

CHAPTER XV.

Third Expedition.—Letter to Senator Benton.—Senator Dix's Views.—Other Senators' Opinions.—The Very Rev. Father MacNamara.—Mexican Authority Ends in California.—Admiral Seymour's View.—The President Wanted California.—What Governor Pickens Says.—Interesting Speculations.—Embark on *Cyane* for San Diego.—On Road to Los Angeles.—Castro Disperses his Force.—Carson Starts for Washington with Despatches.—Leave Los Angeles for Sacramento.—A Lively Fight with Bears.—General Beale's Humorous Account.—Commander Montgomery's Great Loss.—Captain Mervine's Fight.—General Kearny Reaches California.—General Kearny Worst at San Bernardo.—General Kearny Forced Carson to Return.—Carson's Honest Statement of Kearny's Actions.—Kearny Refuses being made Commander-in-Chief.—Kearny Wants to be Governor.—Flores' Well-Considered Plan.—Captain Burroughs Shot.—Severe March from San Juan to Los Angeles.—Don Jesus' Wife and Children Plead.—The Treaty of Couenga.—Hostilities Ended.

Reviewing now, long afterward, the events of that time I come to the belief that the pause which Commodore Sloat made at Monterey in executing the orders of his chief, the Secretary of the Navy, was occasioned by the conflicting despatch of the Secretary of State to his consul; which was pressed upon Commodore Sloat, by the consul, Mr. Larkin, but which had been already rendered wholly inapplicable to the existing condition of affairs before it was delivered to him by Gillespie.

Days of indecision followed, during which the only indication of future action came from Commodore Stockton.

In company with Lieutenant Gillespie I went on board the *Congress* to talk over the situation with Commodore Stockton. I informed him fully of the interview with Commodore Sloat, and of its result in being told "that he could do nothing."

The commodore said to us in reply that he was only second in command, and could not with propriety express any opinion upon the conduct of Commodore Sloat. I remarked to him, that in the course of the night I would decide whether I should return to the United States, or remain in the territory. Commodore Stockton then informed me that within a few days he would be in command of the forces on shore and afloat, and that on assuming the command he would immediately communicate to me his intentions as to future operations. Meantime, he requested me to remain.

The next day he addressed the following letter to Commodore Sloat:

U. S. FRIGATE CONGRESS, July 23, 1846.

MY DEAR COMMODORE: It is very important to take General Castro or to drive him out of the country. Until one or the other is done, I see no hope of restoring peace and good order to this territory.

I wish to send the *Cyane* with Captain Frémont's men to the southward, to head him off, and drive him back here.

Had you not better send me an order to take command at once, and make my own arrangements?

It will facilitate operations, and relieve you from a great deal of trouble.

Faithfully your obedient servant,

(Signed) R. F. STOCKTON.

To Commodore J. D. Sloat, etc., etc., Flag-Ship Savannah.

In reply to the urgent request of Commodore Stockton he was then told by Commodore Sloat that on account of his ill health he would return to the United States as soon as possible, but was not yet disposed to give him the command of the squadron. Commodore Stockton says: "I then stated that it was very important that these Mexican officers should be driven out of the country or taken prisoners, and requested him to place under my command the United States ship of war *Cyane*, then lying in the harbor; he did so. Having then the command of all the forces on shore, and the *Congress* and the *Cyane*, I immediately sent word to Captain Frémont of what had occurred, and to let him know, that if he and Lieutenant Gillespie, with the men who were with them, would volunteer to serve under my command as long as I was in possession of the territory and desired their services, that I would form a battalion and appoint Captain Frémont the major and Lieut. Gillespie a captain, and all the other necessary officers."

