durance under persecution, benevolent forgiveness of injuries, and far-reaching philanthropy, mark him as no common person, and place him on the pedestal of great men.'

"' His influence with the ' old settlers ' was great, for they had tried him, and knew he was worthy of their confidence. ' He was mild, modest, simple, disinterested, and, above all, unimpeachably just.' We may say of him what Anacharsis said of ' the greatest of Grecians ': ' A faithful portrait of his mind and heart would be the only eulogy worthy of Epaminondas.' "



# PART II

# THE MEXICAN WAR AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

## CHAPTER VIII

## CAUSES OF THE MEXICAN WAR

## CHAPTER VIII

### CAUSES OF THE MEXICAN WAR

THE Mexican War resulted in the seizure by the United States of all the Mexican territory north of the Rio Grande and the Gila, together with a small strip below the Gila between the Rio Grande and the Colorado, which was acquired by the Gadsden Purchase in 1853. The cause of the Mexican War, as I have stated in the introductory chapter, was primarily a determination by the slave-holding states to acquire territory out of which future slave-holding states could be constituted. Secondarily, it arose from the natural desire to push the western boundary of the United States across the continent to the Pacific in pursuance of the manifest destiny idea.

After the annexation of Texas had brought the territory between the Sabine and Nueces—

or the Rio Grande—within our boundaries, the government turned a covetous eye toward New Mexico and California. We had possession of Texas, with what justification there was, but there appeared to be no convenient or easy way of securing California. Several attempts had been made to purchase it but all had failed. Peaceful means having been exhausted, there remained nothing but the "stand and deliver" method of the highwayman.

Dr. Henry William Elson, the most recent of our historians, says, referring to the incoming administration of President Polk: "'There are four great measures,' said the new President, with great decision, 'which are to be the measures of my administration'; and these were a reduction of the tariff, the re-establishment of the independent treasury, the settlement of the Oregon boundary, and the acquisition of California."[1]

[1] History of the United States of America. The best single volume history of the United States I know of. In this connection the following letter from Dr. Elson is interesting·





This is interesting testimony to the intent of the government with regard to the territory in question. The United States was to acquire the territory bordering on the Pacific, if not by one means then by another, whatever the claims of Mexico might be, or however much she might object to surrendering it to us.

Our position, it was thought, would appear better if by any means Mexico could be forced to take the offensive and begin the fighting. A blow struck gives an excuse for a return, and

2122 Natrona Street, Philadelphia,
*September 16, 1904.*

My Dear Dr. Brady.—You may remember having written me in July, requesting that I give authority for the statement in my history, page 524, that President Polk designated the acquisition of California as one of the measures of his administration.

I was then about to start on a two-months' western tour and had not a moment to spare to look the matter up—but have done so since.

See Schouler's History, vol. iv, p. 498, and foot-note. It seems that Mr. Bancroft gave the information to Mr. Schouler long after the occurrence. In view of the facts I should have cited Schouler's page when I wrote mine, but had not his volume at hand and had forgotten my source of information.

Very sincerely yours,
Henry W. Elson.

such an action on the part of the enemy would unify and direct popular opinion—never so blind and unreasoning a guide as when war is imminent and threatened.

Opportunities for the commencement of hostilities by Mexico were easily developed by the United States. First, there was the annexation of Texas itself; second, the difference of opinion between Texas and Mexico with regard to the western boundary line of the Texan territory; third, a certain body of claims, made by citizens of the United States against the Mexican government, for which heavy pecuniary damages were demanded. In two of these subsidiary matters the United States was clearly in the wrong. I do not think that for the other, the annexation of Texas, the United States was censurable. That, at least, was not a proper cause for war on the part of Mexico; nevertheless, it was certain that Mexico would so regard it.

I shall discuss the question of annexation first. The people of Texas, at the time Hous-





ton was elected President, had declared with practical unanimity their desire for annexation to the United States, only ninety-one votes being recorded against the proposition. It was well understood by the United States that there would be no objection on the part of Texas to annexation at any time. On the contrary, it was what the people of Texas were solicitous for from the very beginning —and the sooner the better.

