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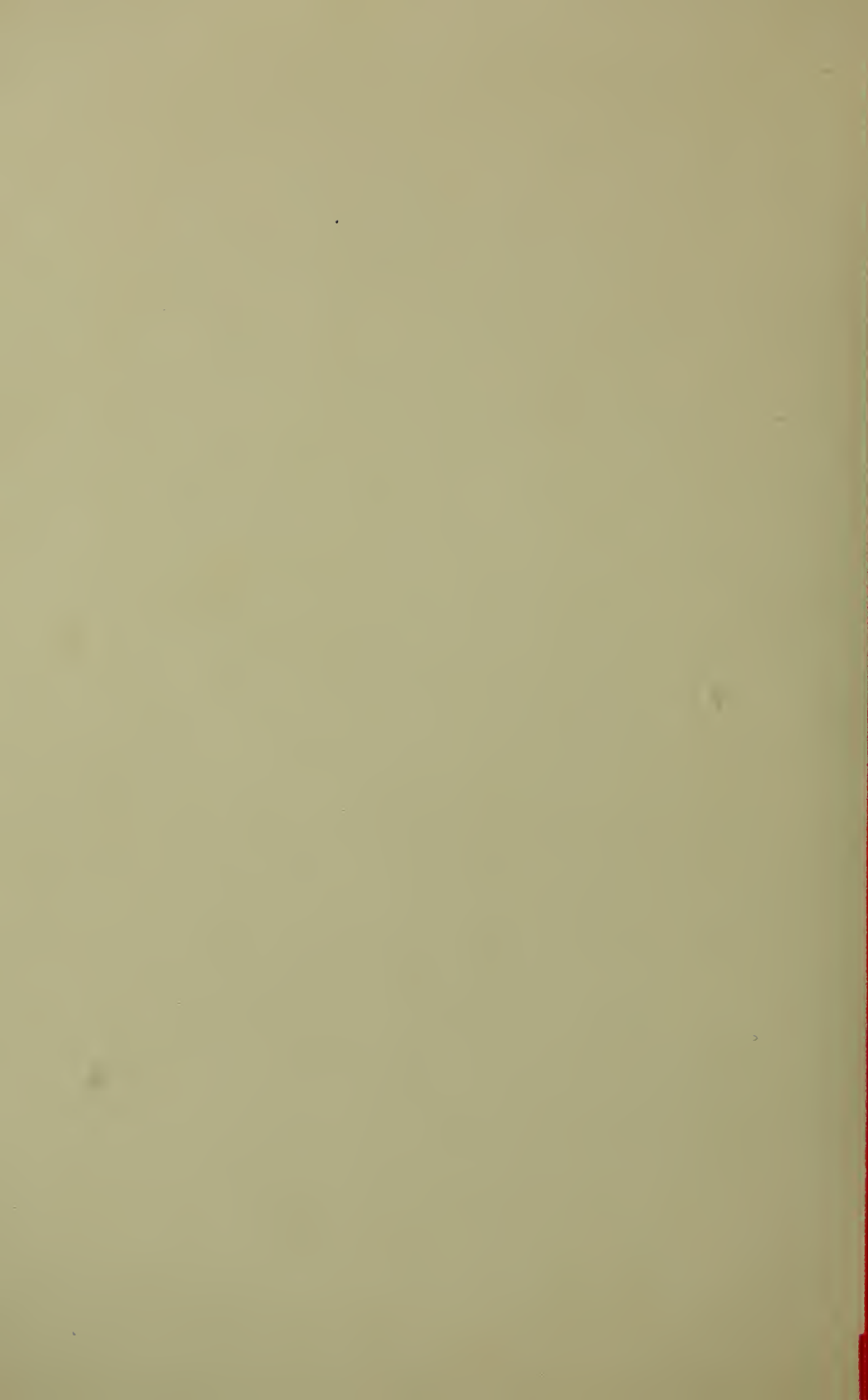
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# POINSETT'S MISSION TO MEXICO

BY

WILLIAM R. MANNING

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## POINSETT'S MISSION TO MEXICO: A DISCUSSION OF HIS INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS

The first United States minister to Mexico was Joel R. Poinsett. To the ordinary mind, however, his chief title to fame does not rest on his filling this or a number of other official posts; but on the fact that he made known to the world the beautiful Christmas flower which in honor of him was named "poinsettia." But even this discovery was a result of his diplomatic appointment; for it was while on his mission to Mexico that he observed it and brought it to the attention of botanists. It is the purpose of this article to study only the minister's personal conduct while in Mexico and his relations with the government and people, explaining the grounds for the charges made against him of meddling in the internal affairs of the country.\*

### DIFFICULTIES AND DELAYS IN CHOOSING A MINISTER

While Poinsett was the first minister to reach Mexico, he was not the first appointed to fill the post. In order to understand the reasons for the delay in making the appointment and to appreciate the difficulties which Poinsett felt were a consequence of that delay, it will be desirable to study with some fulness the various efforts made to fill the post during the two years preceding Poinsett's appointment. The relations between these efforts and current political issues in the United States were very intimate and interesting. In January of 1823, John Quincy Adams, Secretary of State, suggested to President Monroe that the Mexican mission be offered to Andrew Jackson. The President thought Jackson's quickness and violence of temper might make the expediency of his

\* The negotiations conducted by him while there will be published later by the Johns Hopkins Press under the title, *Diplomatic Relations between Mexico and the United States from 1821 to 1829*, in the series of Albert Shaw Lectures on diplomatic history. That study will include also most of the contents of this article, but in a modified form.

appointment questionable. Adams believed he would do nothing to injure the interests of his country; but said there was a more serious difficulty. The legislature of Tennessee had nominated him for the presidency in the election to take place next year. To send him on a mission would look like trying to get him out of the way. The President agreed there was some danger of that.<sup>1</sup>

To get Jackson out of the way was exactly what Adams wanted to do, though he probably would not have admitted it even to himself. But of course he did not want it to look as if he were trying to do so. He had already attempted to rid himself of a still more formidable rival, as he thought, by suggesting that Henry Clay be honored by being appointed first minister to Colombia, as a reward for Clay's long and enthusiastic advocacy of the cause of human liberty and the recognition of the independence of the Spanish-American states, which advocacy had considerably embarrassed Adams in the slow, cautious policy which he had pursued in the matter.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the difficulty, however, Adams addressed a letter to Jackson on February 19, 1823, enclosing the latter's commission from the President as minister to Mexico, adding the gentle compliment, "Permit me to express my own hopes that our country may on this occasion have the benefit of your services."<sup>3</sup> The honor came as a complete surprise to Jackson; but he rose to the occasion. Nearly a month later he replied that the President had said he was under no obligation to accept since he had not been consulted before the nomination was made. As a sort of sugar-coating for the dose of disappointment, and to conceal his real motive as artfully as Adams had done, Jackson said he believed no American minister could at the time effect any beneficial treaty with Mexico, because that country was engaged in a new struggle for liberty against the efforts of the usurper Iturbide to establish himself as emperor. Furthermore, because of

<sup>1</sup> Adams, *Memoirs*, VI, 128.

<sup>2</sup> Adams, *Memoirs*, VI, 26. It is interesting to notice the magnanimity with which Adams felt he was acting. He says: "In pursuing a generous policy towards him, as an enemy and a rival, I do some violence to my inclination, and shall be none the better treated by him; but I look to personal considerations only to discard them, and regard only the public interests."

<sup>3</sup> Adams to Jackson, Feb. 19, 1823, MS. Department of State, Instructions, IX, 169.

Jackson's well known sympathies for the republicans of Mexico he thought it would be embarrassing for him to go as minister to the imperial government.<sup>4</sup>

The expected collapse of Iturbide's empire very shortly after Jackson's refusal of the mission and the long period of uncertainty, during which the Mexican Government was being reorganized, caused the government at Washington to abandon for the time its efforts to fill the post. It was not until the beginning of the next year that the matter was again seriously taken up. On January 5, 1824, Adams entered in his diary the fact that he had discussed the fitness of Ninian Edwards for the mission. Edwards had been territorial governor of Illinois during the whole of that commonwealth's territorial period and was just about to complete his term as one of the first two senators from that new State. On January 17, Adams says he had urged President Monroe to appoint Edwards although he felt that he had been mistreated by Edwards. The President favored G. M. Dallas who was also urged for the appointment by the Pennsylvania delegation in Congress. But Adams opposed Dallas on the ground that "he was not yet of the age and political standing suitable for that appointment." The fact that the relation of the appointment to the coming presidential election was a matter for serious consideration is evident from Adams' statement, "as to its bearing on the presidential election, I must be indifferent between Mr. Edwards and Mr. Dallas, both of whom are avowed partisans of Mr. Calhoun."<sup>5</sup> He was apparently satisfied that the post should go to the Calhounites, since the great South Carolinian's ambition had been postponed for the present by conceding to him the position of Vice-President on the ticket in the famous contest of that year. Adams' influence prevailed. Edwards was nominated, and on March 4, 1824, his nomination was confirmed by the Senate.<sup>6</sup> A few days later he re-

<sup>4</sup> Jackson to Adams, March 15, 1823, MS. Dept. of State, Mexico, Despatches, I. Between the time of Jackson's appointment and his refusal, Zozaya, the Mexican minister lately arrived in Washington, wrote his government of the choice, and the probability that Jackson would not accept. *La Diplomacia Mexicana*, I, 104. The date of Zozaya's note is incorrectly given. Reeves, J. S., *Diplomacy under Tyler and Polk*, 60, mentions Jackson's appointment and refusal.

<sup>5</sup> Adams, *Memoirs*, VI, 227, 233, 234, 241, 243.

<sup>6</sup> Jackson to Edwards, March 4, 1824, congratulating him on his appointment,

signed his seat in that body, and in less than a month had left Washington for his home in Illinois to prepare for an early departure for Mexico.<sup>7</sup>

At this juncture the relation between the appointment to Mexico and the notorious presidential contest of 1824 becomes more intimate and interesting. Just about the time Edwards was leaving Washington some unkind things were said about him by supporters of Crawford, the fourth candidate for the presidency. While on his way towards Illinois Edwards returned the compliment by addressing to the House of Representatives a communication declaring himself to have been the author of an anonymous statement which had appeared some time before charging Crawford with official misconduct as Secretary of the Treasury. He now renewed the accusation. This caused great excitement. A Congressional investigating committee was appointed, and given power to send for persons and papers. Monroe was very indignant at Edwards and thought he ought to resign at once. He instructed Adams to request Edwards not to proceed on his mission for the present but to await the orders of the committee.<sup>8</sup> He did so and returned to Washington. The investigation was political rather than judicial, and eminently unfair to Edwards, being in the hands of Crawford's friends. Calhoun had foreseen that it would be so. In a preliminary report of the Senate committee all the facts charged by Edwards were admitted; but Crawford was acquitted of any evil intention. Then to throw dust into the air in the hope that Crawford might hide behind the cloud,

Washburne, *The Edwards Papers*, 222; Rufus King to Edwards, March 4, 1824, *ibid.*, 222; Adams, *Memoirs*, VI, 245.

<sup>7</sup> Edwards to Adams, March 9, 1824, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp. I. This shows anxiety to get to Vera Cruz as soon as possible to avoid being on the coast during the rainy, sickly season.

Torrens to Secretario, Washington, 23 de Marzo de 1824, MS. Relaciones Exteriores. In this letter the Mexican chargé told his government of Edwards' appointment, resignation from the Senate, and proposed route, saying he would probably arrive in July.

<sup>8</sup> Adams to Edwards, April 22, 1824, MS. Dept. of State, Instr., X, 171; Adams, *Memoirs*, VI, 296-301; D. P. Cook to Edwards, April 17, 1824, Washburne, *The Edwards Papers*, 223.

Torrens to Secretario, 5 de Mayo de 1824, MS. Relaciones Exteriores, said it was thought that another minister would be chosen, since it was supposed Mexico would take Edwards' appointment as an insult.



some indiscreet things Edwards had said and done were brought forward and discussed. Monroe brought pressure to bear and on June 22, after he found further resistance hopeless, Edwards resigned, declaring to the President that he thereby made a voluntary surrender of what his enemies had tried to force from him, and that his sole reason for doing it was to relieve Monroe from any further embarrassment because of him. A cabinet meeting in session when the resignation was presented agreed that Edwards was a much injured man.<sup>9</sup> This Edwards-Crawford controversy occupied most of the attention of the cabinet meetings from May 18 to June 22, if it is safe to judge from the space given to it in the hundred pages of Adams' diary covering this period.<sup>10</sup> It was the influence which the affair exerted on the election, and the fact that the administration was dragged into the controversy that made it seem so immensely important.

