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THE FLORIDA INTRIGUES OF JOSE
ALVAREZ DE TOLEDO ¹

By JOSEPH B. LOCKEY

Jose Alvarez de Toledo came to the United States in September, 1811, in the character of a political refugee. He gave it to be understood that he had been compelled to flee from Spain because of his sympathies with the revolutionary movement then beginning to make itself felt throughout Spanish America. He resided at Philadelphia until the end of 1812, and then proceeded to the southwestern frontier. Entering Texas he took command of the Republican army at San Antonio; but suffering a disastrous defeat, he escaped to Louisiana. He busied himself in that quarter during the next three years or more with the organization and promotion of divers revolutionary enterprises ostensibly in the Mexican interest. About the middle of 1816, he professed a change of heart, abandoned the independence cause, and in December of that year embarked for Spain, where royal forgiveness and honorable employment awaited his return.

The full story of Toledo's activities on this side of the Atlantic has never been told. A little has been written about his relations with Secretary of State Monroe, and a little more about his connection with some of the border incidents; but apart from these very brief accounts there is nothing in the published records to mark his goings and comings, nor to indicate the objects he pursued. His Florida intrigues

¹ This article is an outgrowth of an extended project undertaken by the writer for the Florida State Historical Society. The material upon which it is based consists in part of photostatic reproductions of documents provided by this Society, and in part of like material loaned by the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. The Research Board of the University of California has generously given the project financial support. To all these agencies the writer acknowledges his indebtedness.

illustrate the point. In two instances only has his name been even vaguely associated with the State. It has been said that he gave Monroe, in 1811, secret information regarding the designs of Great Britain on the Floridas;² and it has been asserted, without proof or detail, that he was the author, with General Mina, of the plots which culminated in the seizure of Amelia Island.³ In the first instance Toledo seems to have had little information to give and no purpose to subserve except perhaps to gain the good will of Monroe; but in the second, investigation shows, he was in effect the promoter of a vastly complicated intrigue which involved the destiny not only of Florida but of Louisiana, and, indeed, of America as a whole. To be understood this intrigue must be viewed against the background of Toledo's whole career.

The refugee's conduct in the United States justifies mistrust of all his professions of attachment to the independence cause. He was born in Cuba, but despite that fact was more Spanish than American. His father, an officer in the Spanish navy, and his mother both were born in Spain.⁴ He himself was educated in the Peninsula, and on growing to manhood followed his father's example by enlisting in his country's navy, in which he rose to the rank of lieutenant. In the war resulting from the Napo-

² I. J. Cox, "Monroe and the Early Mexican Revolutionary Agents" in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, 1911, I, 203.

³ Vincente Pazos, *The Exposition, Remonstrance and Protest of Don Vincente Pazos, Commissioner on behalf of the Republican Agents established on Amelia Island, in Florida, under the authority and in behalf of the Independent States of South America.*

...Presented to the Executive of the United States on the ninth of February, 1818. Translated from the Spanish. Philadelphia, 1818.

⁴ Carlos M. Trelles, "Un Precursor de la Independencia de Cuba: Don Jose Alvarez de Toledo," in *Discursos Leídos en la Recepción Pública del Sr. Carlos M. Trelles y Govín* (Havana, 1926), 49, 77, 84.

leonic usurpation in 1808, he saw service against the invaders. But his navel career was soon interrupted. In 1810, when the national assembly known as the Cortes of Cadiz was convened on the island of Leon, he was chosen to represent Santo Domingo in that body. Within a year, the course of his life changed again. He vacated his seat in the Cortes and embarked clandestinely for the United States.

It is important to know, if possible, why Toledo took this step. By his own account, which he set forth in a manifesto published at Philadelphia shortly after his arrival in the United States, he fled to escape the wrath of the very Cortes of which he was a member. He had written, it appears, certain letters to his constituents in the island of Santo Domingo counseling them to take measures for their own safety and well-being and warning them against trusting too much to the protection of the mother country dominated as it was by Great Britain. These letters by some untoward circumstance were intercepted after they reached the island. They were sent back to Spain and eventually were transmitted to the Cortes accompanied by charges which had been formulated against the writer. An order for his detention and trial followed. It was because he was fearful of the outcome that Toledo sought safety in a country where, as he expressed it, he would be beyond the reach of despotic power.⁵ But it is doubtful whether this account reveals the whole truth.

Is it possible that Toledo left Spain with a definite mission? The distrust of England, to which he gave expression in his speeches in the Cortes⁶ as well as in the correspondence with his constituents in Santo

⁵ "Manifiesto o Satisfaccion Pundonorosa, a Todos los Espanoles Europeos, y a Todos los Pueblos de la America, por un Disputado de las Cortes Reunidas en Cadiz," in Trelles *Discursos*, Appendix II.

⁶ Wellesley to Castlereagh, July 6, 1819 (Private and Confidential), Foreign Office, 72/225.

Domingo, and the friendly associations which he established with Bonapartist agents and sympathizers upon his arrival in the United States, suggest the possibility of a French connection. Indeed the Spanish minister, Onis, who watched with attention the refugee's movements, very soon came to the conclusion, at least so he asserted, that the flight from Spain was a premeditated step in an intrigue of the usurper Bonaparte whose object was to deliver the unsuspecting Spanish Americans into the arms of France. But after further observation the Spanish minister came to the very different conclusion—again it must be pointed out that this is what Onis asserted—that Toledo was the instrument of a plot instigated by the American deputies in the Cortes with a view to encouraging the colonies to strike for independence. With this purpose, Onis professed to believe, France and the United States were in active accord.⁷

Of these two views, the latter seems the more plausible ; for it is not wholly inconsistent with Toledo's own explanation nor with his actions during the first few months of his stay in the United States. Moreover this view derives a measure of support from a certain document which Toledo had in his possession at the time of his 'repentance' in 1816. This was a commission reputedly signed by the Mexican deputies in the Cortes on July 14, 1811, which empowered Toledo, then about to embark for America, to raise an army and establish a revolutionary government in the Internal Provinces of northern Mexico. But the authenticity of this paper cannot be vouched for. The original was torn to bits by

⁷ Onis to Bardaxi y Arara, September 25, and December 28, 1811, Archivo Historico Nacional, Estado, Legajo, 5554; same to same, January 20, 1812, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5638.

Toledo,⁸ and the known copies do not, of course, contain the signatures and other data from a study of which the genuineness of the document might be determined. Nor has it been possible, by evidence of any other sort to establish the fact that such a commission was ever issued. Until that is done, Toledo's connection with the Mexican deputies must remain in the realm of doubt.

It may be that none of the explanations accords with the facts of the case. Toledo may have been neither a mere refugee, nor a Bonapartist emissary, nor a representative of the American deputies in the Cortes. He may have been at the beginning what he was at the end: a secret agent of Spain. If that was his role, the way he played it does honor alike to his loyalty and to his skill; but it is difficult to believe that his character was so stable or his actions so consistent. He seems on the contrary to have had an eye to the main chance. He served the master, it appears, that promised the greatest reward.

