

with Mexico was the last thing in the world they then desired, for it could hardly have been declared and carried on without such an active and zealous support of both houses of Congress as the President could, at that time, hardly count upon. It was doubtful whether a proposal to Congress to declare war for the failure of Mexico to settle the claims of American citizens, the only *casus belli*, would have met with popular favor; and it would, at the very least, have involved long debates in which the question of slavery and all the old controversies about Texas would certainly have been reopened. But a successful negotiation with Mexico which should result in the settlement of all pecuniary claims, the settlement of the boundary of Texas, and the acquisition of California would be a very different matter.

Parrott's despatch last mentioned reached Washington in time to be read at a cabinet meeting on the sixteenth of September, only three weeks after its date, for such were the improvements in methods of transportation by sea and within the United States.

"After much consultation," the President recorded in his diary, "it was agreed unanimously that it was expedient to re-open Diplomatic relations with Mexico; but that it was to be kept a profound secret that such a step was contemplated, for the reason mainly that if it was known in advance in the U. S. that a Minister had been sent to Mexico, it would, of course, be known to the British, French, & other Foreign Ministers at Washington, who might take measures to thwart or defeat the objects of the mission. The President, in consultation with the Cabinet, agreed that the Hon. John Slidell of New Orleans, who spoke the Spanish language and was otherwise well qualified, should be tendered the mission. . . . One great object of the Mission, as stated by the President, would be to adjust a permanent boundary between Mexico and the U. States, and that in doing this the Minister would be instructed to purchase for a pecuniary consideration Upper California and New Mexico. He said that a better boundary would be the Del Norte from its mouth to the Passo, in latitude about 32° North, and thence West to the Pacific Ocean, Mexico ceding to the U. S. all the country East and North of these lines. The President said that for such a boundary the amt. of pecuniary consideration to be paid would be of small importance. *He supposed it might be had for fifteen or twenty millions, but he was ready*

to pay forty millions for it, if it could not be had for less. In these views the Cabinet agreed with the President unanimously."¹

It was the intention of the President to send off Slidell at once, but the night brought better counsels. The warlike spirit of Mexican proclamations seemed to throw doubt on the readiness of the Mexican government to enter into diplomatic negotiations, and at a second meeting of the cabinet it was decided to delay sending Slidell until it should be ascertained officially from the Mexican government whether a minister would be received. Slidell was, however, to be privately notified of his appointment, and asked to hold himself in readiness to start for his post on a day's notice.²

That same afternoon instructions to the American consul at the city of Mexico were prepared.

"Information recently received at this department," Buchanan wrote, "both from yourself and others, renders it probable that the Mexican government may now be willing to restore the diplomatic relations between the two countries. At the time of their suspension, General Almonte was assured of the desire felt by the President to adjust amicably every cause of complaint between the governments, and to cultivate the kindest and most friendly relations between the sister republics. He still continues to be animated by the same sentiments. It was his duty to place the country in a condition successfully to resist the threatened invasion of Texas by Mexico, and this has been accomplished. He desires, however, that all existing differences should be terminated amicably by negotiation and not by the sword. He is anxious to preserve peace, although prepared for war.

"Actuated by these sentiments, the President has directed me to instruct you, in the absence of any diplomatic agent in Mexico, to ascertain from the Mexican government whether they would receive an envoy from the United States, intrusted with full power to adjust all the questions between the two governments. Should the answer be in the affirmative, such an envoy will be immediately despatched to Mexico."³

¹ Polk's *Diary*, I, 34. The italics are not in the original. Slidell's name was suggested to the President by Buchanan, who spoke of him as "the best qualified man in the country for that mission, because among other reasons of his knowledge of the Spanish language."—(*Ibid.*, 232.)

² *Ibid.*, 35.

³ Buchanan to Black, Sept. 17, 1845; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 12.

These instructions reached the city of Mexico on the tenth of October, and Black, the consul, lost no time in having a confidential interview with Peña y Peña, the Minister of Foreign Relations, who asked that the President's inquiry be put in writing, which was done in a note containing a quotation word for word from Buchanan's instructions. On Wednesday evening, October 15, Black called again by appointment at the minister's private residence,¹ and was handed a written reply in which the proposal of the United States was accepted in the following language:

"Although the Mexican nation is deeply injured by the United States, through the acts committed by them in the department of Texas, which belongs to this nation, my government is disposed to receive the commissioner of the United States, who may come to this capital with full powers from his government to settle the present dispute in a peaceable, reasonable, and honorable manner; thus giving a new proof that, even in the midst of its injuries, and of its firm decision to exact adequate reparation for them, it does not repel with contumely the measure of reason and peace to which it is invited by its adversary."

