

frustrated his intention of examining the Colorado River, and it was therefore his intention to go east toward the head-waters of the Arkansas, and thence to the frontier of Missouri, where he expected to arrive early in September. He would have to remain at Sutter's till about the first of July, and if in the meantime any attempt was made against him he would repel it, and he was regulating his conduct accordingly, for the nature of his instructions and the peaceful nature of his operations did not contemplate any active hostility on his part, even in the event of war with Mexico. He hoped the *Portsmouth* would remain in the Bay of San Francisco, "where your presence will operate strongly to check proceedings against us." He would also feel more secure if communication by the ship's boats were kept open.¹

Montgomery, who was an honest gentleman, and had no reason for supposing that Frémont was not telling him the exact truth, replied that the events of the last few days were so important for California and the United States that he had decided to stay where he was, and would gladly keep open the communication with Frémont's camp. He himself would preserve a strict neutrality while confessing a sympathy with the "gallant little band in arms for mutual defence." The *Cyane* had come back again to Monterey from Mexico, but he had received no news by her.²

Three days later Montgomery innocently wrote again, giving the current news of the civil commotions. There had been a skirmish north of San Rafael, in which the insurgents had had the best of it, and Castro was reported to be at Santa Clara with seventy men. He enclosed a package to go to Washington for the Secretary of the Navy, which he requested Frémont to take charge of, and he ended with wishes for a safe and pleasant journey home.³

These two letters did not reach Frémont at Sutter's, for on the day the first of them was written he had left to join

¹ Frémont to Montgomery, June 16, 1846; *Century Magazine*, XLI, 783.

² Montgomery to Frémont, June 23, 1846; Frémont's *Memoirs*, I, 527.

³ Same to same, June 26, 1846; *ibid.*, 527-528.

the insurgent force at Sonoma. Whatever Montgomery's ideas might be as to the duty of an officer of the United States, Frémont did not share them. He had not scrupled to deceive both Montgomery and Larkin, the other American agents in California, as to his intentions about returning home, and he had not scrupled to act in direct defiance of orders. The instructions to Larkin, which were given to Gillespie and Frémont as a guide for their action, required these officers of the American government to ascertain the disposition of the Californian people and conciliate their feelings in favor of the United States. Frémont (with whom Gillespie acted) never made an honest effort to find out the disposition of the Californians, and still less to conciliate them. Instead, he did what he could to sow strife and bring about war.

The news of the settlers' outbreak reached Santa Barbara at about the same time that Frémont reached Sonoma, and the governor of California boldly met the crisis by the usual method of issuing a flaming proclamation. In this he informed the inhabitants that a gang of North American adventurers, "with the blackest treason that the spirit of evil could invent," had invaded Sonoma and carried off four prisoners. He therefore called on all Mexicans to fly with the utmost haste in pursuit of the treacherous foe, to follow him to the furthest wilderness, and to run swiftly to crown their brows with the fresh laurels of unfading glory which were ready to be gathered in the fields of the north.¹ But the fervent appeals of Governor Pico were not productive of much result, and by the first of July he had raised only about a hundred men, with whom he started a few days later to meet his dearest foe, General José Castro.

While Pico had been thus busy in the south and Castro in the north, trying to raise forces to meet the Bear Flag party, Frémont and his men were at Sonoma, uncertain what to do next. The Bears had repulsed a small body of men north of San Rafael, a few men had been killed in cold blood on each side, and some twenty men, under Frémont,

¹ Bancroft, *California*, V, 138.

had crossed the Golden Gate and spiked the worthless guns in the old Mexican fort near the presidio. They had also celebrated the Fourth of July at Sonoma, and had done something toward a permanent organization of their force, which, with Frémont's men, now numbered more than two hundred. But the problem of how to conquer the rest of California was still before them. Montgomery had again refused to help,¹ and Larkin was writing to Governor Pico to explain that he, as consul, had no authority over the Americans who had broken the laws at Sonoma, and to deny that his government had any share in the matter. This situation was dramatically ended by the appearance of Commodore Sloat as *deus ex machinâ*.

