POINSETT'S CAREER IN MEXICO.

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Joel R. Poinsett, received at Mexico in June, 1825, as the first representative of the United States, was either singularly perverse or singularly unfortunate. Not one of the other ministers at that post was friendly toward him; his British colleague fought him with passionate intensity; European governments criticised him severely; practically all of the people and several of the State legislatures of Mexico denounced him; her President asked for his recall; it was necessary to protect him with troops; and he long figured in the history of that country as "the abominable Poinsett," a political fiend in human guise, who plunged a gentle and brotherly people into an abyss of discord, hatred and revolution. Worse yet, these accusations have recently evoked an echo in his own country. "Poinsett's course was amazingly imprudent," says the latest and largest book on our relations with Mexico. "He considered it a part of his duty to work actively for the overthrow of aristocracy and hereditary privilege and priesthood," we are told; and he "put this theory in practice by aiding in the establishment of new Masonic lodges, which were intended to be, and, in fact, were, purely political centres." And, to quote again, "The American government had not, of course, authorized Poinsett's excursion into local politics." If our minister deserved such condemnation, the Mexicans were justified in regarding with deep suspicion the country that sent him and supported him; and our view of all the diplomatic

clashes and finally the war between the two nations must seriously be affected.[1]

Now in the first place it is noticeable that Poinsett's American critic, though his book abounds elsewhere in citations of authorities, does not undertake to prove these charges. The Mexican government, in asking for his recall, accused him of no fault; and as for the general denunciations that rained upon him, the most remarkable instance will supply a norm. January 12, 1828, a treaty of limits was signed by him and the Mexican plenipotentiaries. During the latter part of April it reached Washington and was ratified by our Senate. Wishing to expedite the business Poinsett undertook to forward the treaty, whenever it should be ratified by Mexico, to her minister at Washington for the exchange of ratifications, which had to be done by May 12. As the treaty was not ratified by the Mexican Senate until April 25, it was evident that it would not reach our capital in season. Eventually it arrived at its destination, but no "power" to make the exchange accompanied it; the Secretary of Relations, Alamán, probably the most highly educated and most serious of the Mexican statesmen, informed Congress that Poinsett had stolen the "power" in order to defeat a treaty which Mexican delay had already doomed; and such became the accepted opinion in that country. The lack of evidence behind the charges against our

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GENERAL NOTE. The principal documents are to be found as follows: 1Poinsett, Despatches to the Secretary of State, State Department archives, Washington. 2Poinsett, Letters to the President, Poinsett Papers, Pennsylvania Historical Society. 3Poinsett, Correspondence with Rufus King, *ibid.* Instructions to and despatches from Morier, Ward and Pakenham, Foreign Office Papers, Public Record Office, London. Instructions to and despatches from Martin and Cochelet, archives Dépt. des Affaires Etrangères, Paris.

[1] (Ministers) Martin, Dec. 19, 1828. (British colleague) Ward, No. 53, secret and confidential, 1826. (Governments) To Ward, No. 1, 1826; to Martin, Dec. 1, 1827. (States) Pakenham, No. 73, 1827. (Recall) Montoya to Van Buren, Oct. 17, 1829, State Dept. archives. (Troops) Consul Taylor, Vera Cruz, Aug. 11, 1829, *ibid.* ("Abominable") La Ruina de los Mexicanos, México, 1837. (Plunged) México á través de los Siglos, iv., 377. (Own country) Rives, The United States and Mexico (N. Y., 1913), i., 163, 165.

minister does not, however, quite satisfy us, and we will search for it ourselves.[2]