The note then proceeded to state that the envoy to be sent should possess dignity, prudence, and moderation; and further, that the American naval force then anchored near Vera Cruz should be withdrawn.² Black thought this answer satisfactory, especially in view of the conversation which followed the delivery of the note. Peña y Peña began by apologizing in a way, for referring to the grievances of Mexico. If the government had only itself to consider, he said, it would have omitted these expressions, but it was bound to try to reconcile public opinion; a strong opposition was daily scrutinizing and condemning every act of the government, which tried to give as little pretext as possible for criticism; and he desired Black to make this explanation to the American government. As to the person to be sent

¹ He seems to have been accompanied by Parrott, acting as his interpreter.—(W. S. Parrott to Buchanan, Oct. 11, 1845; *State Dept. MSS.*)
² Peña y Peña to Black, Oct. 15, 1845; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 16. The vessels were withdrawn, at the consul's suggestion, a few days later.

out, he said that it was the wish of the Mexican government, and would be for the good of both countries, that a person suitable in every respect should be sent out. Any one like Poinsett, for example, against whom the government or the people of Mexico entertained a fixed prejudice, would be a great obstacle in the way of an amicable adjustment of differences.¹

Black of course could give no assurances as to the character of the person who would be sent to Mexico, for he had not been told who had been selected; but in fact the nominee very fairly came up to the required standard. John Slidell, the son of a New York merchant, was born in that city about 1793, graduated at Columbia College in the class of 1810, studied law, and went to New Orleans (as many other young Northern men did at about that time) in 1819. Being a capable lawyer and an active state-rights Democrat, President Jackson appointed him United States attorney for Louisiana. At the time of his selection for the mission to Mexico he was a member of the House of Representatives, where he had sat for two years. Without possessing extraordinary abilities, he had excellent manners and a good education, and gave every promise of being competent to transact business with the dignity, prudence, and moderation that the Mexican government considered so essential. Pakenham, who had every personal and official reason for being interested in the result of the mission, wrote to the Foreign Office that Slidell was very well regarded for his understanding and moderation, and that therefore his mission might be expected to be successful; and Lord Aberdeen so informed the Mexican minister in London.²

The official report from the American consul of his arrangement with the Mexican Minister of Foreign Relations was brought to the State Department by Parrott in person, who reached Washington on Sunday evening, the ninth of November, and had a long conversation the next morning

¹ Black to Buchanan, Oct. 17, 1845; *State Dept. MSS.*; extract in H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 13.

² Murphoy to Minister of Relations, Jan. 1, 1846; *Sec. de Rel. Ext. MSS.*

with the President. But unofficial information that Mexico was willing to receive a minister from the United States had preceded Parrott, for late on the previous Thursday night, the sixth of November, Bancroft had placed in the President's hands despatches from Commodore Connor, commander of the naval squadron off Vera Cruz, containing the welcome news. Not a moment was lost. The President personally wrote to Slidell in New Orleans, directing him to go at once to Pensacola and await instructions; and the Secretary of State undertook to prepare the necessary official documents without delay.¹

The formal instructions to Slidell proved, as events turned out, to be only of interest as showing the objects which the American government had in mind in opening negotiations; but upon that point they were extremely illuminating. The first object was declared to be the settlement of the claims of American citizens, to which, it was said, Mexico had always opposed "evasions, difficulties, and delays." The Mexican government must be made to see that the "patient forbearance" of the United States could not endure much longer, and that a speedy and satisfactory adjustment must be made.

"But in what manner," the instructions continued, "can this duty be performed consistently with the amicable spirit of your mission? The fact is but too well known to the world, that the Mexican government are not now in a condition to satisfy these claims by a payment of money."

It was then pointed out that the obvious way of satisfying them was by so adjusting the boundary of the two republics as "to cast the burden of the debt due to American claimants upon their own government"; and if Mexico would only agree to the boundary claimed by Texas—that is, the line of the Rio Grande from its mouth to its source—the United States would assume the payment of all the claims.

