

CHAPTER V.

Political and economic problems—Revival of industry, commerce, trade—Cabinet and Council—Military occupation—Guerrilla warfare—Proclamation—"The Black Decree"—Its enforcement—Tacambaro massacre—Emperor's responsibility—Bazaine—Suppression of Liberal government—Finances—Eloin and Langlais—Internal improvements—Education—Church and State—Code Maximilian—Carlotta and state affairs—Mission to Yucatan—Choice of heir to throne—Josefa—Prince Augustin—Restoration of church estates and revenue—Address to Mexican bishops—Carlotta's letter—Results under the empire.

A CABINET of counsellors was chosen from the ranks of the French and Mexicans of honor and distinction: orders and decorations were bestowed, officers assigned to various commands; and the imperial court undertook its giant work of conquering or negotiating a lasting peace, restoring order and system to the public service, and laying the foundations of a successful reign. The emperor studied the situation, and set resolutely to work to effect a radical change. The principles upon which the government was to be administered had already been made known, and had commended

themselves to the approval of every intelligent Mexican. As the first step, the emperor caused it to be distinctly understood, that every citizen was to be protected by the laws, in his person and property; that every one was expected to devote himself to his business, without any apprehension of being called upon for compulsory military service. Activity and enterprise followed this declaration, even in the most distant provinces. Crowds of farmers, anxious to buy implements to resume the cultivation of their long-neglected fields, filled the mercantile houses in the large towns; and in every department of industry the same energy began to be exhibited, and with the same encouraging results. Mexican mechanics, always noted for their ingenuity and for the excellence of their workmanship, assured now of certain remuneration, devoted themselves to their respective trades with a certainty of reward; and all the mechanic arts received a powerful impulse. Commerce revived; and a profitable trade was established with the West Indies, with South America, and the United States, which brought in considerable revenue to the imperial treasury.

Whatever success attended Maximilian's

early administration of affairs may be attributed mainly to two causes: first, to the energy and perseverance of the emperor himself, to his undeniable executive qualities, and to the manner in which his plans were often devised and all his efforts seconded by the empress; and second, to the fact that he gathered around him a number of Mexicans, both in and out of his cabinet, who were devoted to their country, and loyal to any plan that should insure its prosperity and peace. In the organization of his government, Maximilian wisely enlisted their power and influence; and with them were grouped the experienced statesmen and financiers who had been sent to his assistance, and designated for certain offices, by the Emperor Napoleon. His council of ministers and his council of state were composed of men who were best qualified to conceive and enforce the necessary measures.

There were two vital questions which demanded immediate attention,—military operations, and the finances. In the year succeeding the capture of Mexico by General Forey, and the defeat and dispersion of the Republican army, the French forces had been actively

engaged in pursuing the remnants of the Republican troops, who, broken up into small detachments, roamed all over the country, robbing and murdering travellers, and plundering and burning houses, and sacking villages. The guerrillas, and roaming brigands in military guise, were guilty of atrocities as horrible as those which set the civilization of the world aghast in the villages of Bulgaria. Their suppression became a necessity; and the question was, how best to accomplish it? After grave deliberation, the emperor issued the following proclamation:

“Mexicans: The cause which Don Benito Juarez defended with so much valor and constancy has already succumbed, under the force not only of the national will, but also of the very law which that officer invoked in support of his pretensions. ✕

“The national government for a long time was lenient and exercised great clemency, in order to give the chance to misled and misinformed men to rally to the majority of the nation and to place themselves anew in the path of duty. It has fulfilled its object; the honorable men have assembled under its banner, and have accepted the just and liberal principles which regulate its politics. The disorder is only maintained by some leaders carried away by unpatriotic passions, and assisted by demoralized persons who cannot reach to the level of political principles; and by an unprincipled soldiery, the last and sad remnants of the civil wars.

"Hereafter the contest will only be between the honorable men of the nation, and the gangs of criminals and robbers. Clemency will cease now, for it would only profit the mob who burn villages, rob and murder peaceful citizens, poor old men and defenseless women.

"The government, resting on its power, from this day will be inflexible in its punishment; since the laws of civilization, the rights of humanity, and the exigencies of morality demand it."

