

*John Slidell, appointed United States Minister to Mexico, to James Buchanan,
Secretary of State of the United States*¹

No. 4

MEXICO, *December 27, 1845.*

SIR: I have the honor to transmit herewith, copy of my despatch of 17th inst^t.²

On the 20 instant, not having received from the Minister of Foreign Relations, the reply, in relation to my reception, which he had assured me would be made, so soon as he should be informed of the result of the reference to the Council of Government, I thought it advisable to avail myself of the opportunity which his silence afforded, to correct the statement made by him, in his note of the 16 inst^t.³ that the United States, had proposed through their Consul, to treat in a friendly manner respecting the affairs of Texas, I accordingly addressed him the communication, of which you will find a copy herewith,⁴ pointing out briefly the error into which he had fallen, with the hope, rather than the expectation, that it might induce him to withhold or qualify the reply, which it was known from the public declaration of the Minister himself in the Chamber of Deputies, had been prepared, declaring the refusal of the President to receive me. On the 21 instant, I received from M^r Peña y Peña, his promised reply, conveying the formal and unqualified refusal of the Mexican Government to receive me in the character for which I am commissioned. Of this most extraordinary document I send a copy.⁵ To this I replied, under date of 24 instant,⁶ disproving the unfounded assertions of M^r Peña y Peña and refuting the arguments upon which the refusal to receive me was based. It would be superfluous for me to recapitulate

¹ Despatches, Mexico, vol. 12. Received January 23. ² Above, this part, doc. 3636.

³ Not included in this publication. ⁴ Above, this part, doc. 3639, December 20, 1845.

⁵ *Ibid.*, doc. 3640, December 20, 1845. ⁶ Above, this part, doc. 3642.

what I have said in my letter to the Minister of Foreign Relations, and I shall refer you for particulars to the accompanying copy.

I am not without apprehension, lest, in my anxiety to preserve that tone of forbearance, in my intercourse with this Government, which has been so strongly inculcated upon me by your instructions, I may have failed to animadvert with becoming spirit, on its unparalleled bad faith, its gross falsification of the correspondence which led to my appointment, and the utter futility of the miserable sophistries by which it attempts to justify its conduct. If I have erred in this respect, I doubt not that you will find sufficient excuse for the error, in the peculiarity of my position, unprecedented, I believe in our diplomatic annals, the absence of all instructions in a contingency so unlooked for, and the feeling of self abnegation, which has prompted me, rather to subject myself to the imputation of a want of proper firmness and energy, than to take a course which could scarcely have failed to close the door upon all subsequent attempts at negotiation, and render war inevitable.—

Apart, indeed from your instructions, two other considerations would have operated to restrain me from replying to the note of M^r Peña y Peña in stronger terms, the conviction that it was dictated rather by the fears than the feelings of the existing Government, and the relative situation of the two countries, which would have rendered the language of menace and recrimination unbecoming.

You will observe that I have signified to this Government, my intention to proceed in a few days to Jalapa, there to await your final instructions. I have not decided upon this course without due deliberation, and I hope that it will meet with your approbation. My reasons were, first, to let this Government understand from my acts as well as my words, the serious consequences likely to result from a persistence in their present course, and secondly, to avoid the possibility of any suspicion attaching to the Legation, of interference of any kind in the struggle now going on. With a people so jealous and suspicious, the most innocent movements or associations are liable to be misunderstood, and misrepresented, and for that reason, I have, since my arrival, abstained from all intercourse, with members of either of the contending parties. To enable you better to decide upon the course proper to be pursued, I will endeavor to give you in as few words as possible, some idea of the present state of things here. I will not enter into detail, for their phases vary so much from day to day, and there are so many factions and subdivisions of party, that even if I possessed the necessary information, I could not communicate it to you within any ordinary limits. The two great divisions of party are those of the Federalists and Centralists, the former desiring the reestablishment of the Constitution of 1824, which, with the exception of the absence of religious toleration, was very nearly a counterpart of our own, the latter, as the name implies, advocating a consolidated Gov-

ernment, as the only one adapted to the character of the people and possessing sufficient strength and energy to preserve their nationality. But in these two great parties there are many shades of opinion, some of the Federalists, for instance, being disposed to concede greater powers to the General Government, while many of the Centralists advocate an Executive with unlimited powers to be exercised either by a single person or a Triumvirate, and some would even go so far, as to abrogate all the forms of a Republican Government, and call for the establishment of a monarchy, in the person of some foreign Prince, to be guaranteed by some of the leading European powers. But if all these parties be analyzed, they will be found to be mere personal factions, whose members, with very rare exceptions, have no other object in view than the elevation of some chief who will look with complacency upon any corruption or abuse of power that may be committed by his adherents. As for a people, in the proper sense of the term, it does not exist in Mexico, the masses are totally indifferent to all the revolutions that are going on and submit with the most stupid indifference to any masters that may be imposed upon them.

