

where, unless at Malta and Corfu. When we are about it, let us obtain possession, while we can, of the Key of the North-West coast of America."¹

But though British admirals, British consuls, and Hudson's Bay employees urged their government to take over California, the dread of a war with the United States, coupled with uncertainty as to the action of France, and possibly some chivalrous unwillingness to take advantage of the pitiable weakness of Mexico, were enough to induce Peel's cabinet to remain passive. They watched events and made no sign.

¹ Gordon's *Aberdeen*, 183. The author attributes this letter to Lord Ellenborough, "then at the Admiralty"—an obvious blunder: Lord Ellenborough was not "at the Admiralty" when the letter was written, but was governor-general of India.

CHAPTER XXX

SLIDELL'S MISSION

THE anomalous conditions in California and the dangers arising out of the annexation of Texas to the United States gave less concern to General Herrera's unhappy administration than the state of affairs at home. He and his ministers had many and difficult problems to meet, but the most difficult was that of bare existence; for the situation had been immensely complicated by their decision to treat with Texas upon the basis of its recognized independence, a decision which had been approved by a reluctant Congress in the face of the furious opposition of a large portion of the press.

The aspect of domestic affairs was indeed calculated to dismay the stoutest heart. The government of Herrera had no following throughout the country. He was himself more or less the accident of an hour, and was quite devoid of the personal strength and qualities of leadership which had enabled Santa Anna to retain for so long a time his hold on the governing classes in Mexico. Every important man in the country was almost openly plotting to obtain power, but as yet there seemed to be no man with sufficient courage and prestige to establish a government. The condition of the Treasury went continually from bad to worse. The ordinary receipts were far from sufficient to meet the ordinary expenditures in times of peace, even though not a dollar of interest was paid on the foreign debt and the payment of the instalments due by treaty to the United States had been suspended.¹ The army had become more and more

¹ *Memoria que sobre el estado de la hacienda . . . presentó á las cámaras el ministro del ramo en julio de 1845.* The Minister of the Treasury at this time was Luis de la Rosa.

unmanageable every day, partly because the money to pay, feed, clothe, and arm it could not be had, and partly because the revolutions of the past four years, which had begun by making Santa Anna a dictator and had ended by overthrowing him, had emphasized the ability of the army to make and unmake the government of Mexico. Both of those revolutions had been commenced by the active and ambitious Paredes, who had failed to receive any reward which he considered adequate for his deserts, and who was now constantly engaged in schemes for putting himself in Herrera's place.

The regulation of the army and the establishment of the public credit on a sound basis, which would necessarily have involved a revision of the tariff and a radical reduction of expenses, were imperative; but they were tasks which a merely provisional administration such as that of Herrera could hardly be expected to carry through. Congress during its regular session had, however, taken some steps to improve the financial situation. By a law of March 1, 1845, a part of the customs receipts was set aside toward paying debts accrued prior to December 2, 1844;¹ the property belonging to the church, or which was intended for the support of charitable and educational institutions, was to be restored;² and the government was authorized to settle definitively the foreign debt. But as it was forbidden to fund overdue interest, or to dispose of any property of the republic in payment of the public debt, the measure hardly seemed likely to prove fruitful.³

Measures were also taken to increase the military force by raising volunteers. "The Mexican nation," ran the statute, "summons all her sons to the defence of national independence, threatened by the usurpation of the territory of Texas which it is attempted to accomplish by a decree of annexation, passed by the Congress and approved by the President of the United States of the North. The government shall, therefore, put the whole force of the army in the

¹ Dublan y Lozano, V, 7.

² Law of April 28, 1845; *ibid.*, 16.

