

"For the outfit and salary of a diplomatic agent to be sent to the independent republic of Texas ——— thousand dollars."

Again discussion ensued, but at length the word *independent* was struck out and the following phrase was added, viz.:

"Whenever the President of the United States may receive satisfactory evidence that Texas is an independent power and shall deem it expedient to appoint such minister."

In this form the amendment was adopted, by a vote of 121 to 76. The bill was passed by the Senate two days afterward without a division, and was approved by the President on March 3, 1837.<sup>1</sup>

The action of Congress, while finally favorable to Texas, had thus been exceedingly dilatory. It had also been made apparent that there was a very large minority opposed to any action, and probably a majority opposed to immediate recognition. The only measure which secured the approval of both houses was the bare permission given to the President to appoint a diplomatic agent whenever he might receive satisfactory evidence that Texas had become "an independent power." In effect, Congress had decided to leave the whole responsibility with the President.

Andrew Jackson was by this time ready to take all the responsibility. Many of those who had finally voted with Waddy Thompson undoubtedly expected that the incoming President would be the person to decide as to the status of Texas; but the Texan representatives had left no means untried to prevent that result. Jackson had been persuaded that the action of Congress was all that was necessary to enable him to take the decisive step to which he had long been inclined, and accordingly, the moment the diplomatic appropriation bill became a law, he sent to the Senate the following explanatory message:

"In my message to Congress of the 21st of December last," said the President, "I laid before that body, without reserve, my views concerning the recognition of the independence of Texas, with a re-

<sup>1</sup> 5 U. S. Stat. at Large, 170.

port of the agent employed by the Executive to obtain information in respect to the condition of that country. Since that time the subject has been repeatedly discussed in both branches of the Legislature. . . . Regarding these proceedings as a virtual decision of the question submitted by me to Congress, I think it my duty to acquiesce therein, and therefore I nominate Alcée La Branche, of Louisiana, to be chargé d'affaires to the Republic of Texas."<sup>1</sup>

The nomination was received by the Senate during the legislative day of March 3, 1837, and on motion of Mr. Webster consideration thereof was postponed until the following Monday, the sixth of March. By that time Jackson was out and Van Buren was in the White House. La Branche's name was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations, who reported favorably the next day, and the nomination was confirmed without objection.

It was too late for Van Buren to draw back, much as he and Forsyth might have wished to do so; but they managed to delay giving La Branche his commission until July 21, 1837. The official reception of the new Texan minister, General Hunt, was also put off, on the ground of the informal character of the credentials with which he had been furnished; but finally, on July 6, 1837, he was duly introduced at the White House, and received with the genial courtesy for which the new President was so noted.<sup>2</sup>

Public announcement of the fact that the United States government had recognized the independence of Texas was immediately followed by vehement protests from the Mexican authorities, who appealed to the principles laid down in President Jackson's special message of December 21, 1836, and asked—not without a good deal of justice—whether the situation of Texas had so changed since then as to justify recognition.<sup>3</sup> The Secretary of State did not

<sup>1</sup> *Senate Executive Journal*, IV, 631. Shortly before midnight on the third of March Jackson sent for the Texan agents, told them what he had done, and "requested the pleasure of a glass of wine."—(*Tex. Dip. Corr.*, I, 201.)

<sup>2</sup> Hunt to Irion, July 11, 1837; *Tex. Dip. Corr.*, I, 235. In *Tex. Hist. Quar.*, XIII, 155-256, will be found further details concerning the subject of the recognition of Texas.

