

The Republic of Lower California,
1853-1854¹

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The shadows of sunset were creeping across the Bay of Guaymas on June 30, 1853, when there came to anchor the small brig "Arrow," fifteen days out from San Francisco. Among the forty passengers who landed at the dusty little Sonora seaport of Guaymas during that evening and the following day were a few who came without the correct passports required by Mexican law. The captain of the port, distressed by this circumstance, reported to his superior, the Comandante General of Sonora, not only the fact of the law's violation, but his suspicions which had been aroused concerning certain of the passengers.

"Your excellency will perceive," he wrote, "that there is undoubtedly an intention to invade this portion of the Mexican territory, and that one of the principal promoters of this invasion, the American citizen William Walker, has come as passenger in the brig 'Arrow.'" ²

In such manner did the prince of filibusters set foot on Mexican soil. His later visits to Mexico were to be less calmly noted, yet even this small incident was productive of important results. Walker had come to Guaymas duly provided with a passport furnished by the Mexican vice-consul in San Fran-

¹ The following article is not to be regarded in any way as a complete and detailed account of William Walker's career in Lower California. Rather, it might be considered an approach to the subject, on which the writer has done considerable research and proposes to do more. For the report on Walker's arrival at Guaymas, see Mexico, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Paquete 8, *Asuntos Históricos*, Expediente 23, 1853, Antonio Campuzano to Comandante General of Sonora, Guaymas, July 3, 1853.

² *Ibid.*

cisco, as well as with letters of recommendation from that official. But it would appear that the vice-consul, or some other Mexican official, had likewise sent a warning to the Guaymas military authorities concerning the motives of Walker and his associates.³

The American promoter, however, was not easily daunted by his reception, and during the next few days of his sojourn at Guaymas he engaged in a peppery controversy with the port authorities over the question of his being allowed to visit the capital of Sonora. His avowed purpose in making a journey to the interior was the securing of a tract of land for a proposed Anglo-American mining colony. He had been accompanied to Guaymas by a gentleman who was announced as "un abogado" or lawyer, and who professed "no other object than to visit this country," according to the port captain.⁴ This individual was Henry P. Watkins, Walker's law partner and later the notorious lieutenant of Walker. Both Walker and Watkins now found themselves forbidden to leave Guaymas for the interior. This step taken by the Sonora government appears to have been based upon reports received from the San Francisco vice-consul (himself suspect as a United States citizen), and upon testimony given by the crew and officers of the "Arrow."⁵ Word had come to Guaymas from Manuel María Gándara, governor of Sonora, ordering the detention of Walker and Watkins at Guaymas.⁶ All the efforts of Juan A. Robinson, American consul at Guaymas, were wasted in behalf of the two travellers, in spite of his considerable powers of invective; and his sole profit from the affair was the rise of a feeling of

³ *Ibid.*; Thomas Robinson Warren, *Dust and Foam, or, Three Oceans and Two Continents* (New York, 1858), 211; William Walker, *The War in Nicaragua* (Mobile, 1860), 20; William O. Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers* (New York, 1916), 31; Rufus K. Wyllys, *The French in Sonora* (Berkeley, 1932), 163; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of the North Mexican States and Texas* (2 v., San Francisco, 1889), II, 721-722; J. Fred Rippey, *The United States and Mexico* (New York, 1926), 93.

⁴ Mexico, Sec. de Rels. Ext., Paq. 8, Exped. 23, 1853, Campuzano to Comandante General, Guaymas, July 3, 1853; Scroggs, *loc. cit.*

⁵ Mexico, Sec. de Rels. Ext., Paq. 8, Exped. 23, 1853, Captain Cayetano Navarro to Comandante General, Guaymas, July 3, 1853.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Exped. 20, Gándara to Ministro de Relaciones, Ures, July 8, 1853.

distrust toward him on the part of the local officials.⁷ The net result of the whole matter was that toward the close of July Walker and Watkins departed from Guaymas on their return journey to California, much disgruntled and apparently convinced that what Sonora needed was a firm and vigorous government, which could be conferred upon her only by Anglo-Americans. But Walker had seen and learned enough of Guaymas and its hinterland to lay his plans intelligently. Since the Sonorans would not listen to reason, he must apply force.⁸

The adventurer had also spent sufficient time in Guaymas to make something of an impression upon certain of its inhabitants. At the risk of undue repetition, it is perhaps worth while here to quote again the classic description of Walker at Guaymas in that summer of 1853:

To have looked at William Walker, one could scarcely have credited him to be the originator and prime mover of so desperate an enterprise as the invasion of the state of Sonora.

