

to the sending of Slidell "with powers to adjust every existing difference." He described the arrival of Slidell at the city of Mexico, the refusal of Herrera's government to receive him, and the military revolution under the guidance of Paredes. "Determined to leave no effort untried to effect an amicable adjustment," the President said that he had directed Slidell to present his credentials once more to the Paredes government, but that he had met with a second refusal, conceived "in terms that may be considered as giving just grounds of offence to the government and people of the United States."

The President next referred to Taylor's advance. Congress had been informed in the annual message that an efficient military force had been ordered to take position between the Nueces and the Rio Grande. The Texan government, he asserted, had exercised jurisdiction beyond the Nueces; the region between it and the Rio Grande was included in a congressional district, and a revenue officer, under the act of December 31, 1845, had been appointed to reside within it. The Rio Grande, the frontier of Texas, was exposed, and high military authority declared that on its banks were the "proper stations for the protecting forces of the government." Taylor's march, Ampudia's warlike proclamation, Arista's advance, and the affair with Thornton's party were next related.

"The grievous wrongs perpetrated by Mexico upon our citizens throughout a long period of years," the President continued, "remain unredressed; and solemn treaties, pledging her public faith for this redress, have been disregarded. A government either unable or unwilling to enforce the execution of such treaties, fails to perform one of its plainest duties. Our commerce with Mexico has been almost annihilated. It was formerly highly beneficial to both nations; but our merchants have been deterred from prosecuting it by the system of outrage and extortion which the Mexican authorities have pursued against them. . . . We have tried every effort at reconciliation. The cup of forbearance had been exhausted, even before the recent information from the frontier of the Del Norte. But now, after reiterated menaces, Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory, and shed American blood upon the American

soil. She has proclaimed that hostilities have commenced, and that the two nations are now at war.

"As war exists, and, notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, exists by the act of Mexico herself, we are called upon, by every consideration of duty and patriotism, to vindicate, with decision, the honor, the rights, and the interests of our country. . . . I invoke the prompt action of Congress to recognize the existence of the war, and to place at the disposition of the executive the means of prosecuting the war with vigor, and thus hastening the restoration of peace. To this end I recommend that authority should be given to call into the public service a large body of volunteers, to serve for not less than six or twelve months, unless sooner discharged. . . . I further recommend that a liberal provision be made for sustaining our entire military force, and furnishing it with supplies and munitions of war. . . . In making these recommendations, I deem it proper to declare that it is my anxious desire, not only to terminate hostilities speedily, but to bring all matters in dispute between this government and Mexico to an early and amicable adjustment; and, in this view, I shall be prepared to renew negotiations, whenever Mexico shall be ready to receive propositions, or to make propositions of her own."

No popular assembly could have been expected to resist an appeal so skilful as this; but quite apart from anything the President might say, the country was deeply stirred by the public news that a superior force threatened attack on Taylor's detachment. The danger in which the little American army obviously stood was exaggerated by every device then known to the American press, beginning with New Orleans and running thence through the country. The White House on the Saturday night swarmed with congressmen, who, as the President did not omit to note, "were greatly excited at the news brought by the Southern mail from the army." The Committee on Military Affairs of the House met on Sunday and agreed on a bill to appropriate ten million dollars and to authorize the enlistment of fifty thousand volunteers. More congressmen called on Sunday afternoon and Monday morning to learn what the President meant to do, among them Benton, who said he did not believe the territory of the United States extended west of the Nueces, and declared himself unwilling to make an aggressive war on Mexico.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Polk's *Diary*, I, 387-390.



On Monday afternoon, after the President's message was read in the House, there was little opposition, and what there was was roughly ridden over. A bill embodying the views of the Committee on Military Affairs was passed by a vote of 173 to 14 and sent to the Senate. The Senate, where methods were more deliberate, discussed the bill late on Monday afternoon and on Tuesday. The opposition, led by Calhoun, John M. Clayton, of Delaware, and Mangum, of North Carolina, rested principally on the declaration of the preamble that war existed by the act of Mexico, of which it was said there was no sufficient evidence.<sup>1</sup> Houston and Cass ridiculed these objections, citing the long-continued hostile course of the Mexican government in respect to Texas, its declaration that annexation would be regarded as an act of war, and its refusal to renew diplomatic relations. Ultimately the bill was passed, with minor amendments, by a vote of 42 to 2 (Davis, of Massachusetts, and Thomas Clayton, of Delaware), Calhoun and others not voting. The House sat that evening and at once concurred in the Senate's amendments. On Wednesday, the thirteenth of May, the bill became a law by the President's signature.