Who and what, then, was Poinsett? To avoid all risk of partiality, let us take our answer from the book that censures him. He was a native of South Carolina, but received his education in New England and Great Britain. He studied the art of war at Woolwich and the practice of medicine at Edinburgh. After completing his course of studies he travelled extensively in Europe and Asia, and was favorably received in very high circles. Soon after the revolt of Spain began in South America President Madison sent him there on an informal mission, and, although capable of seeing the patriots in a true light, he sided heartily with the cause of independence. Later he was despatched to Mexico on a similar errand. At home he served in the legislature of South Carolina and the Congress of the United States. His address was excellent; his command of Spanish was easy; and to political, military, and medical attainments he added distinction in natural science, for the name of a beautiful plant, the *Poinsettia pulcherrima*, attests his eager study of botany. To these facts a few from other sources may be added. By descent he was partly of Latin blood. At Paris he commanded the confidence of Masséna sufficiently to be told of Napoleon's attempting to shoot the marshal; in Russia the Czar offered him a colonelcy; he championed the cause of Mexican independence in our national House; and once at a public dinner he expressed a wish for the emancipation of the Irish Roman Catholics. A person less likely to be a blunderer, a fool or a fanatic it would not be easy to find.[3]

[2] (Accuse) See Montoya, Note 1. (Signed) Treaties in Force (Washington 1899), 389. (Ratified) Clay to Obregón, April 30, 1828: Ho. Ex. Doc. 42; 25 Cong., 1 sess., 46. (Delayed) Poinsett to Clay, April 26, 1828: *ibid.*, 29. (Undertook) Filisola, *Guerra de Tejas* (México, 1849), ii., 602. (May 12) Clay to Obregón, April 30, 1828. (April 25) Poinsett to Clay, April 26, 1828. (No power) Filisola, *op. cit.*, ii., 602. (Alamán), *ibid.* Poinsett's despatches were more than a month on the way, and, besides, more than a week passed after the treaty was ratified before it was placed in his hands.

[3] Rives, *op. cit.*, i., 162. (Latin) Universal Encyclo., "Poinsett." (Other details) Documents in the Poinsett Papers, Pennsylvania Historical Society.

The instructions given to Poinsett informed him emphatically that the people of his country strongly approved of the independence of Mexico, and that our government had exerted "all the moral influence" it possessed to promote that cause; and they stated that the policy, the interest and the feelings of this nation concurred in favoring the principle of the "Sovereignty of the People." The President's Message of December 2, 1823, which announced the "Monroe Doctrine," was brought forcibly to his attention, and finally he was instructed to be ready "on all occasions" to explain unobtrusively the workings and the advantages of the federal republican system. The use of such language in the orders of a diplomatic agent could only mean that he was to support the principles thus recommended. In other words he was to stand for democratic sentiment, federal republican institutions and the prevention of any European control in Mexico that would make her independence illusory; and of course it was understood in general that he would maintain the position and advance the interests of the United States. Moreover, he was directed at a later time to oppose "any partiality or preference shown to any foreign Nation or its subjects, to the disadvantage of the United States and their citizens"; and obviously the distinct predominance of a jealous and unfriendly power, such as England was believed to be, could not fail to work unfavorably for Americans.[4]

The situation at Mexico rendered these instructions highly opportune. The struggle of that country for independence, initially supported for the most part by the common people, had at first been unsuccessful; but when the liberals gained control in Spain and laid reforming hands upon the Church, all the privileged classes of Mexico—the governing element, the aristocracy, the rich landed proprietors, the monopolistic merchants and the still more monopolistic prelates—desired to cut loose

[4] (Instructions) Clay to Poinsett, March 26 (incorporating R. C. Anderson's instructions of May 27, 1823), Sept. 24, 1825: State Dept. archives.

from the Peninsula. Independence was the result, and then the privileged classes controlled and intended to control the country for their own advantage, as they had previously done. A federal republic was set up, for under the peculiar circumstances nothing else was feasible, but the constitution was not expected in the dominant circles to last long. Many looked and labored for a centralized republic, which the nature of the case would soon have made in fact if not in name a monarchy; many for a throne; and some—headed for a time by the President himself—for a member of the Spanish royal family as king, and a formal or virtual reunion with Spain. Meanwhile the rest of the nation, so far as they were capable of seeing and thinking, looked on with growing wrath. They had expected independence to mean freedom, and now they found themselves under the very tyranny that it had been their aspiration and aim to overthrow. Lacking organization, wealth, social influence and as a rule education, they were helpless; but they were groping their way toward union and a second revolution. No other method to gain their rights was known to them.[5]