His appearance was that of anything else than a military chieftain. Below the medium height, and very slim, I should hardly imagine him to weigh over a hundred pounds. His hair light and towy, while his almost white eyebrows and lashes concealed a seemingly pupilless, grey, cold eye, and his face was a mass of yellow freckles, the whole expression very heavy. His dress was scarcely less remarkable than his person. His head was surmounted by a huge white fur hat, whose long nap waved with the breeze, which, together with a very ill-made short-waisted blue coat, with gilt buttons, and a pair of grey, strapless pantaloons, made up the ensemble of as unprepossessing-looking a person as one would meet in a day's walk. I will leave you to imagine the figure he cut in Guaymas with the thermometer at 100°, when every one else was arrayed in white. Indeed, half the dread which the Mexicans had of filibusters vanished when they saw this their Grand Sachem,—such an insignificant-looking specimen. But any one who

⁷ *Ibid.*, Exped. 19, nos. 1-5, reports of Prefect Navarro, Guaymas, July 16, 1853; *ibid.*, protests of Watkins, July 12, and of Robinson, July 14, 1853; Warren, *loc. cit.*; Scroggs, *loc. cit.*; Walker, *loc. cit.*

⁸ Scroggs, *op. cit.*, 31-34; Rippey, *loc. cit.*; Warren, 211, 213; *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco, cited hereinafter as *D.A.C.*), September 12, 15, 17, 18, 1853; Walker, 20-21. Walker asserts that at the moment of his departure from Guaymas, Governor Gándara relented and invited him to come to Ures, but that the offer was declined. This assertion is doubtful, however, in the light of Gándara's correspondence with Mexico City, cited above.

estimated Mr. Walker by his personal appearance, made a great mistake. Extremely taciturn, he would sit for an hour in company without opening his lips; but once interested, he arrested your attention with the first word he uttered, and as he proceeded, you felt convinced that he was no ordinary person. To a few confidential friends he was most enthusiastic upon the subject of his darling project, but outside of those immediately interested he never mentioned the topic.⁹

Here, then, was the central character of a serio-comic drama which occupied for a few brief months the stage of South-western history in those stirring years 1853-1854, and which exercised no little influence upon the international relations of the United States and Mexico. To be sure, the scene of Walker's Mexican activities was not laid in Guaymas or Sonora after 1853, but none the less Sonora was the ultimate objective of the adventurous chieftain, and one may venture the opinion that his subsequent conduct would not have differed greatly if he and his followers had landed in Sonora.

It was the international setting which made Walker's enterprise possible. Relations between the United States and Mexico had in recent years been such as to lend encouragement to schemes like that of Walker. Not far in the background was the Mexican War, whose settlement by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 had left the United States in possession of the Pacific Coast and half of Mexico and yet had left many Anglo-American expansionists dissatisfied. The California gold rush, with its promise of immediate wealth, had succeeded to the center of national interest. But now, in 1853, some of the glamour of the gold rush had departed, there was appearing a degree of order and law-enforcement in the Golden State, and restless spirits were beginning once more to adventure beyond the border into the Spanish-American lands of Sonora and Baja California. Already French gold-seekers, disappointed in their search for fortune in California, had boldly tried to possess themselves of all or part of the Mexican state of Sonora. A series of their expeditions had been defeated and expelled by the Sonora authorities in 1852, yet one of the French leaders,

⁹ Warren, 212-213.

Count Gaston de Raousset-Boulbon, was still grimly planning a new descent upon this disturbed border state in the summer and autumn of 1853.¹⁰

Nor were United States official circles uninterested in the matter of the Southwestern frontier. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, besides being disappointing to the believers in "manifest destiny," contained serious defects which made its correction a matter of practical importance. Such for example was the famous Article XI, which made the United States shoulder the responsibility of controlling the raiding border Indian tribes, a well-nigh impossible task in those days. Moreover, the need for a transcontinental railway route, a revision of the 1848 boundary line at El Paso, and a settlement of the Tehuantepec isthmian question had arisen. With such a collection of problems to be solved, James Gadsden, the new United States minister to Mexico, was conducting in Mexico City, from August to December of 1853, a diplomatic contest which was to result in the frontier treaty bearing his name. The years 1853-1854 might therefore be regarded as a most critical period in the relations of Mexico with her northern neighbor, because they saw the climax of the career of Gaston de Raousset-Boulbon, the début of William Walker and the settlement of a group of border questions by James Gadsden. As will be seen, these three phases of our Southwestern history were not wholly unconnected.¹¹

The spirit of "manifest destiny," then, was in the air in the summer and autumn of 1853, and nowhere was it more freely expressed than in San Francisco, the home port of California filibusters. Referring to the objectives of the Gadsden mission, even the most conservative of the city's journals, the *Daily Alta California*, could declare in those lively days:

If the acquisitions that may now be looked upon as certain are commenced by negotiation it will not stop until Young America has secured all her

¹⁰ Rippy, *op. cit.*, chs. v, viii; Wyllys, *op. cit.*, chs. ix-x; Scroggs, *op. cit.*, chs. iv-v.

