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THE SITUATION OF MEXICO:

SPEECH

DELIVERED BY

SEÑOR ROMERO,

ENVOY EXTRAORDINARY AND MINISTER PLENIPOTENTIARY
OF THE REPUBLIC OF MEXICO TO THE UNITED
STATES, AT A DINNER IN THE CITY OF
NEW YORK, ON THE 16TH OF
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THE SITUATION OF MEXICO.

SPEECH OF SEÑOR ROMERO.

GENTLEMEN :

The internal condition of Mexico is scarcely understood or appreciated in this country or in Europe.

The general impression seems to be, that we are an uncivilized, heterogeneous people, constantly divided by petty personal feuds and ambitions; always engaged in making pronunciamientos; entirely wanting in patriotism and high-toned sentiments; altogether unfitted for self-government; utterly incapable of developing our great natural resources; and therefore unworthy of the sympathy or respect of mankind.

Never was an opinion more unjust; never a judgment more unfounded.

It is well known that when Mexico was a colony of Spain, it was the policy of the Spanish Government to rule the country by means of the Catholic clergy.

With this object in view, the clergy were clothed with every kind of personal privilege, and were allowed to monopolize a very large portion of the real estate and

other property of the country. They were also the only educated class, and all instruction of the masses was left entirely in their hands. By these means they maintained a profound influence over the consciences of the ignorant people, and they constituted an aristocracy more powerful and more firmly rooted than any other in the world.

When, in 1810, the early Mexican patriots proclaimed the independence of their country from the Spanish yoke, the clergy were alarmed by a movement that had not been made by themselves, and which, if it should terminate in the overthrow of the Spanish Government and the establishment of a National government, might place in peril their numerous privileges, their immense riches, and their controlling influence. They therefore determined to oppose the movement.

It is unnecessary to say that so long as the Mexican clergy threw the immense weight of their influence on the side of the Spanish Government, the Spaniards were everywhere triumphant.

But while the struggle was going on in Mexico, a great change took place in Spain. The Spanish Cortes, animated by liberal ideas, had issued various decrees, seriously diminishing the personal privileges of the clergy, and had passed laws providing for the desamortization of their immense property for the benefit of the nation at large. The Mexican clergy then began to change their ground. They saw at once how much they would have to lose if the laws passed by the Spanish Cortes should be carried into effect in Mexico; and

believing at the same time that they could organize a government which would be fully under their own control, they determined to adopt the cause of independence, and with their aid the independence of Mexico was then achieved.

Since that time a fearful struggle has been going on between the clergy on the one side, who have sought to control the National Government, and, on the other, the few enlightened patriotic men who, seeing that there was no hope that Mexico could become what nature designed her to be unless liberal principles should be adopted, and an entire separation be effected from Church influence and control—began to labor for the establishment of a liberal, popular government, which should keep down the ambition and usurpations of the clergy, always directed to the promotion of their own interests, without any regard for the welfare of the country.

The result of such a struggle in its earlier efforts could not be doubtful, taking into consideration the power, the influence and the resources of each party respectively.

Whenever the Liberal party succeeded in establishing, through the ballot-box, a legal government—a government which would not favor the interests of the clergy when these were opposed to the interests of the country—a government in favor of promoting foreign immigration, of opening roads, constructing railroads, authorizing the free and public exercise of all religions, the freedom of the press, of reducing import duties, favoring all branches of commerce—in a word, of developing all the

natural wealth and vast resources of Mexico — the clergy immediately instigated a pronunciamiento against that government, and brought to bear every influence to secure its overthrow.

Such a state of affairs, however, could not last forever. While the struggle was going on, the people began to grow enlightened. Everybody saw that the money of the clergy was constantly used to foment revolutions, to subvert the public peace, and to shed the blood of the innocent people for the iniquitous purpose of maintaining interests and preserving privileges entirely incompatible with the well-being of the country.

Thus, the Liberal party, which, at the beginning, was small in numbers and weak in power, became stronger every day, until, finally, in the year 1860, it had become strong enough to crush entirely the Church party, and to re-establish, it was hoped forever, constitutional law and constitutional government throughout the whole extent of Mexican territory. This was done without foreign aid, and even against the sympathies and encouragement of European powers, who had ever lent all possible aid to the Church party. At the same time all the special privileges of the clergy were repealed, and the Church property was declared to be National, and was sold to the people at a low nominal price.

This latter measure had a double object. While the Mexican Government proposed to disarm the clergy, by taking from them the principal weapon they had used in their efforts to excite pronunciamientos and disturb the public peace, it desired to render useful to the country

the immense wealth which had been accumulated by the Church, and which, being withdrawn from free circulation, and monopolized by a class indisposed or incapable of making it productive, had only been a source of evil, and a perpetual barrier to the prosperity of the nation. Thus, when it was generally believed abroad that we were at war without a plausible motive, only to promote petty personal ambitions, we were really working out one of the most thorough of revolutions, and one of the most necessary for the true prosperity of the people of Mexico.

It should be well understood that we have never raised any issue with the Church party of Mexico on spiritual questions. Our disagreement has been wholly with reference to temporal affairs, and has not, in any manner, involved the dogmas of the Catholic faith.

