

## CHAPTER X

## GENERAL PORFIRIO DIAZ

THE personality of General Porfirio Diaz is widely known as the President of Mexico, and the greater nations of Europe and America have all come to realize his superior statesmanship. He is to-day one of the great men of his century. The history of his remarkable career, military as well as political and administrative, has occupied the pens of many intelligent writers, but none have yet been able to do him justice.

He was born September 15, 1830, in the city of Oaxaca, in the state of the same name,—the evening before the glorious anniversary of national independence. His parents were Don José Faustino Diaz and Doña Petrona Mory. Oaxaca has been styled “the dwelling-place of heroes in the garden of the gods,” “the Eden of America,” “tomb of the conquerors and the cradle of patriots.” The state, although mountainous, is rich in agricultural and mineral productions. The scenery is grand, and the spot is well adapted to be the cradle of sons who should be the hope of the nation and who should raise aloft the standard of liberty.

The ancestors of Porfirio Diaz were Spaniards who left their mother-country in the first years of the conquest. His father possessed in a high degree all the natural qualities necessary to make him a patriot, a soldier, or a statesman. He was tall, symmetrical, muscular, and active, and carried himself in a manner indicating him to be a man of great resolution. While we find that he was, like his son, most affable in his manners, of a good heart, and extremely generous, yet if an injury or injustice was done him, he resented it with the greatest determination and energy. This quality exists in all great men, who, while ever ready to have justice done, are also prompt to punish evil. One who enters into combat, whether physical or moral, will never come off conqueror unless possessed of force and perseverance.

President Diaz's mother, of the family of Morys, came from Asturias, whose strong and valiant sons were noted for their independent spirit and their ancient lineage, possessing the impetuosity of the Celts and the frankness and integrity of the Goths. Señorita Mory's grandfather, a Spaniard, married in the Mixteca an Indian woman, who was General Diaz's great-grandmother, so that in the veins of Don Porfirio is mixed the blood of the proudest provinces of Spain with that of the highest nations of America, as the Mixtecas were fully as advanced in civilization as the Aztecs.

His father rented in Oaxaca the property known as the Mesón de la Soledad, where Don Porfirio was born. There were six other children, two of whom died in infancy. In 1833 the Asiatic cholera invaded Mexico, and among its victims was Captain Diaz. This was a great blow to the family, as the mother's health was delicate and the children were young; but she had all the energy of her race, and after her husband's death she continued to manage the inn (*mesón*), and showed in every way great firmness and intelligence, maintaining with vigor in all

her acts her integrity as wife and mother. She possessed fine feelings, was industrious and hospitable, courteous and dignified. With all her modesty and delicate instincts, she was brave, and in those tumultuous times, if necessary, could use arms in defence of herself and children. Her great desire was that her children should receive such intellectual development as should fit them for any place which they should be called to occupy.

Don Porfirio was in a primary school until he was seven years old. At fourteen he entered the seminary directed by Roman Catholic ecclesiastics. There were several reasons for his entering this seminary rather than the government Institute of Arts and Sciences. First, business matters had not been prosperous with his mother, and little by little she had been obliged to sell portions of houses, etc., to maintain and educate her family. In the seminary aid was rendered by bright students (although he was not a boarder in the institute), besides which, the father had desired that his sons be educated for the Church. The clergy used all their influence to augment the number of their pupils from good families, seeing that they were losing ground among the principal classes, especially since independence had been established.

After studying for a time to prepare himself, our hero felt that he should do something to aid his mother, whose means had become exhausted, and he commenced to give lessons in his leisure hours. While doing this he came in contact with Don Marcos Perez, judge of the Supreme Court of the state and professor in the Government Institute of Arts and Sciences. Señor Perez became very fond of young Porfirio, whom he often took to the Institute, discussing with him the tendency of extending civil and religious liberty.

