

# IMPERATOR MEXICANORUM



*The Brief, Quixotic, and Turbulent Reign of the  
Emperor Maximilian of Mexico  
(1864-1867)*

## Cover Page:

*The last known photograph of the Emperor Maximilian, taken on May 2, 1867, shows him proudly wearing the Decoration for Military Merit bestowed upon him by his own troops on March 13, during the Siege of Querétaro.*

### **Imperator Mexicanorum: The Brief, Quixotic, and Turbulent Reign of the Emperor Maximilian of Mexico (1864-1867)**

*“Yo sé que en México no habrá Patria, mientras los niños a la escuela no aprendan a derramar una lágrima de gratitud por el hombre que dejó en Europa el lujo y la gloria, para venir a la América a morir en defensa de la cultura latina amenazada.”*

– José Vasconcelos

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there lived a handsome prince and a beautiful princess, both of whom were members of the most eminent royal families of Europe, and who made their home together in a delightful white castle perched on the sun-drenched shores of the the Adriatic coast of Italy. Although fate seemed to have granted them all that life had to offer during this storm-tossed century, both their lives would be irreparably broken before either had reached the age of thirty-five, one dying before an execution squad on a deserted hill outside Querétaro, Mexico, the other living out her days as a madwoman in a secluded Belgian castle.

Although the above description may be redolent of a fairy tale crafted by the Brothers Grimm, its two central figures were very real, and are known to history as the Emperor Maximilian of Mexico (1832-1867), and his wife, the Empress Charlotte (1840-1927). Their tragic story has inspired novels, plays, films, and even an opera, but perhaps the greatest tragedy of all was the failure of their vision for Mexico, which they came to govern, and eventually to love, in the mid-1860s. With the military and financial

backing of the Emperor Napoléon III of France (1808-1873), they had been invited by leading Mexican conservative politicians to exchange their roles as Archduke and Archduchess of the Hapsburg Empire for the throne of Mexico, where they reigned as Emperor and Empress from 1864 to 1867.

### **The Choice of the Mexican Conservatives**

Maximilian had been called to the throne by a group of Mexican Conservatives, who saw in him a last chance to restore dignity and stability to the fractured nation, long wracked by civil war, foreign military intervention, and internecine strife. Indeed, as stated in the official declaration of their offer of the Crown of the Empire of Mexico, dated July 10, 1863, the “Group of Notables” declared, “[T]he monarchical institution is the sole that is adaptable for Mexico, especially in the current circumstances, because it combines in itself order with liberty, and force with the most strict justification thereof.” Furthermore, as stated in the selfsame declaration, the Notables saw in Maximilian an “offspring of royal descent most distinguished for his virtues, his extensive knowledge, his elevated intelligence, and his special gift for governance.” With such faith in his innate qualities as a man, and as a potential monarch, it is no wonder that the Conservatives placed their most fervent hopes in the young archduke as the savior of the Mexican nation, descending as he did from such an illustrious and prosperous European dynasty as the Hapsburgs.

Writing on precisely *why* Maximilian was chosen from among so many possible

candidates, the exiled Conservative statesman José Manuel Hidalgo commented, “To select a prince from any of the Interventionist nations would have been impolitic; this springs to mind immediately.” Furthermore, wrote Hidalgo, “The most natural, the most agreeable, the most certain course, was to turn one's view backward, and to remember the Plan of Iguala, proclaimed by Iturbide, in which was called to the throne, among others, an archduke of the House of Austria.” Clearly, even during the early decades of Mexico's struggle for independence, serious thought had been given to the possibility of offering the imperial throne to a member of the Hapsburg dynasty. Thus it was that Maximilian was a sage choice in many different respects, not the least of which was his imperial descent.

“The name of the Archduke Maximilian presented itself naturally in this connection,” continued Hidalgo, “as he had acquired a certain popularity in Europe for his progressive ideas, and for [his] tendencies during the time that he governed Lombardy and Venetia.” Hidalgo, like many other Mexican leaders of his time and political inclinations, saw the young archduke's time as Viceroy of Lombardy and Venetia as a training period of sorts, one that had equipped him to go on to greater and more extensive responsibilities elsewhere in the world.