¹¹ Authorities cited above: J. M. Callahan, *American Foreign Policy in Mexican Relations* (New York, 1932), ch. vii; Paul N. Garber, *The Gadsden Treaty* (Philadelphia, 1923), chs. ii-iii.

demands, which will prove to be nothing short of the entire scope of territory lying between the Sierra Madre and the Rio Grande, Chihuahua, Sonora, Sinaloa, and Lower California, and the reserved right to take more by purchase or force whenever it may be wanted.¹²

William Walker, it appears, had determined fully a year earlier that with regard to northern Mexico, he at least would assume the right to take more of it by purchase or force. His previous career had in some degree fitted him for an enterprise of this character. Since his boyhood and university days in Tennessee and Pennsylvania, he had turned his hand to three professions, with a uniform lack of distinction as physician, lawyer and journalist. But it was in the last-named character that in 1850, at the age of twenty-six, he came from New Orleans to San Francisco and became one of the editors of a newspaper in the latter city. Reverting to the legal profession, he was presently to be found in the mining camp of Marysville, where in 1851 and 1852 he practised law in partnership with the more sociable Henry P. Watkins. A misfit in most of his occupations to that time, it is perhaps hardly surprising that he should lend a ready ear to the plans of other restless or disappointed gentlemen of fortune. Nor, considering his temperament and background, is it remarkable that his calculating and zealous intrigues should put him very soon in the forefront among the organizers of such enterprises.¹³

Walker tells us that the plan for a settlement of Anglo-Americans on the Sonora border originated at the town of Auburn, in Placer County, California, in the spring of 1852. Certain it is that the organizers of the project sent a promoting agent, Frederic Emory (with perhaps a companion), to Sonora in April or May of that year. Emory seems to have reached Guaymas at an unfortunate moment for his plans, just at the time when Gaston de Raousset-Boulbon had completed the negotiation of a contract for the bringing of a French military and mining colony to the Sonora frontier.¹⁴ Emory's appeals

¹² *D.A.C.*, September 8, 1853.

¹³ Scroggs, 9-17.

¹⁴ Walker, 19-20; Wyllys, 73, 163.

to Sonora's officialdom were then fruitless, and although he seems to have spent several months in negotiation, his reports to the Auburn associates caused them to abandon their hopes for the time being. During the summer and autumn of 1852, the French enterprise developed into a rebellion against the Sonora government, and in consequence the promoters of similar schemes were regarded askance in Sonora, as Walker and Watkins learned in the following summer. But Emory, who had apparently stayed long enough in Sonora to see the departure of the French in November and December of 1852, proposed to Walker the revival of the colonial project, and Walker's approval led to his visit to Guaymas and his cool greeting in that seaport in 1853.¹⁵

Once returned to San Francisco in August or early September of 1853, Walker posed as an outraged and innocent traveller, upon whose head a price had been placed (so it was said), by the Sonora government. He was reported to have "left the country in order to save the important member advertised."¹⁶ That the Sonora authorities were justified in suspecting Walker's motives is perhaps shown by the fact that "bonds" for a "Republic of Sonora" were issued in California at least as early as May 1, 1853, while in the preceding winter rumors were thick concerning a proposed expedition to lay forcible hands upon Sonora.¹⁷

Within a few weeks after Walker's return to the bay region, publicity was being given widely to the project, and enlistment was progressing at a fair rate. Much sentiment entered into the appeals of Walker's recruiting agents. Guaymas was said to be in danger of an Indian attack; the women of that city had begged the chivalrous Walker to bring a force of Americans to their protection; the United States, or its citizens, must save Sonora from the murderous Apache; and "the state of this region furnished the best defence for any American aiming to settle there without the formal consent of Mexico;" while

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 163; Walker, 20.

¹⁶ *D.A.C.*, September 12, 1853.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, August 19, September 3, December 1, 15, 1853.

as for the inhabitants of unhappy Sonora, their only hope was declared to be "in a war and the occupation of their territory by United States troops."¹⁸