The resignation of Edwards left the Mexican post still vacant, and the interests of the United States in Mexico still neglected. Almost another year passed before the appointment was made again. Some suspected and charged that this and other vacant diplomatic posts were being held open by Adams to purchase support in the presidential conflict. He declared that this was a mistaken notion, and that he would as soon all should be filled; but still they remained open. The threatened return to power of Iturbide after his year of exile had something to do with again delaying the Mexican appointment. As the delay lengthened the number of candidates for the Mexican place increased. The most prominent were Dallas, who had been urged when Edwards was appointed, and who later became Vice-President; Henry Wheaton, later so prominent in American diplomacy and as a writer on international

<sup>9</sup> Edwards to the President, June 22, 1824, enclosing his resignation of same date and saying he was undecided whether he should accompany it with an explanation of his reasons, MS. Dept. of State, Mex. Desp., I; same to same, same date, in Washburne, *The Edwards Papers*, 224-229, explains at length his reasons.

An amount equal to a full year's salary, \$9,000, had been advanced to Edwards to purchase an outfit, and the government experienced difficulty in getting him to refund. He finally agreed to repay two thirds, though he said he believed the government had no legal right to claim it. Adams to Edwards, Oct. 9, 1824, MS. Dept. of State, Instr., X, 213; Edwards to Adams, Nov. 10, 1824, MS. Dept. of State, Mex. Desp., I.

<sup>10</sup> Adams, *Memoirs*, VI, 296-395.

law; Thomas H. Benton, who was urged for the place by Poinsett when Monroe first suggested the latter for it; and William H. Harrison, whom Clay favored for the place, who was himself anxious for it and had solicited and obtained many recommendations for it, and who was later appointed minister to Colombia.<sup>11</sup>

The long neglected Mexican mission was filled almost immediately after the new administration began and less than a month after the long drawn out presidential contest had been brought to a close by the choice of Adams in the House of Representatives. On March 5, 1825, the next day after his inauguration, Adams sent for Poinsett and offered him the place. He, too, had been a supporter of Calhoun, now Vice-President, and his appointment had been considered when in the preceding summer the resignation of Edwards was imminent. In July of that year, Southard, of the Navy Department, had asked him confidentially if he was willing to go to Mexico, if he could go at once, and if his absence would affect the vote of his State in the coming election.<sup>12</sup> In November a long very cordial letter from a very intimate friend had closed with the statement: "As I perceive no appointment yet made for Mexico I cannot avoid hoping that if our presidential question can be fortunately adjusted, the one which we all desire may yet be made."<sup>13</sup> In January, Monroe had offered Poinsett the place; but Poinsett urged Benton instead. The reasons for Poinsett's self-denial Adams discovered later. As soon as the House of Representatives had decided that Adams should be President the Calhounites began urging Poinsett for the office of Secretary of State to forestall the expected appointment of Clay; but in spite of the opposition, and in spite of the fact, which Adams and Clay foresaw, that it would give color to the "corrupt bargain" cry,

<sup>11</sup> Adams, *Memoirs*, VI, 413-415, 484-524; Lyman, *Diplomacy of the United States*, II, 484.

Obregon to Secretario, 2 de Febrero de 1825, MS. Rel. Ext., says in order to prevent the Mexican appointment from being regarded as a price for purchasing votes, it appeared that the post would be filled at once. He expected the appointment to go to Benton, or to Everett (later appointed to Madrid); but said nevertheless it may be that the project will prevail for sending Mr. Poinsett, a person known in Mexico.

<sup>12</sup> Southard to Poinsett, Navy Department, July 17, 1824, MS. Poinsett Papers, II, Pennsylvania Historical Society.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Elliot to Poinsett, Charleston, Nov. 16, 1824, MS. Poinsett Papers, II.

and in spite of the fact that Adams disliked Clay personally, this most important appointment at his disposal was given to Clay. This exalted position having eluded Poinsett's grasp, and having been assured that his nominee, Benton, would not get the position in any case, he was willing enough to accept. He did so on March 6, the next day after Adams had tendered him the appointment. Clay wished William H. Harrison to have it; but he had no objection to Poinsett.<sup>14</sup> Two days later the appointment was confirmed by the Senate.

Probably no man in the country had the knowledge and experience which should so well qualify him for the place. At the time of his appointment he was a Congressman from South Carolina. He was a careful student and a polished gentleman. He had traveled extensively in Europe. In 1810 he had gone to South America with a commission from President Madison to report on conditions in Argentina and Chile, then just beginning their struggle for independence. In 1822 he went on a similar mission to Mexico, was favorably received, learned much of the country and people, and made an intelligent and, as events proved, a prophetic report to the State Department which was the principal reliance of the government in shaping its policy with reference to Mexico.<sup>15</sup> In 1824, he published his *Notes on Mexico*, giving an account of his travels two years earlier and his comments on political conditions.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Adams, *Memoirs*, VI, 484, 506, 522-524.

Obregon told his government, March 7, that, as he had formerly suggested might happen, Poinsett had been selected and would start early next month. Obregon to Secretario, 7 de Marzo de 1825, MS. Rel. Ext. Same to same, 28 de Marzo and 30 de Marzo, *ibid.*, tell of Poinsett's departure for Norfolk whence he would sail for Mexico. He was taking for Obregon to the Mexican Foreign Office a number of books and newspapers.

<sup>15</sup> Poinsett's Report, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Duplicate Despatches from Poinsett. This report covers sixty manuscript pages and is accompanied by an appendix of documents about equal in length. It begins with the Iturbidist movement in February of 1821; tells in considerable detail of the struggles between Iturbide and the legislative body, of the erection of the empire and of the ambition and stubbornness of the Emperor, and of the beginning of the movement against him; and closes in December, 1822.

<sup>16</sup> Poinsett, *Notes on Mexico* made in the autumn of 1822, accompanied by an *Historical Sketch of the Revolution, and Official Reports*, 359 pages. See Zavala, *Ensayo Historico*, I, 241, which pays a tribute to Poinsett's astuteness in foretelling events. Brown's *History of Texas*, I, 81, gives a very incorrect account of Poinsett's career up to the time of his arrival in Mexico.

## INSTRUCTIONS, ARRIVAL IN MEXICO, AND RECEPTION

In the instructions which Clay drew up on March 26, 1825, to govern Poinsett's conduct in Mexico, the latter was reminded of the great interest in and importance of his mission. Its purpose was "to lay for the first time the foundations of an intercourse of amity, commerce, navigation, and neighborhood which may exert a powerful influence for a long period upon the prosperity of both states." The fact is dwelt upon that the territory of the United Mexican States is coterminous with that of the United States, rendering the relations with them more important than with any other of the new states. He was told that in point of population, position, and resources, they rank among the first powers of America; and that their early history is not surpassed in interest by that of any other part of America. He was to bring to the attention of the Mexican Government the kindly feeling and sympathy with which the United States had looked upon the long struggle of the new states against the tyranny of Spain; the fact that the United States had recognized their independence at the earliest practicable moment and long before any other country had done so; and the message of President Monroe warning European governments against interfering in the affairs of the American states. He was to say, however, that the United States expected in return no special favors or privileges; but this government did expect that no such favors or privileges would be extended to any European power unless at the same time they were extended to the United States. He was asked to express the compliment felt by the United States that the Mexican states had copied so largely the federal constitution of the former; and was told to show an unobtrusive readiness to explain to the Mexican Government the workings of that constitution.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Clay to Poinsett, Instructions, March 26, 1825, MS. Dept. of State, Instr., X, 225. Extracts from these instructions containing most of the facts given above are printed in *American State Papers, Foreign Relations*, V, 908, and VI, 278, and in *British and Foreign State Papers*, XIII, 485, under the date March 25. The autograph copy of these instructions in the archives of the American Embassy in Mexico bears the date March 25.

Only such portions of Poinsett's instructions are mentioned above as could have influenced his personal conduct in his relations to the Mexican Government. The instructions intended to govern his negotiations will be studied in connection with those negotiations.

It was Poinsett's over-enthusiastic belief in the absolute necessity of maintaining the federal form of government, when he found that centralizing tendencies in Mexico threatened its overthrow, which led him to engage in the activities that gave rise to the charges against him of meddling in the internal affairs of Mexico. And it was in this injunction of Clay's to show an unobtrusive readiness to explain to the Mexican Government the workings of the constitution that he could find the only excuse for his actions. Obregon wrote his government that Poinsett was pronounced in favor of the cause of the American continent and the republican system; that he had a good opinion of the state of Mexico; and that he was especially instructed to prevent England from being granted special favors in return for her tardy recognition. He told of Poinsett's visit to Mexico in 1822 and of his memoirs subsequently published; and inserted a line in cipher declaring, "in my conception he is not a person of great talents."<sup>18</sup>

While this appointment had been knocked about as the football of politicians in Washington, American interests at the new capital were being neglected. The United States might have turned to good account the advantage she naturally gained by recognizing the independence of Mexico and other Spanish American states nearly three years before England took the same step. But when on May 5, 1825, Poinsett wrote from Vera Cruz giving notice of his arrival, he had to report that British agents had anticipated him in making a treaty. The commissioners

<sup>18</sup> The cipher is as follows: "  $\frac{en}{26} \frac{mi}{315} \frac{co}{414} \frac{n}{53} \frac{ce}{115} \frac{p}{33} \frac{to}{118} \frac{no}{552} \frac{es}{551} \frac{pe}{321} \frac{r}{318} \frac{so}{120} \frac{na}{521} \frac{de}{34} \frac{g}{17} \frac{ra}{220} \frac{n}{115} \frac{de}{34} \frac{s}{121} \frac{ta}{222} \frac{le}{321} \frac{n}{115} \frac{to}{522} \frac{s}{121}$ . Obregon to Secretario, 30 de Marzo de 1825, MS. Rel. Ext.

C. C. Cambreling wrote Poinsett from New York, March 30, 1825, a friendly facetious letter saying among other things: "Make a good commercial treaty for us and take care that John Bull gets no advantage of you—if anything get the weather gauge of him. If you can get Texas for some of the lands of the poor Indians of the wilderness you will soon be a great man among us—or if you can contrive to make Cuba independent, protected by the United States, Mexico and Colombia, you have a fair chance and I wish you luck—for it is pretty much everything in political whatever it may be in other matters." This familiar comment probably reflected pretty closely what his friend knew to be Poinsett's own sentiments. The latter's actions with reference to the three matters here specifically mentioned, British influence, Texas, and Cuba, show that these playful injunctions did not fall on deaf ears, though his policy varied in detail from these suggestions.

from that country had arrived two months earlier, just about the time of Poinsett's appointment. The treaty was already concluded; the lower house of the Mexican Congress had already ratified it and he had no doubt the Senate would do so soon.<sup>19</sup> American abstract recognition and philanthropic declarations had interested Mexico for a time and had elicited admiration and gratitude; but dilatoriness in opening communications had made American relations seem cold and Platonic. If England's advances had been long delayed they had been pressed with ardor when once begun, and had elicited an enthusiastic response. Herein was the beginning of Poinsett's troubles. At a later period many Mexican writers looking back to the time of Poinsett's arrival and firmly believing, though unable to produce conclusive evidence, that he was largely responsible for the confusion and disorders into which the country had fallen, alluded to his arrival as an unlucky or dismal day for the republic.<sup>20</sup>

In Poinsett's letter of May 5, mentioned above, he announced that he would leave Vera Cruz the next day and proceed with all possible despatch to the capital. But the speed he made was of the Spanish variety. He reported that his reception everywhere was friendly. The attentions given him were not only respectful, but extremely kind. He was accorded military honors and every distinction. As customary he went to Jalapa and waited there for a reply to his note informing the government of his arrival.<sup>21</sup> While at Jalapa he was informed that

<sup>19</sup> Poinsett to Clay, Vera Cruz, May 5, 1825, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., I.

