

stopped, and were known there as desperate gamblers and outlaws. Robbery and murder were of frequent occurrence on the line we had traveled, and we were told on our way down the river that on the day of our arrival a party of eight coming up the river were overpowered, robbed, and murdered by their boatmen.

We reached Gorgona about dusk, and as it was necessary, in order to reach the steamer at Chagres, to take a light canoe and to leave at three o'clock next morning, I left Mr. Fowler at the so-called hotel and went out to engage a boat and three boatmen, taking the precaution to learn where they would sleep, so that I might waken them, for I well knew they would not otherwise keep their appointment. When I returned, in the course of an hour or two, I found my comrade quite overcome with nervous prostration. He hurriedly placed in my hands his gold watch, a pile of money and a banker's draft for \$80,000, gave me the address of his father, and then sank exhausted to the floor with the feeling that he was dying. I obtained a stimulating drink for him, and, taking advantage of his confidence in me, told him that I possessed a mesmeric power which

would restore him. I made a few passes over his head and took his hands in mine, asking him to notice the vital current passing from my fingers to his. He was so assured of this that he revived, and would not let go of my hands until he had gained strength enough to walk.

We embarked in a light canoe about daylight. My revolver was ready for immediate use, but we reached Chagres the next evening without mishap. Finding that the *North America*, a new independent steamer, was in the harbor and about to leave for New York, we paid off our canoe men, and at once embarked on a large yawl with six oarsmen over the rough waters to the steamer three miles away. The result of my gold hunting was that my entire stock of effects consisted of the clothing I had on, namely, corduroy trousers, a soiled shirt, and a brown linen coat, together with a grizzly bear skin which I had saved as a trophy of California. When we reached New York I was completely cured of my passion for adventure and ready to put on the harness of hard and sober work for all the rest of my life.

*Julius H. Pratt.*

## THE CONQUEST OF CALIFORNIA.



FOR many years after the Louisiana Purchase the Mississippi and Missouri rivers made the boundary line of occupied country. Above St. Louis and between these rivers an encroachment on the wilderness had been made by the first generation of this century. From the confluence of the two great rivers, where the Missouri rolls its yellow floods into the clear waters of the Mississippi, the line of settlement extended along the farther shore of the great tributary only to the mouth of the Kansas. The solitude of the turbulent river in its long course through unknown lands and from remote mountains was broken only by the yearly visit of the Fur Company's steamer on its struggling way to their ports on its upper waters, one or two thousand miles above St. Louis. In those early days the Missouri had for me a mysterious character. I remember with what real excitement I watched for the point where it entered the Mississippi as one of the grand features of the continent. In imagination I saw the tribe of dusky warriors who peopled its upper shores and with whom I afterward became familiar. But when I lately crossed it in the dusk of evening the shapes that I saw were of the comrades with whom

I had traveled its solitary lands and who had now crossed the river of greatest mysteries.

Westward the Indian country stretched to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. On its southern edge were the detached settlements of Mexico, hundreds of years old and oblivious of progress. On the northern side were the British possessions. The great plains and beds of the Rocky Mountains made its eastern division. From the western foot of the Rocky Mountain ranges to the eastern foot of the Sierra Nevada lay the intervening Great Basin. Beyond was the "California Mountain," the trapper's name for the snowy Sierras. This broad region was unoccupied, unused, and trackless. The only traveled way across was the "Spanish Trail," which led along its southern border from the Missouri frontier to the old Mexican towns of the Del Norte, and thence across the "American Desert" to Los Angeles, in the southern part of what was then Upper California. This was the precarious road for trade between the American frontier and the Mexican settlements, subject always to Indian barbarities and the tribute exacted by the savages. Other than this were only the buffalo roads and the Indian trails.

[General Frémont here describes the country as it then appeared.]



Between the Missouri River and the Snowy Sierra the country was a wilderness which bore in its changes only the marks of nature. Indian tribes, more or less savage, sometimes rising into the dignity of nations, occupied the whole area, and all were at war. There were no white settlements, except rare offshoots of civilization where missionary devotion or American instinct for land penetrated its solitude to a short distance. Trading posts of the American and British fur companies were dotted about over this region, remote and disconnected. The British Fur Company, to protect its fur interests, discouraged immigration, but encouraged alliances between its employees and the Indian women, giving preference to the half-breeds. In contributing to the wants of the Indians these posts grew to be part of the Indian life, and so enjoyed immunity from all. For hunters and trappers they were places not only of barter, but also of refuge against the dangerous chances to which they were exposed. It was across this inhospitable wilderness that were to be traced the paths which made the approaches for the United States to Oregon and California.

To this region the Government had already directed its attention in the earlier part of the century. Events had forced upon it the question of future occupation and extension. Under the suggestions of a far-reaching statesmanship the great expedition of Lewis and Clarke in 1804 was followed by that of Long (1819-20), and, still later, by that of Pike (1831). But gradually the interests of expanding population required that our contiguous territory should be made more intimately known to the people, and in 1837-39 expeditions were sent to the northwestern prairies under the French astronomer and geographer Nicollet. Mr. Poinsett, then Secretary of War, had much to do with shaping these. I was then lieutenant of topographical engineers, and, having already been engaged in surveys of Indian country, I was chosen by him to accompany Nicollet as his assistant. These expeditions brought to common knowledge the great capacities of that region, then for all civilized uses unknown.

The house taken by Mr. Nicollet for making up the maps was at the foot of the Capitol, and became a meeting-place for all interested in Western affairs or in national expansion, and for men of large ideas. There came constantly Senator Benton and Senator Linn of Missouri, the sagem-like Governor Dodge of Iowa, my old friend Mr. Poinsett, and often the historian Bancroft, who was that winter in Washington.

A great interest had been kindled into life, and in the furtherance of it an expedition to

the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains was organized in the winter of 1841-42. This was the initial one of five expeditions planned by Senator Benton and me, and was in direct line with his long-cherished views for asserting the title of the United States to the undivided occupation of Oregon. General Harrison, as a military and Western man, would doubtless have favored this, as would his war secretary, John Bell of Tennessee. But his death put into power Mr. Tyler, who was unfriendly to disturbing the English occupation. Consequently, with wise distrust of Government interference, this expedition was directed, apparently, to aid emigration to the Pacific shores by searching for it the best lines of travel, and to select such situations for military posts as would best protect it. This expedition was to have been under the joint command of Mr. Nicollet and me, but Mr. Nicollet's health was giving way and he shortly after died. I had, in the mean time, become a member of Senator Benton's family. It was on New Year's evening of 1842 that he informed me I was to have sole command.