¹ Polk's *Diary*, I, 91-94. Slidell had previously been notified of his appointment and had accepted. See Slidell to Buchanan, Sept. 25, 1845; Moore's *Buchanan*, VI, 264.

But there was another subject "of vast importance to the United States," and that was the ownership of California. Both Great Britain and France, as Slidell was informed, had designs upon California, which was now but nominally dependent on Mexico. Between Mexico and California the United States did not intend to interfere, but "it would vigorously interpose to prevent the latter from becoming either a British or a French Colony."

"Under these circumstances," continued the Secretary of State, "it is the desire of the President that you shall use your best efforts to obtain a cession of that province from Mexico to the United States. Could you accomplish this object, you would render immense service to your country and establish an enviable reputation for yourself. Money would be no object, when compared with the value of the acquisition. . . . Should you, after sounding the Mexican authorities on the subject, discover a prospect of success, the President would not hesitate to give, in addition to the assumption of the just claims of our citizens on Mexico, twenty-five millions of dollars for the cession."¹

These instructions, which had really been drafted some weeks before, were approved at a cabinet meeting held on Saturday, the eighth of November, and, after being copied with the greatest precautions of secrecy, were sent off late at night on the following Monday to Pensacola, where a naval vessel was lying ready for sea.²

So well had everything been planned, and so energetically had the President and the various officers of the government acted, that Slidell was ashore at Vera Cruz on November 29, 1845, and the news of his arrival was in the hands of the American consul in the city of Mexico on the third of

¹ Buchanan to Slidell, Nov. 10, 1845; Sen. Doc. 52, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 71-80.

² Polk's *Diary*, I, 93. There was some further correspondence supplementary to these general instructions. Slidell was informed that he was to hasten negotiations, as the President wished to submit to Congress, before the end of its session, the question of claims against Mexico. He was also warned that if a settlement of the boundary could not be effected without endangering the attainment of the first two objects mentioned in the original instructions—"to counteract the influence of foreign Powers" and "to restore those relations of peace and good will which formerly existed"—he was not to sacrifice these in the pursuit of what was unattainable.—(Buchanan to Slidell, Nov. 19 and Dec. 17, 1845; Moore's *Buchanan*, VI, 311, 345.)

December, precisely seven weeks from the day when Peña y Peña had expressed his willingness to receive a "commissioner of the United States." This unusual promptness, however, was not at all to the taste of the Mexican government. When Black called on the Minister of Foreign Relations to announce Slidell's arrival at Vera Cruz, the minister was plainly very much disturbed.

"He said that ought not to be; the government did not expect an envoy from the United States until January, as they were not prepared to receive him; and he desired, if possible, that he would not come to the capital, nor even disembark at this time, and that I should endeavor to prevent his doing so, as his appearance in the capital at this time might prove destruction to the government, and thus defeat the whole affair. You know the opposition are calling us traitors for entering into this arrangement with you."

Black told him that all this should have been thought of sooner, as the envoy would now be on his way to the capital; but the minister, much flurried, continued to pour out explanations and excuses.

"I know, he said, there was no time set; but from the conversations which I have had with yourself, and what I have heard from others, I had good reason to believe that the envoy would not have been appointed by your government, or, at least, not have started on his mission, until after the meeting of Congress; which, he said, he understood would not meet until the first of this month.

"He said that the government itself was well disposed, and ready to proceed in the negotiation, but that if the affair was commenced now, it would endanger its existence; that the government were preparing the thing, collecting the opinion and consent of the departments, which they expected to have finished by January, and then they would be able to proceed in the affair with more security; that the government were afraid that the appearance of the envoy at this time would produce a revolution against it, which might terminate in its destruction."¹

All this agitated talk was evidently sincere. Herrera's administration would have been only too happy to settle all difficulties with the United States if it could have been per-

¹ Black to Buchanan, Dec. 18, 1845; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 23.

mitted to do so, but the mere knowledge that negotiations had been begun was quite likely to be a spark that would blow up the powder-magazine upon which the administration rested. The official proceedings were, therefore, purely dilatory.