No one could question the necessity of this action; but upon it, in the teeth of strong remonstrances, including, it is said, those of Carlotta, was grafted the iniquitous decree defining the degrees of crime and its penalties, which at the last closed the ears of Juarez and the victorious Liberals to all appeals for mercy and pardon for their illustrious captive, and sealed his fate. These are its famous articles:

"Article I.—All persons belonging to armed bands or corps, not legally organized, whether they proclaim or not any political principles, and whatever be the number of those who compose the said bands, their organization, character, and denomination, shall be tried militarily by the courts-martial, and if found guilty only of the fact of belonging to the band, they shall be condemned to capital punishment within the twenty-four hours following the sentence.

"Art. II.—Those who, belonging to the bands mentioned in the previous article, will be captured with arms

in their hands, shall be tried by the officer of the force which has captured them, and he shall, within a delay never extending over twenty-four hours after the said capture, make a verbal inquest of the offense, hearing the defense of the prisoner. Of this inquest he will draw an act, closing with the sentence, which must be capital punishment, if the accused is found guilty only of the fact of belonging to the band. The officer shall have the sentence executed within the twenty-four hours aforesaid, seeing that the criminal receive spiritual assistance. The sentence having been executed, the officer shall forward the act of inquest to the minister of war."

Thrice, it is said, did the emperor refuse to set his hand to this open violation of the rules and traditions of civilized warfare, and he must have been convinced that the act applied only to the professional highwayman and banditti, and did not apply to the republican troops fighting under their national colors for national independence. At the fourth meeting of the council, the ministers argued that the decree issue as a mere menace to the rebels; that it would serve its purpose without actual enforcement, and the French and Mexican generals, who had been called in to advise, urged that it was a military necessity, and that the sentences of the courts-martial could be revoked or suspended, and the lives of those

condemned be saved through various pretexts. The royal assent was given, upon these assurances.

A swift and terrible answer came, only ten days later, at Tacambaro. The Imperialists, under Mendez, defeated the Liberals, and General Artiaga, a sincere and honest man, and General Salazar, governor of the department, and four colonels, were selected from the prisoners of war, and shot, pursuant to the letter of the decree. Horrified at this savagery, two hundred and five Belgian officers and soldiers sent to the emperor a remarkable protest, closing in these words:

"We hope, sire, that this act of barbarity will not remain unpunished, and that you will cause the laws existing among civilized nations to be respected. We protest most earnestly against this unworthy act, hoping that the Belgian name will not much longer continue mixed up with this iniquitous war."

Whatever the emperor's compunction may have been in the outset, whatever was done by those whom he trusted, to induce him to sanction the articles, whatever regret may have been his when in his own extremity his merciless accusers demanded the highest penalty for "*The Black Decree*," certain it is, that, with

the unanswerable evidence of its literal enforcement in the camps of his own armies before him, he stayed no man's hand, he took no steps to cancel his act or to mitigate its severity, or to check the willing instruments who hastened to do his will.

Countless sacrifices were made to this shameful order; and hundreds of officers and men, of the best blood of Mexico, in regular military service, and battling for the preservation of their country, were murdered because they refused to take the oath of fealty—many of them as worthy of honor as Salazar, who said in a letter to his mother, the night before his execution: "My conscience is quiet. I go down to the tomb at thirty-three years of age, without a stain upon my military career, or a blot upon my name." It is true that many men came in from the scattered detachments of the Liberals, laid down their arms, and engaged in peaceful pursuits; but the gangs of criminals and robbers went on in their nefarious work, and no plea of ignorance, no late repentance, can change the judgment of history as to the emperor's responsibility for this outrage in the name of law.

The suppression of the guerrillas was but an

incident in the actual military occupation. The real problem was the destruction of the government of Juarez. So long as Liberalism could retain a foothold on Mexican soil, there could be no peace that was not at best an armed truce. When General Forey returned to France, in 1863, having received the marshalship he so highly prized, General Bazaine was made commander-in-chief, and remained in control until the evacuation and abandonment of Maximilian in 1867. Bazaine was sent out in 1862 as an officer of rank and experience, to aid in the glorious task of building up the new empire. So prominent was his rôle in the plot of the Franco-Mexican drama, that a word as to his history seems fitting. A soldier of the line, promoted for gallant service in Algeria and Morocco, against the Carlists in Spain, on the fields of Malegnano and Solferino, and in the Crimea, and made general of division and governor of Sebastopol on its capture by the allies—he seemed worthy of all confidence and honor. But so soon as he felt himself master of the situation in Mexico, clothed with unusual authority and discretion, and saw the opportunity for his own advancement, the true

character of this "private soldier who carried a marshal's baton in his knapsack," revealed itself.