One day Perez invited him to be present at the distribution of prizes in the Civil College of the state. The governor, Benito Juarez, was present, and Porfirio was presented to him. Juarez knew Porfirio's father slightly, and had heard of the manly efforts Porfirio was making to get an education in order to be his mother's staff and comfort. The governor spoke encouragingly, and young Diaz found therein the fountain of ambition and source of desires, hopes, and aspirations such as he had never dreamed of before, and he could hardly sleep that night as he thought of the wonderful words, the magnetism, the intellect, and the influence of the great man. As he looked about upon his country he saw nothing but perdition, the curse of Spain and the pernicious results of ill-directed efforts to force upon the Mexican people a foreign religion and civilization, and he resolved to consecrate his life to his country. As a little boy in his play he had ever been a soldier, and had always been made a leader or general by the other boys, so that his inclinations toward and capacity for a military life were early recognized by his friends.

When the war with the United States commenced, in 1846, Porfirio's heart was filled with enthusiasm to fight for his country, and he and several of his college mates petitioned the governor to send them to the front that they might help fight the enemy. Governor Guereque smiled, but placed their names on his list, and the youths were inscribed upon the roll of the national guard, consisting of one battalion, which, by reason of the extreme youth of those composing it, received the epithet “Better than nothing.”

When Porfirio was nineteen and had finished his preparatory studies, the bishop offered to confer on him in the following year the lesser orders and to give him a scholarship; but Diaz then declared his intention of studying jurisprudence in the Institute. The prelate was surprised at a young man in needy circumstances disregarding such valuable aid. It was considered a crazy decision. His uncle, the bishop, withdrew his help and forbade him his house, which made the young man's mother inconsolable.

Maternal tears affected the heart of the affectionate son, and, although insensible to the



counsels of the bishop, as also to his threats, he promised to do as his mother desired. But, although a pious and devoted churchwoman, with great desires for his spiritual and temporal prosperity, she did not wish to go contrary to his will and to oblige or persuade him to follow a calling that would be disagreeable to him: so she left him free to follow his inclinations.

She lived long enough to see the practical wisdom of her son's determination, as after a few years came that blow which destroyed the power of the Church and placed a limit upon its influence, while men of intelligence and position found free scope in the profession of the law.

Porfirio Diaz entered the Institute and commenced in a systematic manner the study of jurisprudence, helping himself by teaching. Juarez, who had not forgotten him, gave him—unsought, as Diaz never asked favors—the position of librarian. After four years of study, having been elected assistant professor of Roman law even before graduating, he had, in compliance with the law, to enter a law office and practise two years, as the course of study required. Benito Juarez was now practising law, his term of governor having expired.

During this time—1853—Santa Anna, who had been made dictator, improved every opportunity to destroy his enemies, and Juarez was arrested and taken to Vera Cruz, whence, after having received most cruel treatment in prison, he embarked for Havana, going eventually to New Orleans to live. His business affairs were passed over to his associate, Señor Perez; but, the latter having been imprisoned shortly after for holding correspondence with some of the enemies of Santa Anna, Porfirio Diaz took sole charge. Here he gave proof of his honesty and activity, and showed great skill in the exercise of his profession.

Seeing the injustice exercised in voting for the dictator, he and other students were indignant at the unwarrantable exercise of power. However, when he saw the frauds committed, the young patriot could endure it no longer, and he and one other went to the table where the negative list was to be voted. An order was soon issued for their arrest, and they were obliged to flee.

Shortly after Diaz was called to put into practice what he had learned in his military drill; and, although only twenty-five, he was found fully competent to direct soldiers, and in the mountains of the Mixteca joined a small company of patriots, two or three hundred in number, commanded by Captain Herrera, who opposed the dictator. Herrera recognized his competency and took his advice. Soon after, though few in number, having but few arms, and being but poorly disciplined, they gained a victory at Scotongo over the large and well-disciplined forces of Santa Anna.

When Santa Anna was overthrown and the liberal government was established, Porfirio returned, and was rewarded by being made chief of police in the district of Ixtlan. Shortly after, when the national guard was formally organized, he was elected captain of the fourth company of the second battalion, and, yielding to his military inclinations, resigned his position as chief of police, with its salary of one hundred and forty dollars a month, to accept that of captain at sixty dollars.

In 1857 he went out under Lieutenant-Colonel Velasco to put down an uprising in Jamiltepec. At Ixcapax he was badly wounded, but, seeing that one of his lines was in great danger, without heeding the blood streaming from his wounds he went forward, and with rare military courage so diverted the enemy as to defeat them.