<sup>20</sup> The following quotation from the *Voz de la Patria*, II, núm. 7, 11 de Febrero de 1830, is typical of the bitterly prejudiced (but then, and for some time previous, generally believed), statements of the character and influence of Poinsett. Reviewing the history of the government during the time of Poinsett's mission, the writer says: "En este misma aciago día, un correo extraordinario llegado de Veracruz avisó que habia desembarcado Mr. Ricardo Joel Poinsett [sic], ministro plenipotenciario de los Estados-Unidos del Norte de América: al saberla el general Wilkinson que se hallaba en México, preguntó el que le anunció esta nueva, ¿que crimen habria cometido esté desgraciado pueblo, que el cielo en su cólera le mandaba tal hombre para que le cause las mayores desgracias? Dentro de breve se cumplió este vaticinio."

<sup>21</sup> Poinsett to Clay, Vera Cruz, May 5, 1825, as cited in note 19; and same to same, Mexico, May 28, 1825, MS. Dept. of State., Mex., Desp., I.

Governor Barragan to Secretario, Vera Cruz, 3 de Mayo de 1825, told of Poinsett's arrival and said provision had been made for his journey and his lodgment at Jalapa. A reply of 10 de Mayo approves the governor's conduct. Poinsett to Alaman, Sacri-

he would be expected to delay his entrance into the City of Mexico until the conclusion of a five days' religious festival which was being celebrated at San Augustin, a village just outside the capital. During the delay he lodged at the country home of Wilcocks, the United States consul, nearby, and visited the scene of festivity every day. The holidays, he reported, were celebrated by early mass and late orgies. From daylight to ten o'clock the churches were filled. At twelve all went to the cock-pit. The afternoon and night were passed in gambling, in which all ages, sexes, and conditions joined; and in dancing on the green as long as daylight lasted, then after dark in the cock-pit. It was in the cock-pit that he had the honor of meeting two members of the cabinet, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of the Treasury. He entered the capital on May 25.<sup>22</sup> Next day he announced to Alaman his presence and asked for an opportunity to present his credentials. Alaman replied May 27, appointing June 1 for Poinsett's reception by the President.<sup>23</sup>

On the day preceding Poinsett's reception the British chargé, Ward, was formally received by President Victoria. On that occasion the latter had emphasized the importance of Great Britain's recognition of Mexican independence, alluded to the English as "that great people who sustain the liberties of the world," and said he had every reason to believe that the friendship of the two nations would be perpetual. In Poinsett's report to Clay he said that in view of this speech he thought it necessary to set the conduct of the United States toward these countries in its true light; and in a cipher paragraph added: "It is manifest that the British have made good use of their time and opportunities. The President and three of the Secretaries—those of State, Treasury, and Ecclesiastical Affairs—are in their interest. We have a very respectable party in both houses of Congress; and a vast majority of the people are

ficios, May 4, 1825, gives official notice of his arrival. A reply of 10 de Mayo acknowledges Poinsett's note, encloses a passport for him to continue his journey to the capital, and tells him that orders had been given providing for the security and comfort of the trip. Alaman to Governor of Puebla, 10 de Mayo, instructs the latter to provide for Poinsett. A reply of 15 de Mayo says the order had been received and complied with, and Poinsett had just arrived. All these are in MSS. Rel. Ext.

<sup>22</sup> Poinsett to Clay, May 28, 1825, as cited in note 21.

<sup>23</sup> Poinsett to Alaman, May 26, 1825, and Alaman to Poinsett, 27 de Mayo de 1825, MSS. Rel. Ext.

in favor of the strictest union with the United States. They regard the British with distrust." In the speech which he felt called upon to make at his own presentation next day, Poinsett seized the opportunity to say, as Clay had instructed, that it was peculiarly flattering to the United States that a constitution so similar to their own had been adopted by Mexico. Then he dwelt upon the sympathy with which the government and people of the United States had watched the progress of the movement toward independence; told of the recognition of that independence within less than a year after it was declared; and mentioned the subsequent declaration against any attempt of any European government to deprive them of independence. In these steps, he reminded them, the United States had taken the lead; and now the freest government of Europe had followed. President Victoria's brief reply was respectful, but entirely non-committal and lacked the enthusiasm which marked his speech to the British representative the preceding day.<sup>24</sup> Thus early Poinsett began definitely to endeavor to exert an influence on the Mexican Government and counteract what he thought was undue English influence. It is clear, however, that he did this not for his own pleasure or profit, nor even for the benefit of the United States, but for the good of Mexico especially, and incidentally for the advantage of all the free governments of America as opposed to the despotic system of the European powers.

#### BRITISH INFLUENCE DISPLACED BY AMERICAN

In Poinsett's mind he early divided all Mexicans into two classes, those friendly to the American system championed by the United States,

<sup>24</sup> Poinsett to Clay, June 4, 1825, enclosing a copy of the speech of President Victoria to the British chargé, May 31; Poinsett's address of June 1; Victoria's reply to the last of same date; Wilcocks to Poinsett, May 12, 1825; and Poinsett's reply to the last of May 15, arranging the reception ceremonies; all in MSS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., I. Poinsett's address and Victoria's reply are printed in Boccanegra, *Memorias para la Historia de Mexico*, I, 379-382. A copy of Poinsett's speech in English with a Spanish translation are in MSS. Rel. Ext. With them is Poinsett's credential letter dated March 14, 1825, and signed by J. Q. Adams and H. Clay. An account of these receptions in *Voz de la Patria*, II, núm. 7, compares Ward with Poinsett, complimenting the latter's linguistic ability, but casting reflections on his character: "El dia primero de Junio hizo lo mismo Mr. Poinsett, enviado de Norte América: su arenga estuvo mejor dicha que la del de Inglaterra, y mas larga,



and those friendly to the European system championed by England. In a cipher paragraph of a letter to Clay of August 5, 1825, he said the President of Mexico was a weak man and was controlled by his ministers, especially the Secretary of State and Secretary of the Treasury. The former (Alaman) was a man of good natural talents and better educated than was common among men of his class in Mexico. He was director of an English mining company and consequently favored British interests. The latter (Esteva) was a man of tolerable ability but without education. He was attached to England because Englishmen of means loaned the government money to help him out of his official difficulties. From this, English influence had profited enormously. These opinions, he said, were not the result of the treatment he had received, for that had been only the most friendly. On the other hand he added: "There is an American party in the House of Representatives and in the Senate, in point of talents much the strongest; but the government have an ascendancy over both bodies."<sup>25</sup>

On September 24, Clay replied that the prevalence of British influence in Mexico was to be regretted; but that it could hardly be made the subject of formal complaint if it were merely the effect of British power and British capital fairly exerted, and if not rewarded by favors to British commerce or British subjects to the prejudice of American. But, he added, against any partiality or preference to any foreign nation to the disadvantage of the United States Poinsett was to remonstrate.<sup>26</sup>

Before this cautious advice could reach Mexico a sort of palace revolution had occurred. The strongest British sympathizers had left the cabinet and those who remained, as well as President Victoria, were entirely favorable to the United States. Poinsett was in high favor. How it happened is told in a letter to Clay of October 12, 1825, all in *pues posee el idioma español muy regularmente por desgracia nuestra, para causarnos infinitos males.*"

<sup>25</sup> Poinsett to Clay, Aug. 5, 1825, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., I. The brief paragraph quoted above telling of the American party appears in the copy of the letter in the volume of Duplicate Despatches but not in the regular volume.

<sup>26</sup> Clay to Poinsett, Sept. 24, 1825, MS. Dept. of State, Instr., X, 225. This paragraph is not contained in any of the printed extracts from this letter. This letter of Clay was written before he had received Poinsett's of August 5. That came to the State Department October 3.

cipher and covering twelve pages. Poinsett began by telling how England had secured her overwhelming influence. In 1823, after the overthrow of Iturbide, Victoria had met the unofficial British agent, Dr. Mackey, who had proposed that Mexico should offer certain commercial privileges to Great Britain in return for British recognition. A Mexican agent was thereupon sent to London to invite that government to send commissioners to treat, hinting that they might expect privileges. In response to this invitation the commissioners had come and had concluded a treaty. Victoria thus considered the establishment of friendly relations with England his own work. A flattering personal letter from Canning had further bound him to the English cause. He further said the English commissioners had won over Tornel, the President's secretary, whom Poinsett calls "a vain and venal man," and further on, "a very bad man without a single redeeming quality," and believed "to be in the pay of the British chargé d'affaires." He exercised a great influence over Victoria. So did Alaman, the Secretary of State, and Esteva, of the Treasury. These three had concocted a scheme to introduce into the cabinet the Bishop of Puebla, a European Spaniard, whose influence was dangerous to these countries; but counter-influence prevented the appointment and set about an attempt to induce the President to dismiss Alaman. The British chargé, Ward, because of personal pique at Alaman, exerted his influence to the same end. Alaman, learning of the combination against him, resigned. Then came the revolution. Esteva had already deserted Alaman and, Poinsett continued, "hastened to assure me of his earnest desire to see our countries united and an American system formed on the principles he knew I had at heart. \* \* \* Esteva is a man of great activity and of some talents; he came over to the American party only because he perceived the impossibility of sustaining himself independently of it." Victoria's attitude also suddenly changed. Of him Poinsett said, "The President sent me word that he wished to have an interview with me, and notwithstanding I requested him to appoint a time convenient to him to receive me, he insisted on coming to me. Our interview was very friendly and in the course of it he gave me repeated assurances of regard for the United States and of his American sentiments. The President is a very good man with no bad dispositions, but he is very vain and is badly

surrounded." It had been suggested to Poinsett that Victoria's attachment to England sprang from a hope that Great Britain might assist in placing a Mexican on the throne of Mexico to prevent other powers of Europe from placing a member of some of their royal houses on the throne. Poinsett thought the President was unwilling to leave office; but the constitution forbade his reelection, which under the circumstances was a dangerous provision. He declared that Victoria was not and never would be a real friend to the United States. He had become reconciled to Poinsett but disliked him. The man who had suggested Victoria's dynastic ambition and had been most influential in ousting Alaman and effecting this change in the sentiments of the executive was Arispe, a daring and intriguing man of talents professing a zeal for America and declaring himself anxious to promote Poinsett's views. He had been useful but Poinsett did not repose entire confidence in him. Neither did he feel any confidence in Esteva, for, he said, "on the very day that he declared himself to me he told the grossest falsehoods of me to Mr. Ward, which occasioned in great measure the difference between that gentleman and myself. The state of society here is scarcely to be credited. I hardly know a man however high his rank or office whose word can be relied on." Poinsett declared he would have kept aloof from such men, but he had found it necessary to form a party out of such elements as the country afforded, or leave the English complete masters of the field. The friends of the latter country were alarmed, and could not conceal their mortification or fears. Ward had sent a messenger to Canning with most exaggerated accounts of Poinsett's influence. The latter adds, "His want of tact and overwrought exertions may contribute to establish that influence he so much dreads." In conclusion Poinsett explained that "The country is tranquil and I see no cause to fear any convulsion except that in a republic without virtue and with a large standing army there is always danger."<sup>27</sup> This despatch was dated almost three weeks after the ministerial crisis had occurred.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Poinsett to Clay, Oct. 12, 1825, in cipher covering twelve pages, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., I.

<sup>28</sup> Resignation of Alaman, 23 de Septiembre de 1825, and acceptance of same 27 de Septiembre de 1825, MSS. Rel. Ext. Zavalá, *Ensayo Histórico*, I, 342.

To counteract Ward's report to Canning, Poinsett had written to Rufus King, the United States minister in London, telling the circumstances that had occurred in order that King might be able to give any explanation that might be needed. In the letter to King he explained that Ward had been forming a European party, which activity had resulted in identifying Great Britain's policy with that of the other European powers.<sup>29</sup>

In his long cipher despatch to Clay, Poinsett practically claims to have brought about this change in the government through the group of men which he alludes to as an American party. Its purpose was to resist the centralizing tendency and preserve and perpetuate the federal form of government, to which Poinsett was so strongly attached and which he believed was the only hope for preserving free government in Mexico. Four years later in referring to his part in effecting this peaceable democratic revolution, Poinsett explained that the cordiality of the democratic party, his own principles, and the hostility of the aristocratic party all tended to cause him to seek his associates among the popular party. He believed England was making efforts to obtain a dominant influence in Mexico as she had in Portugal. He believed too that this would be detrimental to the interests of the United States. Learning that the democratic party intended to effect a revolution by force to get control he advised them to use the more moderate measures of organization, use of the franchise, and establishment of their own press. They took his advice and were eminently successful.<sup>30</sup>

Poinsett's dislike of Tornel, the President's secretary, reflected in his report of October 12, above, was heartily reciprocated by the latter. He did all he could to counteract Poinsett's influence at the time. And in a book which he published several years later he spoke of the minister's arrival as an ill-fated hour for the republic; reviewed his career and acknowledged his ability, told of his attracting to himself little by little persons possessed of state secrets and from them organizing a party, exciting their natural animosities against their rivals; and characterized

<sup>29</sup> Poinsett to Rufus King, Oct. 10, 1825, enclosed with Poinsett to Clay, Oct. 12, 1825, cited in note 27.

