

decision of the Mexican government on the point was declared to be "immutable."¹

The action of the two successive Mexican administrations in refusing to receive an American minister ended all further discussion. Their decision had plainly been dictated by the exigencies of domestic politics. The opinions of the governing class had been too clearly declared to make it possible for any government to enter at that time upon negotiations with the United States; and although the men who were actually intrusted with the responsibility of carrying on the affairs of the republic must have had some perception of the inevitable result of a conflict, they could not have remained in office for a single day if they had openly defied the public clamor for war.

There was obviously nothing for Slidell to do but to return home, and he therefore wrote to Castillo demanding his passports and defending the course which the United States had pursued with respect to Texas. Castillo replied by return of post, enclosing the passports, and saying that he thought it needless to discuss anew Slidell's arguments, as they had already been "victoriously refuted."² At the same time the whole correspondence was published in the *Diario del Gobierno*. At the earliest practicable day Slidell sailed from Vera Cruz, and on reaching the United States set out for Washington to explain to the President the failure of his mission and to offer his opinions as to the course which the American government should pursue.

¹ Castillo to Slidell, March 12, 1846; *ibid.*, 67.

² Same to same, March 21, 1846; *ibid.*, 79.

CHAPTER XXXI

MEXICO SEEKS FOREIGN AID

As the prospect of a war with the United States became more threatening, the successive Mexican administrations saw more and more clearly that they ran a very great risk of losing not only Texas but also a large part of their other territory. California in particular was evidently indefensible against a naval force, and New Mexico was too remote for succor. The only way to guard against such dangers was by securing foreign help; and, indeed, in the earlier efforts of Great Britain and France to adjust the disputes between Mexico and Texas, a foreign guarantee of the northern boundary had actually been offered. Thus in the interview between Lord Aberdeen and the Mexican minister in London, on May 29, 1844, the former had gone so far as to say that if Mexico would acknowledge the independence of Texas, England, and very likely France, would oppose annexation to the United States, and that he would endeavor that France and England should jointly guarantee the independence of Texas and the integrity of Mexican territory.¹ At the same time he had proposed to the French government "a joint operation on the part of Great Britain and France in order to acknowledge the independence of Texas, on a guarantee being jointly given by us that that independence shall be respected by other nations, and that the Mexico-Texian boundary shall be secured from further encroachments." And a few days later, in an interview with Ashbel Smith, of Texas, he had proposed a "diplomatic act" by which England and France, acting with Texas and

¹ *Memorandum of Conversation*, in E. D. Adams, 168.

Mexico, were to secure and guarantee the independence of Texas and settle its boundaries.¹

So also in the memorandum of "points on the settlement of which the Mexican government might agree to grant the Independence of Texas," discussed in the autumn of 1844 between Bankhead and the expiring administration of Santa Anna, one of the clauses of the proposed arrangement was that Mexico should receive an indemnity for the loss of Texas, and also—

"the guarantee of England and France united, that under no pretext whatever shall the Texans ever pass the Boundaries marked out. The same nations shall also guarantee to Mexico the Californias, New Mexico and the other points of the Northern frontier bordering on the United States, according to a Treaty to be drawn up for that purpose.—If the United States carry into effect the annexation of Texas, to the North American Union, England and France will assist Mexico in the contest which may be thereby brought on."²

The idea of any guarantee was, however, soon abandoned, partly because France was lukewarm, partly because of warnings from the British and French ministers in Washington that the least suggestion of foreign interference in the matter of Texas would tend to Clay's defeat for the presidency and thus to the immediate annexation of Texas, and partly because Santa Anna persisted in announcing his intention to make war at once.³ At the end therefore of September, 1844, Bankhead had been instructed to say that if Santa Anna—

"were to take the rash step of invading Texas with a view to its forcible reconquest, and if, by so doing, he should find himself involved in difficulties with other Countries, he must not look for the support of Great Britain in aiding him to extricate himself from those difficulties."⁴

But in spite of this and other later warnings to the effect that Mexico would be left to herself if she did not heed

¹ Aberdeen to Cowley, May 31, 1844; *ibid.*, 171. Smith to Jones, June 24, 1844; *Tex. Dip. Corr.*, II, 1152.

² Bankhead to Aberdeen, Nov. 29, 1844; E. D. Adams, 188.