Another serious feature of the case was the dominance of England. "It is plainly a cardinal object of this government," reported our minister at London, "to make European policy predominate in the new American states, particularly Mexico." By "European" was meant, of course, Europe in preference to America, and England in preference to the rest of Europe; and she had good reasons for expecting to hold the ascendancy. British recognition had been eagerly desired by the republic, and the gratitude for it was of corresponding intensity. Spain had not yet become reconciled to her wayward daughter; and that unfilial child, stand-

[5] A page of citations would be needed to cover this paragraph fully, but the following may answer for the present purpose. 1Poinsett, July 8, 1827; March 10, 1829. México á través de los Siglos, iii,. iv., *passim*. G. Prieto, Historia Patria (Fourth ed., México, 1893), 288-9. Document prepared for the French Cabinet, 1828: archives Dépt. des Affaires Etrangères. Tornel, Breve Reseña Histórica (México, 1852), 5. Ward, No. 36, secret and confidential, 1825; No. 32, confidential, 1826; No. 131, 1828.

ing in great fear of the mother-country, doubtless perceived that no assault could come from the Peninsula without the consent of the British fleet. President Victoria felt greatly flattered because Canning wrote to him. British loans were desired; British capital was invested to a large amount in mines; and British gold was paid liberally for managing these properties. At about the time of Poinsett's arrival, President Victoria was accustomed to spend two hours a week with the British minister, and on one of his visits he assured that official enthusiastically that he regarded England as "the natural Ally and Protectress of Mexico." Ward, the minister, was permitted to insert whatever he pleased in the official newspaper. In every instance, he reported, the President was "most ready" to use his personal and his official influence in behalf of British interests; and Poinsett stated that three of the four Cabinet ministers concurred with their chief in that policy. Official mourning was decreed throughout the country on the death of the Duke of York. In short, Ward informed his government that when the American representative arrived, he found England "in possession of that influence, to which it has so just a claim." In the mouth of an Englishman of that day such language signified a great deal. Cuvillier, Captain of a French frigate, reported at this time, "England is now the protector of Mexico." Under the ambitious and able management of that country conditions approaching such a state of things, if not yet achieved, seemed fairly possible; and all this powerful influence, though not actually hostile was distinctly unfavorable to us. Indeed Canning warned the Mexican government pointedly to beware of an alliance with the United States, declaring that it could only find sure and disinterested support in a close union with a great European power; and our minister was aware of this.[6]

[6] (Cardinal) McLane, No. 18, 1830: archives State Dept. (Desired) Hervey, confidential, Dec. 15, 1824: F. O. Papers, Public Record Office. (Wrote) 1Poinsett, No 166, 1829. (Loans, salaries) 1Poinsett, No. 12, 1825; Cochelet, Jan. 16, 1830. (Cap.

Poinsett's attitude in beginning his labors was doubtless well expressed in his draft of the treaty of limits. "The natural Relations of the United States & the Republick of Mexico, in whatever light they may be viewed," he wrote, "exhibit the strongest grounds for intimate connection, which are presented between any two Nations on this Globe, ... without one solitary cause of rivalry or collision." As for the attitude of the Mexicans, we are told by his American critic that he was "well received." This, however, was only because Ward naturally desired to bring him into harmony with the existing state of things and lead him to accept a peaceable subserviency to England, for he reported that the American minister was indebted to him for almost every mark of civility received from Victoria. In other words it was an endeavor to bring the United States under what Poinsett well termed the "condescending protection" of the British. In reality his reception was the reverse of cordial. "We soon perceived that we were objects of distrust and dislike to the ruling party," he reported; "they displayed hostile feeling towards us." Monarchists, aristocrats, monopolists and Europeanizers could not look with favor on an enthusiastic champion of popular sovereignty, a thorough democrat, a convinced free-trader and an apostle of the Monroe doctrine. Poinsett's rare social gifts doubtless enabled him to have agreeable personal relations with some individuals of high standing, but he assured his government that he was regarded by "the aristocratic faction" with "repugnance"; and repugnance is a strong word.[7]