<sup>30</sup> Poinsett to Secretary of State, March 10, 1829, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., IV.

his actions as conduct so foreign to the circumspection of a diplomat.<sup>31</sup> Alaman, too, was bitterly hostile toward Poinsett, as might have been expected, and later declared that Poinsett planned to remove the aristocratic influence from the government to substitute not a democracy, for that was impossible in a country in which the mass of the people took no part in public affairs, but the uncontrolled domination of a few ambitious individuals of less respectable connections.<sup>32</sup> The testimony of both of these is decidedly prejudiced, but it expresses a feeling that later became almost universal. And although Poinsett did what he felt was for the good of the country, it must be admitted that from the standpoint of Tornel, Alaman, and others of their faction, there was some justification for their violent hostility to him, even if there was no other ground on which to base their charge that he meddled in Mexican internal affairs than Poinsett's own account, studied above, of the way the change in the government was effected. On the other hand, it is certain that Poinsett's belief was not unfounded that England was trying through Ward to exert an influence hostile to the American system, which had been enunciated by Monroe and was now championed by Adams and Clay and accepted by Poinsett as the guiding principle of the relations of the American states.<sup>33</sup>

The influence which Poinsett was so pleased to see in control of affairs remained dominant. Some three months later he reported to Clay that the executive had openly avowed a change in policy from the centralista party to the federalista. His agency in bringing about the change, he said, had drawn upon him the odium of the centralistas. They were declaring, he continued, his purpose to be to gain such an influence that the government would consent to any proposal he might make regarding limits.<sup>34</sup> Not only was this not true; but events proved that if it

<sup>31</sup> Tornel, *Breve Reseña Historico*, 38.

<sup>32</sup> Alaman, *Historia de Mejico*, V, 823.

<sup>33</sup> See Temperley, *The Later American Policy of George Canning*, *American Historical Review*, XI, 779-797, the object of which article is to show that this policy "was intended to defeat certain claims and pretensions of the Monroe doctrine." Much interesting light remains to be cast on this matter of the conflicting interests of England and the United States at the Mexican capital and the conflicting intrigues of Poinsett and Ward, by a careful study of Ward's correspondence with his government while chargé in Mexico.

<sup>34</sup> Poinsett to Clay, Jan. 4, 1826, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., I.

had been true Poinsett failed signally in his purpose. What Poinsett really did toward bringing about this change was known only to the few most intimately concerned and most interested in keeping it secret. Some things, however, became known, for, Poinsett said, "there are no secrets in Mexico." The uninitiated naturally suspected much more than existed; hence the criticisms and attacks that shortly began so seriously to embarrass Poinsett.

#### POINSETT'S RELATIONS WITH THE YORKINOS

There was one matter in which Poinsett was involved that became public immediately. That was the organization of the York rite Masons which at once began political activities and soon dominated the country. Masonry was already flourishing in Mexico in spite of clerical opposition; but all of the lodges hitherto officially organized belonged to the Scottish rite. Their secrecy made them a fertile field for political intrigue. The centralista faction dominated them everywhere, and their influence was reactionary. The federalista faction felt that it was necessary to oppose them to prevent a return to a monarchical system. Just at the time when the changes were occurring in the government which Poinsett spoke of as the organization of an American party, and when that party was getting control of the cabinet, lodges of York Masons began to be organized. In his correspondence at the time Poinsett did not hesitate to acknowledge that he had a part in their organization. In a letter of October 14, 1825, to Rufus King in London, he said he had encouraged and assisted in the organization of them and had entertained the members at his home. The meeting had been reported to Ward by Tornel as having been entirely political; and that gentleman had been given a false notion of the toasts. Subsequently Ward had given a diplomatic dinner to the Secretaries of State and foreign ministers to which he had not invited Poinsett. At this dinner Ward's friends had indulged in toasts allusive to pending negotiations between the United States and Mexico not of a very friendly tenor, and those toasts had been published at Ward's request. The factions which Poinsett classes as the enemies of the government,—the European Spaniards, the Bourbonists, and the centralistas,—had been displeased, he said,

at the good understanding that had hitherto existed between the representatives of England and the United States, and had worked on Ward to break it up. In closing, Poinsett said he would await information from King concerning opinion in London about Ward's activities before he attempted to retaliate for the insult which he felt Ward had offered.<sup>35</sup>

Poinsett did not say the purpose of the movement was political, neither did he say that it was not, although he said that it had been reported to have been such. The fact that the organization was effected at the very time that he was forming what he repeatedly spoke of as an American party, and that the leaders of that party were also leaders in the lodges, is presumptive evidence that he had some notion of the use to which they would be put. But later when the Yorkinos had enjoyed a phenomenal growth and when the names of the old centralista and federalista parties had everywhere been abandoned for the respective designations, Escoceses (Scots) and Yorkinos, he said, in August of 1826, that he was sorry the Masonic meetings had become political. But he suggested an excuse for the faction which he favored by saying that the Escoceses had long existed and been hostile to the United States before the Yorkinos were organized.<sup>36</sup> Two months later he reported that the elections which had just taken place for members of the State legislatures had gone generally in favor of the Yorkinos. The legislature of the State of Mexico, hitherto controlled by the Escoceses, all of whom had been defeated in the election, refused to yield their seats to their victorious rivals. Thus triumphant in the State elections of 1826, the Yorkinos planned already to capture the presidency two years later; and Poinsett knew their plans. In a cipher paragraph of this despatch of October 21, 1826, he said: "The man who is held up as ostensible head of the party and who will be their candidate for the next presidency is General Guerrero, one of the most distinguished chiefs of the revolution. Guerrero is uneducated but possesses excellent natural talents, combined with great decision of character and undaunted cour-

<sup>35</sup> Poinsett to Rufus King, Oct. 14, 1825, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., I.

<sup>36</sup> Poinsett to Clay, Aug. 26, 1826, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., II. In this he said there was a third party called Los Piadosos, opposed to all Masonic influence, but that it received almost no support. In January he had written that Masonry was flourishing and that, except the President, all the cabinet and all the leading men in the country were Masons, even some of the higher clergy being members.

age. His violent temper renders him difficult to control, and therefore I consider Zavala's presence here indispensably necessary, as he possesses great influence over the general." He had just told of Zavala's having been offered the position of Mexican minister to the United States and said: "I was not sorry that he declined it; he is one of the most efficient leaders of the party friendly to the United States, the Yorkinos, and is more useful here than he would be in Washington." He told of the schemes of those in the cabinet who were endeavoring to rid that body of the Yorkino dominance, said they exercised great influence over the indecisive character of the President, and declared that if their schemes succeeded that official would find himself, as before Poinsett's arrival, surrounded by a few supporters hostile to the majority in Congress and the country.<sup>37</sup> A month later he reported that there were election disturbances; but that he did not expect a violent rupture, and was using every effort on his part to prevent such.<sup>38</sup>

On July 8, 1827, in explaining to Clay the attack of the legislature of the State of Vera Cruz upon him, studied below, Poinsett said the most serious charge made against him was that he had established the York Masons; and explained to Clay just what part he had in their organization. He regretted that Masonry should have been made an instrument of political intrigue. He said lodges of York Masons had already existed in Mexico before his arrival; but that they were without charters. Members of these had asked him to secure a charter from the grand lodge of New York, which he had not hesitated to do. The persons who made the request were all members of the government or interested in maintaining the existing order of things and in preserving the tranquility of the country. He said they were General Guerrero, a distinguished revolutionary officer; Esteva, Secretary of the Treasury; Arispe, Secretary of Grace and Justice; Zavala, a member of the Senate and later governor of the State of Mexico; and Alpuche, a member of the Senate. He said he had no thought that such men had in view any project to disorganize the government. As soon as the Yorkinos were publicly accused of perverting the organization to political purposes,

<sup>37</sup> Poinsett to Clay, Oct. 21, 1826, nearly all the facts here given being in cipher, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., II.

<sup>38</sup> Poinsett to Clay, Nov. 15, 1826, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., II.



he said he withdrew from their meetings. Again he excused them by saying the Scottish rite Masons had long been organized, and their opponents had only followed their example in political activity. He said further that the progress of the Yorkino cause had been so rapid as to lead the people to attribute it to some secret cause. They see in this "the direction of some able hand, and have thought proper to attribute the success of the republican party, the consolidation of the federal system, and the establishment of liberal principles exclusively to my influence."<sup>39</sup>

Zavala, to whom Poinsett referred as friendly and so useful and a leading member of the Yorkino lodge, later published a brief account of the formation of the lodges. He says the project was formed by Alpuche and joined by Esteva, Arispe, Victoria and others; that its purpose was to oppose the Escoceses; that five lodges were formed; and that Poinsett was then asked to obtain for them a charter from the grand lodge of New York. This step and the installation of the grand lodge in Mexico, he says, was the only interference by this American, who, he continues, because of his share in the movement has been calumniated by aristocrats and various European agents in Mexico who have taken more part than he in the affairs of the country.<sup>40</sup> Tornel, the bitter enemy of Poinsett, gives an account as prejudiced against him as Zavala's is in his favor.<sup>41</sup> Nearly every writer on Mexican history of this period expresses an opinion on Poinsett's merit or demerit in the matter. Most of these writers have followed either Tornel or Zavala, and show their prejudice either for or against him.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Poinsett to Clay, July 8, 1827, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., III.

<sup>40</sup> Zavala, *Ensayo Historico*, I, 346. This was published in 1831. *Ibid.*, 385, says, "los periódicos del otro bando le acusaban de haber faltado á la primera obligacion de un ministro extranero, que es la de no mezclarse en las cuestiones interiores del pais en que egercen su mision, y en donde no estan de consiguiente sugetos á las leyes comunes. La acusacion en el fondo era injusta." *Ibid.*, 339, pays a glowing tribute to Poinsett's ability and acknowledges his uninterrupted friendship, which shows of course that he is a prejudiced witness.

<sup>41</sup> Tornel, *Breve Reseña*, 45.

<sup>42</sup> Accounts bitterly condemning him are: Alaman, *Historia de Mexico*, V, 822, 824; Bocanegra, *Memorias para la Historia de Mexico*, I, 382, 389-395; *ibid.*, II, 13, 17-22; Rivera, *Historia de Jalapa*, II, 366-369; and Zamacois, *Historia de Mexico*, XI, 620.

H. H. Bancroft, *History of Mexico*, V, 32, quotes Zavala and exonerates Poinsett.

## VERA CRUZ MANIFESTO AGAINST POINSETT'S INFLUENCE

In the latter part of June, 1827, Poinsett was publicly and violently arraigned in a long manifesto issued by the legislature of the State of Vera Cruz. It declared that "a sagacious and hypocritical foreign minister as zealous for the prosperity of his own country as inimical to ours," being jealous of Mexican prosperity which would soon eclipse that of his own country, and jealous also of the friendly relations of Mexico with Great Britain which might prove disadvantageous to the interests of the United States, had established the York Masons, a hundred times more dangerous than twenty battalions of the tyrant of Spain. For an invading army would be met as an enemy by a united country; but the Yorkinos had been organized to destroy the Escoceses and the consequent internal dissensions were diffusing a want of confidence throughout the country, dividing it against itself. It declared that the Escoceses well deserved destruction for their ambition and centralist tendencies; but that many moderate men of that faction had been displaced that their positions might fall to their more ambitious opponents. It declared both Yorkinos and Escoceses injurious, and demanded the enforcement of laws already existing which prohibited all Masonic associations.<sup>43</sup>

A short time after this violent attack Poinsett published in Spanish a pamphlet which he called "An Exposition of the policy of the United

Romero, *Mexico and the United States*, 349, says, "it seems that while he desired the success of the Yorkinos, he was not the founder of that lodge." Robinson, *Mexico and her Military Chieftains*, shows his lack of accuracy by saying, p. 146, "Mr. Poinsett, it may be presumed, never had any connection with either branch of the order in Mexico." McMaster, *History of the People of the U. S.*, V, 540, states correctly but briefly the part Poinsett took in organizing the lodges. Yoakum, in *Comprehensive History of Texas*, I, 124, gives a brief and substantially correct statement.