³ See Vol. I, pages 659-661.

⁴ Aberdeen to Pakenham, Sept. 30, 1844; E. D. Adams, 186.

the advice of her friends in Europe, the Mexican representatives in London and Paris continued to haggle over territorial guarantees by the European powers as a condition to an abandonment of their projects for a reconquest of Texas. In repeated interviews with the French and English Secretaries of Foreign Affairs they argued that no reliance was to be placed on the good faith of the Texans. If Texan independence were recognized to-day by Mexico, what was to prevent those people from seeking to-morrow annexation to the United States? Would not the mere fact of recognition by Mexico be cited as a proof that Texas was at complete liberty to dispose of her own fortunes? And would a mere treaty of peace and friendship restrain the Texans from new aggressions, like the expedition to Santa Fe and the expedition to Mier? Nothing, it was said, would hold the Texans back but the fear of physical force, which force France and Great Britain must agree to furnish if they wished to see peace and to see Texas universally recognized as an independent state.¹

By the end of November, 1844, the news of Polk's election to the presidency had reached Europe, and foreign governments began to see that the United States was fully committed to the policy of annexation, and that any attempt by European powers to prevent it might only result in a war, for which the people of France, at any rate, had no desire.

"It appears to me," wrote Maximo Garro, the Mexican minister in Paris, "that the cabinet of the Tuilleries, even though it might wish to join with that of London in taking up arms in opposition to the annexation of Texas, could never do so without exciting a general clamor against any such policy. All parties, without exception, would accuse it of forgetting that the interests of France require that it shall not take part in a struggle which, whatever its result, will weaken her two maritime rivals and will consequently contribute to the growth of her own power. . . ."

"Should there be a rupture between the English and the Americans,

¹ Murphy to Minister of Relations, Jan. 1, June 1, and July 1, 1845; Garro to same, March 25 and June 17, 1845.—(*Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, México, MSS.*)

we ought to be able to count on an alliance with the former; but if the latter should take up arms to oppose our projected expedition for the reconquest of Texas, I believe that Great Britain will only present itself as a *pacifc mediator*, and that it would redouble its efforts to have Mexico recognize the independence of that Department, offering in that event to intervene in a more efficacious manner."¹

William R. King, the American minister in Paris, held similar opinions.

"There should be no wavering," he wrote privately to the Secretary of State, "on the subject of the annexation of Texas. The growling of the British Lion should only stimulate to immediate action. To falter in our course from apprehension of her hostility, would disgrace us in the eyes of all Europe. The act accomplished, England will complain, perhaps threaten, and her newspapers will be lavish in their abuse; but that will be all; for with all her power, she can but feel that a war with us would be more prejudicial to her interest than with any other nation. She will not risk the consequences. I am aware that she is exerting herself to induce France to make common cause with her on the subject of Texas and that Mr. Guizot is much inclined to do so; but it will not succeed. It would shock the French nation, which detests all alliances with England; and the King is too wise, and too prudent to place himself in a position which would go far towards destroying the dynasty."²

In fact, though neither Señor Garro nor Mr. King was aware of it, the French government had already politely declined to make common cause with Great Britain. Lord Cowley, the British ambassador, early in December, 1844, reported that he had asked the direct question whether France would "act in concert with us in any negotiation with the Mexican Govt. for the purpose of obtaining from them the acknowledgment" of Texan independence. "Any negotiation" probably seemed to Guizot a dangerously vague phrase, and he therefore explained just how far France would go.

"Undoubtedly," he said to Cowley, "we will both use our best efforts for that purpose, and will even refuse to recognize the annexa-

¹ Garro to Minister of Relations, Dec. 18, 1844; *ibid.*

² King to Calhoun, Dec. 28, 1844; *Amer. Hist. Assn. Rep.* 1899, 1013.

tion of Texas to the United States; but, as a Question of Peace or War, I am not prepared to say that its junction with the American States is of sufficient importance to us to justify our having recourse to arms in order to prevent it."¹

Aberdeen, however, was very unwilling to abandon his project of a joint guarantee by Great Britain and France, which he still hoped would result in preserving the existence of Texas as an independent nation. But to attain that end the first essential was evidently to gain the assent of Mexico; and Aberdeen thought it necessary to use plain language in warning the Mexican authorities of the dangerous consequences of the course they seemed bent on pursuing. To the British minister in Mexico he wrote:

"You will also clearly explain to the Mexican Govt. that they must not count upon the assistance of Gt. Britain, whose friendly advice they have constantly neglected in enabling them to resist any attack which may at any time, now or hereafter, be made upon Mexico by the U. States, since they have wilfully exposed themselves to such attacks by omitting to make a friend and dependent of Texas while it was yet time."²

To the Mexican minister in London similar language was used, but the door of hope was held open. In a conversation at the Foreign Office, Aberdeen denounced the folly of an attempt to reconquer Texas.