Naturally this was so, for practically all the people of Texas had come from the United States. The struggle for the balance of power between freedom and slavery, which was not terminated until the close of the Civil War, made the Southern people, who were not only allied by ties of blood to the Texans, but were attracted to them by an identity of policies as well, anxious to incorporate Texas in the Union. They had viewed with great alarm the action of the Mexican government in abolishing slavery. Had that action prevailed in Texas, the slave states would have been cut

off from the possibility of any further increase in their number in every direction.

The territorial extent of Texas was so great that it was suggested that at least four slave-holding states could be created out of its territory. It had been the national policy—forced by the South—for many years to admit states in pairs, a Northern and a Southern, a slave and a free state, coming in together. In the House of Representatives, owing to the growing difference in population, Northern, or free states, were certain to get the predominance. In the Senate, however, where each state had two votes independent of population, the balance of power could be, and was, preserved by such methods.

Putting aside the question of slavery, I think it was inevitable that Texas should become part of the Union, and that the United States should desire to incorporate it within its limits. There would be no rhyme or reason in the maintenance of an independent state on the Gulf of Mexico, with no natural,





racial, or geographical barriers between it and the United States. That any other country should—if any were so disposed—assume by conquest or treaty to administer Texas, was clearly impossible. In any contingency, the annexation of Texas to the United States was unavoidable. Nor did the desire of Texas fail of response in the United States. For instance, General Andrew Jackson wrote privately to William B. Lewis, on September 18, 1843, as follows:

> "I then determined to use my influence, after the battle of San Jacinto, to have the independence of Texas acknowledged, and to receive her into the Union. But that arch enemy, J. Q. Adams, rallied all his forces to prevent the annexation to the United States. We must regain Texas; *peaceably if we can; forcibly if we must!* . . . I repeat that the safety as well as the perpetuation of our glorious Union depends upon the retrocession of the whole of that country, as far as the *ancient limits* of Louisiana, to the United States."[1]

[1] American Statesmen, xvii: Andrew Jackson, by William G. Sumner.

It will be observed from this quotation that the attempt was made to establish a claim to Texas on the ground that it was included in the limits of the Louisiana Purchase, and the annexation was often called a reannexation by the advocates of it. I think there was nothing in the claim; besides, if there had been, we were estopped from urging it by the treaty of 1828 with Mexico, in which we had recognized the boundaries as those of the treaty of 1819 with Spain.

Abel P. Upshur, Tyler's Secretary of State, wrote to our representative in Texas in November, 1843: "We regard annexation as involving the security of the South." [1]

On the other hand, there were equally strong objections to annexation on account of the slavery question. No less than eight free states formally petitioned against it when it was first mooted. The contrary opinion to those cited above was thus expressed by Daniel Webster:

[1] American Statesmen, xxx: Charles Sumner, by Moorfield Storey.





"While we feel as we ought about the annexation of Texas, we ought to keep in view the true grounds of objection to that measure. Those grounds are—want of constitutional power, danger of too great an extent of territory, and opposition to the increase of slavery and slave representation. It was properly considered, also, as a measure tending to produce war." [1]

The spirit in the country at large against annexation was too strong at first to render it advisable for the Southerners to bring up the question formally, but they lost no opportunity to urge it upon the country and to create a sentiment in favor of it.[2] The Democratic party generally favored annexation, while the new and promising Whig party, which had been growing in power at a rapid rate, opposed it. The opposition, however, had an element of weakness in that it was not so much an oppo-

[1] American Statesmen, xxi: Daniel Webster, by Henry Cabot Lodge.

[2] For an illuminating account, in brief compass, of the discussion of this question see History of the People of the United States, by John Bach McMaster, vol. v, chap. liii.

sition to the acquirement of territory, or to the intrinsic fact of annexation, as it was an opposition to slavery as a concomitant of annexation. Aside from that, the advantages of annexation were many, the disadvantages few.

If Mexico had been in a position to coerce the Republic of Texas, and had in fact put it down, the conditions would have been different. The case then would have been exactly that of those states which seceded in 1861, and which were coerced into remaining in the Union by those other states which denied the right of individual secession. Any attempt on the part of England, let us say, to annex South Carolina, at that time, or, to make the parallel more apparent, an attempt of Mexico adjoining Texas to annex Texas in 1861, whether with or without the consent of the Texans, would have been considered preposterous and would have resulted in war if persisted in. But the relations of Texas and Mexico after the battle of San Jacinto were not comparable to those between Texas or





South Carolina or any other seceding state, and the United States in 1861–65. Texas declared, and then for ten years—the latter part of it being practically undisturbed—maintained, her independence of Mexico. South Carolina declared her independence, and tried hard enough, goodness knows, but she could not maintain it.

