

although the proposals of the Texan government to abandon annexation to the United States upon condition of being recognized as independent had been favorably received by Mexico, yet the unanimous expression of popular feeling in Texas was against these proposals, Aberdeen saw his whole policy in ruins. He had wished to build up a buffer state and to limit the growth of the United States, but his instruments had all failed him. France, whom he may have suspected of treachery, would not take a firm stand; the people of Texas plainly showed their unwillingness to assume the rôle of a buffer state; and Mexico had never been ready to take any step at the time when the British government wished it to move. He was therefore very much disposed to blame the Mexicans. "You always do everything too late," he told Murphy; and he showed him newspaper reports of the public meetings in Texas held in favor of annexation. It was too late, he said, to think of a joint guarantee; there was no hope that France would agree to it, and England, as he had always told Murphy, would not act alone.¹

But Lord Aberdeen's determination not to interfere was sorely tried when he began to see, with increasing clearness, that one inevitable result of war between Mexico and the United States must be the annexation of California to the Union. All he could do, however, was to advise delay. A declaration of war, he told the Mexicans, would immediately be followed by the occupation of California, the bombardment of Vera Cruz, and the blockade of all ports; and neither England nor France could interfere if the annexation of Texas had once become a *fait accompli*.

"It follows," wrote Murphy, "that England, and therefore France, will submit in patience to the annexation [of Texas] and the defeat (*desaire*) of their plan of intervening to prevent it. Still, I think I can assure your Excellency that although Lord Aberdeen—fearing that the Californias may fall into the power of the Americans—advises Mexico to refrain from declaring war, and watches in a passive attitude the course of events, he would at heart rejoice if war should take place and our country should prove successful."²

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

² Same to same, Aug. 1, 1845; *ibid.*

But notwithstanding all the discouraging reports which the Mexican government received from Europe, it resolved, as soon as it was definitely informed that the Texas convention had voted to accept the American proposals, to make one more appeal to the European powers.

In despatches to the Mexican ministers in France and England, the Minister of Foreign Relations declared that, in view of the consummation of the act of usurpation of the department of Texas, no recourse was left but that of war with the United States. As that nation had observed a dishonorable and perfidious conduct toward Mexico, and had no other object than to possess itself of as much as possible of Mexican territory, the republic would be unworthy of a place among civilized nations were it not resolved to prosecute the war with vigor. A body of fourteen thousand men was on the march for the frontier, and six thousand more would shortly follow them. The government of the republic had sought to adopt the advice of France and England in the matter of Texas, and it flattered itself, therefore, that these governments would now show themselves favorable to the cause of the Mexican nation, which it was hoped would have their sympathy and moral support.¹

To London, in addition, was sent another and "most secret" instruction. The Americans, it was said, had officially announced their intention of taking the Californias.

"It is therefore indispensable that your Excellency shall, in the manner you may deem most opportune and respectful, give H. M. Government to understand that Mexico will receive their cooperation to prevent the loss of that important part of her territory, as a proof of the good relations that exist between the two countries."²

A copy of the first of these important documents was sent to Lord Aberdeen, and Murphy waited a few days before calling on him, so that it might be translated in the Foreign

¹ Cuevas to Garro, July 30, 1845, *reservado*; *ibid.* Also duplicate to Murphy of same date.

² Cuevas to Murphy, July 30, 1845, *muy reservado*; *ibid.*

Office. When he called, Aberdeen said that he saw from this paper that the Mexican government considered war inevitable, and that they asked for the sympathy and moral support of the British government in the struggle; but he did not see clearly what practical application that request could have. Murphy said he had something to propose. It was evident that the ambitious views of the United States were not limited to the violent and infamous robbery of Texas; California was also the object of their avarice, and it was certain that as soon as war was formally declared it would be the target for their attacks. Mexico would not neglect so important a point, and would defend it by all the means in her power, in spite of the difficulties due to the distance of that part of the republic from the seat of government. But to defend California effectually naval forces were essential, and Mexico had none, so that the help of some friendly naval power was needed. This he was instructed to ask of Great Britain.