Why he chose to establish himself in Philadelphia, where Onis also had his abode, is difficult to explain; for life was made miserable for him there, he claimed, by persecution at the hands of that official. In the course of a few weeks, however, the unhappy exile found a friend. A correspondence which he opened with Secretary of State Monroe resulted in his being invited to come to Washington, at Monroe's expense, for an interview.⁹ What passed between the two men when they met late in December,

⁸ Juan Mariano Picornell and Father Sedella were able to join the torn pieces of the commission together and make a copy which Sedella sent to Onis under date of July 9, 1816. Cf. Onis to Cevallos, August 11, 1816, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5554. Another copy was intercepted by Royalist forces in Mexico in 1815. cf. Trelles, *Discursos*, 153.

⁹ Communication was carried on for the most part through A. J. Dallas as an intermediary. See Dallas to Monroe, November 25 December 4, and December 25, 1811, State Dept., Miscellaneous.

1811, must be inferred in part from scraps of correspondence and in part from the subsequent course of events. Monroe became convinced, it appears, that Toledo was moved by a desire to defeat England's designs on the Spanish Islands and the Floridas, with reference to which he professed to have secret information ; and that he aspired, at the same time, to play a part in advancing the general cause of Spanish American independence. Of greater interest perhaps to Monroe was the visitor's apparent willingness to serve the United States in the impending contest for territory on the southern frontier; and an agreement of some sort on that head seems to have been reached.¹⁰

What the agreement was, can only be determined by viewing it in the light of certain contemporary events. Some two weeks before Toledo appeared in Washington, the Mexican agent, Jose Bernardo Gutierrez de Lara, who had been sent to the United States in search of aid for his country's faltering revolution, called at the White House to present his case directly to President Madison. The President received him with cordiality and expressed sympathy for his cause, but felt obliged to say that since the United States was at peace with Spain, it could not take sides in the contest. It would be feasible however, the President suggested, to send troops to take possession of Texas as a part of the Louisiana purchase ; and he intimated that these troops once they were established on the Rio Grande, could render valuable assistance to the revolutionists. Rejecting this suggestion as unacceptable, Gutierrez¹¹ sought in further discussions, mostly with Monroe,

¹⁰ Onis to Pezuela, October 7, 1812, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5554. Under date of January 7, 1812, Toledo wrote Monroe in veiled terms about setting out on his mission. State Dept., Misc.

¹¹ The name was generally shortened, contemporaneously, to Bernardo, rather than to Gutierrez, or to Lara.

some other basis of cooperation.¹² An understanding, the exact nature of which is a matter of conjecture, seems to have been reached at about the time Toledo was invited to come to Washington. The invasion, it appears, was to be effected, not by United States troops flying the American flag, but by a heterogeneous expeditionary force composed of Mexican refugees and of American and other adventurers under the Mexican flag.

The arrangement with Gutierrez was doubtless a subject of discussion between Monroe and Toledo; and it may have been understood between them that Toledo was to command the expeditionary force. It does not follow, however, that Gutierrez was a party to any such understanding, though his presence on the border seems to have been required under the plan agreed upon. Both Gutierrez and Toledo left Washington early in January, 1812, and both, it appears, were to set out soon afterward for the proposed destination. Toledo returned to Philadelphia where he received on the order of John Graham, chief clerk of the State Department, the sum of seven hundred dollars, presumably to meet the expenses of the journey.¹³ For some reason, however, he delayed his departure for nearly a full year. Gutierrez on the other hand embarked within a few weeks for New Orleans. Upon his arrival there he presented himself to Governor Claiborne, to whom he had a letter of introduction from John Graham. Claiborne in turn introduced him to William Shaler, special agent of the United States to Mexico. After a number of conferences with Claiborne, the Mexican agent and the American agent took passage up

¹² "Diary of Jose Bernardo Gutierrez de Lara" in *The American Historical Review*, XXXIV. 71-77.

¹³ Dallas to Graham, January 4, 1812, State Dept., Misc. Toledo also received divers sums from William Shaler in Louisiana. See Shaler to Monroe, May 16, 1813, State Dept., Spec. Agts.

stream for Natchitoches on the Red River at no great distance from the frontier.¹⁴ During the next three or four months, the two busied themselves-Gutierrez openly and Shaler secretly-with the organization of the expeditionary force. In August, 1812, the motley assemblage styling itself the "Republican Army of the North" advanced into Texas under the joint command of Gutierrez de Lara and Augustus W. Magee, who resigned from the United States army to join the expedition. Shaler was to follow in the event of success.¹⁵

Why Toledo lingered in Philadelphia while these things were going on, is a question. The Cuban historian Trelles believes that Toledo's immediate purpose was to embark for Havana to begin a revolutionary movement in the Spanish islands, and that it was only when the plans for this undertaking proved impractical that he looked, toward Mexico.¹⁶

This opinion is based in part at least on the fact that Monroe gave Toledo a letter-dated early in January, 1812-to William Shaler, who had gone to Havana in 1810 and was supposed still to be there. But Shaler had written Monroe, under date of November 13, 1811, that he expected soon to depart for New Orleans. That information he repeated in subsequent letters, and on December 11, in point of fact, he sailed for New Orleans. Monroe knew at the time of writing the letter of introduction that Shaler had quit, or was soon to quit, Havana; and he must have known very shortly after that he had arrived at his

¹⁴ "Diary of Jose Bernardo Gutierrez de Lara" in *The American Historical Review*, XXXIV, 286-294 ; Claiborne to Shaler, April 7, 1812, State Dept., Spec. Agts.

¹⁵ Shaler to Monroe, May 2, May 7, June 12, June 23, August 18, August 25, 1812, State Dept., Spec. Agents.

¹⁶ *Discursos*, 23, 27.

destination in Louisiana.¹⁷ If, therefore, the letter has any significance, it points to New Orleans as Toledo's immediate objective and to Texas, and not to Cuba, as the scene of his revolutionary activities.