His mother died about the end of 1858, while he was in Tehuantepec. Through all his vicissitudes he had ever been an affectionate and obedient son, and her death caused him great sorrow.

It was in that year that he went to Tehuantepec under General Ignacio Mejia to fight Cabos,

who was defeated at Jalapa, and while there he was made military commander of that district. He maintained the government in that region, contending against an enemy superior in strength, without aid from the general government, and counting only upon the resources which he alone knew how to obtain. He remained in Tehuantepec two years, fighting almost every day against large odds. Again he was wounded, but the victory was complete, and he was advanced from the rank of major to that of lieutenant-colonel. Discretion and prudence united to patriotism and noble aspirations have ever been the base of his military character.

The extraction by a surgeon from the United States of a ball that he had carried in his body for months relieved him from the acute physical suffering that he had long endured. Soon after he received his commission as lieutenant-colonel for a victory obtained in June, 1859, in Mixtequilla. For another one gained in Tehuantepec in November, 1859, the government rewarded



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him with the rank of colonel. On the 5th of August Diaz won another victory over Cabos in Oaxaca. He had only seven hundred men and three pieces of artillery, while Cabos had two thousand men and twelve pieces. Diaz, although wounded in the foot, remained in the saddle, and, while weak and faint from the loss of blood, continued to give orders and inspire his soldiers, until he saw his enemy put to flight and the victory won. Shortly after he was attacked with typhoid fever, but was much encouraged during his sickness by the knowledge that his fellow-citizens had honored him by his appointment as deputy to the General Congress in recognition of the great services he had rendered his country.

Diaz ever loved above all other things a military life, and he could not bear the thought of separating himself from the army. On the battle-field, surrounded by his faithful companions, he



experienced more than anywhere else the pleasure of satisfied ambition. There he could open up for himself a way without contending against the jealousies and envy which were to be encountered in legislative halls. The hardships of war had been until now his sweets of life, and the noise of battle still resounded in his ears like sweet and harmonious music. But he had to submit to his lot and repair to the capital of the republic, there to work as a legislator, having gained another step on the ladder of success. Although virtually the Conservative forces were destroyed, some chiefs, who could find no better occupation than to live by war, were aided by the Church and the prospect of booty. Leonardo Marquez, one of the most prominent of these revolutionary chiefs, on June 24, 1861, attempted an attack on the capital. Congress was in session when the unexpected news reached them of his arrival. Diaz, being, as he said, "a soldier above all things," asked permission to retire, and hastened to the scene of danger. The forces from Oaxaca, which were quartered in the convent of San Fernando under General Mejia, resisted Marquez's attack, and Colonel Diaz's arrival was celebrated with cheers from his old companions in arms, whose enthusiasm he served to revive. Mejia gladly accepted his aid, and the victory was theirs. The importance of the aid that Diaz here gave can be better understood from the reward that the government conferred on him by giving the command of the brigade of Oaxaca to him,—General Mejia being then ill,—with the order to join Ortega's division and to march on and destroy the rest of the Conservative forces. Suffice it to say that on the 13th of August, 1861, the fourth anniversary of one of his first triumphs, Diaz, with a few soldiers, gained another victory over Marquez and his four thousand men. In his attack upon Marquez he had disobeyed General Ortega, and it was not pleasant to the latter to feel that all the glory of that campaign belonged to a subordinate. But Ortega hastened to recommend him. The entrance of Diaz into the capital was one triumphal march, and the government had awarded him the rank of brigadier-general.

Shortly afterward Benito Juarez was elected president of the republic, and the French invaded the country. On the 5th of May, 1862, General Diaz gained a notable victory over the invaders at Puebla de los Angeles. General Zaragoza was the commander-in-chief in this engagement, General Diaz commanding a division.

