

Selections from Mary Howitt, *A Popular History of The United States of America, from the Discovery of the American Continent to the Present Time*. Vol. 2. New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1860.

Although she never visited North America, Howitt published an immense two-volume Popular History of the United States. The aim of this work, as of much of her work, was to provide entertaining and useful information to a growing reading public, infused with her own progressive values and ideology. As such, it calls attention to injustice and oppression while celebrating a general movement toward liberal, protestant enlightenment. This extract covers the war with Mexico leading to the United States annexation of Texas, which figures in the July chapter of Our Cousins in Ohio and even more prominently in the original correspondence. In their strong condemnations of the war, the attitudes expressed in these texts are perhaps more consistent with the abolitionist and pacifist outlooks of the two Quaker sisters. Although in this later work, the United States is gently criticised for “their natural impulse at extension and colonization,” most of the account treats the war as one of liberation from an oppressive Mexican government dominated by Roman Catholic “aversions, prejudices, and jealousies.” Our Cousins offers grim descriptions of rapidly deserting soldiers being dragged, intoxicated, to “pestilence and death” and “inevitable destruction” (120). Here, although Howitt (still a Quaker and a pacifist at heart) reminds us that such a war “perhaps cannot be justified on strict principles of Christian morality,” she nonetheless impresses her readers with the “adventurous and romantic character” of this war, conducted by flocks of “young adventurers... impatient to take part in a enterprise which was dangerous and exciting in the highest degree.”

CHAPTER XXII. WAR WITH MEXICO.—ANNEXATION OF TEXAS.—VAST INCREASE OF TERRITORY.—THE MORMONS.

As regards the relative positions and feelings of the Mexican government and that of the United States, we will give a few remarks from an American writer.² “The Mexican authorities were not so desirous of occupying Texas as of keeping her a desolate waste; that she might present an impassable barrier between themselves and their Anglo-American neighbours. The cause of this is not of difficult solution, and is derived from the old mother-country. At the time when Mexico was first colonised, Spain was at the head of the Roman Catholic countries, and all heretics were held in abhorrence by her, and exterminated by the inquisition and the sword. The changes which knowledge and general enlightenment have produced in the Protestant world universally, and even in the Catholic when it has been forced into closer contact with

² Mrs. Willard [MH].

progressive opinion, have not reached Mexico, which has been shut up as it were, and which has jealously retained all her native aversions, prejudices and jealousies. Besides which, Mexico as a colony belonged less to the Spanish nation than to the Spanish kings, and was governed by their viceroys, regardless of the well-being of the people, merely as an estate to produce a revenue. No possible rivalry with the mother-country was permitted; meanwhile the mines were industriously worked, no commerce was permitted to the Mexicans, nor might they rear the silkworm or plant the olive or the vine.

“When, however, the English colonies asserted and established their own independence, Spain, fearing a similar revolt in her own colony, somewhat relaxed her laws regarding their trade with foreign nations, but only under severe restrictions and enormous duties, so that the freedom on the one hand might be nullified by the restrictions on the other. Very little change took place in Mexico.

“At length, in 1810, when the Spanish nation fell under the arm of Napoleon, the Mexicans revolted. But the people were not united, and after a war of eight years the Royalist party prevailed. A second revolution took place in 1821, under Iturbide, when the Mexicans succeeded in throwing off the Spanish yoke. Iturbide proclaimed himself king, and the people, wishing for a republic, deposed him; he was banished, and returning was executed. A new leader arose in the person of Santa Anna, under whose auspices Mexico was divided into States, with each a legislature, and over the whole a general government with a federal constitution similar to that of the United States. But Santa Anna was not a second Washington; the constitution became subverted, and he the military tyrant of the country.”

Having given this brief sketch of the condition and government of Mexico, we now return to Texas. When, in 1803, the United States purchased Louisiana from France, the disputed claim to Texas became transferred to them, and in 1819, when Florida was granted to them by Spain, they ceded to that country their claims to Texas as a portion of Mexico. But although they had resigned their claim to Texas, the United States could not resist their natural impulse at extension and colonisation, and, in 1821, favoured by the Mexican authorities, who hoped that the bold and determined Anglo-American settler would be a good defence against the hostile Comanches, the first attempt at the colonisation of Texas was successfully made. The intended leader of this movement was Moses Austin, of Durham, in Connecticut, who obtained a grant of land from the Mexican authorities for the settlement of a colony between the rivers Brazas and Colorado. Death prevented Moses Austin from carrying out his plans, which, however, were fully and most successfully executed by his son, Steven F. Austin. The success of Austin's colony soon alarmed the Mexican authorities; and well it might, for these sturdy republicans once planted there would soon take such firm root as to displace any other possessor. Nor was it long before evidences of their intentions were apparent. In 1827, a movement was attempted by the settlers of Nacogdoches to throw off the Mexican yoke and to establish a republic under the name of Fredonia. The attempt was

unsuccessful, but the Mexican authorities were alarmed, more especially as soon after some overtures were made on the part of the United States government to purchase Texas.