General Herrera, the actual President, was elected but a few months since, almost unanimously, and in accordance with the forms of the Constitution; he came into power under auspices apparently the most flattering, and yet he will in all probability soon vacate the National Palace, to be succeeded by some military chief, whose career in turn, will be equally short lived.

The associations of General Herrera, have heretofore generally been with the Federal party, and the bias of his feelings in that direction was indicated by the selection from it of a majority of the members of his Cabinet; but his failure to proclaim the federation and to throw himself frankly upon that party, soon alienated the greater portion of it, while the remainder have given him but a feeble and reluctant support, and the whole force of the Centralists comprising nearly all the officers of the army, and almost the entire clergy has been arrayed against him. He is universally admitted to be a man of probity, and the persons immediately about him are said to be free from any antecedent stain of that corruption, which unfortunately is the almost invariable characteristic of public men in Mexico. He has endeavored to conduct the Government purely, and to correct some of the gross abuses which have existed in every branch of the public service, this has of course enlisted against him, the host of office holders throughout the country and he has not shewn that energy which was necessary to carry his good intentions into effect. The command of the division of reserve, destined to operate on the frontier of Texas, was entrusted to General Paredes, who although he had from causes of personal dissatisfaction contributed to the overthrow of Santa Anna, has always been known as the advocate of centralism or rather of a military despotism.—Ordered to advance several months since to the line of the Rio del Norte, he has on various frivolous pretexts, constantly disobeyed

or evaded his instructions, and the Government, although it cannot have been ignorant of his hostile intentions, has not dared to displace him. The force under his command is variously estimated at from 5 to 8000 men; and is said to comprise the most efficient troops of the Republic.—The intention of the Government to negotiate with the United States has been made the great theme of denunciation, and the opposition has been gradually maturing its plans of insurrection in every quarter; the arrival of an American Minister was to be the signal of the outbreak, it occurred sooner than was anticipated and consequently found them unprepared. Paredes did not issue his revolutionary proclamation until the 15th instant, and did not put his troops in march towards this place until some days after, a corresponding movement in the Capital was expected to have taken place, immediately on the receipt of Paredes proclamation, and such undoubtedly was the intention of the revolutionists, but it seems that his plan, as these insurrectionary programmes are here called, dissatisfied some of the leaders, they could not agree upon their course of operations; and the movement was postponed. This gave the Government a breathing spell, in the meantime several of the most conspicuous revolutionists have been arrested and are now in prison, others, (and among them General Almonte) against whom orders of arrest have been issued are concealed; extraordinary powers for six months have been granted to the President by Congress, the city, which is now being fortified, has been declared in a state of siege and the liberty of the press suspended. The Government appears to be determined to defend itself obstinately, although the defection of the garrisons of San Juan de Ulloa and Vera Cruz, and of the force stationed at Jalapa, gives it but little reason to rely upon the fidelity of any portion of the army. What will be the result it would be idle for me to predict, but the general opinion here appears to be, that the Government must succumb.

If the Government sustain itself, my belief is, that it will find some pretext to reconsider its refusal to receive me, and if it fall, those who may replace it, will perhaps take the same course.—Of one thing however, I feel assured, that after what has occurred, should any concession be made by our Government, if any American Minister present himself here, without an unqualified retraction by whatever party may succeed in the present contest, of M^r Peña y Peña's note of the 20th instant he will come on a bootless errand. The desire of our Government to secure peace will be mistaken for timidity, the most extravagant pretensions will be made and insisted upon, until the Mexican people shall be convinced by hostile demonstrations, that our differences must be settled promptly, either by negotiation or the sword.—I shall be detained here a few days, engaged in collecting the facts and taking certain steps in relation to the disputed payment of instalments, which when obtained and completed will form the subject of a separate despatch.—

I have the honor [etc.].