Recruiting went on steadily, despite occasional hints that the federal authorities might be unfavorable to the expedition. At the close of September the filibusters were nearly ready to take ship for the rescue of Sonora and the winning of personal fortunes. The "Arrow" had been chartered for the occasion. But an unforeseen obstacle arose at this point, in the highly puritanical conscience of Colonel Ethan Allen Hitchcock, U.S.A., Commander of the Pacific Military Division. Hitchcock had received information in September, describing the subversive character of the Walker project, and in accordance with his strict orders from Washington, he investigated the enterprise through R. P. Hammond, federal collector of the port, and became convinced of the truth of his information. When the United States district attorney upheld Hitchcock, the "Arrow" was accordingly seized during the evening of September 30, by a detachment of United States soldiers. There was an immediate uproar. Walker sought to obtain the release of the vessel by threats and appeals, and finally obtained a writ of replevin; but the sheriff was unwilling to serve the writ. Attempts to take possession of the vessel by force were prevented. Meanwhile, Hammond had had much pressure brought to bear upon him by influential persons, and was in great alarm, as was the district attorney. But Hitchcock was profanely contemptuous of "public opinion." A suit for damages was brought against Hitchcock in the San Francisco court on October 10, and he was cited for contempt of court. While this case was pending, and the city was full of excitement, there came the news that during the night of October 16-17, Walker, with a portion of the expedition, had hastily slipped out of San Francisco Bay on board the "Caroline," Captain H. A. Snow, a schooner belonging to the United States consul at Guaymas, Juan A. Robinson.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, September 11, 12, 15, 1853; Walker, 21-22.

¹⁹ *D.A.C.*, October 1-4, 9-12, 16, 18, 19, November 13, 1853; *Fifty Years in Camp and*

The Sonora expeditionary force was off upon its voyage, but it had been badly crippled, both as to personnel and equipment, while the Mexican authorities had been warned against it. Probably not more than two-thirds, at most, of the members made their escape in the "Caroline," to the number of forty-five, while behind them they left not only the ammunition and weapons which had been stored in the "Arrow," but also a considerable quantity of supplies seized by the federal officers on the wharf as the "Caroline" was about to be towed out of the harbor.²⁰

Undoubtedly this hasty departure of the "Caroline" had a most disastrous effect upon the fortunes of the Republic of Lower California. The hopes of Walker and his associates were decidedly dampened, for even allowing for the alleged superiority of Anglo-American fighting men, forty-five adventurers without their original equipment were obviously inadequate for the conquest of a state which defeated Gaston de Raousset-Boulbon's 250 well-armed Frenchmen less than a year before. Probably the grim, tight-lipped little Tennessean pondered deeply upon this matter as the "Caroline" bore him and his discouraged followers southward down the coasts of the Californias. But at least the adventurers seem to have used a part of the time on board in perfecting the governmental organization of their proposed new state.

Without giving detailed reasons, Walker says that "the men who sailed for Sonora were obliged to sojourn for a time on the peninsula," and that "it was the smallness of their numbers which made them decide to land at La Paz."²¹ The condition in which the expeditionary force found itself is sufficient explanation for a change of plan on the part of Walker, who *Field: Diary of Major-General Ethan Allen Hitchcock, U.S.A.* (W. A. Croffut, ed., New York, 1909), 400-403; Scroggs, 34-36; *Daily Herald* (San Francisco), October 16, 1853.

²⁰ *D.A.C.*, October 18, 19, 1853; *Daily Herald*, October 18, 1853; Scroggs, 36; Hitchcock, *op. cit.*, 403; F. Soulé, J. H. Gihon, and J. Nisbet, *Annals of San Francisco* (New York and London, 1855), 474-480; Mexico, Sec. de Rels. Ext., Paq. 8, Exped. 18, William E. Barron (Mexican vice-consul), to Ministro de Relaciones, San Francisco, October 1, 13, 18, 31, 1853.

²¹ Walker, 19, 22.

doubtless hesitated to invade the more populous state of Sonora with so few followers. Probably he expected to await new recruits in the peninsula, since Watkins had been left behind to gather reinforcements and follow his chief with them. The filibusters were not unexpected in Lower California, it seems, any more than in Sonora, if we may credit correspondence published in the *Daily Alta California*. The conduct of United States troops at La Paz during the Mexican War, the reports of Mexicans returning from the California gold-fields, and the rumors of Walker's plans, all created a dislike of Anglo-Americans in the peninsula and an apprehension "that within a short time great events will transpire, not only in Lower California but throughout the whole Mexican so-called Republic."²²

The expedition paused at Cabo de San Lucas and spent a few days there, requisitioning supplies and awaiting either reinforcements or news. Then on November 3 the "Caroline," flying the Mexican flag, put into La Paz Bay, and Walker and two of his officers landed at the chief town of Baja California without interference.²³ They paid a visit to the unsuspecting governor of the territory, Rafael Espinosa, and shortly afterward a detachment of Walker's men made this official their prisoner. Then the Mexican flag was lowered at the governor's headquarters and the red-and-white barred flag of the new republic, with two stars symbolic of the states of Sonora and Baja California, was hoisted amid cheers.²⁴

The stage was now prepared, and Walker as publicity agent as well as president of the new state, made the most of it. On

²² *D.A.C.*, September 18, 1853, letter from La Paz, dated August, 1853; William V. Wells, *Walker's Expedition to Nicaragua* (New York, 1856), 24-27.

