

made him the more determined to aid his own party, and nothing but death could stop him. He was a man of a most unscrupulous nature, and he was a traitor in the most literal sense of the word. He was a man of a most unscrupulous nature, and he was a traitor in the most literal sense of the word. He was a man of a most unscrupulous nature, and he was a traitor in the most literal sense of the word.

## CHAPTER VII.

### ESCAPE FROM CAPTIVITY.

OAXACA was the scene of many important events in General Diaz' life. It was his birthplace, the home of his early years, the centre of government wherein, under the influence of Liberal ideas, his masterful character developed. As a soldier, one of his first military engagements had been to assist in driving the Reactionaries out of the city during the War of Reform.

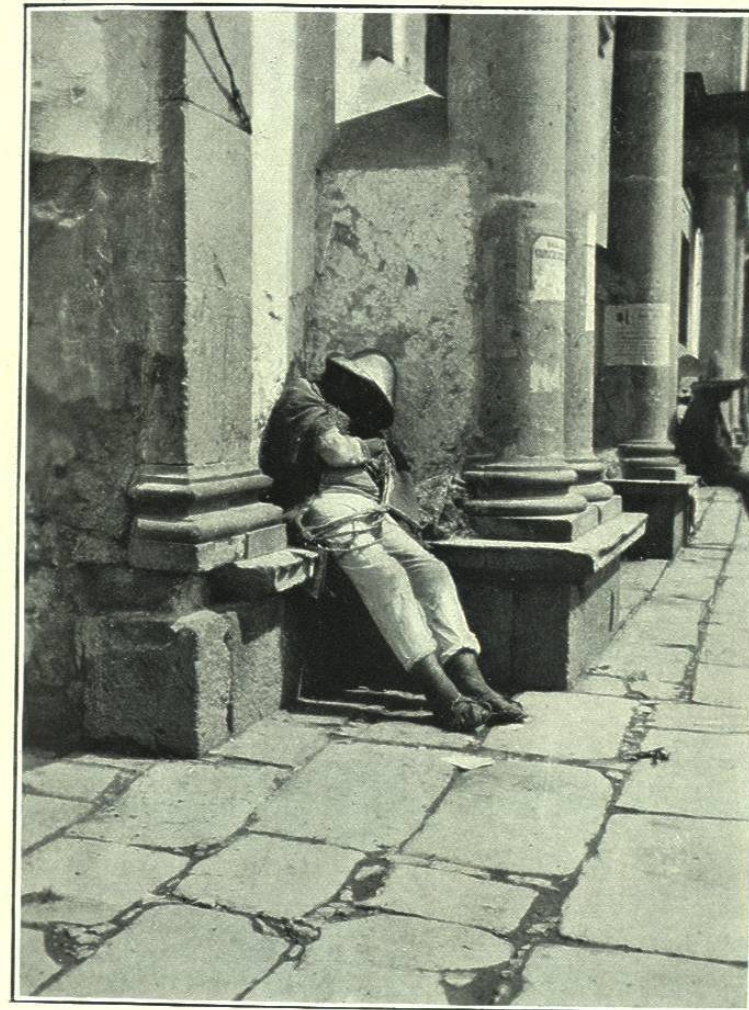
Now he returned to Oaxaca as Governor of the State and of those adjoining, and General-in-Chief of all the troops. He was quickly called upon to defend the city against a foreign invader who came down upon him in overwhelming strength. The unequal struggle ended with his captivity, and for seven months he was held a prisoner.

The first brush with the French occurred in mid-December.

The diary Diaz has kept of the events of this time is fortunately written with much detail, and from it, with but little addition, can be told the whole story of the siege of Oaxaca.

"It came to my knowledge (he says) on December 17, 1864, that the columns of General Courtois d'Hurbal and General Brincourt had met at La Carbonera, and together were advancing to Etla. We were occupying the farm of San Isidro, near Etla, and a cavalry outpost was stationed at Tenexpa, for the purpose of observing the enemy's movements.

