

CHAPTER XXXVI

SANTA ANNA RETURNS FROM EXILE—THE WILMOT PROVISO

SANTA ANNA, watching from his post of observation at Havana, had doubtless seen with satisfaction the downfall of Herrera's government, and he must have awaited with still greater interest the inevitable moment when Paredes should, in his turn, be driven from the seat of power. In the spring of 1846 that moment could not have seemed distant. Mexico presented a picture of anarchy. On the eve of a long-threatened foreign war the Treasury was empty, the credit of the nation utterly gone, the army ready for mutiny, the local assemblies of the departments muttering discontent, and every branch of the government involved in confusion.

General Paredes, shortly after assuming the position of President *ad interim*, had issued a manifesto in which he drew a rhetorical but not very overcharged picture of the state of public affairs.

"The quarrels and exigencies of parties," he wrote, "absorb all the strength of the government. A year has passed since the revolution which put an end to a ruinous dictatorship; and the most urgent affairs of the State are still to be disposed of. Where is the revision of the acts of the provisional government? Where are the political reforms? Where are the improvements in administration? Where is the regulation of the Treasury? What has become of so many promises and hopes? Time has passed in idle and sterile debates. Indecision and weakness alone have characterized the republic and the government. In consequence, the United States have dared to commit, before the whole world, the usurpation of the state of Texas; the revenues of the nation are involved; the scanty food of the soldier is begged from the hand of usury; and parties are constantly more and

more divided, men's minds more and more disturbed, and everywhere are the symptoms of approaching dissolution. Order is precarious, peace insecure, and the nation, in the midst of the anarchy which consumes it and the chaos which surrounds it, moves toward dissolution and the fear of death."¹

To remedy these evils, Paredes promised to maintain order, to uphold the Constitution, and to support the institutions which the new Congress was to adopt, and which were to rest upon the two great principles of liberty and independence. These were brave words, but they satisfied nobody.

The chief adviser of the government—although not in office—was believed to be Lucas Alaman, who early in the year had begun the publication of a newspaper which openly advocated the establishment of a monarchy under a foreign prince. This of itself was enough to discredit fatally the administration. The newspapers throughout the country declaimed against undoing the great work of the war of independence, and against the loss of that freedom for which Mexicans had sacrificed so much. The protests of Paredes and his ministers availed nothing. Thenceforward they were everywhere regarded as ready to sacrifice the republic.

This conviction of a monarchist plot was only heightened by the decree summoning the new Congress. The plan of San Luis Potosí, under which Paredes had been made temporary President, had provided that in this Congress *all classes of society* should be represented; and the government, taking literally this unfortunate phrase, decided to make up the new body from the representatives of classes. The call was issued in January, 1846, and in a hundred and fifty-six paragraphs set out a unique method of election. The new Congress was to consist of one hundred and sixty members forming a single chamber. Of these the clergy was to have twenty members, the army twenty, land-owners and farmers thirty-eight, and commerce twenty. Mining, manufacturing, and the literary and artistic professions

¹ Manifesto of January 10, 1846; *Nuevo Bernal Diaz*, I, 115.

were each to have fourteen representatives, and the judges and the government employees as a class were each to have ten. The archbishop of Mexico and ten bishops named in the decree, besides members from certain cathedral chapters, were to represent the clergy. The army was to name its own representatives, of whom five must be generals of division, and the rest officers not below the rank of lieutenant-colonel. The other members of the Congress were distributed according to what were supposed to be the proportions of the several classes in the various departments. Laborers had no vote; but land-owners, merchants, manufacturers, and mine-owners were to meet separately and choose representatives of their several classes by an elaborate system of secondary elections. The literary and artistic professions—which included lawyers, doctors, and college professors—were to vote directly, and so were the judges. Government employees were to select from lists submitted to them by the government.¹

Alaman was universally believed to be the author of this strange scheme, and his unpopularity arising, in part, from his known monarchical tendencies and in part from the share he was supposed to have had in the shooting of President Guerrero, was enough of itself to insure the unpopularity of the newly begotten Congress. But even without this added weight a method of election which departed so far from the ideals of popular representation could not fail to be the object of attack, and the publication of the decree proved to be "a match thrown into a heap of combustibles."²

The constituent Congress, upon the very face of the decree, was to be mainly representative of property interests. The opponents of the government asserted that it was also designed to be an instrument for establishing a monarchy. Everywhere the press denounced it in unmeasured terms.