<sup>3</sup> Castillo to Forsyth, March 8, 1837; Monasterio to Forsyth, March 31, 1837; Sen. Doc. 1, 25 Cong., 2 sess., 131, 143.



attempt to answer this question, but simply replied that in recognizing the independence of Texas the government of the United States had acted upon the ordinary and settled policy which had been observed in many cases, including that of Mexico herself, and that this act did not proceed from any unfriendly spirit toward Mexico, and must not be regarded as indicative of a disposition to interfere in the contest between her and Texas.<sup>1</sup>

Recognition having been secured, the Texans lost no time in bringing before the American government their proposals for annexation. These proposals had not originated with the people of the United States. They were the natural and inevitable result of the circumstances in which Texas was placed—a small, poor, and widely scattered population, mostly composed of natives of the United States who were living under the constant menace of invasion whenever Mexico could manage to collect the men and money necessary for that purpose. Protection by the United States was the simple, direct, and obvious means of securing the people of Texas in the peaceful possession of the settlements they had formed, and with an instinctive and all but unanimous movement they had turned for help to their powerful neighbor.<sup>2</sup>

The advantages to the United States of the acquisition of Texas were, however, no less obvious than the advantages which would accrue to Texas from being incorporated as a part of the American Union. The immense agricultural possibilities of the country, its evident adaptation as the home of many millions of people, and the fact that its possession would give to the United States a practical control of the world's supplies of cotton, were affirmative reasons of great weight. They had been clearly apparent to Adams and Clay and Jackson and Forsyth. In addition, it was beginning to be perceived that the existence of a separate and independent English-speaking country to the south of the

<sup>1</sup> Forsyth to Castillo, March 17, 1837; Forsyth to Monasterio, May 22, 1837; *ibid.*, 135, 150.

<sup>2</sup> The provisional government, within five weeks after the battle of San Jacinto, declared itself ready to begin negotiations for annexation. Burnet to Collingsworth and Grayson, May 26, 1836; *Tex. Dip. Corr.*, I, 89.

United States could not fail to be a source of trouble and irritation. Nevertheless, the government of the United States made no move in the direction of annexation, and Calhoun seems to have been the only man in Congress who—up to the end of Jackson's administration, at least—had expressed himself as favorable to that policy. The overtures came from Texas, and dated back to the very beginning of the establishment of the constitutional government of the republic.

As early as the autumn of 1836, when Wharton was accredited as minister to the United States upon the formation of Houston's administration, his instructions were to the effect that next to securing recognition the great object of his mission was to effect the annexation of Texas to the United States, "on the broad basis of equitable reciprocity." In any treaty that might be made, the privilege of becoming a state of the American Union ought to be secured, and it should be provided that Texas might thereafter be subdivided into a limited number of new states at the pleasure of the people concerned. The location of Indian tribes, the settlement of public debts, and the adjustment of land-claims should all be arranged for. There must be no special restrictions or limitations as to slavery. As to boundaries, the Texan government asserted that they held possession as far as the Rio Grande, and they considered that this river ought to be the boundary to its source; but if "serious embarrassments or delays" would be produced by insisting on that line they would agree to a line following the water-shed between the Nueces and the Rio Grande, and would leave out the settlements in New Mexico.<sup>1</sup>

By further private instructions, Wharton was directed to stand very firm and yield nothing that would be likely to cause discontent in Texas. He was informed that there was a strong undercurrent of sentiment in favor of remaining a separate and independent republic, and if a treaty of

<sup>1</sup> Austin to Wharton, Nov. 18, 1836; *Tex. Dip. Corr.*, I, 127-135. These instructions followed a joint resolution of the Texan Congress passed Nov. 16, 1836.—(*Laws of the Rep. of Texas*, I, 29.)



peace could be effected with Mexico, and a friendly disposition were manifested by France and England, public opinion might decide in favor of independence, rather than annexation. This change in public opinion, it was said, would certainly take place if the government of the United States should prove adverse to annexation, or should fail to allow the most liberal terms. If such a disposition were manifested, the Texan minister was directed to "have full and free conversations with the British, French, and other foreign ministers" in Washington, with a view to enlisting the interest of their governments and securing recognition of Texan independence in return for a system of low duties and liberal encouragement to immigration.<sup>1</sup> Three weeks later, however, Austin wrote again to Wharton that public anxiety in Texas, on the subject of annexation, remained unabated, and that opinion in favor of the measure was more decided than before.<sup>2</sup>

But before Wharton had been long within the United States he discovered what he described as a bitter opposition to annexation.