"On the following day Colonel Félix Diaz, who had been placed in temporary command, received news that the outpost had been attacked. He at once ordered the Oaxaca Lancers to reinforce it. Hardly had the men formed up outside the farm



Asleep at the church portal.





Photo by MRS. LUCIEN JEROME.]

Mexican-Indian women.

when our cavalry came in at full speed, having suffered heavy losses.

"A moment later the French horsemen, in close pursuit, charged unexpectedly into the midst of our Lancers, whom they had not discerned through the thick cloud of dust that the horses had raised. The shock was tremendous. The African Chasseurs, fine stalwart fellows, fighting under the French flag, reeled under the blow, wavered for an instant, and then turned their backs upon us. Our Lancers were at once after them, and kept up the pursuit for three leagues, assisted by the Northern Legion, who turned out as soon as possible.

"Colonel Félix Diaz did not call in his men until he met the head of the main body of the French army marching along the road. The French cavalry suffered considerable loss in the brush, among their killed being the Comte de Loire."

"Four or five days after General Courtois d'Hurbal, at the head of a strong column of Zouaves, African Chasseurs, Hussars and a battery of artillery carried out a reconnaissance in force in the neighbourhood of the city of Oaxaca, afterwards returning to his camp.

"Some days later I learnt for certain that General Bazaine was advancing on Etlá by the road from Mixteca, with an escort of 500 Zouaves, 300 cavalry, and half a battery of artillery. In this juncture I thought our cavalry might do us good service by attacking Bazaine, and, if possible, destroying his escort before it had time to effect a junction with the main army which was now pressing close upon the city. I completed my plans, summoned the cavalry officers, and gave instructions to Colonel —, who was to go out with the brigade to meet Bazaine.

"The night before the attack was planned to have taken place this officer disappeared with the Northern Legion and the San Luis Lancers, near Tamazulapam, where Bazaine was resting. He moved on quickly with his troops to the hills of Tetela, in the State of Puebla, never returning during the troubled times.

"Meantime Colonel Félix Diaz, who was to have shared in the attack, was encamped at a short distance from Colonel —. It



was not until dawn, when Bazaine, with his escort, began his march, that Félix noticed that our cavalry had moved off the ground. Alone he could do nothing, as he had with him only his own regiment of 350 horse, and a squadron of about sixty others.

"Naturally my brother was at a loss to understand the absence of his colonel, with the greater part of the cavalry. Convinced that he must be in the neighbourhood, he fired some shots to attract attention. No response came. At last, losing all hope and observing a movement by a body of French cavalry which might cut him off, he returned with his troops to Oaxaca.

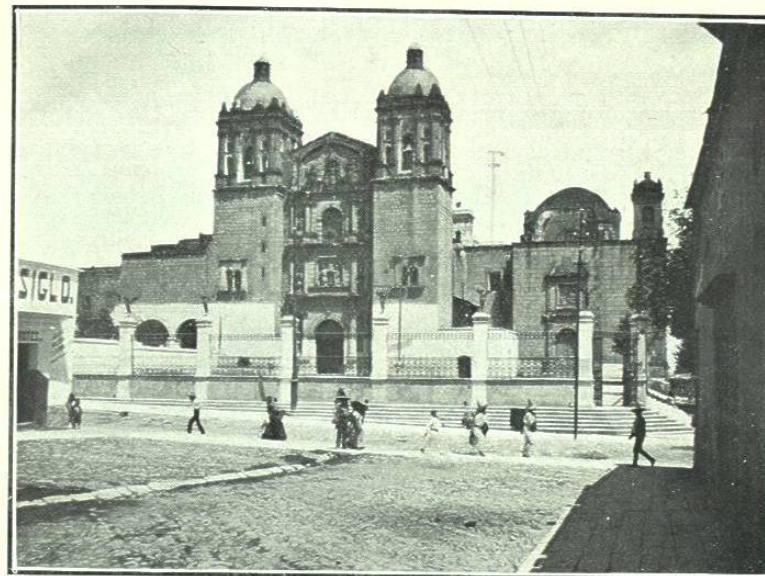
"After this desertion I could no longer count on the help of cavalry outside the town, for the force which remained under Colonel Félix Diaz was too small to undertake operations against the enemy with any hope of success.