In June, 1842, I took the field with my party. The South Pass, which opens the way to the Columbia River Valley, was located in the Wind River Mountains, in which the four mighty rivers of the continent find their head springs. On the return of the expedition, in addition to the general map accompanying my report to the Government, maps of the route in atlas form were made, which pointed out for each day where the emigrants would find water, grass, and wood for their encampments. These accompanied the reports of the expedition, which were ordered to be published by Congress and were distributed for the use of the emigrants. Points were indicated where military posts were to be established for their protection. These proceedings by Congress, which showed a determination to protect the emigration into the valley of the Columbia, roused it into energetic movement, and the Western country, now fairly awake, sustained their representatives at Washington in their continued and bolder effort to secure the Pacific coast. This view opened up into our continent attracted great attention in England as well as among thinking Americans.

The winter months passed quickly in preparing these reports on the first expedition and in arranging the object of the second. The latter was organized and sent out under my command in 1843. In its course the expedition located various passes of the Rocky Mountains. I turned into the bordering territory of Mexico and established the position and character of Great Salt Lake. Thence I continued the line of the first expedition down



the line of the Columbia to Fort Vancouver, where my expedition connected, as ordered, with Wilkes's survey of the coast. I returned to the Dalles of the Columbia, and took up the examination of the coast mountains and worked my way southward along the flanges of the Pacific coast, searching the approaches into the Sierra Nevada for a railway passage to the ocean. A river, the "Buenaventura," indicated upon a map furnished me by the Hudson's Bay Company as breaking through the mountains, was found not to exist; and at length, by a rough winter passage, we forced our way across the great Sierra into what was then the shadowy land of California, soon to become a familiar name to the civilized world. By this passage the Central Pacific Railway now enters.

Descending the American Fork of the Sacramento River, we reached Sutter's Fort, in the "Great California Valley," early in March. A few weeks given to recruit the party from the exhaustion of their winter journey were utilized to obtain some knowledge of the bay and the dependent country. Its broad gates lay open to that trade of the Pacific for which we had been searching a way across the continent. The return expedition reached the frontier of Kansas, on the Missouri River, in August, 1844.

Meantime the covert struggle between England and the United States on the Oregon question had ripened into positive antagonism. In 1845 I was sent out at the head of a third and stronger expedition, for which the plans and scope had been matured on my return from the second. The geographical examinations proposed to be made were in greater part in Mexican territory. But in arranging this expedition the eventualities of war had to be taken into consideration. My private instructions were, if needed, to foil England by carrying the war now imminent with Mexico into its territory of California. At the fitting moment that territory was seized, and held by the United States.

During the winter preceding it the coming third expedition was an engrossing subject to Senator Benton and me, also to others who had interest in its scientific and its possible political results; largely so to General John A. Dix, then senator from New York, and to the Prussian Minister, Baron von Gerolt, an intimate friend of Humboldt, by whom he had been selected as Minister to Mexico. Baron von Gerolt had lived there some twenty years, was well acquainted with Mexican affairs, and had maintained active personal relations with men in power in that country. He was fully informed of their movements in this critical period. His intimacy with Senator Benton and his family and me had increased the in-

terest with which he had followed the course of the previous expeditions, of which he kept Humboldt informed fully, giving him also personal details. Now the Baron, knowing from his correspondents in Mexico that there was to be interference by that government which would place me in peril and break up the expedition if it should enter California, came to give us warning.

It may be well to remind the reader that Senator Benton, not only from his political associations, but from his position as chairman of the Senate military committee,—a post he held for twenty-eight years,—was fully informed of every military measure of the Government. Mr. Benton had many clients from among old Spanish families in Florida and Louisiana, and his knowledge of their language led to friendships with them. He had always held that towards Mexico our relations should be that of the great Republic aiding a neighboring state in its early struggles; he belonged with those who preferred the acquiring of Texas by treaty and purchase, not by war; this he opposed and denounced, and he now held the same views concerning California.

President Polk entered on his office in March, 1845, with a fixed determination to acquire California, if he could acquire it in an honorable and just manner. The President and Cabinet held it impossible for Mexico, situated as things were, to retain possession of California, and therefore it was right to negotiate with Mexico for it. This it was hoped to accomplish by peaceful negotiation; but if Mexico, in resenting our acceptance of the offer of Texas to join us, should begin a war with us, *then, by taking possession of the province*. Relations with Mexico soon became critical and threatened war, leaving no room for further negotiations.

The Secretary of State, Mr. Buchanan, and Senator Dix of New York came frequently to confer with Mr. Benton. Mr. Buchanan had discovered a leak in his department, and, not knowing the Spanish language himself, brought his confidential letters and documents from Mexico to be read to him by Mr. Dix and Mr. Benton, who knew the language well. For the whole of his senatorial term Mr. Dix was a near neighbor, a member of the military committee, and also personally intimate with Mr. Benton. In the security of Mr. Benton's library these despatches were read and discussed and many translations made for Mr. Buchanan's use by Mrs. Frémont and her elder sister. These frequent discussions in our homes among the men who controlled the action of the Government gave to me the advantage of knowing thoroughly what were its present wishes, and its intentions in the event of war.



Mr. George Ticknor Curtis, in his "Life of James Buchanan," gives, in chapters 21 and 22, Volume I., a compact and clear view of English policy towards the United States at this time. He says:

In the mean time Mr. Buchanan had not only to manage the relations between the United States and Mexico under circumstances of great delicacy, with firmness as well as conciliation, but also to keep a watchful eye upon the course of England and France in reference to this measure. It must be remembered that Mr. Buchanan had succeeded as Secretary of State to the management of the Oregon question with England, as well as to the completion of the arrangements for annexing Texas to the United States. He was informed both privately and officially, by the Ministers of the United States at London and Paris, of the danger of an intervention by England and France in the affairs of Mexico. . . .

In 1845, when the war between the United States and Mexico was impending, there was reason to believe that England was aiming to obtain a footing in the then Mexican province of California by an extensive system of colonization.<sup>1</sup> Acting under Mr. Buchanan's advice, President Polk, in his first annual message of December 2, 1845, not only reasserted the Monroe doctrine in general terms, but distinctly declared that no future European colony or dominion shall, with the consent of the United States, be planted or established on any part of the American continent. This declaration was confined to North America in order to make it emphatically applicable to California.