On the other hand those opposed to the dominant oligarchy desired to be on friendly terms with him as the

ital) McLane, No. 18, 1830. (British predominance) Ward, Aug. 22, 1825; No. 21, secret and confidential, 1825; No. 59, 1827; most private and confidential, Sept. 30, 1825; Pakenham, May 19, 1827; 1Poinsett, No. 3, 1825; Cuvillier, Frigate *Nymphe*, July–, 1825: archives Dépt. des Aff. Etrangères. (Canning, Aware) Cochelet, Jan. 5, 1830.

[7] (Attitude) Poinsett Papers, Penn. Hist. Soc. (Critic) Rives, *op. cit.*, i. 162. (Ward) Ward, most private and confidential, Sept. 30, 1825. (Condescending) 1Poinsett, No. 166, 1829. (Perceived) 1Poinsett, *ibid.* (Repugnance) 1Poinsett, *ibid.*

representative of a free country, and especially because he understood the successful working of federal republican institutions, about which the Mexicans knew almost nothing. Convictions, interests and even the desire for social intercourse combined to lead our minister toward this party. "I was compelled to choose my friends and associates from among the opposers" of the privileged faction, he reported; "the only other alternative would have been to have withdrawn from society altogether and to have abandoned the fulfillment of my public duties." The latter policy would have been the dictate of what we call discretion, but it would have meant disobedience to instructions and disregard of the interests and dignity of his nation. The United States would have trailed along after Great Britain, and, as Poinsett himself expressed it, "got on smoothly and insignificantly." Republicanism would almost certainly have been discredited by the outbreak of the contemplated revolution. Democracy would probably have been set back by the defeat of the popular party, strong only in numbers. Monarchy in substance and very possibly in form would have been established. This country would have lost the chance of gaining what we then hoped to find,—a valuable ally in the struggling causes of republicanism and Americanism; direct European interference would have been highly probable; and Spain might have regained her colony.[8]

To meet this critical situation Poinsett adopted no violent policy and, for example, never attended a political meeting; but he took steps that proved as effective as they were simple. "These people were told," he informed our Secretary of State, "that they had only to unite, to organise their party, to establish a press of their own, and to bring the whole weight of their numbers to bear upon the elections in order to effect a great moral change, which would assist their views much more effectually, than could be done by force." This was

[8] (Desired) 1Poinsett, No. 166, 1829. (Compelled) 1Poinsett, No. 94, 1827.

merely to explain the workings of the federal republican system, as he had been instructed to do. "I do assure you," he reported at another time, "that the only influence I have ever sought to exert in these countries has been directed to preserve the existing republican institutions, . . . and to preserve this country from the horrors of civil war." The threatened revolution was thus, although not easily, averted. The President and other leaders found it necessary to recognize the principle of popular sovereignty. Ward himself reported that the plan to overthrow the constitution "failed, not a little in consequence of the formation of Mr. Poinsett's Junta [group], . . . which began by proclaiming the strictest adherence to Federal principles as the bond of it's Union"; and a summary of Mexican affairs prepared for the French Cabinet in 1828 used these words: "The influence of the United States has thus far upheld the republican régime."[9]

In view of Poinsett's instructions this action cannot be condemned. It is, indeed, a recognized part of the ambassador's business to exert influence, and to a greater or less extent affect the course of events. For example, the British and French ministers at Washington were quietly active against our annexing Texas, yet our government made no complaint against them. If told that Poinsett "meddled," one should recall that Monroe's famous Message was decidedly "meddlesome." Canning "meddled," for he sent official advice to Mexico regarding her affairs; and Ward "meddled," for—as he admitted—he maintained a connection with the aristocratic party. The difference was that Poinsett exerted influence in support of the constitution and Ward against it.[10]

