CHAPTER XIII.

DIAZ BECOMES PRESIDENT.

On one occasion I asked General Diaz how it came about that he conceived the first inspiration to become President.

"I never did," he replied; "my highest ambition as a young man was to be made a colonel in the army, and at one time that ambition seemed quite unlikely ever to be fulfilled. I just drifted to the position I now hold, and I often wonder how it ever came about."

"But you have made modern Mexico," I persisted.

"You must make no mistake," continued General Diaz, "I have not made Mexico—I have only been one of a number. It is such men as Limantour who have made the country what it is. Limantour is a great statesman, but he has never pushed himself forward. He refused to accept nomination for the Presidency when I wanted to retire in 1904. He is a great man, a great diplomatist, a great financier, and he has done much for this country."

And so he continued to talk about several others who have shared his labours.

Did I not know General Diaz I should feel inclined to think his modesty assumed; but this shrinking from praise is so marked in his daily life that one soon realises it is part and parcel of the man—a man of extraordinary strength yet inordinately retiring.

Diaz had restored Mexico City to the Republicans, within which their red, white and green tricolour flag has never since been lowered. His marvellous success as a soldier and his daring military exploits won for him the unstinted affection of the

General Porfirio Diaz, President of Mexico.

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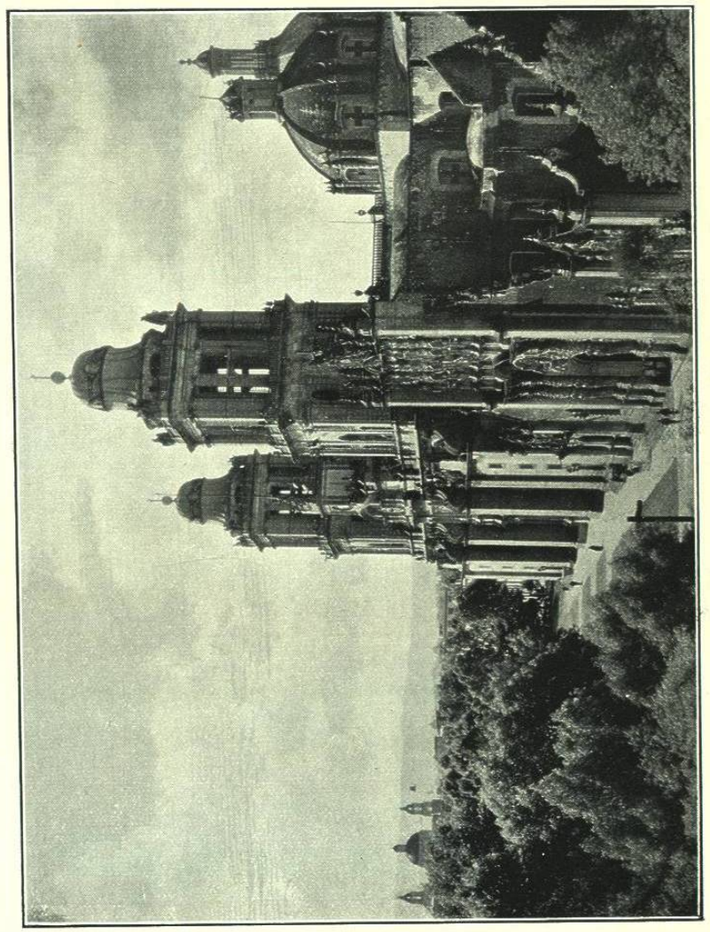

The Cathedral, Mexico City, built on the site of the old Aztec Temple (1573). [*Page* 241.

troops whom he led, and made him the national hero. But since the events recounted in the last chapter a period of nine years was still to pass before he was raised to the office which gave him practically supreme power.

It seems, perhaps, extraordinary that just as he attained such success as the capture of Mexico City, he should throw over his command of the army. Again, it appears remarkable that just as there was a chance of peace and prosperity after half a century of misrule, he should retire from public life and busy himself in the south as a farmer.

"Why?" one asks.

He knew his power, he knew his strength; but he also knew an older man who had never attained the real position he deserved, and the younger man nobly stood aside.

Those were quiet years for the most part with Diaz; years in which the general with a record of twenty battlefields contentedly retired to live the simple life of a sugar planter near the city of his birth, amid scenes which must repeatedly have recalled to his memory many stirring incidents in which he had figured. During these years he learnt much. He studied agriculture in quite a professional manner, saw the great possibilities of the soil, the necessity of irrigation, and other details, all of which he found of practical value when himself called upon to rule.

