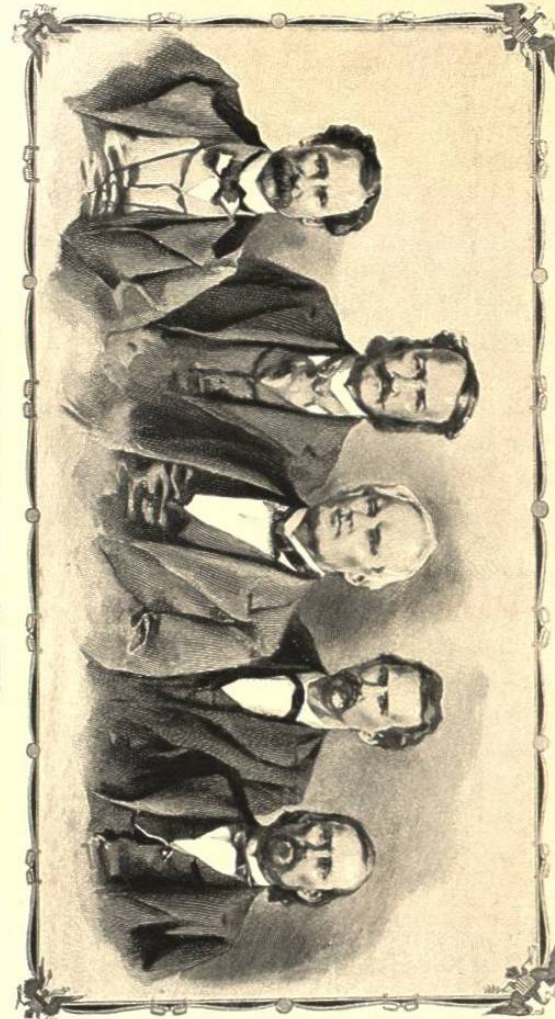
Maximilian in Mexico

the new colonists. It was then becoming clear to many that the half-way policy hitherto followed had led to nothing, and must result in a useless sacrifice of life and millions unless a larger force were maintained by the French in Mexico, or some barrier set up against the naturally dominant position taken by the United States with regard to Mexican affairs.

In June, 1865, Generals Kirby Smith, Magruder, Shelby, Slaughter, Walker, A. W. Terrell of Texas, Governor Price of Missouri, General Wilcox of Tennessee, Commodore Maury of Virginia, General Hindman of Arkansas, Governor Reynolds of Georgia, Judge Perkins, Colonel Denis, and Mr. Pierre Soulé of Louisiana, Major Mordecai of North Carolina, and others, had come to Mexico. With them had passed over the frontier horses, artillery, everything that could be transported, including large and small bands of Confederate soldiers, and some two thousand citizens who left the United States with the intention of colonizing Sonora.

Confederate officers now flocked to Mexico with a view to making new homes for themselves. Many of them were interested in special schemes by which the agricultural wealth of the land might be made to yield its treasure to the ruined but experienced Southern planters.

My mother being a Southern woman, and knowing some of their leaders, our house soon became a center where they gathered in the evening and freely discussed their hopes. Thus was added a new element to the already motley assemblage



EX-CONFEDERATE GENERALS IN MEXICO.
Generals C. Wilcox, J. B. Magruder, S. Price, A. W. Terrell, T. C. Hindman.

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which collected about us at that time. Truly a most heterogeneous set! Confederate officers, members of the diplomatic corps, newly fledged chamberlains and officials of the palace, the marshal's officers,—Frenchmen, Austrians, Belgians, and a few Mexicans,—would drop in, each group bringing its own interests, and, alas! its animosities.

Laws against foreigners having been passed, no property could henceforth be held by them unless they became naturalized. Some of the Confederate refugees therefore became Mexican citizens, and took service under the Mexican government. Governor Price, for instance, received authorization to recruit the imperial army in the Confederacy. He and Governor Harris of Tennessee and Judge Perkins of Louisiana were appointed agents of colonization, and immediately set to work upon the survey of the region lying between Mexico and Vera Cruz, with a view to furthering this purpose. General Magruder, the ex-commander-in-chief of the Confederate forces in Texas, having also become naturalized, was placed in charge of the survey of the lands set aside for colonization as chief of the Colonization Land Office. The government sold such land to colonists for the nominal consideration of one dollar an acre, and allowed every head of a family to purchase six hundred and forty acres upon a credit of five years. A single man was allowed three hundred and twenty acres.

Not only the government, but large landowners, proposed such free grants, and offered every in-

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ducement to settlers, if they would come and develop the agricultural resources of the country. The first Confederate settlement was established near Córdoba in the autumn of 1865.