At the heart of the aristocratic or oligarchial party, serving at once as a bond of union, an effective organ-

[9] (Attended) Answer to Mexico State Legislature (with 1Poinsett, No. 176, 1829). (Told) 1Poinsett, No. 166, 1829. (Assure) 2Poinsett, July 18, 1827. (Easily) 2Poinsett, *ibid.* (Recognize) 3Poinsett, to King, May 16, 1826. (Failed) Ward, secret and most confidential, Oct. 22-25, 1826. (Summary) Document, Note 5.

[10] (Active) J. H. Smith, Annexation of Texas, 261. (Canning) Cochelet, Jan. 5, 1830. (Ward) Ward, secret and most confidential, Oct. 22-25, 1826.

ization and a secret council, was freemasonry of the Scottish rite, and shortly before Poinsett arrived on the scene a number of men holding popular opinions took steps to counterbalance this political factor. Dr. Chism, whose book, entitled *Una Contribución á la Historia Masónica de México*, seems to have been done with care, gives this account of the matter: "Some thirty-six Master masons of the Scottish Rite, aiming to reform the institution, formed a group [*junta*] in the year 1825 to promote the introduction of the York Rite in Mexico, for they believed that it would more easily keep clear of the political arena. The leader of the movement was Don José Maria Alpuche é Infante, a parish priest from the State of Tabasco, who at this date represented his State in the Mexican Senate. . . . A committee . . . addressed Señor Joel R. Poinsett, Minister of the United States of America in Mexico, and that brother obtained from the Grand Lodge of New York letters patent" for several lodges, which "were duly established and installed by brother Poinsett . . . At first the York Lodges confined themselves to the ceremonies of the rite and works of charity and beneficence." Zavala, at that period one of the leading public men of Mexico, confirms the statement that Alpuche was the father of the scheme, and states that our minister did nothing but obtain the charters and install the Grand Lodge, while Tornel, who doubtless told the truth at times, maintains that the scheme originated with Zavala.[11]

Poinsett, whose word only Mexicans—judging others by themselves—have attempted to impeach, explained his course in this matter from various points of view, at various times and to various persons,—particularly to our President, our Secretary of State, our minister at London and the legislatures of Vera Cruz and Mexico States; and from these accounts we obtain an ampler though not a discrepant view of the affair. Soon after

[11] (Freemasonry) 1Poinsett, No. 94, 1827. Chism, Una Contribución (México, 1899), 16. Zavala, Revoluciones de México, i., 346. Tornel, Breve Reseña Histórica, 45.

arriving in Mexico, the minister tells us, he found that five York lodges were in a formative state but had no regular standing, and, as he was a Mason of that rite, a number of leading public men interested in them invoked his advice and aid. Poinsett for his part saw much in the enterprise. Belonging also to the other rite, he ascertained with little difficulty the European sympathies of the Scottish lodges and their essential hostility against the United States, against all democratic ideas and against genuine republican institutions; and he saw that the new society would tend to unite the as yet unorganized opponents of their principles, and exert a strong moral and intellectual force in a contrary direction. He saw that by taking up the matter he would become closely associated with public men whose good-will it was important for him, as our minister, to have. He must have seen, too, though perhaps he did not mention it, that the connection of these lodges with the United States would tend to promote cordiality between the two countries; and he may well have reflected that affiliation with American Masonry would have a conservative effect.[12]