Ineptitude and mismanagement in the administration of the country, which threatened once more to bring it back to its former state, called him again into activity. When he finally left his hacienda it was to meet with some of the most exciting experiences and hairbreadth escapes that fell even to his romantic career. The years between 1867 and 1872 marked his final breach with Juárez, with whom he had worked assiduously since the first days of the *Reforma*, and for whose sake he had gone into retirement.

No comparison of Juárez and Diaz could do justice to either man. Their natures were in most respects dissimilar. An unquenchable love of national liberty, for which they had shown themselves prepared to stake everything and to make the greatest

sacrifices, they shared in common. Both had lived in daily peril of their lives, and had willingly undergone privation and hardship through long and weary years when the cause which they were strenuously upholding seemed hopeless. A common end, a common ideal, bound them together in the struggle which began with the War of Reform, continued through the French Intervention from 1862, and convulsed the country from border to border, until, with the death of Maximilian, the object of the strife no longer existed. The absolute loyalty of Diaz to Juárez is shown by all his actions. It was not, and never has been, questioned.

The end had been attained. Diaz had restored Mexico City to the Republicans. The Republic was re-established on a basis from which no shock, either external or internal, was likely to displace it. Foreign domination had been driven from the country, and an example set which was well calculated to discourage any similar enterprise. Now that the time had arrived for the realisation of the ideal, a constitutional government with equal rights for all, it need give no cause for surprise that the two men should separate. That Diaz, who has built up a nation, will be accounted by history the foremost statesman that his country has produced is assured, but Mexico will always have cause to gratefully remember that it was Juárez who laid deep the foundations upon which he built.

A formal election taken in August, 1867, confirmed the informal proceedings at Paso del Norte, and established Juárez in the office of President of the Republic for a further term of four years. Porfirio Diaz was nominated by his admirers as their candidate, but he refused to accept a contest.

Juárez now began his third term of the Presidency, but the first in which he had enjoyed undisputed authority, and set to work to recreate the national life, which had been so torn and dismembered by the events of the past ten years.

He was in his sixty-second year. In times of storm and stress he had stood firm as a rock, the liberator of his country, never disheartened, never doubting that the triumph of his cause would be complete. Had Mexico wanted a hero, here, indeed, was the man; there is something that is noble and pathetic in the

figure of the staunch old Zapotecan, who, advanced in years, and after a life of intense mental and physical strain, was taking upon himself the task of rehabilitating his country—a task which might well have taxed the utmost capabilities of a younger man. It called for qualities which he did not possess. His Presidency, in short, was not a success.

Juárez was far removed from what excited European opinion of the time pictured him, a half-savage Indian, foreign to all the refinements of civilisation and culture, one who had taken the life of his adversary, the Emperor Maximilian, in sheer lust of blood.

Europe, indeed, misled by the gross malignities of his enemies who found refuge in the Old World, formed an estimate of the man which was wholly false. In early years he had been an ardent student. "He was able," says Dr. Noll,* "to write French with ease; and could read English, though he never attempted to speak it. He was well read in Constitutional Law. History was his favourite study. He received the degree of Doctor of Civil Law from his *alma mater* (the University of Oaxaca), and the honour was worthily conferred. His state papers were models of clearness and exact style."

Juárez was a man of great reserve. Courteous to all with whom he came in contact, he preserved the stoicism of his race in a marked degree. Though he occupied the foremost position, and spoke a tongue which lends itself peculiarly to stately phrases and lively imagery, remarkably few of his utterances survive. The sombre coat of plain black broadcloth which he wore, unrelieved by a single decoration, typified the man, so different in external appearance and qualities of mind from the heavily gold-laced, bemedalled and bejewelled individuals whom treasons, stratagems and plots had for half a century made Dictators of Mexico. When he had convinced himself that a certain course was for the country's good, nothing would bend him from his purpose. Himself the soul of honesty, he looked for an equally high standard of public morality in those to whom he entrusted office, but did not always find it. A more diplomatic man, possibly even a less honest man, would in the

* "From Empire to Republic." Page 285.

peculiar circumstances of the time have avoided some of the troubles which beset President Juárez.