³ Law of March 5, 1845; *ibid.*, 8.

field, pursuant to the authority conferred by existing laws, both for the preservation of public order, and the support of our institutions, and in case of necessity to act as a reserve; and under the authority of the law of December 9, 1844, it may raise bodies to be known as *Defenders of Independence and the Laws.*"¹

As Congress had provided no money for supporting the sons of Mexico in the field, this law (passed at the close of the regular session, on May 31, and approved by the President four days later) could serve no other purpose than to arouse the patriotism of the nation. It was so regarded by the government, which issued regulations for enlisting volunteers, who were to receive no pay, and must not be government employees, or day-laborers, or in the enjoyment of ecclesiastical privileges. The volunteers were to pay for their own uniforms, and were to be armed by the departments, who might, however, if they had no weapons or ammunition for the purpose, apply to the federal government for assistance in this regard.²

It was only too apparent that these measures were far from sufficient to remedy the evils of the body politic; but President Herrera might have hesitated about calling a special session of Congress if he had not learned, by the middle of June, of President Jones's proclamation, summoning a convention of the people of Texas for the fourth of July. It had been known in Mexico for some days before that the Texan Congress was to meet in special session on the sixteenth of June, and it was now feared that the action of both the Congress and the convention of Texas might be in favor of annexation to the United States, rather than of negotiation with Mexico.³

The proclamation issued by the Mexican President, therefore, summoned Congress to meet on the first day of July, and specified as the subjects to be considered—

1. Constitutional reforms.

¹ Law of June 4, 1845; *ibid.*, 19.

² Regulations of June 7, 1845; *ibid.*, 21.

³ W. S. Parrott to Buchanan, May 22, 1845; same to same, June 17, 1845; *State Dept. MSS.*

2. Revision of the acts of the provisional government.
3. Matters pending for the final action of Congress, and especially those relative to the United States and the department of Texas.¹

Congress met accordingly; and on July 16 Cuevas, the Minister of Foreign Relations, reported to the chambers the failure of Elliot's plan for a settlement by negotiation of the Texas question. He also laid before Congress the information received through Arrangoiz, the active and intelligent Mexican consul at New Orleans, that the Texan Congress had approved the proposal of annexation to the United States, that the Texan convention which was to meet on the fourth of July would unquestionably ratify the action of Congress, and that the American troops which had been stationed at Fort Jesup would embark at New Orleans for Galveston, and would advance as far as the Rio Grande.²

The information of the consul as to the future movement of the troops was correct in the main; for the occupation of Texas by the United States forces had been carefully arranged beforehand, so that there might be no delay the moment the Texan convention should adopt an ordinance in favor of accepting the proposals for annexation. President Tyler had given orders, more than a year before, for the concentration of troops on the Texan frontier. In the official returns of November, 1844, Brevet Brigadier-General Zachary Taylor, whose head-quarters were at Fort Jesup, near Natchitoches, in Louisiana, had as many as twelve hundred men under his immediate command. On the Arkansas River, under General Arbuckle, seven hundred and seventy-four more were encamped. There they remained during the whole winter; but in the spring of 1845 Donelson, the American chargé in Texas, was, in effect, authorized to arrange for their future movements.

Donelson had been instructed by the State Department that the American army could not be employed to resist a

¹ Proclamation of June 16, 1845; Dublan y Lozano, V, 22.

² *México á través de los Siglos*, IV, 543.

Mexican invasion until after Texas had accepted the terms of the joint resolution proposing annexation; but he continued earnestly to urge the importance of sending troops. Would the United States, he asked, stand still and see the country invaded by Mexico before the convention could ratify the American proposals? He believed that the Mexicans, at the instigation of Captain Elliot, were taking steps to drive the Texans from the Rio Grande;¹ although, as a matter of fact, Elliot, who had not yet quite despaired of defeating the plan of annexation, was doing his best to keep Mexico quiet, for the breaking out of hostilities would have ruined every chance of an agreement between Texas and Mexico.²

In answer to Donelson's urgent requests Buchanan wrote, that if there were a unanimous or nearly unanimous vote of the Texan *Congress* in favor of annexation, it would be regarded as conclusive evidence that the people of Texas were anxious for the "reunion" of the two republics, and that the President of the United States would then feel himself bound to repel a Mexican invasion. There were, however, he added, many reasons why it was preferable for Texas herself, until after the *convention* had acted, to drive the intruders from her territory.³

On the same day that Buchanan wrote thus to Donelson, orders were sent from the War Department to Taylor, at Fort Jesup, directing him to march the troops under his command to the Sabine River in preparation for an advance to the Rio Grande, "the Western frontier of Texas"; but he was not to cross the Texan border of the United States until he received information that the Texan convention had accepted the proposal for annexation.⁴ Captain Stockton (who still commanded the unlucky *Princeton*) was or-

¹ Buchanan to Donelson, May 23, 1845; Donelson to Buchanan, June 4, 1845; Sen. Doc. 1, 29 Cong., 1 sess., 40, 66.

