



MEXICAN WAR.

CHAPTER I.

Origin of the War with Mexico.—Settlement of Texas.—Declaration of Independence.—Santa Anna's Treaty.—Movement towards Annexation.—Correspondence of Bocanegra.—Declaration of Almonte.—Mr. Calhoun's reasons.—Lord Aberdeen's Declaration.—The Tyler Treaty.—The Joint Resolution.—Departure of Almonte.—General Taylor ordered to Texas.—Strength of the Army at Corpus Christi.

TILL quite recently, the immense territory extending from the Sabine to the Rio Grande was comparatively uninhabited. Comprehending a space large enough for an empire, and within the mildest part of the temperate zone, it was yet too remote from the inhabitants of ancient Mexico on one hand, or from those of the northern Atlantic States on the other, to be reached and cultivated at an earlier period by the adventurous and advancing settlers of America. The country belonged to Mexico, but was hardly possessed by her people. A few towns immediately east of the Rio Grande, and an occasional village or settlement in the interior—such as Antonio de Bexar, Goliad, and Nacogdoches—were the only marks of improvement which indicated the civilization of the white man, or the dominion of Mexico. Nor did the aboriginal inhabitants appear much more numerous. The Camanches of the northern districts, and a few scattered and fleeting tribes,

wandered over the vast territories of uninhabited Texas, but offered no very formidable obstacle to the progress of civilization.

Texas was in this almost desolate condition when it attracted the roving eye of land speculation. Certain persons in the United States foresaw the rapid and inevitable movement of the United States of the North towards the Western Ocean, and sought to enhance their fortunes by obtaining grants of Texan lands from the Mexican government. Among these was Stephen Austin, who obtained a large tract, and whose name has since been attached both to a county and a town. With him, and with others to whom Mexico had made grants, came numerous parties of colonists and adventurers, who sought, like their leaders, to pursue their fortunes and avoid their adversities, by successful enterprise in a new country, and by sharing in the distribution of vast bodies of unoccupied land. The number of these adventurers rapidly increased, till they became more numerous than the Mexicans who previously inhabited the country. The difference of race, religion, and laws, was soon apparent in diversities of sentiment and objects between the old and new inhabitants. The Texan of the United States brought with him, not only greater energy and industry, but a wild and restless ambition—a more intense and speculative pursuit of future objects.

Where differences so deep and original as these exist among different classes of people, they will soon become manifested in external action. The new inhabitants soon seized the direction of all public affairs, and Texas became, in fact, the possession of these adventurers from a foreign land, rather than of those ancient citizens to whose

government it professed allegiance. The power thus obtained was soon manifested in other acts. It is not in the nature of things, that a country should change its inhabitants and not also change its government. The new possessors will assume the laws and institutions to which their habits have been used and their sentiments assimilated. It was so with Texas. No sooner did the settlers from the United States possess the power, than they looked round for the means of establishing their own forms of government.

In the revolutions of Mexico, so rapid and often so disastrous, the opportunities for change could never be long wanting. In the case of Texas, such an occasion was offered in the overthrow, by Santa Anna, of the Mexican Federal Government. This powerful chief being invested with the supreme magistracy, in a short time after assumed absolute power. About this time, the people of Texas having increased largely in population and resources, petitioned the Mexican Congress for admission into the confederation, as a separate State. The bearer of this petition, and a commissioner to represent their claims, was Stephen Austin. The Congress of Mexico paid no attention to the petition; but Austin imprudently wrote back to the Texan authorities, advising them to organize a State, without waiting for the consent of the government. The letter was intercepted, and Austin, on his return, arrested, carried back to the capital, and placed during a year in solitary confinement. The people of the United States who had become citizens of Texas, were naturally indignant at what they considered an outrage on the right of petition, and an insult to the dignity of their commissioner.

Such was the feeling in Texas, when Santa Anna, having completed his usurpation of the supreme power and defeated the Zacatecans, who opposed him, sent General Cos into Texas to enforce certain requisitions of the government. One of these was the execution of the Act of 1830, prohibiting the emigration of Americans into Texas. Another was the surrender of Lorenzo de Zavala, who had become a refugee in Texas, in consequence of moving a law, in the Mexican Congress, directed against church property. To enforce these demands, General Cos took possession of Antonio de Bexar. On the other hand, the Texans prepared for an armed resistance, and on the 28th of September, 1835, they attacked and defeated a party of Mexicans at the town of Gonzales, on the Rio Guadalupe.

