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A Study of Imperialism in Mexico, 1861-1867

Edwin T. Jones

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A STUDY OF IMPERIALISM
IN MEXICO, 1861 - 1867

by
Edwin T. Jones

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Samuel J. J.*

Mexico - the land of toreadors and tortillas - has had a dramatic history filled with bitter conflicts and colorful personalities. One of the moving episodes in the life of this nation was the period of foreign intervention which threatened the very national existence of the Mexican nation from 1861 until 1867. The story, however, has its background a decade or so before the curtain rose on the drama of European imperialism. It began with a social revolution which is known in Mexican history as the Reforma. Speaking of this revolution, Parkes states that, "The primary purpose of the Reform, like that of the French Revolution, was the destruction of feudalism. Its intellectual inspiration came from the philosophers of French liberalism, while its driving-force was the ambition of the mestizos."¹ This is significant to a study of the intervention because in reality the struggle which took place was as much an internal conflict as it was foreign. The liberal element was forced to turn its attention to foreign forces who held practically the same political views as the conservatives in Mexico. Hence the coming of European powers did not change the nature of the struggle, but rather increased the magnitude of the enemies of the republic. The Mexican historian, Bravo Ugarte, sees four periods in what is called the

¹ Henry Bamford Parkes, A History of Mexico, 233.

War of the Reforma, the fourth being the indefinite prolongation of the struggle because of foreign intervention at a time when the liberals were being victorious.²

The war which was in progress in Mexico at the time of intervention was a war between conservatives and liberals for the control and destiny of the Mexican nation. Each party had its definite ideas on what was necessary to the existence of Mexico.

On the liberal side it was a struggle for freedom of thought and speech, for the extinction of clerical participation in affairs of state, for the nationalization of great areas of land held by the church, for the normal participation of laymen in government, for complete equality of all citizens before the law, for intellectual progress and modernity. On the conservative side the ideal was church and army control, with a foreign constitutional monarchy in the background. All the old Spanish abuses based on the colonial conception of political society were to be perpetuated: special privileges, absence of liberty of conscience, class domination.³

It will be seen that the mentioned aims of the Mexican conservatives coincided with the general aims of the intervening forces. But at present a background of the political situation in Mexico is necessary to an analysis of the intervention.

When Mexico's attempt at a moderate government failed in 1858, two rival claimants to political power took to the battlefield to resolve the question of supremacy. Benito Juarez, an Indian of the state of Oaxaca, was the

² José Bravo Ugarte, Historia de Mexico, II, 246.

³ Herbert I. Priestley, The Mexican Nation, A History, 337.

champion of the Reform and of the Constitution of 1857. On the other side was self-appointed General Zuloaga who led the conservative forces. He was succeeded shortly afterwards by General Miramón. Naturally, the contention between these two political forces placed the country in a chaotic state. A half-and-half mastery of the country resulted; the liberals held the north and the west, with the exception of Vera Cruz in the east, while the conservatives were in command of the east and of the central portion of Mexico. A state of indecisiveness gradually resulted in the strengthening of the moral and military power of the liberals. In fact, by 1860 the liberals were powerful enough to give Miramón a stinging defeat in the battle of Guadalajara. The conservative leader left the field with only eight thousand effectives who again met defeat shortly afterwards. It seemed that the termination of the War of the Reforma was near when Juarez occupied the capital on January 11, 1861, with the support of the Mexican people and the confidence of the American and British governments.

Nevertheless, the liberal government found that a chaotic financial situation proved to be the stumbling stone in the way of complete victory. Juarez was forced to suspend for two years the payment of interest on the external national debts. This was the opening act of the drama of foreign intervention. A meeting was held in London on October 31, 1861, to discuss the Mexican Ques-

tion, and at this meeting an agreement was made to collect the debts by military force.