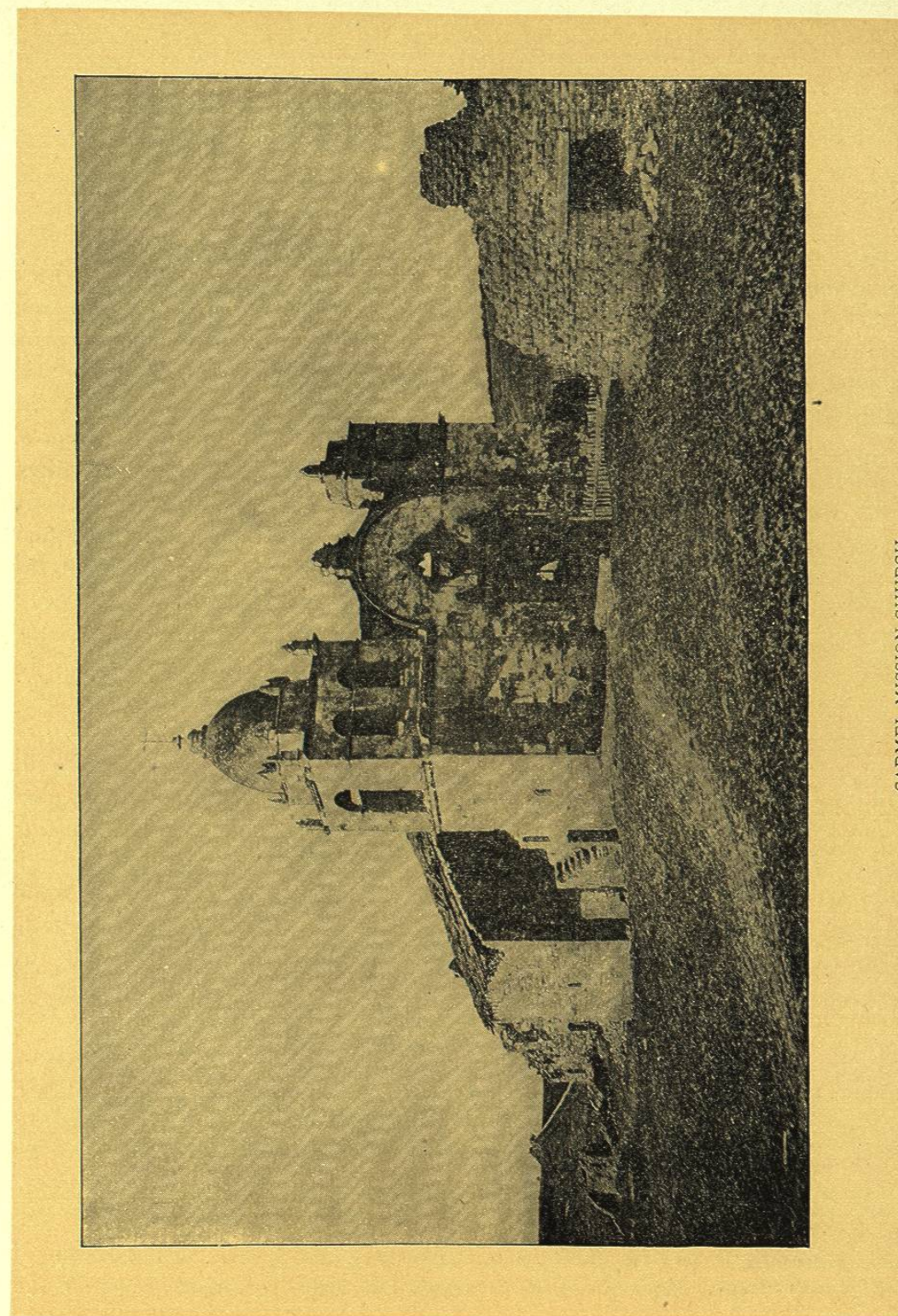
This was all done in the course of the day and the next morning; and they were ordered to embark on board the United States ship *Cyane*, to be landed at San Diego. In this way was the Navy Battalion of mounted riflemen formed, and brought into the service of the United States.