Sloat had been off the western coast of Mexico—generally at Mazatlan—for some months with a squadron composed of the frigate *Savannah*, of fifty-four guns, four sloops-of-war of twenty-four guns each, an armed schooner carrying twelve guns, and a supply ship—in all, seven vessels mounting a hundred and sixty-two guns. In view of the possibility of a war with England, he had been concerned about the movements of the British fleet under Admiral Seymour, who in his turn was uneasy and was writing home for reinforcements.²

Late in March, 1846, came news from California of Frémont's earliest difficulties with Castro, and the sloop *Portsmouth* was despatched to Monterey to protect American interests. Nothing happened for some weeks afterward, but on May 17 Sloat learned that the Guadalajara newspapers were announcing a victory over Taylor's forces on the Rio Grande and the capture of some American cavalry. He at once sent the sloop-of-war *Cyane* to Monterey with a letter to Larkin marked "strictly confidential," in which he gave the information, as he had received it, of Torrejon's crossing the Rio Grande and the capture of Thornton's party. "It is my intention," Sloat continued, "to visit your place immediately," but this was to be kept a pro-

¹ Montgomery to Gillespie, July 1, 1846; Frémont's *Memoirs*, I, 529.

² E. D. Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas*, 260.

found secret, as no officer of Sloat's squadron had any information of the intended movements.¹

Two more weeks passed, but Sloat did not move. On May 31 he heard of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, and his first impulse was to sail for California. He therefore wrote to the Secretary of the Navy that he had received such intelligence as he thought would justify his acting upon the order of June 24, 1845, and would sail "immediately." Instead, he sent the sloop *Levant* to Monterey.²

On June 5 the news came of the capture of Matamoros by Taylor, and thereupon the commodore sat down and wrote to the Secretary of the Navy that since writing on May 31 he had come to the conclusion that the instructions of June 24, 1845, "and every subsequent order," would not justify "taking possession of any part of California, or any hostile measure against Mexico (notwithstanding their attack upon our troops), as neither party have declared war." He should therefore wait until he was certain that one or the other had done so, or until he learned that the squadron in the Gulf had commenced offensive operations.³ Next day appeared this entry in the *Savannah's* log:

"June 7.—News received of the blockade of Vera Cruz by the American squadron; at 2 p. m. got under way for Monterey."⁴

The *Savannah* arrived at her destination on July 2, and again Sloat's mind was thrown into greater uncertainty than ever. He had expected to find California itself at peace, and possibly to find further news of the war on the Rio Grande. He found neither, but he learned that

¹ Sloat to Larkin, May 18, 1846; Bancroft, *California*, V, 203. The *Cyane* arrived at Monterey about the twentieth of May.

² Commodore John D. Sloat was at this time sixty-six years old, in bad health, and anxious to be relieved from command. He had been in the navy since he was a lad, but never seems to have shown any signs of superior ability, and his whole conduct on this occasion evinced a single-minded desire to avoid responsibility and possible censure.

³ Sloat to Bancroft, June 6, 1846; Frémont's *Memoirs*, I, 536. Italics in original.

⁴ *Century Magazine*, XL, 793 (Oct., 1890).

the American settlers in the north, under command of an officer of the United States army, had begun hostilities. For five days he struggled with the torturing uncertainties of a mind suffering from nervous disease, but at length he concluded that the time for action had really come, and on July 7, 1846, a landing party hoisted the American flag at Monterey. The next day Montgomery, under orders from Sloat, took possession of the shores of San Francisco Bay, and the Bears joyfully abandoned their infant republic and hoisted the American flag at Sonoma.

The news reached General Castro at San Juan on the eighth of July, and he marched south at once to meet Governor Pico. The two parties met four days later near the old mission of San Luis Obispo, and the united force made the best of its way to Los Angeles, leaving all the rest of California to the conquering Americans.

Commodore Stockton on the *Congress*, having left the Sandwich Islands on June 23, anchored abreast of the *Cyane* in the harbor of Monterey on Wednesday afternoon, the fifteenth of July. He had been nearly nine months on his way from the Chesapeake, having lain twenty-three days at Rio de Janeiro, twelve days at Valparaiso, six weeks at Callao, and two weeks at Honolulu. Clearly the Secretary of the Navy, who had come in person to Norfolk to see the ship off, had not urged the necessity of great haste.¹ On the next day after the arrival of the *Congress*, the sixteenth of July, a large ship entered the harbor. She proved to be H. B. M. ship *Collingwood*, of eighty guns, Admiral Seymour's flag-ship. He had sailed from Mazatlan on May 24, two weeks before the *Savannah*, and had gone to San Blas (a hundred and fifty miles to the southward), where he lay till June 13, six days after the *Savannah* had sailed from Mazatlan for Monterey.²

On the day of his leaving San Blas Seymour wrote to the Admiralty of his intended visit to Monterey. He had not, he said, judged it advisable to go to California, under the

¹ Colton's *Deck and Port* gives a diary of the voyage.