Slidell reached the city of Mexico on Saturday, the sixth of December, and on the Monday he wrote the usual formal note to the Minister of Foreign Relations, enclosing a copy of his credentials, and asking that a date might be fixed at which he might be received by the President. No reply being given, he wrote again on the fifteenth of December, to which Peña y Peña answered that the matter was under consideration, and that the question whether Slidell should be received had been referred to the council of government, a very unusual proceeding. On the seventeenth their opinion was stated as follows:

"The Supreme Government is advised that the agreement which it entered into to admit a plenipotentiary of the United States with special powers to treat of the affairs of Texas, does not compel it to receive an Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to reside near the Government, in which character Mr. Slidell comes according to his credentials."¹

It was not, however, until the twentieth of December that the Minister of Foreign Relations wrote to Slidell to inform him officially that he could not be received. The refusal was based, in this note, upon the sole ground that Slidell had been commissioned as envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary, instead of as a commissioner, to settle "the questions relative to Texas," and it was suggested that he get new credentials.² Slidell, of course, had no

¹ Slidell to Buchanan, Dec. 17, 1845; *State Dept MSS.* Extracts in H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 23-27. In a postscript dated December 18 Slidell says that the *dictamen* of the council of government has just been published in the newspapers; and he encloses a copy of the *Siglo XIX* containing it. In this despatch he comments on the "weakness and bad faith" of the Mexican government. It was received at the State Department January 12, 1846.

² Peña y Peña to Slidell, Dec. 20, 1845; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 37. In submitting the question to the council of government Peña y Peña had made the further point that Slidell's appointment was incomplete because he had not been confirmed by the United States Senate. See document dated

difficulty in showing that such a limitation as was now suggested had never been mentioned in the correspondence between the American consul and the Minister of Foreign Relations, but the troublesome question as to the next step he should take, still remained. He decided to go to Jalapa, where he could, as he said, communicate more speedily with his government, and there await its final instructions,¹ but he lingered in the city of Mexico for another three weeks, and sent home full accounts of the political situation in Mexico as he saw it. His views were naturally gloomy.

Writing on the twenty-seventh of December, he dwelt on the "unparalleled bad faith" of the Mexican government, "its gross falsification of the correspondence which led to my appointment, and the utter futility of the miserable sophistry by which it attempts to justify its conduct." His own course, he feared, might be considered too forbearing, but he was unwilling to take steps which would preclude subsequent attempts at negotiation and render war inevitable.² The difficulties of the situation due to party struggles were explained.

"But," he added, "if all these parties be analyzed, they will be found to be mere personal factions, whose members, with very rare exceptions, have no other object in view than the elevation of some chief who will look with complacency upon any corruption or abuse of power that may be committed by his adherents. As for a people, in the proper sense of the term, it does not exist in Mexico, the masses are totally indifferent to all the revolutions that are going on and submit with the most stupid indifference to any masters that may be imposed upon them."³

While Slidell still tarried in the capital the long-expected revolt of Paredes broke out and was successfully carried through; and, as the Minister of Foreign Relations had pre-

Dec. 11, 1845; *ibid.*, 60. Before writing to Slidell Peña may have learned what the United States Constitution did provide. Slidell was confirmed soon after the Senate met.

¹ Slidell to Peña y Peña, Dec. 24, 1845; *ibid.*, 39-49.

² Slidell to Buchanan, Dec. 27, 1845; *ibid.*, 32.

³ Same despatch, *State Dept. MSS.* Extracts only are contained in the document as published.

dicted, the mere act of the government in allowing a diplomatic agent of the United States to land in Mexico was put in the very front of the statement of grievances.

Paredes began his revolution in the customary manner by causing a meeting of the principal officers of the army to be held on December 14. At this meeting General Romero, commanding the department of San Luis Potosí, was put up to explain that the administration of President Herrera had lost public confidence, because it had tried to avoid a war with the United States; because it had attempted to re-establish the civic militia, which was an insult to the regular army; because it had agreed to receive a commissioner with whom to treat in regard to the loss of national integrity, and because it had provoked anarchy by encouraging factions. A "plan" was at once adopted which proclaimed that, inasmuch as the plenipotentiary of the United States had entered Mexican territory and was inhabiting the capital of the republic, and as he had come by consent of the cabinet to buy Mexican independence and nationality, the army would support the protest of the nation against all subsequent acts of the present administration, which from this date would be held as null and void. The Congress and the executive authorities, it was declared, were to cease at once from carrying on their functions, the army would occupy the capital, and an extraordinary constituent Congress, without any restriction upon its august functions, would be summoned to establish a new Constitution. As soon as it was installed, the constituent Congress was to organize an executive power, and no authority was to exist but by its sovereign sanction. Departmental authorities were to continue in power until others might be substituted for them by the national representation. The army named as its chief in this political movement General Paredes, who was invited forthwith to adhere to these proposals, the army protesting solemnly at the same time that it had no thought of the personal elevation of the chief it had selected.¹