During the first months of the administration the press had enjoyed unusual freedom, but its attacks had at length become unbearable. A government circular was therefore

¹ Dublan y Lozano, V, 105-119.

² Rivera, *Hist. de Jalapa*, III, 737.

issued on March 14, 1846, declaring that all discussion of the form of government must cease; and again, on March 21, another circular was issued declaring that a stop must be put to "this venomous discussion," inasmuch as the writers and the press had lost all sense of prudence and moderation. At the same time it was thought necessary to announce officially that President Paredes was personally in favor of a republican form of government.¹ A month later another decree was issued, in which the President referred to the many evils caused by the abuses of the press, and directed the governors of the several departments to proceed against offenders by executive measures—that is, without resorting to the courts. The authors, editors, and printers of any document which, directly or indirectly, favored the views of an invader of the territory, or supported any change in the established order, or attacked the authorities, were to be punished as the governors of the several departments might see fit.²

Having thus attempted to muzzle the press, Paredes next set to work to improve the condition of public affairs. Men without visible means of support (*vagos*) were to be summarily examined and sent to the army.³ Payments of all debts due by the national Treasury were to be suspended.⁴ Salaries and pensions were to be reduced.⁵ At the same time, the church was called upon to contribute two hundred thousand dollars a month for the support of the government, which, however, the church protested its inability to pay.⁶ These were measures not precisely calculated to enhance the popularity of the government.

As early as the beginning of March, Santa Anna thought that the time had come when an effort might hopefully be made for his restoration to power. He accordingly wrote to his friends in Mexico adopting the anti-monarchical "cry." He solemnly expressed alarm at the preparations which the former masters of the country were making to support the

¹ *México á través de los Siglos*, IV, 557.

² Decree of April 18, 1846; Dublan y Lozano, V, 121.

³ Decree of April 23, 1846; *ibid.*, 122.

⁴ Decree of May 2, 1846; *ibid.*, 123.

⁵ Decree of May 7, 1846; *ibid.*, 124.

⁶ Rivera, *Hist. de Jalapa*, III, 750.

designs of Paredes, Alaman, and the other monarchists. Indeed, he hinted, he no longer felt himself safe in a Spanish colony. He therefore urged an effort to restore the Constitution of 1824, though he neglected to recall the fact that he himself had destroyed it. He admitted, of course, that he had at one time entertained other opinions respecting that instrument; but he protested that as he now saw "the love of provincial liberties" and the principles of democracy prevailing everywhere, he had become convinced that no permanent system could be established which did not recognize these tendencies. A centralized system, he declared, had dissatisfied the northern departments and led to their separation; and he even asserted that he had been really (though secretly) endeavoring to bring about federalism in 1844, when driven from the country. He therefore urged his friends to unite with the liberals under Gómez Farias, but at the same time to act with the utmost caution, as the army was opposed to federalism.

As for himself, he said, he was ready to "support the claims of the masses, leaving the people entirely at liberty to organize their system of government and to regulate their affairs in the manner which may please them best"; and in maintenance of these opinions he was resolved to die. All he asked as a reward for his services, was the honor of sanctioning the restored Constitution of 1824, whereupon he would forever retire from public life.¹ At the same time, he drew and distributed proposed forms of a pronunciamiento to be adopted by the garrisons throughout the country.

However, no important rising occurred until the twentieth of May, when a part of the garrison of Guadalajara, the capital of Jalisco, pronounced for Santa Anna. The form of pronunciamiento which he had drafted for the use of his adherents was very accurately copied, three additional articles only, relating chiefly to local conditions, being tacked on at the end.²

¹ Santa Anna to Señor D., March 8, 1846; H. R. Doc. 4, 29 Cong., 2 sess., 36.

² See Santa Anna's draft annexed to the letter just quoted. The plan of Guadalajara is printed in *Nuevo Bernal Diaz*, II, 39-44.

The government asserted that the outbreak in Guadalajara was insignificant, and sent a small body of troops under General Pacheco to suppress it; but there were outbreaks at about the same time in Sonora, Sinaloa, Puebla, Oaxaca, and Michoacan, while the Indian tribes were devastating parts of the northwestern departments. Yucatan had again declared its independence in January,¹ and neither Pacheco nor any of the other commanding officers succeeded in putting down the various risings. The press, in spite of the threats of the government, began quite openly to declare that Santa Anna was the only man who could restore peace and order, and the news of the Mexican disasters on the Rio Grande strengthened their demands for his return to power.²

In the meantime, the ministry of Paredes was dropping to pieces. Gorostiza, who had served as Minister of the Treasury, resigned, dissatisfied with the measures against freedom of the press. Almonte, Minister of War, was made minister to France, being suspected of Santanista leanings; but he only went as near Paris as Havana, where he joined Santa Anna. He was succeeded by Tornel, Santa Anna's former minister, who was vehemently suspected of being a monarchist.