To accept the proposal of Commodore Stockton was to abandon the strong and independent position in which I had left Washington and under which I had continuously acted, and in which I knew I would have the support of the Government.

My plan had been, with the willing co-operation of Commander Montgomery, who had agreed to meet me with the *Portsmouth* at Santa Barbara, and the enthusiastic support of the settlers and immigrants, to continue the movement south until it terminated in the complete conquest of the department.

But the proposal of Commodore Stockton was not what Commodore Sloat had in mind when he wrote to ask my co-operation. His withdrawal gave a new face to affairs. There was for me no longer any initiative. If Commodore Stockton could bring himself to make this request I had no other course than to acquiesce, and accept the new situation into which circumstances forced me.

Knowing that the men under my command would go with me, I accepted Commodore Stockton's proposal to take service under him and remain with him as long as he required my services. And I adhered to this engagement at the cost of my commission in the army.



CARMEL MISSION CHURCH.

The temporary indecision over, and a line of action adopted, I wrote from the old mission of Carmel to Senator Benton; giving him a summary of events up to the date of writing.

MISSION OF CARMEL,* July 25, 1846.

MY DEAR SIR: When Mr. Gillespie overtook me in the middle of May, we were encamped on the northern shore of the greater Tlamath Lake. Snow was falling steadily and heavily in the mountains, which entirely surround and dominate the elevated valley region into which we had penetrated; in the east, and north, and west, barriers absolutely impassable barred our road; we had no provisions; our animals were already feeble, and while any other way was open, I could not bring myself to attempt such a doubtful enterprise as a passage of these unknown mountains in the dead of winter. Every day the snow was falling; and in the face of the depressing influence exercised on the people by the loss of our men, and the unpromising appearance of things, I judged it inexpedient to pursue our journey further in this direction, and determined to retrace my steps, and carry out the views of the Government by reaching the frontier on the line of the Colorado River. I had scarcely reached the Lower Sacramento, when General Castro, then in the north (at Sonoma, in the Department of Sonoma, north of the bay of San Francisco, commanded by General Vallejo), declared his determination immediately to proceed against the foreigners settled in the country, for whose expulsion an order had just been issued by the governor of the Californias. For these purposes Castro immediately assembled a force at the Mission of Santa Clara, a strong place, on the northern shore of the Francisco Bay. You will remember how grossly outraged and insulted we had already been by this officer; many in my own camp, and throughout the country, thought that I should not have retreated in March last. I felt humiliated and humbled; one of the main objects proposed by this expedition had been entirely defeated, and it was the opinion of the officers of the squadron (so I was informed by Mr. Gillespie) that I could not again retreat consistently with any military reputation. Unable to procure supplies elsewhere, I had sent by Mr. Gillespie to Captain Montgomery, commanding the United States ship of war *Portsmouth*, then lying at Monterey, a small requisition for such supplies as were indispensably necessary to leave the valley; and my animals were now in such a state that I could not get out of the valley, without reaching the country which lies on the east side of them in an entirely destitute condition. Having carefully examined my position, and foreseeing, I think, clearly, ALL the consequences which may eventuate to me from such a step, I determined to take such active and anticipatory measures as should seem to me most expedient to protect my party and justify my own character. I was well aware of the grave responsibility which I assumed, but I also determined that, having once decided to do so, I would assume it and its consequences fully and entirely, and go through with the business completely to the end. I regret that, by a sudden emergency, I have only an hour for writing to all friends, and that therefore from the absence of detail, what I say to you will not be clearly understood. Castro's first measure was an attempt to incite the Indian population of the Joaquin and Sacramento valleys, and the neighboring mountains, to burn the crops of the foreigners and otherwise proceed immediately against them. These Indians are extremely numerous, and the success of his measure would have been very destructive; but he failed entirely. On the 6th of June I decided on the course which I would pursue, and immediately concerted my operations with the foreigners inhabiting the Sacramento valley. A few days afterwards, one of Castro's officers, with a party of fourteen men, attempted to pass a drove of two hundred horses from Sonoma to Santa Clara, via New Helvetia, with the avowed purpose of bringing troops into the country. On the 11th they were surprised at daylight on the Consumné River by a party of twelve from my camp. The horses were taken, but they were (the men) dismissed without injury. At day-break on the 15th, the military fort of Sonoma was taken by surprise, with 9 brass pieces of artillery, 250 stands of muskets, some other arms, and a quantity of ammunition. General Vallejo, his brother (Captain Vallejo), Colonel Prudon, and some others were taken prisoners, and placed at New Helvetia, a fortified post under my command. In the meantime a launch had reached New Helvetia with stores from the ship *Portsmouth*, now lying at Yerba Buena, on