One legal and personal hurdle remained, however: that of Maximilian's renunciation of his hereditary right to his position in the hierarchy of the Hapsburg imperial family. After much legal and familial wrangling, the archduke was at last persuaded to affix his

signature to the so-called “family pact” that stripped him of all of his dynastic entitlements and privileges within the House of Austria.

In this document, dated April 9, 1864, it was declared that “His Illustrious Highness the Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian renounces for his august person, and in the name of his descendents, the succession to the Crown in the Empire of Austria.” Article Four of this not-so-familial document further states, “His Imperial Highness declares, in addition, that he renounces for himself and for his descendents, masculine or feminine, all the rights and pretensions which appertain to them, or may appertain to them, by virtue of descent, of birth, or by use or custom, to the private fortune, present and future, movable or immovable, of the Illustrious Archducal House.” Hardly words composed in a spirit of tender familial solicitude or fraternal concern, but such was the price demanded by his elder brother, Emperor Franz Joseph, for Maximilian's accession to the throne of the Empire of Mexico. Having signed away all of his imperial rights and privileges, the way ahead was clear, and for the idealistic archduke and his attractive young wife, there could simply be no question of going back.

Although both foreigners, and essentially supported by a French army of occupation, the plans and dreams of Maximilian and Charlotte for Mexico were fundamentally good ones. Maximilian, suspected by many (including Napoléon III) to be the child of the Duke of Reichstadt (only legitimate son and heir of Napoléon I), told the Conservative delegation sent to offer him the Crown of the Mexican Empire at his

Castle of Miramar in Italy that he would devote himself “heart and soul to work for the freedom, prosperity, and greatness of Mexico,” despite the many challenges and obstacles that lay in the way. Mexico, much like the United States (which was embroiled in its own bloody Civil War from 1861 to 1865), was the scene of intense internal conflict and insecurity, with the *conservadores* (who envisioned a Catholic constitutional monarch as the solution to the country's problems) pitted against the *juaristi*, followers of the great reformer, Benito Juárez (who sought to create an independent democratic republic). It was into this maelstrom of ambition, instability, and bloodshed that the imperial couple first set foot on May 28, 1864, at Vera Cruz, with a sizable retinue of European followers, and with the very best of intentions.

They were soon to learn, however, that good intentions were only a small part of what was actually required to lead Mexico into a period of unity, prosperity, and greatness. Although initially backed by the *conservadores*, Maximilian and Charlotte were both possessed of an essentially liberal and idealistic outlook, and soon went about trying to establish a humane constitutional monarchy in the country. Although both were devoted Catholic believers themselves, they also recognized the needs and rights of the indigenous population, thereby alienating the greedy and reactionary clergy of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the *terratenientes* and *hacendados* of the vast farms, ranches, and estates of the countryside, all of whom had long enjoyed quasi-feudal privileges over the millions of poor Mexicans who labored for them.

Pressured at the same time by the financial and political demands of the Second French Empire (1852-1870), which expected to be well-paid for its support of the nascent Mexican Empire, as well as by the increasingly hostile attitude of its northern neighbor, the United States, whose Civil War had ended in 1865 with the reunification of the country under the control of the triumphant and expansionist Northern states, the government of the Mexican Empire quickly careened toward failure and collapse, despite the forward-thinking policies of its young monarchs.

What shines out from this story, however, is the personal courage and perseverance of its two central figures, Maximilian and Charlotte. Despite the difficult and often precarious nature of their circumstances, both did their very best to try to improve the living conditions of the Mexican people, and to put the country's government on a firm and equitable footing for all. Maximilian ratified the liberalizing laws of the Reforma instituted by Juárez, declared freedom of worship, and refused to order the return of the ecclesiastical holdings that had been sold to private owners after Mexican independence had been achieved. This, of course, quickly earned him the enmity of the Roman Catholic Church, the French Empire, and the elite classes of the fledgling Mexican Empire itself, to say nothing of the understandable opposition that he faced from the *juaristi*, who regarded the imperial couple as nothing more than foreign interlopers. Nevertheless, they persisted in believing that theirs was a just cause, and that divine providence had granted them the power that they exercised in the deeply-divided nation.

