

In the House of Representatives there was no such unanimity. Adams was again the leader of the opposition. On May 25, in a speech in Committee of the Whole, when an entirely different subject was under discussion, he denounced the war in Texas as intended to bring about the re-establishment of slavery where it had previously been abolished by law, and he bitterly attacked the administration for making every effort to drive the United States into the war upon the side of slavery. Mexico, according to Adams, was upholding the cause of freedom. And he warned the House that if it came to invading, Mexico was far more likely, with her large and constantly exercised army, to overrun the border states of the American Union than the United States were to overrun Mexico. Adams himself was impressed next day with the violence of his language, for he thought it "the most hazardous" speech he had ever made; but later he found it greeted by "a universal shout of applause" in the North.<sup>1</sup>

Nothing more was done in Congress until the very last moment. On June 27, 1836, the House, by a vote of 142 to 54, laid on the table a proposal to appropriate money for a minister to Texas. On July 4, the last day of the session, the Committee on Foreign Affairs reported the Senate resolutions; debate was cut off by the previous question; the two resolutions were carried by decisive votes—128 to 20, and 113 to 22—and the House thereupon immediately adjourned *sine die*.

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs*, IX, 287-289.

## CHAPTER XVI

### TEXAS PROPOSES ANNEXATION

WHEN the American Congress adjourned on the fourth of July, 1836, the question whether the independence of Texas should be recognized had been fairly submitted to the executive branch of the government, although with strong intimations in debate that an affirmative answer would be welcome. But before the passage of the resolution the President had arranged for a careful inquiry at first hand into the facts, and for that purpose he sent to Texas a certain Henry M. Morfit.

Morfit's instructions were probably verbal, and he bore with him as his credentials nothing but a personal letter of introduction from Forsyth, the American Secretary of State, to Burnet, the provisional President of Texas.<sup>1</sup>

Morfit reached Texas early in August, and stayed until the middle of September, sending back to the State Department about two letters a week, in which he gave an intelligent account of the subjects most likely to interest the American government. Although he only visited that part of Texas which lay in the valleys of the Brazos and the Colorado, he saw and talked with the principal men in the Texan government, and was thus enabled to make what appears to have been an impartial and reasonably complete report.<sup>2</sup>

The army, he stated, was composed of about two thousand men actually with the colors. It was thought that in addition some three thousand militia might be counted upon. The munitions of war appeared to be abundant, and there was scarcely a cabin in the country that could

<sup>1</sup> Dated June 25, 1836; *Tex. Dip. Corr.*, I, 100.

<sup>2</sup> Morfit's letters are printed in Sen. Doc. 20, 24 Cong., 2 sess., as an appendix to the message from President Jackson, dated Dec. 21, 1836.

not, at a moment's warning, arm several men. The weapons of the several classes of troops were, however, not always of the same pattern, and the soldiers, as their terms of enlistment expired, frequently took their arms home with them, "to be ready in any emergency." The navy consisted of four schooners, one of which was undergoing repairs. A descent upon Matamoros, and an expedition to Chihuahua, aided by a force of Comanche Indians, were under discussion. During the summer several hundred emigrants had arrived by sea, besides many who had come overland by the Nacogdoches road. About six hundred and fifty Mexican prisoners were still on Galveston Island, or near Velasco. Santa Anna was at Thompson's Ferry, on the Brazos, his fate still very doubtful.

The programme of the Texan leaders was extremely ambitious. They had intended at first to extend their national boundaries to the Pacific Ocean, but had ultimately decided that if they extended from the Sabine to the Rio Grande, and up to the head of that stream, there would be territory "sufficient for a young republic." As the area within the boundaries thus proposed amounted to something like three hundred and seventy-five thousand square miles—more than that of Great Britain, France, and Ireland combined, and approximately equal to that of the thirteen original states—these modest views were probably correct. It was also the intention that as soon as peace was made with Mexico a railroad should be run to the Gulf of California, to give "access to the East Indian, Peruvian, and Chilian trade."<sup>1</sup>

As to boundaries, it was conceded that Texas as a Mexican province had never extended on the Gulf beyond the river Nueces. And inasmuch as Santa Fe, the capital of the province of New Mexico, lay east of the Rio Grande on its upper waters, it was clear that the boundaries to be claimed in that direction were also far beyond those of the old province. The claim to the additional territory seemed to be based upon the rights gained by conquest, the Mexican army having, in fact, withdrawn beyond the Rio Grande.