"In short, all my plans fell through by the inexplicable disappearance of Colonel — and his men, for I had thought of fortifying and defending the city, depending on the cavalry to assist me in keeping a way open by which I might receive help from without.

"In the conferences I thereafter held with my officers I began to notice that opinion in favour of defending the city grew much more decisive. They did not approve my idea of accepting an open engagement, and I soon noticed that the reasons given were identical with those already expressed to me by the second-in-command, who evidently had not been as discreet as he ought to have been, and had not kept the secret plan I had divulged to him.

"I might even then have abandoned the town and undertaken a retreat by way of the mountains, but it would have been an extremely perilous adventure, for no transport had been prepared, in view of my former arrangements, in which I counted upon help from without, and there was now, with the enemy in sight, no time in which to improvise new plans.

"I never imagined that the result of the siege would be a victory, but I felt confident that the defence would be a long one, and that we should do the French much damage. I was



Santo Domingo, Oaxaca.



Photo by CONSTANTINE RICKARDS.]

Interior of Santo Domingo, Oaxaca.





Marshal Bazaine.

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sure that the city would not be taken by assault if I could maintain the garrison at anything like its present strength—but that was the trouble. The desertion of the cavalry in the face of the enemy had greatly depressed their spirits. The disaffection of the garrison of Tehuantepec (one of the places from which we had hoped for outside help, and from which we had had no recent news), and the dissolution of the remaining bands of National Guards in the mountain villages, all helped to increase the difficulties of the defence.

"Finding themselves powerless, owing to lack of protection by cavalry, these bands were either in hiding or had dispersed, while many delivered up their arms to the enemy.

"These circumstances determined me not to attempt a retreat, but to defend Oaxaca—with no hope of success, it is true—still, I could fulfil my duty by resisting the enemy. I accordingly accepted the siege."

For forty long and dreary days the town held out valiantly against a much superior force, but the moment had come when its ammunition and supplies were exhausted. General Diaz' diary is still quoted :

"Just as the year (1864) was at its close the enemy was within a few kilometres of the city. Two or three days after General Courtois d'Hurbal's reconnaissance all the French forces, with their traitorous Mexican allies, began a movement to encircle the town. General Bazaine arrived in camp on January 15th, and thenceforward assumed the chief command. The French first occupied the great Palado Hill, Monte Alban, and the town of Xoco, and continued to extend their lines without any effective resistance on our part, though firing from the city at times made their operations more difficult. The French circumvention was completed by the closing up of the circle at San Felipe del Agua, on which spot General Jeanningros was posted with the infantry battalions of the African Chasseurs and the Foreign Legion.

"General Bazaine established his head-quarters from the beginning of the siege in the village of San Jacinto de Amilpas,



and when he was forced to leave that place removed them to the estate of Montoya.

"I calculate that the troops under Bazaine's command numbered some nine thousand men of the French army, and about one hundred traitorous Mexicans. These last were mounted. After losing my cavalry there remained to me in the city only 2,800 men. The besiegers were reinforced during the last days of the siege, for when Bazaine had contracted his lines and advanced his approach works, and even had fixed a day for the assault, he began to detain and add to his fighting ranks the escorts of the convoys which were sent to him. These must have been numerous, for Colonel Félix Diaz, with his little force of cavalry, fought bravely with many of them on the road."

Ceaseless struggle with no particular advantage on either side marked the opening weeks of the siege, but to the many perils to which the defenders were exposed from the enemy without, were added disaffection and treachery within the city.