To Mr. Benton and other governing men at Washington it seemed reasonably sure that California would eventually fall to England or to the United States, and they were firmly resolved to hold it for the United States. The instructions early sent, and repeatedly insisted upon, to the officers commanding our Pacific squadron, gave specific orders *to be strictly followed in the event of war*. For me no distinct course or definite instruction could be laid down, but the probabilities were made known to me, as well as what to do when they became facts. The distance was too great for timely communication, but, failing this, *I was given discretion to act*. And for this, as soon as war was sure between Mexico and ourselves, Lieutenant Gillespie was despatched with instructions and with letters which, if intercepted when crossing Mexico, would convey no meaning to others, while to me they would be clear.

The first and second expeditions had their political as well as their geographical objects; both were successfully accomplished. The route to Oregon through to the mouth of the Columbia was definitely surveyed and mapped and its features were fully described for the use of the emigration. And the intended political effect was created of awakening the Govern-

ment's interest in and protection to the emigration to Oregon. The third expedition had also its underlying political intention. Its chief geographical feature was very interesting. It was to explore and open what had hitherto been believed to be an uninhabitable desert — thence to find nearer passes through to the Pacific.

Our journey was continuously in Mexican territory from the head of the Arkansas River, and through all of the Salt Lake Valley. I found the beds of mineral or rock salt where Humboldt had marked them on his map of New Spain, "Montagnes de Gemme," to the eastward of the Salt Lake. He had so placed them from the journal of Father Escalante, who towards the close of the last century attempted to penetrate the unknown country from Santa Fé in New Mexico to Monterey, California. Father Escalante did not get beyond the southeastern rim of the lake. It was believed to be a desert without water. None of my men knew anything of it; not even Walker or Carson. The Indians declared that no one had ever crossed the immediate plain of sage-brush stretching westward to the stony, black, unfertile mountains which ran in range north and south in jagged saw-teeth profile.

Early in November we reached a river to which I gave the name of Humboldt, who did me the honor to write and thank me for being the first to place his name on the map of the continent. Both the river and the mountain to which I gave his name are conspicuous objects, the river stretching across the basin to the foot of the Sierra Nevada, and the mountain standing out in greater bulk and length than its neighbors. Here I divided the party: the main body with Walker, who knew the southern part of the California mountains well, as their guide, had a secure southerly line in following the Humboldt River, which was to be surveyed by Mr. Kern. For myself I selected ten men, among them some of my Delawares. Leaving the main party, I started on a line westward directly across the basin. This journey determined a route passable for wagons from eight to nine hundred miles shorter than any known, and through a country abounding in game and fine grasses and wood.

Passing over details of the separation of the party and its wanderings and hardships on the Sierra Nevada, I come to my arrival at Sutter's Fort on the 9th of December, 1845. On the 15th of January, 1846, I set out with Mr. Leidesdorff, American vice-consul, for Monterey, and on arriving went directly to the house of our consul, Mr. Larkin. My purpose was to get leave to bring my party into the settlements in order to refit and to obtain the

<sup>1</sup> Verified by the great McNamara grant. See the last page of this article.



supplies that had now become necessary. All the camp equipment, the clothes of the men, and their saddles and horse gear, were either used up or badly in want of repair.

The next morning I made my official visits. I found the governor, Don Pio Pico, absent at Los Angeles. With Mr. Larkin I called upon the commanding general, Don José Castro, and upon the prefect, the alcalde, and Ex-Governor Alvarado. I informed the general and the other officers that I was engaged in surveying the nearest route from the United States to the Pacific Ocean. I informed them further that the object of the survey was geographical, being under the direction of the Bureau of Topographical Engineers, to which corps I belonged; that it was made in the interests of science and of commerce; and that the men composing the party were citizens and not soldiers. The permission asked for was readily granted, and during the two days I staid I was treated with every courtesy by the general and the other officers. By the middle of February my party was all reunited in the valley of San José, about thirteen miles south of the village of that name on the main road leading to Monterey, which was about sixty miles distant.

The place I had selected for rest and refitting was a vacant rancho called the "Laguna," belonging to Mr. Fisher. I remained here until the 22d, occupied in purchasing horses, obtaining supplies, and thoroughly refitting the party. It was the delightful spring season of a most delightful climate, and many Californians visited the camp, and very friendly relations grew up with us. I established the rate of the chronometer and made this encampment a new point of departure.

March 1 we resumed our progress southward along the coast, and March 3 encamped at the Hartwell rancho. We were now passing Monterey, which was about twenty-five miles distant. The Salinas Valley lay outside of the more occupied parts of the country, and I was on my way to a pass opening into the San Joaquin Valley at the head of a western branch of the Salinas River.

In the afternoon the quiet of the camp was disturbed by the sudden appearance of a cavalry officer with two men. This officer, Lieutenant Chavez, was abrupt and disposed to be rude. He brought me peremptory letters from the general and the prefect, ordering me forthwith out of the department and threatening force if

<sup>1</sup> This was the course of action decided upon in Mexico of which Baron von Gerolt had information and of which he had given us warning in Washington. In connection also see Bancroft's letter to Buchanan dated Washington, August 7, 1845.

<sup>2</sup> That we were *bandoleros* (highwaymen, or freebooters).

I should not instantly comply with the order.<sup>1</sup> I desired the officer to carry as my answer that I peremptorily refused to comply with the order, which was an insult to my Government. My men, like myself, were roused by the offense, and were eager to support any course I saw fit to adopt.

Near by was a mountain called the Gavilan (or Hawk's) Peak. Early the next morning I moved camp, following the wood-road to the summit, and camped in a convenient position. It afforded wood, water, and grass, gave a view over the surrounding country, including the Salinas plain and the valley of San José, and opened in case of need a retreat to the San Joaquin. Here we built a rough but strong fort of logs. A tall sapling was prepared, and on it the American flag was raised amid the cheers of the men. The raising of this flag proved a premonition of its permanent raising as the flag over California.

I remained in possession, the flag flying, for three days, during which I received information from Mr. Larkin, our consul, and from citizens of what was going on below. Late in the afternoon of the second day we discovered a body of cavalry coming up our wood-road; with about forty men I went quickly down this road to where a thicket among the trees made a good ambush, and waited for them. They came to within a few hundred yards of us and halted, and after some consultation turned back. Had they come on they would have had to come within a few paces of our rifles.