Like many another statesman before him, and like Diaz himself who came after, Juárez found that a country just recovering from revolution is not the most profitable soil in which to sow the seeds of Liberal reform. Much was expected of him that he found it impossible in the still disturbed condition of Mexico to grant. The Spanish temperament was never patient. He was reminded of promises which there is no reason to doubt he was loyally anxious to fulfil when opportunity favoured. They could not be—or, at any rate, were not—fulfilled at the time, and the disillusionment of those who had hoped for the most Liberal measures from the re-establishment of the Republic began to create a general spirit of discontent.

Juárez remained immovable; conscious of the purity of his aims, firm in his adherence to a great principle in face of all opposition.

Nor was he altogether happy in his selection of men. As we have seen, his differences with Diaz began when he displaced officials whom his most brilliant general had found invaluable in the course of his arduous campaigns. Diaz protested; Juárez listened, but with dogged persistency refused to alter his decisions.

General Diaz, in accordance with the President's express wish, continued to serve for some months in carrying out an entire reorganisation of the army. As soon as this necessary work had been accomplished he sought his discharge without his pay, in order that he might be under no obligation to the Government, with which his sympathies as time went on became more and more estranged. Juárez fully realised what the loss of this vigorous personality to the army and to himself would mean. In vain he endeavoured to persuade Diaz from his purpose, and finally granted his discharge in May, 1868, with the pay due. "It was," said the old President, "the nation's debt to her servant according to the law. The law, and not the Government, paid the debt."

Diaz returned to his native State and to his wife, from

whom his military duties had kept him long parted. During the following years General Diaz' three children were born, but he never let his own domestic affairs interfere with his life as a soldier. Often he had to leave his home, his wife, or a child's bed of sickness to help the Republican cause which he held so dear. Those were happy years of domestic peace, and Señora Diaz was such a good, sensible, kind woman that he knew he could trust her to do the best for the children in his absence, and be ever ready with a smile to greet him on his return; but she only lived a few years.

His journey from the capital when he withdrew from the army was in the nature of a triumphal march. Oaxaca received him with open arms. Fêtes were organised in his honour, enthusiasm was raised to the highest pitch, and in admiration of his distinguished services to the cause of National Independence he was presented by the city of his birth with the farm and estate of La Noria.

Here, at any time during the next four or five years, he might have been found displaying as keen an interest in the growth of cane sugar as before he had shown in the most momentous affairs of State.

He took no active part in politics, though the Liberals who had broken with Juárez came to regard him as their chief. The discontent against the Republican Government grew, and at last manifested itself in open revolt; but there was no organised plan, and these sporadic risings were speedily put down. Santa Anna, the centre of so many of the most stormy episodes of Mexican history, re-entered the country, was captured and sentenced to be shot; and no doubt the Government thought themselves well rid of him when he was allowed to escape and return to his former exile. Diaz persistently refrained from taking any steps which would complicate still further the difficulties surrounding his old chief.

A different aspect of affairs came about when it was known in 1871 that Juárez was intending to put himself forward for a further term in the Presidency. The country was intensely excited.

Many of Juárez' most intimate friends, while bearing generous testimony to his incalculable services in the past, strove to dissuade him from a step which they believed must be attended with disastrous results. His four years of office had removed but few of the perils which threatened the nation. The advanced Liberals were incensed, such of the old Conservatives and Reactionaries as remained were eagerly hoping to gain something from an upheaval, and signs were not wanting that, unless restrained by a strong hand, the nation would again split up into factions, with all the attendant evils of civil war. Juárez, nevertheless, persisted in his belief that he was necessary at the head of affairs to maintain good government for Mexico—the good government for which she had fought and suffered.

Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada was nominated against him.

Then it was that Porfirio Diaz came out of his retirement to stand as a candidate, and the South awoke to great enthusiasm. The triangular contest was a close and exciting one. Congress met on September 16th, but it was not until four weeks later that Benito Juárez was declared to be re-elected by the votes of a majority of the States.

Anticipating events, the Governor of Nuevo-León in September denounced the Government and declared General Diaz President. *Pronunciamientos* followed in other parts, but all such attempts to restore rule by force were successfully repressed. On November 8th, 1871, Diaz issued from his homestead in Oaxaca the famous protest known as the "Plan of Noria," on behalf of the reforms promised under the Constitution of 1857, but never instituted. A manifesto was circulated proposing to convene an Assembly of Notables to reorganise the Government, with General Diaz to assume the powers of Commander-in-Chief of the army until such a Government could be founded.