"The leading prints of the North and East and the abolitionists," he reported from Kentucky, "every where oppose it on the old grounds of an opposition to the extension of slavery and of a fear of southern preponderance in the councils of the nation. Our friends, by which term I now mean those of Louisiana, Mississippi, Kentucky, etc. (for I have seen and conversed with no others as yet) oppose our annexation, on the grounds that a brighter destiny awaits Texas."

As a state in the Union these friends thought Texas would be oppressed by "high tariffs and other Northern measures," and would be driven to nullification and ultimately to civil war. Nevertheless, Wharton continued to believe in the policy of annexation, although he saw with remarkable clearness the difficulties in the way.

"To be plain and candid," he continued in the same letter, "I believe the recognition of our independence will certainly take place,

<sup>1</sup> Austin to Wharton, Nov. 18, 1836; *Tex. Dip. Corr.*, I, 135-140.

<sup>2</sup> Same to same, Dec. 10, 1836; *ibid.*, 150.

but I have not at present much hopes of our being annexed. That question when proposed will agitate this union more than did the attempt to restrict Missouri, nullification, and abolitionism, all combined."<sup>1</sup>

The events of the next eight or nine years bore signal witness to the wisdom of this forecast.

When Wharton finally reached Washington, about the middle of December, the prospects of annexation seemed still more doubtful. Some of the Southern senators appeared friendly, but the Secretary of State, although himself a Southerner, was not at all encouraging. In reply to a direct inquiry from Wharton, Forsyth said that "various conflicting sectional interests in Congress would have to be reconciled before annexation would be agreed to"; that, if a treaty of annexation should be made by the administration, he thought it would be consented to by the Senate; and he added that "he thought it would be best done under the administration of a Northern President." This, as Wharton pointed out, was simply postponing the subject for at least a year, though he then believed that Van Buren would favor annexation.<sup>2</sup> But for months the Texan representatives were uncertain and worried, as to what Van Buren would really do.

Although Van Buren, in the course of a long career in the active school of New York politics, had acquired a remarkably effective knowledge of political methods, it would be a mistake to regard him as nothing more than a party manager. He had strong and clear convictions on certain subjects, and was quite capable of expressing them upon suitable occasions with courage, and to his own hurt, although he was generally inclined, in his own phrase, to "the utmost prudence and circumspection" on delicate questions of public policy. He was usually a follower, rather than a leader, of public opinion, and anxious to find out what the people wanted before declaring himself; and this helped to make him a reputation as an extremely clever but shifty poli-

<sup>1</sup> Wharton to Austin, Dec. 11, 1836; *ibid.*, I, 151-154.

<sup>2</sup> Wharton to Austin, Jan. 6, 1837; *ibid.*, 169.



tician—an opinion which did not do justice to some really solid and admirable qualities.

As Jackson's devoted adherent and political heir, it was to be expected that Van Buren would continue his predecessor's policies, and his first step after his inauguration was a significant confirmation of that expectation, for he retained all of Jackson's cabinet except Cass, the Secretary of War, who had already been appointed minister to France. Cass's place was taken by Poinsett, the former minister to Mexico.

For months after his inauguration Van Buren kept strictly to himself whatever views he may have had on the subject of Texan annexation. His thoughts were indeed occupied very largely by matters nearer home, for the purely domestic difficulties of the administration were extremely serious. In the first few weeks after March 4, 1837, the disastrous financial panic of that year was at its worst. The banks throughout the country suspended specie payments in the month of May, and the situation became so acute that the President found it necessary to summon a special session of Congress, to meet on the fourth of September, 1837.

The Texan representatives could not, of course, bring up the question of annexation until they had been formally received, which was not, as already stated, until July 6, 1837; in the meantime they were busy with inquiries and conjectures as to how the proposal, when made, was likely to be received by the administration. Before the inauguration Wharton reported that "the Van Buren party" were very fearful on the subject of annexation, as they believed it would become the controlling issue in the next elections, and that they would therefore try to postpone its consideration.<sup>1</sup> In July Hunt, who had succeeded Wharton as minister from Texas, wrote that he was satisfied the President's ambition would lead him "to distinguish his administration by such an accession of territory";<sup>2</sup> but on August 4 he could only say that the President had not yet determined

<sup>1</sup> Wharton to Houston, Feb. 2, 1837; *ibid.*, 180.