The protecting favor all civilized governments accord to scientific expeditions imposed on me, even here, corresponding obligations, and having given Castro three days' time in which to execute his threat, I slowly withdrew. Besides, I always kept in mind the object of the Government to obtain possession of California, and would not let a proceeding which seemed personal put obstacles in the way. In a letter written soon after to Mrs. Frémont, telling of this, I made an allusion she would fully comprehend.

SACRAMENTO RIVER,

Latitude 49°, April 1, 1846.

... My sense of duty did not permit me to fight them, but we retired slowly and growlingly: they had between three and four hundred men and three pieces of artillery, and were raising the country against me on a false and scandalous proclamation.<sup>2</sup> I had my own men, and many Americans would have joined me, but I refrained from a solitary hostile or improper act, for I did not dare to compromise the United States, against which appearances would have been strong.

The following extracts from the report of the United States consul, Mr. Thomas O.



Larkin, to the Secretary of State belong to this subject. Mr. Larkin wrote:

MONTEREY, March 9, 1846.

SIR: . . . There will be two or three hundred men collected to-morrow with the intention to attack his (Frémont's) camp. Captain Frémont has about fifty men. Neither himself nor his men have any fears respecting the result, yet be the result for or against him it may prove a disadvantage to the resident Americans in California. . . . I have at some risk despatched out two couriers to the camp with duplicate letters, and this letter I sent to Santa Barbara in expectation of finding a vessel bound to Mazatlan. Having had one-half of my hospital expenses of 1844 cut off, and know not why, and even my bill for a flag, I do not feel disposed to hazard much for Government, though the life of Captain Frémont and party may need it. I hardly know how to act. I have only received one letter (of June) from the department for the year 1845. *General Castro says he has just received by the "Hannab" direct and specific orders not to allow Captain Frémont to enter California.*<sup>1</sup>

We made a stop of a week near Sutter's Fort to recruit the animals on the fine range, and then continued to travel slowly towards the Oregon line. One night I was standing alone by my camp-fire and thinking these things over, and how best to meet the expectations intrusted to me in case of war, when suddenly my ear caught the faint sound of horses' feet, and as I listened there emerged from the darkness into the circle of the firelight two horsemen riding slowly, as though horse and man were fatigued by traveling. They proved to be two men from Sutter's whom I knew, named Neal and Seigler. They had ridden nearly a hundred miles in two days, having been sent forward by a United States officer, Lieutenant A. H. Gillespie, who was on my trail with despatches for me. He had been sent to California by the Government across Mexico to Mazatlan, and had letters for me. He had been directed to find me wherever I might be. Accordingly on landing from the United States steamer *Cyane* he had started from Monterey, and had been looking for me on the Sacramento. Learning at Sutter's Fort that I had gone up the valley, he had made up a small party and had followed my trail for six hundred miles, the latter part of the way through

great dangers from Modoc and Tlamath Indians.<sup>2</sup>

Then I knew the hour had come. Neal knew the danger from these Indians, and his party becoming alarmed and my trail being fresh, Lieutenant Gillespie had sent forward Neal and Seigler on their best horses to overtake me and inform me of their situation.

I selected ten of the best men, Kit Carson, Stepp, Dick Owens, Godey, Basil Lajeunesse, and Crane with four other Delawares, and at early dawn we took the backward trail, and after a ride of about forty-five miles we met Lieutenant Gillespie and greeted him warmly. It was now eleven months since any tidings had reached me.

Lieutenant Gillespie informed me that he had left Washington in November (1845), under orders from the President and the Secretary of the Navy, and had been directed to reach California by the shortest route through Mexico to Mazatlan. With many detentions on the way he had followed his instructions to find me wherever I might be, and under Neal's guidance had now overtaken me.

It was a singular coincidence that I was informed by Neal of Gillespie's coming on the 8th of May and met him on the 9th—the days on which were fought the first battles of the Mexican war, Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma.

Lieutenant Gillespie brought a letter of introduction from the Secretary of State, Mr. Buchanan, and letters and papers from Senator Benton and family. The letter from the Secretary of State was directed to me in my private or citizen capacity, and, though seeming nothing beyond an introduction, it accredited the bearer, and in connection with circumstances and place of delivery it indicated a purpose in sending it. From the letter I learned nothing, but it was intelligibly explained to me by my previous knowledge, by the letter from Senator Benton, and by communications from Lieutenant Gillespie.<sup>3</sup>

This officer informed me also that he was directed by the Secretary of State to acquaint me with his instructions to the consular agent, Mr. Larkin, which were to ascertain the disposition of the California people and conciliate

<sup>1</sup> Larkin was evidently not deep in the confidences of the Government.

<sup>2</sup> These Indians became known to the whole country in 1873 by their treacherous assassination, when in council, of General Canby and his command.

<sup>3</sup> In a discussion in the Senate immediately after the close of the Mexican war Senator Badger of North Carolina said: "We next find him in Oregon, where he is overtaken by a messenger, an officer of the Government, who bore him a letter, and—there is no use in concealing it, sir—although it purported to be a mere letter of introduction, it was in reality an official

document, accrediting the bearer of it to Colonel Frémont, with a view to the union of the two in devising some means to counteract the designs of the British emissaries. Captain Gillespie, the officer to whom I allude, in his evidence before the committee on military affairs states that he was directed to convey the order of the Government to Colonel Frémont, to watch the interests of the United States in California. This, sir, was the purport of Captain Gillespie's mission; and so soon as the communication was made to him Colonel Frémont returned to California, under the order of his Government, and by its express authority."



their feelings in favor of the United States.<sup>1</sup> This idea was no longer practicable, as actual war was inevitable and immediate; moreover, it was in conflict with our own instructions. We dropped this idea from our minds, but falling on others less informed, it came dangerously near losing us California. The letter of Senator Benton, while apparently only one of friendship and family details, was a trumpet giving no uncertain note. Read by the light of many conversations and discussions with himself and other governing men in Washington, it clearly made me know that I was required by the Government to find out any foreign schemes in relation to California, and to counteract them so far as was in my power. His letters made me know distinctly that at last the time had come when England must not get a foothold; that we *must be first*. I was to *act*, discreetly but positively.

The thread of my narrative must now be broken here to introduce the following evidence.