He married an ambitious and beautiful Mexican, who belonged to the faction who engineered the intervention—to enhance his own popularity with the people. The civil marriage was performed with great display by the intendant of the city; the archbishop gave the couple his blessing; and Maximilian and Carlotta acted as padrinos. The emperor, as a token of his esteem, presented a beautiful palace to "the pacificator of his realm," in which he lived in great luxury and magnificence; and in 1864 he was made a marshal of France. From this dizzy height of distinction and prosperity, he saw wider fields of conquest and renown; and the daring soldier became the knight-errant of intrigue and treason.

He was true to no man, to no pledge, to no principle. He plotted against the government with the unquestionable purpose of having himself declared emperor in Maximilian's stead; and at last, as a bribe to enlist him in his own nefarious work, he offered to betray his trust to Diaz, the victor of Puebla. And his real reputation among the French and Austrian forces is nowhere better shown than

in the sentence which one of the French generals is said to have written on Maximilian's request for his recall: "Bazaine would sell his mother to a cannibal, without being hard up, for a five-franc piece." And any criticism stands justified, when one recalls that on his return to France he defied public censure, threatened to publish the Emperor's correspondence when he charged him with the failure of the expedition, and challenged the Empress to disgrace him, as she had proposed. That, holding high rank in the Franco-Prussian war, he entered into secret relations with the parliamentary opposition, and insisted upon being appointed to the chief command of the army after the defeats at Woerth and Forbach; and when beleaguered by the victorious Germans at Metz, he intrigued, that he might crush the young republic, and set up a regency, with Bazaine for regent, and the Prince Imperial for a figure-head. That he ventured negotiations with the enemy, in behalf of the Orleanist princes, to the degree that Moltke and Roon held him in horror as a traitor; and finally, that he basely surrendered the great stronghold of the empire and the third army corps; was tried for treason, and sentenced to death at

court-martial; and, under a commutation to life imprisonment, died in exile and dishonor.

Such was the man Napoleon chose to do the work of peace for Maximilian. He organized a force, commanded by the notorious Du Pin, and composed of Mexicans and foreigners, whose custom it was to shoot every one suspected of hostility to the invaders, and to plunder and blackmail the resisting natives. It was a system of irregular warfare, for the most part, carried on with bravery and spirit, with assassinations and barbarities on both sides. At Santa Isabel, at Parras, Mapimi, Matamoros, Encarnacion, Saltillo, Monterey, and other strategic points to the northward, the troops of the Liberals made gallant defense under Trevino, Naranco, Escobedo, and other commanders; but the real objective, the occupation of Mexico, was temporarily gained when Juarez and his government were driven from San Luis Potosi to Monterey, and at last from Chihuahua to the northern frontier.

While the military operations were in progress, and France, Austria, and Belgium were supplying men and materials, and the government was making loans in Europe at a ruinous discount, the emperor and his council of min-

isters undertook the no less serious problem of civil administration. At the head of these economic questions came *the revenue*. This department was placed in charge of Eloin and Langlais, Belgian and French financiers of ability and distinction; and they soon devised a plan, and carried it to a success, which placed the revenues of the country upon a satisfactory basis, and within two years they reported to the emperor that the income was sufficient to support the government, and leave a surplus to apply on the foreign liabilities, including the heavy charges due to France under the treaty of Miramar.

Internal improvements were projected upon an extensive scale. Roads and canals were repaired and improved; several lines of railway were surveyed; capitalists and engineers engaged in the enterprises; and the chief line from Vera Cruz to Mexico, as a military necessity, was pushed toward completion.

Education received particular attention and encouragement. Schools and academies were everywhere established, even in such remote states as Yucatan, and liberal provision was made for their support; and all the colleges in Mexico received large endowments from the

imperial purse. Maximilian and Carlotta expended large sums in charity, donations to schools and benevolent institutions, and public works.

Special attention was given to the adornment of the capital. The empress ordered the Alameda to be put in complete order, paying the expenses out of her private purse. The fountains were repaired, pavements relaid, trees pruned and trimmed, and the entire grounds decorated with plants, flowers, and trees; and it soon became the favorite resort for all classes of people. The Plaza, which was merely a bare, paved square, destitute of ornament, was wholly changed. The pavement was taken up; new walks laid; the spaces between the walks filled with trees, flowers, and shrubbery; fountains erected; and in the centre was placed a group of statuary, representing the leading spirits of the Mexican revolution—all the design and work of Mexican artists. To encourage dramatic art, the emperor began the erection of a magnificent theatre, and offered prizes for the best tragedy and comedy. Catholicism was the religion of the state; but all creeds were tolerated.