<sup>43</sup> "Manifesto of the Congress of Vera Cruz to the Mexican Nation," June 19, 1827, translation covering 26 manuscript pages, enclosed with Poinsett to Clay, July 8, 1827, MSS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., III. A copy printed in Spanish is in the volume of Duplicate Despatches. It declared also that many Iturbidists were members of the York lodges and their purpose was to bring about the return of the empire with Iturbide's son at its head. This Poinsett considered too absurd to need argument. It is a fact that Iturbidists later cooperated with the Yorkinos; but that was probably due to the fact that the Bourbonists cooperated with the Escoceses.

States toward the Republics of America," replying to the charges in the manifesto. It argued the uniformly friendly policy of the United States and of himself for Mexico, and declared that far from being inimical to the prosperity of Mexico or the other republics the United States "are desirous to see their neighbors wealthy and powerful in order that they may be more efficient allies and more profitable customers." He quoted from a discourse which he had himself pronounced in favor of the recognition of these states, in which he had expressly refuted the argument that their prosperity would hurt the United States. Further, the United States were far from thinking the friendship of Great Britain for Mexico injurious to them. On the contrary, the United States invited Great Britain to join them in recognizing the new states; and when that was not done urged Great Britain to follow their example, and rejoiced when she did. In answer to the charge that he was controlling the prevailing party in the federal government, he argued that the vexatious delays in his negotiations proved the falsity of it. He declared that he had had no part in the perversion of the Masonic lodges to political purposes, and that since they had been so perverted he had withdrawn from their meetings. He declared that he had not interfered with the internal concerns of the country unless advocating the superiority of republican institutions and explaining the workings of United States institutions be considered as interfering.<sup>44</sup>

In a long letter of July 8, 1827, Poinsett explained to Clay the situation and the events that led up to it. He said he had abstained from demanding satisfaction for this unprovoked and unjustifiable insult because the State of Vera Cruz had recently committed acts of rebellion against the sovereignty of the federal government and was then maintaining a defiant attitude. There was hardly any way short of civil war that the federal government could have forced the state to give satisfaction. If he had demanded satisfaction and had not promptly received it, he would have been compelled to demand his passports and

<sup>44</sup> Poinsett's "Exposition of the Policy of the United States toward the Republics of America," dated July 4, 1827, enclosed with Poinsett to Clay, July 8, 1827, MSS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., III. A copy printed in Spanish is in the volume of Duplicate Despatches. It is also on the market in pamphlet form, though rare. English translations of it were printed in various newspapers of the United States at the time. The manuscript copy covers 16 pages.

leave the country, placing the United States and Mexico in collision, which he thought the governing faction in Vera Cruz desired. He regretted that the legislature of Vera Cruz had thus violated the law of nations and every principle of decency and good faith by publishing suspicions derogatory to the character of a friendly nation and the reputation of a foreign minister. But they were also guilty of violating the federal constitution. The maintenance of the federal form was sure to involve the central and local governments in disputes concerning sovereignty. The other States were giving proofs of attachment to the federal government and the State would have to submit. The general government had lamented the attack but was slow in acting and hitherto had lacked the energy to make itself obeyed in the State of Vera Cruz. He said the errors of Mexico ought to be viewed with indulgence. Their long period of political tutelage to Spain and their lack of experience in dealing with foreign nations was their only excuse. It was not strange that they should confuse the duties and rights of different organs of government. He said he had always made every effort to show the friendly disposition of the United States, and rendered cheerful service to those who applied for advice or assistance in the framing of laws or in understanding the working of constitutional principles. He had uniformly exhorted them to submit to any temporary evil rather than resort to violence. This conduct had drawn upon him the odium of those who sought to overthrow liberal institutions. The necessity for thus defending his conduct was painful, he said, but there was no alternative.<sup>45</sup>

Before this explanation had been received at Washington, Sergeant had returned from Mexico, where he had gone to cooperate with Poinsett in the mission to the Congress of Tacubaya, the unsuccessful attempt at a continuation of the Panama Congress of the preceding year.

<sup>45</sup> Poinsett to Clay, July 8, 1827, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., III. This letter covers 20 manuscript pages. Much of it is occupied with a review of the origin, composition, and principles of the Scottish party, and of the part he had taken in the organization of the York Masons, and the political activities of the Yorkinos to counteract that of the Escoceses. See above.

Rivera, *Historia de Jalapa*, II, 426, gives a brief study of the Vera Cruz Manifesto and the attendant rebellious movements in the State of Vera Cruz; most of the other Mexican historians cited in notes 40-42, above, discuss the manifesto.

President Adams entered in his diary on August 1, the statement that "Mr. Sergeant thinks not favorably of the proceedings of Mr. Poinsett during his residence in Mexico." Adams also says that Sergeant had handed him a private letter from Poinsett in which the latter said he had received an intimation from the President of Mexico that his recall would be demanded.<sup>46</sup> Obregon wrote his government that, in a conference some time in August, Clay had expressed disapproval of Poinsett's conduct in so far as he had mixed in the internal affairs of the country. When the news of the Vera Cruz attack first arrived, about the middle of August, the *National Journal* had expressed the same sentiments as Clay; but on August 31 the *National Gazette* had praised Poinsett's conduct, and a few days later both the *National Intelligencer* and *National Journal* approved it. Consequently Obregon thought the government must have received further information convincing them that Poinsett's conduct was excusable, since one of these papers was official and the others were supporting the administration. The action of the legislature of Vera Cruz was looked upon as revolutionary, he said, and as showing a lack of respect for the federal government. It had been intimated to him that Poinsett would probably be recalled in spite of the approval of his conduct.<sup>47</sup> It was on August 31 that the Department of State received Poinsett's letter of July 8 with the enclosed manifesto and his answer.

But Adams and Clay did not act precipitately nor enthusiastically in exonerating Poinsett. It was more than ten weeks after receipt of his explanation before they passed judgment. On November 19, 1827, Clay wrote Poinsett that the President approved his conduct and did not consider that he had interfered in the politics of Mexico, since no complaint had come from the Mexican Government of his conduct. It was thought best to make no formal complaint of the act of the Vera Cruz legislature; but Poinsett was asked to remonstrate informally to the President of Mexico, and say that if that government had any complaint to make concerning Poinsett the Government of the United States was ready to receive such in the regular manner. The President did not desire the termination of Poinsett's mission: but if his position had

<sup>46</sup> Adams, *Memoirs*, VII, 312.

<sup>47</sup> Obregon to Secretario, 13 de Septiembre de 1827, MS. Rel. Ext.

become unpleasant and he desired to return he might. It had been rumored, he was told, that he would return. The matter was left entirely to his own feelings and discretion.<sup>48</sup>

#### POINSETT'S POLITICAL INFLUENCE, AND THE MONTAÑO REVOLT

The Yorkino party, which had come into existence in 1826 and which before the end of the year had grown so strong as to carry most of the State elections, continued to grow and retained its influence. The Escoceses, unable to retain or regain influence and still attributing the growth and power of their opponents to the magic influence of Poinsett over the government and the Yorkino lodges, resorted first to innuendo and then to violence. Zavala, who was a Yorkino, says that in the papers which they established they declared with as much ignorance as impudence that so long as the Escoceses had control the government was tranquil and prosperous; but as soon as the Yorkinos attempted to take part disorder and anarchy prevailed. He says this is the argument of the tyrant who has monopolized power and wishes to keep it from the people. Just so, he continued, the King of Spain argued that so long as Spaniards were allowed to rule and the natives did nothing but obey all was quiet; but as soon as the natives began to assert their rights the struggle began and peace vanished.<sup>49</sup> The Yorkinos also published papers to advocate their cause, and these became the objects of suspicion and attack from their opponents, who declared they were sub-

<sup>48</sup> Clay to Poinsett, Nov. 19, 1827, MS. Dept. of State, Instr., XII, 36.

<sup>49</sup> Zavala, *Ensayo Historico*, I, 354. In the preceding seven pages he reviews the party strife. The tone of these newspaper criticisms of Poinsett and the government supposed to be dominated by him is indicated in the following extracts from the *Voz de la Patria*, II, núm. 8, 15 de Febrero de 1830: "No affigan menos la Pátria los males políticos que ya comenzaban á manifestarse, y cuyo origen fontal se debe casi esclusivamente á la instalacion de las lógias de los yorkinos en México. \* \* \* Poinsett, el regulador y árbitro de este establecimiento, de que se ha llamado Sumo Pontífice, muy luego procuró sacar todo el partido posible para llenar sus objetos principales; á saber, destruir nuestra República, y engrandecer la del Norte América, por ser on [en] su concepto incompatible la existencia de ambas. \* \* \* La mano artera de Poinsett, movia á su placer los hilos de esta trama: este hombre insidioso de la humanidad, y cuyo nombre hace temblar á las repúblicas de Chiloe y Buenos-Aires, de donde fué lanzado como una mala y dañina bestia."

sidized by Poinsett and working for the interests of the United States as opposed to those of Mexico.<sup>50</sup>

On November 10, 1827, Poinsett reported to Clay an act which it is difficult to see how he could have defended from the charge of interfering in Mexican politics. As has been shown, Guerrero had been closely associated with what Poinsett frequently alluded to as the American or democratic party. He was also a member of the Yorkino lodges, an active spirit in their organization, and practically the head of the order. In October of 1826 Poinsett had predicted that Guerrero would be the Yorkino candidate for the next presidential election. He now proceeded to assist in making his prophecy come true. Against the wish of his friends in the government, Guerrero had declared that he was going to join the movement, at the time becoming popular, for expelling from Mexico all remaining European Spaniards. These friends appealed to Poinsett to persuade Guerrero to abandon his designs, and to await patiently the effect of his friends' efforts to have him elected next year as successor to Victoria. He had written the desired letter, Poinsett told Clay, and President Victoria had thanked him for writing it. Guerrero had replied in a tone of great intimacy, modestly declaring his unfitness for the high office which Poinsett had thus informed him his friends wished him to become a candidate for. Poinsett virtually admits that this was improper interference, because he tells Clay he wishes President Adams to understand that he had never taken any step toward interfering in the affairs of Mexico "without the knowledge and consent and generally at the solicitation of the government."<sup>51</sup> If the government had been as subservient to Poinsett as his critics supposed it to be, he would have had no difficulty in obtaining their consent. It was the suspicion that he and the govern-

<sup>50</sup> Aviraneta, a European Spaniard traveling in Mexico, was told in Vera Cruz "que el Mercurio es un periódico subencionado por Poinssete [sic] enviado de los Estados Unidos: es un periódico yorkino, para promover la espulsion de los comerciantes y propietarios Españoles del territorio del república, y substituir la influencia del pueblo Yanki." See Aviraneta é Ibargoyen, *Memorias Intimas 1825-1829*, in D. Luis Garcia Pimentel, *Documentos Historicos de Mejico*, III, 45. *Ibid.*, 58 says: "Los escritores del Mercurio son hombres vendidos al oro que desparrama Poinssset [sic] á manos llenas, entre los incautos mejicanos." Martinez, *Sinopsis Historica de las Revoluciones*, I, 58, gives a brief outline account of the party struggles.

<sup>51</sup> Poinsett to Clay, Nov. 10, 1827, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., III.

ment were in accord that occasioned their most serious criticism. But from the tone of Poinsett's letter to Clay it is evident here, as in other cases where his acts might be considered of doubtful propriety, that he was doing what he believed for the good of Mexico, and thought necessary to prevent the country from suffering serious evils which he thought he foresaw.

