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CHAPTER II.

Mexico—Romance and superstition—Revolution and anarchy—Population—Whites—Indians, Mestizos—Race characteristics—Mexican leaders—Miramon—Juarez—Mexican government—Broken treaties—Abuse of resident foreigners—Repudiation—Confiscation of funds—Demands for reparation—England—Spain—France—England's hesitation—Motives of intervention—Napoleon's mission—Action of the French government—Minister Bigelow—Mexican sentiment for foreign domination—Estrada—Almonte—Labastida—Empress Eugenie—Diplomacy—Appeal to Napoleon—Actual causes—Attitude of United States—Sumner—Seward, Lincoln—Summary of conditions and events—Secession and loyalty.

ALL our knowledge of Mexico, to a recent date, has come to us tinged with the mellow light of tradition and romance, or the sombre shadows of conquest and revolution. We are charmed with the story of her ancient days, from archeologist and historian, as they evoke from temple, pyramid, or inscription, its mystery, or clothe with fancied life the grotesque statues, and bid them tell the secrets they have held within their chiseled lips while

"The ages have passed and come with the beat of a measureless tread,
And piled up their palace domes on the dust of the ageless dead."

Through the three centuries of her history under the Spanish royal councils, and the viceroys from Mendoza to O'Donoju, while land and people were the joint possession of priest and king, there runs the red current of cruelty and crime, of countless sacrifices to the imperial Moloch; and the years of her nominal independence are aglow with the satanic fires of war, anarchy, and misrule. It is a sorry chronicle of superstition and slavery, of race hatred, of decrees and proclamations, of treason and intrigue, of brigandage and assassination, without an historic parallel.

From the revolt against Spanish domination and its triumph in the proclamation of the First Empire in 1822, to 1876,—within fifty-four years,—Mexico had fifty-five presidents, two emperors, and one regency, and at least three hundred pronunciamentos were issued. Three of the great leaders in the war of independence, both of the emperors, and two of the more noted presidents, were shot; and of the other presidents, nearly all were banished, or

had to flee from the country to escape death or imprisonment.

At the time of the intervention Mexico had a population of about nine millions,—one million whites of European descent, four million native Indians, and the remainder mestizos, blacks, and mulattoes. The Mexicans were of the historic types,—statesmen, patriots, soldiers, priests, planters, adventurers, smugglers, bandits, as necessity or choice directed—proud, vain, and cruel, of fiery temper, lofty conceit of ancestry, and inborn, irrepressible disquiet, and love of intrigue and revolution; the normal career of the ambitious citizen, civil or military, said the Abbé Domenech, "being to alternate between success and failure, wealth and poverty, high command and exile, the palace or the mountains, until arrested by the bullet or the sword." The Indians were of the old Aztec lineage—gentle, patient, ignorant, and poverty-stricken; emancipated by law, but in fact the victims of a system of peonage that made both their service and their servitude perpetual, until lifted to the promise of liberty and manhood in the brilliant and patriotic administration of Diaz, "the strong man," with its achievements of

domestic peace, public credit, commercial development, education, and protection of life and property.

Between these race extremes—the Mexican, with his power in Church and State, his superior wit and finesse, and the native, with his stoicism and rules of caste—were grouped the mixed races, upon whom ignorance and superstition and license had set their seal, but powerful in their uplift toward the civilization of the whites, in their hold upon the economic, social, and political forces of the government, and the signal ability of their leaders. Out of this chaos of humanity the star of empire was to rise.

The central figures in the storm of civil strife, of intrigue and diplomacy, pending our civil war and the French intervention, were Miramon, the standard-bearer of the Church party and policy, and Juarez, the champion of the Liberals, or Republicans. Miramon, the brave young cadet in defense of his country at Chapultepec, the gallant commander in the famous double defense of Puebla, in 1856, the general of the Conservative forces in the "War of Reform," the soldier of fortune, whose official misdeeds compelled all the diplomatic

bodies to suspend their relations; Miramon, the champion of the Church, who supported his administration by plunder, forced loans, and the blessings of the clergy, enjoying at the same time the benefit of their immense temporal possessions, and who, like many of his predecessors, had to make swift choice between execution and exile, and fled to Europe to become one of the zealous advocates of foreign intervention, and to return in the closing days of the empire to serve upon the staff of Maximilian, and die at his side at Queretaro.