However, the Congress selected to represent the classes and not the people of Mexico, under the call of January, 1846, was permitted to assemble peaceably on the sixth of June, ex-President Bustamante being made its presiding officer. Paredes appeared before it, and in a vain effort to turn the current, again declared himself in favor of a republican form of government. He was, of course, elected President *ad interim*,³ General Bravo being chosen Vice-

¹ *Nuevo Bernal Diaz*, I, 125.

² Rivera, *Hist. de Jalapa*, III, 745-755; *Nuevo Bernal Diaz*, II, 10. Santa Anna, it seems, had had some idea of going to Matamoros and taking Arista's place in opposing Taylor, but his friends dissuaded him. They all agreed that if Arista beat Taylor Santa Anna's return to Mexico would be difficult if not impossible.—(Rivera, III, 780.)

³ Dublan y Lozano, V, 133. The vote was not unanimous. Paredes had 57 votes out of a total of 81, Bravo 13, Herrera 7, the rest scattering. It will be observed that a bare quorum of members was present and voting.—(Rivera, III, 762.)

President, but it was too late. His administration, struggling against constant ill-success, lasted for only two months more.

Toward the latter part of July he thought himself strong enough to spare three thousand men for service in northern Mexico, and these troops actually set out on their march, having, it seems, been equipped by means of money "borrowed" from the clergy. The last of them had hardly been gone a week when, on August 4, 1846, General Salas, commanding a force of about a thousand men—also destined for the Rio Grande, but temporarily quartered in the citadel of the city of Mexico—pronounced for Santa Anna, and the whole fabric of the Paredes government instantaneously collapsed. It had been in power a little over seven months.

Nominally, this latest revolution was intended to overthrow the centralist and establish the federalist principles, but actually its object was only to bring Santa Anna and his friends back to power.¹ By the terms of the "Plan of the Citadel" put forward by Salas and his men, which was also based upon Santa Anna's draft pronunciamiento of the previous spring, a new constituent Congress, elected in accordance with the laws which regulated the elections in 1824, was to be summoned; Santa Anna was to be recalled and made commander-in-chief of all the national forces; the executive, in the interval before the meeting of the Congress, was to take all measures that might be necessary and proper to sustain with due dignity (*decoro*) the national flag; the existence of the army was to be guaranteed, and it was to be fostered and sustained; and any person who should try to impede the meeting of the new Congress, or to dissolve it, or to suspend its sittings, or who should refuse to recognize its acts, was to be declared a traitor.² Who was to be the executive was not stated, but it was, of course, understood that it would be the commander-in-chief.

¹ The hollowness of the pretence of federalism as a basis for this revolt is convincingly discussed in *México á través de los Siglos*, IV, 576.

² Dublin y Lozano, V, 144.

Salas therefore, acting as commander-in-chief in the absence of Santa Anna, assumed the executive power and issued a decree summoning a new Congress. Next day he issued another, repealing all laws interfering with the liberty of the press, and a week later another, repealing the decree of May 7, 1846, which had cut off twenty-five per cent from salaries and pensions.¹ And having thus placated the press, the army and the office-holders, he sat down to wait until Santa Anna should be ready to return to Mexico and take over the command.

During all this time the American administration had been doing whatever lay in its power to sow discord among Mexicans, to induce the people of the frontier states to secede from the central government, and to create a sentiment in favor of an early peace. But one very great difficulty in the way of creating a popular feeling of friendship to the United States lay, it was believed, in the strong religious feeling that prevailed in Mexico. The war had been represented in the Mexican newspapers as being, on the part of the United States, a war of rapine and plunder, a war of "impiety" conducted by heretics, who were bent on robbing the churches and destroying the true religion. To counteract these representations various methods were adopted.

