

Near Oaxaca, in the year 1806, Benito Juarez was born. The little Zapotec Indian boy was left an orphan when only three years old, and at the age of twelve he fled from his cruel master and was sheltered by a good Franciscan lay brother, who taught him to read and write. In the year 1834 he was licensed to practise law, and soon became judge of the Supreme Court. He rose rapidly to distinction ; was for several years Governor of his native State, and in the year 1858 he was President of Mexico.

Juarez was the leader of the " Liberal " party. The Liberals fought for free schools, a free press, and universal religious toleration.

The Catholic Church party appealed to the Pope at Rome for help to overthrow the Republic. An army of French troops were sent to aid them, and Maximilian, Archduke of Austria, was crowned Emperor of Mexico. Juarez was driven to the very boundary line of Mexico, and there he appealed to the United States for help. Our President sent a messenger to Napoleon III., demanding the recall of his French troops, for no foreign army would be permitted to remain on American shores. The French army left the country, Maximilian was besieged at Queretaro, tried by a court-martial and condemned to be shot.

The Princess Salm-Salm rode one hundred and sixty miles in a carriage, to San Luis Potosi, to see President Juarez to plead for the life of the Emperor. She said : " It was eight o'clock in the evening when I went to see Juarez, who received me at once. He looked pale and suffering himself. With trembling lips I plead for the life of the Emperor. The President said that he could not grant it ; the Emperor must die to-morrow. I fell on my knees sobbing, and plead with words that came from my heart, but which I cannot remember. The President tried to raise me. With tears in his eyes, he answered in a low, sad voice : ' I am grieved, madam, to see you thus on your knees before me, but if all the kings and queens of Europe were in your place I could not spare his life. It is not I who take it. It is the people, and the law, and if I should not do its will, the people would take his life and mine, too.' The wife of General Miramon came into the room, leading by the hand her two little children. It was a most heartrending scene to hear the poor wife and little ones praying for the life of their father. Señora Miramon fainted and was carried out of the room. These trying scenes were too much for Juarez. For three days he kept his room and could see no one."

Maximilian, Emperor of Mexico, was the brother of the Emperor of Austria. He was brother-in-law of the King of Belgium, cousin of the Queen of Spain, cousin of the Queen of England and Empress of India. The man who made every throne in Europe tremble when he signed the death-warrant of the Emperor was a Zapotec Indian. This man, kind to a fallen foe, tender to the suffering, was nevertheless formidable. With black, piercing eyes, a mouth of inflexible decision, the face calm and serene, he had a bearing as royal as those Zapotec kings, among whose deserted palaces he had played in his childhood.