* The Mission of Carmel is three miles south of Monterey.

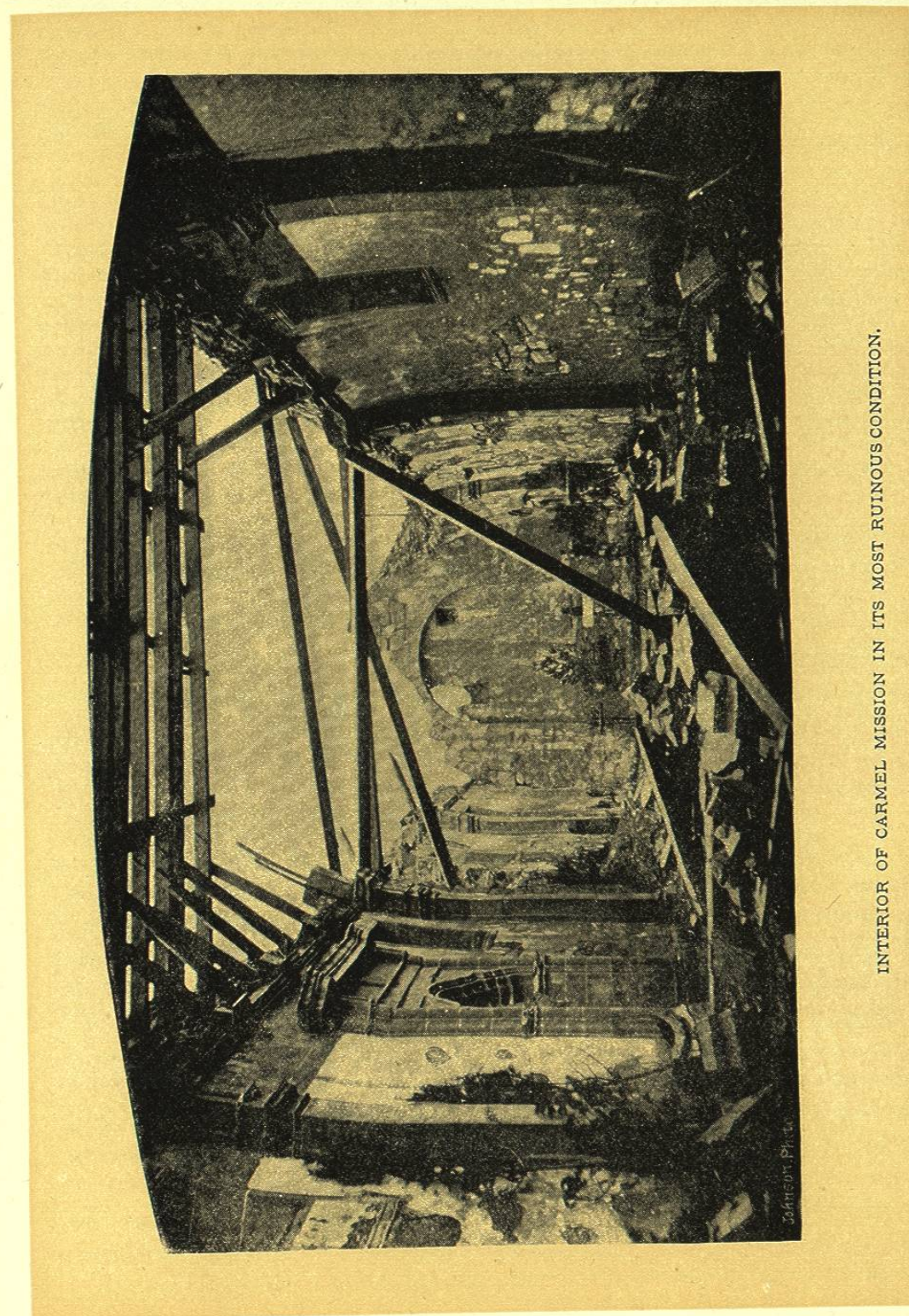
Francisco Bay. News of General Castro's proceedings against me in *March* had reached Commodore Sloat at Mazatlan at the end of that month, and he had immediately despatched the ship *Portsmouth* to Monterey, with general instructions to protect American interests in California.