² *Century Magazine*, XL, 794.

views expressed by Lord Aberdeen to her Majesty's minister in Mexico, which deprecated interference while California remained a part of the Mexican republic; but he had sent the *Juno*, Captain Blake, on May 11 to observe what was passing. The directions to Captain Blake, "in the event of California's declaring or having declared its Independence of Mexico," were to use his influence to counteract any inclination on the part of the authorities to place themselves under the protection of any foreign power; and Seymour had given Captain Blake copies of Lord Aberdeen's two letters of December 31, 1844, to Mr. Bankhead and Mr. Barron.¹

"This contingency," he concluded, "having occurred while I remain on the Coast, I deem it right, although I can form no very favorable anticipations of a satisfactory result, to proceed to Monterey, and ascertain the actual state of affairs; and it is my intention to sail from San Blas, for that purpose this evening."²

What this muddle-headed gentleman meant by the "contingency" which had occurred to justify a visit to California is not at all clear; but his letter is of extreme value as showing that he had no orders to seize the country under any contingency, and that he had not the smallest idea of a "race" with Commodore Sloat for priority of possession—a legend which was long industriously propagated in the United States.

Seymour stayed a week at Monterey, exchanged the customary civilities with the American ships, witnessed Frémont's dramatic entry at the head of a hundred and sixty frontiersmen, and finally, before sailing for the Sandwich Islands, wrote an excellent letter of advice for Forbes, the British consul, warning him to preserve the strictest neutrality.³

By the time the *Collingwood* left, Commodore Sloat, worn out by excitement and illness, was hesitating whether he

¹ See page 51, above.

² Seymour to Corry, June 13, 1846; E. D. Adams, 258.

³ Seymour to Forbes, July 22, 1846; Frémont's *Memoirs*, I, 555.

ought not to hand over the command to Stockton, the next officer in rank; but he could not bring himself to act. Stockton, with that robust self-confidence which he never failed to exhibit in any relation in life, was ready and anxious to undertake the duty. On July 23, 1846, he sent a letter to Sloat pointing out what ought to be done, and, in the tone one might adopt toward a sick child, he asked: "Had you not better send me an order to take command at once, and make my own arrangements? It will facilitate operations, and relieve you from a great deal of trouble."¹ Under the influence of Stockton's stronger will Sloat presently yielded, and on June 29 sailed in the *Levant* for Panama, reaching home in November, where he received a very sharp reprimand for his delay in seizing California.

How Stockton and Frémont blustered and swaggered, how they got possession of all Upper California, how Governor Pio Pico and General José Castro fled to Mexico, how Gillespie, left in command at Los Angeles, exhibited himself to the natives as a petty tyrant, how they rose and fought the Americans with unexpected energy and temporary success, how Colonel Kearny with a hundred dragoons came overland in time to have a share in the fighting, and how the Americans finally succeeded, are details of local California history which do not fall within the scope of this book. It is enough to say that by what was called the treaty of Cahuenga the entire native force surrendered on January 13, 1847, and that not long afterward American reinforcements arrived, whereby American control of the country was so fast riveted that no possible native rising and no conceivable expedition from Mexico could have shaken it. Thenceforth, all through the war, California remained securely in the undisputed possession of the United States.

¹ Stockton to Sloat, July 23, 1846; *ibid.*, 544.

CHAPTER XXXV

PLANNING A CAMPAIGN—THE OCCUPATION OF NEW MEXICO

WHEN Congress had placed at the disposal of the administration ten million dollars and fifty thousand men the real task of preparing for a foreign war was only just begun. How great that task was nobody in the cabinet had any idea. In the seventy years of national existence only two wars had been fought—both against Great Britain and both on American soil—and the men at the head of affairs were innocent of any knowledge of what was involved in conducting such an enterprise as that on which they were now embarked.

Not a single step had been taken toward planning a campaign. There was no intelligence department for either the army or the navy. The government—as the President noted later with vexation—was without reliable information of the topography of Mexico, the character of the roads, the supplies which could be drawn from the country, or the facilities or obstructions which might exist in carrying on a campaign.¹ Nobody seems to have known anything of even the seasons. Scott announced, with the air of disclosing an important secret, that there was rain in northern Mexico from May to the end of September, and that there was therefore no advantage in undertaking military operations before October.² Even the immediate surroundings of a

¹ Polk's *Diary*, II, 139 (Sept. 15, 1846).

² Scott to Marcy, May 21, 1846; Sen. Doc. 378, 29 Cong., 1 sess., 6. Scott said he had received this information from "Col. A. Butler, a distinguished officer of the War of 1812, since minister in Mexico, &c. &c., and from General J. T. Mason, who has travelled much in Mexico with Col. Butler. It is clear to my mind that the two know more of northern and middle Mexico than all other persons, taken together, in the District of Columbia." See