Commodore Maury, now a naturalized Mexican citizen, had in September been appointed imperial commissioner of immigration and councilor of state. He opened an office in the Calle San Juan de Lateran, and was authorized to establish agencies in the Southern States.¹ But the indecision and weakness of Maximilian prevented his taking full advantage of the opportunity then offered to strengthen the empire. The delay caused by a vacillating policy discouraged the would-be colonists, and before long the flood of immigration was checked.

General Charles P. Stone had come to Mexico with a colonization scheme of his own. He had, in 1859, made a survey of Sonora under the Jecker contract. He now was on his way to look after some of the Jecker claims when accident threw him on board of the steamer with Dr. William M. Gwin, ex-senator for California. The two men at once came to an understanding and joined forces.

In 1856 (December 19), two years after the filibustering expedition of Count Raousset de Boulbon, the house of Jecker had obtained from the Mexican government the right to survey the territories of Sonora and southern California. The conditions were that one third of the unclaimed

¹ See decrees signed by Maximilian and the minister of the interior, D. Luis Robles Pezuela, on September 24 and 27.

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land should become the property of the house of Jecker.

In 1859 the Liberal government had rescinded the grant, and this had added one more grievance to those which the Swiss banker had brought up against the administration of Juarez. No sooner had Sonora sent in its adhesion to the empire than Jecker proposed to the French government to make over his rights against a payment of two million dollars.

The plan was then to colonize Sonora and Lower California, establishing, on behalf of France, a right to exploit the mines. The climate was healthful, the land rich, the adventure tempting; but it had the great drawback of running foul of the most acute Mexican susceptibilities. Not only did such pretensions at that time excite the suspicions of the Mexicans with regard to the disinterestedness of the French alliance, but they were calculated to give umbrage to the United States government.

As early as 1863, Napoleon III had discussed the possibility of establishing in Sonora¹ a colony which should develop the mining and agricultural wealth of the state. In exchange for a grant of unclaimed national lands, these colonists were to pay a percentage of their proceeds to France, as well as a tax to the Mexican government.

A colony of armed Confederates, inimical to the Federal government of the United States, established between its dominions and the heart of the

¹ Chihuahua, Durango, and Sinaloa eventually were also included in the scheme.

Mexican empire, and backed by France, Austria, and Belgium, must form a formidable bulwark in case of trouble between Mexico and its Northern neighbor. There is small doubt that some such plan had formed a part of the original "deal" proposed by Jecker to the French leaders.

In the spring of 1864 unauthorized attempts had been made by Californian immigrants to land at Guaymas and settle upon certain lands granted them by President Juarez. The marshal had sent French troops to protect the province from such inroads, treating these intruders as squatters. This had furnished a reason for the military occupation of Sonora; thus was the first step taken in the realization of the project.

Such was, in rough outline, the position of the Sonora colonization question when Dr. Gwin entered upon the scene. Upon his arrival in Mexico, he applied at headquarters for an audience. The marshal, although in full sympathy with the project, realized the danger of its open discussion at that time. Maximilian and his advisers were opposed to it. Much tact and secrecy seemed, therefore, necessary in the conduct of negotiations having for their object the furtherance of so unpopular a scheme. Dr. Gwin was too conspicuous a figure to pass unnoticed the portals of the French headquarters. An informal interview was therefore arranged.

We then lived at Tacubaya, a suburb of Mexico reached by the Paseo, where the marshal rode every day for exercise. Our house was built at the foot

of a long hill, at the top of which stood a large old mansion, the yellow coloring of which had won for it the name of the Casa Amarilla. It had been rented by Colonel Talcott of Virginia, who lived there with his family. Dr. Gwin was their guest; and it was arranged that the marshal, when taking his usual afternoon ride with his aide-de-camp, should call upon us one day, and leaving the horses in our patio with his orderlies, should join us in a walk up the hill, casually dropping in *en passant* at the Casa Amarilla.

The plan had the double advantage of being a simple one and of providing the marshal, who did not speak English, with suitable interpreters. The interview was a long one. The marshal listened to what the American had to say. Indeed, there was little to be said on his own side, as the Mexican ministry was absolutely opposed to the project, and any change of policy must depend upon a change in the imperial cabinet.

His Excellency, however, seemed in high good humor. As we came out, he merrily challenged us to run downhill, much to the astonishment of the few leperos whom we happened to meet. The Mexican Indian is a sober, rather somber creature, not given to levity; his amusements are of a dignified, almost sad nature. He may be sentimental, bigoted, vicious, cruel, but he is never vulgar, and is seldom foolish. Indeed, well might they stare at us then, for it was no common sight in the lanes of Tacubaya to see a commander-in-chief tearing downhill, amid peals of laughter, with a party of