

FOURTH DESPATCH OF MAJOR DOWNING.

[PRIVATE]

To James K. Polk, President of the United States, and nearly half of Mexico certain, with a pretty tolerable fair chance yet for the whole.

CITY OF MEXICO, DOCTRIFUL TERRITORY,  
February 11, 1818.

DEAR COLONEL: If any body asks you that impudent question again, "What are we fightin' for?" jest tell him he's a goose, and don't know what he's talking about, for we *aint* fightin' at all; we've got peace now; got an armistice, they call it; so there's no sense at all in their putting that question to you any more. We've got the opposition fairly on the hip upon that question, if no other: fairly gagged 'em; they can't say to you any longer now, "What are we fightin' for?" This is some consolation for the shabby trick TRIST has served us. That fellow has made a bargain with the Mexicans to stop the war, in spite of the orders you sent to him to come right home and let things alone. I felt uneasy about it when I see him hanging about here so long after he got his orders to come home, and I said to him, once or twice, "Mr. Trist, what's the reason you don't go off home and mind the President?" This unlawful boldness of yours is shameful."

"Why, Major," says he, "he that does his master's will, does *right*, whether he goes according to orders or not. The President sent me out here to make peace, and it's a wonder to me if I don't fix it yet, somehow or other, before I've done with it." And then he put his finger to the side of his nose and give me a sassy look, as much as to say, Major Downing, you better not try to be looking into diplomatic things that's too deep for you.

Says I, "Mr. Trist, I'm astonished at you; I thought you was a man of more judgment, and looked deeper into things. Don't you see what advantage it gives the President to let things now stand jest as they be? He's offered peace to the Mexicans, and they have refused it. Therefore, the opposition at home can't cry out against him any more if he goes ahead with the war. He's shut their mouths up on that score. He's made the war popular, and can go into the Presidential campaign now with a good chance of being elected another term. And now if you go to dabblin' in the business any more, I'm sure you'll do mischief. As things now stand, peace is the last thing in the world that the President wants. You've done your errand here and got your answer, and it's turned out jest right; we can go on with our annex all Mexico now, without such an everlastin' growlin' among the opposition at home, for we've offered the Mexicans peace, and they wouldn't take it. So you've nothin' to do now but to be off home, for the war is jest in the right shape as it is."

Well now, after all this plain advice—for I felt it my duty to be plain with him—he still kept hangin' about here, day after day and week after week, and the first I knew we was took all back by being told that Mr. Trist had made a treaty and General Scott was to order an armistice. I couldn't hardly believe my ears at first. I posted right off to General Scott to know what it all meant.

"General," says I, are you going to order an armistice?"

"Yes, Major Downing," says he: "Mr. Trist and the Mexican Commissioners have signed the preliminaries of a treaty, so of course we shall have an armistice."

"Well now, General," says I, "I don't think the President will thank you for that."

"Can't help that," says he, "I must obey the orders of the Government, thanks or no thanks. And when Mr. Trist was sent out here to make a treaty, I was directed, whenever the plan of a treaty should be signed on both sides, to order an armistice, and wait for the two Governments to ratify the treaty. Well, Mr. Trist and the Mexican Commissioners have at last fixed up some kind of a bargain and signed it, and of course according to my orders we have nothin' to do but to stand still and wait for the two Governments to clinch the nail."

"But," says I, "General, you know Mr. Trist has no right to make a treaty any more than I have, for the President has ordered him to come home; and if he has made a treaty, it's no better than a piece of blank paper, and you should'n't mind it."

"Don't know any thing about them matters," says he, "I can't go behind the curtain to inquire what little manoeuvres are going on between the President and his Commissioner. Mr. Trist came out here with his regular commission to make a treaty. He has brought me a treaty, signed by himself and the Mexican Commissioners; and my orders are to cease hostilities. Of course we can do nothin' else but halt and stack our arms."

"Well," says I, "General: it aint right; it's bad business; it'll break up this grand annexin' plan that was jest going on so nice that we might a got through with it in a year or two more; and then it will bother the President most to death about his election for the second term. That treaty must be stopped; it must'n't be sent home; and I'll go right and see Mr. Trist about it."

So off I went and hunted up Mr. Trist, and had a talk with him. Says I, "Trist, how's this? They tell me you've been making a treaty with these Mexicans."

"Should'n't wonder if I had," says he: "that's jest what I come out here for."

"Well, I must say, sir," says I, "I think this is a pretty piece of business. How do you dare to do such a thing? You know the President has ordered you home."

"Yes," says he, "and I mean to go home as soon as I get through the job he sent me to do."

"Well now," says I, "Trist, I claim to know what the President is about, and what he wants, and I'm his confidential friend and private ambassador out here, and I shall take the liberty to interfere in this business. This high-handed doings of yours must be nipt off in the bud. What sort of a bargain have you been making? Jest let me look at the treaty."

"Can't do it," says he, "it's half way to Vera Cruz by this time; I sent it off yesterday."

"Blood and thunder!" says I, "then you have knocked the whole business in the head, sure enough. You've committed an outrageous crime, sir, and a great shame; and don't you know, sir, that great crimes deserve great punishments? I don't know what Col. Polk will do; but I know what my friend old Hickory would do if he was alive; he would hang you right up to the first tree he could come at."

