

"After a series of brilliant victories, when our troops were at the gates of the capital, and it was completely in our power, the Mexican government have not only rejected your liberal offers, but have insulted our country by proposing terms the acceptance of which would degrade us in the eyes of the World, and be justly condemned by the whole American people. They must attribute our liberality to fear, or they must take courage from our supposed political divisions."

Buchanan also dwelt on the mode of conducting the war. Never, he asserted—and with some justice—had war been levied by invading forces in such a manner. Fair or even extravagant prices had been paid for supplies. Private property had been held sacred. Famishing Mexican soldiers had been fed and their wounds bound up. In return, American citizens had been murdered, and their bodies mutilated by bands of savage guerillas; and Mexican officers and soldiers alike had habitually violated their parole. "Those paroled at Vera Cruz have fought against us at Cerro Gordo; and those paroled at Cerro Gordo have doubtless been in the ranks of the enemy in the battles so glorious to our arms at and near the City of Mexico."

In conclusion it was stated that the President believed Trist's continued presence with the army was likely to do more harm than good, and he was therefore directed to return home by the first safe opportunity. No other offer to treat would be made to the Mexican government. They must first sue for peace.

"What terms the President may be willing to grant them will depend upon the future events of the war, and the amount of the precious blood of our fellow citizens and the treasure which shall in the mean time have been expended. Should the Mexican government desire hereafter to open negotiations, or to propose terms of peace, their overtures will be immediately transmitted to Washington by the commanding general, where they will receive the prompt consideration of the President."<sup>1</sup>

There can be no doubt that the President of the United States and his cabinet, at this stage of the game at least, were most sincerely anxious for peace. They were within

<sup>1</sup> Buchanan to Trist, Oct. 6, 1847; *ibid.*, 91.

two months of the meeting of a new Congress, in which the Whigs had a majority in the House, and which was by no means assuredly in favor of the administration in the Senate. A renewed and embittered discussion over the origin and causes of the war, with the inevitable accompaniment of fresh attacks upon the extension of slavery, was something the administration must have looked forward to with dismay. But anxious as they were, they obviously blundered in the methods they adopted for gaining their ends.

It should not have required any very great penetration, or any very wide knowledge of history, to see that the first requisite for peace—the first object which the United States must endeavor to attain after defeating the Mexican armies in the field—was the establishment and maintenance of some sort of recognized government which could act in the name and on behalf of Mexico. The result of too complete a victory might well be, and was indeed likely to be, the dissolution of the existing social order, and a condition closely resembling anarchy. The best that could be hoped for in the event of Santa Anna's disappearance would be the establishment of some other government of more or less revolutionary origin; because as long as the better part of the country was held in awe by American troops regular and generally recognized elections could not be held, except by agreement with the United States. But a revolutionary government, whether Santa Anna or another were at its head, was precisely the most difficult to deal with because of its inherent weakness. The strongest revolutionary ruler of the nineteenth century, Napoleon himself, dared not yield an inch of territory, even to a united Europe, after the terrific losses of the Russian campaign. Legitimate sovereigns, he declared, might venture to do so; but for him, a soldier who had forced his way to the throne, no such weakness was permissible. The day he ceased to be dreaded he must cease to rule.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Eh bien! qu'est-ce donc qu'on veut de moi? me dit brusquement Napoléon. Que je me déshonore? Jamais! Je saurai mourir, mais je ne céderai pas un pouce de terrain. Vos Souverains, nés sur le trône, peuvent se laisser battre vingt fois et rentrer toujours dans leurs capitales; moi, je ne le puis pas, parce que je suis

In Mexico it was to be feared that these inevitable difficulties in the way of peace would be extraordinarily enhanced from the fact that mutiny had been for years the normal method of overturning unpopular administrations. Every act of every government in that unhappy country was necessarily conditioned by the fear of what the other revolutionary elements might attempt. It was always to be assumed that numbers of men were on the watch for any hopeful pretext to revolt. But a revolt, by its very nature, excluded deliberation or discussion of any kind—even newspaper discussion. A "cry" was all any opposition leader needed, and no better "cry" could be asked for than that which a proposal to dismember the national territory would afford.

Now what the American administration seemed to expect was that the Mexicans, after being utterly crushed, should themselves formulate and transmit to Washington such terms of peace as might be acceptable to the conquerors. Obviously, such an expectation was unreasonable. No conquered government, however powerful at home, could have ventured to propose the conditions of its own humiliation or do more than accept those dictated to it. The most that it could do would be to yield to demands which were backed by a demonstrably irresistible force. It could never be expected to formulate terms of surrender, and the weaker the government the less was to be expected of it.<sup>1</sup>

There were several courses open to the government of the United States. Thus it might perhaps have been well to

*un soldat parvenu. Ma domination ne survivra pas au jour où j'aurai cessé d'être fort, et, par conséquent, d'être craint.*"—(*Mémoires de Metternich*, I, 148. Account of interview of June 26, 1813.) Much to the same effect were Napoleon's remarks to Schwartzberg, the Austrian ambassador in Paris, on April 9, 1813.—(*Rose, The Life of Napoleon I*, II, 259.)

<sup>1</sup> The case of France in 1871 offers some striking analogies to that of Mexico in 1847. In both the country was invaded and the capital taken. In both there was for some time a doubt as to whether a sufficiently stable government could be established with which peace might be made. In both the conqueror demanded territorial concessions. But Bismarck never for a moment suggested that Thiers or the Government of National Defence should formulate the terms of peace. Those terms, he said, he would state himself whenever he was satisfied the French agents were ready and able to make a bargain.

replace Trist by a stronger man; but clearly it was useless to recall him and then to sit waiting until Mexico was ready to come to Washington with proposals for a treaty. Persistence in that policy could only have resulted in an enforced prolongation of the war, and the consequent occupation of all Mexico by the United States. And this is precisely what Scott and Trist, as well as many men at home, came to suspect was the real purpose of the American executive.

It was not, however, until the sixteenth of November that the instructions of October 6 from the State and War Departments reached their destination. These instructions—requiring the American troops thenceforward to live on the country, and ordering Trist to leave Mexico—were based, as has been seen, upon a somewhat imperfect knowledge of the condition of things which existed in Mexico at the time when the armistice ended—on the seventh, namely, of September. And during the seventy days which elapsed from the seventh of September to the middle of November events had occurred which affected most materially the situation of the contending nations.