Some years ago, when publishing a volume of memoirs, I wished to be especially accurate on the subject of Lieutenant Gillespie's coming to me from the Government. Gillespie had been directed to commit his despatches to memory before reaching Vera Cruz, then destroy them. I asked Mr. George Bancroft, who as an accurate and reliable historian kept the data of this California period, which was solely in his charge, for his recollections, and he was so kind as to take much trouble to verify the subject from his record. He sent me full and distinct memoranda to use, marked "Not to be printed." With his consent, I have used the following extracts from these official and personal papers; now such of them as are needed here are given to show how subsequent events were governed by these instructions brought me by Gillespie. They were to be known only to Gillespie and myself. Commodore Sloat had his separate, repeated, definite orders.<sup>2</sup>

FROM MEMORANDUM BY THE HONORABLE  
GEORGE BANCROFT (SECRETARY OF THE  
NAVY), MADE FOR GENERAL FRÉMONT.

NEWPORT, R. I., 2d September, 1886.

Very soon after March 4, 1845, Mr. Polk one day, when I was alone with him, in the clearest manner and with the utmost energy declared to me what were to be the four great measures of his administration. He succeeded in all the four, and one of the four was the acquisition of California for the

United States. This it was hoped to accomplish by peaceful negotiation; but if Mexico, in resenting our acceptance of the offer of Texas to join us, should begin a war with us, then by taking possession of the province. As we had a squadron in the North Pacific, but no army, measures for the carrying out this design fell to the Navy Department. The Secretary of the Navy, who had good means of gaining news as to the intentions of Mexico, and had reason to believe that its government intended to make war upon us, directed timely preparation for it.

In less than four months after the inauguration, on the 24th day of June, 1845, he sent orders to the commanding officer of the United States naval forces on the Pacific that, if he should ascertain that Mexico had declared war against the United States, he should at once possess himself of the port of San Francisco and such other ports as his force might permit. At the same time he was instructed to encourage the inhabitants of California "to adopt a course of neutrality." The Secretary of the Navy repeated these orders in August and in October, 1845, and in February, 1846. On one of these occasions (October, 1845) he sent the orders by the hands of an accomplished and thoroughly trustworthy officer of the navy<sup>3</sup> as a messenger, well instructed in the designs of the department and with the purposes of the administration, so far as they related to California. Captain Frémont having been sent originally on a peaceful mission to the West by way of the Rocky Mountains, it had become necessary to give him warning of the new state of affairs and the designs of the President. The officer who had had charge of the despatches from the Secretary of the Navy to Commodore Sloat, and who had purposely been made acquainted with their import, accordingly made his way to Captain Frémont, who thus became acquainted with the state of affairs and the purposes of the Government. Being absolved from any duty as an explorer, Captain Frémont was left to his duty as an officer in the service of the United States, with the further authoritative knowledge that the Government intended to take possession of California.

The Navy Department had no cause for apprehension that the movement upon California would lead to a *conflict* with any European power, and yet it was held that the presence of armed ships of any other power in the California harbors before annexation might be inconvenient. Therefore no orders were given to use force against any European powers; but the utmost celerity was used by the Navy Department in conveying to the commander of the American naval forces on the California coast orders in the event of war by Mexico to take instant possession of San Francisco and as many other places in California as the means at his disposal would permit. The information which the department possessed made it reasonably certain that if the United States commander in California should act with due celerity on receiving his orders, California

<sup>1</sup> See "Californiana" in the present number for the text of this despatch.—EDITOR.

<sup>2</sup> Undue value has been given by a few writers to the despatch sent by the Secretary of State to the consul at Monterey. It could in no way affect other and different instructions from the President and the Secretary of the Navy, or Secretary of War, who alone could govern the actions of officers. It would seem

needless to state so simple a fact, but it appears the writers do not know that the different branches of the Government cannot interfere with each other; and though the President, as commander-in-chief, commands both army and navy, their officers are otherwise solely under the orders of their respective departments.—J. B. F.

<sup>3</sup> Gillespie.



would be occupied before any European government or any armed ship in the Pacific could be in motion.

NEWPORT, R. I., 3d September, 1886.

My motive in sending so promptly the order to take possession was not from any fear that England would resist, but from the apprehension that the presence of an English man-of-war in San Francisco harbor would have a certain degree of inconvenience, and that it was much better for us to be masters there before the ship should arrive; and my orders reached there very long before any English vessel was off California. The delay of Sloat made a danger, but still he took possession of San Francisco before the British ship arrived. . . . After your interview with Gillespie you were absolved from any orders as an explorer, and became an officer of the American army, warned by your Government of your new danger, against which you were bound to defend yourself; and it was made known to you on the authority of the Secretary of the Navy that a great object of the President was to obtain possession of California. If I had been in your place I should have considered myself bound to do what I saw I could to promote the purpose of the President. You were alone; no Secretary of War to appeal to; he was thousands of miles off; and yet it was officially made known to you that your country was at war; and it was so made known expressly to guide your conduct. It was further made known to you that the acquisition of California was become a chief object of the President. If you had letters to that effect from the Secretary of War, you had your warrant. If you were left without orders from the War Department, certainly you learned from the Secretary of the Navy that the President's plan of war included the taking possession of California. The truth is, no officer of the Government had anything to do with California but the Secretary of the Navy so long as I was in the Cabinet. . . .

With this necessary digression to make clear my subsequent acts, I return to our camp of May 9 (1849) on the Tlamath Lake. We had talked late, but now, tired out, Gillespie was asleep. I sat far into the night, alone, reading my home letters by the fire, and thinking. I saw the way opening clear before me, and a grand opportunity was now presented to realize fully the far-sighted views which would make the Pacific Ocean the western boundary of the United States. I resolved to move forward on the opportunity, return forthwith to the Sacramento Valley, and bring all the influence I could command. This decision was the first step in the conquest of California.

[General Frémont here relates an attack upon his camp the same night by Tlamath Indians resulting in the death of three of his men, his reunion with the main party, his retaliation upon the Tlamaths, and his return southward.]

On the 24th of May we reached again Lassen's (near Sutter's Fort), and in the evening I wrote to Senator Benton a guarded letter. Until the arrival of Commodore Sloat my own movements depended on circumstances,

and of them I could say but little. But I told him of the arrival of Lieutenant Gillespie, of the Tlamath fighting and the men we had lost, and how we fought that nation from one border to the other, "and have ever since been fighting until our entrance into the lower Sacramento Valley," and in phrases he would understand let him know I was to go the whole length of California; why, he knew.