In the first place, it was suggested in Washington that Catholic priests might be obtained to go with the army as chaplains,² and thus allay the fears of the Mexicans as to their religion and the property of their church. Accordingly the Catholic bishops of St. Louis and New York were sent for to the White House and asked to designate for the purpose a few priests who spoke Spanish. Bishop Hughes,

¹ Decrees of August 6, 7, and 15, 1846; *ibid.*, 146, 153, 155. He also issued a manifesto on August 6, explaining that a return to the Constitution of 1824 was the only means of removing the evils which were afflicting the country: the "horrible disorder" of the Treasury, the demoralization of the army, and so forth.—(*México á través de los Siglos*, IV, 572.)

² There was at that time no authority of law for commissioning army chaplains, but they were "employed" on the same legal footing as teamsters, couriers, etc.

of New York, with the ready patriotism he always exhibited, not only promised his assistance, but told the President that he knew the archbishop of Mexico personally and would be willing himself to visit Mexico if the government so desired.¹

In the next place, a reassuring proclamation in Spanish, intended to be distributed by General Taylor, was drawn up in Washington, in which the same note was sounded.

"We come," it ran, "to obtain reparation for repeated wrongs and injuries, we come to obtain indemnity for the past and security for the future, we come to overthrow the tyrants who have destroyed your liberties; but we come to make no war upon the people of Mexico. . . . Your religion, your altars and churches, the property of your churches and citizens, the emblems of your faith and its ministers, shall be protected and remain inviolate. Hundreds of our army, and hundreds of thousands of our people are members of the Catholic church. In every state, and in nearly every city and village of our Union, Catholic churches exist, and the priests perform their holy functions in peace and security."²

And in all the instructions to the commanding officers at the front the idea of conciliating the Mexican people and inducing them to remain neutral was reiterated.

But the chief reliance of the President was on the exiled Santa Anna, who, as he rightly judged, would still play an important part in the affairs of Mexico. The day, there-

¹ Polk's *Diary*, I, 408-411. Archbishop Posada y Garduno, the first archbishop appointed for Mexico by the Holy See since the revolution, was Bishop Hughes's acquaintance. He was dead at the time of the conversation above mentioned, so that the proposed visit to Mexico would have been fruitless. C. M. Bustamante says that the archbishop was extremely fat and never took any exercise, and that his death, on April 30, 1846, was attributed to over-indulgence in candy and julienne soup!—(*Nuevo Bernal Diaz*, II, 15.) President Polk's course in employing the Catholic clergy to serve as chaplains was violently denounced by a Presbyterian minister, who was also, incidentally, a disappointed office-seeker. The President, for reasons not very much in favor with Presidents in the twentieth century, declined to enter into a newspaper controversy with this man, but expressed himself freely in his diary. "I have met with no man during my administration," he wrote, "among the numerous office-seekers who have beset me, for whom I have so profound a contempt."—(Polk's *Diary*, II, 188-191; III, 103-105.) See also, for some further details as to the employment of Catholic priests in the army, Curtis's *Buchanan*, II, 627.

² See the form of proclamation sent by Marcy to Taylor, June 4, 1846; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 284.

fore, that war was declared, the following "private and confidential" order was sent to Commodore Conner, enclosed with the general order directing him to institute a blockade of the Gulf ports: "*Commodore: If Santa Anna endeavors to enter the Mexican ports, you will allow him to pass freely.*"

President Polk had by no means forgotten the long and highly interesting conversations he had had with Colonel Atocha in the preceding February. Atocha had assured him that Santa Anna expected to return to power shortly; that he was in favor of a treaty which should give Texas, New Mexico, and Upper California to the United States upon payment to Mexico of thirty million dollars; that before this could be done the United States must display a strong force on the border, ready to strike; that Santa Anna must have money to sustain himself; and that "with half a million in hand" he could make the treaty. The first thing to be done, if the programme was to be carried out, was evidently to restore Santa Anna to power, and Polk determined to facilitate the restoration by all the means within his reach.

The force on the borders had already been provided for, and all that was needed further from the American government in order to carry out Atocha's plan (in case Santa Anna should return to Mexico) was the ready money to enable him to "sustain himself." The President, therefore, early in the spring and before any acts of hostility had been committed, consulted several members of Congress in reference to a proposed appropriation of a million dollars to enable him to conduct negotiations with Mexico. In general the proposal was favorably received. It was not intended by the President to make a secret payment, but to offer Mexico "to pay down a half million or a million dollars" immediately on the signing of a treaty. Calhoun, however, objected. He said he feared it might embarrass the settlement of the Oregon question if (as was almost certain) the purpose of the proposed appropriation became known; and Allen, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Com-