The danger which he and Guerrero's friends foresaw this time was a real one. Within less than a month he reported that there had been insurrectionary movements in Puebla and Vera Cruz the purpose of which was to force those States to expel the European Spaniards. In the latter State it had accomplished its purpose immediately, the legislature yielding without resistance; but in the former it had resulted in bloodshed. These and similar movements elsewhere were being promoted by a secret society that had been organized for the purpose by leading members of the Yorkino party and modeled on the Italian Carbonari. The new organizations had spread rapidly and virtually controlled the whole country. They would manage the election of Guerrero in the coming campaign.<sup>52</sup>

Disturbances rapidly developed. Party controversy became more bitter. Poinsett reported on January 9, 1828, that the Escoceses, despairing of regaining their influence by peaceable means, had appealed to arms. He confesses that he had not foreseen this conflict because he did not think the leaders of that party would be so rash. On December 23, preceding, the Plan of Montaña had been proclaimed and a revolution started to force its adoption. The Plan contained four demands. The first was the extermination of all secret societies. The second was the dismissal of certain ministers. The fourth was the maintenance of the existing constitution and laws. But the principal demand was the third, which was aimed directly at Poinsett and declared: "The Supreme Government shall, without an instant's delay, furnish the envoy of the United States to this Republic with his passports to leave the country." The fourth demand is the stock argument of the revolutionist that he is not trying to destroy the government or the laws but

<sup>52</sup> Poinsett to Clay, Dec. 8, 1827, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., III. He said an act for the expulsion of the Spaniards was before the lower house of the National Congress and would probably pass.



to maintain them. The second grew out of the belief that the ministers were the tools of Poinsett and working for the interests of the United States. The purpose of the first was the destruction of what was considered a gigantic organization which enabled Poinsett and his friends to dominate the country. Thus the other three demands grew out of and were but corollaries to the third, the ostensible purpose of which was to rid the country of what was felt to be the baneful influence of the American minister. As a matter of fact it was of course the desperate effort of a disappointed and despairing political faction to regain control by voicing what was thought to be a popular demand. But they were mistaken in the strength of their cause, although at first it seemed formidable and had high official sanction. Nicholas Bravo, the Vice-President, and titular head of the Scottish Masons, took the field at the head of the revolutionary forces. But General Guerrero, titular head of the York Masons, led the government troops and overthrew Bravo and his associates in less than a month and with scarcely an effort. Movements similar to this and in sympathy with it were expected to follow shortly in many places. In Vera Cruz the standard of revolt was raised and the governor headed the movement. Active measures prevented such elsewhere. Other States hastened to express their indignation and Vera Cruz retracted its position.

The diplomatic corps in the city had openly advocated the cause of the insurgents; but Poinsett was sure that they had acted without instructions. They had been deceived into thinking the movement would easily succeed because the social aristocracy belonged to Bravo's party. Poinsett added: "It is needless to say that I have pursued a different course. The cause of free institutions is the cause of America, and although I have taken no part in the contest and obtruded no advice, I have withheld my opinion and counsel whenever it has been asked by this government or by those connected with it." Speaking of the demand that he be sent out of the country he declared: "These people [the Scottish party] persist in regarding me as the principal obstacle to their success and as directing not only the operations of the opposite party but of the government." In closing this long report of the revolt and its collapse, he said he considered the event fortunate since it had overthrown the faction concerning whose plots there had been great uneasi-

ness.<sup>53</sup> After telling, on February 9, of the collapse of the revolt, Poinsett showed that he was thinking of making his escape from the continual insinuations and attacks made by the party opposed to the government. He said, "Although very desirous to avail myself of the permission of the President to terminate my mission, I shall wait until the treaties are ratified, and until I can leave this country without prejudice to the interests which have been entrusted to me."<sup>54</sup>

The failure of the Montaña revolt left the Yorkinos in control of the government. The fact that it had ostensibly been directed at Poinsett and had failed to drive him out of the country confirmed the popular notion of his magic influence over the government and country.<sup>55</sup> In July, two months before they occurred, Poinsett wrote that excitement over the coming presidential elections was high, and there was talk of revising the election laws. He believed the popular party would prevail; but feared a revolution over this and the disordered finances. After the election and before the result was known, he wrote that the candidate of the aristocratic party seemed to lead, and added that if Guerrero, the popular candidate, should not be elected he believed the people would rise against the choice which should be made. On September 25, 1828, he wrote that the election had resulted in the choice, by a very narrow majority, of Pedraza, the aristocratic candidate, over Guerrero, the popular nominee. In anticipation of this the radical Yorkinos had already appealed to arms in the State of Vera Cruz under the leadership of Santa Ana, who had raised a cry for the preservation of the federal system of government, for the sovereign rights of the people, for the

<sup>53</sup> Poinsett to Clay, Jan. 9, 1828, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., III. The most radical Yorkinos wished to execute the rebels. The Escoceses wished to proclaim an amnesty for all. Wisely a middle course was pursued and they were allowed to go into exile, and ultimately to return. See Bancroft, *History of Mexico*, V, 37-40; Rivera, *Historia de Jalapa*, II, 450; Alaman, *Historia de Mejico*, V, 836-839.

<sup>54</sup> Poinsett to Clay, Feb. 9, 1828, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., III.

<sup>55</sup> Looking back, after Poinsett's departure, on the period of party strife during his mission, the *Voz de la Patria*, II, núm. 14, 11 de Marzo de 1830, says: "Poinsett mandaba á Victoria, como á un pilhuanejo, y éste no queria oír mas voz que la de Poinsett, \* \* \* Poinsett llevaba adelante su influjo, y sacaba de el todo el partido posible. Figurábase ser algun dia el arbitro de la Nacion."

Ibar's *Muerte Política de la Republica*, núm. 11, 20 de Mayo de 1829, speaks of "las miras ambiciosas de ese ministro estrangero, agente pagado por el gabinete de Norte-América para remacharnos las cadenas de la esclavitud."

immortal Guerrero, and for the expulsion of the European Spaniards. During the first four days of December there was fighting in the streets of Mexico City, Poinsett wrote the tenth of that month, which resulted in the complete success of the revolutionists. Pedraza, the president elect and, according to Poinsett, the cause of all the trouble, had fled, and Guerrero, the defeated candidate, was made Secretary of War instead of him in the cabinet of President Victoria. Notice had been sent to both factions struggling throughout the country to cease hostilities. The principal agent in effecting the revolution, Poinsett said, was Zavala, who had been forced into the ranks by unwise attacks on him in the Senate, charging him unjustly with having been in communication with the insurrection. The Secretary of State had come to Poinsett and revealed his fears that England or some other foreign power would interfere. Poinsett calmed his fears by declaring that no power had any right to interfere. During December the country was in a state of anarchy. But toward the end of the month most of the States had given in their adherence; and early in the new year the last resistance had ceased. Poinsett declared it to be his belief that it had been the federal institutions only that had saved Mexico from a military despotism. He deplored the violence that had resulted but declared that, if ever a revolution could be justified, this was, for the oligarchy had again gotten control and the weak Victoria had yielded to them a second time. Many of the popular party had been imprisoned without cause. The election was by States, each having one vote cast by its legislature. When the votes were counted by the National Congress it was declared that Pedraza had received a majority of the votes, but that public opinion had pronounced so positively against him that even he had felt the necessity of resigning all claims to the office. In consequence of this the choice was reduced to the next highest. Therefore Guerrero was declared elected. During the remainder of the unexpired presidential term civil commotions continued in some of the States in resistance to the government and the declared result of the election; and the National Senate, still dominated by the aristocratic party, was also resisting the will of the people, especially in the matter of the expulsion of Spaniards and in declaring amnesty for the participants in the late revolution. But early in March Poinsett reported that quiet

had been restored throughout the country and the choice of Guerrero seemed to be giving general satisfaction. And on April 3, 1829, he reported that Guerrero had been inaugurated as President the first of the month and the republic was tranquil. On April 15, he said that the President seemed about to confine his cabinet to members of the popular party, which Poinsett considered a wise move. His friend, Zavala, had been made Secretary of the Treasury, and would, he thought, give general satisfaction.<sup>56</sup>

In his long recapitulation on March 10, 1829 (for the benefit of the new Jackson administration at Washington) of all that had passed since he had been in Mexico, after telling how the members of the defeated Scottish party, and the representatives of the foreign powers had all abused him both publicly and privately, and after reviewing the attacks upon him by the legislatures of Vera Cruz and Puebla, and recounting the suspicions and charges against him in connection with the Montaña revolt and the revolution following the elections of 1828, Poinsett declared his belief that "there is no instance on record of a foreign minister having been so persecuted in any country." He realized that it was hard to believe this hatred was not due to improper interference. But it had resulted purely from his efforts to prevent the encroachments of European powers. If he had chosen to witness such with indifference, he said he could have passed on smoothly and insignificantly. But he did not think this the proper course; and had cheerfully borne the obloquy which his conduct had brought upon him, caring only that his actions should be fully understood in the United States and especially by the government.<sup>57</sup> It should be noticed here again that

<sup>56</sup> This account of the campaign, the election, and the results, is taken entirely from Poinsett's letters to Clay running throughout the nine months, as follows: July 16, 1828; Sept. 17, 1828; Sept. 25, 1828; Oct. 22, 1828; Dec. 10, 1828; Dec. 17, 1828; Dec. 24, 1828; Dec. 27, 1828; Jan. 8, 1829; Jan. 10, 1829; Jan. 23, 1829; Jan. 31, 1829; March 3, 1829; April 3, 1829; and April 15, 1829. MSS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., IV.

<sup>57</sup> Poinsett to Clay, March 10, 1829, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., IV. In this long letter covering 42 pages, commenting further on the persons and principles involved in the recent revolutionary events, he said that Pedraza was a political turncoat; he had fought during the war for independence in the Spanish service against the insurgents; he went as a deputy to the Cortes; on his return he became a minister of Iturbide; afterward he was a leader in the overthrow of Iturbide and an

Poinsett does not claim not to have interfered in Mexican political affairs, but endeavors to defend his actions from the charge of improper interference, by explaining his motive.

#### POINSETT RECALLED AT MEXICO'S REQUEST

The opposition to the election of Guerrero acquiesced in his inauguration in April of 1829 and it seemed for a time that his administration would succeed in maintaining quiet in the country. But the opposition to Poinsett, who was popularly supposed to have been largely instrumental in bringing about the victory of the new government, never ceased. Attacks by the public press became more frequent, more virulent, and more unreasonable. A periodical of June 6, 1829, asked in inflammatory language why all Mexicans did not unite in one terrific cry that would penetrate the sordid deafness of those controlling the government de-

adherent of the Scottish party; on the discovery of the plot of Friar Arenas and the connection of the Scottish party with it, he deserted that party and won popularity in the punishment of those conspirators and in assisting to overthrow General Bravo; he became Secretary of War; when it was desired to divide the York party he was chosen as the instrument, having friends in all of the opposing factions. His success in the election was due to the fact that some of the State legislatures had been chosen while the Scottish party was in the lead. The senate and supreme court of the federal government were also still of that faction. He believed if the reactionary factions had used their advantages with moderation they could have retained power; but their persecution drove Santa Ana, Zavala, and others to take refuge in revolution.

Poinsett defended the army that took the City of Mexico by assault, and said the cruelties that had been attributed to it were greatly exaggerated. He blamed the government for not having prevented the attack on the city by a vigorous defence at first, and in the absence of that by accepting the proffered opportunity to capitulate before the attack.

The opposition of the recent revolutionists to the Spaniards, he said, could be explained by reviewing the political interference of the Spaniards, who had been uniformly trying to restore Spanish control. The Senate still refused to pass a law expelling the Spaniards as the revolutionists demanded, because the Spaniards had uniformly supported the Scottish party, which still prevailed in that body. He feared this might cause some further disturbance.

For reviews of the election of 1828 and the revolution following, see Bancroft, *History of Mexico*, V, 40-45; Zavala, *Ensayo Historico*, II, 101-148; Alaman, *Historia de Mejico*, V, 839-843; Zamacois, *Historia de Mejico*, XI, 671-715. Zavala's account is of course prejudiced in favor of the revolution, in which he was one of the chief leaders.

manding that the country should rid itself of that bold and intriguing minister, the sole source of all of the country's evils and miseries. On June 24 the same periodical declared that if the Republic of North America really wished to show that she desired the friendship and good faith of Mexico she ought to order this astute and intriguing minister to withdraw from Mexican soil. Let those States know that the Mexican nation detested him and justly desired his expulsion.<sup>58</sup> On July 15, Poinsett wrote that Mexico was in a critical condition. The dissolution of the confederacy seemed inevitable unless some popular military chief seized control to save it; and that would be a death blow to free institutions. Added to the danger of invasion from Spain was the opposition in the States to the federal government and the dissensions between States. Many Mexicans were so desirous of changing the form of the government that they would rather deliver the country to a foreign prince than see it continue in its present form. He believed European governments were intriguing to bring about such; and said he would like to know the attitude of the administration. For himself, he thought it could not accord with the interests of the United States to permit any European power to obtain undue influence in these states.<sup>59</sup>

At the end of July, 1829, the legislature of the State of Mexico addressed a memorial to President Guerrero requesting the dismissal of Poinsett. It was a long diatribe based confessedly not on facts proved but on a general belief that he was secretly opposed to the interests of Mexico, that he was the cause of discord in Mexico, and that his presence was undesirable. It called to witness the cry of alarm which was resounding throughout the republic against him. It declared that his character as a diplomat ought to have caused him to refrain from all interference in internal affairs. The legislature would not say, as some thought, that he was the controlling spirit of the administration; but it was well known that he had been instrumental in organizing one of the secret societies whose struggle was the cause of the country's dis-

<sup>58</sup> Ibar, *Muerte Política de la Republica Mexicana*, núm. 15, 6 de Junio de 1829; *ibid.*, núm. 19, 24 de Junio de 1829; *ibid.*, núm. 1, 11 de Marzo, núm. 6, 23 de Abril, and núm. 26, 18 de Julio de 1829. The last declares that it is also said with some reserve that Poinsett was a paid agent of the Madrid government to assist in the Spanish reconquest.