"What had Mexico to hope from such an undertaking? Not only would she never recover that territory, but in the course of the war with the United States in which she would be involved she would probably lose other provinces and especially the Californias. These and no others would be the results, truly disastrous for Mexico, if she persisted in so imprudent a policy. How different would the conditions be if she would listen to the voice of reason and decide once for all to recognize the independence of Texas! . . . In that event, as he had told me several times, it might be possible, with the co-operation of France, to enter into arrangements for guaranteeing at the proper time the independence of Texas and the territory of Mexico. The recognition of the independence of that country is therefore the only

¹ Cowley to Aberdeen, Dec. 2, 1844; E. D. Adams, 190.

² Aberdeen to Bankhead, Dec. 31, 1844; *ibid.*, 192.

course which reason, prudence and sane policy commend to Mexico—following the example of other countries in the like circumstances. It was well for England that she recognized the independence of her former colonies when she saw it was hopeless to reconquer them; and it was well for Spain that she did the same in respect to hers. 'Now,' continued Lord Aberdeen, 'if Mexico persists in her desperate projects, it may not be impossible that England and France will resolve to oppose both annexation to the United States and reconquest by Mexico. . . . I have spoken of the Californias. You may be aware that offers of that country have been made to England by the Mexican inhabitants themselves; as also proposals for establishing colonies there under our protection. Acting in this matter in the honorable spirit in which I hope we always act, we have closed our ears to these proposals and offers. But must we let our fair dealing serve only to enable some one else to take possession of that territory? The attack of Commodore Jones in time of peace shows you what you must expect from the preposterous war (*la insensata guerra*) with the United States in which you wish to engage.'¹

Aberdeen's rather vague suggestions naturally did not suffice for the Mexican minister, and he asked what guarantees might be counted on. Aberdeen replied that England alone would not engage in war with the United States, though he would not say so to them.

"I asked His Lordship what was the disposition of France. He replied that when M. Guizot was here he talked with him at length about the business, and although in general he agreed to co-operate with England on the question of guarantees, it must be confessed he would not go to the length of binding himself to make war."²

Thus matters stood during the winter, but late in March, 1845, after the news of the passage of the annexation resolutions by Congress had reached Europe, accompanied by the inaugural address of the new President, the Mexican minister in Paris had an interview with King Louis Philippe, which he reported in the following dramatic form to his government:

¹ Tomás Murphy to Minister of Relations, Jan. 1, 1845; *Sec. Rel. Ext. MSS.* The reference to offers of California evidently relates to the request for a protectorate made through Forbes, of which Aberdeen had received information on Dec. 13, 1844. See page 50 above.

² Same despatch from Murphy. Guizot accompanied Louis Philippe on a state visit to Queen Victoria, in the latter part of September, 1844.

"*Eh bien*, M. Garro, is your new administration going to recognize the independence of Texas so as to put a stop to annexation to the United States? It cannot be prevented in any other way'

"I don't know of anything, Sir, *up to the present time*, which leads me to suppose that the present government is any more disposed than the former one to abandon the defence of our just rights over that territory.'

"Why, what hope have you of reconquering it? The Americans will never allow it, and a war with them would lead to consequences infinitely serious and disastrous for Mexico, for she would run the risk of losing a great part of her present possessions.'"

After some further talk of the advantages to Mexico of recognizing Texas, which, Garro said, would be illusory unless France and England guaranteed the stipulations of any treaty that might be made, the King spoke of the difficulty of conquering Texas without a navy capable of dealing with the American navy, and of the foolish obstinacy Spain had displayed in refusing to recognize the independence of her former colonies.