However that may be, Toledo did not turn his face toward the west until December, 1812. He then set out in the company of half a dozen officers, all of whom like himself looked to the achievement of some ambition amid the turbulent scenes then being enacted on Mexican soil. At Pittsburg, one of the number, Colonel Nathaniel Cogswell, abandoned the party. He had been closely associated with Toledo for some months past, and before setting out had begun to entertain suspicions of Toledo's integrity. He had now come into possession of information that seemed to him to convert suspicion into certainty. He felt it to be his duty, therefore, to warn the leaders of the republican army in Texas, which he was able to do by despatching a letter by mail ahead of the party.¹⁸

I now pledge you my honor as a gentleman, and as an officer; and I call God to witness the truth of my assertion, that the object of Mr. Toledo is to play the same game with you as Miranda¹⁹ did in Caraccas. It has been fully ascertained that the people of Old Spain finding that it would be difficult or impossible to prevent the colonies from aiming at independence, have made arrangements to counter revolutionize, assume the garb of Patriots, and to have all the appearance of being persecuted for their Patriotism, in order to obtain the confidence of the Patriots,

¹⁷ Shaler to Monroe, November 13, November 25, December 6, December 8, December 27, 1811, State Dept., Spec. Agts. The letter of November 25, an endorsement shows, was received at the State Department on December 17. (The writer is indebted to Mr. Hunter Miller, Historical Adviser of the State Department., for this information.) An earlier letter of Shaler's required only twelve days to reach Washington. It is not unlikely, therefore that Monroe had received Shaler's letter of December 8, by the end of that month.

¹⁸ Cogswell to Gutierrez and Magee, December 29, 1812, [Extract] State Dept., Spec. Agts. See also in this connection Shaler to Gutierrez, May 28, 1813, and Shaler to Monroe, June 12, 1813, State Dept., Spec. Agts.

¹⁹ Miranda had recently surrendered to the Royalist forces in Venezuela. The belief was common that he had played the part of traitor. That view is no longer held.

and to be entrusted by them in important situations, so that when a favorable opportunity occurs to sacrifice the Patriots and their cause as General Miranda has done. Such a man is Mr. Toledo. I pledge you my life on the issue, for I know it to be a fact. To my certain knowledge Mr. Toledo is in close correspondence with his relation the Marquis of Villa Franca a member of the Spanish Cortes-with the Duke of Infantado, a member of the regency;²⁰ and with others, the most inveterate foes of the Patriotic cause. . . . The object is to place himself at the head of the expedition, of which yourself and Magee are now the chiefs. He would then get rid of you and Magee as soon as possible, when he would manage everything in his own way; and as far forth as lay in his power to the utter ruin and subversion of the Patriotic cause. Rely upon what I now tell you. Toledo has not a single particle of Patriotism, his only object is by a great shew of disinterestedness, and affected Patriotism to deceive you, and get himself at the head.

As intended, this letter went in advance of the party to Natchitoches, from which place it was forwarded to its destination.²¹ Meanwhile Toledo and his retinue proceeded at a slower rate down the Ohio and the Mississippi to Natchez. There Toledo found himself the object of further mistrust. At Rapides he was humiliated by arrest and brief detention on the ground that he was a French agent. Rumor preceded him and when he arrived at Natchitoches, in April, 1813, the mistrust had become general. But William Shaler was not among the doubters. Receiving his information from high sources he was little influenced by mere rumor or by unsubstantiated charges. He did everything in his power, therefore, to make known what he regarded as the correct view of Toledo's mission. He was so successful in allay-

²⁰ The Marquis of Villafranca was in effect a member of the Cortes, and the Duke of Infantado had been a member of the Regency since January 21, 1812. - Lafuente, *Historia General de Espana*, XVII, 269, 466. Toledo may have been related to the Duke of Infantado (Pedro Alcantara de Toledo) as well as to the Marquis of Villafranca. Cf. Trelles, *Discursos*, 44-45.

²¹ The letter was sent to the Postmaster at Natchitoches, who consulted Shaler before sending the packet on by express. There is a possibility that Shaler may have acquainted himself with the contents of the letter before it was allowed to proceed. See Jno. Johnston [Postmaster at Pittsburg] to the Postmaster at Natchitoches, December 29, 1813, and Shaler to Monroe, February 26, 1813, State Dept., Spec. Agts.

ing the suspicion that Toledo ventured to send his subordinates on to join the army and to go himself as far as Nacogdoches, in eastern Texas, to await developments.²²

But the conditions were not yet ripe for Toledo's assumption of power. Uninterrupted successes had been the portion of the army since it entered Texas eight or nine months before. Though Magee had died in the midst of the campaign,²³ Gutierrez was able to carry on as the sole commander with good results. He had just won, with the aid of the American volunteers, a brilliant victory over the Royalist army, capturing hundreds of prisoners including the Governor of the Province, taking a great quantity of arms and military stores, and laying the capital, San Antonio, open to occupation by his troops.²⁴ Now master of the Province, he formed a provisional government with himself at its head. His position at the moment seemed secure. In the circumstances Toledo saw no hope of achieving his aim.²⁵ Accordingly he retraced his steps to Natchitoches, where he continued, with Shaler's aid, to plot against the leadership of Gutierrez in the Texan regime.

Several months were to elapse before Gutierrez was at last forced to yield. His downfall may be attributed in great part to William Shaler. It was Shaler who encouraged the spirit of discontent among the Americans in the army. It was Shaler who laid the ugly charges against Toledo by facing Cogswell-when he appeared on the scene-and branding him as "a base and treacherous colum-

²² Shaler to Monroe, April 18, 1813, State Dept., Spec. Agts.; Morphy to the Viceroy of New Spain, May 8 and 25, 1813, Archivo General, Mexico, Guerra, Notas Diplomaticas, III.

²³ Shaler to Monroe, February 26, 1813, State Dept., Spec. Agts.

²⁴ Shaler to Monroe, May 7, 1813, State Dept., Spec. Agts.; Morphy to the Viceroy of New Spain, May 21, 1813, A. G. M., Guerra, N. D., III.

²⁵ Toledo to Monroe, May 6, 1813, State Dept., Spec. Agts.

niator." It was Shaler who gave countenance at every turn to Toledo's doubtful cause. But Gutierrez himself must bear his share of the blame. He was his own worst enemy. He weakly permitted a number of the officers captured at San Antonio to be butchered, to the great disgust of the Americans and of many of the Mexicans as well; he did nothing to strengthen his position or to pursue his advantage in the neighboring territory; and he failed miserably in his efforts to organize and administer a government suited to the peculiar needs of the situation.²⁶ In short, it was incompetence at San Antonio no less than intrigue at Natchitoches that opened the way for Toledo.

The denouement was astonishingly sudden. On July 24, 1813, Toledo set out from the Trinity in Eastern Texas for San Antonio, where he arrived early in August. He immediately assumed command, Gutierrez retiring to Louisiana. In the meantime, Colonel Arredondo with a Royalist force advanced from Laredo and took up a position on the Medina river a few miles from San Antonio. Thereupon Toledo mustered his army, freshly recruited and superior in numbers as well as in warlike equipment, and marched out to meet the foe. On August 18, the two forces clashed and after a sharp fight Toledo's band fled from the field in the greatest disorder.²⁷ From that day the proud Republican Army of the North ceased to exist. A few of its more fortunate members, among whom was Toledo, succeeded in reaching safety across the Louisiana border. So complete was the victory that the independence movement in Texas was left in a state of paralysis

²⁶ Shaler to Monroe, May 7, 1813, H. A. Bullard to Shaler, June 27, 1813, Jas. B. Wilkinson to Shaler, June 27, 1813, State Dept., Spec. Agts.