Gillespie's arrival at Sutter's, and his taking the men to help him overtake me, had quickly spread among the people, and I found the settlers anxiously awaiting the result of his risky journey, and hoping to see me return with him. The Government vessels at San Francisco, the coming of a Government messenger to follow and find me, together with thick-coming rumors of war, were more than enough for our intelligent, quick-witted Americans. I found myself welcomed, and saw I should find support in carrying out my instructions.

The California authorities, under their orders from Mexico, had on their side given offense and alarm to old settlers and the incoming immigration—requiring all foreigners to be naturalized or expelled,<sup>1</sup> interfering with long acquired property rights, and fomenting disturbances by the Indians. I saw we must meet these Indian menaces and make them realize that Castro was far and I was near. And I intended to leave no enemy behind to destroy my strength by cutting off my supply of cattle and breaking communication with the incoming emigrants. So we raided all their rancherias on the western bank of the Sacramento, finding the men with feathers in their heads, faces painted black, and on the midst of their war ceremonies, and we did this so effectually as to put an end to the burning of wheatfields and intended attack on whites. It was a rude but necessary measure to protect the whites.

Then I began my preparations for carrying out my instructions. Except myself, then and for many months afterward, there was no other officer of the army in California. The citizen party under my command was made up of picked men, and though small in number was a formidable nucleus for frontier warfare, and many of its members commanded the confidence of the immigration. I wrote to Captain Montgomery, commanding the United States ship *Portsmouth*, then at Yerba Buena [San Francisco], asking for needed supplies from his ship's stores. With this was also an

<sup>1</sup> Proclamation of the 30th of April, 1846, which was forwarded by Don Manuel Castro, prefect of Monterey, to his sub-prefect in San Francisco, and transmitted by the latter to the United States vice-consul at that port, Leidesdorff, to be by him made known to the American settlers.—J. B. F.



official letter from Lieutenant Gillespie,—who was well known to him,—which ended as follows:

Hoping you will be able to make the supply, I will only add that in the event of the party receiving from you the assistance requested, you may be sure the same will not only be highly appreciated by the President and departments, and confer an obligation upon Captain Frémont and myself, but will receive the heartfelt thanks of some of the bravest and most determined men, who are happy in suffering privations while serving their country with unsurpassed zeal and fidelity.

ARCHIE H. GILLESPIE,  
*First Lieut., U. S. Marine Corps, and special and confidential Agent for California.*

Gillespie visited Captain Montgomery on his ship, and brought me in answer all I required—lead, powder, percussion caps, as well as camp supplies, and fifteen hundred dollars, to be repaid by an order on the proper department in Washington.<sup>1</sup>

Soon after, when urgently appealed to for powder to sustain his party by Mr. William B. Ide, who had raised the flag of independence, the Grizzly Bear flag, at Sonoma, Captain Montgomery, while answering with perfect courtesy, had to decline.

Permit me, sir, in response to your call for powder for the use of your party, to say that I am here as a representative of a government at peace (so far as I know) with Mexico and her province of California, having in charge the interests and security of the commerce and citizens of the United States, lawfully engaged in their pursuits, and have no right or authority to furnish munitions of war, or in any manner take sides with any political party, or even indirectly identify myself or official name with any popular movement (whether of foreign or native residents of the country), and thus, sir, must decline giving the required aid.

JOHN B. MONTGOMERY, *Commander.*<sup>2</sup>

In answer to urgent appeals made by the settlers I went to Sonoma on the 25th of June. On what I learned there I hurried back to head off advancing troops under De la Torre, a Mexican cavalry officer, but found he had retreated to Saucelito. At Saucelito I found an American vessel, the *Moscow*, Captain Phelps, of Worcester, Massachusetts. Before daylight next morning he was at the landing with one of his large boats. I took twelve of my men, my best shots; Captain Phelps and his boat's crew were excited and pleased to aid in the work on hand. On his ship were a quantity of rat-tail files, with which we supplied ourselves. It appeared

<sup>1</sup> See also "Montgomery and Frémont" in "Californiana," THE CENTURY for March.—EDITOR.

<sup>2</sup> While Montgomery could not aid a citizen movement, he knew through Gillespie enough of my secret instructions to realize that I represented the army and the flag.

This name I placed on the map made by me in June, 1848, for the United States Senate.

that there was little or no guard maintained at the fort, which was at the point on the southern side of the gate which makes the entrance to the bay, and to which I gave the name of Golden Gate.<sup>3</sup> Pulling across the strait or avenue of water which leads in from the gate, we reached Fort Point in the gray dawn and scrambled up the steep bank in time to see horsemen escaping towards Yerba Buena. We promptly spiked the guns,—fourteen,—nearly all long brass Spanish pieces. The measures which I had taken and the retreat of De la Torre freed from all Mexican authority the territory north of the bay of San Francisco from the sea to Sutter's Fort.

On the fourth day of July I was back in Sonoma, where the day was celebrated by salutes, and in the evening by a ball. During that and the following day the settlers were organized into a battalion consisting of four companies, numbering 224 men. The force with which I had recently been acting was 160 men. It was now necessary to concentrate the elements of this force. Naturally, the people desired me to take charge of it. Its existence was due to my presence in the valley, and upon my withdrawal it would have collapsed with absolute ruin to the settlers. They saw the coöperation between me and the naval forces, and Carson, and some of my most trusted men, had enough information from me to assure them of my having the support of the Government. Accordingly, the settlers having met to offer me this command, I accepted it. In accepting I urged them to remember the responsibility which I had assumed as an officer of the United States army, and said I trusted to them to do nothing which would discredit it, themselves, or their country's flag.

This placed the settlers' movement under our flag, and made the necessary condition which both Mexico and foreign nations were bound to respect under the law of nations.

I sent out parties for horses to mount the battalion, and bring in cattle for their support.<sup>4</sup> The fine immigration coming in was full of enthusiasm for the new and lovely land of California. A picked body of a hundred men was also hastening down from Oregon, and we only waited the arrival of Commodore Sloat.

On the 10th the express from Captain Montgomery roused us to enthusiasm by the news that Commodore Sloat had raised the flag at Monterey, that he had hoisted one at Yerba

<sup>4</sup> The value of these and all other supplies taken during my operations in California was afterward estimated by a board of officers at Washington, appointed by the Government, and the estimated value was appropriated by Congress and paid to the respective owners. Sutter also was paid for the use of his fort.



Buena, and sent one to Sonoma to be hoisted at that place. Montgomery also sent one with the request to have it hoisted at Sutter's Fort, and accordingly, with great satisfaction, I had this done at sunrise the next morning with a salute of twenty-one guns and amid general rejoicing. This paralyzed all opposition.