But the man in Mexico, in 1861, upon whom centred the chances of real civilization and government reform, was the Liberal leader Benito Juarez. Toward him all classes save the Clerical party, were looking for the solution of the problems that forty years of revolution and bloodshed had but made more complex and hopeless. Born in ancient Mitla in 1806, of pure Indian race, as student, instructor in college, advocate, governor, delegate in Congress, Minister of Justice, President of the Supreme Court, and Vice-President of the Republic, and in the high honor of its Presidency, the masses had come to trust and follow this man of patriotic

service, of genius in state affairs, of stainless honesty. His was the patience that could wait at any sacrifice for justice and right to win; the statesmanship to foresee and master events; the courage to enforce his political policy, and to endure all until public opinion ratified his action.

Three years before the London convention, Juarez was declared President at Vera Cruz, under the new Constitution, and formally recognized by the United States, but it was only after three years of conflict—the civil war—in January, 1861, that he entered the capital, and the allies found him at the head of the Government when they landed in Mexico. It will measure the range of his brief service, and his own power, to recall that in the few months of his administration marriage was made a civil contract, celibacy was abolished, ecclesiastical tribunals, that were mockeries of justice, were suppressed, Church property of more than $375,000,000 in value held in mortmain by the clergy with a revenue of twenty millions of dollars, and one-third of the soil, were confiscated for the public use and benefit, and the final separation of Church and State was decreed.

For the first time since its independence, Mexico was promised a government of power, of justice, of domestic peace,—the work of a man capable of devising and enforcing reforms which should command the support of a popular majority, and hold in check, by force if necessary, the dissensions and revolutions of embittered factions.

But time was vital to the development of his great purposes; and when the alliance was made, no account was taken of all that this man of the people had accomplished. Even to impartial observers abroad, the Mexicans still seemed incapable of self-government. The nations of the world could hold them to no treaties, to no observance of international law, no political or commercial stipulations or contracts. Diplomacy and statesmanship had proved powerless to change the condition of affairs, the resident subjects of foreign governments were forced to serve in the army; they were robbed, imprisoned, and murdered, and their properties confiscated; the ambassadors at the capital were insulted, and driven from their posts, and some of the foreign legation offices were openly plundered.

But the cardinal reason for the intervention,

so far as the articles of the London treaty in terms disclosed, was the potent one of money—the solemn promises of a nation gone to protest. In July, 1861, the Congress of Mexico, chosen from the Liberal party, with Juarez as dictator, as a temporary expedient, voted to suspend payment for two years on all debts due to foreigners; and this was done in one of the great crises in affairs when national credit was the national life. At that moment the debts due to England, France, and Spain were more than seventy-five millions of dollars, and if to these be added the domestic obligations, the so-called Peza and Jecker bonds, issued by Miramon and Zuloaga,—and, it is alleged, sold in part to "the brethren of the Tuileries," at five cents on the dollar,—the obligations the republic then repudiated, or was unable to pay, were about one hundred and fifty millions of dollars.

So long as the questions were simply between Mexicans and resident English, French, or Spanish subjects, their governments could not interfere, but when the Mexicans confiscated the funds deposited in the house of the British legation for safe-keeping, and suspended payment of the percentage of customs pledged

by treaty to the payment of convention debts, then the questions passed into the domain of international law, and the respective governments could enforce their claims at their election. All the creditors were clamorous for their money; the French minister demanded his papers; the Spanish minister was dismissed; the English minister protested against the outrages of the government; diplomatic relations were suspended, and the powers finally agreed to use force to secure indemnity for loans, protect their resident subjects, and compel payment of the government obligations.

Such, in brief, was the condition of Mexico, and such were the facts that governed the allies, as they are marshalled in the partial history of the time, and as they are recited in the convention itself.

But the agreement involved serious questions. There were men in the English cabinet in 1861 who remembered how the government was outwitted in the diplomacy that allied England with France in the invasion of the Crimea. And when the Emperor of the French made overtures to join in the Mexican expedition, there was grave doubt of his pur-

pose in the ministerial mind. So marked was this fact that England finally refused her assent to the treaty, save upon the incorporation in it of the article that prohibited either party to seek "any acquisition of territory, or any special advantage in the enterprise."

The real motives for the intervention were not disclosed at the London meeting or embodied in the convention articles. They were hidden in the historic policy and ambition of the ruler of the French people. In the search for the actual cause, the advocates and critics stand far apart in their conclusions. One of the defenders of the alliance states Louis Napoleon's purposes to have been:

"To deliver the Mexican people from that condition of anarchy and helplessness under which they had groaned for forty years, deluded by the name of a republic, but which was a republic only in name.

"To offer to the Mexican nation a government whose stability should be guaranteed by the great powers of Europe, and which should secure to the Mexican people as perfect and the same liberty that is enjoyed by the people of England, France, or any other well regulated, constitutional monarchy, and all the other blessings of a good stable government.

