

CHAPTER XXXIX

ANTI-CLERICALISM AND ANTI-SLAVERY

THE authorities in Mexico, unlike those in the United States, gave themselves very little concern about plans of campaign. The problems with which they had to deal were far more fundamental, for they were problems involving the bare existence of an army. It had only been by dint of great exertions that a few thousand men could be assembled at Monterey; and it became daily more and more difficult to equip or subsist a force of any respectable size. The difficulty resolved itself, of course, into a lack of money; and how money was to be raised for the army was, in the last analysis, the problem set before the Mexican government. There was but one mine in Mexico, said a Mexican historian, from which money could be extracted, and that was the property of the church, which few dared to lay hands on. Santa Anna, who had always professed the utmost piety, was most unwilling to come forward as the author of a plan for seizing the patrimony of the church; and for months he seems to have been engaged in trying to devise some scheme by which money could be raised from this source without his being put forward as the author.

For some time after his arrival at Vera Cruz, in August, he refused to show himself in the capital, although urged to do so by Salas and the rest of the temporary government. The reason which he alleged for staying away was that he feared his enemies might accuse him of having taken advantage of the revolution of August 4, 1846, to reinstate himself in the presidential chair; and he declared that his sole ambition was to be the instrument for repelling the piratical invasion of the Americans. Nevertheless, on September

14, having allowed himself to be persuaded, he arrived at the city of Mexico, where he was received with great popular rejoicing and a number of speeches at the palace; but he refused to accept a dinner which was to be given in his honor, and took up his residence outside the city at the Archbishop's Palace at Tacubaya.

Persisting firmly in his refusal to accept the responsibilities of the government, Santa Anna declared that he would only remain at the capital long enough to secure supplies for a campaign. He also announced that he did not mean to leave a single soldier in the city, as he meant to concentrate his whole force at San Luis Potosí, and that he would insist on the government's providing three hundred thousand dollars a month for the support of the army. But while he professed entire detachment from politics, his chief occupation at Tacubaya, according to the general belief in Mexico, was the carrying on of intrigues with the various factions and the encouragement of hostility between them. His object, it was said, was to push the radical party—the *exaltados*—to such an extreme that he would be called upon by the public generally to take over the government as a saviour of society. Salas, who was still acting as President *ad interim*, was a notoriously weak figure-head, and Santa Anna's design was to push forward Farias, the typical representative of the radical party and the old enemy of the church.

The first step was to establish a "council of government," with Farias at its head, which was done by a decree issued by General Salas on September 20, 1846.¹ The next step was to use Farias as a cat's-paw to extract from the church the money needed for the support of the army.

It would obviously have been too dangerous a policy to attempt to lay hands at once upon the church's property, and the government therefore devoted itself ostentatiously to efforts to raise the money elsewhere. Appeals were made to the patriotism of the nation, and these appeals actually brought out some substantial contributions, as the news of

¹ Dublan y Lozano, V, 171.

Taylor's march from the Rio Grande to Monterey came in good season to inflame the patriotism of those who had money to give. Santa Anna himself encouraged the movement by declaring that he personally would advance money for the support of the army. But the total result of these appeals was, of course, absurdly inadequate to setting an army in the field, although money enough was actually raised to enable Santa Anna to march out from the capital on the twenty-eighth of September at the head of two brigades, for the relief, as he stated, of Monterey. Monterey had fallen three days before.

On August 29, the day after Santa Anna left the capital, the official newspaper published a full account of the pious and public visit of the commanding general to the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe, whither he had gone, like Dunois *partant pour la Syrie*, to invoke the protection of the sacred image in the campaign he was about to undertake. From this incident the newspaper deduced the moral that the clergy ought to pay for the army as well as pray for it.

