

Benito Juárez (pronounced Huarez) was a man and a judge when Diaz began life, there being a difference of twenty-six years in their ages. Diaz fought for Juárez' Laws of Reform against the Church, and also helped to make Juárez President of the Republic, when he was himself a captain in the army in 1856-7. These two men, although in later years political differences created a wide gulf between them, were for the greater part of their lives warm personal friends. Both were Presidents of Mexico, and to these two wonderful personalities Mexico owes her strength to-day.

As a bare-footed Indian lad, Juárez had originally been a servant in a monastery; but on finding that he possessed a brilliant intellect, the priests educated him to be a "pillar of the Church." He loved learning, studied theology, and read ecclesiastical history. A keen scholar and deep thinker, he worked on and on until, like Diaz some few years later, he realised that a dominant civil power, and not a clerical oligarchy, is necessary to govern a country successfully.

General Diaz speaks most charmingly of Juárez. He told me the following story, which I give as nearly as possible in his own words:

"Juárez, when nine years old, was left an orphan; he lived with an uncle of his, a full Indian like himself, in the poor little village of Guelatao, in the State of Oaxaca, about forty-five miles from where I myself was born. His uncle employed him in looking after his cattle, and frequently beat him, and treated him harshly in many ways. One day when in the fields with his oxen, he accepted the invitation of another shepherd boy that they should go down a ravine near by to roast some ears of green corn.

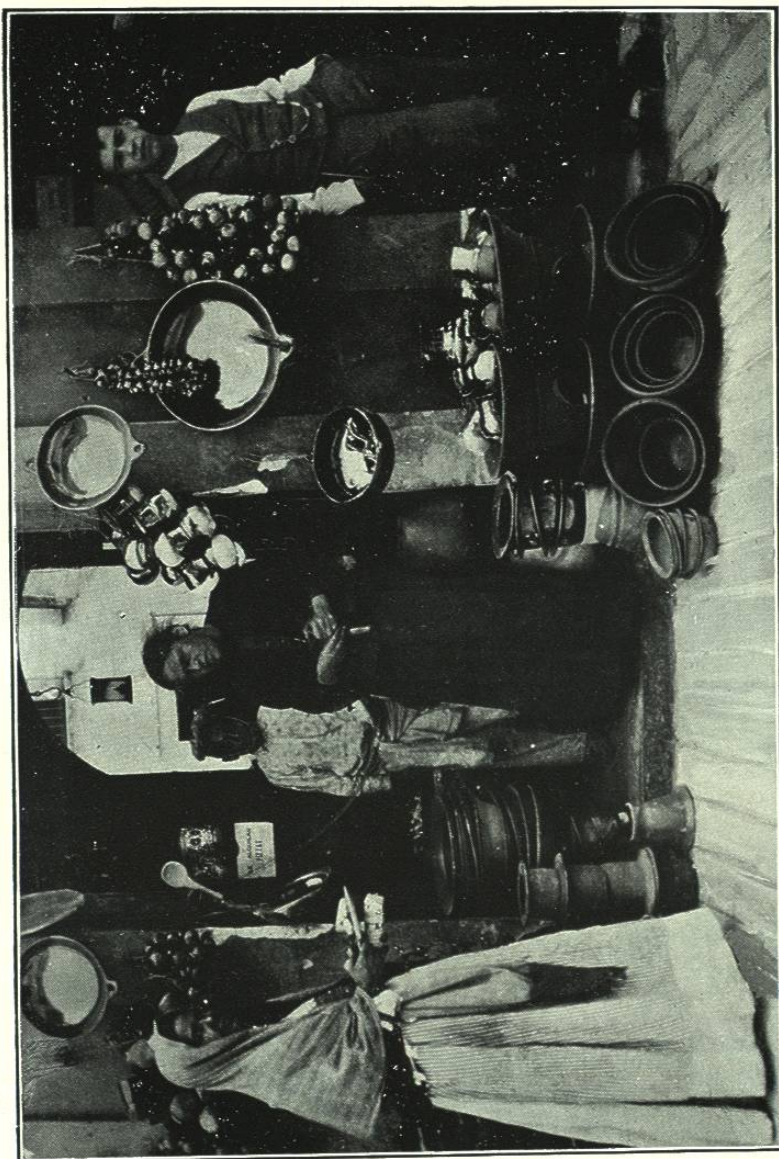
"This meant leaving their oxen, for the fire took some time to make, and the corn some time to roast, although, no doubt, it tasted excellent when done.