The Church party has wished, as an association, to rule the country for their own advantage. We have sought to establish a perfect independence between Church and State, to confine the Church to spiritual affairs, and to make it subordinate to the State in temporal matters.

Thus, when we had reason to believe that our long civil wars had ended—for we had removed, even to the roots, the sole cause of all our past misfortunes—and that we were now about to enjoy the blessings of peace—the only thing needed by Mexico to become a prosperous nation—new misfortunes of a different kind have suddenly fallen upon us.

The Church party of Mexico, seeing that with their own means it was impossible to make any further resist-

ance, or to foment any further revolutions, and having in view, as they always have had, only their own advantage, regardless of the welfare of the country--resolved to send emissaries to Europe, for the purpose of interesting in their favor some of the principal European Governments, in order to be by them restored to power in Mexico.

These emissaries represented that the Church party were in favor of a Conservative Government—a Monarchical Government—modelled after the European system; while the Liberal party were in favor of democratic institutions, and sympathized fully with the views and principles of the United States.

On this point the emissaries were right. The Liberals of Mexico do believe that if they can succeed in developing there, the great principles which have made the United States so great and prosperous, Mexico will reach the same end by using the same means.

These emissaries, however, exaggerated the influence of the Church party in Mexico. They said the Liberal Government of that country was tyrannical, oppressive, and unpopular, and governed only by force; and they even affirmed that the mere moral influence of Europe would be sufficient to overthrow it, and to restore the Church party to power.

They further promised, that after overthrowing the Liberal Government, the Church party would establish a Government which should be entirely under the influence of the European nations which should aid them in their purpose.

These false representations of the emissaries led to the

allied expedition of France, England, and Spain, which, assuming pretexts utterly insufficient and unjust, disembarked at Vera Cruz, in December, 1861.

When the English and Spanish Generals and Commissioners, after having resided some time in Mexico, saw that the state of things in that country was entirely different from what the Church party emissaries had represented to their respective Governments, they decided without hesitation to withdraw, with their forces, from the country; and so clear to them was the deception practiced upon their Governments, that they took the delicate step of withdrawing from the alliance of their own accord, without consulting with their superiors, and without waiting for instructions from their Governments, although acting in an affair so full of difficulties and of ulterior complications.

We have thus reached the actual situation in Mexico; and under this head it will be necessary to say a few words more.

The French army did not retire from Mexico, with the armies of England and of Spain, for the French Government had other objects in view, and it was fully determined to accomplish them. The Emperor of the French believed at that time, and perhaps he still believes, that the United States were permanently divided, and that circumstances might take such a shape as to afford him the opportunity of acquiring Texas, of recovering Louisiana, and of possessing the mouth of the Mississippi.

To accomplish this end, it was necessary to obtain a

foothold on this continent, at a point as near the United States as possible, and particularly to Louisiana and Texas—a point of departure where he could collect securely and conveniently a large army and a large naval force, and form a base of supplies.

The Emperor of the French, therefore, directed himself, not so much against Mexico as against the United States. How far he has succeeded in his plans is now a matter which belongs to history. It is sufficient to say, that by means of his Mexican expedition he has been able to collect, on the American continent, almost on the Southern frontier of the United States, a large French army, and has sent to the Gulf of Mexico a very considerable French squadron, much larger than could have been necessary for any purpose connected with Mexico—a country that has no navy; and all this has been accomplished—strange to say—without any remonstrance, without any protest, and even without any demonstration of interest or concern, on the part of the United States.

What the end of these complications will be, it is very difficult to foretell. So far as relates to the occupation of Mexico, it is perfectly certain that the Emperor of the French will soon be undeceived, and will learn that he has undertaken more than he can accomplish, and that when he sees the complete failure of the farce which his agents are now playing in the city of Mexico, he will find himself compelled to retire from a country which he has so unjustly invaded. With regard to ourselves, therefore, there can be only one result, which will be

verified sooner or later. It will inevitably be the triumph of the holy cause of Mexican independence.

The French will soon fail of even the aid of the Church party. That party hoped, and to a certain extent, with reason, that when the French army should occupy the City of Mexico, the Imperial Government would annul the laws of reform issued by the Liberal Government of that Republic, and, the first thing, would restore to the clergy the property that had been taken from them, and nationalized and sold.

But it happened that among the persons who had purchased the ecclesiastical property, there were a considerable number of French subjects, who would be injured by the restitution of that property, if it should take place; and this consideration has led the French Government, not only not to abrogate the reform laws, but to prevent its satellites, who have assumed the name of regency in Mexico, from themselves attempting to abrogate them. If, then, the French Government should persist in the policy which they have commenced to follow, it will not be long before the Church party will begin to make as decided opposition to the intervention, as they did a year ago to the Constitutional Government.

In conclusion, there is one remark that cannot be withheld. It is regarding the striking similarity which exists between the Church party of Mexico and the Slavery party in the United States.

The Church was there a power stronger than the State; so was slavery in this country. The Church has there been the only cause of our civil wars; so now

is slavery here. The Church party in Mexico, after being conquered by the people, solicited foreign intervention, in order to be re-established in power; so slavery in this country, as I understand, has sought foreign aid even before being conquered by the Government of the United States.



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