England, Spain, and France were the high contracting parties to the compact, -- a just and lawful one as written upon the face of the convention articles, but in truth one of the acts in the historic drama of French imperialism, and charged in its tragic end with disappointment and chagrin to the courts of Rome, Madrid and St. James, and with humiliation and sorrow to the courts of Brussels, the Tuileries and Vienna.⁴

Actually the justice of the compact mentioned in the above statement was based upon what the contracting nations felt were legitimate claims against the Mexican government. A survey of the nature of these claims seems appropriate to an understanding of the immediate cause for action on the part of Britain, Spain, and France.

The grievances of the British government were based on the following: "non-settlement of claims of British bondholders; murder of the British vice-consul at Tasco; the breaking into the British legation and carrying off £152,000 sterling in bonds belonging to British subjects, besides numerous other outrages committed on the persons and property of individuals."⁵

Spain likewise had numerous claims dating back to the day when the Mexicans began their struggle for independence in 1810. These are far too many to enumerate. They were of the same nature as the British claims, but

⁴ John M. Taylor, Maximilian and Carlotta, A Story of Imperialism, 2.

⁵ John H. Latane, The Diplomatic Relations of the United States and Spanish America, 224.

there were many exaggerations which were made to discredit the Mexican government. Perhaps Spain was possessed by a more imperialistic motive than mere collection of claims; for Carl Schurz, then American minister to Spain, states that the Spanish press began to play up "the new mission of Spain in the New World. And assiduously stirred the popular imagination with glowing predictions of the restoration of ancient glories."⁶

It is significant to this study in considering the French demands to understnad how trifling they were in relation to those of the other powers. England claimed a total of £67,800,000 damages, Spain £6,800,000, and France £190,000.⁷ The declaration of French claims seems even more disproportionate when the basis for them is taken into consideration.

Those for whom compensation was claimed included a tailor in Mexico City, who had been wounded before the door of his house by a dagger thrust; a bootmaker who had been assailed by some individual and seriously wounded because he refused to deliver up the money which he carried; the relatives of a Frenchman who was assassinated at Puebla, and whose murder was attributed to the Mexican police; a hotelkeeper who had been robbed upon two occasions at Palmar, and a number of other French subjects who had been robbed, tortured and ill-treated at various times and various places of the Republic.⁸

Certainly these claims as a foundation for military

⁶ Carl Schurz, The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz, 293.

⁷ Edgar Turlington, Mexico and her Foreign Creditors, 124.

⁸ Percy F. Martin, Maximilian in Mexico, the Story of French Intervention 1861-1867, 7.

action against a government are questionable. This was the assertion, too, of the French minister to Mexico, Saligny, who felt that the claims were trivial "and such as should not be made the subject of diplomatic representations."⁹ Nevertheless, it was the open motive for French participation in the London conference.

Compensation then for these claims which were termed legitimate losses by the allied powers was the basis for the so-called just and lawful use of military forces in Mexico. And the intervening forces pretended to limit their powers by an article of the convention which guaranteed the integrity of the Mexican nation. The clause pertaining to this guarantee is summarized:

They engaged not to seek for themselves in the employment of the coercive measures contemplated by the convention, any acquisition of territory, nor any special advantage, and not to exercise, in the internal affairs of Mexico, any influence of a nature to prejudice the right of the Mexican nation to choose and to constitute freely the form of its government.¹⁰

No matter what this convention article advocated, in the words of Corti, the agreement was "as elastic as india-rubber."¹¹ It could be interpreted at will to satisfy the ulterior motives of each party. France took it to mean that Juarez must be prevented from holding down the conservatives and monarchists. For to France

⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰ Taylor, 20.

¹¹ Count Egon Caesar Corti, Maximilian and Charlotte of Mexico, I, 114.

the monarchist element was to be the instrument for the realization of her real purposes for intervention in Mexico. The situation seemed perfect. The United States was engaged in a titanic struggle to preserve the Union -- the Civil War; and the liberal government of Juarez was weak from the struggle for reform in Mexico. But what France and the other intervening powers failed to realize was that Juarez and his forces were fighting for their national existence. When Juarez appealed to his nation to unite and resist, the allied powers had a worthy foe.