²⁷ Shaler to Monroe September 5 and September 19 1813 State Dept., Spec. Agts.; Onís to Labrador, October 8, 1813, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5639.

from which it was not to recover for years to come.²⁸ The hopelessness of further effort was apparent at once to Shaler, and he soon returned to Washington. Toledo retired for a while into Tennessee.

Two weeks before the battle, Cogswell died of a fever at Rapides. If he had lived he would have had the dismal satisfaction of pointing to the disaster as the perfect vindication of his charges; but there the matter would have ended. Nothing could cause the tide of opinion to turn against Toledo. He was strangely immune from attacks on his personal character. The men who were with him on the Medina and who fled with him across the border found no reason to suspect him of double-dealing; Shaler continued to regard him as trustworthy; the Mexican insurgents with whom he was associated afterward in divers enterprises believed him to be devoted to their cause; and with few exceptions the chroniclers of the events in which he played a part have to this day represented him as a man of good faith.²⁹ But poor Cogswell may have been right and the supporters of Toledo wrong.

It might have made a difference if those who retained their faith in Toledo's integrity despite every suspicious circumstance could have seen a letter that Onis wrote in cipher to his Government under date of October 7, 1812, more than two months before Toledo set out for the western frontier.

The ex-deputy of the Cortes Toledo came the day before yesterday to tell me that since his arrival here he has been in direct communication with the Government [of the United States] with a view to fomenting revolution in our Americas, particularly in Mexico: that he acknowledges his inconstancy, that he remembers that Spanish blood flows in his veins, that he anxiously desires his pardon and readmittance to the bosom of the fatherland; but that although he recognizes the generosity of our Gov-

²⁸ Arredondo to the Junta de Guerra, April 10, 1817, A. G. M., Historia, Tomo 152.

²⁹ Alaman, *Historia de Mejico*, III, 488; Zamacois, *Historia de Mejico*, IX, 216; Bancroft, *North Mexican States and Texas*, II, 31; Yoakum, *History of Texas*, I, 173-175; Trelles, op. cit.

ernment and confidently expects to be treated by it with the benevolence with which a father treats a wayward son, he would not be satisfied with the pardon unless, before obtaining it, he gave proofs of a repentance consecrated by some essential service. He assured me that he believed himself to be in a position to render such a service by virtue of the fact that this Government has agreed that he is to go and take command of a body of two thousand men that have been raised in the Province of New Orleans, to which body another of Mexican insurgents in Texas will be united: that his plan is to concert with one of the chiefs of the Internal Provinces an arrangement by which he would surrender unconditionally the troops under his command along with the twelve thousand rifles and three thousand sabers that have been sent by this Government to the insurgents; and he adds that he is certain of success if he is provided with the funds requisite for carrying the plan into effect.³⁰

The sum required, five thousand pesos,³¹ presented a difficulty. Onis alleged that he did not have such a sum at his command ; besides he was unwilling to pay before the event. He held out the hope, however, that the reward might be even greater if the promise were kept. To encourage Toledo he offered to advance a modest sum to meet the expenses of travel, and he offered further to dispatch a special messenger to enlist the cooperation of the Commandant of the Internal Provinces. But Toledo maintained that money in hand was essential to the success of his plan. Since he could not obtain it, and since he had given up his original idea of leading an army against Spain, there seemed to be no reason for his making the journey to the frontier. He gave Onis to understand, however, that he would consider the matter further and return to report his final decision. But he did not return, and Onis concluded that his only object was to obtain money under the false pretense of loyalty to Spain.³²

Reverting to the subject in a subsequent despatch, Onis declared that this opinion had been confirmed. Time had passed and still Toledo had not returned.

³⁰ Onis to Pezuela, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5554.

³¹ So stated by Onis in a later letter [to Ferdinand VII] dated September 19, 1819. A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5554.

³² Onis to Pezuela, October 7, 1812, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5554.

Instead he had slipped away to Washington to confer with the Secretary of State, after which he had set out, with flattering promises from that official, for the western front.³³ Onis cautioned the authorities to be on the lookout. If the traitor attempted to enter the dominions of Spain he could be recognized, said Onis, by the following description: "Toledo is of medium height, light complexion, good figure, well proportioned, and about 36 years of age." But Onis gave the warning in a perfunctory manner; for the revolutionists lacked, in his opinion, the leadership and the resources necessary to achieve success.³⁴ When the news of the disaster on the Medina reached Washington he showed no surprise. He forwarded to his Government an account of the event which appeared currently in the newspapers. In his accompanying letter he betrayed no sign of exultation over the outcome nor of interest in the part Toledo played in the affair.³⁵

After the Texas fiasco, Toledo ceased to be, it seems, in any sense an agent of the State Department. On the surface he was a rebel against Spain, and Onis so characterized him in all his official correspondence, with the Government at Madrid as well as with that at Washington. Whether this was his true character or not, Toledo played the part successfully for two or three years longer. For a while he was on the Sabine inciting the Mexicans to shed their blood in the sacred cause of liberty.³⁶ In 1814, he went to New Orleans, where he was arrested on a charge of violating the Neutrality Act; but he escaped prosecution because no testimony was brought against him.³⁷ He took part, it is said, in the famous

³³ Onis to Labrador, March 4, 1813, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5554.

³⁴ Onis to Labrador, August 18, 1813, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5639.

³⁵ Onis to Labrador, October 8, 1813, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5639.

³⁶ Trelles, *Discursos*, 131.

³⁷ *American State Papers: Foreign Relations*, IV, 431.

battle of New Orleans, on the American side.³⁸ During the next year and a half he was engaged, the evidence abundantly shows,³⁹ in all manner of enterprises intended, ostensibly at least, to promote the interests of the revolutionists. Yet none of his efforts resulted in the slightest benefit to the cause; indeed, in many cases, they seemed to produce the opposite effect.⁴⁰ Was this because Toledo willed it to be so?

Many of his dealings with the insurgents suggest a positive answer to this question; unfortunately, however, the limitations of space do not permit this phase of the subject to be inquired into. It must suffice to direct attention for a moment to the parallel case of a certain Juan Mariano Picornell, who served Toledo as aide-de-camp. Picornell, a Spaniard who had played an obscure part in the revolution in Venezuela, went to Philadelphia in 1812, and was one of the small group of men who accompanied Toledo to the West. Cogswell knew him and thought him even less to be depended upon than Toledo.⁴¹ It was Picornell's function, it appears, to go ahead and prepare the way.⁴² We was in Texas weeks before his chief, and if there were any secret negotiations with the Royalist commander, Picornell doubtless conducted them. Like Toledo he escaped to Louisiana and there continued to play the insurgent

³⁸ Trelles, *Discursos*, 33.