Diaz left the South, where the movement had its chief centre, in the early spring of the following year, and arrived at Chihuahua, in the North, only to be met with the news that Juárez was dead.

The President had expired, after a day's illness, on July 18th from an affection of the heart. Mexico lost in him a great

patriot. Born in poverty, he lived and died poor, with means of enrichment at his hand from which others had not hesitated to profit. Juárez gave to Mexico an example of a virtue which hitherto had been all too rare among her rulers, that of a man who was absolutely honest and incorruptible. His dust reposes in the Pantheon of San Fernando, in the capital. There every year, on the anniversary of his death, a pilgrimage is made to his tomb, and in the celebrations which accompany it the youth of Mexico is taught to revere the memory of the great Zapotecan-Indian who devoted a laborious life ungrudgingly to accomplish the nation's welfare.

By a wise provision of the Constitution of Mexico, which existed unaltered throughout the country's most tumultuous days—though not always honoured—on the death of the head of the Republic, the President of the Supreme Court of Justice stepped provisionally into his place. It afforded a bulwark, if only a slender one, against the usurpation of the first dictator who took occasion to proclaim himself. Lerdo de Tejada succeeded Juárez. The capital remained quiet.

With the institution of the new Government the purpose of armed hostility existed no longer. The rising subsided at once. General Diaz returned to Oaxaca, to watch from there the course of events.

Lerdo de Tejada was as an administrator but little known to his countrymen, but his reputation as a patriot stood deservedly high. He had remained by the side of Juárez in those years when, harried by the armies of Bazaine and Maximilian, the fugitive Government was driven from pillar to post; and when peace returned had filled office with some success.

As a politician he had been under the influence of Juárez, and trained in his school. A lawyer of repute, and a scholar, he had shown evidence of broad-minded sympathy with the demands, which had been growing daily more clamorous, for the realisation of the programme of Reform. A general amnesty which he hastened to proclaim greatly strengthened his position, and when in the late autumn he ordered an election, he had no

difficulty in securing his re-establishment as Constitutional President for a further term of four years.

General Diaz on this occasion stood aside.

Had his patriotism been subordinate to his ambition, no time could have been more favourable to "pronounce" himself. His attitude towards Lerdo evinced a steady purpose to do nothing which could add to the difficulties of the President and his Government, but, on the contrary, to afford them every facility for a fair trial. Though he had been in virtual rebellion against Juárez in his closing days, when death removed that eminent man General Diaz at once recognised Lerdo's claim under the Constitution, as head of the Supreme Court, to succeed to the Presidency. He withdrew from the contest he had begun, and used his influence with his followers to assist the Republican Government in maintaining order.

A month after the election Diaz himself visited the capital, and was made the subject of popular ovation. Demonstrations were organised for him. His name was everywhere mentioned as that of the next President. Various States of the Republic took occasion to confer high distinctions upon him. If the truth were known, his presence in Mexico City was probably not a little embarrassing to the existing President. Lerdo could not have been unconscious of the fact that his own personality was lacking in that glamour of military exploits which made Diaz the darling of the populace. An impulsive and impressionable people like the Mexicans are always apt to follow the leadership of their hero.

Lerdo, gauging the feelings of the public, invited Diaz to occupy high positions in his Government and the State, all of which he declined. A diplomatic mission to a foreign country was proffered, and also failed to win acceptance. Diaz, in spite of his friends' solicitations, preferred to maintain his independence, and went back to sugar-planting.

Lerdo de Tejada had not the skill to pass unscathed through so fiery an ordeal as the Presidency of Mexico thirty-five years ago. It offended the advanced Liberals, whose hopes centred more and more upon General Diaz, that Lerdo should have retained

many members of Juárez' Government among his councillors. A dozen forces were at work to undermine him. The country, however, was exhausted, and his Presidency, if undistinguished in other ways, was at least by outward signs peaceful. Prosperity began slowly to return. Deceived by the indications around him, and misjudging the strength of his opponents, Lerdo, as the expiration of his period of office drew near, began his preparations for securing a further term. At once the flood-gates were opened upon him, and in the turbulent waters he was overwhelmed.

The statesmen who drafted the Constitution of the Spanish-American Republics and sought to make impossible the re-election of the existing President for a second term, did not act without good reason. Nothing was easier than for a dictator, once he had secured his election constitutionally, to so manipulate the voting that, save by an armed rising, he could never be displaced.