Mexicans! if it is still sought to distort our intentions, and it is decided to humiliate us as a nation, to dismember our territory, to interfere in our internal affairs -- perhaps even to break up our very nationality -- I appeal to your patriotism; I conjure you to forget all your hatreds and jealousies, to sacrifice your fortunes, and to shed your blood; rally round your government for the defense of your common cause-- the most sacred and grandest cause known to man as it is to an united people-- the cause of one's country.¹²

This was a call to arms; the fight was on -- nationalism versus imperialism. It began with the landing of Spanish troops at Vera Cruz in December, 1861. For the moment it seemed as if the tripartite intervention was to be the exclusive action of Spain. This situation annoyed the French especially; but Habana was closer than Paris or London, so Spanish troops took the glory for the initial landing. But distrust arose among the allied powers,

¹² Martin, 81.

and they began to watch each other for some hidden objective to reveal itself. They had not long to wait. Once all the allies were ashore, an agreement was reached with the liberal government of Juarez to allow the allied troops to move inland in order to escape from the fever-ridden coastal area. Shortly afterwards an increasing number of French re-inforcements were landed and this brought doubts as to whether the French were sincere in their adherence to the treaty stipulations.

Spain and England found it necessary to make arrangements for negotiations with Juarez immediately if they were not to become instruments of French imperialism. A meeting was arranged for at the city of Orizaba. France, at this meeting, added to her claims an amount of fifteen million dollars. It was based on a loan made by a Swiss banker named Jecker to the government of Miramón at a fifteen to one ratio.¹³ Miramón, of course, was the anti-president; yet the claims were made against the government of Juarez. And furthermore, Jecker was even made a French citizen so that France might back his absurd claims. The Spanish and British were vexed with this demand; they claimed it would lead to war, as no nation could be expected to accede to it; and they refused to sanction it. The conference at Orizaba ended the tripartite intervention. Spain and England came to an agreement with Juarez and evacuated their troops from

¹³ Parkes, 249.

Mexico. The French marched toward Mexico City. The story of European imperialism now became the historic drama of French imperialism.

What then was the real ambition of Napoleon III?

It has often been remarked that the world is ruled by ideas, or at least by imagination. Looking back, it is possible to descry more than one idea for the intervention of France in Mexico. Within the two great historic personalities of Napoleon III of France and Maximilian I of Mexico are complicated ideas, both philosophical and practical, for the intervention. Also, it is an amateur fashion of looking at history to regard a single motive or reason as the moving force for a human affair such as the interference in Mexico's internal affairs. Therefore it is necessary to attempt to summarize the possible motives for the historic trespass of France on Mexico's right to exist. And also, to consider the influences of Maximilian on the situation.

Let us consider the motives of France by means of the historic divisions of man's activities, i.e., the political, the economic, the social, the cultural, and the religious.

To begin with, Napoleon III had a political motive for the Mexican enterprise. It is historical fact that French imperialistic designs in North America began as early as the sixteenth century and continued even during the reign of Louis XIV when an attempt was made to ex-

pand French holdings by occupying Texas. Furthermore, the fact that the French empire collapsed in North America after the French and Indian War in 1756 did not end their imperialistic adventures in this area. Napoleon I, on the eve of the nineteenth century, attempted to recreate the French colonial empire in North America but failed when his forces met defeat at Santo Domingo. Therefore it is not surprising that Napoleon III entertained Bonapartist ideas of a similar nature when he embarked on the Mexican expedition. In fact, the American minister in London advised his government when the French began their march to Mexico City that, "The expedition to the city of Mexico may not stop until it shows itself in the heart of the Louisiana purchase."¹⁴ This was possible in view of the fact that the American Republic was engaged in a civil war.

There seems to be some historical evidence for French imperialistic designs since numerous historians note that the Mexican province of Sonora was among the objectives of Napoleon III. Corti claims that Maximilian, before accepting the crown, was approached on the idea of selling Sonora to the French, but he flatly refused.¹⁵ This rich silver-producing state in the northwest of Mexico is contiguous to the United States and an excellent base for further expansion northward. It would have been worth the

¹⁴ Latane, 237.