Aberdeen said that this would be taking part in the war between Mexico and the United States, which Murphy could not but admit. He suggested, however, that if the British government objected to war, some other plan might be adopted, "some combination which would give England the right to repel, even by force, the attack which the Americans would not fail to make on Mexico, without thereby losing the neutral character she wishes to preserve."

Aberdeen rose to the bait at once. There had been, he said, a plan of colonization made up by the English consul in the city of Mexico, Mr. Mackintosh, a partner of the firm of Manning & Marshall, which Mr. Bankhead had forwarded with a view to finding out how far the British government would favor it; and he sent for Bankhead's despatch and read it to Murphy.¹ Murphy, who had known nothing of Mackintosh's proposal, was quick to see the point.

¹ This was Bankhead's despatch of July 31, 1845, to which no reply was given (in writing) either to Bankhead or the promoters.—(E. D. Adams, 253.) It seems probable, however, that Lord Aberdeen may have talked to members of the firm in London.

"Well, my Lord, I said, if the Mexican government agrees to that, your Lordship can see that you have there an opportunity under which England might put itself forward as protecting British interests, and might consequently oppose an attack on California by the United States, without thereby taking any part in the war."

But Aberdeen saw difficulties in the way. He remarked that if the grant to British subjects had been made some time before, the matter would be simpler; but if made just at this time it would be regarded as made in view of present circumstances, and would give just cause of complaint to the United States. If war with America was to be the result, the subject would have to be looked at for a long time, even if Mexico offered California to England as a gift, for England would not go to war alone. Now, if France would join, it would be very different. Murphy asked what was to be done to accomplish the object. Aberdeen remained silent for some time, and finally promised to sound Guizot.

At an interview a few days later, reported in the same despatch, Aberdeen said he had sent a message to Guizot, but had received no answer. The policy of France generally, he considered, was to keep in accord with the United States. He wished Mexico would present some definite proposal showing how England could co-operate. Any project of colonization or sale made at this time would justly offend the United States. He would consider what could be done; the matter was very serious and needed reflection; it was necessary to watch the course of events, and in the meantime Mexico ought not to rush hastily into war.

Murphy left him firmly convinced that the British government would frankly and openly take part in the war so as to prevent the United States from absorbing the Californias, if only it were not held back by France; but as to the helpful attitude of France, he had the gravest doubts.¹

However, as time went on, Aberdeen expressed himself more and more positively as being unwilling to intervene in any way between Mexico and the United States. Murphy quoted him as saying that he did not doubt the justice of the

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

Mexican cause, but that it would be Quixotic for England and France to act upon that ground alone. As for the interest they had in seeing that California did not fall into the hands of the United States, this was hardly enough to run the risk of a war, with its incalculable consequences. No doubt they could never look with indifference upon that fine country in American hands, but there was a great distinction between that and a willingness to risk a disastrous war.

However, a hint from Lord Aberdeen that something might yet be done by taking advantage of the decree of April 12, 1837, under which the holders of Mexican bonds were authorized to locate land in various parts of Mexico, including California, set the Mexican minister to work on another plan. He learned that Mr. Powles, vice-chairman of the Mexican bondholders' committee, and Mr. Price, a member of the firm of Manning & Marshall, had seen Aberdeen, and that he had expressed an active interest in the subject. Accordingly, with the aid of these two gentlemen, a plan was drawn up as follows:

A company was to be formed to acquire from the Mexican government 50,000,000 acres of land in California. This land was to be paid for as follows:

In deferred Mexican bonds.....	£5,000,000
In cash.....	1,250,000
	<hr/>
	£6,250,000

The cash was to be payable to Mexico in instalments, and was to be borrowed by the company at three per cent interest, the British government guaranteeing the loan. How the British government was to be persuaded to guarantee such a loan did not appear, nor did Murphy very clearly see how Great Britain could intervene to prevent the sovereignty over California passing from Mexico to the United States, provided the interests of British subjects were not thereby put in peril. However, the only question with Lord Aberdeen was to find some way of thwarting American

expansion, without at the same time risking a war. He even ventured the impossible suggestion that California might set up an independent government which could be recognized by Mexico and its independence guaranteed by France and England.