The writer is under obligations to General Hinojosa, late secretary of war, for the following:

"In the report rendered to the secretary of war by Ignacio Zaragoza, the general commanding the Liberal forces of the constitutional government of President Juarez, giving the detail of the battle of Puebla, of the 5th of May, 1862, in which the invading army of France was defeated, is found the following:

"On the 4th I ordered the brigades under command of Generals Berriozabal, Diaz, and Lamadrid to form three columns of attack, the first being composed of one thousand and eighty-two men, the second of one thousand, and the third of one thousand and twenty. General Diaz with two sections of his brigade and one from that of Lamadrid, with two field-pieces, and the remaining one from Abzarar, not only held the enemy in check but repulsed the column that made a bold attack on our position. Thus repulsed, they fell back upon the hacienda of San José Rentaria, where they united with the force repulsed from the hill, which, having reorganized, was preparing for the defensive, having already made loop-holes in the heavy walls of the buildings.

"Although they had been routed, I could not attack them in that position, their numerical force being so much superior to mine; consequently I recalled General Diaz, who, with great ardor and gallantry, was following them up, and ordered that simply a menacing attitude be maintained."

On the 16th of March, 1863, the French General Forey marched upon Puebla with twenty-six thousand men, and, after a brave defence, General Ortega wisely surrendered, having refused to capitulate. On the 17th of May the white flag invited the French to enter and receive as prisoners eleven thousand soldiers and fifteen hundred officials. It was difficult to guard so many prisoners, and Diaz and Berriozabal took the first opportunity of escaping, as others afterward did; and the two generals, especially Diaz, were received in Mexico with enthusiastic demonstrations. Again he was given the command of a division when Juarez evacuated the city of Mexico. He left his command to General Comonfort and went to Oaxaca to organize the Army of the East. Marshal Bazaine went in command of eighteen thousand men and forty-eight pieces of artillery to attack Diaz in Oaxaca. Diaz surrendered, and was sent a prisoner to Puebla, but escaped. Ten thousand dollars was offered for his capture or proof of his death. He gathered together a small force, and here and there would have engagements, with varying success. But the brilliant triumphs of Miahuatlan and La Carbonera over the French brought back to General Diaz all the lustre and fame that he had gained as the most prominent general of the country. While the battles themselves were eclipsed by many of his previous victories, they were most notable for the indisputable establishment of republican supremacy in all the vast region of the south,—the result of more than a year of vigorous and persevering efforts.

He again organized new troops, and defeated Visoza at Julingo, state of Puebla, on the 1st of October, 1865. He then went to La Providencia, where General Juan Alvarez gave him some two hundred arms, and he again defeated Visoza at Comitlipa, state of Guerrero, on the 4th of December, 1865. He fought successfully against General Ortega at Pinotepo and Jametepo, state of Oaxaca, in March, 1866. He again defeated the Imperialists, under Major Cevallos, at Puebla, state of Oaxaca, on the 14th of the same month. At Nochistan, in the same state, Diaz fought Hungarian cavalry under the Count of Gauz, who was killed on the field.

At Miahuatlan General Diaz captured over one thousand muskets and two pieces of artillery, with all the ammunition of the enemy. A battalion of chasseurs under French officers was captured; the colonel, Hourie Icolart, was killed.

From Miahuatlan he marched to the city of Oaxaca, and while besieging that capital he learned that the Imperial government had sent a column under command of Baron Luker, an Austrian officer, to relieve the besieged garrison of Oaxaca. General Diaz decided at once to march on the approaching relief column, which he met at La Carbonera on the 18th of October, 1866; and, after routing it completely, he returned to Oaxaca, when the garrison surrendered on the 31st of the same month. He thus obtained forty-two pieces of artillery, twenty-five hundred muskets, and all the garrison provision and stores.

The 1st of November, 1866, General Diaz entered his natal city to be crowned with laurel as its liberator. On April 2 he won at Puebla another glorious victory, which made the walls of the empire totter, as Puebla was one of the invader's three strongholds. Among the prisoners were eleven generals and three bishops. By law all the officers taken prisoner were to be shot as traitors, and even foreigners were to suffer the same fate after the French armies had been withdrawn. Presenting himself before the eleven generals, Diaz politely invited them to follow him, without being guarded, to the episcopal palace, where were six hundred officials, many of them occupied with confession and making their final arrangements, as they knew the fate that had befallen other prisoners.

"Gentlemen," said Diaz, "it is very painful to me,—it is impossible for me to execute the punishment which the law imposes, and there is no alternative for me but to make you