<sup>59</sup> Poinsett to Van Buren, July 15, 1829, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., IV.

asters. It had been suggested that the interests of the United States being opposed to those of Mexico, made it desirable to prolong the discord in the latter and the agent of those States was maintained in Mexico for that purpose. Whether this suspicion was true or not the character of their envoy was such as to adapt him for carrying out such a policy. His natural talents, his smooth and elegant manner, his erudition, his cheerful disposition, and his professed devotion to republicanism all adapted him for political manipulations. If this was not the policy of that government, why did not the President or cabinet at Washington voluntarily recall him, knowing the discord he was causing, to prevent new catastrophes and avoid compromising the friendly relations of the countries? In closing, the legislature requested the President of the Republic to give orders that Poinsett be given his passports to leave the country.<sup>60</sup> In the following weeks the legislatures of several other States made the same request. A few days after the first attack Poinsett published a lengthy reply to the suspicions and charges, declaring that they were without foundation. In this he said he felt compassion rather than anger, and closed with a paternal exhortation breathing good will for the Mexican people as a whole in spite of the attacks a faction were making upon him. He declared there was no jealousy in the United States for Mexico, but a desire for the latter's prosperity; and appealed to Mexicans to imitate the institutions and the characteristics which made the United States great.<sup>61</sup>

In Poinsett's letter to Van Buren of August 7, telling of the manifesto and his reply, he said he would be sensibly mortified in reporting the attacks that had been made on him if he could attribute them to any misconduct or want of prudence on his part. He declared that the suspicions and conjectures were utterly unfounded; and said he had not interfered in the internal affairs of the country nor deviated from the frank, open, manly policy which distinguishes the intercourse of

<sup>60</sup> "Manifesto of the Legislature of the State of Mexico," Tlalpam, 31 de Julio de 1829, MS. Rel. Ext. A translation of this is enclosed with Poinsett to Van Buren, Aug. 7, 1829, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., IV. A pamphlet containing the same printed in Spanish also accompanies.

<sup>61</sup> Poinsett's reply, Aug. 2, 1829, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., IV, enclosed with Poinsett to Van Buren, Aug. 7, 1829. The English translation covers 26 pages. The same printed in Spanish accompanies.

the United States. He was not conscious, he said, of any offense, unless his uncompromising republican principles and friendly intercourse with leaders of the popular party could be considered such. He said the aristocratic, monarchical, and European factions which were in control when he arrived in the country attributed their fall to him; but it was really due to the institutions of the country. They still believed him the soul of the existing government and wished to overthrow him. He said this faction were telling the people of Mexico that the United States was jealous of Mexico and had instructed him to throw obstacles in the way of progress. They even went so far as to say that the cabinet in Washington had caused the death of their minister Obregon (who had committed suicide) and therefore they argued publicly that the people of Mexico would be justified in assassinating Poinsett. He said he had had frequent interviews with President Guerrero, who had expressed his regret at the attack and his own satisfaction with Poinsett's conduct, and had spoken in strong terms of the infamy of those who thus sought to interrupt the friendly relations of the two republics. The President said he regarded it really as an attack on those in control of the government.<sup>62</sup> Although Poinsett asserts that he had not interfered in the internal affairs of the country, and asserts that he was not conscious of any offense, yet in this very defense of his conduct he admits his friendly intercourse with members of the popular party, and by implication his unfriendliness for the members of the opposing factions. This was exactly their complaint against him.

Poinsett's frequent and lengthy defenses of his conduct in his correspondence with the government at Washington were apparently occasioned by a feeling that his conduct was not fully approved there. Communications from Clay had been very infrequent for some time before

<sup>62</sup> Poinsett to Van Buren, Aug. 7, 1829, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., IV.

Zavala, who was in the ministry of Guerrero at the time of the legislative attacks, but who resigned soon after, says that behind all these could be seen the hand of two other ministers, Herrera and Bocanegra. The timid and uncertain policy of Guerrero, who was aware of their plans, he says, enabled them to do this. Zavala, *Ensayo Historico*, II, 197. Ibar, *Muerte Politica*, núm. 32, 8 de Agosto de 1829, said: "¿Quién fue el que mandó asesinar á nuestro enviado á los Estados-Unidos del Norte, al virtuoso Obregon? Poinsett. Conocidas son las intrigas de este ministro infame, y hoy se han presentado á todo luz."



the close of the Adams administration; and it was several months before Van Buren, the new Secretary of State wrote to him, except on matters of mere routine. This neglect was the occasion of some complaint by Poinsett. Finally, on October 16, 1829, the Jackson government passed its opinion on his conduct. Van Buren said he regretted to learn that there was a prejudice against Poinsett of the strongest and, there was every reason to fear, of the most incurable type; and continued: "The only ground upon which this state of feeling appears to be justified, is the allegation on the part of those who entertain it, that you have availed yourself of your situation to intermeddle in the domestic affairs of that Republic. The suspicions entertained on this subject—the existence of which he sincerely deprecates—the President feels himself justified, by all the information of which he is possessed, in considering without just cause. The fact that no complaint has at any time been made by the authority to which you are accredited, which would be the most likely to be informed of such interference, if it did exist, and the first to feel aggrieved thereby; your knowledge of the established policy of this government in that respect, and its decided repugnance to all intermeddling in the internal concerns of other states; your own assurance to the contrary; and the confidence which the President reposes in your discretion and patriotism—secure him from the apprehension that the present embarrassed state of our affairs with that country is attributable to the indiscretion of the representative of the United States." But, he said, whatever the cause of those suspicions might be, they existed and were believed by the President to interfere in the relations of the two countries. Since Poinsett, availing himself of the permission granted by the preceding administration, had already expressed a wish to return, the President, Van Buren said, "gives his assent to your resignation. It is, however, his anxious wish that your return should not be attended by any circumstances which might wear the appearance of censure, or afford countenance to the imputations of your enemies." The way to prevent this "assent to your resignation" from having the appearance of censure was outlined in the following paragraph. If by the time he should receive this letter there should have been such an effectual change in sentiment toward him in Mexico as to render his continuance agreeable and to lead him to think he could

carry into effect the views of his government, it would accord with the President's wishes that he should remain where he was. He was to be at liberty to speak freely in his interviews with public men of his freedom of election to return or remain.<sup>63</sup>

Jackson and Van Buren apparently had no expectation that there would be such a change in sentiment toward Poinsett that he would think of remaining. The belief that the prejudices were of an incurable character had been expressed in the beginning; and the whole tone of the letter, especially the instructions concerning taking leave, seem to assume that he would return. A *chargé* was appointed and sent to take his place. The apparently optional character of the recall seems to have been simply a device to "save the face" of Poinsett. Unless there should be an "effectual change in sentiment" there was really no option.

But if the apparent option in Poinsett's recall had been a real option on October 16, a chain of circumstances which had been in operation for more than three months culminated the next day to make his recall positive. On October 17 Montoya, the Mexican *chargé* in Washington, handed to Van Buren a letter from the President of Mexico to the President of the United States demanding the recall of Poinsett. This had been written on July 1, 1829, a full month before the manifesto of the legislature of the State of Mexico had been presented to Guerrero requesting him to order that passports be given to Poinsett. President Guerrero said to President Jackson:

Of late, public opinion has pronounced itself against him in the most conclusive, general and decided manner, as appears from the writings published almost every day in nearly all the states of the confederation. The public clamor against Mr. Poinsett has become general, not only among the authorities, and men of education, but also among the vulgar classes; not only among the individuals who suspected him, but also among many of those who have been his friends. To Mr. Poinsett are attributed the misfortunes which have befallen the Republic, and it has even been unhesitatingly supposed that he had a direct influence over the proceedings of the Government, in consequence of which they have not been received by the public with the respect which is due to them. Owing to the general distrust of Mr. Poinsett the relations be-

<sup>63</sup> Van Buren to Poinsett, Oct. 16, 1829, MS. Dept. of State, Instructions, American States, XIV, 141.

tween the two republics have not been attended with that success which had been anticipated.

The fact that Poinsett's recall had not previously been demanded in spite of the fact that his presence had caused these embarrassments is suggested as evidence that the Mexican Government was unwilling to do anything to disturb friendly relations.

But things have now arrived at such a point that the Government of Mexico would fail in its performance of its most essential duties if it forbore from asking of that of the United States the recall of its minister. \* \* \* The course of events may be such as to require of the Government of Mexico, as a duty, the exercise of its rights to grant the necessary passports to Mr. Poinsett before the receipt at Mexico of the answer of the Government of the United States of America. In such case (which God forbid) the Government of Mexico trusts that that of the United States of America, which is characterized by the impartiality and liberality of its principles and institutions, will appreciate the propriety of a step of this nature, which it would itself adopt if placed in the same situation and under similar circumstances.<sup>64</sup>

In the note to Montoya enclosing this demand for Poinsett's recall, the Mexican Government told its chargé that it wished to do nothing to disturb peaceable relations with the United States; but instructed him to ask an audience, express a sincere desire to preserve harmony, explain the situation in Mexico with respect to the United States minister, and say that the Mexican Government finds itself unhappily but necessarily compelled to ask that minister's recall.<sup>65</sup>

On October 17, Van Buren added a postscript to his letter of the preceding day to Poinsett revoking the option of remaining or returning, thus making it a positive recall. He added: "In the absence of a contrary allegation on the part of the Mexican Government, and confiding in your assurances, he [President Jackson] still allows himself to believe that the prejudices against you are without just cause."<sup>66</sup> Al-

<sup>64</sup> Guerrero to Jackson, [July 1, 1829], MS. Dept. of State, Notes from Mexican Legation, I, enclosed with Montoya to Van Buren, Oct. 17, 1829. The Spanish original of Guerrero's letter accompanies this translation.

<sup>65</sup> Secretario to Montoya, 1 de Julio de 1829, MS. Rel. Ext.

<sup>66</sup> P. S. Oct. 17, to Van Buren to Poinsett, Oct. 16, 1829, MS. Dept. of State, Instr., Am. Sts., XIV, 141; Jackson to Guerrero, Oct. 17, 1829, MS. Rel. Ext.

A postscript of Oct. 17, attached to Van Buren to Butler, Oct. 16, indicates that Jackson and Van Buren thought the attacks on Poinsett due to the failure of the

though the Jackson administration thus officially exonerated Poinsett again, yet the wording is such as to indicate that the approval was not very enthusiastic and was given only because there was no positive assertion by the Mexican Government that the prejudice against him was with just cause. There is a slight indication that the administration was not fully convinced of Poinsett's innocence, or was somewhat provoked at his conduct, in the fact that on this same day, October 17, a draft which Poinsett had drawn on the Department was protested because of what was regarded as a small irregularity in the way Poinsett had retained for himself the sum of money due to the difference in the rate of exchange between the two countries.<sup>67</sup> The matter could have been arranged in a manner less humiliating to Poinsett had it been so desired. This seems to have been "the last straw which broke the camel's back." In Montoya's letter to his government telling of his presenting the demand for the recall, he too assumed the innocence of Poinsett because of the absence of allegations of his guilt. He said he was persuaded there were no grounds for the charges made in Mexico that the United States was jealous of the prosperity of Mexico.<sup>68</sup>

In the instructions which were written on October 16 for Butler, who was to take Poinsett's place if the latter should return, there is a

Mexican Government to protect him adequately rather than to his actions. *House Docs., 25th Cong. 2d sess., No. 351, p. 52.*

Jackson's reasons for recalling Poinsett, quoted from the Jackson MSS., are printed in Reeves, *Diplomacy under Tyler and Polk*, 68.