² Elliott to Jones, June 13, 1845; Jones, 471. "I have written to Mexico in the strongest terms, suggesting *complete* abstinence from onward movement, let this Congress and Convention say what they may. The Mexicans had better leave the initiative in hostile proceedings to the United States."

³ Buchanan to Donelson, June 15, 1845; Sen. Doc. 1, 29 Cong., 1 sess., 42.

⁴ Bancroft to Taylor, June 15, 1845; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 81.

dered to repair with that ship and a small squadron under his command to the mouth of the Sabine, for the purpose of transporting the American troops to whatever positions Donelson and the Texan authorities should deem most expedient.¹

It was, however, evidently impracticable for Taylor to embark his forces at the mouth of the Sabine on Stockton's ships, and he therefore made his arrangements, late in June, to move his infantry regiments by way of the Red River to New Orleans, and to embark there, together with his artillery, for such point on the coast of Texas as Donelson might indicate. The cavalry he proposed to send overland.²

Donelson, in consultation with the Texan authorities, had no difficulty in reaching the conclusion that the most suitable point for Taylor's infantry to occupy would be Corpus Christi, "the most Western point now occupied by Texas." The cavalry, he thought, should proceed to San Antonio and occupy that point, and possibly it would be advantageous to establish a third post between Corpus Christi and San Antonio.³

By the end of July, 1845, Taylor's infantry and artillery were therefore encamped at Corpus Christi, on a bluff overlooking the bay of the same name, into which enters the Nueces River; and from that time forward the United States occupied in force this post lying between the Nueces and the Rio Grande. The cavalry soon afterward completed its long march, and joined the rest of the army, and before the

¹ Stockton had been for some time cruising with three or four ships off the coast of Texas. He was not at all satisfied to remain a peaceful spectator of events. When off Galveston in the month of May, 1845, he seems to have tried to persuade the Texans to collect a force and seize Matamoros; and he offered if that were done to support the movement with his ships. Jones says that what Stockton wanted was "to manufacture a war," and that these were his secret instructions from the United States government.—(Jones, 48-52.) The notion that the American government was then trying to "manufacture a war" is absurd. What they wanted was to buy off Mexico. Donelson, in the month of June, thought it necessary to warn Stockton against any premature action by his squadron.—(Donelson to Stockton, June 22, 1845; Sen. Doc. 1, 29 Cong., 1 sess., 86.)

² Taylor to the Adjutant-General, June 18 and 30, and July 8, 1845; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 800-803.

³ Donelson to Taylor, June 28, 1845; *ibid.*, 804.

summer was over, additional troops having been sent to reinforce Taylor, more than half the regular army of the United States was in Texas. This force consisted of one regiment of dragoons, sixteen companies of artillery, and five regiments of infantry; numbering in all, according to the annual return in November, three thousand five hundred and ninety-three men.¹

The information that the American troops were on the point of embarking in July, 1845, for the purpose of actually occupying Texas, seems to have come as a sort of surprise to the Mexican ministers. However, it was quite evident—in view of their repeated declarations that the mere act of annexation would *ipso facto* amount to a declaration of war—that they could do no less on the present occasion than propose vigorous action to Congress. The Minister of Foreign Relations, therefore, on July 21, 1845, proposed the following resolution:

"As soon as the government ascertains that the department of Texas has united itself to the American Union, or that the troops of the latter have invaded it, it shall declare that the nation is at war with the United States of North America. This war shall be conducted for the purpose of saving the integrity of the Mexican territory within its ancient limits—recognized by the United States in the treaties from the year 1828 to 1836—and for the purpose of assuring the threatened independence of the nation."²

On the same day the Secretary of the Treasury proposed the adoption of a law authorizing the government to make a loan, either domestic or foreign, for such an amount as should furnish the Treasury the actual sum of fifteen million dollars. To secure the payment of this loan and the interest thereon, the government was to hypothecate all the income of the nation not hypothecated for any other debt.