"Lord Aberdeen," wrote Murphy, "has been reduced to inventing various plans which on the one hand may prevent the dreaded seizure of California by the Americans, and on the other, may not involve England in serious controversies with them. It is not easy to find such a combination, but I believe I am not mistaken in saying that he thinks of nothing else."¹

But Murphy, of course, did not know that the subject of intervention to save California from the encroaching Americans had been the subject of a discussion in the cabinet, which had ended in the decision to do nothing so long as the Oregon question remained open. There was strong pressure brought to bear from many different sources, there were vague tales in the newspapers of British efforts to acquire "the magnificent province of California," and it was urged that the prospect of a war between Mexico and the United States offered an assured means of converting dreams into realities, and of securing, by a grant from Mexico, an interest in that great and undeveloped land.²

Lord Aberdeen's son, writing of the cabinet discussion over the proposal to establish a British colony in California, says:

"Nor was Sir Robert Peel wholly undazzled by the prospect. Lord Aberdeen however maintained that although had the interest already existed, it would be right to maintain it, its establishment at this

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

² A French newspaper, early in March, 1845, stated that it appeared from Santa Anna's correspondence (then recently seized) that he had been on the eve of ceding California to perfidious Albion for the sum of \$25,000,000, "of which he had reserved for himself a considerable portion." This was copied a day or two later in the English press, and a question was asked in the House of Commons concerning it. Sir Robert Peel, for the government of the day, and Lord Palmerston, for the former government, declared the story to be "as utterly without foundation as any report that ever was invented."—(Hansard, 3 ser., LXXVIII, 431, March 7, 1845.)

moment and in such a manner would be little less hostile than a declaration by England and France that they would not permit the conquest of California; which would virtually be a declaration of war against the United States. But even this he would prefer to the creation of an unreal interest for political purposes. The grant might create a very pretty quarrel, but no amount of privileges bestowed by Mexico would suffice to keep out American settlers, who would probably be too powerful for the English. But, above all, while the Oregon question was still capable of a peaceful settlement, he deprecated a measure which would practically render such a settlement impossible. Should the negotiation respecting it end in war, the offers of Mexico should be at once accepted and the active co-operation of Mexican forces on the South West frontier of the United States encouraged, as a formidable diversion of the American forces."¹

This, then, was the final decision of the British government, but it involved some embarrassment to their agents in America, and especially to Sir George Seymour, the admiral in command of the naval squadron on the Pacific coast. He was left wholly without instructions in reference to California, and all he knew of the policy of his government was derived from the copy of Lord Aberdeen's instructions of December 31, 1844, which, late in the year 1845, Bankhead sent him from Mexico.

From these instructions the admiral gathered that while the separation of California from Mexico was regarded as probably inevitable, it was for the Mexican government alone to take measures for providing against such a contingency; that Great Britain had no more ground for interfering to preserve California to Mexico than it had a right to excite or encourage the inhabitants to separate from Mexico; and that if Mexico chose to be wilfully blind it could not be helped. A policy of complete non-interference thus seemed to be prescribed, although the British minister had been enjoined to keep his attention "vigilantly alive" to every credible report of occurrences in California, and especially with respect to the proceedings of American citizens settled in that province, who, it was thought, were "likely to play a prominent part in any proceeding which may take

¹ Gordon's *Aberdeen*, 183.

place there, having for its object to free the Province from the yoke of Mexico."¹

In the spring of 1846 Admiral Seymour, still without any later instructions, was rendered anxious by the increase of the United States naval forces in the Pacific, and he wrote urging that reinforcements be sent him. Again, in the month of June, he wrote that he had not deemed it advisable to proceed to California "under the views expressed by the Earl of Aberdeen to her Majesty's Minister in Mexico, deprecating interference while California formed a part of the Mexican Republic."² This, of course, is proof positive that no instructions in reference to California of a date later than December 31, 1844, had reached him, much as he must have desired to learn what was expected of the ships under his command.