The following letter from Commodore Sloat to Commander Montgomery and myself shows the reason why I now marched to Monterey.

FLAGSHIP "SAVANNAH,"

MONTEREY, July 6, 1846.

SIR: Since I wrote you last evening, I have determined to hoist the flag of the United States at this place to-morrow, as I would prefer being sacrificed for doing too much than too little. If you consider you have sufficient force, or if Frémont will join you, you will hoist the flag of the United States at Yerba Buena, or any other place, and take possession in the name of the United States of the fort and that portion of the country. I am very anxious to know if Frémont will cooperate with us. Mr. Larkin is writing to him by the launch. Please put him in possession of this letter as soon as possible.

A long letter from Commodore Sloat to me, dated July 9, followed, in which he requested me to bring my force to Monterey, saying, "I am extremely anxious to see you."

Going down to Monterey by way of the Salinas Valley, we gave on the way a marching salute to the Gavilan Peak, where four months before we had hoisted the flag.

It was a day of excitement when we entered Monterey (July 19). Four of our men-of-war were lying in the harbor, and also the *Collingwood*, 80 guns, flagship of Admiral Sir George Seymour. She had come in on the 16th, and on her arrival the vessels of the American squadron had been signaled to prepare for action. I learned from Midshipman Beale, who was on shore at the time with a party building a block-house on the hill, that the signal was also made recalling to their ships all officers and men, and when he reached the *Congress* he found the men at quarters.

Immediately I went on board and waited on Commodore Sloat. I was accompanied by Lieutenant Gillespie. Commodore Sloat was glad to see me. He seemed excited over the gravity of the situation, in which he was the chief figure, and now wholly responsible for its consequences. After a few words he informed me that he had applied to Lieutenant Gillespie, whom he knew to be an agent of the Government, for his authority; but it had been declined. He then asked to see my instructions. "I do not know by what authority you are acting; I can do nothing. Lieutenant Gillespie has told me nothing; he came to Mazatlan and I sent him to Monterey, but I know nothing. I want to know by what authority you are acting."

I informed him that *I had been expected to act, and had acted, largely on my own responsibility, and without written authority from the Government to justify hostilities.*

He was greatly disturbed by this, and distinctly told me that in raising the flag at Monterey he had acted upon the faith of my operations in the north.

He had expected to find that I had been acting under such *written* authority as would support his action in raising the flag. He was so discouraged and offended that he terminated the interview abruptly, quitting the cabin and leaving me. I should have been glad to explain, and to satisfy him that the taking of California would exactly meet the wishes of the Government, but he closed his mind against anything short of "the written paper." He declined to see me again; and, as a much younger officer, I could not urge myself upon one of his rank and present command. Knowing the instructions to all officers on the coast, I could not suppose that the officer commanding the squadron was relying on me to justify his action.

I had turned back into the California valley two months before full of one purpose. I was so inspired with watchful excitement that the nights were almost as wakeful as the days. I saw California dangerously near to becoming an appanage of England. I knew that the men who understood the future of our country, and those who at this time ruled its destinies and were the Government, regarded the California coast as the boundary fixed by nature to round off our national domain. It was naturally separated from Mexico, and events pointed to its sure and near political separation. I had left Washington with full knowledge of their wishes, and, as far as could then be settled, their purposes. And I was relied on to do all in my power if opportunity offered to further their designs. When I was notified that the time had come, and I had my warrant, I turned back with great joy and the resolution to give my country the benefit of every changing circumstance. Now in two months the change was accomplished, and my work was done.

[The account of the night preceding the raising of the flag at Monterey is best told by Ex-Governor Rodman Price<sup>1</sup> of New Jersey (then an officer of the squadron under Commodore Sloat), and who had a deciding part in the raising of the flag. After stating that the *Cyane* was ordered to convey Gillespie to California or Oregon and land him at some port where he could overtake Frémont, he details the hesitation and final refusal of Commodore Sloat to give aid to Frémont (July 5); and although aware of active hostilities with Mexico Sloat also ordered Montgomery to "obey strictly our treaty stipulations with

<sup>1</sup> Governor Price had been a guest at the White House just before joining the squadron, and had been told by President Polk of his plans.



Mexico." He gives in detail his visit at night to Sloat, and how upon his presentation of the case Sloat recalled his refusal to aid, and not only ordered Montgomery to furnish all the supplies and all the aid Frémont required, but also on receipt of the order to raise the flag immediately at San Francisco. . . . The prompt decisive action taken by Frémont before Sloat raised the flag forced Sloat to do so, and that was the great cause which conspired to the acquisition of California.—J. B. F.]

In order not to embarrass the Government if it should find it best to disavow any act of mine, I sent to Mr. Benton, when I wrote to Montgomery for supplies, my resignation of my commission in the army. This he was to use in case of necessity. The date, May 24, 1846, would leave the sole responsibility on me should any political necessity require the Government hereafter to disavow any act of mine. But it was never used. The Government accepted, and paid for, all my acts on its behalf.

Referring to Commodore Sloat's failure to raise promptly the United States flag as ordered, his department sent a severe letter which shows how the situation was misinterpreted by Sloat and how the delay was regarded by the Government. It closes with the words:

The Department does not charge you with disobedience of orders. It willingly believes in the purity of your intentions. But your anxiety not to do wrong has led you into a most unfortunate and unwarranted inactivity.

Very respectfully yours,

GEORGE BANCROFT.

Days of indecision followed my interview with Commodore Sloat, July 19, and finally, in company with Gillespie, I went on board the *Congress* to talk over the situation with Commodore Stockton. I said that in the course of the night I would decide whether I should return to the United States or remain in the territory. 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 future intentions. Meantime he asked me to remain.

On the 24th of July, Commodore Stockton received full command, succeeding Sloat. He asked me to join him with the men under me, and act with him and under him, I on land, he by water, as long as he was in possession of the territory. 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. Knowing, however, that the men under me would go only with me, I accepted Stockton's proposal to take service under him as long as he required my services; and I adhered to

this engagement at the cost of my commission in the army. As I was an officer in the army, he could not command me. Gillespie was also independent, being on special service. Stockton therefore asked us to volunteer. There was no longer for me the clear initiative. The new situation was forced upon me, and for the general good I gave up my independent position which had led only to success, and in that way became later involved with the rivalries of Stockton and Kearney, who threw upon me the decision they could not make themselves, as to which should command. Each gave me the order to act under him. I remained with Stockton as I had agreed. When Stockton sailed for Mexico I was made to feel the revenge of Kearney.