"To inaugurate and set on foot measures for the development of its vast and inexhaustible mineral resources

and agricultural wealth ; and to give to Mexico those facilities for transportation in the shape of railroads which would enable her to enjoy her full share of the great carrying trade between Europe and the East Indies."

And this philanthropic work of His Majesty takes on a richer color when seen through eyes dazzled by the glamour of his reign, and recalled in the traditions that centre in the Napoleonic idea of conquest and renown, or in the imperial policy for the aggrandizement, not of France, but of her Second Empire.

Says one of the English apologists :

"The intervention in Mexico is a remarkable episode in the policy of Napoleon III., and, as such, will not fail to attract the regard of future historians. It is a task as novel as it is honorable for a monarch to attempt the regeneration of a country other than his own, to carry civilization and prosperity into a region of the globe where they have fallen into decay, even though he undertook the task primarily with a view to his own interests. To raise a country thrice as large as France from a state of chronic desolation, to pierce it with railways, to reconstruct the old watercourses of irrigation to re-open the rich mines, and to make the waste places blossom with flowers and fruits and useful plants—is certainly a noble design. And still nobler it is to rescue a population of eight millions from anarchy, demoralization, and suffering, and to restore to them, in better fashion than they ever had

before, the protection of the State and the benefactions of the Church."

And another, closer to the truth of history, writes :

"In exile and in prison Louis Napoleon had ample time to meditate on the high mission to which, by a strong and strange presentiment, he felt himself called. He reviewed, as a political philosopher, the requirements of the age ; and thus, when he came to the throne, he brought with him many high designs already formed, which he had resolved to accomplish so far as the opportunities of his career should permit. Among those projects, of material as well as of political interests, stands the intervention in Mexico. . . . The Emperor was desirous of finding some enterprise which should employ his army and engage the attention of his restless and glory-loving subjects until the affairs of Europe should open to him a favorable opportunity for completing his grand scheme of 'rectifying' the frontiers of France. And in this he succeeded. Even though the enterprise was not popular in France, it at least served to attract the thoughts of the French to a foreign topic, and it, moreover, shut the mouths of the war party, and established a solid excuse for the Emperor not engaging in a European conflict until he had got this trans-Atlantic affair off his hands. Those were considerations of present value, which Napoleon was not likely to underestimate, though he could not frankly avow them.

"By his intervention in Mexico Napoleon III. endeavors to arrest the decay of the Romish Church in America,

and to check the continuous spread of the Protestant Anglo-Saxons. The Empire of the Indies, reared by Spain, and so long a bright gem in the tiara of the Popes, has gone to wreck. Brazil, with its enormous territory, but mere handful of people, is the only non-Protestant state in America which is not a prey to anarchy and desolation; and a few years ago the gradual extension of Anglo-Saxon power over the whole of the New World appeared to be merely a question of time. Seizing a favorable opportunity the 'eldest son of the Church' now intervenes to repair the fallen fortunes of the Papacy in Central America, and in so doing to erect a barrier against the tide of Protestantism, and to reflect new lustre upon the Church of which he is the champion, and with whose greatness that of France is indissolubly connected."

It is in such discussions that some of the speculative causes of the triple alliance, not set forth in the convention itself, are reflected. But it is not in the court of his friends that Napoleon and his real designs can be so truly, so justly judged, as in the light which the history of recent years throws upon him and them; although many important facts and records must remain secrets of the state, until time and government policy warrant their disclosure to student and historian; and there is a witness to the popular opinion of His Majesty's action at home, whose competency no one

will challenge. In 1863, the French government, by secret orders, licensed the building of four cruisers at Bordeaux and Nantes, on account of the Confederacy; and when the Minister of Marine ordered a full armament of guns, on the authority of the agent of the Confederate secret service, our Minister to France, in a successful attempt to follow the responsibility of the government itself, consulted the eminent advocate and jurist, Berryer; and in reporting one of his interviews with him, Mr. Bigelow says:

"He deplored the Mexican expedition, which he said he could not comprehend; neither could he comprehend the emperor's passion for expeditions to the ends of the earth, which were exhausting the energies of France, without giving her wealth or glory. He said he could no longer stand the way things were going on. There was a very large number of would-be Imperialists who were dissatisfied with the Mexican expedition, and who thought just as he did about recognizing the Confederate organization in America, but who, nevertheless, would not vote against the government. Their reason for this refusal was that a defeat of the government would bring on a crisis, ruin the public credit, and then would come all the evils, tried and untried, which usually follow in the train of revolutions in France.

"When I said that I had lost no opportunity with my government and compatriots to cultivate the friendly