The British policy of waiting to see what would happen to Oregon before deciding what to do about California involved also the necessity, or at least the desirability, of preventing Mexico from beginning hostilities prematurely. The news, therefore, that the American government had offered to resume diplomatic relations, and to send John Slidell as minister to Mexico, fitted in exactly with Aberdeen's plans. He hoped that everything might be gained by negotiation, especially time, and he was careful to warn the Mexicans to go slowly. Murphy, the Mexican minister, having referred in conversation to the Oregon dispute,

"Lord Aberdeen replied that England would do everything compatible with her honor and her interest to avoid a conflict, and that he believed and hoped the United States, after all, would not disturb the peace between the two countries; that at any rate there would be a whole year in which to negotiate on the subject; that within the year either the United States would submit the point to the arbitration of some third power, or they would agree on some honorable and convenient division of the disputed territory; and that if neither of these things were done (though he was sure they would be) then God knew what would happen. His Lordship continued, 'So far as concerns

¹ Aberdeen to Bankhead, Dec. 31, 1844; E. D. Adams, 249.

² Seymour to Corry, June 13, 1846; *ibid.*, 258. See also letter from Lord Alcester in *Century Magazine*, XL, 794.

your negotiation with the United States as it is always your custom to go slow, you might now do so from policy.'"¹

Nothing more was said about grants of land in California or projects of colonization. The European governments waited for news from America.

Toward the end of January, 1846, Murphy received instructions from his government, written just before Slidell's arrival at Vera Cruz. Nothing, he was told, had yet been heard from the United States as to the arrival of "a commissioner to settle the pending questions," but the American ships of war had been withdrawn from before Vera Cruz. There were rumors that General Taylor was advancing from Corpus Christi, but this was supposed to be due to the fact that he had not yet been informed of the arrangement to receive the American commissioner. Nothing had been omitted, so far as the scanty resources of the Treasury would permit, to provide for the defence and security of the Californias. A military expedition was preparing, part of which was already at Acapulco, and would proceed to its destination as soon as possible; "but as perchance it may not be sufficient to ward off a *coup de main* by the Americans, in case hostilities should be begun, it is indispensable to rely on the assistance which the government hopes to obtain from Great Britain and France."²

There was really nothing new in all this, but Murphy duly called at the Foreign Office, and then wrote that he had nothing to add to the information he had previously given. The Foreign Secretary still strongly objected to the Americans taking California, and would be glad to employ the power of Great Britain to prevent it; but he would not dare to take such a step, as he feared a war with the United States. But, added Murphy, "this consideration would not stop him if he could count on the co-operation of France," and recent speeches of Guizot's, in which he had

¹ Italics in the original. *Ya que siempre andan Vmds. despacio por hábito, ahora pueden hacerlo por cálculo.*—(Murphy to Minister of Relations, Jan. 1, 1846; *Sec. Rel. Ext. MSS.*)

² Peña y Peña to Murphy, Nov. 28, 1845; *ibid.* The expedition from Acapulco never got away from that port.

deplored the spirit of aggression that prevailed in the United States, furnished some ground for hope that a change in the policy of France might be expected.