<sup>67</sup> Van Buren to Poinsett, Oct. 17, 1829, MS. Dept. of State, Instr., Am. Sts., XIV, 148. When Poinsett was embarrassed by learning that his draft had been protested, he said he regretted that this had been thought necessary, since he would have made good the difference with pleasure if he had known the Department wished. He explained how he had been drawing for his salary and why he had done so, and closed by saying he will "be perfectly content with the decision of the Department with respect to the draft for £100 on London provided the government will refund the amounts for which I have given them credit, on account of the favorable state of exchange between Mexico and the United States." Poinsett to Van Buren, Dec. 9, 1829, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., IV.

<sup>68</sup> Montoya to Secretario, 19 de Octubre de 1829, MS. Rel. Ext.

For brief discussions of Poinsett's recall, see McMaster, *History of the People of the United States*, V, 549; Bancroft, *History of Mexico*, V, 81; Bocanegra, *Memorias*, I, 382 and II, 23; Zamacois, *Historia de Mexico*, XI, 810; Zavala, *Ensayo Historico*, II, 197; Mayo, *Political Sketches*, 95.

positive statement of the government's desire that such actions as Poinsett's should not be repeated. Van Buren said:

With respect to your future official correspondence with the Government of Mexico, and your intercourse, public and private, with the people and their functionaries, the past strongly admonishes you to avoid giving any pretext for a repetition against yourself of the imputations which have been cast upon Mr. Poinsett, of having interfered in the domestic concerns or politics of the country; or even showing any partiality towards either of the parties which now appear to divide the Mexican people. The manifestation of such a preference, or of any connexion, remote as it might be, with their political associations, might again be construed into a wish to influence or foment their party divisions. The President, therefore, expects you to exercise the most sedulous care in guarding against similar imputations, and wishes you to use your utmost endeavors in allaying the irritation which seems to pervade a large portion of the people, and to do away [with] the groundless and unjust prejudices which have been excited against the government of the United States. A social, open, and frank deportment towards men of all classes and all parties; a proper degree of respect for their opinions, whatever they may be; a ready frankness in explaining the true policy of your government, without attempting to obtrude your views where they are not desired; and the most guarded care in condemning or censuring theirs, are among the means which the President would suggest as most likely to command the confidence of the people, and to secure for yourself a proper standing in the opinion of their public functionaries.<sup>69</sup>)

It was on December 9, 1829, that Poinsett's recall reached him.<sup>70</sup> The Mexican Government had not found it necessary to give him his passports as Guerrero's letter demanding his recall said might have to be done. But Poinsett had himself asked permission, in a letter of November 4 to return home.<sup>71</sup> On December 25 he had a conference with the provisional executive and took formal leave.<sup>72</sup> On the last

<sup>69</sup> Van Buren to Butler, Oct. 16, 1829, *House Docs.*, 25th Cong. 2d sess., No. 53, p. 51. It should be mentioned that Butler's conduct in Mexico was worse than Poinsett's, his motives less pure, and that his recall was also demanded.

<sup>70</sup> Poinsett to Van Buren, Dec. 9, 1829, acknowledging receipt of his recall, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., IV.

<sup>71</sup> Poinsett to Van Buren, Nov. 4, 1829, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., IV. This says he had asked the commander of the United States squadron in the West Indies to send a warship to the Mexican coast to take him from the country.

<sup>72</sup> Poinsett to Van Buren, Dec. 26, 1829, saying he had taken leave the preceding day and expected to depart January 2, 1830, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., IV.

day of the year the Provisional President of Mexico, in a letter to the President of the United States, acknowledged the latter's note of October 17 announcing Poinsett's recall, and said that act was looked upon as a testimony to the sincere friendship of the United States for Mexico.<sup>73</sup>

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A new revolution had overthrown Guerrero, who had taken flight, and Vice President Bustamante took control. Poinsett to Viesca, 15 de Diciembre de 1829, asked an audience to present his letter of recall. Secretario de Relaciones to Poinsett, 24 de Diciembre, in reply appointed December 25. Poinsett left Mexico January 3, 1830, and arrived at New Orleans February 2. Poinsett to Van Buren, New Orleans, Feb. 3, 1830, MS. Dept. of State, Mex., Desp., IV.

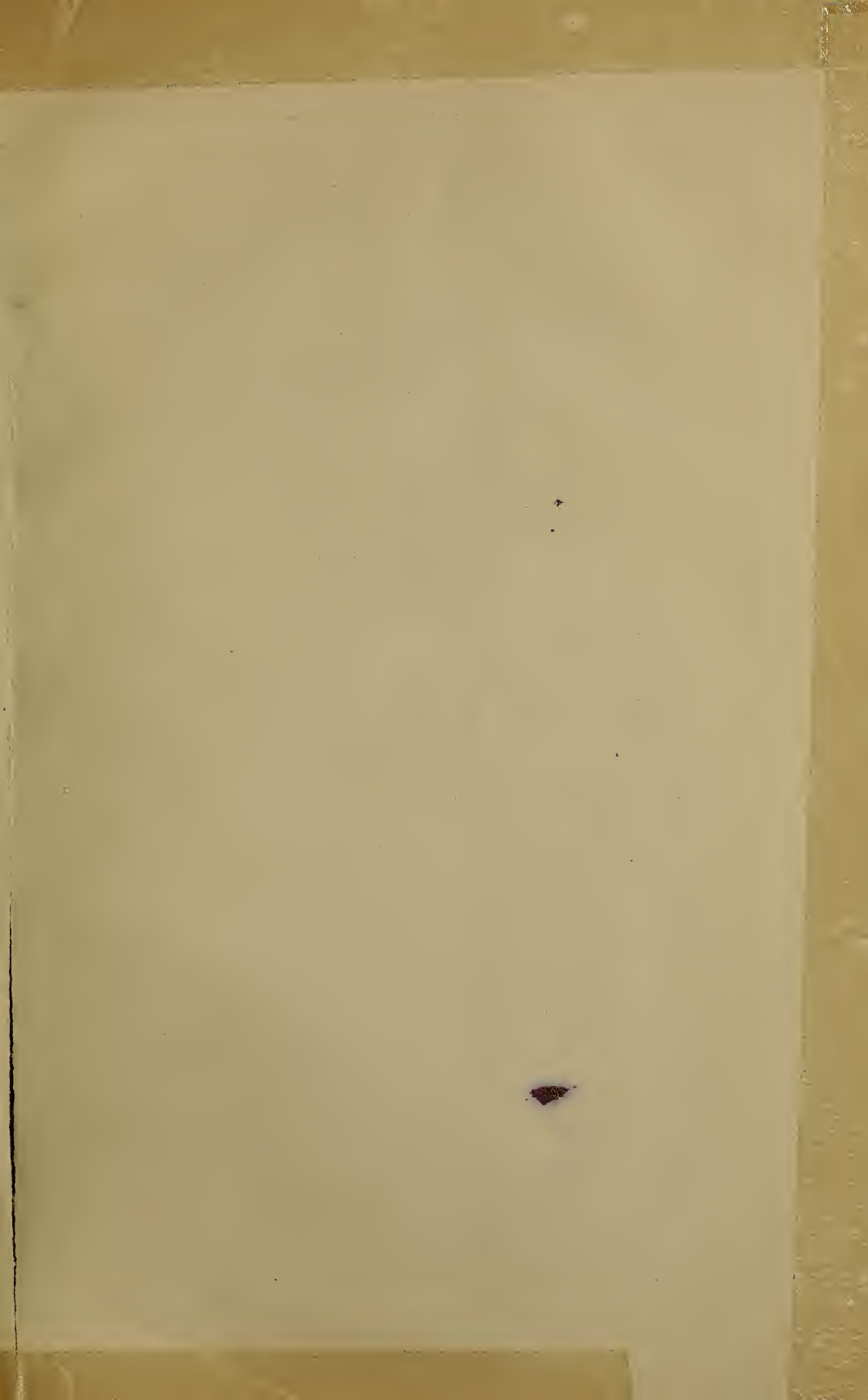
<sup>73</sup> Provisional President to President of the United States, 31 de Diciembre de 1829, MS. Rel. Ext. Accompanying this is Secretario to Poinsett, 31 de Diciembre, granting the privilege to leave and assigning an escort.

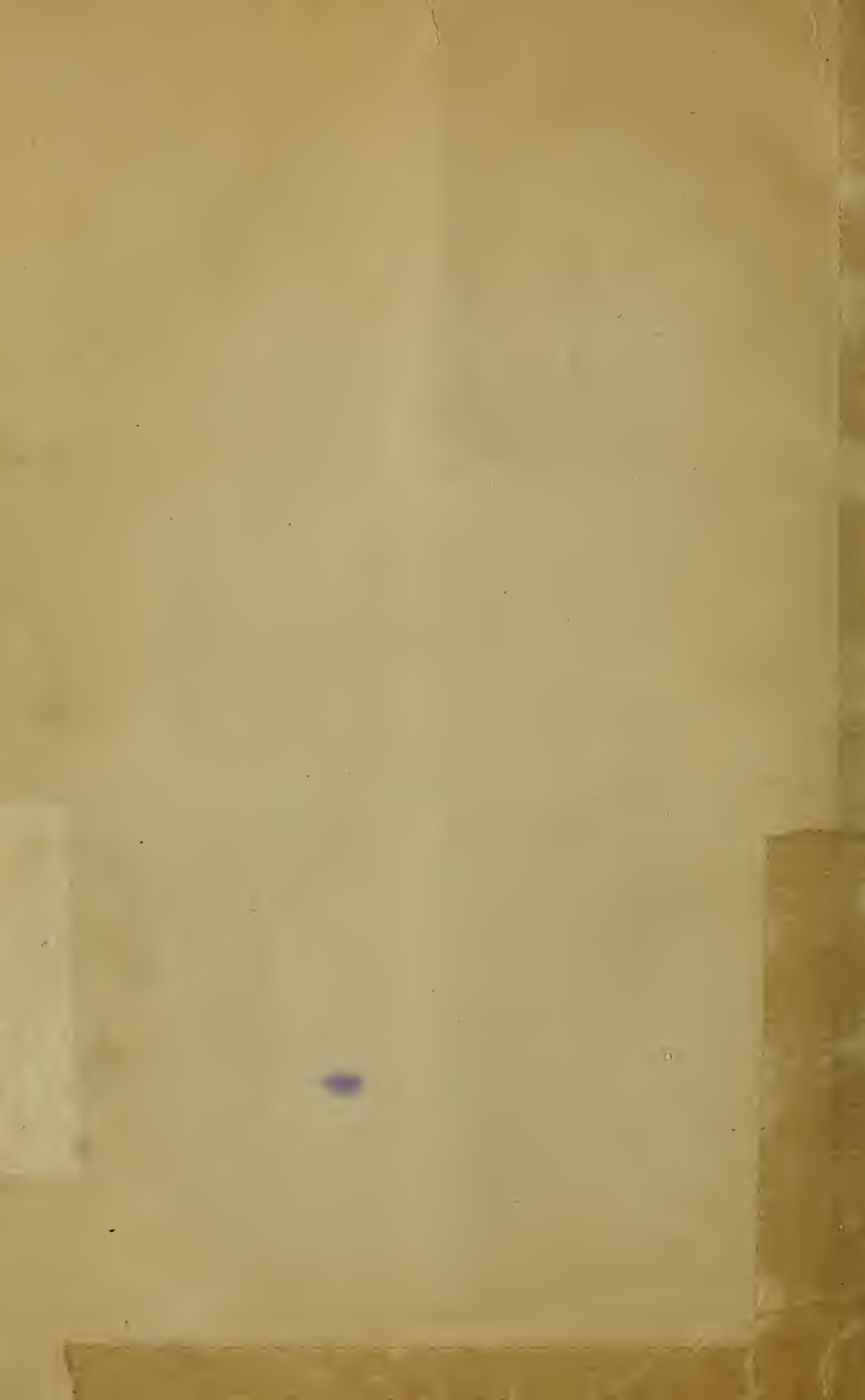
About the middle of December a circular letter was sent by the central government to the governors of the States telling of Poinsett's recall. This and congratulatory replies to it from fifteen State governments are in an expediente in MSS. Rel. Ext.













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