

**THE QUICK-STEP OF AN  
EMPEROR: MAXIMILIAN  
OF MEXICO**

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The quick-step of an Emperor: Maximilian of Mexico by George P. Messervy

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BY  
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## PREFACE

AMONG the great political tragedies that have been enacted in the Western Hemisphere, the career of the Austrian Archduke Maximilian ranks second only to that of President Lincoln. Upon his brief but fateful adventure in Mexico hung momentous issues. It involved the political destinies of a great and populous nation. It was bound up with the hopes of the Roman Catholic Church. It brought about the stricter definition and the more practical application of the Monroe doctrine than any other event. Moreover, apart altogether from the importance of these great political, religious and social questions, the personality of the man in whose career they were focused has an independent and absorbing interest.

Not infrequently misrepresentation prejudices the general estimate of a man who has played a prominent part in the world's affairs, and many years elapse before the actual character, motives and actions of a leader in a great movement become fully known. Such has been the case with Maximilian of Mexico. It has been the writer's aim to correct this misrepresentation and

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to attempt to arrive at a truer estimate of Maximilian's life than that which has hitherto prevailed.

The scope of the present work is that neither of a history nor yet of a historical novel. While observing a strict regard for well-authenticated fact, the writer has principally endeavoured to present a fresh and living portrait of the Emperor as a man. With this end in view, much of the conversation of Maximilian and his expressions of opinion, recorded in the following pages, have been taken bodily from his own writings or from documents of the highest authority recently obtained by the writer in Mexico. It is hoped that thereby certain characteristics have been revealed which will help to explain his motives and actions.

There is a current idea that Maximilian was at the same time an adventurer and a weakling. The writer has shown him to have been a man of more than average ability, of trained faculties, inspired by the highest ideals, political, religious and humanitarian. Unfortunate he was without doubt. Only a certain blindness to well-known tendencies of liberal religious thought in Mexico can explain his acceptance of so difficult a mission. But he was the dupe of a band of desperate conspirators within the Church of Rome. Louis

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Napoleon also used him as a tool for the accomplishment of his own purposes. National interests and the extension of the Roman Church in the Western Hemisphere were alike involved in this amazing enterprise, which proved to be the grave of so many hopes and ambitions.

Maximilian was selected as a Roman Catholic Bourbon prince to rule over a newly created empire. His power rested almost entirely upon the army of Napoleon III., which remained in occupation of the country after the English and Spanish forces had been withdrawn. To the last the French were regarded by both ally and foe alike in the light of invaders and conquerors.

Previous to Maximilian's acceptance of the throne, the people of Mexico had been assured of the establishment of religious toleration, the confiscation of ecclesiastical property (amounting to a third of the productive land of Mexico), the abolition of all religious orders and the institution of civil marriage. After his accession, the Mexican clergy proclaimed that he was pledged to the Holy See to restore the confiscated property of the Church. Marshal Bazaine, however, who commanded the French army of occupation, enforced the maintenance of all *bona-fide* transactions in clerical property, while compelling the revision of such contracts as

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might be proved to be fraudulent, and advocated a *concordat* securing State support for the clergy.

Maximilian had the qualities of a ruler. Possessed of grand conceptions of empire, he hoped to establish the military and naval strength of the country, to put the national finances upon a sound basis and to raise the standard of education and enlightenment among the people. He was, however, neither a constructive statesman nor a great military organiser or leader. He was eminently imbued with the sense of justice, progress and political order, and he was animated by a genuine religious fervour; but the task of governing a people without racial unity or any other cohesive bond was that for a Cæsar—a man with a creative intellect and a relentless iron hand. For this task Maximilian proved unequal, and his condemnation to death as an enemy of the Republic of Mexico set the seal of failure and tragedy upon his career.

It has been thought that the true conquest of Mexico was achieved by the spread of modern material progress and civilisation. But the overthrow of Porfirio Diaz and the following events have proved the undiminished strength of barbaric Mexico. Looking upon the condition of anarchy now prevailing in the country, it seems probable that if Maximilian had been allowed by the

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United States to reign and had succeeded in carrying out his intentions there would have been a stable government and a prosperous people in Mexico to-day.

It is furthermore believed that the insistence upon the Monroe doctrine in 1866 worked against the advancement of civilisation in Mexico. Mexico civilised and ordered with productiveness like Canada would be a more desirable neighbour than Mexico the International nuisance.

In respect to the Monroe doctrine the United States may be likened to an enterprising man carrying a powerful hand weapon which is likely to get him into more trouble than it will get him out of.