



Mirabeau B. Lamar.

Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar

Troubadour and Crusader

BY

HERBERT PICKENS GAMBRELL

In writing History . . . I conceive that the whole truth should be given; & that the simple chronicling of events, without the . . . motives of the actors, is but the telling of half a truth, and falling short of the duty of the historian.

—MIRABEAU B. LAMAR



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Chapter XV

END OF THE JOURNEY .

RELIEVED of the cares of office, Lamar began again to collect materials for his contemplated history of Texas. He had promised himself that he would take no further part in politics, and, although he was more successful than most statesmen who take that pledge, he could not resist the temptation on occasion. In 1844, for example, he urged his old friend, James Webb, to oppose Anson Jones and Edward Burlinson—both anti-Lamar men—for the presidency, and that year he also announced his belief that Texas should relinquish her independence and seek annexation.

“I was, in the early stages of our Revolution, opposed to the Annexation of Texas to the United States,” he wrote to a committee of Galveston citizens. “To insure . . . [independence and prosperity] Slavery . . . was indispensable. Without that institu-

tion . . . we should have dwindled into pastoral ignorance and inefficiency; and would have sunk back under Mexican despotism . . . But when I saw our government in collusion with England, to overthrow that Institution—when the confidence of the Southern people in our integrity and the disposition to maintain it, was destroyed—and the tide of emigration actually changed from Texas back to the United States, I paused in my opinions, and turned to seek for my country a shelter from the grasp of British cupidity beneath the only flag under which her institution could be saved from the storms that threatened her. I knew from the first expression of public opinion in 1836, down to its reiteration by the Congress of 1843, that the people of Texas were still in favor of Annexation. It was not . . . in Texas that the battle was to be fought; but in the United States, between the two great contending parties . . . and it was there and in that conflict, that I aided the cause of Annexation to the extent of my influence.”

After annexation was accomplished, Lamar’s name was linked with Thomas J. Rusk’s as the probable choice of the legislature for United States senators. “It seems to give general satisfaction,” a friend wrote Lamar in September, 1845. But Lamar declined to be

considered a candidate. Houston and Rusk were elected.

When the war between the United States and Mexico began, Lamar raised a company of sixty-seven volunteers and joined General Zachary Taylor's army at Monterey on October 6, 1846. General Henderson, whose division inspector and adjutant Lamar was, commended the former president of Texas in his official report of the battle of Monterey. Soon afterwards, in spite of his own eagerness to march toward Mexico City with the army, he was ordered back to Laredo to hold that place and attend to marauding Indians.

"On his march from Monterey to the Rio Grande," an early biographer recorded, "while crossing a stream which ran at the foot of a hill near a small town, one of the soldiers was shot while stooping to drink. It was believed that the shot came from the high bluff which shielded the village from view and . . . a . . . soldier, by the name of John Hancock, started up the hill to reconnoitre the enemy, who was supposed to be waiting in ambush . . . Lamar called out . . . 'Halt! Stop! Don't you know they will kill you if you go up there? Let me go.' And he actually . . . dashed up the bank himself; but fortunately there was no enemy."

Lamar busied himself with taking a census of

Laredo and chastising the Indians that wandered into reach; but that did not satisfy him. "The post I occupy in this war is certainly a very petty and unsuitable one," he wrote to David G. Burnet, "but the President is determined to gratify his favorite—your '*demented monster*'—in all his resentments . . . You speak of a book called Houston and *his* republic. *His* republic! That is true; for the country literally belongs to him and the people are his slaves. I can regard Texas as very little more than *Big Drunk's* big Ranch."

Lamar had the satisfaction, however, of helping to establish American authority over the territory between the Nueces and the Rio Grande. He supervised a municipal election at Laredo in July, 1847, and in November, after the organization of San Patricio and Nueces counties, was a candidate for the legislature. "At an Election held . . . on the First day of the present Month," the chief justice of Nueces country informed him, "you were elected to Represent the Counties of Nueces & San Patricio, in the House of Representatives of the State of Texas—You having received 521 Votes, and H. J. Levy 59 votes, your majority over the next highest candidate being 462 votes."