## **The Opposition of the Catholic Establishment**

One of the chief difficulties that faced Maximilian as he and his wife struggled for the betterment of the Mexican Empire was the bitter opposition and frequently ill-disguised hostility of the upper echelons of the Mexican clergy, who found the imperial couple's support for the land reforms enacted under Juárez to be infuriating and contrary to the conservative principles of those who had engineered Maximilian's ascent to the throne. Writing directly to the Emperor on October 18, 1864, Pope Pius IX informed him, "We are sending our representative, so that he might confirm in *viva voce* the pain that has been caused to us by the sad news which as of this date has been sent to Us." Furthermore, continued the Pope, "We have also charged [our representative] with the task of begging of Your Majesty, in Our name, for the revocation of the harmful laws which for some time have oppressed this Church.... [as well as the] complete and fervently desired reorganization of ecclesiastical matters." Pius' supplications, however, were to be in vain, for not only did Maximilian continue to support the reformist policies of the Constitution of 1857, but he was to go even further in his zeal to create a modern, liberal, diverse, and fundamentally utopian state. Where once there had stood the quasi-feudal monolith of inequality and limited horizons that had existed since 1521, both under the Vice-Royalty of New Spain, and under the various Mexican governments that had succeeded since the final overthrow of the Spanish hegemony in 1821, Maximilian sought to forge a state that would offer opportunities to citizens of all ethnic, socio-economic, and religious backgrounds.



In a letter of December 8, 1864, the Empress Charlotte wrote to the Empress Eugénie of France, “The nationalization of the property of the clergy will produce an immense enthusiasm, and will fill the coffers of the State, as buying for nothing the properties remaining unsold, which are worth much, and to sell them subsequently, will make for a magnificent business.” Thus, even the Empress Charlotte herself, raised as she was in the observant royal Catholic household of the King of the Belgians, was cognizant of the necessity for land reform, and for inspired and visionary policies with regard to the welfare of the millions of peons and landless indigenous workers who had theretofore labored in semi-servitude at the very bottom of the Mexican social pyramid.

On December 26, 1864, the Emperor Maximilian proposed the following points to the papal nuncio, Pedro Francisco Meglia:

1. *The Mexican government will tolerate all religious observances that were [formerly] prohibited by the laws of the country, but concedes its special protection to the Roman Catholic and Apostolic religion.*
2. *The public treasury will provide for the costs of [Catholic] religious observances, and will pay its ministers, in the same way, in the same proportion, and under the same title as the other civil servants of the State.*
3. *The religious ministers will administer the sacraments free of charge, without requiring that the faithful should be obliged to pay retributions, dispensaries, tithes, premiums, etc.*

4. *The Church will cede to the government all rents proceeding from ecclesiastical properties, which were declared nationalized during the Republic.*
5. *The Emperor Maximilian and his successors to the throne will enjoy “in perpetuum,” with respect to the Mexican Church, rights equivalent to those granted to the Kings of Spain with respect to the Church of America.*
6. *The Holy Father, in agreement with the Emperor, will determine which of the religious orders extinguished during the Republic must be restored, specifying in what manner they shall subsist, and under what conditions.*

*The religious communities that exist in fact at present may continue to subsist, but with the prohibition of receiving novices, until the Holy Father, in agreement with the Emperor, has specified their modalities and conditions of existence.*

7. *[Jurisdiction of the clergy]*
8. *In those places which he judges to be suitable, the Emperor will charge Catholic priests with the [maintenance of the] civil register of births, marriages, and deaths; [they] must undertake this commission as functionaries of the civil order.*
9. *[Commentaries]*

Such a bold and far-reaching statement of intent could not help but alarm and anger the Catholic authorities in Mexico, and prompted a crisp reply from the papal nuncio, Monsignor Meglia, directed to Escudero, one of the Ministers of His Majesty's Cabinet:

“The letter of His Majesty the Emperor, published in the official periodical of the 27<sup>th</sup>, relative to the question pending between the Holy See and the Mexican government, that His Majesty proposes to regulate without the participation of the authority of the Church, places me in the sad necessity of directing to Your Excellency this note to protest against His unjust and injurious expressions toward the Sovereign Pontiff and His government...”