¹⁵ Corti, I, 327.

costs of intervention to secure this prize. Maximilian was not pressed about the Sonora question, but Napoleon intended to revert to the plan at a favorable opportunity. In fact, shortly after the pacification of the area in 1864, Napoleon wrote to Maximilian:

It is feared in Mexico that Sonora may become an American province...This will not happen if the Government places itself at the head of the immigration, plants its flag there, and organizes the country.¹⁶

Maximilian wrote to reassure Napoleon that "the establishment of a regular Government in Sonora under the simultaneous protection of the French and Mexican flags is the object of all my care."¹⁷ Although Maximilian had rejected the proposal to sell Sonora, it seems evident that the matter was not dropped completely. Sonora was to be watched closely and it was to be under joint occupation.

Even in France itself the opposition party was vehement in its denunciation of the French imperialistic policy in Mexico. In an introduction to his The Expedition to Mexico, Edgar Quinet is emphatic in his warning of Napoleon's true objective.

Reader, stop your ears to the grands mots by which Bonapartism conceals the true object of the Mexican expedition, and learn its awful secret from one fact alone; the American civil war. That war is the occasion of the expedition to Mexico, which is Bonapartism's one chance to recoup the fortune lost in 1812. And once established on the plateau of Mexico, it will have at its feet

¹⁶ Corti, II, 854.

¹⁷ Ibid., 861.

not the kingdoms but the republics of an entire world. 'These,' it says, 'shall all fall.' First those to the South: Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Montevideo and Buenos Aires shall disappear one after the other...Then we shall look to the North; the United States the hope of the friends of freedom in the two worlds, must be destroyed, for, left standing, it would only be a scandal and a menace to the Bonapartist edifice.¹⁸

Whether or not any faith can be placed in the opposition party's propaganda is questionable. But it is an indication of a feeling which was current in France. That Bonapartism could again attempt a world conquest in another direction is not unthinkable. Hence, the imperialistic designs of Napoleon are evident.

Another political aim in Napoleon's policy seems likely-- that is, appeasement in European politics. France's position in the European political scene was somewhat isolated. Friendship could not be shunned; in fact it might even be searched for. To take Mexico outright in the name of the Empire of France would bring on the wrath of nations, not their friendship. But to bring stability to that nation by inviting a European royal house to assumed the throne would be a feather in Napoleon III's political hat. There can be no doubt that the Emperor was thinking along these lines when he encouraged Maximilian to accept the crown. Aubry states that, "Perhaps in compensation for the throne he would be giving a Habsburg he could get Venetia and hand that province over to his beloved Italy."¹⁹ He verifies this assertion with

¹⁸ Frank Lally, "French Opposition to the Mexican Policy of the Second Empire," John Hopkins Press Series, XLIX, 59.

¹⁹ Octave Aubry, The Second Empire, 289-290.

an Italian diplomatic communication which reads, "The offer of the Mexican throne to Maximilian of Austria is a concession which his Majesty hopes to balance at the proper time against the proposal that the Austrian cabinet cede Venetia."²⁰ Then the Italians could give up their claims to Rome and Napoleon's political objectives would be realized. Hence, the political gains to be had by intervention seem lucrative. Certainly imperialistic expansion suited well the Bonapartist policy of conquest; and appeasement argued well for the strengthening of France's position in Europe.

Secondly, the economic origin for French action must not be overlooked. Like every great power, he greatness depended on maintaining a commanding economic position. North America was always a fertile field for exploitation as well as the areas to the south. Napoleon had a definite view on the economic value of the Western Hemisphere. He wrote:

Now if Mexico preserves its independence and maintains the integrity of its territory; if a firm government is established there by the aid of France, ...we shall have guaranteed the security of our own and the Spanish colonies in the West Indies; we shall have extended our benevolent influence to the center of America, and that influence, while it makes a market for our fabrics, secures us the material indispensable to our manufactures.²¹

Napoleon III's thoughts on the economic value of the Western Hemisphere went further than the mere value in

²⁰ Ibid., 289.