<sup>1</sup> Sen. Doc. 20, 24 Cong., 2 sess., 12, 13.

From the best information obtainable there were in Texas proper about thirty thousand American settlers, five thousand negroes, and thirty-five hundred native Mexicans—besides some twelve or fourteen thousand independent Indians. The part of New Mexico which the Texans meant to claim would increase her population by at least fifteen thousand, making, in all (including "Indians not taxed"), about sixty-five thousand.

As to financial matters, Morfit calculated that the indebtedness of the country by the time the term of office of the provisional government expired would probably amount to a million and a quarter of dollars; and to meet this debt and provide for the future support of the government there were the public lands, the customs duties, and moneys still due on lands formerly granted.

"The present resources of Texas," he added, "are principally derived from the sympathies of their neighbors and friends in the United States, and by loans upon the credit of the state. The donations from the former quarter have been, and will no doubt continue to be, very liberal, and indeed munificent. . . . I have been surprised to find that Texas has carried on a successful war thus far, with so little embarrassment to her citizens or her treasury; and perhaps it is the first instance in the history of nations where a state has sustained itself by men and means drawn wholly from a distance."<sup>1</sup>

As to the attitude of Mexico, no negotiations for peace had been undertaken since those with Santa Anna had been interrupted. It was believed that his power and popularity at home were already extinct, and that if the Mexican government could raise the necessary money, which seemed doubtful, a new invasion of Texas would be undertaken. Already four thousand troops were said to have been collected for the purpose at Matamoros.

That the people of Texas with entire unanimity desired, at that time, to be admitted as one of the states of the American Union, was made apparent by the election held on the fifth of September, at which the voters were required

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 16, 17.

to state whether they favored annexation,<sup>1</sup> and the terms on which annexation was to be effected had been seriously discussed in the Texan cabinet.

Finally, Morfit's conclusion was that as the population of Mexico was eight millions, and that of Texas not over fifty thousand, the issue of the war between them would not, under ordinary circumstances, long remain doubtful; and that the ability of Texas to maintain her independence resolved itself, after all, into the single fact that "without foreign aid her future security must depend more upon the weakness and imbecility of her enemy than upon her own strength."

The September election to which Morfit referred had been held pursuant to the action taken by the constitutional convention of the previous March, directing that an election should be held for ratifying the Constitution, and choosing officers at a date to be fixed by the provisional government. On July 23, 1836, President Burnet had issued his proclamation fixing the first Monday of September as the day for choosing a President, a Vice-President, and representatives to the first Congress of Texas; also for deciding upon the acceptance or rejection of the new Constitution; and also for voting upon the question of annexation to the United States. By the same proclamation the new government was to come into existence at Columbia, on the Brazos, on the first Monday of October.<sup>2</sup>

The voters, by a substantially unanimous vote, approved the Constitution and declared in favor of annexation. At the same time they elected Houston as President and Lamar as Vice-President; but the newly elected officers were not inaugurated and the regular constitutional government of the republic did not go into operation until Saturday, October 22, 1836. Houston's two principal rivals for the Presidency were made members of his cabinet—Stephen F. Austin becoming Secretary of State and Henry Smith Secretary of

<sup>1</sup> Only ninety-three votes were cast against annexation.—(*Tex. Dip. Corr.*, I, 140.)

<sup>2</sup> See E. W. Winkler, "The Seat of Government of Texas," in *Tex. Hist. Quar.*, X, 156 *et seq.*, for the reasons for selecting Columbia.

the Treasury. William F. Wharton, who had been one of Austin's associates as commissioner to the United States, was appointed to the highly important post of minister at Washington.