³⁹ Onis to the Viceroy of New Spain, October 26, 1815, and numerous other documents in A. G. M., Guerra, N. D., III, bear on this subject.

⁴⁰ This is an example: "Por una carta qe acabo de recibir del Vice-Consul Ynterino de S. M. de Nueva Orleans Don Diego Morphy, aparece qe la Goleta Petit Milan, qe Toledo habia enviado a Boquilla de Piedra, con cantidad de armas, municiones, proclamas, y otros efectos, ha perecido con todo su cargamento." — Onis to Cevallos, March 30, 1816, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5641.

⁴¹ Cogswell to Gutierrez and Magee, December 29, 1812, [Extract] State Dept., Spec. Agts.

⁴² Toledo lo manda siempre por delante.—Morphy to the Viceroy of New Spain, June 11, 1813, A. G. M., Guerra, N. D., III.

role; but he threw off the disguise long before his chief.⁴³ As early as February, 1814, he gave up all pretense of insurgency, and being pardoned by his Royal master, was thereafter more successful in frustrating the plans of the revolutionists than he had ever been in promoting them.⁴⁴

The defection of Picornell, to be sure, proves nothing ; but it heightens the mistrust with which Toledo's acts must be viewed. The striking parallelism between the two cases is suggestive more of collusion than of coincidence. It is difficult to escape the conjecture, despite all Onis's declarations to the contrary, that both set out from Philadelphia to render some "essential service" to the crown of Spain; and if this be fact, the pardon in both cases was a mere device intended, no doubt, to serve the double purpose of disguising the transaction and of inducing other leaders to follow the example set.

Toledo was less fortunate than Picornell in obtaining the prompt indulgence of the crown. It is vaguely intimated that he too applied for pardon in 1814,⁴⁵ upon the return of Ferdinand to the throne; but if the boon was not then granted, it must have been because Toledo had not yet fully rendered the service to which he was committed as the duty of a Spanish agent, or as a sign of the true penitence of a recreant Spanish subject. Be that as it may, his continuance on the frontier put him in possession of a vast amount of information regarding the connivance of American authorities in the efforts of the revolutionists to dismember the Spanish empire in the New World ;⁴⁶ and that information presumably would

⁴³ Trelles, *Discursos*, 139; Apodaca to O'Donoju, March 30, 1814, Archivo General de Indias, Papeles de Cuba, Leg. 1856.

⁴⁴ Onis to the Viceroy of New Spain, January 8, 1816, and other letters in A. G. M., Guerra, N. D., III.

⁴⁵ See an undated report of Onis in A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5554, (L. C. p. 1126).

⁴⁶ Onis to Cevallos, August 11, 1816, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5554.

be of great value in consolidating European opinion against so unholy a combination. When, therefore, Toledo quit New Orleans, about the middle of July, 1816, after a final repentance,⁴⁷ he did not go, crestfallen and ashamed, to assume the difficult task of rehabilitating a traitor's name: he went buoyantly to lay the fruits of his labors at his master's feet.

But he was not yet to embark, for Spain, nor was he immediately to lay aside his Patriot garb. Returning late in the summer of 1816 to his former haunts in the eastern part of the United States, he professed still to be attached to the Mexican cause. He renewed old associations and made constant companions of the numerous revolutionary agents who now congregated in the principal cities of the Atlantic seaboard. With Onís, his relations perforce were secret. Months passed and no one seemed to suspect him. Meanwhile, he was busy with his intrigues. In New York he attempted, with false designs, to encourage Joseph Bonaparte to assert his claims to the Mexican throne.⁴⁸ In Baltimore he spied on Xavier Mina and succeeded,⁴⁹ it appears, in interesting him in a scheme to launch an attack on Florida. Then, accompanied by Pedro Gual, a representative of the revolutionary government of New Granada, he went to Washington to lay the plan before the State Department. Due to the fortuitous

⁴⁷ Onís to Cevallos, July 7, 1816, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5641, and the letter cited in Note 46. Toledo's formal application for pardon was dated at Philadelphia, December 12, 1816. The document is in A. N. N., Est., Leg. 5554. Trelles basing his narrative on the *Memorias* of García de León Pizarro, gives the date of this communication as December 12, 1815. This is manifestly an error.

⁴⁸ Onís to Cevallos, August 30, 1816, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5554. For the development of this intrigue see, Onís to Cevallos, September 16, 1816, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5641, and same to same in Leg. 5554 under dates of October 20, 1816, November 16, 1816, and November 23, 1816.

⁴⁹ Letter cited above under date of August 30, 1816. The discussion between Toledo and Mina on the subject of Florida is inferred.

circumstance of Monroe's absence from the city, the visitors conferred with John Graham who communicated at once the substance of the conversation in writing to his chief. Thus a record of the transaction was preserved.

Genl Toledo and Mr. Gual were with me yesterday [wrote Graham] to say that they had wished to have seen you, to assure you that the Patriots of Mexico & So America would do no act in the Ports of the U States contrary to Law-that they knew what the Law was and would take care not to violate it that they also wished to apprise you that the want of a convenient Port on the Gulf of Mexico might perhaps induce them to take possession of Pensacola, but if they did so it would be with no view ultimately to keep it as it ought to belong to the U States. They seemed anxious to know how such an act on their part would be viewed by this govt. On that point I could of course say nothing: but I intimated to them as my individual opinion that it was an act on which they ought maturely to deliberate as it might be seized on by the British Ministry as a reason for taking measures against them-and perhaps by bringing them so immediately in our neighbourhood lead to consequences which could not be foreseen and might not be agreeable either to us or to them-Should you & the President think it would be injurious to the U States that the Revolutionary Party should take Pensacola -I am of the opinion that an indirect intimation might be given in time⁵⁰ to prevent the attempt tho' perhaps in this I am mistaken-

Here seem to be the beginnings of the Amelia Island affairs. Vicente Pazos,⁵¹ whose *Exposition* was written shortly after the event, is the sole authority for the assertion that Toledo and Mina originated, in the summer of 1816, the plot which culminated nearly a year later in the seizure of the island by Sir Gregor MacGregor. Graham's letter supports that view; but it does not show what was undoubtedly true, that Mina was to be the instrument for carrying the plan into execution. The silence of all the contemporary documents on this point is strange, though it is not strange that Graham should have been left in ignorance of the fact. The conspirators, as a matter of discretion, no doubt refrained from

⁵⁰ Graham to Monroe, September 12, 1816, N. Y. Pub. Lib., Monroe Papers.