Political elections have been "managed" in many countries in the most scandalous way. Mexico had seen the method brought to its full perfection under Santa Anna. The South American Republics have given countless examples. How grave the peril was recognised by the founders of the Mexican Constitution of 1857, which had made the ineligibility of the President to receive re-election one of the main planks; but the reform, though desirable, had in the divided state of the country never been enforced.

It is not necessary to recapitulate the charges of corruption, persecution, extortion, and general mismanagement of the country's affairs which were launched against Lerdo. They were not wanting in violence and completeness, but to his enemies the very fact that he was attempting to stand again, in violation of the provisions of the Constitution, and so perpetuate the evils which they saw in his previous Government, was the chief cause of his offence.

In the category of men considered by a Government which had become increasingly reactionary to be dangerous, General Diaz had not been overlooked.

Mexico was once more ripe for revolution, which soon came.

Diaz left the State of Oaxaca in the winter of 1875, passed to Vera Cruz, and on December 5th sailed from that port on board the *Corsica* to the United States, intending to take charge of affairs in the north of Mexico. With him went General González, who had been the subject of bitter persecution by the Lerdist Government, and now became one of his stoutest adherents. They were on the seas when General Hernandez issued his "Plan du Tuxtepec," denounced the Government, and at the head of two thousand badly-armed troops marched on the city of Oaxaca.

The days of "Plans" are now passed. The "Plan du Tuxtepec" was destined to be the last. For thirty years no political manifesto has disturbed the peaceful development of the country. As this was the "Plan" upon which Diaz stepped into the Presidency, and it affords an indication of the policy with which he began his rule, I give the text of its chief articles. It is a fair example of the type of *pronunciamientos* which had played so large a part in Mexican history:

"*Article* 1. The Supreme Law of the Republic shall be the Constitution of 1857, the Reform Act promulgated on September 25th, 1873, and the Law of December, 1874.

"*Article* 2. The same law making the President and Governors of the States ineligible to the same position will be maintained, this being a measure of constitutional reform which we agree to sustain by all the legal means afforded us by the Constitution.

"*Article* 3. We repudiate Don Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada as President of the Republic, and all those persons employed by him or occupying positions under him, or elected at the elections of July, 1875.

"*Article* 4. All State Governments adhering to this 'Plan' will be recognised. Those refusing to do so will be placed under a Provisional Government to be appointed by the executive officer of the army.

"*Article* 5. The election of officers of the Union will be held two months after the capture of the capital of the Republic,

at such places as the executive shall appoint one month after capture, and will be held under the election laws of February 13th, 1857, and October 23rd, 1872. At the time appointed for the interior elections Congress shall assemble, and shall proceed immediately to carry out the provisions of Article 51 of the first-mentioned laws, in order that the Constitutional President of the Republic may enter upon the discharge of the functions of his office, and that the supreme tribunal may be installed."

The South and East flocked to the standard of the revolution. Oaxaca received General Hernandez and his band with immense enthusiasm. They marched into that city on January 27th, 1876. One of General Hernandez' first acts was to proclaim General Porfirio Diaz Commander-in-Chief of the Army of Re-organisation. He himself took charge of the government of the State. In six weeks the revolution had spread from Oaxaca throughout the States of Vera Cruz, Puebla, Guerrero, Jalisco, Yucatán, and Nuevo-León. On March 22nd General Diaz, in company with General González, left the United States, where he had landed and found temporary refuge, and crossed the Rio Grande from Brownsville, Texas, with forty followers, to direct the movements of the revolutionists in the North.

Later, Don José María Iglesias, President of the Supreme Court of Justice, also took occasion for a *pronunciamiento*. If Lerdo was not President, then under the Constitution he claimed to be his successor. He established a weak government of his own at Guanjuato, but was never a formidable factor in the *mêlée*. Thus there were three parties in the field, the "Lerdistas," the "Porfiristas" and the "Iglesistas," as they came to be respectively termed.

Lerdo moved with decision. At the outset his vigorous measures were able to control the situation, though he proved powerless to suppress the revolt. Diaz' forty stalwart men multiplied twenty-fold as he moved southward through the country. By the end of March he considered his force strong enough to attack Matamoros, a place occupied by a Lerdist garrison under La Barra, which was the key to the