After the battle of San Jacinto, it became evident to everybody, except the Mexicans themselves, who simply would not see, that Mexico could not reconquer Texas. Texas became as free and independent a nation as any on the globe. It was equally evident that, so far as Mexico was concerned, Texas would remain free and independent. The great powers of the world had recognized her. Her relation to Mexico was exactly that of Mexico to Spain, which had long refused to recognize the independence of Mexico, although it was an accomplished fact. The logic of events was absolutely against the survival of the Mexican claim of eminent domain over Texas. The

fact of annexation, therefore, can not be considered a legitimate cause of war on the part of Mexico.

However, before annexation was finally brought about, the United States by a series of notorious breaches of international comity and a number of flagrant violations of international law, aggrieved Mexico almost to the breaking point.

For instance, General Edmund P. Gaines, commanding the United States forces at Natchitoches, whom we have seen on the Sabine River, sent troops to seize Nacogdoches, on the 4th of August, 1836. He was ordered to do this by the government at Washington, under the pretense of preventing Indian depredations. Nacogdoches was within the Texan limits, and, although Texas had declared her independence, inasmuch as we had not recognized it Nacogdoches was, so far as we were concerned, on Mexican territory. The United States justified this arbitrary procedure by saying that Mexico was unable to preserve





order within her own territory and restrain the Indians, and that common humanity constrained it to seize Nacogdoches! All of this gave no little aid and comfort to the Texans.

The Mexican Minister at Washington protested vigorously against this armed invasion and demanded the instant withdrawal of the troops and an apology. His demands were refused. He thereupon asked for his passports and left the country. Again, in September, 1843, Commodore Thomas Ap Catesby Jones, commanding the Pacific squadron of three ships, then lying at Callao, Peru, read a quotation from a New Orleans journal in a Boston paper which had been sent him, to the effect that Mexico had ceded California to Great Britain, and that England, which also had a squadron in the Pacific, was about to seize Upper and Lower California. Jones called a council of war of his ship captains and decided to anticipate the action of Great Britain. He sailed with all speed to Monterey, California, landed on the 19th of October, and without op-

position took possession of the town and territory in the name of the United States. The day after this brilliant feat of arms, finding he had been mistaken, he hauled down his flag, apologized and departed. The act was disavowed by the government and Commodore Jones recalled, but no censure whatever was visited upon him. Public opinion generally commended him for his promptness and decision.

Upshur, at that time Tyler's Secretary of the Navy, in his report to Congress, under date of December 4, 1841, had said:

"In Upper California there were already considerable settlements of Americans, and others are daily resorting to that fertile and delightful country. Such, however, is the unsettled condition of that whole country, that they can not be safe either in their persons or property, except under the protection of our naval power."

He also declared that,

"It is highly desirable that the Gulf of California should be fully explored, and that this duty





alone will give employment a long time to one or two vessels of the smaller class."

The Mexicans, therefore, were not feeling very kindly toward the United States while the question of annexation was being discussed. No specific attempt was made to annex Texas until Tyler became President. Martin Van Buren, who had succeeded Andrew Jackson, realizing that the power of the Whigs was so great that any attempt at annexation would probably fail, and further, that it would greatly impair the chances of his reelection, already seriously endangered by the panic of 1837 and the disturbed financial conditions for which he was most unjustly held responsible, refused to take any steps to bring it about. He failed of reelection, however, and William Henry Harrison, the first Whig President, who succeeded him, died a short time after his inauguration. He was succeeded on the 4th of April, 1841, by the Vice-President, John Tyler, of Virginia.

Tyler was at heart a Democrat, although he had been elected by the Whigs and had

engaged himself to uphold the principles of that party. He was probably the most unpopular President in our history. He betrayed the party that elected him and refused to carry out the policy to which it was pledged—sole instance of such action among our Presidents. The Whigs read him out of the party and stigmatized him a political Benedict Arnold. The Democrats received him after the Whigs were through with him with just about as much joy and affection as the English had manifested toward Arnold half a century before. He was a President without influence and without party.