⁵¹ Pazos was connected with the Amelia Island establishment at the time of its suppression in December, 1817. See footnote 2.

disclosing their intention to violate the neutrality laws. Moreover, Mina was already under a heavy weight of suspicion. He had arrived a short while before from England with the nucleus of his Mexican expedition, a ship, supplies, and a few officers and deserters from his ranks had spread reports of his plans on all sides. Onís complained, but the government did not interfere.⁵² A week or so before the conference in Washington two vessels of the expedition, one the ship acquired in England and the other a schooner hired in the United States, put to sea. On board were arms and ammunition and some two hundred men, most of whom were recruited in the ports of Baltimore and New York. A few weeks later Mina himself sailed on board a brig, also obtained in the United States, and early in October joined the first contingent at the rendezvous in the harbor of Port au Prince.⁵³

From this port, Pazos asserts, the invasion of Florida was to be carried into effect. Two simultaneous attacks were to be launched, one under Mina and the other under Toledo. But, says Pazos, the damage sustained by some of the vessels in a storm and the defection of Toledo caused Mina to abandon the scheme and sail away to join Aury at Galveston Island. The concomitant circumstances—the arrival of the expedition at Port au Prince, the damage to the vessels, the delay, and finally the departure for Galveston Island—are amply corroborated by Robinson's narrative and by documentary evidence

⁵² Onís to Monroe, July 22, August 28, August 29, and September 11, 1816 (the last with affidavits enclosed), State Dept., Notes from the Spanish Legation; Monroe to Onís, August 16 and September 12, 1816, State Dept., Foreign Legations, Notes.

⁵³ William Davis Robinson. *Memoirs of the Mexican Revolution. Including a Narrative of the Expedition of General Xavier Mina* (Philadelphia, 1820), 57.

found elsewhere.⁵⁴ The principal facts, however, do not meet with a like substantiation. Robinson's account contains no reference to the supposed descent upon Florida, nor to Toledo's connection with the expedition in any capacity. Official communications and other available documents, published and unpublished, are equally silent, unless a single letter of Mina's be admitted as an exception. Writing from Port au Prince to General Montilla, Mina declared that "T- remained in Philadelphia because of the withdrawal of Gabriel and others."⁵⁵ That "T--" was for Toledo is not, in the light of all the circumstances, a rash surmise.

If it be assumed then, as the evidence seems to warrant, that the Pazos account is substantially correct, it is interesting to speculate on the motives of the two protagonists of the enterprise. Mina undoubtedly acted in good faith. Intrigue was foreign to his character. A devotee of liberty, he had been forced to flee his native Spain soon after Ferdinand returned to the throne. He made his way to England whence he embarked, with British assistance, on his expedition for the liberation of Mexico. The Florida invasion, whether it first occurred to him before his arrival in the United States or after, seems to have been incidental to his main purpose. Disappointment at Port au Prince may have caused him to banish the idea from his mind altogether. If so, he soon had occasion to give the subject fresh consideration; for while he was busy at Galveston Island with his preparations for the invasion of Mexico, he received overtures from certain persons in New Orleans who

⁵⁴ Robinson, op. cit.; Simon Bolivar to Maxwell Hyslop, September 26, and October 4, 1816, in *Cartas del Libertador* (Lecuna Ed.), I, 252-253.

⁵⁵ September 17, 1816, in O'Leary, *Memorias*, XI, 348. This letter was obviously misdated, for Mina did not arrive at Port au Prince until early in October. Cf. Robinson, *Memoirs*, 57, and the letters of Bolivar cited in note 54.

desired to have him lead an attack on Pensacola and who offered to furnish men and arms for the purpose. Accordingly he went to New Orleans, early in 1817, to investigate the proposal; but finding it, to be, in his opinion, a mere mercantile speculation from which no advantage would accrue to his Mexican undertaking, he rejected it. For, "As a soldier and a patriot," says Robinson, "he disliked to war for mercenary considerations, and he was most decidedly hostile to all predatory projects."⁵⁶

The matter may not have been as simple as Robinson makes it appear. It is not improbable that the New Orleans overture was of a piece with the Toledo intrigue. Spanish agents-Picornell and Father Sedella, perhaps-in collusion with Onis, may have been attempting to do what Toledo had failed to do; that is for reasons known to themselves, they may have been attempting to divert the Mina expedition from the coast of Mexico. Yet Mina, despite his unwillingness to lead the attack against Pensacola, saw the advantage of an insurgent base in Florida,⁵⁷ and he may still have cherished the hope of obtaining one on that coast. In April, 1817, his expedition, escorted by Aury's privateers, landed at the Mexican coast town of Soto la Marina.⁵⁸ His purpose was to hold that port, or some other convenient place on the Mexican coast, as a point of contact with the outside world. In any logical development of the plan, Aury's function would have been to acquire an additional port in Florida, and to keep the communication open between the two places. There is no proof

⁵⁶ *Memoirs of the Mexican Revolution*, 76. Charles Morris, Commanding the U. S. Frigate Congress, reported the rumored attack by Mina in a letter to the Secretary of the Navy under date of March 14, 1817. See extract of his letter in State Dept., Despatches from Consuls. The British Consul at New Orleans gave similar information under date of March 4, 1817.-F. O. 115/27.

⁵⁷ Robinson, *Memoirs of the Mexican Revolution*, 261.

⁵⁸ The correspondence relating to the expedition is found in A. G. M.. Historia, Tomo 152.

that such an understanding existed. But in view of all the circumstances-Mina's known interest in the subject, the relations between Mina and Aury, and the raising of the Mexican flag by Aury at Amelia Island a few short months later-the conjecture is not wholly, without justification. If the plan was never fully realized, it was perhaps due more to Mina's failure in Mexico than to Aury's mismanagement of affairs at Amelia Island.

Toledo's motives are more difficult to divine. In part, his purpose was no doubt to frustrate Mina's plans.⁵⁹ The expedition, it seemed obvious, could not be prevented from sailing, given the weakness of the neutrality laws and the indifferent attitude of the government at Washington.⁶⁰ If it landed in Mexico it might do infinite harm, for Mina's prestige and his capacity as a leader might readily turn the balance in favor of the revolutionists. If it could be diverted to Florida, which was doomed to be lost in any case, it would spend its strength in vain. Moreover, the resulting delay would give Toledo or some other agent time to compass its destruction by boring from within.⁶¹

Yet destruction of the expedition was not the only object sought. The actual seizure of a Florida port was no less desired. That being the case Pensacola could hardly have been the objective, for its defenses rendered it impregnable against a force such as that at Mina's command. Shortly before Mina sailed from Baltimore a rumor, probably inspired by the conspirators themselves, that Pensacola was to be

⁵⁹ Onis to Cevallos, August. 30, 1816, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5554.

⁶⁰ Onis to Cevallos, September 11, 1816, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5641.