"The animals, finding themselves no longer watched, entered an adjacent corn-field and caused much destruction. This was discovered by the owner, who immediately appeared beside the



Country fruit pedlar.





A shop door.

[Page 29.

frightened lads, threatening Juárez that he would accuse him of neglect and theft before his uncle. The boy begged for mercy, for his uncle was cruel without cause, and he dared not face him under such circumstances. He was so frightened that he never returned home, but took himself off, bare-footed as he was, to the city of Oaxaca, joining some vendors of provisions who were going to the market, with whom he walked all the distance, about fifteen leagues, in two days. He remained with them during the market day, intensely interested in all he saw, earning a few *centavos* by carrying market produce, with which he obtained food. Although his newly-found acquaintances wanted to take him back he refused, and remained alone, with no money and no friends, in a strange town—not even able to speak Spanish, for he only knew a dialect of his Zapotec tongue.

“He wandered around the market, but luck had left him with his fellow-villagers’ departure, and no one would employ him. At last, crying and lamenting to himself in his Indian language, he was noticed by a student, also of Zapotec origin, who could understand him. Juárez told him his story, and finding the stranger sympathetic, asked if he could work for him as a domestic servant, not for wages but for food, to learn Spanish and the Christian Catechism—all he then thought necessary for his education.

“The student took him to the house of a man who kept a shop. This individual had a son, and engaged Juárez to perform menial work and accompany his little boy to school. Juárez’ intelligence and eagerness for instruction were soon observed, and finally the lad was sent to the same free school with the shopman’s own son, and allowed so many hours’ liberty a day from domestic duties for the purpose. Later on, as a reward for his good conduct, his master sent Juárez to College, intending him for a priest. The boy had different inclinations. No power or persuasion could make him take Holy Orders, and when his benefactor died he determined to follow the career of a lawyer.”

In time he became a judge; more than once he was Governor of the State of Oaxaca, then Minister of Justice, and was several



times President of Mexico, and the principal mover in what Mexicans call the Laws of Reform.

These Laws of Reform briefly meant :

- 1.—Equality of all men before the law, and the abolition of the privileged courts for priests and military men.
- 2.—Sequestration of the property of the Church, the dissolution of the Religious Orders, and eventually civil marriage, civil registration of births, deaths, etc.
- 3.—Religious toleration, with certain privileges for Catholic worship, and full separation of Church and State.

So complete has this latter severance become that the President of Mexico to-day never enters a church except to attend a friend's funeral service.

All this was the outcome of a bloody war lasting three years. It commenced with an attempt at partial reform, which the clergy, in combination with the more conservative elements in the army, resisted. The above facts are worth keeping in mind in view of subsequent events, and are given here as they were the culmination of the life work of Juárez.

Of his professors and fellow-students in those early days General Diaz has something to say in the diary in which he has jotted down some of the leading events of his life, one of the most remarkable lives ever recorded. No part of this diary has hitherto been published, but through his kindness and courtesy I am able to quote his own words somewhat fully in the following pages.

Writing of his teacher, for whom he had an inordinate love and risked his own life, a man who greatly influenced his early years, he says :

"Don Marcos Pérez was, like Juárez, an Indian of pure race, and both of them might have figured with advantage among Plutarch's characters.

"He was sent by his father to the town of Oaxaca to receive his education. A man of distinguished ability, of wide learning, and of strong character, honourable in all his dealings, he became the best lawyer in Oaxaca, and rose to be one of the most dis-

tinguished men in the State, discharging the duties of President of the Court of Justice.

"Perhaps more severe than Juárez, to whom he was related by blood, Pérez enjoyed the sincere and lasting friendship of that great Mexican statesman. The two had many ideas in common, and both were among the most firm and enlightened Liberals of the whole Republic.

"I had the good fortune to know Pérez intimately, to understand his character, to learn much from him, for I admired my teacher, and held him as a model worthy of imitation. He treated me as a child, but his friendship was a great advantage to me in improving my education and position when I was still a poor and unknown boy."

It was on the occasion of a prize distribution at the school that Diaz was first presented to Benito Juárez, when that illustrious patriot was Governor of the State of Oaxaca. The bearing and conversation of Juárez and other of the Liberal politicians with whom he came in contact, made a lasting impression upon him :

"I was delighted with the open and frank countenances of these two men, after the reserved and ceremonious bearing of the clergy, my first preceptors in the seminary. I heard at the prize distribution very Liberal speeches, delivered by the Licentiate Professors Don Manuel Iturrigarriá and Don Bernardino Carvajal—discussions in which young men were treated as friends, and as men who possessed rights."