John Fiske points out that no platform, or official declaration of principles, was adopted by the Whig Nominating Convention; that their informal platform was "Anything to beat Van Buren"; but the measures advocated by the Whig party were nevertheless thoroughly well understood by Tyler and everybody else. It was these measures, notably those concerning finance, which Tyler prevent-





ed from being enacted and which caused his unpopularity. Fiske finds a great deal in Tyler's actions to commend, and in estimating his character and services seems to have chosen the middle course between those who condemn him absolutely and—but there are none who entirely support him. Witness the following:

> "As for Tyler, while we can not call him a great man, while for breadth of view and sound grasp of fundamental principles he is immeasurably below Van Buren, at the same time he is not so trivial a personage as his detractors would have us to believe. He was honest and courageous, and in the defeat of Mr. Clay's theory of government he played an important and useful part. If he is small as compared with Jackson and Van Buren, he is great as compared with Pierce and Buchanan."[1]

On the whole, I agree with Fiske, and it is with especial pleasure in this instance that my heart goes out to the under dog.

[1] Essays Historical and Literary, vol. i. Chapter viii: Harrison-Tyler and the Whig Coalition, by John Fiske. See also Letters and Times of the Tylers, edited by Lyon Gardner Tyler.

One of Tyler's pet projects was the annexation of Texas. Being a Southern slaveholder and fully committed to the Southern policy, this was natural. His Secretary of State,[1] as has been noted, was also heart and soul for this cause. The untimely death of Upshur, by the explosion of a huge gun, "The Peacemaker," on the United States ship Princeton, on February 28, 1844, prevented him from negotiating the treaty. Through the influence of Henry A. Wise, of Virginia, John C. Calhoun, of South Carolina, the original Southern secessionist, (John Quincy Adams was the original Northern secessionist!), was persuaded to become Tyler's Secretary of State, solely and wholly for the purpose of effecting the annexation of Texas, upon which, as the best means of promoting the extension of slavery and preserving that zealously defended balance of power, his heart was set. One conviction of which Calhoun affected to be possessed, and of the truth

[1] Upshur was Secretary of the Navy, 1841–43, and thereafter Secretary of State until his death in 1844.





of which he strove to persuade his countrymen, was a fear that England would absorb Texas. I do not believe there was the slightest possibility of this, but it furnished a powerful argument for annexation. The influence of England was, indeed, constantly exerted to secure the abolition of slavery in Texas. An anti-slavery party there was, already strong and growing stronger, but that England had any designs on Texas is no longer maintained. Von Holst says:

"Leading Texans — *e. g.*, ex-President Mirabeau B. Lamar—had frequently declared that the anti-slavery party would soon acquire the ascendancy, and that the abolition of slavery could be effected 'without the slightest inconvenience.' The most zealous advocates of annexation in Congress had emphatically indorsed this opinion, and Upshur himself had written to Mr. Murray, 'If Texas should not be attached to the United States, she can not maintain that institution (slavery) ten years and probably not half that time. Calhoun held the same opinion. He informed Mr. Pakenham [the British Minister—C. T. B.] that the President had 'the settled conviction that it would be

difficult for Texas, in her actual condition, to resist what she (Great Britain) desires, without supposing the influence and exertions of Great Britain would be extended beyond the limits assigned by Lord Aberdeen'; and he added, 'and this, if Texas could not resist the consummation of the object of her desire, would endanger both the safety and prosperity of the Union.'

"An independent Texas without slavery and the permanent continuance of slavery in the Union were, however, irreconcilable."[1]

On April 12, 1844, Calhoun negotiated a treaty between Texas and the United States, but, to the great mortification of Tyler himself, and in spite of all the pressure the administration could bring to bear upon the Senate, it failed of ratification in the Senate by a vote of 35 to 16. To such an extent had Tyler discredited himself with the people generally that many Senators who were really in favor of annexation voted against it because it was his measure.

[1] American Statesmen, xxii: Calhoun, by Dr. H. Von Holst.



## CHAPTER IX

## CAUSES OF THE MEXICAN WAR, CONTINUED—CONTRASTING OPINIONS