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VENTION

THE cheerfulness of the imperial capital had faded away in the suspense and anxiety of the moment. All wore grave, anxious faces. Those who were going first were busy and bustling. The Mexicans whom one met in the street looked sullen and often hateful. It did not seem safe freely to express one's opinions; but thoughtful people felt that the close of the intervention, if it did not carry with it that of the empire, opened up possibilities that one shuddered to contemplate. Young and old, Mexicans and foreigners, realized that they were playing a part in the opening scene of the last act of a tragedy the dénouement of which no one dared to guess.

A serious personal problem was now before us. What were we to do? Closely connected as we had been with the invaders, we could expect little favor. Nor could we even depend upon the protection of the United States flag, as the Imperialists would for some time, at least, remain in possession of the capital. Yet to leave Mexico was a serious step

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for us to take; it meant abandoning considerable property, and at such a time this meant its loss.

The matter was decided for us at military headquarters. Our friends were clear that the future was too uncertain for any one to remain who had in any great degree been connected with the intervention. All earnestly urged us to go; and the remembrance of our early experience in Mexico made us dread renewed exposure to increased anxieties.

Every one was preparing for the exodus. *Remates*, escorts, and other details of travel were the common topics of conversation. One heard of little else than of the safest and most comfortable way of getting down to the coast. Bands of Liberals were said to be everywhere closing in upon the neighborhood; and although, of course, "diplomacy" had made the retreat of the French secure, some forethought must be exercised by travelers in order to insure safety on the journey.

January 2 was fixed upon as the most auspicious day for our departure. At this date the first detachment of the army was to be directed toward the coast, and we were to follow in its wake. Moreover, all along the road word had been sent to the military authorities to look after our safety in their respective jurisdictions, and everything was done to smooth our way.

For some evenings before our departure there was a round of simple festivities in the little colony. We were to leave first, but all must scatter soon. To me these entertainments seemed as lugubrious

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as a prolonged "wake." It was as though we were launching out in the night, and, like children in the dark, we sang aloud to keep up our courage.

For several days our patio rang with the clanging of swords, as our numerous military friends—I was about to say "comrades"—came to bid us God-speed and to offer their services.

On our last night in Mexico a friend gave us a midnight supper, from which we were to step out at three o'clock in the morning to meet the stage which was ordered to stop and pick us up at the corner of the Paseo. This was intended to be a jolly send-off; only our nearest friends were asked. But what a mockery of mirth!

For three mortal hours we strove to affect what Henri Murger so wittily describes as the "gaieté de croque-mort qui s'enterre lui-même"; and it was a relief when the moment came to make our last preparations.

The small party escorted us to the place where we were to board the coach. Oh, the gloom of that early start in the darkness of the morning! The dreariness of every one's attempt at cheerfulness! And then the approaching noise of the mules, and the rumbling of the wheels, as the somber mass neared the spot where we stood in weary expectancy. Exclamations of good will, kind wishes, a pressure of the hand, a last kiss, a farewell, a lump in the throat, a scurry, and a plunge into the dark hole open to receive us. At last the start, and, looking back, some whitish specks waving in the distance against the dark, receding group of friends

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left behind; and five years of my life, all the youth I ever knew, were turned down and closed forever! What was before me now?

We breakfasted at Rio Frio. Later in the day, at Buena Vista, between Puebla and the capital, we came upon a military encampment. It turned out to be the last remnant of the Belgian corps, then awaiting orders to proceed to the coast. As our stage halted, we had a few words with Colonel van der Smissen and other officers. There was in our party a Belgian captain who was on his way home. While chatting together, we saw at some distance, against a background formed by the Belgian camp, Princess Salm-Salm, in her gray-and-silver uniform, sitting her horse like a female centaur—truly a picturesque figure, with her white *couvre-nuque* glistening under the tropical sun.

The colonel had just received the intelligence that Maximilian, with his escort, would pass Buena Vista on the morrow, making his way to the capital.

Before we left Puebla, where General Douay was in command, we were told that the Emperor had started upon his journey to Mexico. He was escorted by a squadron of Austrian cavalry. A body of French Zouaves, which was to be relieved of duty upon his reaching the capital, was protecting the road. Besides the officers of his household, his physician, and his confessor, Father Fischer, Maximilian had with him General Marquez and his staff.

The prince was returning to the capital to pre-

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pare for the final struggle. He was determined to take his chances. These had been presented to him in as hopeful a light as the imagination of his interested councilors could place them. Now the time had come when he must arouse himself to action.

At Orizaba we learned that the Liberals were closing in at every point upon the ever-narrowing empire. The French having seized upon the Vera Cruz custom-house in payment of the war indemnity, the only source of supply was cut off, and the stress for money was terrible. The promise of financial relief mysteriously held out by the new cabinet had turned out to be delusive, and, it was soon found, was based upon the hope of a lottery! When the time for action came, the promised millions melted away, and all that the unfortunate monarch could scrape together, on the eve of entering upon a campaign on which hung his life, was a paltry fifty thousand dollars!