"My troops (writes Diaz) were becoming demoralised. The havoc made in our ranks by the frequent sorties and encounters which took place for the purpose of hindering the enemy's approaches and the constant bombardment of the town, as well as the consequences, every day more harmful to us, of the disaffection of the garrison of Tehuantepec, caused wholesale desertions. In this particular work certain Liberal renegades were notably active. One day, while the French were attacking the fortified position at Libertad, the major of one of our battalions shouted to his soldiers to jump the trench, and he with more than a hundred of the men who should have defended the position went over to the enemy. Not without difficulty were the other defenders restrained from joining their comrades."

This was not the last, nor the worst example of desertion. A few days after a lieutenant-colonel of infantry deserted, but on reaching the French lines he was shot dead by the outpost, who took him for a spy.

"In the first days of February I received communications

from officers defending some of the principal posts giving an alarming report of the situation. It was, they represented, impossible for a force so small and so demoralised as ours to resist an assault by such strong and well-armed troops as the French had at their command. Above all, provisions were becoming scarce; but if I insisted the officers would fulfil their duty.

"We had completely exhausted our supplies of both food and ammunition by February 8th. Some days before that the rations for the civilians who remained in the besieged city were reduced to almost nothing. They were few in number, but they went about from house to house, complaining constantly of their unbearable position, and thus further breaking the spirits of the soldiers, already sufficiently depressed.

"In this state of complete demoralisation, defence of the town was no longer possible. I could not sacrifice my men uselessly; we had no reserves of any kind, great or small, and at this time not even a thousand men remained effective. We could not respond to the enemy's fire in the last decisive assault, which I now knew to be imminent.

"Accordingly I resolved to surrender.

"As I crossed the Plaza a cannonade and bombardment were going on, which undoubtedly indicated a simultaneous assault on distant posts and fortifications. Mounting my horse, I went out in person that night to explain to General Bazaine, in his head-quarters at Montoya, that the attack he was preparing was unnecessary. Observing no rules, nor seeking any armistice, I had sent no adjutant before me, fearing on the one hand a misunderstanding, on the other that Bazaine's desire for honour and distinction would induce him to carry on the attack against men without ammunition, without food, and without strength to fight. I supposed that my presence in the enemy's head-quarters, and my personal explanation, would prevent the threatened attack. Bazaine's longing for the ephemeral glory of assaulting the city was great, especially since he knew that he could take it easily, having already exhausted all our means of defence.

"About ten o'clock on that night, accompanied by a couple



of colonels whom I took with me so that they might be present at my interview with General Bazaine, I passed out of the fortified lines and turned towards Montoya. This was Bazaine's head-quarters. We were challenged by the outposts, one of which fired upon us, but I spoke to the soldiers, telling them that we were not an armed enemy, and they thereupon ceased fire. The officer in charge of the outpost sent us with an escort to another fort on the left bank of the river Atoyac; thence we were passed on to another detachment on the opposite bank of the river, and were finally conducted to Montoya."

Bazaine was sitting when they arrived at a small square table in a well-furnished room. His grey hair was brushed straight back from his high forehead, and his black moustache drooped at the ends in a way that gave him a hang-dog look. His secretary was in the room with him arranging the papers spread upon the table when Diaz entered.

The future President of Mexico wore a blue uniform with several medals upon his breast, and, holding his cap under his arm, advanced and saluted. Bazaine acknowledged the salute. The meeting was perfectly military, but hardly cordial.

"On my explaining to General Bazaine that the city could no longer carry on the defence, and that it was therefore at his disposal, he apparently thought that this was equivalent to a submission to the Empire, and replied that he 'was very glad that I had realised my error,' which he considered a serious one; for, he added, 'it was criminal to take up arms against one's sovereign.'

"I replied that I considered it my duty to explain to him that I would not join, nor even acknowledge, the Empire; that I was just as hostile to it as I had been at the cannon's mouth; but that further resistance was impossible, and further sacrifice useless, as I had neither men nor arms. His face suddenly assumed an expression of disgust. General Bazaine reproached me for having broken faith with the document that I had signed at Puebla, a document promising not to take up arms against the Intervention.

"I denied having ever signed such a paper. General Bazaine at once ordered his secretary, who was present, to bring the portfolio containing the signed documents from Puebla.