²³ Scroggs, 36-37; Rippey, 93-94; Bancroft, *op. cit.*, II, 722; *D.A.C.*, December 21, 1853; San Diego *Herald*, December 3, 1853; Mexico, Secretaría de Guerra y Marina, Archivo General, Fracción Primera, Legajo 16, Año de 1853-1855, Operaciones Militares, *Expediciones filibusteras sobre las costas de México*, Report of Rafael López, Captain of the Port of Mazatlán, Mazatlán, November 9, 1853.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Pedro Váldez, Comandante of Mazatlán, to Ministro de Guerra y Marina, Mazatlán, November 16, 1853; *D.A.C.*, December 8, 1853, February 5, 1854; Scroggs, *loc. cit.*; Rippey, *loc. cit.*; Bancroft, *loc. cit.*; *El Nacional* (Ures, Sonora), November 2, 25, 1853.

the same day he issued the first of his many grandiloquent "official" proclamations, which read in part as follows:

The Republic of Lower California is hereby declared Free, Sovereign and Independent, and all allegiance to the Republic of Mexico is forever renounced.²⁵

This proclamation was followed soon afterward by a number of messages from "President" William Walker of Lower California, by which all tariffs were abolished, the law of the land was declared to be the Civil Code of Louisiana, and an explanation of the expedition's purpose was condescendingly addressed to the people of the United States.²⁶

Accounts vary as to the conduct of the filibusters at La Paz. Walker lauds his administration and followers, and declares that their treatment of the natives compared favorably with that accorded by the Mexican authorities. But Mexican records indicate that there was much indiscriminate plundering of the townsfolk, and that the government offices and archives were rifled and partially destroyed. It may be assumed that such procedure made the stay of Walker's so-called "Independence Battalion" in La Paz a most disorderly episode in the history of this rogues' republic. Inevitably, too, the adventurers thus brought down upon their heads the pent-up wrath of the Mexican populace, who were sufficiently poverty-stricken without the added affliction of this unprovoked invasion.²⁷

So it was that on November 6 the expedition prepared to take leave of La Paz, the desired reinforcements not having appeared. As the filibusters were about to leave the harbor, a Mexican vessel, the "Neptune," arrived from the mainland bringing a new territorial governor, Colonel Juan C. Rebolledo, to replace Espinosa. Walker's men promptly captured this unlucky executive, but they occupied some time in the process and in the meantime the report spread that a force of Mexican troops was approaching La Paz. At this news the

²⁵ *D.A.C.*, December 8, 1853; Wells, *op. cit.*, 24.

²⁶ Scroggs, 37; Wells, 24; *D.A.C.*, December 8, 1853.

²⁷ Walker, 22; Rippey, 94; Scroggs, 37-38.

townspeople were encouraged to attack a shore party of the filibusters, who were gathering firewood. A brief but spirited skirmish ensued. According to the Americans they were victorious due to the landing of Walker with most of his force and to the firing directed upon the town from the "Caroline." Both sides, it appears, had several men killed and wounded, although Walker reported no casualties "except from *cacti*, while pursuing the enemy through the chaparral, in the rear of the town."²⁸

The "battle" of La Paz created much excitement when the news of it reached San Francisco. "The triple-barred and twin-starred flag" was "flung to the breeze on the corner of Kearney and California streets, where a recruiting office was opened and the cut-and-dried bonds of the government were put upon the market and *sold*. The war spirit ran riot. Freedom to the Mexicans and spoils to the Americans, was the battle cry. Lower California must be free, and then, ho for Sonora! A league of land, with cattle to stock it, and all for the trouble of going there." Such was the impression created in the mind of one early California journalist.²⁹ No difficulty seemed to lie in the way of collecting recruits through the efforts of Henry P. Watkins.

Meanwhile the new republic had bodily left La Paz on board the "Caroline." Walker put in at Cabo de San Lucas again on November 8, apparently for the purpose of establishing his capital there. But the town was too small and the neighborhood too poor to support even as weak a force as the "Independence Battalion." In addition, the port offered no facilities for defense, while a Mexican government cutter was seen to be hovering off the coast. Accordingly the plan for awaiting reinforcements at this point was abandoned, and the Sonora expeditionary force retreated another step backward from its goal, a maneuver which was probably very discouraging to Walker's followers. In those days there were no settlements

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 38; Rippey, *loc. cit.*; Bancroft, *loc. cit.*; *D.A.C.*, December 8, 1853.