The King continued:

"To describe the kind of obstinacy which prevents one from seeing what is evident, we have a word in French which is very easy to translate into Spanish—*infatuation*. This *infatuation* prevents you from recognizing what everybody else sees; that is, that you have lost Texas irrevocably. If I urge you to recognize her independence, it is because I believe that advantages will result to Mexico, in whose happiness I take great interest. If a barrier is once established between Mexico and the United States, they will have no excuse for mixing in your affairs, and they will let you live in peace.'

"Sir, I beg your Majesty to let me ask one question, and allow me to send your answer to my government, so that they may know what they can in any event rely on. If Mexico should decide to recognize the independence of Texas, would your Majesty's government and that of Great Britain *guarantee formally* the perpetuity of the boundaries of the new state?'

"No, no. Any such formal guarantee might give rise to an intervention, and I don't like interventions; because I know what they cost in blood and treasure. Without this formal guarantee, the arrangements you may make would afford you the necessary security.'

"Sir, I beg your Majesty to believe that my question was only for the purpose of informing my government what it could hope for in the *hypothesis* which I have no grounds for foreseeing—'

"The King walked away, repeating that he was very sincerely interested in the happiness of the republic.

"Before closing this despatch I must tell your Excellency that before the King came up to speak to me he had been talking for some time with the English Ambassador who, when His Majesty left him, came up to me and asked me what I thought about Texan affairs. I told him frankly my opinion and my astonishment at the recognition—under Lord Palmerston's *Whig* administration (the Ambassador Lord Cowley is of the *Tory* party) which wished to abolish negro slavery—of a state that had established slavery where it did not exist before. Lord Cowley, pretending not to understand my observation, said: 'But really now, how does the Mexican government expect to conquer Texas?' (Your Excellency will note that this was almost exactly the same question with which the King began his conversation.) 'By employing all her resources,' I replied, 'to accomplish it.' 'Yes, but with these resources you have not been able to do much so far, and I am afraid that, in view of all the circumstances, you will not be more fortunate in future.'

"I confess that I could not find any entirely satisfactory answer to this simple remark."¹

A few days after this interview, all idea of giving Mexico any guarantees against the possible encroachments of the United States was definitely abandoned, as the French government firmly refused to join in the project. Lord Aberdeen, however, was not yet willing to give up entirely all hopes of continuing Texas as an independent state. He therefore proposed that Great Britain and France should unite in trying once more to secure an acknowledgment of Texan independence from Mexico, but upon the distinct understanding that there should be no responsibility on the part of either of the European powers. Both governments on several occasions had been told positively that Mexico would not recognize Texas without a guarantee of her good behavior; but Aberdeen doubtless thought it worth while, under the hopeless circumstances of Mexico, to make one more attempt.

"Her Majesty's Government," he wrote, "would not propose to enter into any guarantee whatever with respect to either of the States,

¹ Garro to Minister of Relations, March 25, 1845; *Sec. Rel. Ext. MSS.* Italics in original.

whether to secure to Mexico the inviolability of Her frontier against Texas, or to secure to Texas its frontier against the United States or Mexico. In fact H. M. Gov^t. would not be disposed to place themselves in any respect in a position which might give to Mexico or to Texas the power of hereafter calling upon Great Britain, as a matter of right, for her protection and succour against encroachment on the part of any other Powers, nor even of leading the Mexican Gov^t. to hope that such succour might be afforded. . . . They would merely wish to exert all the weight of their moral influence, added to that of France, in order to secure the present pacification and future stability both of Mexico and Texas."¹

Guizot, of course, agreed to this proposal, which was exactly in line with what his government desired and had offered; and on the first day of May instructions were sent to Bankhead directing him to urge upon the Mexican government the importance of haste in seizing this last chance of safety.²

By the same packet that carried Aberdeen's instructions, the Mexican minister in London wrote to notify his government of the change in the attitude of Peel's administration, which he thought was not surprising, as they had always declared they would not act alone, and France had undoubtedly refused to co-operate in the plan of an absolute guarantee.³

These letters were crossed on the Atlantic by "most secret" circular instructions from the Mexican government to its diplomatic agents in England, France, and Spain, advising them of the propositions just submitted by Texas through Captain Elliot.⁴ The Mexican President, it was stated in these instructions,

"is disposed to enter into a treaty with Texas suitable to the honor and dignity of Mexico, thus avoiding all the evils and complications of a war, while he hopes to be able to succeed in preventing the annexation of that department to the United States, and in the meantime has succeeded in delaying it for the present. . . . Your Excellency will endeavor to ascertain the spirit of the government to which you

¹ Aberdeen to Cowley, April 15, 1845; E. D. Adams, 204.