"The secretary looked for my name, and still hoping to find it he began to read the list aloud.

"Not only had I not signed when they presented the book to me in Puebla, but I had even gone so far as to notify that I would not on any account sign, because I owed sacred duties to my country which I was obliged to fulfil as long as I was capable of doing so.

"When the secretary came to this reply of mine he stopped reading and passed over the book. General Bazaine took it, read the lines, and closed the portfolio with a snap without saying a word further on the subject.

"General Bazaine then spoke to me of certain difficulties that he thought the French would meet with in occupying the city, for he knew that there were many mines which might easily explode. I answered that there were indeed several, but I had been obliged to empty them to make cartridges, as I had no other ammunition for the defence; adding that I could easily arrange to take the powder from the few that remained, for I knew where they were, and would order an officer to effect the operation of emptying them. This was done, although one mine did blow up, for a Zouave imprudently drew the cord and caused an explosion."

Later, the diary continues:

"I commanded my men to cease firing from the hills, and then advanced with a French officer and one of my colonels—Colonel Angulo—towards the Republican trenches. Angulo spoke to the officer defending the most advanced post, who thereupon raised himself in the trench and began to reproach Angulo, and afterwards opened fire upon him, thinking that he was a traitor who had gone over to the enemy. Angulo explained with great difficulty what our situation was, and told him that he brought an order from me to cease firing.

"Arms were then laid aside. Bazaine kept me for the rest



of the night in his quarters, where we spent the time in a room set aside by Bazaine for my two colonels and myself. I was thus detained as a prisoner, not knowing what my fate would be, because not only had I aroused Bazaine's anger by explaining my reasons for not signing the document at Puebla, but I had asked no guarantee for myself and my friends.

"In the early dawn I despatched one of the colonels, with Bazaine's consent, to give orders for surrendering various points. When morning came Bazaine sent me to the city with an escort of African Chasseurs to give orders permitting the French to enter. Behind me followed General Brincourt with a French regiment, and he marched to the State Palace, the French army thus taking possession of the city.

"The state of my mind while all this was going on may be imagined."

Knowing the man who penned these words, one can well gauge the overpowering anguish of that moment. He had begun the siege knowing the odds against him. He had fought against difficulties, encouraged despairing men, and struggled with lack of food and ammunition. For forty days he had been the mainstay of the siege, looking hourly for help from outside which never came. When the moment arrived that he could hold out no longer he went forth boldly, and gave himself up. To surrender the city of his birth to the French must have been a cruel blow.

"After the French were installed in the Palace," continues Diaz, "I returned to Montoya, and from there was marched to Etlá by night, under a strong escort, as a prisoner of war. Every precaution was taken against my escape this time. I was placed in the immediate charge of a company of Zouaves, and was led between open ranks. Outside the ranks marched, on both sides, a line of cavalry, while detachments of Hussars brought up both front and rear. The lines of mounted troops were but one hundred yards apart. Over the fields at some fifty yards' further distance on each side were forces of Mexican renegades who had accepted service with the French.

"Thus we arrived at Etlá, where I was lodged, by order of General Bazaine, in the best house in the place—the one in which he had himself lived a short time before.

"While I was a captive in this town a cavalry major who had served on the Staff of the Emperor Napoleon III. in France came to see me. He was now in command of the Hussars forming the prisoners' escort. He undertook to look after me personally on the march to Puebla, and was very friendly to all of us, but at the same time I noticed that he kept a vigilant look-out, and was prepared to shoot down any man who attempted to escape. He often courteously requested my permission, when the opportunity occurred, to give the signal for marching, and frequently asked if there was anything he might do for me in various places we passed through. Thus, under strong escort, we arrived in Puebla, where for the second time I found myself a prisoner."

Diaz thus speaks of his days of captivity:

"In Puebla," he says, "we were placed in custody of the Austrian forces, who shut us up in different prisons, putting the generals, colonels, and lieutenant-colonels in the fortress of Loreto. Here we were joined by other Liberal prisoners, and stayed for three months.