As finally passed, it recited that "by the act of the Republic of Mexico, a state of war exists between that government and the United States"; and it was thereupon enacted that for the purpose of enabling the government to prosecute the war to a speedy and successful termination the President was authorized to call for and accept the services of any number of volunteers, not exceeding fifty thousand, who might offer their services for twelve months or to the end of the war; and the sum of ten million dollars was appropriated for the purpose of carrying the provisions of the act into effect. The volunteers were to be subject to the rules and articles of war and were to be received in companies, battalions, squadrons, and regiments, whose officers

<sup>1</sup> Calhoun feared that the declaration of war might defeat "the arrangement of the Oregon question" and invite European interference, and that if not speedily settled the war would prove a great disaster.—(Calhoun to A. P. Calhoun, May 14, 1846, *Amer. Hist. Assn. Rep.* 1899, II, 691.)

were to be appointed in the manner prescribed by law in the several states and territories. These bodies the President might organize into brigades and divisions; and he was authorized to apportion the staff, field, and general officers among the states and territories from which the volunteers came.

As soon as the action of Congress became known it was enthusiastically supported by the people and—somewhat less warmly—by the press of the United States. The newspapers were at first inclined to be critical and to question whether the story of the Mexican movements was not exaggerated, and whether the parties that had crossed the Rio Grande were acting under the orders of the Mexican government. But the popular feeling had no share in such doubts. Meetings were held, resolutions were adopted pledging the support of the people, volunteers poured in, and drilling was begun. "It has long been the fashion," says a recent historian, "to assert that the annexation of Texas was the cause of the Mexican war. No such delusion was held by the people in 1846."<sup>1</sup> Those who favored the war—probably a large majority of the people for the moment—believed that it was justified by the long-continued hostility of Mexico, her failure to settle American claims, and her refusal to negotiate for an adjustment of the matters in dispute.

The news of the outbreak of hostilities on the Rio Grande and of the response by the Congress and people of the United States to the President's appeal, reached London in the latter part of May. The Foreign Office had just before instructed Pakenham to settle the Oregon question substantially on the terms proposed by the United States. It would probably not have been too late to recall those orders had the government desired to do so; but, far from taking any steps in that direction, instructions were sent to the British minister in Mexico positively refusing to interfere in any manner, and also (what was more interesting) setting forth the opinion of the British government as to the

<sup>1</sup> McMaster, VII, 445-446.



course long pursued by Mexico. A copy of these instructions was sent to Pakenham in Washington.

"Within the last three years," Aberdeen wrote, "I have frequently had occasion to convey to you the opinions of Her Majesty's Govt. respecting the position of embarrassment and danger in which the line of policy long and unfortunately pursued by the Mexican Govt. with regard to Texas, and also to the United States, had placed Mexico; and the decision to which Her Majesty's Govt. had come on the subject of any assistance which might be requested of them, on behalf of Mexico, against the United States. . . ."

"The more recent events which have occurred in Mexico are far from affording Her Majesty's Govt. any reasonable ground for departing from the line of policy which in 1844 they found it expedient to adopt. On the contrary they see in those events more and more cause for rigidly adhering to the system of non-interference which they then prescribed to themselves.

"Since that time the Annexation of Texas to the United States, which had long been foreseen and pointed out to the Govt. of Mexico by Her Majesty's Govt. and which the timely recognition of Texas by Mexico, so often insisted on by Great Britain, could alone have prevented, has been consummated; and the further encroachment of the United States on the Mexican Territory, which was equally foretold by Her Majesty's Govt., has been realized. Meantime Mexico, although menaced, and now indeed, as we learn, actually engaged in hostilities, on her Texan Frontier, has been precluded by her internal dissensions and the penury of her finances from effectually providing against the emergency in which She is involved. . . ."

"Were Great Britain to interfere in that quarrel, She would involve herself in a war with the United States; and not only that, but She must necessarily play the part, not merely of an auxiliary, but of a principal, in such war; that is, She would find herself engaged in a war with a Nation with which She would have no personal cause of quarrel, in behalf of a Nation and Govt. which She has repeatedly warned in the most friendly and urgent manner of their danger, and which, solely in consequence of their wilful contempt of that warning, have at last plunged headlong down the precipice from which the British Govt. spared no efforts to save them.

"I state these circumstances not by way of reproach, for reproach is now useless, but solely in order to enable you to place more clearly before the eyes of the President Paredes, if he be still Chief Magistrate, the real state of the case without disguise, and to point out to him in a palpable shape the true position of Great Britain, and the reasons for which Her Majesty's Govt. must necessarily decline to come forward in support of Mexico against the United States.

"In making known this decision, however, which you will do in explicit but courteous terms, and accompanied by an assurance of the sincere regret which Her Majesty's Govt. feel in being compelled to take this course, you will at the same time declare to the President, or the Secretary of State, that Her Majesty's Govt. will always be found perfectly willing and desirous to give Mexico every proof in their power of their earnest wish to save her, as far as it may yet be possible, by friendly interposition, from the fatal consequences of the policy which her successive Govts. have for many years past been so unfortunately induced to pursue towards Texas and the United States."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Aberdeen to Bankhead, June 1, 1846; *British Foreign Office Archives MSS.* Acknowledgments are due to Professor Adams, of Stanford University, for a complete copy of this important paper, a part of which he has printed in his work, *British Interests and Activities in Texas.*