<sup>2</sup> Hunt to Irion, July 11, 1837; *ibid.*, 240.

what to do, "or at least he is doubtful as to what course of policy would be most popular—for that course he will be certain to pursue as soon as it is fairly ascertained." And Hunt added that since the first part of his letter was written he had received "intimations" which strongly confirmed him in the belief that the President would favor annexation.<sup>1</sup>

Thus emboldened, the Texan minister submitted to the State Department a long communication proposing annexation, giving a résumé of the history of both Mexico and Texas, and pointing out the mutual advantages to be derived from the course proposed, and the disadvantages that were likely to arise if Texas should remain an independent power.<sup>2</sup> This paper bore date the same day as Hunt's despatch to his own government just quoted.

Nearly a week later he sent a copy to Texas, explaining as his reason for the historical disquisition that it was indispensable to destroy the false impressions created by Gorostiza's pamphlet and other publications. "The French and English legations," he added, "are the only ones here that are not decidedly against us." He also mentioned that he had thought it best "to say nothing on the slave question, which, as you know, is more important than any other connected with the subject of annexation." As to the attitude of the administration, he thought they wished consideration of the question postponed, and that they were likely to "pursue an equivocating course." The President, Hunt believed, could not be re-elected unless he favored annexation. As to the cabinet, Poinsett (Secretary of War), Forsyth (Secretary of State), and Kendall (Postmaster-General) were favorable to annexation—especially Poinsett, who zealously advocated the measure.

So far Hunt on Thursday, the tenth of August; but in an agitated postscript, dated "Friday morning," he reported that Forsyth was "violently opposed" to annexation, and therefore "a traitor to the most delicate and deepest inter-

<sup>1</sup> Same to same, Aug. 4, 1837; *ibid.*, 247. Poinsett was probably Hunt's informant.

<sup>2</sup> Hunt to Forsyth, Aug. 4, 1837; H. R. Doc. 40, 25 Cong., 1 sess., 2-11.



ests of those to whom he is indebted for the very power and influence which he is now attempting to exercise against them." Poinsett, however, was still true, and would retire from the cabinet if the question was not carried.<sup>1</sup>

Hunt was not kept long in suspense. An answer dated August 25, 1837, not only refused, in the most explicit terms, to enter upon any negotiation in regard to annexation, but stated that the subject would not be considered in the future.

"Neither the duties nor the settled policy of the United States," said Forsyth, "permit them to enter into an examination of the accuracy of the historical facts related by General Hunt, nor to allow them, if even admitted to be correct, to control the decision of the question presented by him. The United States were foremost in acknowledging the independence of Mexico, and have uniformly desired and endeavored to cultivate relations of friendship with that Power. Having always, since the formation of their Government, been exempt from civil wars, they have learnt the value of internal quiet, and have consequently been anxious yet passive spectators of the feuds with which their neighbor has been afflicted. Although in the controversy between Texas and Mexico, circumstances have existed, and events have occurred, peculiarly calculated to enlist the sympathies of our people, the effort of the Government has been to look upon that dispute also, with the same rigid impartiality with which it has regarded all other Mexican commotions.

"In determining with respect to the independence of other countries, the United States have never taken the question of right between the contending parties into consideration. They have deemed it a dictate of duty and policy to decide upon the question as one of fact merely. This was the course pursued with respect to Mexico herself. It was adhered to when analogous events rendered it proper to investigate the question of Texian independence. . . .