²¹ Martin, 107-108.

raw materials and a market. His fertile imagination had given thought to the building of a canal to link the Atlantic and Pacific. The Emperor had once paid a visit to the United States, and he suffered from the hallucination that he understood America. Its problems haunted him while he was imprisoned, and "he made sketch-maps of the Canale Napoleone; and the fascination remained with him."²² Why not make his own Strait of Anian? Possibly concessions could be secured for French aid to Maximilian. It was long known that the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Mexico was an excellent location for a canal. To secure its rights and build the canal would be a Napoleonic service to mankind! And a service to France, too.

If Napoleon III were to choose what he thought was the most important objective in his Mexican policy, it would probably be what he called "the grand design of his reign."²³ This was a third motive of intervention - the cultural. It was the desire to assert the dominance of the Latin race throughout the world. No doubt this was appealing to a man so in love with the idea of perpetuating Bonapartism. Viel, in his Memoirs, writes:

The Emperor wishes to give the force of cohesion to the Latin races, and to stimulate the vigour they have lost. From Cadiz to the frontiers of Belgium and the borders of the Rhine, he wishes to reunite these races by a community of interest, by opposing the Latin to the Saxon element...²⁴

²² Philip Guedalla, The Second Empire, 319.

²³ Cambridge Modern History, XI, 476.

²⁴ Castel Viel, Memoirs, II, 185.

This grand design was, no doubt, a noble action and excellent propaganda in the attempt to attract the Latin elements to the French camp. But it made little impression on Spain because she pulled out of Mexico rather than assist the French Latins. And too, although Mexico was Latin to an extent, she had chafed too long under the ideas Napoleon III had come to assert. It will be seen that the principle of freedom and a republican government were more attractive to the Mexicans.

The fourth influence on Napoleon's decision to intervene in Mexico was his desire for the betterment of the Mexican people. This shall be considered as the social basis of his action. No doubt the enemies of the French emperor would not accede to this interpretation. But the nature of this study is to attempt to exhaust the possible motives for the action, and there is some historical evidence to substantiate the idea. On this worthy motive Napoleon III wrote:

The idea which guided the expedition to Mexico was a grand one; to regenerate a people; to implant among them ideas of order and of progress;... and too, leave as a trace of our passage, the memory of services rendered to civilization.²⁵

An aim such as this can not be condemned, but the means he desired to use must be decried. He advised:

Allow me to call your attention emphatically to one point; a state which is sunk in anarchy is not to be regenerated by parliamentary liberty. What is wanted in Mexico is a liberal dictatorship.²⁶

²⁵ Martin, 7.

²⁶ Corti, I, 260.

Again Napoleon was in error if he believed that Mexico desired a dictatorial monarchy. He was wrong if he thought a dictatorship would bring progress and order to the Mexican people. The Mexican people were of the same conviction, and proved the desire to shape their own destiny.

Finally, the last motive to be discussed is the religious influence on the intervention. This was not directly the affair of Napoleon III, but rather of the French empress, Eugenie. Spanish by birth, she naturally inherited the desire to spread the faith. The empress had dreams of the reconquest of Mexico in order to return it to the Church and save it from anarchy.²⁷ It is not surprising that the idea spread to her husband since it is well known that she was often his inspiration even in state affairs. And championing the faith was in accordance with the other reasons for intervention. Napoleon says that "his mind often dwelt on the manifold advantages that France would sometime gain if she could set up a Catholic and Latin monarchy that would halt the Protestant and Anglo-Saxon republic to the north."²⁸

This then summarizes the origins of the French intervention in Mexico: a variety of political considerations, plus an assortment of romantic social, cultural, and religious ideas, plus the materialistic consideration of economics. The Emperor was dreaming his old dream of

²⁷ Aubry, 290.

²⁸ Ibid., 289.

a Canale Napoleone. The Spanish Empress was seeing herself as a modern Isabella. Thus the whole affair was a complication of objectives which became even more complicated when the French found themselves victorious. It was necessary then to set up the monarchy they thought so important to Mexico. And when the choice fell on Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian of Austria, another man with personal ambition entered into the drama of imperialism in Mexico. This story would not be complete without discussing the effect of Maximilian's personal ambition and political activities on the intervention.