But before that I had led the battalion a second time to the south; carefully making the people sure of our good-will and protection, and arriving near Los Angeles in good time to make with the insurgent Californians there a treaty of peace. They had been irritated by injudicious and petty restrictions which many resented. Their fine horsemanship, their inherent love of combat, and their great familiarity with the country enabled them to carry on a guerrilla warfare as harassing as it was successful. They were succeeding in confining their enemy near his ships when we bore down on them inland. This, and the friendship of some leading Californians, brought about a capitulation to me, arranged during Christmas week at Santa Barbara and completed on the plains of Cahuenga, January 13, 1847. This was signed by me as Military Commandant representing the United States, and by Don Andres Pico, Commander-in-Chief of the Californians.

With this treaty of Cahuenga hostilities ended and California was left in our possession, to be finally secured to us by the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, thus becoming ours by purchase as well as by conquest and by treaty.

As part of the plan for putting California in English hands, Governor Pio Pico issued a grant to Father McNamara [a British subject] on the 7th of July, but the raising of our flag at Monterey that day ended Mexican authority. Both the religious and the civil authorities in the city of Mexico had considered and indorsed this colonization plan; and as the guest of the English consul in the city of Mexico McNamara was presumably in relations also with English officials. The consent of Mexican authorities having been secured to the granting of nearly fourteen million acres, Father McNamara was brought by the English war frigate *Juno*<sup>1</sup> to Santa Barbara in California,

<sup>1</sup> Contrary to custom, the English admiral sent the *Juno* to sea on this occasion without the formality of informing the American commanding officer of her destination.



and lost no time in making his application for the vast colonization grant based on the expressed condition that it was to keep out Americans, and it was immediately granted by Governor Pico. I took possession of the archives in August and later turned them over to General Kearney. This colonization grant I had already sent to the Government in Washington as proof of that concert of action of which Mr. Buchanan had been informed between England and Mexico.<sup>1</sup> It granted all the lands from the bay of San Francisco to the San Gabriel Mission near Los Angeles on the length of the San Joaquin River, the river and the Sierra Nevada being boundaries—13,500,000 acres. The colony was to number three thousand British families, one square league to be assigned to each family. When Admiral Seymour left, about ten days after his arrival, he took Father McNamara with him on the flag-ship *Collingwood*. The English admiral would not admit that California as yet belonged to the United States, and so instructed the English consuls in their different ports.

In closing this paper the following letter of George Bancroft, the historian, referring to errors in a "History of the Pacific States," by Hubert Howe Bancroft [no relation of George Bancroft], will prove of interest. The points noted are from a review of the "History" contained in the New York "Sun" of August 29, 1886, and the errors mentioned have been repeated by other equally unreliable historians.

<sup>1</sup> See Curtis's "Life of James Buchanan," Vol. I., chapters 21 and 22.

Among pointed examples of the "blunders" referred to by George Bancroft in this letter are these statements:

. . . There is conclusive evidence that Frémont did not act in pursuance of instructions secret or inferential from the United States Government, and the Pathfinder is accordingly set down as a mere filibuster. . . . The conquest of California was the outcome of accident and of fitful irreflective effort rather than any forecast of its superlative importance. . . .

NEWPORT, R. I., September 6, 1886.

DEAR MR. FRÉMONT: My letter of Friday last crossed your inclosure to me and answers it in advance. I return the California newspaper [New York "Sun" of 29 August], as enjoined by you.

Yours very truly,

GEO. BANCROFT.

I add all wishes for the happiness of Mrs. Frémont, and severe justice to those who do her wrong or wrong any one she loves. How can a man commit such blunders as are found in the New York "Sun" of Sunday, August 29? I thought the paper Mrs. Frémont sent me was a San Francisco paper; can it be our New York "Sun"? If so it is, I shall get a copy of it.

DEAR MRS. FRÉMONT. P. S.—As I close this letter yours of Saturday arrives. If any one contests anything stated by me to you, I am ready to be referred to as its voucher.

Your most truly, G. B.

NEWPORT, 6 September, 1886.

The foregoing article has been edited by Mrs. Jessie Benton Frémont from the manuscript and notes of

*John Charles Frémont.*

## CALIFORNIANA.

### The Official Policy for the Acquisition of California.

IN the recent papers in THE CENTURY on the seizure of California frequent mention has been made of the instructions brought across Mexico by Archibald H. Gillespie, "Confidential Agent of the United States for California," and communicated by him to Larkin and to Frémont. Gillespie's own testimony before a congressional committee in 1848 was to the effect that, on meeting Frémont in the Tlamath region he showed him the duplicate of a despatch from Secretary Buchanan to Consul Larkin. He does not mention any special instructions to Frémont from Secretary Bancroft, or from any other member of the Administration. The Government's policy, as outlined in the despatch to Larkin, is in full accord with the tenor of all the despatches from Secretary Bancroft to Commodore Sloat, both in 1845 and in 1846. A personal examination of all the secret records of the Navy Department bearing upon the seizure of California has shown us nothing in conflict with the conciliatory tone of the despatch to Larkin. On the history of the Larkin despatch we refer to the article by Professor Royce in "Californiana" for September, 1890. On Frémont's own original view of the nature of his instructions, we refer to his letter to

Montgomery of June 16, 1846, as copied in "Californiana" in the March number, under the title "Montgomery and Frémont." In the present number we give *in extenso* General Frémont's own narrative of the events in controversy. Following is the full text of the despatch from Buchanan to Larkin.—EDITOR.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,  
WASHINGTON, October 17, 1845.

THOMAS O. LARKIN, Esq.,  
*Consul of the United States at Monterey.*

SIR: I feel much indebted to you for the information which you have communicated to the Department from time to time in relation to California. The future destiny of that country is a subject of anxious solicitude for the Government and people of the United States. The interests of our commerce and our whale fisheries on the Pacific Ocean demand that you should exert the greatest vigilance in discovering and defeating any attempt which may be made by foreign governments to acquire a control over that country. In the contest between Mexico and California we can take no part, unless the former should commence hostilities against the United States; but should California assert and maintain her independence, we shall render her all the kind offices in our power, as a sister Republic. This Government has no ambitious aspirations to gratify and no desire to extend our Federal system over more territory than we already possess, unless by the free and spontaneous wish of the independent people of adjoining territories. The exercise of compul-