

THE FALL OF
MAXIMILIAN'S EMPIRE.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY AND RETROSPECTIVE.

WHEN, with the spring of the year 1865, the United States emerged from the winter of their domestic strife, the foreign Empire founded just beyond their southern border was apparently an accomplished fact. An Austrian held the sceptre of Montezuma, and forty thousand French bayonets bristled around his throne. It is possible that during the long civil war the mass of the American people had not fully realized the importance of that remarkable usurpation; but the eyes of their statesmen in the capital had been fixed with ceaseless watchfulness on the menace implied by the intervention of a European power in the affairs of that neighboring Republic.

For a number of years, in Mexico, revolution had succeeded revolution with such dazzling swift-

ness, that American interest in that country had become slight; but when that interest was quickened by transatlantic officiousness, there was aroused a latent feeling of sympathy, possibly the outcome of traditionary policy as much as from personal regard. As early as 1862 the complication of affairs had become a cause of serious concern to the American government, and, in the spring of that year, Mr. Corwin, United States Minister to Mexico, negotiated a treaty in which was stipulated a loan of eleven million dollars to that country, upon the security of her public lands. Looking upon it in the light of subsequent events, then impossible to foresee, it is evident that a ratification and carrying out of at least that clause in the treaty would have spared the world a sad spectacle of prolonged strife and bloodshed, and would have saved many an anxious hour in diplomatic circles. But the instrument was reported upon adversely by the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, and the fatal Jecker bonds, issued by Miramon, while temporarily invested with the executive power, still remained as a firebrand between Mexico and England, France, and Spain.

The panorama of events glided swiftly along:—the signing of the convention of London; the landing of the French, English, and Spanish expeditions; the preliminary convention of La Soledad; the withdrawal of the English and Spanish forces;

the advance of the French on Puebla. Every step was closely watched by the far-seeing members of Mr. Lincoln's Cabinet, and the skillful diplomacy evoked was a faithful expression of the people's instinctive distrust of foreign complications and interventions, coupled with an hereditary, pronounced desire that the affairs of the western continent should be settled by the western continent. The tenor of Emperor Napoleon's confidential letter of instructions to General Forey did not become generally known until long after. Some significant passages in it would have perhaps opened wide the eyes of popular jealousy in the United States, and given a more determined coloring to what was dimly suspected. Among the paragraphs may be quoted the following:

“There will not be wanting some who will ask you why we have provided men and money to establish a regular government in Mexico. In the present state of civilization of the world the prosperity of America is not indifferent to Europe, for she it is who feeds our manufactures and keeps our commerce alive. It is to our interest that the Republic of the United States may be powerful and prosperous, but by no means that she should take all the Gulf of Mexico and hence command the West Indies as well as South America, and be the sole dispenser of the products of the New World. . . . Now, therefore, our military honor

pledged, the exigencies of our politics and the interest of our industry and our commerce make it our duty to march on Mexico, to plant there boldly our standard, to establish there—a monarchy if it is not incompatible with the national sentiment of the country—but at all events a government which possesses some stability.”

This was dated July 3, 1862.

A righteous determination to err on the side of strict neutrality, if at all, was prominent in the considerations that induced Mr. Lincoln to avoid taking part in the speculative debates bearing on the situation; and he must have been rudely startled by the propositions made on July 10, 1863, by the Assembly of Notables in the city of Mexico, summoned by General Almonte's triple-headed regency. It was with a painful sentiment, unfavorable to a good understanding between France and the United States, that the people of the latter country heard of the adoption of a decision previously arrived at in Paris. The propositions submitted to that Assembly were these:

“*First.* The Mexican nation adopts a monarchical, temperate, and hereditary form of government, under a Catholic Prince.

“*Second.* The sovereign shall take the title of Emperor of Mexico.

“*Third.* The imperial crown of Mexico shall be offered to his Imperial and Royal Highness the

Prince Ferdinand Maximilian of Austria, for him and his descendants.

“*Fourth.* In case, from circumstances which cannot be foreseen, the Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian should not take possession of the throne which is offered to him, the Mexican nation shall place it under the consideration of His Majesty Napoleon III., Emperor of the French, that he may indicate another Catholic Prince to whom the crown shall be offered.”

These propositions were accepted and published in the form of a decree.

The nobleness of the ambitious young Archduke, in refusing to accept the proffered crown unless the votes of the entire country should ratify the wishes of the capital city, was only clouded by his lamentable blindness to the mockery of a plébiscite taken in a country whose patriot army had been almost destroyed, and which was overrun by the amalgamated forces of the regency and of France.