"The question of the *annexation* of a foreign independent State to the United States has never before been presented to this Government. Since the adoption of their constitution, two large additions have been made to the domain originally claimed by the United States. In acquiring them this Government was not actuated by a mere thirst for sway over a broader space. Paramount interests of many members of the confederacy, and the permanent well being of all, imperatively urged upon this Government the necessity of an extension of its jurisdiction over Louisiana and Florida. As peace, however, was our cherished policy, never to be departed from unless honor should

<sup>1</sup> Hunt to Irion, Aug. 10 and 11, 1837; *Tex. Dip. Corr.*, I, 252-256.

be perilled by adhering to it, we patiently endured for a time serious inconveniences and privations, and sought a transfer of those regions by negotiations and not by conquest.

"The issue of those negotiations was a conditional cession of these countries to the United States. The circumstance, however, of their being colonial possessions of France and Spain, and therefore dependent on the metropolitan Governments, renders those transactions materially different from that which would be presented by the question of the annexation of Texas. The latter is a State with an independent Government, acknowledged as such by the United States, and claiming a territory beyond, though bordering on the region ceded by France, in the treaty of the 30th of April, 1803. Whether the constitution of the United States contemplated the annexation of such a State, and if so, in what manner that object is to be effected, are questions, in the opinion of the President, it would be inexpedient, under existing circumstances, to agitate.

"So long as Texas shall remain at war, while the United States are at peace with her adversary, the proposition of the Texian minister plenipotentiary necessarily involves the question of war with that adversary. The United States are bound to Mexico by a treaty of amity and commerce, which will be scrupulously observed on their part, so long as it can be reasonably hoped that Mexico will perform her duties and respect our rights under it. The United States might justly be suspected of a disregard of the friendly purposes of the compact, if the overture of General Hunt were to be even reserved for future consideration, as this would imply a disposition on our part to espouse the quarrel of Texas with Mexico; a disposition wholly at variance with the spirit of the treaty, with the uniform policy and the obvious welfare of the United States.

"The inducements mentioned by General Hunt, for the United States to annex Texas to their territory, are duly appreciated, but powerful and weighty as certainly they are, they are light when opposed in the scale of reason to treaty obligations and respect for that integrity of character by which the United States have sought to distinguish themselves since the establishment of their right to claim a place in the great family of nations. . . . If the answer which the undersigned has been directed to give to the proposition of General Hunt should unfortunately work such a change in the sentiments of that Government as to induce an attempt to extend commercial relations elsewhere, upon terms prejudicial to the United States, this Government will be consoled by a consciousness of the rectitude of its intentions, and a certainty that although the hazard of transient losses may be incurred by a rigid adherence to just principles, no lasting prosperity can be secured when they are disregarded."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> H. R. Doc. 40, 25 Cong., 1 sess., 11-13.



To Forsyth's note Hunt returned a somewhat uncivil reply. As the United States, he said, had declined the generous offer of Texas, the latter would feel free to look solely to her own interests. If, for example, she should lay heavy duties on cotton-bagging and provisions, "such as would amount to an almost total prohibition of the introduction of those articles," or if she should establish intimate commercial relations with Great Britain and France, to the practical exclusion of the United States, she must not be blamed for looking solely after her own interests.<sup>1</sup> This not very formidable threat called for no answer, and none was sent.

The Texan representatives, however, hoped for some weeks that the American government might be induced to reconsider its action. Forsyth was represented as being friendly at heart, and as thinking that annexation would come about in time if matters were properly conducted in Texas.<sup>2</sup> Poinsett, the Secretary of War, gave assurances that he was still firm in support of annexation, and the cabinet as a whole was said to be merely "acting with a sort of diplomatic caution out of deference to the prejudices of the North."<sup>3</sup> On the other side in politics Clay was quoted as saying that he was friendly to the annexation of Texas, "but that in his opinion the time had not arrived when the question could be taken up in Congress with any probability of success."<sup>4</sup>

But notwithstanding these vague and polite assurances, the agents of Texas very soon acquired the conviction that no favorable result could be looked for until there was a great change in public opinion. The "determined and uncompromising" character of the opposition from the Northern and Eastern states was what was understood to weigh with the administration. All contemporaneous opinion considered that the action of the government was solely due to Northern opposition to the extension of slavery, and

<sup>1</sup> Hunt to Forsyth, Sept. 12, 1837; *ibid.*, 14-18.