⁶¹ Onis to Cevallos, December 7, 1816, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5641. Robinson gives a circumstantial account (*Memoirs, 69-71*) of a mutiny at Galveston Island led by a certain Correa, who was an agent of Onis. The plot was discovered and Onis's part in it exposed. In writing to his Government (December 7, 1816, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5641) Onis mentioned the charge, but did not deny it.

seized by the Patriots was circulated in the public press. During the fall of 1816 and spring of 1817, the rumor gained fresh currency from time to time.⁶² Meanwhile the eyes of the conspirators must have been on defenseless Amelia Island in the other corner of the State. At any rate there, months later, the blow was to fall.

But why should Toledo, a Spanish agent, instigate an attack upon his own sovereign's territory? The answer to this question has already been intimated: to precipitate a war in which England or other European power, or powers, would be brought to the side of Spain. Shortly before the Toledo intrigue came to a head, Onis wrote his government that the United States had taken measures for strengthening the defenses of West Florida and Louisiana in anticipation of a possible war with Spain. The authorities at Washington desired the war, said Onis, but in order to make it popular they were attempting to maneuver Spain into the position of the aggressor. Beginning with the insult to the Spanish minister in 1809,⁶³ there had been a long series of acts offensive to Spain. The Floridas had been invaded, Mobile and Pensacola had been taken, the insurgents had been permitted to operate on our soil, our agents had fomented revolution throughout the Spanish colonies, and privateers had been allowed to fit out in our ports to cruise against Spanish commerce. Back of all these acts was the deliberate intention of pro-

⁶² *Niles' Weekly Register*, XI, 64 (September 21, 1816) ; *Ibid.*, XI, 106 (October 12, 1816) ; *Ibid.*, XII, 46 (March 15, 1817). See also Captain Charles Morris to the Secretary of the Navy (Extracts), March 14, and April 17, 1817, State Dept., Despatches from Consuls.

⁶³ From 1808 to 1814 there were two governments in Spain: one at Madrid under French auspices, and another at Cadiz under a regency in the name of the captive Ferdinand. Onis came to the United States in 1809 as the representative of the government at Cadiz; but he was not received until 1815. The government at Madrid was not recognized.

voking Spain to declare war. Dread of complications alone prevented the United States itself from taking the initiative. "The only thing that restrains, or can restrain, this government," declared Onis, "is the fear that England, France or Russia might make common cause with us. . . ." ⁶⁴

The United States undoubtedly was restrained by the fear of European intervention; but it was restrained even more by the confident expectation of attaining its end by peaceful means. ⁶⁵ Spain on the other hand had everything to lose unless a general war could be provoked. To the achievement of that aim its agents in the United States seem to have been directing all their efforts. Just before Toledo returned to Philadelphia from the West, Onis proposed in a letter to his Government a measure which, if it had been carried into effect, would have resulted inevitably in the desired conflict. His idea was to cede the Floridas-if the United States declined to accept them in exchange for Louisiana-to England, or better to France. War of course would result, and Louisiana would be recovered and ceded to one of the allies. Spain would perhaps reserve the island and city of New Orleans for itself. Thus, a powerful and ambitious nation, whose subversive principles were a menace to the monarchical form of government, would be confined to limits within which it could do no harm. ⁶⁶

After he had had an opportunity to confer with Toledo, Onis wrote again, adding fresh details. The cession of the Floridas to England, it now appeared, was to be in the nature of a bribe to hold that power in check. Spain itself would take Louisiana. Toledo

⁶⁴ Onis to Cevallos, May 30, 1816, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5660.

⁶⁵ Adams to Monroe, March 30, 1816, Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, III, 1437; Erving to Monroe (Private and Confidential), September 22, 1816, Monroe Papers, N. Y. Pub. Lib.

⁶⁶ Onis to Cevallos, August 11, 1816, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5554.

would see to that. His knowledge of the conditions in the territory and his influential connections there admirably fitted him for rallying the disaffected population to the standard of Spain. The conquest made and a friendly power installed, assistance would always be at hand in time of need. The western States of the American Union, cut off from the navigation of the Mississippi and the other rivers that flow into the Gulf, would eventually be compelled to reunite with Spain. The tranquillity of Mexico and of all the colonies to the south would be assured.⁶⁷

The Mesa, a section of the foreign ministry to which these letters were submitted for recommendation, endorsed on the first a brief report which in part reads as follows:

Onis's idea of ceding the Floridas to England in order to remove the Anglo-Americans from our vicinity would be like chasing a fox out of the sheepfold and throwing in a wolf instead. England has been, is, and will forever be the natural enemy of Spain and of every power that has coasts or colonies, or that may have ships or foreign trade.⁶⁸

The second letter bears a similar indorsement. A man of Onis's talent should have perceived, declares the report, that Toledo was openly mocking him. The talk of conquering Louisiana was ridiculous. It was equally absurd to count upon any assistance from the inhabitants of that territory; for they were the ones who had been most active in giving support to the insurgent cause.⁶⁹ That was a strange way to show love for Spain.

These were the views, it must be observed, of under officials who may not have known that the seemingly fantastic proposals had a practical end to serve; that is, that they were intended to trap the United States into assuming the offensive to ward

⁶⁷ Onis to Cevallos, August 30, 1816, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5554.

⁶⁸ Onis to Cevallos, August 11, 1816, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5554.

⁶⁹ Onis to Cevallos, August 30, 1816, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5554.

off imminent attack. If this were the purpose, it was essential that knowledge of the plot should be permitted to leak out. The conspirators themselves, it may be presumed, attended to that detail. In the midst of the affair, Colonel Thomas S. Jesup commanding the United States forces in Louisiana wrote Monroe :

I have positive information that an attack is contemplated by the Spaniards on this City [New Orleans], during the present season-The Spanish Minister De Onis, has a number of Agents in this Country, who are, I understand, endeavouring to ascertain what individuals are favourable to Spain, and are using other means, for the purpose of organizing a revolution. The last mail brought a letter from the Minister on the subject. I am not at liberty to say how I obtained my information, but you may rely on the correctness of the fact.⁷⁰

Some two weeks later Jesup wrote:

A secret negotiation is going on between the courts of Madrid and London for the purpose of transferring to Great Britain the Floridas and the Island of Cuba, for which, it is understood, she is to assist in reducing to subjection the revolted colonies of Spain. This information is derived from a person in the confidence of the Spanish Consul and who has seen the papers.⁷¹

Aroused by this information, Jesup was disposed to precipitate the conflict; for he was a strong believer in the offensive defense. It was his intention, at the first hostile gesture on the part of Spain, to occupy Florida ; and with the assistance of the naval commander on the station, he proposed to carry the war deeper into the enemy country by seizing Cuba, the key not only to the islands and the Spanish Main, but to all Western America.⁷² But there were cooler heads. "If the offensive defense alluded to by this officer," said President Madison, "should be carried into execution it would be perhaps the boldest project ever assumed by no higher authority." Yet

⁷⁰ August 21, 1816, State Dept., Misc.

⁷¹ Letter to Monroe. September 3, 1816. State Dept., Misc.