These enterprises accomplished I proceeded to the American settlements on the Sacramento, and the Rio de los Americanos, to obtain reinforcements of men and rifles.

The information brought by Mr. Gillespie to Captain Montgomery, in relation to my position, induced that officer immediately to proceed to Yerba Buena, whence he despatched his launch to me. I immediately wrote to him, by return of the boat, describing to him fully my position and intentions, in order that he might not, by supposing me to be acting under orders from our Government, unwittingly commit himself in affording me other than such assistance as his instructions would authorize him naturally to offer an officer charged with an important public duty; or, in fine, to any citizen of the United States.

Information having reached me from the commanding officer at Sonoma, that his post was threatened with an attack by a force under General Castro, I raised camp on the American Fork on the afternoon of the 23d, and, accompanied by Mr. Gillespie, at two in the morning of the 25th, reached Sonoma, with ninety mounted riflemen, having marched eighty miles. Our people still held the place, only one division of Castro's force, a squadron of cavalry, numbering seventy men, and commanded by Joaquin de la Torre (one of his best officers), having succeeded in crossing the straits (Francisco Bay). This force had attacked an advanced party of twenty Americans, and (was) defeated with the loss of two killed and two or three wounded. The Americans lost none. This was an unexpected check to the Californians, who had announced their intentions to defeat our people without firing a gun; to beat out their brains with their "tapaderos," and destroy them "con cuchillos puros." They were led to use this expression from the circumstance that a few days previous they had captured two of our men (an express), and after wounding, had bound them to trees, and cut them to pieces while alive, with an exaggeration of cruelty which only Indians would be capable of. In a few days de la Torre was driven from the country, having barely succeeded in effecting his escape across the straits, the guns (six large and handsome pieces) spiked at the fort on the south side of the entrance to Francisco Bay, and the communication with the opposite side entirely broken off, the boats and launches being either destroyed or in our possession. Three of Castro's party having landed on the Sonoma side in advance, were killed on the beach; and beyond this there was no loss on either side. In all these proceedings, Mr. Gillespie has acted with me. We reached Sonoma again on the evening of July 4th, and in the morning I called the people together, and spoke to them in relation to the position of the country, advising a course of operations which was unanimously adopted. California was declared independent, the country put under martial law, the force organized and officers elected. A pledge, binding themselves to support these measures, and to obey their officers, was signed by those present. The whole was placed under my direction. Several officers from the *Portsmouth* were present at this meeting. Leaving Captain Grigsby with fifty men in command of Sonoma, I left that place on the 6th, and reached my encampment on the American Fork in three days. Before we arrived at that place, General Castro had evacuated Santa Clara, which he had been engaged in fortifying, and with a force of about four hundred men, and two pieces of artillery, commenced his retreat upon St. John's, a fortified post, having eight pieces of artillery, principally brass. On the evening of the 10th we were electrified by the arrival of an express from Captain Montgomery, with the information that Commodore Sloat had hoisted the flag of the United States at Monterey, and taken possession of the country. Captain Montgomery had hoisted the flag at Yerba Buena, and sent one to Sonoma, to be hoisted at that place. One also was sent to the officer commanding at New Helvetia, requesting that it might be hoisted at his post.