The former president of the Republic was defeated

for the speakership of the house by ten votes. Lamar served as chairman of the committee on state affairs, but took little interest in the legislation before the house. One new member of that body, however, remembered him with gratitude. This member had been designated to present an important set of resolutions, but, he recalled, "It did not occur to me that in so doing I would make myself responsible for the defense of them." The proposed resolutions were attacked by a Whig member, who offered substitute resolutions. "I was expecting some other member to reply to him; but no one seemed disposed to do so; and I saw all eyes directed toward me . . . I was a young and new member, and had never addressed the House, but I made the best argument I could; and when I sat down, M. B. Lamar, ex-President of the Republic . . . arose and said he had examined the resolutions with care, and that they stated the views of the people and of the South very clearly and correctly, and that he hoped they would be passed by the House unanimously without the crossing of a t or the dotting of an i. There were but three votes for the substitute and the resolutions were adopted." The "young and new member" was John H. Reagan.

When the legislature adjourned, Lamar was back in Laredo, explaining to the town commissioners that

Mexican laws could no longer operate there. "The inhabitants of Laredo," he told them, "can choose one of three things: they can submit to the laws of the United States; they can leave the country; or they can take up arms . . . I speak frankly to your Excellencies as a friend, not as an enemy, because I sincerely desire the prosperity and happiness of the town of Laredo."

When Henry Clay's compromise of 1850 was passed, Lamar was in Georgia, attending to long-neglected business. As a Texian and as a Southerner, he denounced the measure. The compromise of 1850 was bad, as the Missouri compromise had been, he told his friends in Macon, but he especially resented the provisions of the current measure concerning the boundaries of Texas. "It fell to my lot while President of that Republic to become intimately connected with her claim to the Santa Fe Country. The right of Texas to all the territory west to the Rio Grande was considered as indisputable as her right to any other portion of her possessions . . . During my Administration I despatched an army to Santa Fe to enforce our jurisdiction, and but for ôtrations and treachery, it would have been completely established. From that time up to her annexation Texas always claimed this country . . . ; she was received into the

Confederacy with these limits, and the War with Mexico was made to assert and enforce her jurisdiction . . . The proposition made by Congress to pay her ten million dollars for the country, is coupled with an alternative, that she will be forced by Federal bayonets to submit if she refuses. What course it is proper for her to take, I cannot now pause to argue . . .

“There is no safety in the Union as it now exists. It is not the Union of the Constitution—not the Union established by the Sages of the Revolution; not the one that ‘ensures domestic peace and tranquility;’—but another great dynasty erected on its ruins—a Russian Empire, which makes a Hungary of the South.”

Secession appeared to him to be the only remedy. He wanted the Southern states to send delegates to a convention authorized to form a Southern Confederacy. That, he hoped, might bring the North to terms; otherwise, there was no hope. In 1850, as in 1835, it appeared that the times were out of joint. The situation in 1850, however, was much more serious. Lamar was in middle age, and the union he once had loved, then doubted, then loved again, seemed to be approaching its dissolution. He regarded the course of events as something akin to a personal

affliction, and the melancholy anticipation of the aftermath filled him with apprehension.

An invitation to join the López expedition for the liberating of Cuba, in 1851, appealed to his love of adventure, but his judgment told him that the scheme could not succeed. After some correspondence with the leaders, he declined to join the movement. In January, 1855, we find him in New Orleans, presiding over the fifth Southern Commercial Convention. That was a movement in which he could co-operate. Its object was to strengthen the economic position of the South and to insist upon political measures that would promote Southern interests.

The election of James Buchanan, “a Northern man of Southern principles,” to the presidency in 1856 gave Lamar a ray of hope for the future of the Union, as well as an opportunity to gain a diplomatic position for himself. The former president of Texas attended Buchanan’s inauguration, and four days later called at the White House. He was “an applicant for the appointment of resident minister to some of the European or South American Republics, or would accept the Governorship of a Territory . . . induced to make the present application from pecuniary distress.”

Senator Rusk of Texas, Senator Quitman of Missis-

sippi, and Governor Wise of Virginia did what they could for him. A nephew, Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar, Jr., of Mississippi, was a member of the house of representatives, and a cousin, Howell Cobb—grandson of that Uncle Zack who had given Lamar his name—sat in Buchanan's cabinet as secretary of the treasury.