<sup>2</sup> Hunt to Irion, Nov. 15, 1837; *Tex. Dip. Corr.*, I, 268.

<sup>3</sup> Grayson to Houston, Oct. 21, 1837; *ibid.*, 265.

<sup>4</sup> Hunt to Irion, Jan. 31, 1838; *ibid.*, 287.

it is indeed abundantly clear that the existence of slavery in Texas delayed and prevented action by the United States on the subject at that time. The friends of the measure who were in the confidence of the President and his cabinet assured the Texan minister that it was "impossible to jeopardize the strength of the party in the North by precipitate action upon the subject."<sup>1</sup>

The one fact which seems to have chiefly impressed the Texan representatives was the astonishing volume of petitions that were being presented to Congress. "Petitions upon petitions still continue pouring in against us from the North and East," wrote the Texan minister in Washington, describing what he called "the furious opposition of all the free States."<sup>2</sup> "I regret the presentation of so many petitions against Texas from the Northeastern states," was the comment of the Texan Secretary of State in a previous letter to the same effect, "I had anticipated opposition from that quarter, but did not suppose it would be so determined and uncompromising in its character."<sup>3</sup>

In the face of this attitude on the part of the government of the United States and a large proportion of its people, the proposal for annexation was withdrawn by the Texan government,<sup>4</sup> and the people of Texas turned their thoughts in other directions and began to consider whether, after all, an independent existence might not be to their interest.

"The prompt and decided refusal of the Government of the U. States to act in favor of the proposition," said the Texan Secretary of State, "has had a tendency to fix the opinions against admission of those who were wavering on the subject. So great has been the change in public sentiment that it is probable should the vote be again taken at the next September election that a majority would vote against it. Therefore, I do not believe that any future administration will attempt such a negotiation."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hunt to Irion, Oct. 21, 1837; *ibid.*, 266.

<sup>2</sup> Hunt to Irion, Jan. 31, 1838; *ibid.*, 287.

<sup>3</sup> Irion to Hunt, Dec. 31, 1837; *ibid.*, 277.

<sup>4</sup> Same to same, May 19, 1838; *ibid.*, 329. Also Jones to Vail, Oct. 12, 1838; H. R. Doc. 2, 25 Cong., 3 sess., 33.

<sup>5</sup> Irion to Hunt, Dec. 31, 1837; *Tex. Dip. Corr.*, I, 279.



President Lamar, of Texas, who came into office in December, 1838, fully verified this prediction, for he not only failed to attempt any negotiations for annexation, but expressed himself as unable to discover any advantages in it.<sup>1</sup> With easy optimism and ambition, and a certain contempt for the unpleasant realities of life, he was looking forward to a powerful Texan nation, which should extend from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific, and ultimately afford a highway for commerce to the Indies by way of Galveston and San Francisco. These dreams were destined to become realities, but by other and far different agencies than those which Lamar imagined, and if he could have had his way he would have proved an obstacle, and not a help, to the accomplishment of the objects he had in mind.

It was indeed not surprising that Van Buren, oppressed by many cares, should have been willing to put aside the question of Texas when he saw how certain it was to arouse new controversies over the expansion of the slave territory of the United States. That subject, it was hoped, had been laid at rest by the adoption of the Missouri compromise; and it was believed that it would not again be brought to life so long as there was no addition to the possessions of the United States. But the moment any addition was made, the balance of power established by the compromise would be disturbed.

The year 1837 was a singularly unpropitious time for the discussion of so agitating a topic. In his inaugural address Van Buren had urged the importance of a spirit of forbearance in regard to the institution of slavery and the necessity of avoiding dangerous agitation if "the apprehensions of the timid and the hopes of the wicked" were to be disappointed. Agitation, however, could not be stilled by any presidential voice, no matter how persuasive, for the anti-slavery spirit had grown up during Jackson's eight years in the presidency to a most amazing extent.