Indeed, this constituted but the opening salvo of a communication that was aimed squarely at putting the imperial newcomer in his place. “The Imperial Government having presented to me a project of nine points, contrary to the doctrine, to the discipline of the Church that is currently in place, and to the sacred canon laws, a project which tends to the despoliation of all the goods of the Church, of its jurisdiction, [and] of its immunities, will make of it in all matters dependent and enslaved to the civil power, all of this condemned by the Roman Pontiff in two consistorial addresses of 1856 and 1861. I have openly objected that I hold no instructions to treat on bases so inadmissible, and I have given proof in a definitive manner that the Holy Father has not been able to give me instructions [in these matters].” In addition, the nuncio accused the Mexican government of having tried to hide its intentions: “ If, then, the Imperial government has kept secret until the last moment this deplorable project, how can it be surprised that the Nuncio of the Holy See holds no instructions in this respect?” It would seem that the Catholic establishment had seriously misjudged the fundamental intentions and imperial

initiative of a young ruler whom it had theretofore considered to be one of its own. As the weeks, months, and years rolled forward, this *mésentente* was only to worsen, with an enormous gulf eventually opening between Maximilian's view of his prerogatives and obligations as a progressive monarch, and the intransigent insistence of the Church on the maintenance and strengthening of its countless and time-honored traditions, practices, and entitlements.

Perhaps even more forward-thinking than her Hapsburg husband was the Belgian-born Empress Charlotte, despite (or perhaps because of) her austere Catholic upbringing. In a letter to the Empress Eugénie of France, Charlotte poured out her bitterness at the papal nuncio's resistance to the imperial couple's designs for the Mexican church. "We were truly troubled, I tell you," she writes,

*because of the Nuncio, and I must confess that my political sense has failed completely, and that Your Majesty was right... Because he [Meglia] is an obtuse brain, a blind man, an obstinate man according to all proof, who claims to maintain that the country, which was completely filled with rage against the theocracy, desired that the property of the clergy should be returned to it. As if at mid-day there should come someone who tells us that it is night!*

These two convinced liberals, Maximilian and Charlotte, clearly found it nearly impossible to conceive that anyone could reasonably object to their projects for the

strengthening and expansion of the civil authority in Mexico, or to the sale and distribution of Church lands and properties to the millions of formerly landless indigenous serfs. For his part, however, the Secretary of State of the Holy See, in a letter to the Mexican government, eloquently expressed the sentiments of the Holy Father with regard to these matters:

*His Holiness believes firmly that to return peace to people's minds; to calm the inquietude of people's consciences; to assure the prosperity of the Church; to consolidate, at last, the very civil order, it is indispensable in every point that the two powers should come to a complete state of agreement, and that the civil authority, respecting the authority of the Church, will receive from Her a sure and powerful support.*

Nevertheless, the Emperor failed to see things quite as the ecclesiastical authorities would have liked. Further proof of this fact is his decree of January 7, 1865:

*To fix the form in which Bulls, Briefs, Rescripts, and Dispatches from the Court of Rome must receive sanction through the political organization which today obtains in the nation:*

*We have decreed and decree the following:*

- 1. Being in force in the Empire those Laws and decrees promulgated before and since Independence, regarding passage of Bulls, Briefs, Rescripts and*

*Dispatches of the Court of Rome:*

2. *Briefs, Bulls, Rescripts and Dispatches will be presented to Us by Our Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Negotiations, to obtain their respective passages.*

*This decree will be deposited in the Archives of the Empire, and will be published in the official periodical [i.e., the Diario del Imperio].”*

Thus it was that, notwithstanding clear and potent signals from Rome with regard to the determination of the Church to fight for the maintenance of its ancient (and lucrative) prerogatives, the Emperor of Mexico and his consort persisted in their plans to establish an independent state that was beholden to no outside power in the conduct of its affairs, the chief principle of which was enshrined in the motto emblazoned beneath the Arms of the Empire, *EQUIDAD EN LA JUSTICIA* (“Equity in Justice”). That their state was largely the result of Mexican conservative collusion with a French army of occupation may have been an inconvenient truth for the two European-born monarchs, but nonetheless, neither one was particularly blithe to see yet another sphere of outside influence (in this case the retrogressive one of the Roman Catholic Church) gain an increased hold on the minds, consciences, and pocketbooks of the impoverished Mexican peasantry.