The Archduke was the second son of the Archduke Charles and the Archduchess Sophie, and was born on July 6, 1832, at the palace of Schonbrunn near Vienna. His brother, Francis Joseph, two years his elder, succeeded to the throne of Austria. Hence Maximilian was a Hapsburg without a throne, but not a Hapsburg without ambition. He was enthused with the idea of rejuvenating his house.²⁹

Thus, evidence of his imperialistic nature can be seen in his exclamation upon first catching sight of the American coast while on an expedition to Brazil. He wrote:

Man is interested in what is distant and unknown, and when he divines that there is life on some distant point, it draws him to it....It seems to me like a fairy-tale that I am the first scion of the blood of Ferdinand and Isabella the object of whose life has been from childhood upwards to set foot upon a continent which has acquired such gigantic significance in the history of mankind.³⁰

²⁹ Corti, I, 114.

³⁰ Ibid., 90.

In the succeeding years, Maximilian continued his travels and studies until he was offered the leadership of Mexico. The thought of a throne intrigued him. He succumbed to the idea. On April 10, 1864, Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian of Austria became Emperor Maximilian I of Mexico. Crowned with him was his wife Carlotta. A few days later the Emperor and Empress left their estate at Miramar for their unknown Empire of Mexico. Perhaps Maximilian recalled the day he had visited the royal tombs in Granada - those of Ferdinand and Isabella, the Spanish Hapsburgs - when his emotions were aroused by the glories of his royal house. On seeing the royal insignia of Ferdinand, Max had commented:

Proudly, longingly, and yet sadly, I grasped the golden circlet, and the once mighty sword. What a lovely glittering dream for a nephew of the Spanish Hapsburgs to wield the latter in order to win the former.³¹

The nephew had taken the first step. The Hapsburgs had another throne. A six weeks voyage to Mexico allowed much time for Maximilian to dream of his new Empire. He must have felt a close affinity with the great conqueror, Cortez, who had made great dreams come true. The American continent was the objective of this nineteenth-century Cortez. For in his ambitious plans was the idea of a great double Hapsburg empire to be comprised of Brazil and Mexico. Once this grand idea became a fact, the Western Hemisphere would be carved into three areas: the United

³¹ Ibid., 47.

States would be the dominant power in the north; Mexico would control the middle, up to and including Panama; and Brazil would assert its supremacy in South America.³² It was the wild dream of an imperialist. But Maximilian wrote on this thought:

Owing to the pressure of contemporary conditions the pristine glory of our house has become dimmed; while the Coburgs gain throne after throne, and spread their growing power abroad over the whole earth, our family has in quite recent times lost two sovereignties. None sees more clearly than I that it is the duty of our house to wipe out this stain; and so I cannot fail to see what an impression would be made upon the world, and above all upon enfeebled Austria, if the proposition in question (the proposed marriage of Archduke Ludwig Viktor to the daughter of Dom Pedro of Brazil, who had no male heirs) were carried into effect. I was the first warmly to advocate a Brazilian marriage in this connexion.³³

The attempt for the double Hapsburg empire was made, but it failed, only because the obstinate brother Hapsburg, Ludwig Viktor, refused the proposal. He preferred comfort to ambition.

Maximilian did not give up his imperialistic dreams when his brother refused to become part of the quixotic plan to divide up the Western Hemisphere. Instead, he went ahead with ideas of extending his own empire even before he had secured a strong foundation for his wobbly throne. His idea was to move the borders of Mexico southward. In order to put this plan into operation, he sent Count Ollivier Resseguier, an Austrian confidant of his,

³² Ibid., facing 400.

³³ Ibid., 115.

to Guatemala. There the messenger informed the French consul general that "there was an idea of annexing Central America to the Empire of Mexico in the more or less remote future."³⁴ All this business of building up the power of the Hapsburgs and extending the borders of the new-found Empire no doubt was a cause for discord between Napoleon and Maximilian. Conditions in Mexico itself argued against the idea of going on an imperialistic rampage. And besides, Napoleon III certainly did not desire to become an instrument for raising the Hapsburgs to their former glory.