Thus was commenced the war and revolution of Texas: a war which arose, on the part of Mexico, from an attempt to enforce the authority of the government *de facto* (without reference to the Constitution) over the province of Texas; and on the side of Texas, in an obvious attempt to make that province virtually independent of Mexico.

On the 3d of November, 1835, the delegates of Texas assembled at San Felipe de Austin, and issued a solemn declaration against Santa Anna and other military chieftains, "who had by force of arms overthrown the Federal Institutions of Mexico, and dissolved the social compact which existed between Texas and the other members of the Mexican confederacy."

The war thus commenced between Texas and the mother country continued, with various fortune, till the 21st of April, 1836, when General Santa Anna was captured at the battle of San Jacinto, and the Mexican authority over the Texans really destroyed.

On the 2d of March previously, the Texan delegates assembled at Washington on the Brazos, made a formal declaration of independence, signed a constitution, and organized a government. This independence Santa Anna, a captive in the hands of the Texan army, afterwards bound himself to "solemnly acknowledge, sanction, and ratify;" and to use his personal and official powers to procure without delay the ratification and confirmation of that treaty by the legitimate government of Mexico.

The boundaries of Texas, as then defined, are of importance as constituting one of the grounds of claim on the part of the government of the United States against Mexico. They were declared to be as follows:—

"Beginning at the mouth of the Rio Grande; thence up the principal stream of said river to its source; thence due north to the 42° of north latitude; thence along the boundary line, as defined in the treaty between the United States and Spain, (February, 1819,) to the beginning."

To any claim of boundary, however, resting upon this concession of Santa Anna, it is well replied, that it was made when he was under constraint, and was in its very terms of no effect till ratified by the legitimate government of Mexico. Accordingly when, a little while afterwards, Bustamente became president of Mexico, he repudiated this treaty, and recommenced the war with Texas. This war was continued, in desultory and predatory excursions, on both sides, till Texas was finally annexed to the United States.

While things were in this state—the mother country contending for its continued dominion, and the young province for absolute independence—the QUESTION OF ANNEXATION (as it is politically called) arose both in

the United States and Texas. The inhabitants of the latter, we have said, were chiefly citizens of the United States—persons whom past adversities or future hopes had impelled to this new region in pursuit of fortune or adventure. If it was natural for them thus to pursue these new objects, it was equally natural that they should desire to remain politically and socially connected with the land of their birth and the home of their associations. Accordingly, as early as the 4th of August, 1837, soon after she declared her independence, Texas proposed to annex herself to the United States.¹ The then president of this country, Mr. Van Buren, declined the terms, for reasons which were alike honorable to his sagacity as a man, and his principles as a statesman. He declared, that so long as we were bound by a treaty of amity and commerce with Mexico, to annex Texas would necessarily involve the question of war; and that a disposition to espouse the quarrel with Mexico was at variance with the spirit of the treaty, and with the policy and welfare of the United States.²

Texas continued negotiations with the United States, with Great Britain, France, and Mexico—the object of which was to procure the acknowledgment of her independence by Mexico, or her protection by some more powerful government. Thus matters continued—a partial war at one time, and a series of negotiations at another—till the administration of President Tyler revived the plan of annexation. On the 6th of October, 1843, the Hon. A. P. Upshur, Secretary of State, proposed to the Texan envoy the renewal of negotiations for the annexation of

¹ Vide State Papers.

² Idem.

Texas to the United States; which was accepted by the Texan executive.