On the next day Paredes by a formal manifesto accepted

¹ Dublin y Lozano, V, 97-100.

the plan of the army, protesting his disinterestedness and want of ambition, and promising to summon the new Congress as soon as the army occupied the capital.

Herrera's government, of course, denounced Paredes for his want of patriotism in failing to push the Texan campaign, referred to him and his supporters as "shameful cowards," and bitterly contrasted his acts with his loud professions of love for the country.

"It is not," said the *Diario*, "the bad state of the Republic nor the war with Texas—in which he has never wished to take part but which he has always clamored for—that have induced General Paredes to rebel at San Luis. Other causes, more influential with him, have been the motives for his action. He doubtless hopes that as the movement to defeat General Santa Anna was initiated by him, he will become the idol of the nation; and he looks to take the place of the fallen tyrant. Fortunately the nation owes him little and has sufficiently paid him by its confidence. . . . General Santa Anna in 1841 summoned a commission in order that he might *freely* be elected for the Supreme power. To-day in like manner the proposed Congress will elect *freely* the soldier of the country, the defender of the integrity of our territory."¹

All the authorities in the city of Mexico, and many of the authorities outside the capital, protested against the plan of San Luis. Congress on December 23 issued a manifesto denouncing the perfidy of the soldiers who had betrayed constitutional institutions by proclaiming the re-establishment of a dictatorship, summoning all the sons of the country to the support of their rights and liberty, and the defence of its institutions, declaring that all officers and soldiers of every class who failed to present themselves in support of the cause of the republic, and against the plan of San Luis, were to be degraded, and proclaiming that any act of persons under rebel authority would be null and void.² President Herrera also issued a proclamation of his own, denouncing Paredes personally and calling on the army to consider whether the man who had refused under false pretexts to comply with orders to reinforce Arista was likely to con-

¹ *México á través de los Siglos*, IV, 546.

² Dublan y Lozano, V, 96.

duct them to the plains of Texas.¹ He further announced that he relied confidently upon the aid of the people and the special protection of divine Providence; but nevertheless, on the twenty-fifth of December he declared the capital to be in a state of siege.

At twenty minutes before eleven on the night of December 30 the entire garrison of the city of Mexico, with the exception of the troops stationed in the National Palace, mutinied on a signal given from the citadel. On the morning of the thirty-first these latter troops also announced their adherence to the pronunciamiento, and two hours later General Herrera left the palace as a private individual. A little before four o'clock on the same afternoon General Valencia, president of the council and commander of the troops in the city of Mexico, went to the Palace accompanied by a numerous staff, and took possession (it was said) of most of the cash in the Treasury. At the same time the bells of the cathedral and all the churches were rung, and the revolution was thus fully completed without the firing of a single shot. The garrison at the capital announced that it adhered *in toto* to the plan proclaimed at San Luis Potosí on December 14 by General Paredes; it named as its chief General Valencia, who was authorized to carry it into effect with certain additions; and Generals Tornel and Almonte were sent out as a committee to meet Paredes, who was approaching the city, to inform him of these events.

Under the constitutional laws of December, 1836, the president of the council was entitled to succeed temporarily to the presidency of the republic,² and immediately on Herrera's resignation Valencia had occupied the Palace. But Paredes, who had been twice disappointed in the revolutions he had begun, was by no means ready "to see the feast that was preparing turned into a banquet for a rival"; and Tornel and Almonte were sent back to the city with a message to the effect that General Paredes would not submit to

¹ Herrera's manifesto of Dec. 22, 1845; *México á través de los Siglos*, IV, 548.

² "En las faltas temporales del Presidente de la República, gobernará el presidente del consejo."—(Leyes Constitucionales, 4a, Art. 9; Dublan y Lozano, III, 243.)