Another point certainly influenced him. Absolute religious intolerance prevailed in Mexico. Even the British could not obtain permission to erect a chapel, and not only the interests but the lives of all Protestants were every moment in danger from this cause. Being responsible for the security of our citizens, Poinsett was bound to labor, as did his English colleague, against this fanaticism; and, as an additional reason for so doing, he realized that the Roman Church in Mexico strongly supported the principles of the Scottish party. It was certainly his hope, therefore, that the York Masons would spread abroad to a greater or less extent the religious liberalism which prevailed in the United States, —a very different thing from attempting to "over-

[12] (Explained) 2Poinsett, April 26, 1827; 1Poinsett, No. 166, 1829; 3Poinsett, Oct. 14, 1825, and May 16, 1826 (both to King); Replies to Vera Cruz and Mexico Legislatures, 1Poinsett, No. 94, 1827, and No. 176, 1829 (enclosures).

throw" the priesthood. In this, as in his other operations, he was merely carrying out the objects of his mission. Victoria himself said that in Mexico right ideas were not enough; that one had to "oppose system to system." Yet, aside from the ridiculous accusation of stealing the "power," Poinsett's agency in establishing the York lŏdges is the one definite and serious charge against him.[13]

The events that followed in Mexico were deplorable. The oligarchical party would not accept the rule of the majority, and the majority, after gaining the power, would not act fairly or decently. Partisanship and factionalism did their worst. In 1827 the oligarchy took up arms. About a year later there was a popular insurrection against them. And so Mexico was fairly launched on the career of revolution. This, however, was not Poinsett's fault, unless it be the fault of the chemistry professor that some of his pupils manufacture bombs. Poinsett's friends broke away from him and his principles. As early as September, 1826, Ward reported, "His former adherents are now held together by ties very different from those by which he, at first, hoped to connect them,"—those ties having been, according to Ward himself, Americanism and loyalty to the federal republic. The trouble arose from the charac-

[13] (Another) 3Poinsett to King, Oct. 14, 1825. (Chapel) Morier and Ward, No. 1, 1825. (Danger) Ward, Nos. 20, 25, 1825. (Colleague) M. and W., No. 1, 1825; Ward, No. 34, 1825. (System) Ward, No. 21, secret and confidential, 1825. (One) The British and French reports took exception to Poinsett's entertaining Zavala, a leader in the Acordada insurrection (1828), just after that affair; but during it he had entertained at the risk of his life persons connected with the aristocatic party, and one could hardly complain if he also opened his door and spread his table for a friend and political ally. There is another criticism. Poinsett wrote a private letter to his friend, General Guerrero, after learning that the government wished him to do so, urging the General not to take part in a certain revolutionary movement. In this matter he acted as agent of the government in favor of a section of the party that hated him. His only motives can have been to promote the general good and carry out the spirit of his instructions. See 1Poinsett, No. 107, 1827. It has also been argued that Poinsett's dignified explanations of the situation and his course prove he was conscious of having done wrong, but the principle that self-defence against a slander is an admission of its truth cannot be seriously urged. It has also been said that disapproval was shown by our government in ordering Poinsett's successor to give no pretext for such imputations as had been cast upon him, but the fundamental instructions of our first minister were not given to the second, and this order is a reflection upon the preceding administration rather than upon its agent.

teristics and previous experience of the Mexicans. Had Poinsett never set foot on their soil, much the same course of things would have occurred, except that the first revolution would have been launched by the popular side. When the Scotch party say, wrote Zavala, that everything went well until the Yorkinos appeared, they do like the Viceroys, who said that everything went well so long as Mexico obeyed Spain.[14]

The York lodges degenerated into violent and unscrupulous political centers, but this also was not Poinsett's fault,—especially since he withdrew as soon as this tendency declared itself. Martin, an agent of the French government not friendly to our minister, expressed the opinion that founding a lodge, which he admitted was the only act chargeable against Poinsett, could not be made the basis of accusation, and still less the basis of abuse and outrage, since many lodges already existed. There would have been no essential difference had our minister made no such move. After both Masonic rites became thoroughly discredited and useless, a non-Masonic secret society was organized by each party, and the mischief done was greater than before. Had no charters been obtained for Alpuche's lodges, they or some equivalent organizations, lacking the conservative influence of regularity and of association with American freemasonry, would have done the work.[15]