²⁹ Horace Bell, *Reminiscences of a Ranger* (Los Angeles, 1881; 2nd ed., Santa Barbara, 1927), 210-211; *D.A.C.*, December 9-11, 1853.

of any consequence in the neighborhood of Magdalena and Sebastián Vizcáino bays, nor in fact anywhere on the west coast of the peninsula south of Rosario. Therefore, following the route indicated by prudence, and yet remaining beyond the international border, Walker could find no region suitable for the recuperation of his government and forces south of the more thickly populated northwestern section of Lower California. Moreover, there was the possibility of reaching Sonora overland from this region. Thus, at least, one may follow his line of reasoning as borne out by his subsequent conduct.³⁰

On November 29, then, the filibustering "army" appeared in Ensenada (Bahía) de Todos Santos, some eighty miles south of San Diego, and here the itinerant republic was once more established. Around this point as a center were to take place the last events of the tragi-comedy being played by Walker and his ragged commonwealth. Besides awaiting the arrival of reinforcements, the President now sent his Secretary of State, Frederic Emory, on a mission extraordinary to Alta California in the interests (probably financial), of the republic. By Emory, Walker also forwarded "to the people of the United States" a handsome proclamation of the reasons for his conduct. At first the filibusters met little opposition, and the chief untoward incident of their stay at Ensenada for a few days was the escape of the "Caroline." It would seem that the mate of the vessel had some misgivings as to the business in which he was engaged. While Captain Snow was on shore at Ensenada the two captive Mexican governors of Baja California prevailed upon the mate by threats or promises of reward, to put to sea, bearing off not only the prisoners but also a considerable amount of Walker's supplies. The "Caroline" then made her way southward to her home port of Guaymas, releasing the Mexican officials en route at the Cape.³¹

³⁰ Scroggs, *loc. cit.*; Rippey, *loc. cit.*; Bancroft, *loc. cit.*; *D.A.C.*, December 23, 1853.

³¹ Wells, 24-28; Bancroft, II, 723; Scroggs, 38-39; Rippey, 94-95; *D.A.C.*, February 5, 1854; *El Nacional*, January 27, 1854; Mexico, Sec. de Guer. y Mar., A.G., F.P., O.M., 1853-1855, Legajo 16, *Expediciones filibusteras*, Colonel José Ochoa to Ministro de Gobernación, La Paz, December 18, 1853.

It was a dark moment for Walker's enterprise, and it was rendered still more gloomy by other events that were transpiring. At almost the same time that the "Caroline" took flight, Walker's men found themselves hotly besieged by the Mexicans of the vicinity, under the leadership of one Guadalupe Melendres, "who objected to being liberated."³² The immediate occasions for the Mexican rising seem to have been Walker's effort to requisition horses for his followers from neighboring *ranchos*, and his proposed move against the military colony and town of Santo Tomás, about thirty miles south of Ensenada. Such an undertaking, with so few followers, perhaps indicates Walker's desperation. Colonel Francisco del Castillo Negrete, in command at Santo Tomás, not only repulsed the filibusters but roused the countryside against them, putting the Mexican volunteers under the command of Melendres. The results were the deaths of a number of filibusters and the investment of Ensenada, although the besiegers were driven off on December 14, some time after the escape of the "Caroline."³³

Whatever elation the adventurers may have felt at their successful defense, therefore, was quickly dispelled by the "Caroline's" desertion. The same mixture of triumph and desperation was probably experienced two weeks later, when, on December 28, the barque "Anita" put in at Ensenada with some two hundred recruits brought from San Francisco by Henry P. Watkins. These new volunteers were well armed and enthusiastic but so great had been the confidence of Watkins and his aides in the success of Walker, that they brought no food or other supplies with them. Many more recruits made their way to San Diego by the regular coastwise vessels, intending to go overland to Ensenada.³⁴

Here was an addition to the citizenry of the republic which

³² Bell, *op. cit.*, 211.

³³ Rippy, *loc. cit.*; Scroggs, 40-41; Bancroft, *loc. cit.*; Mexico, Sec. de Guer. y Mar., A.G., F.P., O.M., 1854, Legajo 5, Exped. 3, Colonel Francisco del Castillo Negrete to Ministro de Guerra, Santo Tomás, December 18, 1853.