The situation, therefore, so far as the Mexican representatives in Europe could see it, was thus summed up:

"Our position under present circumstances appears to me to be as follows: England will do nothing, either directly or indirectly, to forestall the usurpation of California so long as the Oregon question remains unsettled. If war breaks out, all difficulty on the part of this cabinet will have ceased, and there is no doubt that one of their first objects will be, in that event, to prevent that usurpation. If on the contrary the dispute over Oregon is amicably settled, England will find herself more free to act in respect to California—openly and directly in case France continues in the line of policy she has just adopted and lends her aid—or indirectly by means of some plan of Colonization in California."¹

Thus all the calculations of the Mexican agents and their fond hopes of foreign aid rested entirely upon the result of the pending negotiations over the Oregon question. Without foreign aid, European observers at least were convinced that the result of a war between the United States and Mexico could not be doubtful; for in every element of material strength, whether in numbers, in wealth, in shipping, in manufactures, or in the means of transportation, the superiority of the United States was overwhelming.

In the first place, the population of Mexico was believed to be almost stationary. It was, in fact, probably slowly increasing, as a census in the year 1854 subsequently indicated; and it may be estimated from the result of that census, combined with earlier statistics, that the population in 1846 was not far from 8,000,000.² The population of the United States, on the other hand, chiefly as the result of

¹ Murphy to Minister of Relations, Feb. 1, 1846; *Sec. Rel. Ext. MSS.*

² An effort was made in 1839 to ascertain the population of Mexico, and the figures (which of course included an estimate for Texas) amounted to 7,044,140. In 1854 the census showed 7,853,395; and making an allowance of 58,000, which was the estimated population of Texas, New Mexico, and California, the population in 1846 might be estimated at about 7,450,000. But almost all Mexican statistics of population were believed to have been much too low, so that perhaps 8,000,000 is not an unreasonable figure for the population of Mexico (excluding Texas) in 1846.

large immigration, had risen in 1846 to approximately 20,300,000.¹ This was more than two and one-half times the population of Mexico; but if the comparative increase since 1800 was taken into account, the astonishing rapidity of growth of the United States became more apparent. Mexico during that time had grown from perhaps 6,000,000 to 8,000,000, or approximately thirty-three per cent; but the United States had grown in the same period from 5,309,858 to about 20,300,000, or nearly three hundred per cent.

Significant as these figures were, they were less impressive than a comparison between the respective wealth and industry of the two countries. So far as statistics could reveal the difference, it could scarcely be exaggerated. Thus, in regard to shipping, the United States was then one of the first maritime powers of the world. Mexico, on the other hand, possessed no merchant marine, save a few petty coasting vessels whose tonnage was entirely insignificant. The movement of vessels from Mexican ports, so far as could be ascertained, was extremely small. For instance, in 1841 the whole foreign trade of Matamoros was carried on in vessels from the United States, 32 in all, the total movement of exports and imports from that port being about \$900,000. In the same year there were 91 arrivals and departures from Tampico, of which 19 were British men-of-war and government packets; while from Vera Cruz, the principal port of the republic, for the six months ending July 1, 1842, there were but 271 arrivals and departures.² No records from the Pacific ports were published, but their foreign trade was practically non-existent. Against this may be placed the recorded movement of shipping in the ports of the United States. The tonnage of American vessels entering and clearing during 1845 was 4,089,463, and of foreign vessels 1,840,838; or, in all, close upon 6,000,000 tons.

In the entire absence of accurate Mexican statistics, the amount collected from import duties in the two countries gives some notion of the respective size of their foreign com-

¹ By the census of 1840 it was 17,069,453; in 1850, 23,191,876.

² Farnham's *Mexico*, 32.

merce. In Mexico the customs receipts for the year 1845 amounted to \$5,814,048.69.¹ This was under a heavy tariff, which would average from fifty to sixty per cent of the value of the imports. Under the far more moderate American tariff the customs receipts for the year ending June 30, 1845, were \$26,712,667.87. The total Mexican commerce, including both imports and exports, was believed to amount to perhaps \$40,000,000 a year, while the total commerce of the United States was officially reported to be about \$235,000,000.