Wharton's credentials and instructions reached him at Velasco on November 22, 1836, and he arrived at New Orleans six days later, after a stormy passage across the Gulf, "without a place to sleep, except on the naked deck—without anything but two little blankets to answer both for a bed and covering." How to get to Washington was a problem. The meeting of the American Congress was only eight days off. To go by sea to New York, with a certainty of northerly winds, would require thirty or forty days, and the roads on the southern route through Alabama and Georgia were reported to be almost impassable. Wharton concluded, therefore, that the "shortest and far the most certain" method of reaching Washington was by way of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers to Wheeling, and thence overland.<sup>1</sup>

Travelling with the utmost rapidity, Wharton was only nineteen days on the road, and having reached Washington in safety was received by General Jackson unofficially on December 20. The next day he saw Forsyth, who told him that the Texan popular vote for annexation had embarrassed the American government in the matter of recognizing their independence; for if Texas were recognized promptly it would look as if it were part of an agreement for immediate annexation. He wished Texas would get recognition from England or elsewhere first. And he said that the President would that week send a message to Congress dealing with Texan affairs.<sup>2</sup>

Wharton was evidently not at all pleased with these interviews, and was still more put out when he read the President's message, which was presented to Congress on the day following his conversation with Forsyth.

The message transmitted the greater part of Morfit's

<sup>1</sup> Wharton to Austin, Nov. 28, 1836; *Tex. Dip. Corr.*, I, 144.

<sup>2</sup> Wharton to Austin, Dec. 22, 1836; *ibid.*, 157.

letters. After an admirably clear and accurate statement of the considerations which should govern the nation in acknowledging the independence of any new state, and the peculiar delicacy of doing so when the new state had forcibly separated itself from another of which it had formed a part, and which still claimed dominion over it, the President went on to express the view that it was expedient to leave to Congress the question of the recognition of Texas, although he did not intend to relieve himself from the responsibility of expressing his own opinion concerning the course which "the interests of our country prescribe and its honor permits us to follow." A rigid adherence to the principles laid down and followed in the contests between Spain and her revolted colonies would be the safest guide. In those cases "we stood aloof, and waited, not only until the ability of the new states to protect themselves was fully established, but until the danger of their being again subjugated had entirely passed away. Then, and not until then, were they recognized."

With regard to Texas, the fact was that, although the civil authority of Mexico had been expelled, its invading army defeated and driven beyond the frontier, and the President of the republic captured, yet there was, in appearance at least, an immense disparity of physical force on the side of Mexico and a fresh Mexican invasion was in preparation.

"Upon the issue of this threatened invasion," the message continued, "the independence of Texas may be considered as suspended; and were there nothing peculiar in the relative situation of the United States and Texas, our acknowledgment of its independence at such a crisis could scarcely be regarded as consistent with that prudent reserve with which we have heretofore held ourselves bound to treat all similar questions. But there are circumstances in the relations of the two countries, which require us to act on this occasion, with even more than our wonted caution. Texas was once claimed as a part of our property, and there are those among our citizens who, always reluctant to abandon that claim, cannot but regard with solicitude the prospect of the reunion of the territory to this country. A large portion of its civilized inhabitants are emigrants from the

United States; speak the same language with ourselves; cherish the same principles, political and religious, and are bound to many of our citizens by ties of friendship and kindred blood; and more than all, it is known that the people of that country have instituted the same form of government with our own; and have, since the close of your last session, openly resolved, on the acknowledgment by us of their independence, to seek admission into the Union as one of the federal states. . . . It becomes us to beware of a too early movement, as it might subject us, however unjustly, to the imputation of seeking to establish the claim of our neighbors to a territory, with a view to its subsequent acquisition by ourselves. Prudence, therefore, seems to dictate that we should still stand aloof, and maintain our present attitude, if not until Mexico itself, or one of the great foreign powers, shall recognize the independence of the new government, at least until the lapse of time, or the course of events shall have proved, beyond cavil or dispute, the ability of the people of that country to maintain their separate sovereignty, and to uphold the government constituted by them."

The signature to this message was that of Andrew Jackson, but the body of it was unquestionably the production, both in form and substance, of John Forsyth.<sup>1</sup> The cautious policies here advocated—the acute sensitiveness to foreign opinion, the desire not to seem to interfere with the rights of others—have not always been manifest in the foreign policy of the United States.