One can readily understand that this was a new experience for the earnest and impressionable young man.

In this critical period of his life Diaz was preparing himself physically and mentally for the strife and struggle of future years. In his diary he frequently speaks of his delight in athletics. While mainly engrossed in the law, his inclination towards a military life was so strong that he lost no opportunity of acquiring knowledge of war. He shared with his fellow-students of Oaxaca, so long as Juárez remained Governor of



the State, the privilege of attending the military schools, where he received his first instruction in arms.

Politics, too, were beginning to exert a sway over him.

"My intellect," he writes at this time, "first expanded under the heat of Liberal principles, and I developed and improved in philosophical studies."

Of Juárez in those days he saw a good deal.

"In the house of my master and patron Don Marcos Pérez, I often met Señor Don Benito Juárez, who was always very kind and friendly to me."

In 1854, an opportunity came to Diaz to repay with interest the many services he had received from his former teacher. Pérez was arrested by the followers of General Santa Anna, and accused of being a Liberal conspiring against the dictatorship. He was thrown into prison, and for greater security was confined in a turret of the Convent of Santo Domingo, in Oaxaca town, where he was rigorously guarded. Though the walls were high and the sentinels vigilant, Porfirio Diaz, aided by his brother, Félix Diaz, succeeded in the dead of night in effecting an entrance to the convent and communicating with the captive, and was thus instrumental in obtaining his liberty. The adventure was perilous, as may be judged from General Diaz' own simple words:

"The window was closed, and in the upper part of the solid shutters were two small openings, each with an iron cross in the centre. In the door of the turret was a small wicket, rather lower than the full height of a man, through which the sentinel, stooping down, could from time to time watch his captive. There was a second outer door, and in the passage between the two were the sentinel and a corporal. This second door was, like the first, closed and locked. The guard consisted of fifty men, under a captain and a superior officer. All were perfectly sure that the prisoner could not effect an escape, for his cell had only the one door and the windows.

"When I had been lowered by a rope to the window and the sentinel showed himself at the little wicket, I had to stoop down, sliding below the sill as far as possible so as not to be seen. Thus I hung, suspended by the rope which my brother Félix held from the top of the roof. In spite of many difficulties and dangers, we succeeded on three separate nights in speaking with Don Marcos Pérez."

It is not difficult to realise the scene. The walls of the courtyard were solid and high. There were no windows until the third floor, so that to gain access from below was impossible.

Porfirio and his brother Félix, nothing daunted, determined to communicate with Pérez at all costs, and, procuring a rope, these two adventurous young men succeeded in getting on the roof of some neighbouring houses, and, under cover of night, running along to the spot where they believed Pérez was concealed.

Then came the anxious moment. They dared not call out for an answer which would locate the teacher's whereabouts, and therefore Diaz had to risk being let down to the wrong window.

The rope was quickly tied round Porfirio's body, and Félix made it secure to his own person for safety. Then slowly and stealthily Porfirio slipped from the roof, and, clutching the large stones of the wall, slid down some fifteen feet until he was level with the window grating. To his joy it was the right one, and he saw the object of his search sitting in a corner of the cell, with a little oil lamp before him.

At any moment the sentry might have come to his spy-hole, not twenty feet from where the young man was dangling, but luckily for the fortunes of Mexico he did not do so, or a ball would have shortened the career of her future ruler.

The conversation between master and pupil ended, a low whistle informed Félix that his brother was ready. The ascent began, but Félix, who was tired with the strain, found dragging Porfirio up was more difficult than letting him down, so the moment was an anxious one for both.



The feat was accomplished, however. On three successive nights the perilous visit was made by the same means.

It was this revolt against the power of General Santa Anna, for which Pérez was made prisoner, that altered the whole course of the career of the present President of Mexico. Up to that time he had quietly pursued his profession as a lawyer. Though known for his Liberal sympathies he had not figured among the prominent political leaders, possibly on account of his youth, and because no opportunity had up to that time occurred.

It came with the national rising. His introduction to the strife was the occasion of a dramatic incident, which can luckily be given in his own words.

"The dictatorial, retrograde politics of General Santa Anna, and his persecution of the Liberals, occasioned a re-action in the country which culminated in the proclamation of the 'Plan of Ayutla,' in January, 1854. The Revolution was headed by General Don Juan Álvarez, a full-blooded Indian, who was one of the few leaders of the War of Independence still surviving. Soon after its inception Santa Anna, imitating the example of Louis Napoleon—whom he flattered himself he resembled in more ways than one—sought to obtain a demonstration in his favour, and ordered a popular vote to be taken which should decide who should exercise the supreme Dictatorship.