Referring to this proposed election, M. Drouyn de l'Huys, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, intimated to the United States Minister in Paris that “an early acknowledgment of the proposed Empire by the United States would be convenient to France, by relieving her, sooner than might be possible under other circumstances, from her troublesome complications in Mexico.” To this Mr.

Seward's reply, to Mr. Dayton, was : . . . "Happily, the French government has not been left uninformed that, in the opinion of the United States, the permanent establishment of a foreign and monarchical government in Mexico will be found neither easy nor desirable. You will inform Mr. Drouyn de l'Huys that this opinion remains unchanged. . . . It is proper also that Mr. Drouyn de l'Huys should be informed that the United States continue to regard Mexico as the theatre of a war which has not yet ended in the subversion of the government long existing there, with which the United States remain in the relation of peace and sincere friendship ; and that for this reason the United States are not now at liberty to consider the question of recognizing a government which, in the further chances of war, may come into its place."

Nor were the halls of Congress silent. Various joint resolutions introduced at different times in both branches of the national legislature showed that, amid all our domestic troubles, a restless eye was kept on those engrossing outside matters ; and, while not one of those resolutions acquired the character of a legislative act, through failure to receive the concurrence of the other house, they were accepted as truly interpreting the unanimous sentiment of the people of the United States. "Do you bring us peace or bring us war?" were the first

words addressed to Mr. Dayton, as he entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris one day in April, 1864. The question referred to the passage, by the House of Representatives, of a resolution condemning the invasion of Mexico and the establishment of Maximilian upon the throne.

Vain protests. They indicated a current, but one powerless just then to stem the counter torrent of aggression. As had been pointed out by Mr. Sumner, in combating Mr. McDougal's fiery resolution in the Senate, we were not in a position to invite war with a foreign power ; and a keen appreciation of that fact was in itself ample explanation for the invasion of the New World by the Old.

The doomed Prince, accompanied by his faithful, loving consort, left the fair palace of Miramar, and landed in Mexico greeted by ovations as brilliant as those that had characterized their departure from Austria. The clerical party and the authorities of the Intervention had reached the summit of their desires, and festivities and decorations were lavished with a free hand. Even a large part of the Indian population hailed their new emperor with manifestations of joy, for the legend of Quetzalcoatl still lived in their traditions, and they saw in him the fair white man who was to come from over the eastern sea to raise them from their oppressed condition.

Under the leadership of the indomitable Benito Juarez, however, Mexico did not respond as Prince Maximilian had been led to believe it would. The patriot forces, dispersed, atomized, but not crushed, displayed powers of self-sacrifice and determination of purpose undreamed of by Napoleon. By force of arms alone, and foreign arms at that, could the Empire be upheld; and when, contrary to the expectations of many European powers, the United States brought their civil war to a successful close, it was shrewdly foreseen by many that the days were numbered of that ephemeral Empire designed by Napoleon to be the "most brilliant page in the history of his reign." The President and the Cabinet could then certainly feel less restraint in voicing the American sentiment in that and all kindred matters; and Mr. Johnson's first annual message to Congress, containing a clear and firm, though moderately expressed, declaration of the will of the government to maintain its traditional policy—in other words to sustain the Monroe doctrine,—was telegraphed to every part of Europe, and due significance was attached to every word therein expressed.

Much has been said and written of the stormy period of Mr. Johnson's administration, but it must be considered that his hand was most firm and most wise in the guidance of the republic through this most dangerous crisis, and that, with the help of

his matchless Secretary of State, he steered the country through dangers that darkly clouded the horizon of its future. The establishment of a European monarchy in Mexico, supported by a European army, could not have failed to be a perpetual menace to the peace of the North American continent, and would have compelled, in the United States, a continued armament and state of military preparation most distasteful to a nation specially averse to war and devoted to the peaceful development of the western hemisphere. The one great fundamental idea, underlying all diplomatic expressions, had been well given in a letter from Mr. Seward to Mr. Dayton in April, 1864. "I remain now firm as heretofore in the opinion that the destinies of the American continent are not to be permanently controlled by any political arrangement that can be made in the capitals of Europe."