In 1833, there were about 10,000 American settlers in Texas; and at that time dissatisfaction and discontent were prevailing largely among them. The Spanish Mexicans of the province carried against them every measure in the government, and when Steven Austen was sent to the city of Mexico to petition for redress, he was first neglected, and then thrown into a dungeon. In 1835 Austen was once more in Texas. The usurpations of Santa Anna had in the meantime increased the public discontent, and the Texians generally prepared to throw off the yoke of his despotism. Adventurers from the American states hastened to take part in the approaching contest, which sooner or later was sure to be advantageous to their nation. A provisional government was appointed, and Samuel Houston placed at the head of the army in Texas.

In December the Texian forces, under General Burleton, besieged the strong fortress of Alamo and the city of Bexar, which was garrisoned by General Cos and 1,300 Spaniards and Mexicans. In a few days the fortress was taken, and the Mexicans obtained permission to retire; so that within a very short time not a single Mexican soldier remained east of the Rio Grande.

Santa Anna, who understood too well the spirit of the people, no sooner saw the stronghold of Bexar taken by a party whose purposes were so adverse to his own, than he entered Texas in person, and with 4,000 men invested Goliad and Bexar, which had unfortunately been left in the hands of a very inadequate force. The attack commenced and continued for several days, the fortress of the Alamo in Bexar being defended by its little band with a courage, says Samuel Goodrich, worthy of Leonidas and his Spartans. After having held out for a considerable time they sustained a general assault on the night of the 6th of May. They fought until Travis, their commander, fell, and seven only of the garrison were left when the place was taken, and the little remnant was torn to pieces. Two human beings only were left, a woman and a negro servant. Among those who fell on this terrible occasion was the celebrated David Crockett of Tennessee, a man well known from the eccentricity of his mind and the independence of his character; he was found surrounded by a heap of dead whom he had slain.

Colonel Fanning, who commanded at Goliad, by direction of the Texian authorities evacuated this place on the 17th of March, but had scarcely reached the open country when they were surrounded by the Mexicans with a troop of Indian allies. They defended themselves all day, and killed a great number of the enemy; during the night, however, the Mexicans being reinforced, they were obliged to surrender, on condition of being treated as prisoners of war: good faith, however, was unknown to Santa Anna, and no sooner were they in his power than he ordered them to be drawn out and shot. Four hundred men were thus murdered in cold blood; one of the soldiers saying to his fellows, when the inhuman order was given,

"They are going to shoot us; let us face about and not be shot in the back." This bloody tragedy, which stamped the name of Santa Anna with infamy, took place on the 27th of March, 1836.

These direful tidings aroused, at the same time, the American hatred and sympathy. After this they would not permit Texas to remain in the hands of so cruel and false an enemy.

Santa Anna, encouraged by his victory and confident of success, pursued the Texian army, now under the command of General Houston, as far as San Jacinto, where Houston resolved to risk a battle, although his force was less than 1,000 and the enemy double his number. This was on the 21st of April. The Texians commenced the attack, rushing furiously forward to within half-rifle distance, with the ominous battle-cry of "Remember the Alamo!" The fury with which they assailed the enemy was irresistible, and in less than half an hour they were masters of the camp, the whole Mexican army being killed, wounded, or prisoners. The following day Santa Anna himself was taken, without arms and in disguise.

The plausibility of this artful leader induced his captors to believe him favourable to the independence of Texas. At his request he was sent to the United States, and had an interview with President Jackson, whom he succeeded also in winning, and by whom he was permitted to return to Mexico. No sooner in Mexico than he disclaimed his late proceedings and again commenced war on Texas. In the meantime the United States, England and France recognised the independence of that country. But her struggle was not at an end; and gaining strength by the contest, the Texians, in 1841, assisted by a body of American adventurers, proceeded to take possession of Santa Fe, the capital of New Mexico, lying on the eastern side of the Rio Grande. This attempt was unsuccessful, but it opened, as it were, a door into New Mexico, and the American foot being once planted there, as elsewhere, was but the forerunner of possession.

In 1844 Texas made application to be received into the American Union. Great discussion followed; both President Jackson and his successor, Van Buren, opposed it, on the ground of the existing peaceful relations with Mexico, but the great body of the American people were favourable to it. The question of annexation was made the great test question of the following election, and James Polk and George M. Dallas owed their elections to its support. Accordingly, on the 4th of March, 1844, they were inaugurated, and Texas already in February had been admitted into the Union. The annexation of Texas was of course resented by Mexico, her minister at Washington declaring it to be "the most unfair act ever recorded in history."