In the mean while, the subject had been discussed in the newspapers, and the Mexican government availed itself of this information to make a formal declaration of its views on this important point. Mr. Bocanegra, the Mexican Minister of Foreign Relations, addressed a note¹ (August 23, 1843) to Waddy Thompson, our minister in Mexico, of which the following is a passage:—

“And if a party in Texas is now endeavoring to effect its incorporation with the United States, it is from a consciousness of their notorious incapability to form and constitute an independent nation, without their having changed their situation, or acquired any right to separate themselves from their mother country. His Excellency the Provisional President, resting on this deep conviction, is obliged to prevent an aggression, unprecedented in the annals of the world, from being consummated; and *if it be indispensable for the Mexican nation to seek security for its rights at the expense of the disasters of war, it will call upon God, and rely on its own efforts for the defence of its just cause.*”

This declaration was a notice to the American government of the effects to be anticipated from the annexation, and fully justified the sagacity and firmness of Mr. Van Buren. It was replied to, by Mr. Waddy Thompson, in a haughty note, affirming that the notice of the Mexican minister was a threat, or a warning; but silent as to the attitude really assumed by the United States.

A short time subsequent to this correspondence, and

¹ State Papers—Letter of Bocanegra.

as if to prevent any misunderstanding of the meaning of Mexico, General Almonte, Mexican minister at Washington, addressed a note to Mr. Upshur, Secretary of State, of which the following passage is a part:—

“But if, contrary to the hopes and wishes entertained by the government of the undersigned for the preservation of the good understanding and harmony which should reign between the two neighboring and friendly republics, the United States should, in defiance of good faith, and the principles of justice which they have constantly proclaimed, commit the unheard-of act of violence of appropriating to themselves an integrant part of the Mexican territory, the undersigned, in the name of his nation, and now for them, protests in the most solemn manner against such an aggression; and he moreover declares, by express order of his government, that on sanction being given by the Executive of the Union to the incorporation of Texas into the United States, he will consider his mission ended, seeing that, as the Secretary of State will have learned, *the Mexican government is resolved to declare war as soon as it receives intimation of such an act.*”¹

Long previous to actual annexation, it will be observed, the Mexican government had officially informed the Executive of the United States, that war must inevitably result from that act. It cannot, therefore, be said, with any regard to truth, that the government of the United States, in annexing Texas, did not have reason to anticipate that result, and did not neglect that preparation which such anticipations required of a prudent administration.²

¹ General Almonte's Letter, dated November 3d, 1843.

² In fact they made none till the war was commenced.

The plan of annexation, notwithstanding these explicit declarations of the Mexican government, was anxiously and sedulously pursued by the Executive of the United States. Mr. J. C. Calhoun, who had succeeded Mr. Upshur as Secretary of State, signed with the Ministers Plenipotentiary of Texas (Messrs. Van Zandt and Henderson) a Treaty of Annexation, on the 12th of April, 1844. In the same month, the Secretary of State (Mr. Calhoun) advised the Chargé d'Affaires in Mexico, “that the step had been forced on the government of the United States in self-defence, in consequence of the policy adopted by Great Britain in reference to the abolition of slavery in Texas.”² At the same moment, there had been presented by Mr. Pakenham, (British minister,) and was on file in the Department of State, a solemn declaration of the British government, by Lord Aberdeen, that this idea of British interference was a gross mistake.³ In this declaration, Lord Aberdeen says,—

“With regard to Texas, we avow that we wish to see slavery abolished there, or elsewhere; and we should rejoice, if the recognition of that country by the Mexican government, should be accompanied by an engagement on the part of Texas to abolish slavery, and under proper conditions throughout the republic. But although we earnestly desire and feel it to be our duty to promote such a consummation, *we shall not interfere unduly, or with an improper assumption of authority with either*

¹ Mr. Upshur was killed on board the Princeton.

² State Correspondence, April, 1844.

³ Lord Aberdeen's Letter was dated December 26th, 1843; and presented by Mr. Pakenham, February 26th, 1844.

party, in order to insure the adoption of such a course. We shall counsel, but we shall not seek to compel or unduly control either party."

Did the President and Secretary of State disbelieve this declaration? In any case, upon what *evidence* did the Secretary declare, that the government of the United States was forced into this step, in consequence of the interference of Great Britain with slavery in Texas? Upon what principle of the Constitution did the American government interfere with Texas for such a cause?—The plan of annexation, however, was strenuously pushed by its projectors.

On the 22d of April, 1844, Mr. Tyler submitted to the Senate a Treaty of Annexation, which was soon after rejected, and the question left open for public discussion.¹

In consequence of the election of President Polk in November, 1844, and the apparent approval of annexation by the people of the United States, Congress on the 1st of March, 1845, passed what is called the JOINT RESOLUTION, giving its consent that the territory "rightfully belonging to the Republic of Texas" might be erected into a new State called the State of Texas; subject, however, to the adjustment by this government of "all questions of boundary that may arise with other governments."