Then too, there was another annoying element in regard to Maximilian. Napoleon had hoped to have a puppet-emperor in Mexico. Maximilian knew this before he accepted the crown. He wrote:

In my opinion the Emperor wants to be master in Mexico, without directly seeming so in the eyes of Europe. To this end he proposes a prince upon whose entire devotion he thinks he can reckon, and whom he can in any case keep under constant pressure, owing to the fact that he will find in France the sole support of his throne.³⁵

But Maximilian did not foster the idea. His exaggerated liberalism did little to achieve the goals of Napoleon III's enterprise. If it was a Latin and Catholic monarchy that Napoleon III desired in order to combat the spread of Protestantism and republicanism, he must have felt his cause fade when Maximilian wrote:

³⁴ Corti, II, 444.

³⁵ Corti, I, 158.

This continent is very progressive in a political sense, more so by far than European states with their exaggerated self-esteem. What we know in the Old World as mandarinism with all its ridiculous bathos, is utterly incongruous here. All the stilted trumpery with which we so stupidly encumber ourselves in Europe, and shall continue encumbering ourselves for centuries, has been discarded over here.³⁶

Perhaps this was enough for Napoleon to lose confidence in his royal protege, but there was even more to make him skeptical. In the sudden rush on the part of Mexicans to assume nobility, Maximilian said, somewhat annoyed, "These gentlemen seem to believe that the blood of the nobility is blue, and forget that much noble blood ran during the French Revolution and that it was as red as that of the lowest plebeian."³⁷

Reflections such as these must have disheartened Napoleon III. Maximilian had become contaminated with a political disease. In fact, he even leaned toward the support of the liberal faction in Mexico which the French had come to destroy. Blasio writes that:

There was discontent among the conservatives (the original supporters of the Empire) for the Emperor himself, while realizing that there were excellent men among them, leaned toward the liberals, as he regarded the party as progressive and with a political future.³⁸

So then, Maximilian had seemingly changed political horses in the middle of the stream. This swing to the liberal side and its result is even more apparent in another com-

³⁶ Bertita Harding, Phantom Crown, 155.

³⁷ José Luis Blasio, Memoirs, 27.

³⁸ Ibid., 43.

ment of Maximilian's secretary:

It was the Emperor's great illusion that if he could talk to Juarez he could attract him to his cause, make him his ranking minister, and aided by him, and freed of the intervention of the French, he could govern the Empire wisely and inaugurate for Mexico, in its entirety, an era of peace, progress, and well being.³⁹

In other words, French intervention had become obnoxious. But Maximilian was not alone in being annoyed by the state of affairs in Mexico. His own exaggerated liberalism was not in accord with Napoleon III's political policy; and the Mexican Emperor's religious policy was also working against one of the very reasons why Napoleon III had sent his forces to Mexico - to help the Catholic Church. Instead of being sympathetic to the cries of the clergy in Mexico, the Hapsburg Emperor upheld the nationalization of church property and the secularization of church rights. This alone was embarrassing to the French Emperor, and even more so when his protege became actually antagonistic to the Church. Tired of clerical interference and demands, Maximilian wrote to the Pope by way of his Minister of Religious Affairs:

Maximilian, citizen and member of the Christian Church, bows in submission to the spiritual authority of the Father of the faithful; but, Maximilian, emperor and representative of the Mexican sovereignty, recognizes no power upon the earth superior to his own.⁴⁰

Now, Napoleon III decided to withdraw from Mexico. Again the question, "Why?" is controversial. Undoubtedly the most widely accepted interpretation of this question

³⁹ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁰ Martin, 261.

is a study made by C. A. Duniway entitled Reasons for the Withdrawal of the French from Mexico.⁴¹ His conclusion is that there were four considerations for the withdrawal, i.e., the actual conditions in Mexico, the demands of French domestic politics, the increasing complications in European relations, and the attitude of the United States towards Napoleon's policy in Mexico. It is not the purpose of this paper to substantiate each of the above points. However, there has been wide interpretation on the subject and some of the works are worth mentioning. Lally, in a work already cited in this paper, is opposed to the idea that French domestic politics were a cause for the withdrawal. In a recent work entitled James Watson Webb and French Withdrawal from Mexico,⁴² the author, McCormack, supports the idea that the threat of the United States after the Civil War was the real reason for the evacuation of French forces. But opposition to this idea is found in Duniway's work.