² Aberdeen to Bankhead, May 1, 1845; *ibid.*, 205.

³ Murphy to Minister of Relations, May 1, 1845; *Sec. Rel. Ext. MSS.*

⁴ Cuevas to Garro, *muy reservado*, April 29, 1845; *ibid.*

are accredited and ascertain the terms upon which a treaty might be made with England, France and Spain . . . which will assure to Mexico the inviolability of the territory she now possesses."

Spain, of course, was hopelessly incapable of entering into any engagement of the kind suggested.

"This unhappy nation," Gorostiza, now Mexican minister in Madrid, had written some weeks earlier, "torn for so many years past by civil war, is at present in too precarious a position, too weak and without resources to note and weigh the serious events which are taking place on the Continent of America. Thus it is that although the question of the annexation of Texas to the United States has attracted the attention of Her Majesty's government on account of its importance and on account of the ambitious tendencies which the dishonorable (*desleal*) conduct of the Washington cabinet towards Mexico discloses, it is not to be expected that it will deal with the matter with the energy that could be desired, and still less that it will be disposed to take up arms to prevent the usurpation which is projected by our Anglo-American neighbors."¹

France, for different reasons, was equally unwilling to become involved in war. In reply to a verbal request to Guizot for a definite statement, he was reported to have answered as follows:

"Neither the King's government nor that of Great Britain (to whom this question is of more interest) can ever give such a guarantee as will, in certain events, compel them to intervene with force of arms. No: *such a guarantee is impossible*, and you can readily understand the reasons that forbid it, when you consider present circumstances and the difficulties inherent in the parliamentary system etc., etc.; but the Mexican government may count upon the *moral influence* of France and England—upon their good offices, their friendly counsels, their energetic remonstrances to prevent the Texans from violating treaties."²

Great Britain perhaps might have been willing to take a much bolder stand if she could have felt sure of France; but without France at her side, the British government had always refused to act. The Mexican agents abroad believed that the secret of this refusal was the very slight reliance

¹ Gorostiza to Minister of Relations, Feb. 20, 1845; *ibid.*

² Garro to same, June 23, 1845; *ibid.* Italics in original.

that could be placed by England on French support. They reported that most Frenchmen, so far as they thought about the business at all, were rather pleased than otherwise at the idea of Texas being annexed to the United States, simply because it was displeasing to England. What the immense majority of Frenchmen then wanted was to see England humiliated. Louis Philippe and his cabinet, though some of them, in the bottom of their hearts, had not forgotten Waterloo, did what was possible to bring about the *entente cordiale* of which the King talked so much. An informal friendly understanding was entirely in line with their general policy of cautious conservatism; but if the country was not back of them, there was a point beyond which the French government would not have dared to go in support of Great Britain.

The British government, it was said, were perfectly aware of this attitude on the part of the French people, and they were afraid that in the event of war with the United States France might not only fail to make common cause with Great Britain, but might even seek revenge, as in 1778, by again making an American alliance.

"It is therefore not surprising," wrote Tomás Murphy, "that the English minister looks with terror upon anything that may expose him to a war with the United States, unless he first comes to a complete understanding with France; not because he needs her physical force in a conflict with the United States, but because he must commit her in such manner that she will not join with the enemy's forces and so bring on a general conflagration throughout the world, which would involve incalculable consequences."¹

And Murphy in his next despatch expressed the opinion that if Aberdeen could have carried France along with him, war with the United States would not have stood in his way, but that as this was impossible he was greatly embarrassed.²

When, therefore, the news reached the Foreign Office that,

¹ Murphy to Minister of Relations, Oct. 1, 1845; *ibid.*

² *Nada le importaría esa guerra si pudiese arrastrar tras sí á la Francia, pero no siendo esto posible, la cuestion por cierto toma un carácter bien embarazoso para su señoría.*—(Murphy to Minister of Relations, Nov. 1, 1845; and to the same effect, Garro to same, May 30, 1845; *ibid.*)