In the work of reform the emperor undertook, none in civil matters was of greater value than the revision of the Mexican laws. The most eminent and learned jurists were selected as commissioners; and taking the Code Napoleon as a model, the work embodied all the general or public laws in force when the empire was established, and all that were enacted to the time of publication, after the downfall. The civil code has been recognized as authoritative in the later legislative and judicial history of Mexico, and has served as the standard in recent law reforms. It represents the energy and ability which the emperor displayed in his administration of civil affairs, the real intent and spirit of the government, and will always stand as a witness to its higher purposes and achievements.

The empress devoted herself to the great tasks in which her husband was so absorbed; and in the earlier history of her service to the empire, there may be taken as signal illustrations of her genius and ability, her mission to the province of Yucatan, the nomination of an heir to the throne, and her discussion of the issues between Church and State, upon which hinged the destiny of the government itself.

In its strategic position and material resources, Yucatan was of prime importance to the integrity of the empire. Its people had not yielded ready obedience to their new masters; and late in 1865 the general discontent threatened the traditional revolution. The emperor could not leave his station of constant responsibility; and at last the empress undertook, with a few friends and a small escort, to visit the province, assure the Yucatanese of the government's interest in their welfare, allay their suspicions, and attach them to the policy and purposes of the court. It was a difficult and dangerous errand; but it was accomplished with a grace and completeness that the diplomacy of our times has seldom equalled. The earnestness and sincerity, the charm of speech and manner, which had won so many hearts at Vera Cruz, at Puebla, and in the court circles at the capital, proved no less effective among the mercurial races of the peninsula.

The empress visited the principal towns, and was received with respect and courtesy. Her accurate knowledge of the political situation, and her readiness in meeting all inquiries, disarmed the critics of the foreign rule, and

elicited the confidence of the masses. It was at the old capital, Merida, that her mission culminated ; and the story of her reception and gracious action there may be taken as the measure of her welcome and of her success. It is quaintly told in a letter of the time :

“ After receiving the congratulations of the delegations appointed to welcome her, her Majesty advanced into the city, in the midst of the liveliest acclamations, the cortége being swelled by various deputations and by a large number of distinguished persons.

“ Her Majesty was received upon the steps of the porch of the temple by the apostolic administrator of the diocese, the venerable ecclesiastical chapter, and all the clergy of the capital, in their splendid vestments.

“ Kneeling upon a crimson velvet cushion bordered with gold fringe and placed upon a rich carpet, her Majesty kissed the holy crucifix presented to her, and entered the edifice under a canopy borne by the judges of the Superior Court and the members of the government council of the district.

“ In the chancel a rich canopy was prepared ; and, after prayers customary upon the reception of sovereigns, and a chant accompanied by solemn music, worship was offered to Him through whose will all sovereigns reign ; during which the empress remained kneeling in a most devout attitude.

“ A solemn Te Deum, expressly composed for the occasion, was then performed.

“ The vast cathedral was filled with a numerous assem-

blage, comprising persons belonging to the highest, as well as the lowest, degrees of society, collected together to welcome the empress.

“ Upon the conclusion of the religious ceremonies, her Majesty received the congratulations of the officials of the district, in a mansion specially arranged for the purpose, and a large number of military and civil officers and citizens paid their respects.

“ In reply to the congratulatory address her Majesty appeared on the balcony of her apartments, at the request of the multitude without, and expressed herself as follows :

“ ‘ We have long wished to visit you, in order to study your necessities and learn your desires. The emperor, being prevented from effecting this important object, has sent me to you to present to you his cordial greetings.

“ ‘ I assure you from my heart that he deeply regrets that he cannot be here with me, to tell you how great is his affection toward you. He will regret it still more when I inform him of the enthusiastic reception you have given me. He desires, and by all means will endeavor to secure, the prosperity and happiness of the people of Yucatan.’ ”

It was upon her return that the critic, the Abbé Domenech said : “ If this country had ever had a president with half the ambition, energy, and honesty of the empress, it would be in a prosperous condition.”

In the empire's sunny days, when its fortunes seemed assured to its friends, it became ex-