Nevertheless, there seems to be another possible reason for withdrawal of French forces. It too, is a matter of interpretation, but seems substantiated somewhat by the following considerations of Maximilian's apparent desertion of Napoleon III's policy. First, there can be no doubt that Maximilian's religious policy ran counter to that of

⁴¹ See C.A.Duniway, "Reasons for the Withdrawal of the French from Mexico," in the Reports of the American Historical Association, 1902, Vol. I.

⁴² See Richard McCormack, "James Watson Webb and French Withdrawal from Mexico," in the Hispanic Historical Review, XXXI, (May, 1951), 274-286.

Napoleon III; secondly, Maximilian's attempts to further the imperialistic ambitions of the Hapsburg house were not approved by Napoleon; and thirdly, the liberalism of Maximilian seemed to threaten monarchical prestige. In other words, Maximilian had upset the Bonapartist apple-cart with his ambitious policies, and this left Napoleon III no other choice than to pick up the pieces and go home.

Whatever the cause may be, the French withdrew from Mexico. When the French military might took to its ships, the liberal forces swarmed across Mexico from their guerrilla hideouts. Within a short time Maximilian found himself threatened in every direction. The monarchists began to leave for extended vacations to Europe. But Maximilian, idealist and imperialist, decided to remain with his followers. He changed his crown for a morion and took to the field with the Empire's forces. Querétaro, a city which Juarez had once passed by in retreat as indefensible, was chosen for the defense of the monarchy. It was there that the Second Empire of Mexico came to an end. Defeated, Maximilian was taken prisoner. On June 19, 1867, Maximilian, deposed Emperor without title, faced a firing squad and died on a lonely hill outside of the city of Querétaro in his beloved Mexico. It was the final act in the historic drama of foreign intervention in Mexico.

In conclusion it might be asked what the significance of foreign intervention in Mexico was. The answer must include at least four main points.

First, Napoleon's position was weakened at home and in foreign relations. This conclusion is, of course, open to criticism. But the evident failure of French policy in Mexico must have weakened, at least, Napoleon's domestic support, and opened the eyes of Europe to the imperialistic designs of France. Whether or not it was responsible for the ruin, invasion, and dismemberment of France is, of course, questionable.

Secondly, the Emperor of the French lost prestige in the eyes of the Catholics. This assertion seems very likely because of his failure to convince his protege in Mexico to modify his religious program. And too, his withdrawal meant the return of Juarez and the anti-Catholic legislation.

Thirdly, the failure resulted in the increased dominance of the Anglo-Saxons in the Western Hemisphere. The gamble to regain the lost French empire in North America had failed. In fact Napoleon III discouragely remarked, "that England and the United States were the only people qualified to govern colonies...(and) he announced his determination to get rid of the French Colonial system altogether, instead of desiring to extend it."⁴³ Of course, this is to be taken with a grain of salt. Nevertheless, history has proved that the Americans and British assumed the supremacy in trade throughout Central America and Mexico after the intervention.

⁴³ McCormack, 282.

Lastly, the attempt and failure of European imperialism had welded Mexico into a somewhat united national republic. It proved the strength of the American ideal of republicanism in its victory over European imperialism.

Historically, the drama of the intervention in Mexico is significant because it is the intermedium between the old benevolent imperialism and the new materialistic imperialism. It is one of the object lessons of history, which makes history what Nevins so aptly sees it as -- "the sextant and compass"⁴⁴ for the nations of the world.

⁴⁴ Allan Nevins, The Gateway to History, 3.

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