Independence and the flag of the United States are synonymous terms to the foreigners here (the northern, which is the stronger part, particularly), and accordingly I directed the flag to be hoisted with a salute the next morning. The event produced great rejoicing among our people. The next day I received an express from Commodore Sloat, transmitting to me his proclamation, and directing me to proceed with the force under my orders to Monterey. The registered force, actually in arms, under my orders, numbered two hundred and twenty riflemen, with one piece of field artillery, and ten men, in addition to the artillery of the garrison.



INTERIOR OF CARMEL MISSION IN ITS MOST RUINOUS CONDITION.

We were on the eve of marching on Castro when this intelligence arrived; accordingly, I directed my march upon Monterey, where I arrived on the evening of the 19th, with a command of one hundred and sixty mounted riflemen, and one piece of artillery. I found also there Commodore Stockton in command of the *Congress*, and Admiral Seymour, in command of her Britannic majesty's ship *Collingwood*, of eighty guns. I have been badly interrupted, and shall scarcely be able to put you in full possession of occurrences.

To come briefly to a conclusion, Commodore Sloat has transferred the squadron, with California and its appurtenances, into the hands of Commodore Stockton, who has resolved to make good the possession of California. This officer approves entirely of the course pursued by myself and Mr. Gillespie, who, I repeat, has been hand-in-hand with me in this business. I received this morning from Commodore Stockton a commission of major in the United States army, retaining command of my battalion, to which a force of eighty marines will be attached. We are under orders to embark to-morrow morning on board the *Cyane* sloop of war, and disembark at San Diego, immediately in the rear of Castro. He is now at the Puebla de los Angeles, an interior city, with a force of about five hundred men, supposed to be increasing. The design is to attack him with my force at that place. He has there seven or eight pieces of artillery.

Commodore Sloat, who goes home by way of Panama, promises to hand or send you this immediately on his arrival at Washington, to which he goes direct. It is my intention to leave this country, if it is within the bounds of possibility, at the end of August. I could then succeed in crossing without fear on account of the snow; and by that time a territorial government will be in operation here.

Yours very truly,

J. C. FRÉMONT.

Hon. Thomas H. Benton, United States Senate, Washington City, D. C.

For the reason that will be naturally conceded to me, that I feel special interest in having this part of California history understood, I introduce here some extracts from a discussion in the Senate of the United States immediately upon the close of the war. In this I anticipate somewhat, but I do so in order to complete the record by showing how these events were viewed at the time they took place by men in the Government who were in the best position to have correct information and to understand them.

In a speech in the Senate by Senator Dix to which fuller reference will be made when I reach a later subject, he gives clearly the attitude of England towards us at the time immediately preceding the declaration of war against Mexico; and, from a discussion in the House of Lords in 1845, the Earl of Aberdeen defending the Ministry, shows the power England gives her admirals on foreign stations and the use she makes of the results in cases similar to that of California. Her usage was to leave to them unlimited discretion in great contingencies; reserving it to herself to support or disavow their acts, but always demanding action. Senator Dix makes it forcibly clear that, if the work on land had not been done on which Commodore Sloat based his raising of the American flag, Admiral Seymour would have raised that of England, and California would have been lost to us; for with her vastly superior navy the chances of war were largely against us.

It will be borne in mind that this speech was not made by an incautious or inadequately informed person. General Dix was a member of the Military Committee of the Senate and Senator from New York; his military