In manufacturing, the advantage of the United States over Mexico was not less remarkable. There were, for instance, estimated to be in Mexico in the year 1843, fifty-three textile factories, with 131,280 spindles.² The corresponding figures in the United States at that time were from 1,250,000 to 1,500,000 spindles. Like discrepancies were shown in the estimates of agricultural products, even in respect to such crops as sugar and cotton.³

As a charge upon the commerce of the United States, there were federal expenditures to be met, which in 1845 amounted to less than \$23,000,000, though the revenue amounted to nearly \$30,000,000. The total national debt was much less than a year's income, being under \$24,000,000. The total reported revenues of the Mexican government were not very different from those of the United States, being in 1845 a trifle over \$24,000,000; but this by no means sufficed to meet the national expenses, for the interest upon the funded debt was left wholly unpaid, and other indebtedness was being constantly incurred. By the first of July, 1846, the exterior debt of Mexico amounted to over \$55,000,000, or considerably more than twice the whole national debt of the United States; and the interior debt was probably near \$100,000,000.⁴

¹ Romero, 145.

² Farnham, 30.

³ Cotton exports from the United States for 1845 were valued at \$51,739,643.—(Report of the Secretary of the Treasury for 1845, 605, 615.)

⁴ J. M. L. Mora in 1835 estimated the total interior debt at \$82,364,978; and it must have largely increased in the next ten years.—(Mora, *Obras Sueltas*, I, 425.)

As to means of transportation, they were no better in Mexico in 1846 than they had been in 1825; but in the United States about 5,000 miles of railway had already been put in operation, steam-boat facilities on the rivers and Great Lakes had largely increased, and traffic upon the canals was perhaps at its height. So important, indeed, had American methods of communication become that a serious French work in two large volumes, with an atlas, published in 1840, was wholly devoted to the history and description of traffic facilities in the United States.¹

Not less incontestable was the superiority of the United States navy. The Mexican navy, consisting of a few ill-found and ill-manned vessels of small tonnage, was a negligible quantity. The American navy, on the other hand, with over thirty vessels actually at sea, had acquired a brilliant reputation for efficiency; and, what was still more vital, it had acquired in many seas such traditions of gallantry as sufficed to make it a formidable opponent to any adversary. The one apparent element of warlike superiority on the part of Mexico was the greater size of its army. On paper the regular Mexican troops far outnumbered the American, and whether this superiority in numbers could be offset by a difference in *personnel* and by the enlistment of volunteers was the only problem to which an answer could not well be given in advance.²

¹ Chevalier, *Histoire et Description des Voies de Communication aux Etats-Unis*.

² A part of this chapter has already been published as an article in the *Amer. Hist. Rev.*, vol. XVIII, pp. 275-294. I have to thank the editors for the permission to reproduce it here.

CHAPTER XXXII

PEACE OR WAR

THE public aspect of the relations between the United States and Great Britain during the first year of Polk's administration certainly bore a very warlike appearance. It was in July, 1845, that the British minister in Washington had peremptorily declined the proposal to settle the Oregon question by extending the line of 49° north latitude from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, and had left it to the American government to make some other proposal, "more consistent," as he pleasantly put it, "with fairness and equity, and with the reasonable expectations of the British government."

The issues of peace or war thus seemed to be left solely in the hands of the President and his Secretary of State, and the timid and irresolute spirit of Buchanan was greatly vexed in dealing with a subject so full of the most dreadful possibilities. Never was the sobering action of official responsibility more clearly exhibited. He who had so courageously declaimed as a senator against the pretensions of Great Britain was now, as Secretary of State, filled with painful forebodings at the possibility of war.

But if the Secretary of State was terrified at the spectre he had helped to raise, the President stood firm against any policy of concession, and "communicated to the several members of the cabinet," as he himself has related, "the settled decision to which his mind had come."¹ Mr. Buchanan's reply to Pakenham, he said, should assert the American claim to the whole of the Oregon territory, from

¹ Polk's *Diary*, Aug. 26, 1845, I, 2. It was the importance of this conversation in the cabinet that suggested to the President the keeping of a diary, which he did, from that day on.