

THE CAPTURE OF MONTEREY OCT. 19, 1842.

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The capture of Monterey, the capital of Alta, California, Oct. 19, 1842, is an event that from an American standpoint has but little importance beyond the fact that it was a blunder of the Commodore of the United States Squadron in the Pacific. From the standpoint of the Californian of that day it was an event of vast importance—not so much in immediate results as it was a premonition or prophesy of greater events surely coming. For ten years preceding the capture, California had been in an almost continual state of revolution. There had been an average of a new Governor for each year between 1831 and 1841. The Territory had been blessed (or cursed) with two Governors at a time and once with triplets. The fault did not altogether lie with California. The home government was largely to blame. Mexico, herself, was in a chronic state of revolution. The government appointees sent to the Territory from Mexico were often mere adventurers in search of gain or position, and unfit for office. The intelligent leaders among the Californians had begun to realize that a territory so rich in possibilities must ultimately fall into the hands of some foreign power. Mexico could not hold it in case of war with a stronger nation; and the Territory could not maintain its independence even if allowed to peaceably separate itself from the mother country. The future of California hung upon the question of which nation, England, France, or the United States could first pick a quarrel with Mexico, or which could secure it by purchase. The United States had the advantage in proximity to the coveted territory; and among the alien population it had the greatest number. Some of these were nominally Mexican citizens, but every Californian knew that in event of war between Mexico and the United States, these naturalized citizens would quickly renounce their allegiance to their adopted country.

The capture of Monterey revealed to the Californians that the “manifest destiny” of the Territory, was to fall into the hands of the Americans.

To intelligent, broad minded and progressive native statesmen like Bandini and Vallejo, this was a much desired consummation. But to men like Pico, Castro and Carrillo, who had been most active in fomenting revolutions, and who disliked Americans, it would be the bitterness of disappointed ambition, and the loss of power and prestige.

This was begun with no intention of writing an historical essay on this subject; although a most interesting and original paper might be written on it, if the author would view the subject from the native Californian standpoint and not from the American standpoint, from which

all Californian history is written. It was written partly to introduce an extract from the diary of a pioneer who was an eye witness to the capture and whose account has the merit of having been written on the date of the occurrence; and partly to give some facts not generally known in regard to the conference between Governor Micheltorena and Commodore Jones at the Stearns House in Los Angeles. Commodore Jones and his officers were the first official representatives of our government who visited Los Angeles.

"Monterey, Oct. 19, 1842. At 2 p. m. the United States man of war "United States," Commodore Ap Catesby Jones, came to anchor close along-side and inshore of all the ships in port. About 3 p. m. Captain Armstrong came ashore accompanied by an interpreter and went direct to the Governor's house where he had a private conversation with him, which proved to be a demand for the surrender of the entire coast of California, Upper and Lower, to the United States government. When he was about to go on board he gave three or four copies of a proclamation to the inhabitants of the two Californias, assuring them of the protection of their lives, persons and property. In his notice to the Governor (Alvarado) he gave him only until the following morning at 9 a. m. to decide. If he received no answer then he would fire upon the town.

I remained on shore that night and went down to the Governor's with Mr. Larkin and Mr. Eagle. The Governor had had some idea of running away and leaving Monterey to its fate but was told by Mr. Spence that he should not go, and finally he resolved to await the result. At twelve at night some persons were sent on board the United States, who had been appointed by the Governor to meet the Commodore and arrange the terms of the surrender. Next morning, at half past ten o'clock, about 100 sailors and 50 marines disembarked. The sailors marched up from the shore and took possession of the fort; the American colors were hoisted. The United States fired a salute of thirteen guns, it was returned by the fort which fired twenty-six guns.

The marines in the meantime had marched up to the Government House. The officers and soldiers of the California government were discharged and their guns and other arms taken possession of, and carried to the fort. The stars and stripes now wave over us. Long may they wave here in California." "October 21st, 4 p. m. Flags were again changed, the vessels were released and all was quiet again. The Commodore had received later news by some Mexican newspapers."