A policy so hesitant as that advocated in the President's message was not very consonant with Jackson's impetuous character, and it is quite possible that if he had not been for several weeks in ill health more vigorous methods might have been adopted by his administration.<sup>2</sup> Certainly the tone and spirit of the message, as John Quincy Adams noted in his diary, were entirely unexpected, "a total reverse of the spirit which almost universally prevailed at the close of the last session of Congress, and in which the President notoriously shared."<sup>3</sup> It was rumored that Van

<sup>1</sup>There is some evidence, besides strong antecedent probability, to show that Van Buren was consulted in the preparation of this message.

<sup>2</sup>"I have been only four times downstairs since the 15th of November last, although I have been obliged to labor incessantly."—(Jackson to Trist, March 2, 1837; Parton, *Jackson*, III, 624.)

<sup>3</sup>*Memoirs*, Dec. 22, 1836, vol. IX, 330. And see *Debates in Congress*, 24 Cong., 2 sess., 1141-1143.

Buren was the real author of the message. The Texan representatives thought its "cold-blooded" and "ungenerous" tone argued ill for the policy of the American government in the next administration,<sup>1</sup> and they believed that the best prospect of success lay in an immediate appeal to Jackson himself.

"All that remains for me," wrote Wharton, "is to operate with the President, and to get him to quicken the action of Congress with another message. This I shall day and night endeavor to effect by using every argument that can operate upon his pride and his sense of justice."<sup>2</sup>

And for the next two months Wharton had many highly confidential interviews with the President, in which annexation as well as recognition were discussed.

But while Jackson listened benevolently, and told Wharton to be easy, for all would go right, he steadily declined to take any further public steps in the matter, although his private and personal sympathies were not disguised. The object of his message, as he explained to Wharton, had been to obtain the concurrent action of Congress; he wished the sense of Congress on the subject; he would immediately concur if a majority recommended recognition; and it was "all foolishness" to say that members of Congress would forbear voting for recognition for fear of being thought to be opposed to the administration. He did, however, send to the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House a copy of a private letter from Austin, giving a long and detailed account of conditions in Texas, with some appended comments of his own favorable to recognition.<sup>3</sup> Early in February he told Wharton that Judge Ellis (then the United States minister in Mexico), who had just arrived in Washington, if called before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, could convince them in five minutes that a new invasion by Mexico was an utter impossibility. But although entirely undis-

<sup>1</sup> Catlett to Austin, Jan. 11, 1837; *Tex. Dip. Corr.*, I, 173.

<sup>2</sup> Wharton to Houston, Feb. 2, 1837; *ibid.*, 180.

<sup>3</sup> Miss Rather, "Recognition of the Republic of Texas," in *Tex. Hist. Quar.*, XIII, 251.

guised and explicit in expressing his personal views, he still refused to send another message to Congress.<sup>1</sup>

Jackson was no doubt influenced chiefly by a desire not to embarrass Van Buren's administration by committing the executive branch of the government to a course which had not the support of Congress, and until the latter part of January he was probably not without hope that Santa Anna's visit to Washington might result in some sort of treaty between Mexico, on the one side, and the United States and Texas, on the other, which would solve all difficulties. But the firm refusal of the Mexican chargé d'affaires to have anything to do with Santa Anna put an end to that possibility. Until almost the last moment of the remaining weeks of his term of office the President, broken in health, allowed his public conduct in this matter to be governed by the views of Van Buren and Forsyth, and to put the responsibility upon the shoulders of Congress.<sup>2</sup>

Congress, on its part, was not much interested in the subject. The expunging resolution, the Treasury circular requiring specie payments for purchases of public lands, the admission of the state of Michigan, and the question whether anti-slavery petitions should be received, were far more attractive topics. Wharton tried hard to find members of the two houses who would urge early consideration of the claims of Texas, for he was in the greatest anxiety lest other matters should so occupy the time of Congress during the short session as to put off the business of recognition till the next December, and it was not until three weeks after the President's message was received that the subject was mentioned in either house.

<sup>1</sup> Wharton to Austin, Jan. 6, 1837; Wharton to Houston, Feb. 2, 1837; Wharton and Hunt to Rusk, Feb. 20, 1837; *Tex. Dip. Corr.*, I, 171, 179, 195. Austin died Dec. 27, 1836, which was the reason why Wharton addressed Houston, the President. Zavala had also died, Nov. 15, 1836.