The elderly office-seeker employed his idle time in preparing a volume of verse for publication, in the hope that its sale would provide a small nest-egg for his little daughter. March, April, May, June, and most of July passed before an appointment was obtained. On July 19, 1857, he wrote to his kinsman, Gazaway B. Lamar: "I have just received the appointment of Minister to the Argentine Confederation, which I am extremely desirous to accept; but which I will not be able to do, unless I can make some arrangements with my creditors, among whom you are the most considerable. I wish therefore to propose to you to receive Lands in payment of what I owe you . . . choose the best, have it valued by honest men, and then take for it one-half of the price they may fix upon it— . . . I ask this favor because my whole happiness is involved in it. — It may be a small affair with you, but it is one of vital importance to me. It will relieve me from a mountain of miseries—restore

VERSE MEMORIALS.

BY

MIRABEAU B. LAMAR.

"Such is the nature of my lays—
Plain, simple strains in Beauty's praise,
Designed at first for those fair friends
Whose memory with my being blends,
And now sent forth, to find their way
To minds congenial, grave or gay."

INTRODUCTION—PAGE 20.

NEW YORK:
PUBLISHED BY W. P. FETTRIDGE & CO.
281 BROADWAY
1857

my peace of mind—and secure a little repose for me between this and the grave.”

The arrangement of his business affairs consumed about six months. News of Lamar's appointment pleased his old friends in Texas, and none more than David G. Burnet. On September 26, 1857, the old man wrote to Lamar from his home near the battlefield of San Jacinto: “Yours of 23d. inst. was received this morning—Our Smart Post Master had carried it two days in his pocket . . . May it please the great Author of all good that we shall meet again in that World where no changes and no sorrows can ever mar the happiness of the blessed—

“That we have long acted in harmony for the intended good of our adopted country, is and always will be a gratifying reflection to me— . . . You are going to a delightful climate . . . I hope Mrs. Lamar will find enough of the right sort of female associates to make her residence in a strange land altogether agreeable— You must be careful in your fondness for equestrian exercise, that you do not venture too far among the wild gauchos of the pampas—they are a savage and faithless race. . . .

“My own condition is at present painfully embarrassing—I have not the means of making a decent living for my family—I am looking anxiously for

. . . means to purchase a negro man and enable me to cultivate my little farm. . . . Well we must live any how all the appointed days of our lives—and after that, it will be of little consequence whether we passed our brief pilgrimage amid the luxuries of wealth or the trials and privations of poverty . . .

“May the Lord who rules in heaven and holds the seas in the palm of his hand bless you and yours in all your journey . . .”

A month before Minister Lamar was ready to sail for Buenos Aires, a treaty had been signed at Washington between the United States and the Republic of Nicaragua. The president and secretary of state then decided to send Lamar to Nicaragua as minister to secure ratification of the agreement.

The gold rush to California in '49 had brought that turbulent little republic into prominence, for the best route to the gold country by boat ran along the San Juan river and through Lake Nicaragua. An American corporation had got from the government of Nicaragua the exclusive right to transport men and goods from the Atlantic to the Pacific along this route, but, after a desperate struggle between rival groups of American financiers for the control of these transport lines, a new administration in Nicaragua had cancelled the concession. An interesting Ameri-

can adventurer, William Walker, entered the country in 1855, and for a brief period before his expulsion in May, 1857, occupied the presidency of Nicaragua. And even after the ejection of Walker, stability had not returned to that troubled country. The concession which a previous administration had cancelled was not restored, and the United States was interested in procuring safe transit for her citizens and merchandise along this route to California. By the treaty signed at Washington on November 16, 1857, the United States undertook to guarantee safe transit for the benefit of all nations, and was to be permitted to employ troops to protect the route in case Nicaragua should fail. It was Minister Lamar's business to secure ratification of this treaty.