The authority to make the loan was granted by a law passed September 15, 1845,³ but the proposed resolution

¹ *Return of the Army of Occupation in Texas*; Sen. Doc. 1, 29 Cong., 1 sess., 220 f.

² *México á través de los Siglos*, IV, 543.

³ *Dublan y Lozano*, V, 36.

authorizing a declaration of war was not passed, either because it was considered that war had already been declared, or because Herrera's government still entertained hopes of adjusting the difficulty by negotiation, a result which Cuevas at least was sincerely anxious to accomplish.

In spite of the warlike talk of the ministry, the conduct of the government, so far as it was then known, was met by bitter opposition. It was accused of having put the Texan question into the worst possible predicament; it had allowed itself, it was said, to be deceived by the Texan rebels; and it had consented to discuss proposals of settlement, thus wasting precious time which should have been improved in carrying on a war without quarter. To all this the friends of the government replied that any arrangement which did not call in question the good name of the republic was preferable to the hazards of a war. No war could fail to be expensive though it were just. There were risks in all wars; the caprices of fortune must be allowed for; and, moreover, even if the administration had peremptorily declined the preliminaries which the Texans presented, the only result would have been to hasten annexation, with its consequent evils, which the ministers were now endeavoring, for the good of the country, to prevent.¹ This sort of controversy, of course, convinced nobody, but the undeniable fact remained that the administration had been willing to bargain for the independence of Texas, a thing odious to many of the governing class and probably to a majority of them.

But though the hour for the fall of Herrera seemed to have come, still the man had not appeared. There were nearly a dozen candidates for the Presidency—Herrera himself; Cuevas, his Foreign Secretary; Gómez Farias, as radical as ever; Pedraza, energetic, able, and deeply distrusted; and Generals Bravo, Rincon, Valencia, and Almonte. But stronger than any of them, with some thousands of armed men at his back, was Paredes, who bided his time. The departments, therefore, under the orders of the central gov-

¹ *México á través de los Siglos*, IV, 543.

ernment, obediently voted for General Herrera, who was duly declared elected President of the republic for the remainder of Santa Anna's term, *i. e.*, until February 1, 1849.¹

Before the formal announcement of his election, and as soon as the reports from the several departments showed what would be the result, the President received the resignations of all the members of his cabinet; and on August 14, 1845, he appointed a set of new ministers who were thought to be more "democratic" than their predecessors. The Minister of Foreign Relations was Manuel de la Peña y Peña, a lawyer of high standing, for many years a member of the Supreme Court, who had been Minister of Justice in Bustamante's second administration in 1837. He was regarded as a moderate man, rather inclined to support the church. "He will be guided in his foreign policy," Buchanan was informed, "by General Pedraza, who is decidedly in favor of an amicable arrangement with the United States."²

The members of Herrera's new cabinet, like those of the old, were suspected of being but lukewarm in regard to beginning a war for the recovery of Texas. They therefore felt it necessary to protest loudly their patriotic intentions; and the official newspaper, after a silence of some weeks on the subject of war, suddenly declared that the American government must now be made to understand that, accustomed as the Mexicans were to freedom and independence, they would never forgive the unparalleled offence committed by the United States, and would avail themselves of every opportunity to inflict exemplary punishment on their perfidious neighbors.³

Such vaguely magnificent threats evidently committed the administration to nothing, and were not very convincing to Herrera's opponents. The press, or a noisy section of it, continued to denounce the ministry as being subject to the fatal influence of Senator Pedraza and as being the cause of all the difficulties that were delaying the opening of

¹ Law of Sept. 14, 1845; *Dublan y Lozano*, V, 35.