The troops were moving down. A large number of transports was waiting, and a fleet under Admiral la Roncière le Noury was in readiness to escort the marshal and the army on the homeward journey.

Upon our arrival at Vera Cruz, we stopped at the Hôtel de Diligencias to await the departure of the next outgoing vessel to New Orleans.

Here we were immediately called upon by Colonel Dupin, the commander of the region, who invited us to a breakfast to be given in our honor. He strongly impressed upon us the necessity of

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keeping indoors and avoiding exposure to the sun. This did not prevent our accepting an invitation to visit the *Magenta*, the flagship of Admiral Cloué, then in the harbor; upon hearing of which the colonel called again to remonstrate with us with regard to what he deemed an imprudence. Having been requested from headquarters to look after us, he regarded us as under his care, and evidently felt the burden of the responsibility.

Colonel Dupin was a picturesque figure. He was already an old man when I met him, and was regarded in the army as a brilliant officer of undaunted courage, but of questionable methods and of almost savage harshness.

He had taken part in the Chinese war, was present when the French and British allies entered Peking, and had a share in the sacking of the Summer Palace. He returned to France laden with a rich booty, including precious objects of artistic value, which he boldly exhibited for sale in Paris. This was against all military traditions, and in consequence Colonel Dupin's connection with the army was severed. Time had elapsed since this episode, however, and against Maximilian's expressed wishes he had been sent to Mexico by Napoleon himself to take command of the contre-guérilla formed for the defense of the coast region against the depredations of the Mexican bands. It was a relentless warfare, in which the vindictiveness of the Mexicans met with cruel reprisals. The most exaggerated stories were told of the brutality of the French commander, who, in

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order to intimidate the inhabitants, always in league with the guerrillas then infesting the region, treated them as accomplices whenever outbreaks occurred causing loss of life and property. This treatment, if it insured the submission of the people, was not likely to engender loyalty. Moreover, it earned for Colonel Dupin the title of "Tigre," of which, strange as it may appear, he seemed, I thought, rather proud.

The French army, with the marshal, made its final exit in state from the capital on February 5. At the last, and in order to insure their own safety, the French had surrendered the points held by them directly to the Liberal leaders.

Thanks to this prudent but unchivalrous policy,¹ the retreat of the army was as uneventful as had been the movement of concentration. The Liberal forces offered no opposition, and their guerrillas did not even harass the rear-guard of the retreating French. Several thousand men, mainly from the foreign legion, however, deserted. It is said that the marshal claimed them, but General Marquez replied that if he wanted them he might come and fetch them.

On March 3 the marshal arrived in Vera Cruz with his last detachment, having lingered on the way, in the hope that the misguided Emperor might reconsider his decision and still be induced

¹ Commandant Billaud was censured by his superior officers for having, in his retreat from Mexico to Puebla, beaten back a body of Liberal troops who had taken possession of the town of Chalco. See D'Héricault, *loc. cit.*, p. 41.



COLONEL DUPIN.

Commander of the "Contre-Guérilla," District of Vera Cruz.

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to join him. Orizaba and Córdoba were already in the hands of the Liberals, and all communication with the capital had virtually been cut off. The commander-in-chief had not even heard of what had taken place since his departure.

Letters from members of the marshal's staff, received after we sailed from Vera Cruz, convey a graphic impression of the last days of the intervention.

From one under date of February 28, 1867, I quote the following passage:

Vera Cruz is overcrowded; many of the troops are on board their transports. The marshal is expected tomorrow. The Liberal army is already in Tacubaya, and bands are at Tacuba and all around the valley of Mexico ready to enter the capital. Every one thinks that the Emperor must leave very soon. Our orders are to hurry off our last detachments; perhaps we dread lest a cry for help should come from Mexico. Terrible confusion prevails here. Lodgings have given out, and officers sleep anywhere in the streets. Last night Vicomte de Nouë slept on the staircase, having secured for his wife a room in which four beds were made for her, her three children, her two maids, her two dogs, and her three parrots! The price for such miserable accommodations is so exorbitant that everybody prefers going immediately on board. . . .

Another letter, dated March 4, says:

The marshal is as unpopular as ever with the army. His methods are censured by every one. The transports are here. With a better system our men might be shipped as soon as they arrive in this God-forsaken hole. Instead

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of this, however, unnecessary delay results in sickness among the rank and file. According to my orderly, who saw them, fifteen men were picked up this morning whom the surgeons had declined to embark. . . .

And the last, from another friend, under date of March 12, on board the *Castiglione*, says:

We sail to-day at eleven o'clock. For twenty-four hours out of Vera Cruz we are to form an escort to the *Souverain*, on board of which are the marshal and his wife, in order that their Excellencies may sail out of port in state. After this we will make straight for Toulon. All our men are at this moment on board their transports. The Mexican colors are flying over the citadel. The French intervention has come to a close, and is now a thing of the past. . . .

PART V

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THE END