The clergy were alarmed. The Scottish rite they had winked at, but they were thoroughly hostile to a secret society promoted by a heretic. Republicanism and democracy meant liberalism, and liberalism was everywhere their enemy. Before Poinsett was received as our minister, a British agent reported that republican-

[14] (Events) See, *e. g.*, México á través de los Siglos, iv., *passim*. Zavala, *op. cit.*, i., 353. Ward, No. 114, 1826. The fact that all the other members of the diplomatic corps at Mexico "openly advocated the cause of the insurgents" (1Poinsett, No. 114, 1828) illustrates the anomalous character of the situation, the moderation of Poinsett's course, and the demand for doing things which under other circumstances might not have seemed to be called for.

[15] (Centres) Chism. *op. cit.*, 16. (Withdrew) 1Poinsett, No. 166, 1829. Martin, July 26, 1827. Guadalupe Society (Yorkino): See 1Poinsett, No. 110, 1827. Novenarios (Escoceses society): See México á través de los Siglos, iv., 164.

ism had given rise to a spirit of religious independence. The growth of American influence tended the same way; but this too was not Poinsett's fault. Nor was it his fault that aristocrats and monopolists began to see writing on the wall. A new day had been born in Mexico, and for good or ill its light was bound to shine.[16]

Poinsett, however, had to bear the blame of it all and of much more besides. The aristocratic party, knowing something of his agency in their downfall and easily imagining much more, were fierce both against his principles and him; and, besides, they saw that it was good politics to represent him as the chief of the opposing party, for the prejudice against foreigners was intense, and the Mexicans, whatever their moral character, were devoted to the Roman church. The Yorkinos, having learned all Poinsett had to teach them and gone far beyond his principles, were eager to escape—by turning against him—from the odium they had brought upon themselves. Some who knew he had meant well and not ill, admired his ability so much that on general principles they feared him. Every public man about whom a scandalous tale was brought forth by the bushwhacking journalists blamed Poinsett for his disgrace, and almost all the public men were on this list. Before he presented his credentials, the United States had come to be regarded by influential Mexicans as the natural competitor and enemy of their country. We had been very tardy in sending a minister. We were charged with aiming to bring all the American states together in a confederation dominated by ourselves. It was believed that we were scheming to get hold of Texas. The Mexicans were disposed to give the other Spanish-American nations commercial advantages, and we protested with vigor. They desired to attack Spain in Cuba, and we not only objected emphatically, but were known to favor guaranteeing the possession of Havana to Spain. An article in the *American Quarterly Review* criticising Mexico threw her abnormal vanity into con-

[16] (Heretic) Ward, No. 44, Oct. 8-17, 1825. (Agent) Morier, No. 10, 1825.

vulsions of resentment; and a number of minor causes tended in the same direction.[17]

These factors were enough to produce a storm of obloquy, but there was another. The reports of the British and French agents prove that Poinsett's views regarding European nations were, as might have been expected, decidedly liberal for an American of that day, and that personally he was conciliatory and friendly toward his colleagues. But Poinsett's republicanism, our doctrine of America for the Americans, and our objections against allowing special privileges to the other Spanish-American countries led all the foreign representatives to oppose him; and Martin, who said he maintained "the best understanding" with Ward, wrote home in so many words that it was a question of defeating the American party. Ward in particular, finding the supremacy of England threatened and the aristocratic faction in danger, took up arms; and he used methods that brought upon him the censure of his government. The aims of Poinsett and of the United States were misrepresented, and the suspicions of the Mexicans were thus powerfully confirmed by a combination of the other foreign agents against our minister.[18]

On general principles one would not care to assert that Poinsett was always as prudent and far-sighted as, after the event, might seem to have been desirable; but on a full review of the data, including a great quantity of Mexican political literature, his bad reputation appears to have arisen from supporting the causes of Americanism, popular sovereignty and federal republican insti-