The terms of this Resolution admit that Texas might have claimed boundaries which were not *rightfully* belonging to her, and that these "questions of boundary" had *yet to be settled*.

To the terms of the Joint Resolution, Texas assented

¹ See the Public Documents of 1844

by her ordinance of July 4th, 1845, and having formed her Constitution, became virtually a State in the American Union.¹ Two days after this (July 7th) the same Convention requested the President of the United States to occupy the ports of Texas, and send an army to their defence. This desire the President of the United States immediately complied with.

GENERAL ZACHARY TAYLOR, then in command at Camp Jessup, was ordered to move his forces into Texas, weeks before the War Department had received information of the Texan ordinance. On the 28th of June, Mr. Donelson, then minister to Texas, and to whom General Taylor was referred for advice upon his movements, wrote him that he had best move his forces "without delay to the western frontier of Texas," and also informing him that Corpus Christi, on Aransas Bay, was the best point for the assembling of his troops. The same letter also admitted that the country between the Nueces and the Rio Grande *was in dispute, the Texans holding Corpus Christi and the Mexicans Santiago, at the mouth of the Rio Grande.*²

General Taylor proceeded immediately with the forces under his command to Aransas Bay, and in the beginning of August, 1845, had taken the position assigned him by the government. All the troops in the west, the northwest, and the Atlantic which could be spared, were ordered to join him. In November, 1845, by the report of the Adjutant-General, his army was composed as follows:—³

¹ Documents of 1845.

² Mr. Donelson's Letter 28th of June 1845.—Public Documents.

³ Adjutant-General's Report, November 26th, 1845.

General Staff	-	-	-	-	24
2d Regiment of Dragoons	-	-	-	-	596
1st " of Artillery	-	-	-	-	236
2d " " "	-	-	-	-	233
3d " " "	-	-	-	-	219
4th " " "	-	-	-	-	235
3d Regiment of Infantry	-	-	-	-	533
4th " " "	-	-	-	-	511
5th " " "	-	-	-	-	573
7th " " "	-	-	-	-	442
8th " " "	-	-	-	-	447
Aggregate	-	-	-	-	4,049

This was General Taylor's army in November, 1845, when, by the confession of the government, the territory between his position and Santiago, or rather, between the Nueces and the Rio Grande, was *in dispute*, and the subject of negotiation for boundaries.

What, however, was at this moment the real position of affairs in regard to the question of war? Was there any room to doubt that war was the necessary consequence of annexation? Was there any thing to justify the total neglect of all preparation for so serious a conflict, as war with a nation, however inferior, of seven millions of people? The facts, as we have reviewed them, are simple and brief.

Mexico, hearing from the United States the distant rumors of an intended annexation of Texas, announces by Mr. Bocanegra to the American minister, that she will resent such an act at the expense of the disasters of war.

In the same year, (1843,) and a few months later, the Mexican minister, General Almonte, reaffirms the same

fixed determination of his government in a letter to the American Secretary of State.

When the act for annexation is passed, Almonte declares in his final note to the Secretary of State, that it is the most unjust act recorded in the annals of history; protests against it; declares that his government will resist it by all the means in its power; and demands his passports.

The diplomatic correspondence of our government shows, that it apprehended war—that it knew well the sole cause by which war would come—and that in the minds of the President and his cabinet, the annexation of Texas, and its disputed boundaries, was the sole foundation for any rupture with Mexico.

The march of General Taylor's army was evidently and declaredly¹ intended to meet the contingencies of such a rupture.

The most remarkable fact in this transaction, is that, with this apprehension of war vividly impressed upon the mind of the government, the President should never have asked Congress for one dollar of money, or one company of soldiers in addition to the provisions of the peace establishment! Upon what principle was it assumed, that an entire province could be wrested from one empire and give no cause for war? Upon what idea of prudence or sagacity was all preparation for that war neglected, till battles were already fought, and the opposing nation excited by all the worst feelings of national and martial controversy?

The effect of this neglect we shall see in the series of subsequent events.

¹ See Donelson's Correspondence.