"The American army," said the *Diario*, "is made up of adventurers who have no country, no political or religious creed, no moral principles or sentiments; for whom there are no priests or magistrates, and for whom the house of God, the Senate, a drawing-room, a theatre and a circus, are all the same. For this reason we think that the ministers of the altar, being specially interested in the present war for the preservation of our adorable religion, instead of incessantly directing their prayers to the Almighty, ought also to unite with other citizens in contributing of their wealth to aid the government in the present critical circumstances."¹

On the second of October, four days after the Virgin of Guadalupe had been invoked, the news of the capitulation of Monterey reached the capital. On the same day General Salas issued a decree which had evidently been prepared for use some time beforehand. It began by reciting at great length that the existing war with the United States was for the Mexican nation a question of life or death; that

¹ *México á través de los Siglos*, IV, 591.

many individuals had offered generous sums for the support of the war, but these sums had proved insufficient; that the war ought not to be permitted to languish for want of money, lest the men of that generation should become the object of the curses of posterity and the scorn of other nations and of history; and that sacrifices must therefore be exacted from all citizens. Owners of real estate were therefore required to pay the government a sum equal to one month's rent for their lands, while those who occupied their own houses and lands, including convents and schools, were also to pay such a sum as might be assessed as the equivalent of a month's rent. Tenants were to pay a sum equivalent to a quarter of a month's rent of the premises they occupied, unless their rental was less than a dollar a month. The proceeds of this tax were to be deposited in a special safe with three keys, one to be held by the President of the republic, another by the Secretary of the Treasury, and the third by the chief alcalde of the city of Mexico, so that no money could be drawn except for the necessary expenses of the war—a curiously primitive method of securing financial responsibility. There was also to be a national lottery on a large scale.¹

The decree did not, however, provide any means of enforcing payment of the amounts thus levied, so that nobody obeyed it, and it was generally ridiculed and assailed in the public press. It was, however, to some extent the cause of serious riots in the capital between the fourteenth and eighteenth of October, 1846, although it was also said that private letters from Santa Anna, published in the newspapers, in which he expressed his opinion in regard to the conduct of General Salas, had contributed to these disturbances. These riots, whatever their cause, were quickly put down.

Santa Anna, with the garrison of the city of Mexico, arrived at San Luis Potosí on the eighth of October. A few days before, Ampudia, with the whole of the former garrison of Monterey, had started south from Saltillo, and after a

¹ Decree of Oct. 2, 1846; *ibid.*, 172.

fortnight's march they arrived at San Luis. His abandonment of Saltillo was by Santa Anna's orders; but why he should have been ordered to evacuate that important point it is difficult to understand. The movement has been severely criticised by Mexican writers.

At the same time Santa Anna gave orders for the immediate evacuation of Tampico, which was garrisoned by about four thousand men, and orders were sent to all the neighboring states of Mexico to forward reinforcements to San Luis. Works of defence were thrown up about that city, and the troops whom Santa Anna had already collected, together with the reinforcements as they arrived, were organized and occasionally drilled, in preparation for a forward movement.

"The infantry," wrote an officer, "was exercised by brigades under the command of the respective generals; but I never saw any general manœuvres even by divisions. The cavalry was drilled only by regiments. The artillery hardly ever manœvred, and never fired a blank shot. The general in command was never present on the field of manœuvres, so that he was unable to appreciate the respective qualities of the various bodies under his command. On Sundays the troops went to mass, marched through the city and returned to their quarters. If any meetings of the principal commanding officers were held to discuss the operations of the campaign, it was not known nor was it known whether any plan of campaign had been formed. In none of the corps were there schools of officers as there should have been."¹

The reinforcements which arrived, principally from the states of Guanajuato and Jalisco, were badly armed, badly clothed, and completely ignorant of their duties. Many of the soldiers, says the author just cited, went into battle without ever having fired off a musket. But Santa Anna, with his accustomed energy and activity, succeeded in collecting a large body of troops who, if not very efficient, were at least capable of making long marches and of sustaining patiently great fatigues.

By the middle of November the moderate sums of money which had been contributed for the army were nearly ex-

¹ Balbontin, *Invasion Americana*, 55.

hausted, and the plan embodied in the decree of October 2, 1846—which really consisted in requesting the inhabitants of the nation to contribute voluntarily the equivalent of a month's rent—having proved a failure, the ingenious minds of the authorities in Mexico hit upon another and more complicated expedient.

A decree was issued on November 19, 1846, which recited the necessity for raising money, in view of the approach of the day upon which a battle would take place on whose result would perhaps depend the very existence of the republic; that the efforts of the people and of the army would be useless if the necessary money was not forthcoming; that the government had exhausted all ordinary and extraordinary means and all mild and temperate measures (*medios suaves y templados*); that the venerable clergy throughout the whole republic, and especially in the metropolitan diocese, had constantly expressed itself as ready to contribute from its property for the sacred purpose of saving the nation; and that it could not be doubted that private individuals were animated by the same spirit. It was therefore decreed that drafts should be drawn by the government upon the clergy throughout the country, payable, with interest, in two years from date, which drafts the ecclesiastical authorities of each bishopric must accept within three days after sight. It was, of course, also a necessary part of the scheme to get these drafts promptly discounted, and the decree, therefore, further provided that certain persons who were to be designated in each locality were to purchase these drafts at par within eight days after demand. The total amounts of the drafts were to be two million dollars.¹

Before the efficacy of this measure could be fully tested, the Mexican Congress met and was opened in the usual form by General Salas on Sunday, December 6, 1846. His speech

¹ Dublan y Lozano, V, 211-216. The sum of \$800,000 was to be raised in the Federal District (city of Mexico and suburbs), and a list of the individuals who were to be assessed in sums varying from \$20,000 to \$200 apiece is annexed to the decree. Similar lists, of course, were to be prepared in each bishopric by the authorities of the locality.

set forth the causes and effects of the revolution of the previous August, gave an account of the acts of the government during the four months that had since elapsed, announced that the national army had been concentrated and organized at San Luis Potosí and numbered twenty-three thousand men, and that it was hoped they would soon meet the American forces, which were advancing toward the interior of the republic under General Taylor. The national triumph, he added, would be a certainty, provided the new representatives of the people should fortify the federal system and democratic principles, and provided also they devoted themselves to the task of bringing the nation out of the chaos and absolute disorder in which it had been involved as the result of perpetual revolutions.

The first measure which the temporary government urged upon Congress was necessarily that of dealing with the financial situation, for that, in the then condition of Mexico, dominated everything else. Almonte, who had become Secretary of the Treasury, proposed the imposition of an extraordinary tax upon each of the states and territories, payable monthly, in addition to an immediate payment aggregating six hundred thousand dollars. Congress, however, received the suggestion without enthusiasm, and it adopted a reply to his proposal, expressing surprise that Congress should be thus called upon—immediately after the organization of the two houses, and before any account had been rendered of the condition of the Treasury and the expenditure of the money already collected—to furnish additional supplies for the campaign.

"The government," said the reply of Congress, "in the four months of its existence, during which it has exercised absolute power, was under the strictest obligation to provide means—not only for the term of its own existence, but also for such a period as might elapse before the representatives of the country could establish new taxes and make them effective. . . . Before loading the people, already oppressed by taxes, including that which is most onerous—the tax of their blood—it is necessary to know how much is needed in order to sustain the war for a year. Congress should not pursue a system of only acting from day to day."

The reply concluded by demanding information of the receipts of the government and a budget of expenses, in order that Congress might act with full knowledge.¹

Having delivered this rebuke to the government of Salas, Congress next proceeded to the election of a President and Vice-President of the republic. Santa Anna, by a small majority of the states (eleven to nine), was elected President over Don Francisco Eloriaga.² His old associate, Gómez Farias, was chosen Vice-President, to the annoyance and alarm of the conservative elements of society, especially the clergy.

In accepting his election, Santa Anna in a high-flown letter repeated his declaration that he had not returned from exile for the purpose of obtaining the presidency, but only "to combat the daring foreigner who profanes with his presence the sacred territory of the fatherland." He asserted that he would accept the post simply because he wished to pay respect to the decision of the constituent Congress which represented the nation; that he purposed to carry on the military operations with which he had been charged, and which, under divine favor, would result in conquering a glorious peace; and that when this was accomplished he intended to surrender the office of President and retire into private life. He did not, however, then take the oath of office.

Gómez Farias, being thus left to himself by Santa Anna, was now in readiness to raise money by means of the seizure of ecclesiastical property, a course to which his thoughts naturally inclined. His first step was to cause an inspired article to be published in the *Diario Oficial* of December 31, in which, after insisting upon the necessity of obtaining abundant means for carrying on the government, and after referring to Almonte's proposed special tax upon the states, attention was called to the propriety of contributions by the church. The measure proposed in the decree of November 19 for raising money by means of drafts drawn

¹ *México á través de los Siglos*, IV, 600.

² Decree of Dec. 23, 1846; *Dublan y Lozano*, V, 238.

upon the clergy, it was said, had proved a melancholy failure. Every possible means had been taken by the ecclesiastical authorities to postpone a definite settlement of the affair, but it was to be regretted that the patriotism of the venerable clergy had not been exhibited on this occasion, and the bishops were therefore now urged to make some sacrifice for the country, in view of the great dangers which threatened "our religion, our independence, and our liberty."

This very broad hint produced no results, and the government within the week proposed to Congress the forcible seizure of the endowments of the church. The proposal, as was to be expected, was bitterly resisted; but the necessities of the country were so obvious, and the government of the day was so strong, that after a continuous session of nearly three days and three nights—lasting from the seventh of January, 1847, until the morning of the tenth of that month—a bill was passed authorizing the government to raise fifteen million dollars by mortgage or sale of church property for the purpose of carrying on the war with the United States. It was approved by Farias, and became a law on the eleventh of January.

This statute, in the most general terms, authorized the government to seize any church endowments at any time during the continuance of the war, but with certain exceptions. The property excepted was that used for the support of hospitals, almshouses, schools, and other similar institutions; benefices created by gift, in which the right of nomination resided in individuals; the sacred vessels, vestments, and other objects indispensable for worship; and the property of nunneries to an amount equal to six thousand dollars for each of the nuns. The proceeds of seizures were not to be applied to any other object than that of carrying on the war, and one million dollars out of the fifteen must be expended in the purchase of arms, one-half of which were to be given to the frontier states and the balance to the other states.¹

Instantly upon the passage of this law the chapter of the

¹ Law of Jan. 11, 1847; *ibid.*, 246-252.

Cathedral of Mexico issued a formal protest, in which they set forth that it was impossible for any one to comply with it without incurring the censures and ecclesiastical penalties pronounced by the Council of Trent against those, of whatever rank or dignity, who should despoil, or consent to despoiling, the property of the church.¹

This protest produced the expected result. The persons whose duty it was to publish or execute the law refused to do so. But there were men of a younger generation who were quite prepared to assume the responsibility of supporting the views of Farias and his cabinet, and of opposing the whole power of the church; and one of these was the third deputy alcalde of the city of Mexico, Don Juan José Baz, who said that he would publish the decree, and would for that purpose take charge *ad interim* of the government of the Federal District. He did so, and the decree was published at noon on Wednesday, January 13, 1847. The step was followed by some attempts at rioting in the city, which were apparently incited by the clergy of the Cathedral. At noon on Thursday, January 14, people ran about the streets shouting: "Long live religion!" "Down with the government!" The shops, as usual on such occasions, were instantly closed, and there was general apprehension of serious trouble; but the affair went no further at that time. Next day it was found that the doors of the Cathedral had been closed and were being kept closed, and it was

¹ Protest of January 11, 1847, at twelve o'clock noon. The edict referred to is in Sess. XXII, c. XI, *Bonorum Cuiuscunque ecclesiae aut pii loci occupatores puniuntur*. The essential parts of it may be thus translated: "If any cleric or layman, by whatsoever dignity pre-eminent, be he even emperor or king, should be so possessed by covetousness as to presume to convert to his own use the jurisdictions, property, rents and rights, including those held in fee or under lease, the fruits, emoluments, or any sources of revenue whatsoever belonging to any church, or to any benefice, whether secular or regular, which ought to be employed for the necessities of the ministers thereof or of the poor; he shall lie under an anathema until he shall have made full restitution to the church, and until he shall, furthermore, have obtained absolution from the Roman Pontiff. And the cleric who shall be the author of, or consenting to, any execrable fraud and usurpation of this kind, shall be subjected to the same penalties; as also he shall be deprived of all benefices whatsoever, and be rendered incapable of any others." The phrase *anathema subiaceat* is the regular formula of excommunication.

rumored that they would not be reopened for an indefinite period. A note in a very peremptory tone was thereupon addressed by the government to the authorities of the Cathedral, stating that the government had been given to understand that the chapter was exciting the people to rebellion by issuing disrespectful protests and by closing the Cathedral; and that if the Cathedral was not opened at the customary hours, and if public tranquillity was disturbed, the government would find itself compelled to take repressive measures which would be as severe and as efficacious as circumstances might demand. The Cathedral was opened.

On the following day the government made preparations to take possession at once of ten million dollars' worth of church property in the bishoprics of Mexico, Puebla, Guadalajara, Michoacan, Oaxaca, and Durango, deferring the raising of the additional five millions from property in the provinces, until further information could be obtained.¹ But though it was easy for the government to issue decrees for seizing the property, it was difficult to take actual possession; for many of those who were appointed commissioners to effect the seizure declined, under one pretext or another, to serve.

While the government was thus trying to get the law executed, new embarrassments arose from the attitude of Santa Anna. It was his urgency which had induced the government to adopt extreme measures. He had undoubtedly given Farias to understand that he would support a measure for seizing ecclesiastical endowments. He had written, immediately on receiving information of the passage of the law, that it would save the country, that it was eminently patriotic, that the representatives who had voted for it had deserved well of the country, that the news had been received by his troops with loud and enthusiastic cheers, and that the measure must be carried into effect with exactness and promptitude. But when Santa Anna learned of the violence of the clerical opposition he wrote again, on January 26, from San Luis Potosí, that he was

¹ Decree of Jan. 15, 1847; Dublan y Lozano, V, 248.

informed the law had produced no result except an almost universal discontent. He was also informed, he said, that he himself was regarded as the author of the measure—this belief in his authorship being based upon certain private letters which had been published. He expressed strong objections to such a publication of his private letters, and protested that the ideas which he might put forth in this manner were not to be regarded as final decisions and that his name should not have been used in passing the act. The result, as he chose to regard it, was that his "unwearied enemies" were now asserting that the act had been drawn up at his suggestion, and that it was to be enforced simply because it had received his approval. He therefore begged that Congress would modify the law if any other means could be found for raising the money. He also took occasion to point out one other source of revenue, by stating that he had just seized ninety-eight bars of silver from the mines, most of which belonged to Spanish merchants.¹

This protest of Santa Anna encouraged the clerical party to renew the discussion in Congress. The first result of their efforts was the passage of another law, on February 4, 1847, which gave the government "extraordinary powers" to raise forthwith five million dollars for use in the defence of the national territory. The act, however, declared that this was not to be construed as giving the government power to exact forced loans, or to relax the "prohibitive" laws, or to seize the property of private individuals, or to execute any contract of colonization. The government was also prohibited from alienating, in whole or in part, national territory and from disposing of any property exempted from the operation of the law of January 11, 1847.² These exceptions seemed to make the law ineffectual, for it was hard to understand from what sources the government could raise money, even by the most "extraordinary powers," when no one was willing to make loans, and when the seizure of private property and the alienation of land belonging to the nation were alike prohibited. In fact, the law of Feb-

¹ *México á través de los Siglos*, V, 607.

² Dublan y Lozano, V, 255.