He arrived at the Nicaraguan capital early in January, 1858, and for eighteen months he labored to accomplish his mission. The government of Nicaragua was suspicious of Americans, especially of Southerners, and it could not rid itself of a belief that Lamar was in some mysterious manner connected with Walker and his filibusters. Too, the agents of three transit companies, each claiming exclusive rights on the isthmus, and representatives of Great Britain and France threw every imaginable obstacle in the way of the American minister. More than once Lamar ap-

peared to be on the brink of success, but when he asked for his recall, in July, 1859, he had only the draft of a new treaty—acceptable to Nicaragua but unacceptable to the United States—to show for his labors. But, as *The States*, a Washington newspaper, remarked:

“A minister could not well have a more unpleasant mission assigned him than that of Gen. Lamar in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Those republics have been playing fast and loose with us ever since we relieved them from the presence of Walker, and they refuse to look upon the American minister as anything more than the ‘diplomatic valet’ of the British envoy. Yet in this false and discouraging position, Gen. Lamar has given general satisfaction to the governments to which he is accredited, as well as his own . . . whatever there may be to complain of in the paltering delay of our isthmus negotiations, the fault is not in Minister Lamar.”

During intervals of lesiure, Minister Lamar had made observations touching the history and literary development of Central America. If the Republic of Texas had needed schools in 1838, how much more obvious was that need in Nicaragua, a country whose Spanish heritage was so strangely blended with the Indian. When he heard that the Congress of Nica-

ragua was considering the establishment of a public library, he wrote:

“I beg leave to place at the disposal of your Honorable body a Small collection of Books about two hundred volumes—embracing ancient and modern literature as well as works on art, science, government, and international law.” What more appropriate memorial to his eighteen months’ residence in Central America could Lamar have left? As Thomas Jefferson had been the founder of the Library of Congress, so Mirabeau B. Lamar became a founder of the Nicaraguan National Library.

In spite of the difficulties which beset him there, Lamar liked Nicaragua, and enjoyed a certain easy intimacy with some of the citizens of that Republic. When he was ready to return to the United States he wrote to Don Pedro Zeledón, minister of foreign affairs: “Indeed my good old friend, I have enough vanity in myself and confidence in you, to believe that if the difficulties and disagreements between our countries had been left to our adjudication . . . we would have settled them all—transits, treaties and reclamations—without the slightest difficulty & to the satisfaction of all parties, except the rapacious vultures that were seeking to prey upon the bowels of your country . . . But when the Bellys, Barwells—the

Vanderbilts and Websters, and such like unprincipled interlopers, commenced their diabolical operations . . . poor Nicaragua became bewildered by their evil counsels . . .” And then in a playful postscript: “You must not forget that your place *Mount lookout* belongs to me I am dertermend to have it.”

In taking leave of General Jerez, he said: “I shall be pleased to hear from you often—indeed by every steamer—as I shall not cease to take a lively interest in the affairs of your country. Probably I may visit it again some day with my family . . .”

After Minister Lamar had gone to Washington to make his final reports to Secretary Cass, he hurried to his country home, at Richmond, Texas, to join his wife and little daughter. They had not accompanied him to Nicaragua for want of “suitable facilities for getting there.”

His first wife had died before he came to Texas, and he had remained a widower until 1851, when he was married at Galveston to Henrietta, daughter of the Rev. John Newland Maffitt. Mrs. Lamar was a sister of Commodore John Newland Maffitt of the Confederate Navy.

The death of his first wife and the loss, a few years later of his daughter, Rebecca Ann, had “cast a cloud over the early years of General Lamar’s manhood,”

wrote the Rev. H. S. Thrall. “Nor did the cares of public life seem to dissipate his gloom. At that period, those in his company often noticed a deep-drawn sigh, as from a bosom still pierced with anguish.” Others noticed occasionally a certain coldness and exaggerated formality in dealing with friends and strangers alike. He had not been in the presidency six months before one of his official family told him that this trait was causing his popularity to wane. “It is,” he said, “very little trouble to ask a man when he reached the city, &c, &c, &c, &c, and I will take the liberty of recommending to you to tax your self in this respect.”

But in later years, after his second marriage, “the elasticity of his spirits returned.” The little home at Richmond, to which he returned in September, 1859, held most of what he considered precious in this world. There he died, on December 19, 1859, not long after he had written:

Like yon declining sun, my life
Is going down all calm and mild.

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