The author of this extract states it as a fact of which he was cognizant, that Governor Alvarado seriously contemplated running away and leaving Monterey to its fate. It is not fair to impute this to the Governor's cowardice. It is more than probable that it arose from a desire to avoid the

responsibility of surrendering the city. He had already been superceded as governor. His successor, Micheltorena, had been nearly two months in California and was daily expected at the Capital to take charge of affairs. There was no good feeling between the two; and Alvarado would no doubt have been glad to have shouldered the odium of the surrender on his successor.

Governor Micheltorena after a stay in Los Angeles of several weeks had taken up his line of march for the Capital with his army of 300 cholos. The cholos (half-breeds) were most incorrigible thieves, and had robbed the hen roosts at Los Angeles of their last chicken. Micheltorena had reached a point about twenty miles north of San Fernando, when on the night of the 24th of October, a messenger aroused him from his slumbers with the news that the Capital had been captured. Micheltorena seized the occasion to make political capital for himself with the home government. He spent the remainder of the night in fulminating proclamations fiercer than the thunderbolts of Jove, copies of which were dispatched post haste to Mexico. He even wished himself a thunderbolt "that he might fly over the intervening space and annihilate the invaders." To Vallejo he wrote, "Triumph is certain; with my present force I should not hesitate to attack; but it is just that all share in the pleasure of victory. Are their Mexican bosoms which do not feel themselves boil with valor at seeing this effort to rob us of our Territory. Invite, then excite, move the patriotism of all able to bear arms." (Bancroft's History of California, Vov. IV.) Then with his own courage and doubtless that of his brave cholos aroused to the highest pitch the next day he fled back to San Fernando, where afraid to advance or retreat he halted until news reached him that Commodore Jones had restored the Capital to the Californians. Then his valor reached the boiling point. He boldly marched to Los Angeles, established his headquarters in the city and awaited the coming of the Commodore and his officers.

At the famous conference in the Stearns House, Micheltorena presented his "Articles of Convention" to the Commodore. Among other ridiculous demands were the following: "Article VI. Mr. Thos. Ap C. Jones will deliver 1500 complete infantry uniforms to replace those of nearly one-half of the Mexican force which have been ruined in the violent march and the continued rains while they were on their way to recover the port thus invaded." "Article VII. Jones to pay \$15,000 into the national treasury for expenses incurred from the general alarm; also a complete set of musical instruments in place of those ruined on this occasion."

Gov. Micheltorena had only 300 men in his force and these were mostly convicts released from the prisons to enlist and were of the lowest

class of half-breeds, it was not probable that any one of them had ever possessed an entire suit at one time in his life.

One of the Commodore's staff, writing of this interview says: "The requirements of the articles were so preposterous as to excite for the moment feelings of disgust mingled with commiseration, and to make it a matter of serious reflection, and consultation between the Commodore and Captain Stribling as to the course most proper to pursue. The Commodore's first impulse was to return the papers without comment and to refuse further communication with a man who could have the effrontery to trump up such charges as those for which indemnification was claimed." The Commodore on reflection put aside his personal feelings, met the Governor at the grand ball in Sanchez Hall held in honor of the occasion. The ball was a brilliant affair, "the dancing ceased only with the rising of the sun next morning." The Commodore returned the articles without his signature. The Governor did not again refer to his demands. He evidently had been making a little by-play at diplomacy in order to make himself solid with the home government. The articles had been officially published in Mexico nearly a month before Commodore Jones had either seen or heard of them, as part of the correspondence between Commodore Jones and Governor Micheltorena.

Micheltorena had the audacity to claim that the fear of his army of choleros and their valiant general, had impelled the Commodore to restore the Capital.

General Micheltorena had attained some military reputation in Mexico and probably was not wanting in courage, but he was so accustomed to the exaggerated expressions and bombastic proclamations so common in Mexican diplomacy that he would no doubt have considered that he was not doing his whole duty to his country, had he used simpler forms of expression.

On January 21, 1843, Jones and his officers took their departure from the city "amidst the beating of drums, the firing of cannon and the ringing of bells, saluted by the General and his wife from the door of their quarters." A military escort accompanied the Commodore and his staff to San Pedro. And thus was sped the parting guest. Nearly four years later there was another military procession with beating of drums and booming of cannon moving through the streets of Los Angeles; it was Stockton's army taking final possession in the name of the United States of America of the last Mexican stronghold in California.