<sup>2</sup> There are some curious analogies between the position of President Jackson and his Secretary of State in reference to the recognition of Texas and that of President Grant and Mr. Fish in reference to the proposed recognition of the Cuban insurgents in 1870. General Grant was at first in favor of recognition, but was persuaded by Mr. Fish not to take the steps he had had in contemplation. — (Chadwick, *The Relations of the United States and Spain, Diplomacy*, 306 et seq.)

There had been, in fact, a considerable change in public opinion since Congress adjourned the previous July, when the Mexican atrocities and the sweeping victory of San Jacinto were fresh in men's minds. The possible effect of the proposed step on the subject of slavery was beginning to be recognized, and many men in public life were coming to see that it was something to be handled with great caution. However, on the eleventh of January, 1837, Senator Walker, of Mississippi, offered a resolution that, as there was "no longer any reasonable prospect of the successful prosecution of the war by Mexico," the independent political existence of Texas ought to be recognized. In offering it he explained that he had that morning received information from Vera Cruz that General Bravo's army, destined for an invasion of Texas, had been reduced to a very small number by desertion and other causes; that this "miserable remnant" was unsupplied with provisions; that Bravo himself had resigned the command; and that the proposed invasion had proved entirely abortive.<sup>1</sup> He did not, however, ask for immediate consideration of his resolution.

A month later Walker called up his resolution, but both Benton and Silas Wright objected—the former with rather uncalled-for vehemence—and the subject was postponed. The source of the objection suggests Van Buren as the person most anxious to defer the discussion, but indeed nearly all the administration senators from the Northern states thought it should be postponed.<sup>2</sup>

It was not until the first day of March that Walker could get a hearing, when he and Preston and Calhoun spoke strongly in favor of recognition. Both Clay and Buchanan

<sup>1</sup> Bravo was appointed Aug. 12, 1836, to succeed Urrea, whose deeds had by no means equalled his brave words. Bravo soon found, however, that the government could not, or at least did not, send him the men or the equipment which he considered indispensable if Texas was to be recovered, and he resigned, turning over the command to Ramírez y Sesma. On November 21, 1836, a debate occurred in the Mexican Congress, in the course of which the Deputy Don Mariano Michelena seems to have made the assertions which Walker repeated, and which Tornel, the Minister of War, substantially admitted to be true. See *México á través de los Siglos*, IV, 380.

<sup>2</sup> Jenkins, *Life of Silas Wright*, 113.

were in favor of waiting. Norvell, of Michigan, a new member, proposed a substitute, which was lost by a vote of 16 to 25, and thereupon Walker's resolution was carried by 23 to 19. The division was mainly between the West and South in the affirmative and New England, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania in the negative; but there were affirmative votes from Maine and Connecticut and negative votes from Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana. Webster and Clay did not vote. On the next day a motion was made to reconsider the Walker resolution, which failed by a tie vote, 24 to 24.

In the House of Representatives Waddy Thompson, a South Carolina Whig, was the principal advocate of immediate recognition; but although he had displayed a good deal of temper when the President's message came in, he did nothing until the thirteenth of February, 1837, when he inquired why the Committee on Foreign Affairs had not acted. The committee did, however, report on Saturday, February 18, when it recommended the adoption of the following resolutions:

1. That the independence of the government of Texas ought to be recognized.
2. That the Committee on Ways and Means be directed to provide in the bill for the civil and diplomatic expenses of the government, a salary and outfit for such public agent as the President might determine to send to Texas.

On February 21, after some debate, these resolutions were laid on the table by a vote of 98 to 86. Six days later, on February 27, Thompson renewed his efforts by moving an amendment to the civil and diplomatic appropriation bill, while in Committee of the Whole, so as to provide for the salary and outfit of "a diplomatic agent" to Texas. After a very long discussion Thompson was beaten again, this time by a vote of 40 to 82.

On the following day, the last of February, after the bill had been reported to the House, the indefatigable Thompson again offered his resolution, in the following form: