

vigor and courage of the men in the battles of Contreras and Churubusco was certainly beyond all praise. Undoubtedly the desperate position in which they found themselves—cut off from all possible support, in the midst of an enemy's country—had a great deal to do with the endurance and resolution with which they attacked superior forces fighting behind intrenchments; but in addition to this they were encouraged and emboldened, as the Mexican forces were dismayed, by the repeated victories of every one of the American armies. They had acquired the habit of victory, as the Mexicans had acquired the habit of defeat.

The dispositions of the several commanding officers were not equally free from criticism. The successive detachment of four brigades from Scott's forces during the afternoon of the nineteenth was obviously a measure that involved the most serious risks. These detachments were interposed, one after the other, in plain view of Scott and his staff, between superior forces of the enemy; and the only justification that can be alleged on behalf of the American commanders was, in the first place, the enormous advantages to be gained if the movement proved successful, and, in the second place, their knowledge of the superiority, man for man, of the American army to the Mexican.

A much more serious criticism was made in respect of the battle of Churubusco—a criticism which was hardly to be answered, as in the case of Contreras, by the successful result. Why, it was asked, was the battle of Churubusco fought at all? Scott had turned without loss the positions of El Peñon and Mexicalcingo and compelled their abandonment; and with only a trifling loss at Contreras, he had also turned the position of San Antonio. When he reached Coyoacan he was in a position where he could easily have turned the position of Churubusco; and if he had stopped long enough to reconnoitre the works constructed at the bridge and near the convent, it can hardly be believed that he would have attacked at all. Moreover, it seems likely that Santa Anna did not intend to make a serious stand at Churubusco, and only held it to delay the American advance.

"If Scott and Worth," says a Mexican author, "had halted at the village of Coyoacan and the hacienda of San Juan de Dios (in front of San Antonio) they could not—halt or no halt—have failed to occupy the entrenchments of the hacienda of San Antonio and the bridge and church of Churubusco, only a few hours later and without the slightest resistance. . . . And as to the moral effect which, according to Scott, facilitated and smoothed the way toward the capture of Mexico . . . the battle of Padierna would have sufficed to cause that result; since the advantages which he may have enjoyed from the capture of the other points disappeared, or were not a little diminished, in the face of the obstinacy and courage of the defence of the convent of Churubusco, and in face of the terrible reception which the invader met with that evening, when in pursuit of our soldiers, at the mouths of the guns at the gate of San Antonio Abad."¹

Nor could Scott, if he had stopped to reflect, have failed to see that a direct attack on Churubusco was by no means essential for carrying out his plans. A glance at the map would have shown him that from the villages of San Angel and Coyoacan there was an abundance of good roads leading direct to the city of Mexico and to its westerly suburb of Tacubaya and the hill of Chapultepec. A movement along these roads that night would assuredly have led to the instant abandonment of Churubusco, which was the only fortified work still held by the Mexicans south of the city. In the direction of Tacubaya there were no works at all.

The answer to the question as to why Scott attacked Churubusco must therefore be found in some preconceived notion of his that the direct road between San Antonio and the city of Mexico was not strongly held, and that once the works at San Antonio had been disposed of the American army could march directly to the gates of Mexico. Undoubtedly the road through San Antonio and Churubusco—the Acapulco highway—was the most direct and the best road from his depot at San Agustin to the city, and if it had been free from obstruction it would have been a natural and desirable means of approach to the capital. But Scott was elated by the morning's victory at Padierna, and he pushed forward with his whole strength in order to gain the

¹ Roa Bárcena, 347.

direct road, without stopping to ascertain what obstacles might be in his way. No doubt risks must be run in war, but in this case there seems to have been no reason to depart from the cautious policy which had heretofore enabled Scott to accomplish such great results with so trifling a loss. In front of Vera Cruz, at Cerro Gordo, and at Contreras, he had spent days in careful reconnoissances, in which the work of his admirable corps of engineers had laid the foundation for his victorious operations. But at Churubusco he attempted nothing of the sort. His troops were hurried forward into action without any knowledge of the Mexican position until they came under a destructive fire, and having become fully engaged he was forced to persist in his attacks upon a strong position held by a superior force. The result of the contest was determined by the excellent quality of the American army and by the good conduct of the officers commanding the three detached bodies into which Scott had divided his army, and over which it was impossible for him during the conflict to exert any adequate control. It was therefore the conclusion of most military critics that it was a mistake on Scott's part to have fought the battle of Churubusco at all, and that its successful result was by no means due to the foresight or to the dispositions made on the ground by the commander-in-chief.¹

As to the Mexican generals, Santa Anna's conduct of the operations at the battle of Contreras has naturally been most severely criticised by Mexican writers, and indeed it is hard to account for his failure to attack vigorously the small force under Riley, Cadwalader, and Smith, which alone interposed between him and Valencia on Thursday afternoon. He received news as early as two o'clock that the Americans were attacking Valencia's position; but it was not, as he stated, until five o'clock that his troops reached the hills south and southwest of San Angel, where he found himself separated from Valencia by a deep ravine and opposed by a considerable part of Scott's army. His own explanation

¹ Ripley, II, 310-313, severely criticises Scott, while Stevens (78-82) warmly supports him.

was that he did not reach the field of battle until so late in the afternoon that he had no time to complete his reconnoissances before dark; that the ground in his front was too broken to enable him to attack the Americans; and that the weather that night was such that he had to withdraw his infantry nearly two miles to take shelter in the houses of San Angel.

In the latter respect his conduct certainly presented a very striking contrast to that of Smith and the other American officers at San Gerónimo. While the latter, exposed to the same torrents of rain which were driving Santa Anna to shelter, were making their preparations for a march at three o'clock in the morning, and were reconnoitring the line of their intended advance, Santa Anna, apart from sending messengers to Valencia with orders to retreat, was doing nothing to prepare for the combat of the following day. On Friday morning he moved early, but he had not even reached the position which he had occupied the night before by the time the Americans had reached and stormed Valencia's camp; and when he met the stream of fugitives he hastily marched back to Churubusco.

Santa Anna's lack of enterprise and activity upon this occasion may perhaps be explained partly by the traditional Spanish unwillingness to attack and partly by reasons already mentioned. He was undoubtedly affected by a deep distrust of his own men, and by Valencia's disobedience of orders which had resulted in upsetting the carefully meditated plan of a purely defensive attitude on the part of the Mexican army. Valencia's conduct was obviously inexcusable. His course, says Ripley, was "perfectly inconsistent with military art, reason or judgment." Even if his opinion had been correct that the proper strategy under the circumstances was for the Mexican army to hold the line of the San Angel road in force, so as to prevent Scott's turning movement, nothing could possibly have justified his disobedience of the repeated orders to fall back from the position at Padierna, which he held with fully one-fifth of the whole Mexican army. Nor was his subsequent conduct

such as to redeem his character. He was never in danger of any real attack in front, and when he first saw the various American brigades descending from the Pedregal and crossing the road and advancing to San Gerónimo, he was in far stronger force and should evidently have made a vigorous effort to oppose the advance and thus defeat these detachments in detail. His efforts, however, to oppose Riley's advance were of the most feeble and ineffectual description, and he seems to have had little idea of defending himself, except to keep his men huddled together in the camp he had selected. Although he must have been warned of the danger of a night attack from the large American force which held the village of San Gerónimo, he threw out no adequate pickets; he did not even occupy the summit of the hill on the slope of which he was encamped; and the natural consequence of his neglect was the surprise and utter defeat at dawn on the following morning.

His defeat was followed by his own hasty and discreditable flight, which he continued to Toluca, in company with a part of his former army, who had managed to escape across the mountains. From Toluca he addressed a short note to the Minister of War on the following day, in which he expressed his intention of recruiting his force, and of explaining, whenever the voice of justice could be heard, his reasons for not returning to Mexico. On the day after that, he issued a manifesto in which he gave his own version of the battle, and explained that he had not gone to President Santa Anna's side because he feared that he might be insulted, and might then be unable to restrain himself.¹

After the destruction of Valencia's army Santa Anna could hardly have acted otherwise than he did. As soon as he received news of the disaster he sent orders to Bravo at San Antonio and Gaona (one of his old Texas generals) at Mexicalcingo to fall back to the city at the gates of San Antonio and the Candelaria, respectively. Rangel, with his brigade, who had been ordered up to San Angel during the night, was directed to retreat to the gate of the Niño Perdido;

¹ Roa Bárcena, *Invasion Americana*, 341, 342.

while Santa Anna himself, with the brigade of Pérez and the other troops, retired to Churubusco. His intention seems to have been to withdraw all his men from that point, and to concentrate the entire army within the walls of the capital; but the movements of the Americans were too swift to enable him to continue his retreat, and he was forced to halt and face his pursuers.

On the Mexican side the action at Churubusco was merely the defence of strongly held intrenchments and buildings, which involved no particular skill. The defenders fought with the courage always characteristic of Spanish troops behind walls, although with despair in their hearts; and the Irish deserters fought with added desperation, from the knowledge that their lives were forfeited if they fell into the hands of their old comrades.¹ The defenders of the convent seem to have been in great part men of Spanish (not Indian) descent, and the Spaniards and Irishmen together proved the worthiest and most stubborn opponents that the American invaders had thus far met.

The sounds of battle had died away by sunset on Friday, but the events of the day were not yet over, for the commanding generals on both sides were compelled to provide for what the morning might bring forth. So far as Scott was concerned, the task was relatively easy. He had watched the contest at Churubusco from near the scene of Twiggs's attack on the convent, and when night fell he returned with his staff to the quarters they had occupied the night before at San Agustín. There he prepared orders for the movements of the several divisions on the next day, directing them, as he reported, "to take up battering or assaulting positions," and he also drew up a summons for the surrender of the city of Mexico.

Santa Anna, on his part, had taken little personal share

¹ A few days later the greater part of the captured deserters were hanged, after trial by court-martial, and the rest were flogged and branded, under the military code then in force. This severity, necessary as it may have been for the security of Scott's army, seems to have produced on the Mexican mind a strong impression of ruthlessness and barbarity.

in the battle of Churubusco. In the tardy official report of the action which he sent to the Mexican Secretary of War he reported that after posting the troops destined for the defence of the bridge and convent he busied himself with hastening the movement of the troops retreating from San Antonio; that he met Shields's attack on the road north of the bridge; and that when Churubusco was lost he had recognized the necessity of falling back to the second line of defence, and had reached the city between five and six o'clock in the afternoon.¹ In plainer words, Santa Anna, after watching the battle from a safe distance in the rear, had made good his escape with the rest of the fugitives.

He retired to the palace, says a contemporary Mexican account, in a state of deep despair, and hastened to assemble a number of his friends for consultation. His own conclusion was that it was indispensable to obtain a truce of some considerable duration, and after discussion it was agreed that a suspension of hostilities should be negotiated through the Spanish and English legations.² But if the Spanish chargé d'affaires was ever asked to intervene, his answer must have been a flat refusal. Certainly he took no steps in the desired direction, and he stated at a later day that he had been instructed by his government "to observe a strict neutrality during any negotiations that might take place."³ The British agents, diplomatic and consular, were however, very willing to do what they could to promote peace, and in fact had already taken preliminary steps in that direction.

"The darkness of night," says a writer who was on the spot, "had hardly fallen on the 20th of August, and the smoke of Churubusco was still hanging lazily over the low and marshy grounds, when a coach containing a deputation from the English Embassy came out of the city and approached Worth's pickets at the Ladrillera. This deputation was composed of Thornton, the Secretary of Legation, and Mackintosh, the Consul General, accompanied by Rafael Beraza, the celebrated English courier, and as their mission was to General

¹ *Apelacion al buen Criterio*, App., 100.

² *Apuntes para la Historia de la Guerra*, 260.

³ Doyle to Palmerston, Feb. 1, 1848, No. 13; *British F. O. MSS.*

Scott they were permitted to pass the outposts. It was now evident that Santa Anna, unable further to continue the defence with his army broken and dispirited, was disposed to open negotiations for an armistice."¹

Of the individuals who made up this party, we have already seen that Edward Thornton was a young attaché (not secretary) of the British legation. Beraza was a Spaniard by birth, who had been of service to Wellington in the Peninsula. He subsequently became a naturalized British subject. He had been employed as courier ever since the first establishment of a British legation in Mexico, and had regularly, once a month, gone to and fro between Mexico and Vera Cruz.²

Mackintosh, the consul-general, was a member of the firm of Manning & Marshall, of London, who had been deeply concerned as bankers in the negotiations for readjusting the Mexican debt. As appeared a little later, he held a concession from the Mexican government for the Isthmus of Tehuantepec which he regarded as extremely valuable, and he had another lucrative contract for operating the mint in the city of Mexico for a period of ten years. His large interests in the country were believed to make him eager for peace.³ He had lived long in Mexico and had married a Mexican lady.

Lieutenant Rafael Semmes, who was also at Worth's head-quarters at Ladrillera, three or four miles from the city, when the Englishmen arrived, gives another account of their reception.

¹ George W. Kendall, *The War Between the U. S. and Mexico Illustrated*, 35. Kendall was at this time present with Worth's division as correspondent of the *New Orleans Picayune*. He had been one of the Santa Fe prisoners, and was the author of a book giving a history of that absurd expedition.

² Trist to Buchanan, Oct. 1, 1847 (postscript); *State Dept. MSS.* Beraza's home was at Vera Cruz. He had some furniture damaged during Scott's bombardment, and applied to the Foreign Office to be allowed its value. Doyle, then in England, wrote an unofficial note in support of the application, giving Beraza an excellent character.

³ "The soul [of the peace party] is Mr. Mackintosh the British Consul who has immense interests—perhaps everything—at stake upon the restoration of peace."—(Trist to Buchanan, Oct. 25, 1847; *State Dept. MSS.*)

"The commission," he says, "was entertained a few minutes by General Worth and then despatched, under an escort to the rear, to General Scott's headquarters. When they were gone Kendall, with the bluntness and frankness which characterize him, exclaimed: 'It's no use, we're humbugged—McIntosh is among them!' Kendall, some years before, had been a prisoner in Mexico, and knew the man well."¹

But Kendall, and Worth for that matter, could not stop the party, and Thornton and his companions drove on to San Agustin, where they were listened to as "intelligent neutrals" by General Scott. Ostensibly they came to ask for a safeguard for the English minister and British subjects, says Hitchcock, "but really to prepare the way for peace";² and although no record of the interview has been preserved, their statements were echoed in Scott's subsequent correspondence.

At about midnight that same night the British minister received at his residence in the city of Mexico a visit from Pacheco, the Mexican Minister of Relations, who said he had come to ask Bankhead's good offices "in inducing General Scott to save the city from being sacked." Bankhead (as he reported) declined to interfere. He would do no more than "transmit" a letter from Pacheco to Trist.

"As the assistance of Great Britain was only partially admitted by the United States, towards bringing this war to an end," he explained to Lord Palmerston, "and as the Mexican Government have not condescended to give any answer to Her Majesty's gracious offer of Mediation and Good Offices, I refused to accede to Señor Pacheco's request further than to transmit his letter simply to Mr. Trist, offering to receive that Gentleman as Plenipotentiary for the discussion of whatever propositions the United States might have to make."³

But there must have been a good deal of other conversation with Pacheco that night which Bankhead did not

¹ Semmes, 412. The author says that General Mora, of the Mexican army, was with the party. This is evidently a mistake. Mora did not call upon Scott on the evening of the battle of Churubusco, but on the following morning.

² Hitchcock, 280. Thornton is reported as saying "that the city was perfectly astounded at our success—that the greatest consternation pervades the capital."

³ Bankhead to Palmerston, Aug. 21, 1847, No. 76; *F. O. MSS.*

think it necessary to report to the Foreign Office, and there were undoubtedly other reasons than those stated for Bankhead's unwillingness to be personally concerned in the coming negotiations. He could hardly have been unaware of the *pourparlers* at Puebla. And he failed to report that Thornton and Mackintosh had visited Scott at San Agustin earlier that same evening, although in the despatch just quoted he referred to certain "private reasons" he had for thinking that Scott would accede to the proposals for an armistice. Pacheco, of course, could not insist on Bankhead's going in person to Scott's camp, and was obliged to take what he could get; and so, while he waited, Bankhead composed a note to Trist.

"I have the honour," he wrote, "to transmit to you, at the earnest request of the Mexican Government, a letter addressed to you by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the contents of which are, I understand, to express the anxiety of the President not only to listen to and discuss whatever propositions the United States are willing to offer as Preliminary to the establishment of Relations between the two countries, but likewise to receive you at once as Plenipotentiary for that purpose. Although I have no authority to do more than transmit this letter to you, I trust that I shall be pardoned for expressing a sincere hope that both yourself and the General in Chief may feel justified in taking this expression of good will on the part of Mexico into your early and favourable consideration with a view, if possible, of saving this Capital from the horrors of War."¹

With this note, which in its last clause went very near begging for an armistice, Pacheco returned to the palace to prepare his own communication. His note was soon ready, but it was not addressed to Trist. The Mexican authorities were unwilling to appear to initiate any negotiations, and therefore the note was, in form, merely a reply to Buchanan's note of the previous April, over which Santa Anna and the Mexican Congress had wasted so much time in July.² The Mexican executive had at last concluded to take the committee of Congress at its word, to assume that

¹ Bankhead to Trist, Aug. 20, 1847; copy enclosed with Bankhead's despatch No. 82 of Aug. 29, 1847; *ibid.*

² See pages 444-446, above.

the law of April 20, 1847, which denounced as a traitor any man who opened negotiations with the Americans, had been impliedly repealed, and to profess a willingness to consider terms of peace.

Pacheco's reply to Buchanan was therefore drawn in this sense, and was not unskilfully worded. The results of battles, it ran, were not always in accordance with the justice of the cause for which they were waged. The President of the republic had continued fighting up to the moment when the American troops were at the gates of the capital, and he was now bound to listen to other duties which he owed as chief magistrate of the nation. Acting under the powers conferred on him by the Constitution, he had resolved to hear the proposals which Mr. Trist was instructed to make, provided they were advantageous to both parties and—as had been publicly asserted—they were consistent with the honor of the Mexican republic (*dejen á cubierto el honor de la república Mexicana*). All this, he added, was on the understanding that the Mexican government would undertake to discuss preliminaries of peace, and that a definitive treaty should be concluded within a year, and submitted, according to the Constitution of Mexico, to the approval of the proper authorities.¹

This last qualification was too much for Bankhead's comprehension; and so in forwarding Pacheco's note he added a hurried private note of his own to Trist, in which he expressed the hope that the Americans would "yield at once" to the Mexican wishes, although, he continued,

"with respect to that part of the note which relates to the period for the conclusion of a treaty; I own I do not understand its meaning; but I have no doubt that it could easily be arranged among other matters when you come to talk with the Mexican Plenipotentiary upon the great point at issue, namely the re-establishment of Relations."²

¹ *En la inteligencia de que el gobierno Mexicano se prestará á que se abran preliminares de paz no pasando de un año el término dentro de cual haya de celebrarse un tratado y sometiéndose éste, según la constitución del país, á la aprobación de la autoridad á quien ella comete esta atribución.*—(Pacheco to Buchanan, Aug. 20, 1847; Sen. Doc. 52, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 189.)

² Bankhead to Trist (private), Aug. 21, 1847; enclosure with Trist's despatch No. 12, of Aug. 22, 1847; *State Dept. MSS.*

These three notes—two from Bankhead to Trist and one from Pacheco to Buchanan—were then intrusted to General Mora y Villamil—a man of character, reputed a friend of peace, who had served at Buena Vista as Santa Anna's chief engineer, and had also been engaged in the short campaign in the valley of Mexico. He bore no other written communication from his government. Driving out in "a handsome carriage," with Señor Arrangoiz (the late consul at New Orleans) as interpreter, Mora met Scott at the village of Coyoacan on his way from San Agustin to Tacubaya. Colonel Hitchcock, who was present with the rest of the staff, noted the interview in his diary at noon on Saturday, August 21.

"General Mora," he says, "was presented to General Scott. All gave way at once for the interview between the two generals and Mr. Trist, the American commissioner. The Mexican handed a parcel to General Scott, who handed it over to Mr. Trist, who broke the seal and read the enclosure. The parties have now been in conference over half an hour under the shade of a tree. We outsiders suppose communications have been opened between the Mexican Government and ours, and we hope it may be the beginning of a peace."¹

¹ Hitchcock, 279-280.