The causes of this phenomenal growth and the sudden development of moral and quasi-religious fervor, which was

<sup>1</sup> Yoakum, II, 252.

the marked characteristic of the movement, are not altogether easy to trace; nor would the attempt to trace them fall within the proper limits of this work. But the strong and growing anti-slavery sentiment in the United States was henceforth so potent in its influence upon all subjects connected with the growth of the Southern portions of the country—it played so immense a part in all discussions relative to Texas annexation, and thus incidentally in the relations of the United States with Mexico—that the salient features of the development of the anti-slavery movement must be always clearly present in any study of these subjects. And although no attempt to inquire into its complex causes need here be made, the symptoms and results of the widening conviction that slavery was morally wrong, and should be put an end to, must be briefly stated.

The establishment of the *Liberator* by William Lloyd Garrison on the first of January, 1831, marked, if it did not occasion, the beginning of a period of thirty years of discussion which never failed to be earnest, and was very often violent and bitterly abusive. The founding of the American Anti-Slavery Association, in 1833, tended to foster the growth of the movement throughout the North, and the fact that this association represented the genuine convictions and hopes of a multitude of people was shown by the fact that by 1835 there were already two hundred local auxiliary societies, and in 1837 there were more than five hundred.

The rise of the militant abolitionist party was not, however, welcomed by the major part of the people of intelligence or wealth. Their opposition to the movement was partly due to the crude methods of the more active preachers of the cause, such as Garrison. His support of all sorts of then unpopular causes, including those of co-education of the sexes and the participation of women in public affairs; his supposed lack of adherence to established religious standards, and his rather ostentatious disregard of the customary amenities of life were some of the reasons why he and his followers failed to attract the more fastidi-



ous. But a much more fundamental reason why the out-and-out abolitionists always remained a relatively small group was because of the immense danger to the Union which their programme involved.

To the best minds of that day the perpetuation of the American Union and the avoidance of civil war seemed infinitely more important objects than the abolition of slavery. The thing which was nearest their hearts and deepest in their convictions was that the Union of the states should be perpetuated. If the Union could best be preserved by tolerating slavery, they were ready to tolerate it. The men who directed the affairs of the nation and the men who directed the affairs of the several states were all of one mind in this regard, and the great body of voters was all but unanimously of the same opinion. Until at least 1835 there was not a man in Congress of either house who was in favor of abolition. From 1835 to 1839 Slade, of Vermont, was alone in Congress as a professed representative of anti-slavery constituents; although Morris, of Ohio, joined an abolitionist society in 1835 and defended the cause in the Senate.

At the beginning of Van Buren's administration, therefore, almost all the men in public life, almost all the men of affairs, and, with few exceptions, all the churches and colleges throughout the country, especially those in New England, were arrayed against the abolition propaganda.<sup>1</sup> By the ruder elements of society the freely expressed dislike of educated people in the North for the active abolitionists was translated into violent acts. Abolitionist meetings in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and other smaller places were the signal for riots, which went to extraordinary lengths. In Boston, in 1835, Garrison was about to be lynched when the mayor managed to rescue him and lodge him in jail to save his life.<sup>2</sup> In some parts of New England the opposition to any movement for the benefit of negroes showed itself in the extravagant form of the suppression, by violent means, of schools for colored children;

<sup>1</sup> Hart, *Slavery and Abolition*, 210-214.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Garrison*, II, 1-37.

and this not only in cities like New Haven, but in rural towns like Canaan, in the heart of New Hampshire, and Canterbury, in the wilds of eastern Connecticut. In Illinois in November, 1837, Lovejoy, an abolitionist editor, was deliberately murdered by a mob.

It would, however, be a very great mistake to conclude that because the majority of the people of the Northern states were opposed to the methods and doctrines of those who advocated immediate abolition, they were insensible to the evils and dangers of slavery. On the contrary, there was always a very large proportion of the most influential men in the free states who were strongly opposed to slavery in principle, who believed it to be highly injurious to the best interests of the nation, and who would gladly have seen it abolished if any means of doing so could have been devised which did not seem to them likely to create even greater evils, and to endanger the very life of the nation. At the same time, they were strongly opposed to anything which would tend to increase what they regarded as a national misfortune, if not a crime, and they were, therefore, steadily hostile to any proposal to extend the area of slavery. They desired, in Lincoln's famous phrase, to "arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in course of ultimate extinction."