[17] (Canning) 1Poinsett, No. 166, 1829. (Yorkinos) Martin, April 10, 1828; Ward, No. 114, 1826; Ward, secret and most confidential, Oct. 22-25, 1826. (Feared) Zavala to Poinsett, June 16, 1827: Poinsett Papers, Penn. Hist. Soc. (Public men) Ward, No. 114, 1826; secret and most confidential, Oct. 22-25, 1826. (Before) 2Poinsett, April, 26, 1827; 1Poinsett, July 22, 1829; Manifesto of Vera Cruz State Legislature (with 1Poinsett, No. 94, 1827). (Confederation) Ward, most private and confidential, Sept. 30, 1825. (Texas) 2Poinsett, April 26, 1827. (Advantages) Van Buren to Butler, Oct. 16, 1829: archives State Dept.; Clay to Poinsett, March 26, 1825: *ibid.* (Cuba) 1Poinsett, No. 24, 1825; No. 184, 1829. (Havana) Ward, secret and confidential, May 29, 1826. (Article) 1Poinsett, No. 128, 1828.

[18] (Liberal, etc.) 1Poinsett, No. 166, 1829; Ward, separate and private, March 25, 1826; Ward, No. 45, 1825; Pakenham, No. 98, 1829; Cochelet, May 22, 1829. (Doctrine) Ward, No. 17, 1825. Martin, April 27, 1827. (Censure) Ward, No. 68, 1825; To Ward, No. 1, 1826. (Misrepresented) Martin, March 30, 1827; Ward, No. 44, Oct. 8-17, 1825, etc.

tutions, in accordance with his instructions and what were believed to be the interests of the United States, in a situation where every factor went against him; and this conclusion is strengthened by certain official facts. First, Rufus King, our minister to England in 1826, with whom Poinsett opened a correspondence on account of his difficulties with Ward, wrote that he fully understood and fully endorsed his principles. Secondly, Canning himself did not condemn Poinsett's action in helping to establish the York lodges. Thirdly, our government, to which his ideas and conduct seem to have been fully explained, never censured him. Fourthly, as our Secretary of State pointed out, if he concerned himself improperly with Mexican affairs, it was the duty of the Mexican national authorities to give us information of that fact, and no such information was given. And finally, President Victoria not only offered to assure the United States that Poinsett had been guilty of nothing culpable, but admitted that our minister had done good service to Mexico.[19]

Poinsett therefore stands forth, it seems but fair to say, as not only one of our most gifted and most accomplished citizens, but one of the noblest figures in our diplomatic annals, facing "with imperturbable calm," as an unfriendly agent of France admitted, a perfect hurricane of abuse, endeavoring patiently and skillfully to quench passion and slander with facts and sound arguments, and refusing despite threats of assassination to leave his post until recalled by this government; and so far as their unreasoning prejudice and resentment against him tended to precipitate the Mexicans into a contest with us, their blood was upon their own heads.

[19] 3Poinsett, from King, Jan. 24, 1826. (Canning) 3Poinsett, from King, Feb. 18, 1826. (Never) Van Buren to Poinsett, Oct. 16, 1829: archives State Dept. (Duty) *Idem* to Butler, Oct. 16, 1829: *ibid.* (Victoria) 2Poinsett, June 8, 1827; Zavala to Poinsett, June 16, 1827: Poinsett Papers, Penn. Hist. Soc. (Agent) Cochelet, Aug. 7, 1829. The reason why Poinsett's recall was asked was that he was supposed to have much influence with President Guerrero, and Guerrero, who was in great political straits, did not wish to share in the minister's unpopularity. See Bocanegra, Memorias, ii., 18; Montoya to Van Buren, Oct. 17, 1829: archives State Dept. As the text suggests, the author has read a great amount of Mexican political literature, particularly editorials in the newspapers, bearing upon this subject.