The conditions of annexation required from the authorities and people of Texas were as follows: 1st. That all questions of boundary should be settled by the United States; 2nd. That Texas should give up

her harbours, magazines, etc., but retain her funds and her debts, and, until their discharge, her unappropriated lands; 3rd. That additional new states, not exceeding four, might be formed *with slavery* if south of lat. $36\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$, but if north, *without*.

The annexation of Texas led to war with Mexico. In July an armed force under Colonel Zachery Taylor, was sent out to protect the new territory against the threatened invasion of Mexico, besides which negotiations were opened for the adjustment of the quarrel, the United States being desirous of purchasing a peaceful boundary on the Rio Grande and the cession of California.

Whilst these negotiations were pending with but little hope of a successful termination, a difficulty arose between the United States and England respecting the northern boundary of Oregon. The brief history of this north-western state is as follows. In the spring of 1792, Captain Robert Gray, of Boston, discovered a river to which he gave the name of his vessel, the Columbia. This was the first knowledge which the Americans had of this river. In 1804–5, Messrs. Lewis and Clarke, under the commission of the American government, explored this river from its mouth to its source. After the year 1808, the country was occupied by various fur companies. These are the circumstances upon which the United States based her claims to the territory as far as $54^{\circ} 40'$. But English merchants being settled in the country, England also asserted her claim, and a discussion of rights and claims ensued, which became so hot on both sides as even to threaten war between the two countries. Fortunately, however, the question was amicably adjusted by the treaty of 1846, by which the 49th degree became the frontier of the United States to the north, Vancouver's Island was wholly relinquished to the British, to whom also the right of navigation in the Columbia was conceded.

War with Mexico continued through the whole of 1846–47, and in May of the following year, left the Americans in quiet possession of the northern provinces of Mexico proper, a vast and important territory including New Mexico, Utah, and California. The incidents of the war were of an adventurous and romantic character. The wonderfully varied and tropical character of the country, and the wild and guerilla kind of warfare amid scenes rendered memorable in the old chivalrous days of Spanish glory and enterprise, gave an extraordinary charm to a war which perhaps cannot be justified on strict principles of Christian morality. Young adventurers flocked to the armies of Generals Wool, Kearney, and Taylor, impatient to take part in an enterprise which was dangerous and exciting in the highest degree. It is said that when the news of the imminent danger of the army on the Rio Grande reached the United States, that everywhere young men hastened westward to defend their brethren, fight the Mexicans, and push forward for the Halls of the Montezumas; and that Prescott's work, the "History of the Conquest of Mexico," being just then published and universally read, greatly increased the enthusiasm.

In April, 1847, Puebla, the second city in Mexico, was taken by the Americans under General Scott, and in the following September, the grand city of Mexico itself. "Three hours before noon," says Mrs. Willard, who seems to have the strongest sympathy with this war, "General Scott made his entrance, with escort of cavalry and flourish of trumpets, into the conquered city of the Aztecs. The troops for four-and-twenty hours now suffered from the anarchy of Mexico more than her prowess had been able to inflict. Two thousand convicts let loose from the prisons attacked them from the house-tops, at the same time entering houses and committing robberies. The Mexicans assisting, these fellows were quelled by the morning of the 15th.

"General Scott gave to his army, on the day of their entrance into Mexico, memorable orders concerning their discipline and behaviour. After directing that companies and regiments be kept together, he says, 'Let there be no disorders, no straggling, no drunkenness. Marauders shall be punished by court-martial. All the rules so honourably observed by the glorious army in Puebla must be observed here. The honour of our country, the honour of our army, call for the best behaviour from all. The valiant must, to win the approbation of God and their country, be sober, orderly, and merciful. His noble brethren in arms will not be deaf to this hasty appeal from their commander and friend.'

"On the 16th, he called the army to return public and private thanks to God for victory; and on the 19th, for the better preservation of order and suppression of crime, he proclaimed martial law. Thus protected by the American army, the citizens of Mexico were more secure from violence, and from the fear of robbery and murder, than they had ever been under their own flag."

Nor does this statement appear to be overdrawn. An English writer³ on Mexico, who was in the country the two years following the war, dates the commencement of an improvement in this degraded people from the American invasion. "Nothing," says he, "could exceed the jealous suspicions with which the Mexicans formerly regarded other nations, more particularly perhaps the people of the United States. The hatred and rancour with which the very name of American was mentioned while hostilities were in progress, were immeasurable. But at the present time kindly feelings are being fostered with a large proportion which will lead to happy results for both countries.

³ R. H. Mason [M.H.].