In the autumn of 1865 the Emperor of France was led to suggest a willingness to retire from Mexico, but that it would be inconvenient to do so without first receiving from the United States an assurance of a friendly or a tolerant disposition to the power which had assumed to itself an imperial form in the capital city. But the only answer that could be made to this overture was that, while friendship with France had always been deemed important and peculiarly agreeable by the Ameri-

can people, the condition suggested by the emperor seemed quite impracticable.

It is not necessary to quote farther from the correspondence between Washington and Paris. One resolute step taken by Mr. Johnson solved this Gordian riddle, the keen edge of the sword not coming in actual contact with the knot, but severing it none the less effectually. The mission of General Schofield as a special personal envoy to the Emperor Napoleon was an event the importance of which can scarcely be overestimated. The selection of that tried soldier to bear to Europe the unvarnished statement that the United States desired that French troops should leave Mexico, was an expression of the high confidence reposed in his firmness and tact. The mission was confidential in its character, and when the time shall have come when its records may properly be made public, a most interesting chapter will undoubtedly be added to the diplomatic history of our country. Suffice it to say that, as an immediate result, a promise was given that the evacuation should take place forthwith, and that promise was on the eve of fulfilment at the time of the opening of this little history.

At daylight of the 20th of February, 1867, the U. S. S. "Tacony," Commander F. A. Roe, passed out to sea between the capes of Virginia. Her destination was the waters of Mexico; her

mission, "to protect American interests." This term, often used by those who comprehend the necessity of a great country having an adequate naval force to represent it abroad, may at times include a wider range of duty than is apt to be thought. As distances have come to be shortened by the railway and the steamer, and annihilated by the telegraph, it has seemed as though authority and discretion could be more and more centralized, and that an officer would but need to watch events carefully and keep his ship in good fighting trim. A commander's first duty is indeed to keep his ship in good condition for effective service; and it is the duty and the ambition of his officers to do their important share in bringing about that result; without it the assertion of a principle would lack force. But far more weighty and responsible work may fall to the lot of a small vessel, perchance isolated in every way from the lawgivers of the home country. The amount of power displayed by a double-ender, for instance, is not great, *per se*; an ignorant rabble, a body of bitterly prejudiced partisans, a band of irresponsible soldiery, may not comprehend, or may despise, the power merely represented by that vessel. With him who shows the flag of his country abroad and watches over her interests, it lies, under such circumstances, to display certain qualities besides pluck and technical professional acumen. Upon

him rests, first of all, the onus of a correct interpretation of his orders in their widest bearing; and then must he, by tact and forbearance, associated with a bold front, do his utmost to execute the duty with which he is charged.

The "Tacony" was a wooden double-ender of 934 tons, a sister ship to the much-abused "Talla-poosa," which vessel, somewhat altered afterwards, has of late years been so familiar to the casual reader of the American newspapers. The double-enders were a type of vessel, the conception of which was due to the exigencies of the civil war; of light draft in proportion to their displacement, they could carry heavy batteries and large crews in shallow water. Being designed for river work, and not for the high seas, it is not to be wondered at if these vessels were regarded with distrust when detailed for the latter service. Being side-wheelers, with the machinery high above water, their efficiency in a strictly naval fight was limited; and their manœuvring qualities, or rather the lack of them, became a by-word in the navy.

The "Tacony's" battery consisted of two sixty-pounder rifles in pivot, and four eight-inch smooth-bores in broadside, besides four small howitzers; and she had a complement of 144 officers and men.

Such was the little vessel that was destined to take a not unimportant part in the events connected with the re-occupation of a part of Mexico by the Liberal or patriot forces.

CHAPTER II.

AT daylight of the 28th of March the "Tacony" appeared off the city of Vera Cruz, and quite a fleet was sighted moored under Sacrificios Islands. This anchorage, four miles southeastward of the harbor, is usually chosen by foreign men-of-war for sanitary reasons, although in those days, when steam launches were almost unknown, except to a few especially favored vessels, the long pull (or sail) to town was a serious matter.

Among the vessels present was the U. S. S. "Tahoma," Lieutenant-Commander Gherardi, who, on making out the distinguishing signal of the approaching steamer, came out to meet his countryman, and thus make a tangible offer of services, pilot knowledge, advice, etc. Commander Roe quickly decided to follow the custom, at least for the present, and the "Tacony" was soon snugly moored in nine and one fourth fathoms of water, a short distance inshore of Sacrificios Island. Good ground tackle is a necessity in this roadstead, as *northers* are frequent, and there is no shelter except from the immediate islands.

The "Tahoma" had been there for some time,