"I was filling the post of Professor of Law, when the Director of the Institute—then Dr. Don Juan Bolaños—called all the professors together on the 1st of December, 1854, to vote in a body for Santa Anna. I refused, thinking that during the voting there would be some scandalous incident which would justify recourse to arms, and hoping that I might perhaps find an opportunity to be of use. This, however, was impossible, since the Government had posted a strong guard of troops in the plaza, and had even brought up cannon. I went to the porch of the Palace where the votes were being taken.

"General Don Ignacio Martínez Pinillos, who was Governor and Military Commander of the State of Oaxaca—or Depart-

ment, as it was then called—was presiding at the poll within the Palace.

"The head of the division in which I lived, Don Serapio Maldonado, presented himself, saying that he voted on behalf of various individuals who were residents in his division for the continuance in power as Supreme Dictator of General Santa Anna. Then it was I appealed to the President myself to discount my vote from the number, because I did not wish to exercise the right of voting.

"At that moment the academical body of the Institute arrived, and all the professors voted in favour of Santa Anna, and gave their respective signatures to the roll.

"When this was done the Licentiate Don Francisco S. de Enciso, who was Professor of Civil Law, asked me if I was fully determined not to vote. I answered in the same terms in which I had excused myself to General Martínez Pinillos, saying that voting was a right which I was free to exercise or not.

"'Yes,' answered Enciso, 'and one does not vote when one is afraid!'

"This reproach burnt into me like fire, and made me seize the pen which was again proffered me. Pushing my way between the electors I passed up the room and recorded my vote, not for Santa Anna, but in favour of General Don Juan Álvarez, who figured as chief of the Revolutionary movement of Ayutla."

This unexpected incident aroused general consternation and uproar. In the excitement of the moment young Diaz passed out of the voting hall unobserved, and disappeared in the crowd in the plaza of Oaxaca. Orders were immediately issued for his pursuit and arrest. In the meantime he had grasped a rifle, mounted his horse, and, accompanied by another resolute companion, got away, riding down those who would have barred his passage. The two horsemen disappeared into the shadows by the Ejutla-road, on the way to Mixteca, where the peasants had already risen in arms against the Dictatorship of Santa Anna.

Diaz placed himself at their head. Rarely has a commander had less promising material with which to conduct his first



enterprise. His men were few in number, ill-armed, ill-prepared—poor labourers of the soil, entirely unskilled for the task before them.

"I ordered my men," explains General Diaz, "to lie concealed in the plantation of Teotongo, knowing that Lieutenant-Colonel Canalizo, of the 4th Cavalry, was following to attack us with a mixed column of eighty to one hundred horse and some fifty infantry.

"This was a very small force, but one half as strong would have served to cut us to pieces if it had not been that the country, with which I was familiar, favoured our manœuvres. Scarcely twenty or thirty of our men were armed with muskets; the rest had axes and implements of labour and agriculture.

"It seemed a natural supposition that at the spot where we awaited their coming—a gap in the plantation, with thick vegetation all round—the Republican soldiers should stay to drink from the running stream and rest their horses."

This was a peculiarly rugged ravine. Below ran a pretty bubbling stream through thick vegetation. Precipitous rocks rose on one side perpendicularly above the water, so high and so straight, that by climbing up the back of the range Diaz and his followers could look over the precipice on to the river below, along the bed of which he expected his enemies to pass.

"Many of the soldiers did stop, especially the infantry, but the cavalry rode on. We had loosened numbers of boulders on the hill above, and placed levers beneath to topple them over at a given moment when the soldiers should be drinking at the stream. We bided our time, and then suddenly an avalanche of large stones were let loose on the troops, causing many injuries among them."

One can picture the youth, the blood tingling in his veins, roused to indignation against Santa Anna's Dictatorship, smarting under what he considered an insult, the fire and enthusiasm of early years burning within him. One can fancy his excitement over that encounter, only a small affair it is true, but still it

proved the turning point in his career. The events leading to it had weaned him from the law as conscience had weaned him from the Church.

No man can be great without opportunity; but opportunity without the talent to seize it is like a watch without a main-spring.

Diaz was only twenty-four, just at the most impressionable age. He felt his country was being sacrificed to one unscrupulous man, that this was the moment to be up and doing. He had tasted the first fruit of independence. From that moment he felt spurred on to work for his country, to achieve something for Mexico, to lay down his life, if need be, for the cause. But all he records in five simple words is the fact:

"That was my first engagement."