³⁴ Scroggs, 41; Rippy, 95; Bancroft, *loc. cit.*; *D.A.C.*, December 12, 1853, January 10, 1854.

would have been only too welcome a month previous; but which under existing conditions was an overwhelming burden to Walker's needy commissariat. Nor would it, just then, have been particularly comforting to Walker to know that some two thousand miles away James Gadsden was about to make the disappointing Gadsden Purchase, in which Santa Anna's ministers had not dared to include Baja California, probably lest they be accused of complicity with the Anglo-American expansionists then in the peninsula. At that time, however, no doubt many of Walker's followers would have been glad to learn that the United States had acquired this troublesome territory peacefully.³⁵

It was not long before the needs of the liberating army began to produce further difficulties. Among the reinforcements were some adventurers whose ideas on how to liberate Lower California differed sharply from those of Walker and his lieutenants. Unfavorable reports drifted back to San Francisco, and the efforts of Watkins, who had promptly returned to that city for more recruits, failed to secure more than a few scattering volunteers. Watkins himself was presently arrested in San Francisco, as was Emory at San Diego, while an agent or two sent up into the mining camps of the Sierras met with no greater success. The men at Ensenada speedily tired of a diet consisting almost exclusively of beef collected forcibly from the timid *rancheros*, and a revolt was soon in progress, fostered by the enforced idleness of the camp. Although a San Francisco paper had truly declared that the character of Walker's expedition was "such that the President, if he desired, dare not punish any of his followers for pillage, since he is far more dependent on them than they on him," yet Walker was bold enough to deprive one of his companies of a herd of horses which its members had collected.³⁶

³⁵ Garber, *op. cit.*, 97-98; *D.A.C.*, February 3, March 6, 1854; Mexico, Sec. de Rels. Ext., Archivo General, Paq. 8, Exped. 18, Año de 1853, Correspondence of Gadsden and Bonilla, Mexican Ministro de Relaciones, November 17, 26, 1853.

³⁶ *D.A.C.*, January 10, 11, 18, 25-27, 30, February 6, 15, 16, 25, 28, March 2, 1854; Scroggs, 42-43; *El Nacional*, March 17, 1854.

The effect of this step was another rebellion, in which about fifty of Walker's men proved impervious to his frantic and eloquent appeals and marched for San Diego. Lesser parties were steadily deserting in a more furtive manner, the *rancheros* were up in arms, and Walker's four haughty proclamations of January 18, 1854, could not disguise the fact that his ship of state was badly foundered. These decrees annexed Sonora to the Republic of Lower California and then changed the latter's title to the Republic of Sonora, consisting of the two states of Lower California and Sonora.³⁷ While these fine announcements were being made to a somewhat skeptical world, a Mexican war vessel took up a threatening position outside Ensenada, and early in February the U.S.S. "Portsmouth" joined in keeping an eye on the movements of the liberators.³⁸

These portentous events at last stirred the vacillating Walker to action. On February 13 he ordered most of his little battery of field pieces either spiked or buried, and with less than 130 men marched out of Ensenada, leaving a number of sick and wounded men behind to be rescued by United States sailors from the "Portsmouth." The filibuster army, its spirits presumably improved by an address from Walker, betook itself to Santo Tomás, from which the Mexican defenders retreated, and thence to San Vicente, about twenty miles farther south. Here Walker made a last effort to rally the Mexican inhabitants to his cause, summoning a forced convention of some sixty *rancheros* on February 28. The "delegates" were compelled to take an oath of allegiance to the republic, and a specious "Declaration," approving Walker's policies, was drawn up, supposedly the outcome of their sessions.³⁹

Desertions had now reduced Walker's men to about 120 in number. His advance farther southward, plus the sharper discipline of the march and the scarcity of provisions, all stimulated desertions, and the decision of the chieftain's council was that desperate measures were needed. It was therefore

³⁷ Wells, 28-30; Scroggs, 42; *D.A.C.*, January 30, 31, February 4, 1854.

³⁸ Scroggs, 37; *D.A.C.*, February 4, 19, 22, 1854.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, February 4, 19, 22, March 15, 1854; Scroggs, 43-44.

determined to undertake the expedition to Sonora, for which Walker had been so long preparing and which he probably had been dreading as a last resort. Accordingly, on March 20 he stationed a garrison of twenty men in an adobe ruin at San Vicente, now his capital, and with about one hundred followers and driving a herd of cattle, the would-be conqueror set forth, over scarcely known trails, quixotically determined to win or die. The last phase of the republic's history was about to open.⁴⁰

Little is known definitely of Walker's expedition to the Rio Colorado. His exact route is uncertain, but since the journey required two weeks over vague Indian trails, we may infer that it was not an easy one. Not far above the mouth of the great river the bedraggled expeditionaries painfully crossed the stream on rafts, but lost most of the cattle, which they tried to swim across. The army must have presented a dreary spectacle as they stood on the desolate eastern bank of the Colorado. Their situation, with a wilderness before and behind them, seems to have brought the patience of the men to the final breaking-point. Fully half of them abandoned Walker's cause then and there, and wearily made their way up the river some seventy miles to Fort Yuma, the nearest outpost of civilization. Walker's last desperate move had failed.⁴¹

There was nothing to be done but retrace the desert miles to San Vicente, and after three days of indecision the filibuster chieftain and his remaining followers recrossed the Colorado and traversed the trail to San Vicente in a journey that must have been much more difficult and discouraging than before. At San Vicente, however, on April 17, they met more disastrous news. Melendres had descended upon the garrison and either killed or put its members to flight.⁴²

Again there was only one course of action, and the sorry remnant of Walker's conquering army retreated northward on its way to the border, its leader having proudly rejected a

⁴⁰ Scroggs, 45.