"While we were detained in this fortress, envoys from Maximilian came to admonish us upon our obstinacy, as they had done before the surrender. They wished us to promise not to take up arms against the Intervention or the Empire. Most of the officers gave this undertaking, but I remember that among the prisoners General Tapia, Colonel Don Miguel Castellanos Sánchez, Artillery-Captain Ramón Reguera and myself did not sign. Sánchez, in fact, not only refused, but couched his reply in words so offensive to those who proposed it that for some days he was removed to a dark and solitary cell. To secure their submission the French even threatened to shoot the officers whom they held as prisoners.

"Although Benítez and Ballesteros were amongst those who signed the parole, they were not liberated until some months later. After our removal from Loreto to the Convent of Santa



Catarina these two gentlemen were quartered in my cell; but one day I feigned a disagreement with them, and then asked the governor to give them other accommodation, which he did. I remained alone, as I had wished, and at once began to prepare plans for my escape. In fact, from that moment I commenced to make a subterranean passage in the floor under my bed, where it would be least noticed.

"When the work of excavation had gone below the thick cement of the floor I began to cut a horizontal gallery towards the street. My room faced the street, a condition which I had ensured by various means, not necessary to mention here. Alas! before I could complete my work I was suddenly transferred to another prison.

"We had been five months in Santa Catarina when we were moved to the Convent de la Compañía. Here I was allowed a certain amount of freedom.

"The unsuccessful campaign that General Count Thun had been waging in the mountains had put him in a bad temper. The day after his arrival in Puebla he came to the prison and called me before a court-martial. He curtly ordered me to sign a letter previously written by himself. In this document I was supposed to give directions that the traitorous Mexicans whom the Republican armies held as prisoners should not be shot for their perfidy, because the Imperial Government proposed to exchange for them some of my companions in captivity, of whom I might myself be one. I replied that I could not sign such a letter, and even if I did it would be useless, for being myself a prisoner I was not in a position to give orders that anyone would be obliged to obey.

"In reply Count Thun remarked in a tone of reproach that it was strange that I was not willing to sign the letter, when I had actually signed a despatch in prison and sent it to General Don Luis Pérez Figueroa. This was true, and I did not deny it.

"He then told me that he would never have imagined that after seven months' imprisonment I should be so insolent. Baron Csismadia, my custodian at the Convent de la Compañía, might, he declared, by allowing me so much liberty have caused

great harm to the Imperial Government had I profited by his favours and escaped.

"I answered that evidently Csismadia knew better than he the character of honourable Mexican officers, with whom Count Thun had apparently never been intimate; he judged them only by the character of the traitors who took Maximilian's service. I told him that the guarantees I had given to Baron Csismadia were sufficient between men of honour.

"The same day Count Thun entered the prison, and ordered that all our shutters should be closed, leaving the cells without light. Our confinement was made more rigorous. The guard was increased both day and night, and the men were given orders to enter the prisoners' cells every hour of their watch."

Diaz then goes on to tell the story of the preparations for his flight:

"Count Thun especially vented his wrath on me, which merely determined me to hurry forward my escape. I thought of making it on September 15th, my birthday, but as this was also the eve of the anniversary of our Independence, I remembered that I could not hope to carry out my plan that night, because the streets of Puebla would be illuminated for the festival. So the project was postponed until the 20th.

"I had managed by a little manoeuvring to buy a horse and trappings, and these, together with a servant and a guide, were waiting in hiding for me at a certain house.

"Two confidants among my prison-companions—my only close friends in those days of captivity—invited the rest of the officers to play cards on the night of my proposed escape, in order to keep them occupied and prevent them from walking about the corridors and so seeing what was happening.

"Late at night on the 20th, I rolled into a small ball three ropes which I had surreptitiously obtained to assist me in my escape, putting another in my kit-bag along with a dagger, perfectly pointed and sharpened—the only weapon at my disposal.

"After the bell had sounded for silence in the prison I went out upon an open balcony near the roofs. It overlooked an