

THE MEANING OF MAY 5th

We will always remember with just pride this immortal date which recalls the glorious triumph of Mexico over the French army. First in the world of those times, the French army thought to conquer the country with the greatest of ease, and paid dearly for its audacity. What was the motive of such a scheme?

At that time, Mexico's reputation in the world was low because of its bad government officials. First, these officials advertised the riches of Mexico to the world. These descriptions attracted the interest of the great European powers. Then, these Mexican officials provided the excuse for foreign intervention by suspending temporarily the payment of debts contracted with England, France, and Spain. When Mexico did not pay, these countries demanded money or territory as a guarantee against future payment. The English was not interested in territory; they were interested in recovering their money. They did not care who recovered it for them. The dispute among the powers was over who should do the "recovering". The choice was between Spain and France. Spain, having lost Mexico early in the century, was the more determined to intervene. But Napoleon III of France saw in Mexico what he thought was an easy way to add lustre to the French arms. From intervention, he could come away with part of Mexico's national territory--Sonora and Lower California--where a French colony could be established. Further, he could establish a monarchical government in Mexico (he had noted the influence of some powerful Mexicans who desired a monarch and who would accept it very willingly).

Laurences, who commanded the French Army, arrived at Veracruz on March 5, 1862, and wrote to his government immediately, assuring it that the conquest of Mexico would be an easy thing.

The illustrious Benito Juárez dedicated himself to the defense of the country, and exhorted all Mexicans to forget any differences of opinion and unite in the common defense. He was a man in the right; he knew what to do and did what had to be done.

Spain and England withdrew from the intervention when they saw what was happening. Only France continued in the undertaking.

General don Ignacio Zaragoza was commandant of the Mexican forces. On May 5, 1862, a date never to be forgotten in Mexican history, the first real battle took place. The invader was humiliated and defeated. The battle immortalized the names of Zaragoza and his aides: Negrete, Berriozábal, Díaz, Méndez, Lamadrid, Escobedo, and Martínez. It was demonstrated in this encounter at Puebla that the invaders were not invincible. The Mexicans could, and did, defeat them!

Among those who wrote the glory of Puebla with their blood, courage, and fearlessness, were the Zacapoaztlas Indians. They repelled the French with hurricane force. The forts of Loreto and Guadalupe at Puebla remain as eternal and mute sentinels of the bravery of the Mexican soldier, who risked death to defend his country.

The French intervention lasted five years. The French "empire" fell on the 19th days of June, 1867. At 7:15 in the morning of that day, Maximilian, Miramón and Mejía were executed in the "Hill of the Bells" in Querétaro. These last two were Mexicans, traitors to their country.

Mexico, after a century and a half struggle for its liberty, has seen the dawn of a new, progressive country. Now, with its economy firmly established, with its tireless campaign against illiteracy, and with its prestige as a pacifist country, Mexico has won a place in the family of nations.

Indisputably, this place rests on the foundation laid by those who did not hesitate to offer the supreme gift of life itself on the altars of defense for their homeland and its cherished ideals, making as valid today and tomorrow---as it was yesterday---the immortal words of Juárez: "BETWEEN TWO INDIVIDUALS AS BETWEEN NATIONS, RESPECT FOR ANOTHER'S RIGHT IS PEACE!"

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