"What, hang me for doing jest what I was sent here to do?" says he. "For I've made jest such a bargain as the President told me to make; only a little better one."

"That's nothin' here nor there," says I, "you know circumstances alters cases. And you know well enough, or you ought to have sense enough to know, that, as things now stand, the President don't want a treaty. Now, says I, Mr. Trist, answer me one plain question: Do you think you have any right at all to make a treaty after the President has ordered you home?"

"Well," says he, "I think circumstances alters cases too; and when the President ordered me home, I suppose he thought I couldn't get through the job he sent me to do. But I thought I could, and so I kept trying, and I've got through with it at last, and done the business all up according to my first orders; and I don't see why the President should'n't be well satisfied."

"Well," says I, "what's the items of the bargain? What have you agreed upon?"

"Why," says he, "we have the whole of Texas clear to the Rio Grande; we have all of New Mexico, and all of Upper California. And we pay the Mexicans fifteen millions of dollars, and pay our own citizens five millions that the Mexicans owed them. And we stop firing, draw our charges from the guns that are loaded, and go home."

"Well, now," says I, "Trist, don't you think you are a pretty feller to make such a bargain as that at this time of day? The President will be mortified to death about it. Here we've been fightin' near about two years to make the Mexicans pay over that five millions of dollars they owed our people, and now you've agreed that we shall put our hands in our own pockets and pay it ourselves. The whole plan of the war has been carried on by the President upon the highest principles to go straight ahead and 'conquer a peace,' man-fashion; and now you've agreed to back out of the scrape, and buy a peace, and pay the money for it. You know very well the President has declared, time and again, that the war should go on till we got indemnity for the past and security for the future—their's his own words—and now you've agreed to settle up without getting one jot of either. For the past, we are at least a hundred millions of dollars out of pocket, besides losin' ten or fifteen thousand men. As for the men, I spose you may say we can offset them against the Mexicans we have killed, and as we have killed more than they have, may be it foots up a little in our favor, and that's the only advantage you've secured. As for the hundred millions of dollars, we don't a get a penny of it back. So all the indemnity you get for the past is a few thousand and dead Mexicans—that is, as many as remains after subtracting what they've killed of us from what we've killed of them. But the cap-sheaf of your bargain is the 'security for the future.' The cities and towns and castles that we have fit so hard to take, and have got our men into, and all so well-secured, you now agree to give 'em all right up again to the enemy, and much our men off home with their fingers in their mouths; and that's our security for the future. As for the fifteen millions of dollars you agree to pay for New Mexico and California, you might jest as well a throw the money into the sea, for they was ours afore; they was already conquered and annexed, and was as much ours as if we had paid the money for 'em."

Here I turned on my heel and left him, for I was so disgusted at the conduct of the teller that I wouldn't have any more talk with him. And now, my dear Colonel, there is nothin' for us to do but to look this business right in the face and make the best we can of it. If there was any way to keep the thing out of sight, it would be best for you to throw the treaty into the fire as soon as you get it, and send word on to General Scott to go ahead again. But that is impossible; it will be spread all over the country and known to every body. And I'm convinced it will be the best way for you to turn right about, make out to be glad of what can't be helped, and accept the treaty. The nominations for President is close at hand, and you must get ready to go into the election for your second term on what you've got, and make the best show you can with it. If you should reject the treaty, the opposition would get the advantage of you again; they would then cry out that the Mexicans had asked for peace and *you had refused it*; and there would be no end to their growling about this oppressive war of invasion. But if you accept the treaty, it puts an end to their grumbling about the war.

To pacify our friends that are very eager for the whole of Mexico, you must tell 'em to look out and see how much we have already got; keep telling of 'em that half a loaf is better than no bread; tell 'em to keep quiet till after your next election is over, and may be you'll contrive some plan to be cutting into 'other half. Keep Mr. Riche blowing the organ, all weather, to the tune of half of Mexico for a song. Tell the whole country, and brazen it out to every body, that you've made a great bargain, a capital bargain, much better than Jefferson made when he bought Louisiana for fifteen millions of dollars; tell 'em for the same sum of money you have got a great deal more land, and more men on it. I'm satisfied this is the best ground to take. We must go for the treaty, and, bitter pill as it is, we must swallow it as though we loved it. I spose it will have to go before the Senate, as the constitution now stands, (the constitution is very defective on that pint, and ought to be mended, for it's dangerous trustin' important matters to the Senate; but you must drive your friends all up to vote for it; don't let it fail on no account; don't let 'em go to fingerin' it over and putting in amendments that will make the Mexicans so mad that they will kick it all over again. For that would put things into such a hurly-burly I'm afraid you would lose your election.

Ratify the treaty, and then gather up all the glory that's been made out of this war, twist it into a sort of glory wreath round your head, and march with a bold step and a stiff upper lip right into the Presidential campaign, and I should'n't wonder if you beat the whole bunch of all your enemies and all your friends. And if you went into your second term on the strength of half of Mexico, it would be a pretty good sign that you *might go into a third term on the strength of the whole of it*.

I remain your faithful friend,  
MAJOR JACK DOWNING.