It was this feeling, not yet fully formulated, which had embittered the long discussion over the admission of Missouri. It was a very clear apprehension of the hostility with which any proposal to acquire additional slave territory would be viewed in the North, that had inspired Monroe in dealing with the problems raised by the Florida treaty. And there could be no question that the anti-slavery discussion from 1830 on, if it had thus far produced no direct results, had at least greatly strengthened Northern opposition to the spread of slavery.

The conduct of the Southern states was not calculated to relieve the tension. Violent language and unfounded assertions in the North were met with even greater violence and



more extravagant statements in the South. It was impossible for an abolitionist to hold a public meeting in the Southern states or to print his views. Anti-slavery newspapers and pamphlets could not even be circulated through the mails, for the postmasters were authorized by the government to refuse to deliver such documents. In Congress the course of the Southern leaders was not only characterized by vehemence, but—what was worse for them—by extraordinarily bad judgment. Their most conspicuous and fatal blunder was the attempt to stifle discussion, by the adoption of the famous rule in the House of Representatives, in February, 1836, which provided that all petitions or papers "relating in any way or to any extent whatever to the subject of slavery shall, without being either printed or referred, be laid upon the table and that no further action whatever shall be had thereon."

The chief opponent of this measure was John Quincy Adams, whose views on slavery, until that time, had been those of the great majority of men in Massachusetts. He disliked slavery, but he thought that discussion of the subject "would lead to ill-will, to heart-burnings, to mutual hatred, where the first of wants was harmony, and without accomplishing anything else."<sup>1</sup> But the moment he believed that free speech was in danger his energies and his immense abilities were aroused. Characteristically, he conceived the most intense dislike of all those who opposed him. He regarded himself as the champion of a great moral cause, and he went into the conflict with a whole-souled bitterness that could not fail to attract universal attention and stir up the most furious antagonisms. The picturesque details of the controversy need not be gone into. In 1836 and 1837 it was at its height. One effect of it was to increase greatly the number of abolition petitions presented; while another effect was to add to the already dangerous acrimony with which every topic relating to slavery, including Texan annexation, was discussed in Congress.

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs*, VIII, 454.

## CHAPTER XVII

### CLAIMS AGAINST MEXICO

BOTH Poinsett and Butler, when they were sent as representatives of the United States to Mexico, had been instructed to pay particular attention to two subjects: the negotiation of a treaty of commerce and the purchase of Texas. By the beginning of the year 1836 these subjects had been removed from the region of diplomatic discussion. The treaty of amity, commerce, and navigation ratified April 5, 1832, had put the ordinary relations of the two countries upon a basis that was regarded as reasonably satisfactory. The boundary line of 1819 had been explicitly affirmed by the treaty concluded January 12, 1828. The proposals to buy Texas had been fruitlessly and persistently urged for ten years, until further efforts were manifestly useless, and until the rising of the colonists indicated at least a possibility that Mexico, even if terms were agreed on, would be unable to deliver possession.

There was, however, another task for diplomacy which had not been in any way disposed of, although it had constantly been before the American legation, and that was the subject of the claims of American citizens. These claims were all based on asserted injuries to persons or property inflicted by the Mexican government or its agents, for which redress had been sought in vain. As early as the year 1826 Poinsett had been instructed by President Adams's administration to demand redress for damage sustained by the forcible seizure of the property of American citizens,<sup>1</sup> and a

<sup>1</sup> See Clay to Poinsett, March 20, 1826, *State Dept. MSS.*, where Clay writes in regard to the seizure and detention of the schooner *Fair American*: "Respect for the authorities of the United Mexican States alone forbids my characterizing it by the epithet which belongs to the transaction." Most of the instructions of 1826 related to similar claims, and the number of demands increased in later years.