Matters were by no means settled by the Emperor's further provocations, however, and on March 9, 1865, an official of the Roman Curia, Cardinal Antonelli, wrote directly to

the Emperor, and in very firm language:

*The letter of His Majesty Maximilian, of December 27, caused the most painful surprise to all Catholic hearts, and made the Holy Father weep tears of bitterness and profound pain...*

*The Mexican nation considered that it was one of its great glories to have never admitted any religion other than the true one, and the story of these last times shows us most eloquently what have been the results of the many attempts made by the enemies of the Church to introduce in Mexico the law on religious practices...*

*Taking up now the question of the properties of the Church, all principles of justice demand that the ecclesiastical patrimony and the rights that refer to the same, be respected and guaranteed by the civil power. We ask for the sustenance of the poor, we call for, in fact, the interests of social order, because this order is seriously threatened wherever there is authorized the despoliation of the property of others.*

*I feel it my duty to declare that the current dynasty of the new empire cannot, in any way, succeed to the enjoyment of the privileges exclusively granted to the dynasty of Castille and Leon, without obtaining a new and special concession from the Holy See, and with respect to the inherent abuse exercised in other times by the Crown of Spain, any such act of the new sovereign of Mexico will be a true usurpation, as unjust as it is censurable.*

Such lines of demarcation having clearly been drawn, the outcome of subsequent

appeals to the Holy See in its hour of need by the shrinking and embattled Mexican Empire were not surprisingly to meet with absolute and unwavering refusals to provide any species of aid or support whatsoever. As with the Conservative politicians, Maximilian and Charlotte had also managed to alienate and offend the Catholic establishment with their progressive and uncompromising approach.

### **The Betrayal by Napoléon III**

Equally firm in his determination to distance himself from the Mexican quagmire that he had largely engineered was “Napoléon le Petit” (as Victor Hugo called him), who found himself compelled to address his fellow monarch, Maximilian, on New Year's Day, 1866, “I write to Your Majesty not without a painful sentiment, as I feel myself obliged to make you aware of the determination that I believe to be necessary in view of the continuation of the difficulties that the Mexican question raises for me.”

Knowing full well that he was now abandoning the man he had personally helped recruit to occupy the Mexican throne, Napoléon still could not resist a disingenuous exculpatory maneuver: “I believe that your throne will reaffirm itself; although the departure of our troops may signify a momentary debilitation, it is certain as well that this will open the window to removing from the United States any pretext for intervention.” Thus was the conscience of the imperial Judas somewhat assuaged by the notion, pretended or not, that his one-time protégé was now set to spread his wings on his own, and to fly to new heights, albeit without much-needed French support.



In his public announcement of the troops' withdrawal, made to the French Senate on January 22, 1866, Emperor Napoléon III boldly (and inaccurately) declared, “ The government founded by the will of the people of Mexico is consolidating itself. The dissidents are defeated and dispersed, and no longer have a leader.” This, of course, could not have been further from the truth, but with growing threats from the nascent German empire in Europe, the third imperial Bonaparte could no longer afford to waste men, money, and time in the fractious and faraway states of Mexico. Thus, the decision was made to withdraw French troops as quickly and as expeditiously as possible, leaving only an empty shell of French advisers to prop up the tottering edifice of imperial Mexican authority.

When all seemed lost, and this premature withdrawal of French troops threatened to leave their empire increasingly defenseless against its many enemies, Empress Charlotte crossed the Atlantic to plead with both Napoléon III, and with his wife, the Empress Eugénie, as well as with Pope Pius IX, to provide some sort of meaningful aid to her beleaguered husband, whose sense of honor and duty forbade him to give up the throne he had assumed just two short years before.

Despite seemingly insuperable difficulties, however, Charlotte's support of her husband's throne remained solid and steadfast. Indeed, when Maximilian's aides broached the possibility of abdication, in response to the continued deterioration of the situation within the Mexican Empire, his wife, in July of 1866, fired off a letter

meant to reignite his will to rule. “To abdicate,” she wrote,

*is to condemn oneself, to extend to oneself a certificate of incompetence, and this is alone admissible for the elderly or the imbecilic, it is not the modus operandi for a prince of thirty-four years of age, full of life and hope for the future... From the moment in which one accepts the destinies of a nation, one takes on its risks and dangers, and no one has the liberty to abandon them... Inasmuch as there shall be an Emperor here, there shall be an Empire, even if there should be only six feet of earth that belongs to it. The empire is nothing other than an Emperor. That one has no money is not a sufficient objection, as this can be obtained through credit, it is earned through success, and success can be conquered... All of this is not worthy of a prince of the House of Hapsburg... One does not abandon one's post in front of the enemy... [A]bdication was only invented when sovereigns forgot to mount their horses in days of danger...*

Sadly, however, and despite her brave words, it was during the course of this desperate voyage to Europe that the world first became aware of the cloud of madness that had begun to descend on the Empress, who raved intermittently of plots against her, as well as against her husband, Maximilian. What is more, her efforts to secure further support for the Mexican Empire were in vain, and this fact only served to drive her further into the shadowy realms of psychosis and paranoia. She was later taken in hand by her relatives, the royal family of Belgium, and was never to see her husband

again.

### **The Courage of a Hapsburg**

Meanwhile, in Mexico, the situation of the Emperor was becoming increasingly perilous, and he was soon obliged to retreat from his capital of Mexico City, and to establish a new seat for the Empire in the confines of Santiago de Querétaro, where he and his followers were to valiantly undergo an agonizing and protracted siege waged by the forces of the *juaristi*, under the command of the eminent Republican general Mariano Escobedo. On March 13, 1867, in recognition of his heroism, leadership, and personal courage during the course of the pitiless siege, Maximilian was presented with the Decoration for Military Merit (an award which he himself had created in 1865) by General Miguel Miramón, on behalf of his own imperial Mexican troops.

The last known photograph of the Emperor, taken on May 2, shows him in a sombrero and field uniform, supporting a naval telescope under his left arm, and proudly wearing the insignia of this coveted distinction, along with that of the Imperial Order of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and the Imperial Order of the Mexican Eagle. The Emperor was subsequently to send his Decoration for Military Merit to his mother as a remembrance, shortly before his execution on the outskirts of Querétaro; his cross of the Imperial Order of Guadalupe was later sent to his brother-in-law, King Leopold II of Belgium, with the same intention.

Eventually betrayed by one of his own officers, Colonel Miguel López, for a large sum

of money, Maximilian was forced to surrender to General Escobedo on May 15, 1867, and with his generals Tomás Mejía and Miguel Miramón, the Emperor was placed on trial for his life before a tribunal of the victorious Republican forces. He declined to appear in the *ad hoc* courtroom established in the Iturbide Theater for the conduct of the proceedings brought against him, and his triumphant captors wasted no time in pronouncing him and his generals guilty of various crimes against the Juárez-led Mexican Republican state.

Despite the pleas for leniency of several influential international figures, all of whom attempted to intercede with President Juárez (among them the French author Victor Hugo, the Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi, and Queen Victoria of Great Britain), all three men were sentenced to death by firing squad. On June 19, 1867, Maximilian stood before a fractured adobe wall on the Hill of the Bells outside Querétaro, accompanied by his loyal followers Mejía and Miramón. He had earlier commented to them, upon observing the beauty of the weather, “What a wonderful day! I have always wanted to die on a day like this.” After having distributed gold coins to the firing squad that was soon to take his life, the Emperor forcefully declared to the crowd assembled to witness his death, and that of his generals,

*... I hope that my blood, which is about to be shed, will bring peace to Mexico.*

*Viva México! Viva Independencia!*

Mejía and Miramón were executed directly after the Emperor, whose body was embalmed and eventually returned to Austria, where it lies today in the Imperial Crypt of the Monastery of the Capuchins in Vienna. The Empress Charlotte was to live for almost another sixty years as a madwoman, and was buried in a comparatively modest tomb in Belgium that identifies her as a princess, and as the widow of the Emperor of Mexico.

On June 18, 1867, the eve of his execution before the Republican firing squad, Maximilian composed a brief letter to President Juárez. Solicitous to the end for the welfare and happiness of his adopted country, he declared,

*On the point of suffering death for having wanted to prove that with new political institutions it was possible to put an end to the civil war which for so many years has afflicted this unfortunate country, I face with boldness the loss of my life, if this my sacrifice can contribute to the peace and prosperity of my new fatherland.*

Such were the thoughts of the last emperor of Mexico on the night before his death, a death that might well have been avoided had he been less courageous, or less determined to do his duty as he saw it, both as a monarch, and as a Hapsburg. It is this determination that ultimately stands as the clearest expression of his innate sense of chivalry, honor, and humanity.

Perhaps the most poignant element of this story, however, is the fact that both Maximilian and his Empress, Charlotte, were in search of essentially the same sorts of reforms and improvements for the benefit of the Mexican people as their arch-rival, President Juárez, himself a man of indigenous Zapotec background. Sadder still is the knowledge that Juárez was to exercise power all too briefly, dying in 1872, and that his early death paved the way for the autocratic control of the Mexican state by General Porfirio Díaz, whose proto-fascist dictatorship was to last until he was forcibly deposed in the wake of the revolutionary upheavals of 1910.

Thus, despite the fact that both were foreigners, and that their Empire was essentially a foreign creation, one cannot but help admire the courage and sense of duty of Maximilian and Charlotte. Notwithstanding the many dangers and hardships associated with their choice, they were willing to exchange a seemingly storybook existence in an Italian castle by the sea for the many cares of state in a turbulent and faraway land, and were ultimately to pay the highest possible price for their commitment to Mexico, the one with his blood, and the other with her sanity. Idealistic and flawed creatures though they might have been, they deserve to be remembered fondly and respectfully by their adopted homeland, and as the one-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Second Mexican Empire approaches, they should perhaps also be honored as patriots and visionaries by its present government, in recognition of their unselfish efforts to bring stability and progress to Mexico.

## **Epilogue**

Opinions on the reign of Maximilian, even after his execution in 1867, were deeply divided and frequently the cause of bitter dispute among various factions of the Mexican intelligentsia. What was never in doubt, however, was the Emperor's deep commitment, even unto death, to the cause of Mexican independence and political stability, as well as his belief (albeit an ill-founded one) in the power of his own personal sense of duty, nobility, and dedication to overcome patently impossible odds.

It is deeply touching to read the tributes of those of his enemies, like Hilarión Frías y Soto (1831-1905), who could openly admire Maximilian's sterling qualities, despite the fact that they stood on the opposite side of the political and philosophical divide in 19<sup>th</sup> century Mexican society. Frías y Soto, a native of Querétaro, actively fought against both the French Intervention and the Second Empire of Maximilian. Nevertheless, as a historian and thinker, he was able to see through to the heart of the Maximilian the man and, speaking of the repercussions of the Emperor's execution on the Hill of the Bells, boldly gave this judgment of the respective places of Maximilian and Napoléon III before the bar of history:

*Three years later, in September of 1870, Napoléon III surrendered to Wilhelm of Prussia [after the disastrous French defeat at Sedan], saying that he “placed his sword at the feet of His Majesty.”*

*What a difference between this miserable man, and the noble, the valiant*

*Maximilian!*

*Napoléon, who claimed to be the savior of the Latin race, and who had gambled away the honor of France in Italy and Mexico, delivered his country to the enemy, and took refuge as a prisoner in a Prussian country store, to thus escape from the anger of the French people.*

*History, when judging these two individuals, will always tender to Maximilian an epithet worthy of him, and a smile of disdain for Napoléon III, for this old Caesar who in the hour of danger flung to the ground the sword he had intended to brandish, having robbed it from the tomb of Bonaparte.*

*Mexico City, October 6, 1870.”*

Thus will be remembered two of the chief players in the brief and perilous drama that was the Second Mexican Empire, the one a youthful idealist, a utopian liberal, and an ill-fated imperial dreamer; the other a shameless opportunist, an unprincipled schemer, and a thoroughly unworthy scion of the House of Bonaparte. The former met a hero's end on the heights above Querétaro, hoping that his death would bring to an close the suffering of his adopted land; the latter slipped from life during an operation resulting from his overindulgence in the pleasures of the table, having previously eluded the wrath of the war-weary French people by ignominiously escaping incognito to England after abject disaster had embraced his countrymen.

– Sir Stewart Addington SAINT-DAVID, Bt., GCLR, PhD, MTS  
*Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Order of the Crested Crane of Rwanda*  
*Knight of the National Order of Merit of France*

**Profesor de Humanidades del Colegio Eton, SC**  
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