⁴¹ Scroggs, 45-47; *D.A.C.*, April 26, 1854.

⁴² Scroggs, 47.

Mexican offer to allow the Americans to depart peacefully if they would first lay down their arms. On the flanks of the retiring filibusters hovered the followers of Melendres, giving them no peace but avoiding a pitched battle. Melendres sent word beyond the border to Major J. McKinstry, commanding the United States forces at San Diego, that the Mexicans proposed to capture Walker's band, and McKinstry replied that he would not intervene on behalf of the filibusters. As Walker's men approached the border at Tia Juana on May 8, they found Melendres and his forces posted to intercept them. But for once Walker's followers were fully in accord with his ideas, and their one purpose was to cross the frontier. With a wild cheer they plunged forward, and the Mexicans, no doubt startled at the ferocity of these tattered desperadoes, broke their lines and let the Americans pass through. Walker and his remaining thirty-three men were met on the American side by Major McKinstry and Captain H. S. Burton, to whom they gladly surrendered, promising to make their way to San Francisco to undergo trial for their violation of the federal neutrality laws. The Republic of Lower California had come to a close befitting the motives which led to its inception.⁴³

The sequel of these brief and turbulent annals of the filibuster republic may be disposed of quickly. Watkins, Emory and others had already been brought to trial in San Francisco and the first two were fined fifteen hundred dollars each for their breach of the neutrality statutes, fines which were never paid. Walker was more fortunate, due to his eloquence in his own defense and to his obvious popularity among San Francisco's adventurous element. In October he was declared not guilty, and on its failure to convict the filibuster leader, the federal government dropped its cases against his followers. Walker and such of his adherents as were still faithful were left free to share in the California politics of 1854 and to lay plans for their more ambitious Nicaragua filibustering venture

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 47-48; *D.A.C.*, May 16, 1854; Wells, 36-37; Mexico, Secretaria de Gobernación, Archivos Viejos, Legajo de 1854, *Tranquilidad Pública*, Número 66, Negrete to Ministro del Interior, San Diego, May 11, 15, 1854; *El Nacional*, June 9, 1854.

of the following year, a venture which carried the "grey-eyed man of destiny" to greater heights of fame and to face a Central American firing squad in 1860.⁴⁴

How shall we judge this remarkable episode in the story of western expansion? Various commentators have associated William Walker, Senator William M. Gwin of California, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis and others in an alleged effort to expand the area of the slave states. Such observers based their assumptions upon such evidence as Walker's institution of the Civil Code of Louisiana in his attempted republic, the removal of Walker's stumbling-block, Colonel Hitchcock, by Jefferson Davis in the spring of 1854, and the accusations of Walker's partisans by Hitchcock himself. It would seem, however, from the sources thus far available, that the chief narrator of the attack upon Baja California is in general correct in the conclusions by which he refutes such arguments, and we may therefore perhaps dismiss the old explanation of Walker's motives.⁴⁵

But it cannot be denied that the Republic of Lower California has in its own right no insignificant place in the story of Manifest Destiny. Unquestionably it hampered the negotiations of James Gadsden for the purchase of the peninsula, which with all its mineral wealth and its strategic importance would have been no mean acquisition for the United States. Thus the incident, besides illustrating the manner in which Anglo-American expansionists often frustrated the efforts of United States diplomats, also profoundly affected the Anglo-American social and economic development of the inland Southwest. As an adventure in expansion, it should be classed with the deeds of López and Crittenden in Cuba, Crabb and Raousset-Boulbon in Sonora, Pierre Soulé in Spain, and the exponents of the Sierra Madre Republic along the Rio Grande. Not only is it an unusually good example of the scorn which the Anglo-American pioneer felt for international agreements,

⁴⁴ Scroggs, ch. v, *et seq.*; *D.A.C.*, March 21-26, April 1, 26, May 16, 27, June 3, 7, October 11-20, 1854; Wells, 39-40.

⁴⁵ Scroggs, 48-51; *D.A.C.*, December 24, 1853, February 17, 1854.

boundaries and rights; it also reflects conditions in the old, wild days along the Mexican border and displays the results of our "shirt-sleeves" diplomacy of the lively fifties.

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