² W. S. Parrott to Buchanan, Aug. 23, 1845; *State Dept. MSS.*

³ Same to same, Sept. 13, 1845; *ibid.*

the Texan campaign.¹ The latter accusation was in reality very unjust, for the administration was helpless. The army, as always, was a Frankenstein monster of whom every successive ministry stood in dread, and it became more formidable than ever when an attempt was made to concentrate the reluctant troops in preparation for an advance on the Texan border. The War Department had been doing its best ever since Santa Anna's overthrow to get together an adequate army; but the mutinous temper of the leading officers tended to make the efforts of the central authorities fruitless.

General Arista, who commanded on the Rio Grande, probably had less than three thousand men under him in the late summer and autumn of 1845; but a much larger force, perhaps eight or ten thousand men, who were intended for Texas, were in or within easy reach of San Luis Potosí. As they had neither shoes nor clothing nor transport, it was difficult to move them through a barren country. The commander at San Luis was General Paredes, who for some time before the formation of the new government had expressed himself publicly and privately as hostile to the existing government, and was little disposed to move. Orders were sent him to forward troops to reinforce Arista, which he said he would obey when supplied with money and clothing. Repeated orders were then sent to him to come to the capital, but these were calmly ignored. It was rumored in the city of Mexico that General Filisola, commanding another division, had been ordered to march against Paredes; and then it was announced that Filisola had been relieved from his command and ordered to turn it over to Paredes, who was thus at the head of both divisions. That the government had decided to humor Paredes by giving him control of much the largest military force in Mexico was apparent; but the reasons for this surrender remained a mystery.

While the Mexican government was thus doing its best to carry on, in some more or less disjointed fashion, the busi-

¹ *México á través de los Siglos*, IV, 544.

ness of the country, and especially was endeavoring to persuade its troops to march upon Texas, the government of the United States was still trying to restore diplomatic relations. William S. Parrott, the secret agent of the Washington government in Mexico,¹ wrote on August 16, 1845, that the President had been heard to say that, if a minister from the United States should arrive, he would be well received. Ten days later Parrott wrote that the war talk had ceased and that he had good reason to believe that the arrival of an envoy from the United States would be hailed with joy.²

On August 29 he wrote again that the Mexican government was the mere creature of circumstances and without any fixed principle for its guide; but that, judging from his knowledge of the men in power, and from the general and freely expressed feeling of the moment, he had no doubt an envoy from the United States would be greeted with "heartly welcome." The government, he was satisfied, was not strong enough to take a decided stand; the insubordination of Paredes was much more serious than had been supposed, for he had intercepted money and clothing sent by the government for Arista on the frontier; and a civil, not a foreign war, had begun.³ This news was confirmed by despatches from Black, the American consul in the city of Mexico, and from Dimond, the consul at Vera Cruz.

The information that Mexico was willing to negotiate came as a perfect godsend to Polk's administration. A war

¹ Parrott was a dentist who had gone to Mexico (like many others of his calling since) to practise his profession. He afterward, according to the American minister, "engaged in mercantile business, living in a style the most luxurious and expensive, and wound up, as such persons always do, a bankrupt." He had a large claim against the Mexican government, which, the minister said, "may be, and no doubt is just to some extent, but I cannot forbear to say that it is exaggerated to a disgusting degree. To assert such a claim would subject both me and my government to ridicule if nothing worse." —(Thompson to Webster, Nov. 30, 1842; *State Dept. MSS.*) Reeves, in his *American Diplomacy under Tyler and Polk*, 270, says that Polk at the time of Parrott's appointment probably knew nothing of this claim; but he gives no proof of his assertion. Parrott, for a secret agent, was a well-qualified person, for he was active, alert, knew the language and the people, and was a most voluminous correspondent. He had one serious defect. He wrote an almost illegible hand.

² W. S. Parrott to Buchanan, Aug. 16, 1845; Aug. 26, 1845; *State Dept. MSS.*

³ Same to same, Aug. 29, 1845; *ibid.*