⁷² Jesup to Monroe, August 21, 1816, State Dept.; Misc.; Jesup to Claiborne, August 24, 1816, Claiborne Papers, Library of Congress.

the matter was not, as Madison saw it, of trifling importance. He thought the intriguing at New Orleans was probable and the meditated attack possible, though he would have said impossible if there had been less of folly in Spanish councils or less likelihood of foreign support for Spanish undertakings. In any case, if mischief were brewing our minister at Madrid would discover it. In the meantime it would be sufficient to pay attention to such precautionary measures as prudence and the means at our disposal might warrant.⁷³

If aggression on the part of the United States had been the outcome, the conspirators might have had their wish. The Old World might have combined against the New. The conditions on the whole favored such an alignment. The reactionary governments of the continent were strongly inclined to lend assistance to Spain. Feeling toward the United States was generally hostile. "The Royalists everywhere," said J. Q. Adams, who viewed the situation from the vantage point of London, "detest and despise us as Republicans. . . . Emperors, kings, princes, priests, all the privileged orders, all the establishments, all the votaries of legitimacy eye us with the most rancorous hatred."⁷⁴ An obstacle, to be sure, stood in the way of the desired combination. That obstacle was England. This power had steadfastly refused to intervene by force of arms to restore the rebellious colonies to their former subjection. Moreover, its policy was to maintain friendly relations with the United States.⁷⁵ Yet popular feeling in England as elsewhere was hostile toward the upstart republic, and the feeling was heartily

⁷³ Madison to Monroe, September 22, 1816, N. Y. Pub. Lib., Monroe Papers.

⁷⁴ J. Q. Adams to John Adams, August 1, 1816, J. Q. Adams, *Writings*, VI, 61.

⁷⁵ C. K. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh*, 408, 437.

reciprocated on this side of the Atlantic. In the circumstances a trifling incident might have brought the two powers to blows.

Influences tending to produce the incident were constantly at work. During 1815 rumors of the cession of Florida to Great Britain were repeatedly circulated in the British press.⁷⁶ Whatever the purpose, the effect was to exacerbate feeling between the two nations. The rumors were so persistent and so circumstantial in character that Adams went early in February, 1816, under instructions from his Government, to make inquiries at the Foreign Office. He was assured that the reports were without foundation. "Military positions," said Lord Castlereagh, "may have been taken by us during the war of places which you had previously taken from Spain, but we never intended to keep them. Do you only observe the same moderation. If we shall find you hereafter pursuing a system of encroachment upon your neighbors, what we might do defensively is another consideration."⁷⁷ But British trouble makers continued to busy themselves with Florida. The machinations of Colonel Nicolls more than anything else, perhaps, set in motion the train of events that resulted in the execution of Arbuthnot and Ambrister. War on that occasion would have been the outcome, Lord Castlereagh afterward declared to Rush, "if the ministry had but held up a finger."⁷⁸

If Jesup's offensive defense had been undertaken, and especially if it had been directed against Cuba, the finger of the British ministry might have been

⁷⁶ On January 1, 1816, Onis reported to Cevallos that the news from England regarding the supposed cession had caused general consternation, that General Jackson, then in Washington, was holding frequent conferences with the President, and that nobody doubted but that Jackson was going to be given command of an army to take possession of the Floridas.-A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5641.

⁷⁷ Adams to Monroe, February 8, 1816, *Writings*, V, 502.

⁷⁸ Rush, *Memoranda of the Court of London*, (Ed. of 1833) 488.

raised in 1816. But the conspirators must have known that such a move would be made only in response to a warlike gesture on the part of Spain. The Florida intrigue gave promise of throwing the onus of aggression on the United States. By the secret Act of January 15, 1811, the President had been authorized to take possession of Florida in the event of an attempt on the part of any foreign government to occupy it. The Act was still in force, and the policy of the Administration was still to carry it into effect, if occasion demanded.⁷⁹ In the light of these facts, the visit of Toledo and Gual to Washington for the purpose, as they alleged, of apprising the government of their intention to seize a Florida port takes on fresh significance. "They seemed anxious to know," said Graham. "how such an act on their part would be viewed by this govt. . . ." Graham's guarded reply that the contemplated seizure might lead to British intervention or to other consequences disagreeable to the United States must have been encouraging to Toledo, if not to Gual. But more encouraging must have been Monroe's reply to Graham directing that "Mr. Toledo" be told that in the event the revolutionists took possession of Pensacola, the law of 1811 might be considered applicable to the case.⁸⁰ How ingenuous was Monroe in all his dealings with Toledo!

With Spanish territory invaded by the United States, the rest would be simple. England would immediately undertake to repel the invasion by force of arms. That this was the view of the agents in the United States can scarcely be doubted. The principals in Madrid entertained a like view, though they may have been unacquainted with the full details of the Florida plot. But principals and agents both

⁷⁹ Richardson, *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, II, 24.

⁸⁰ Monroe to [Graham], September 17, 1816, State Dept., Misc.

were reckoning without their host. A private letter of Castlereagh's to Wellesley, British ambassador at Madrid, written shortly after the events of the summer and fall of 1816, throws a flood of light on the subject.

I think Spain cannot be too cautious in avoiding by every possible means a quarrel with that power [the United States] ; and don't let her falsely calculate upon embarking Great Britain in her cause by such an expedient. I make this remark the rather, because I observed in the note presented in October by Fernan Nunez, but which was prepared at Madrid, an assumption that we had pledged ourselves to resist by War any En^{croachment} croachment on the part of America in the Dominions of Spain.⁸¹

The assumption, Castlereagh went on to say, was based erroneously on his conversation with Adams—the one alluded to above—the substance of which had by some means become known at Madrid. In concluding this interesting communication, Castlereagh said :

I have stated thus much, in order that you may correct any Misconceptions you find to prevail, & which do mischief in proportion as by holding out false hopes of involving other States in their Quarrels, the Spanish Govt. postpones, from day to day, adopting a rational Course of Policy for itself.

This counsel went unheeded. Spain obstinately pursued its course. It preferred to believe that the great powers of Europe, England included, could be brought to support its cause. It was loath to abandon the position of innocent victim of atrocious wrong. It did nothing to adjust its differences with the United States. On the contrary it permitted conditions to arise which at last resulted in the courted violation of its territory. Late in 1817, the military and naval forces of the United States took possession of Amelia Island to suppress the establishment formed there some months before by Sir Gregor MacGregor. If Spain, itself, had destroyed the establishment, which it could have done with slight effort,⁸² the United States would have been

⁸¹ January 10, 1817, F. O. 72/196.

⁸² See "MacGregor's Invasion of Florida, 1817" by T. Frederick Davis, in the Florida *Historical Society Quarterly*, July, 1928.

deprived of its pretext for invading Florida on that occasion. Likewise Jackson's invasion a few months later to punish the Seminole Indians would have been forestalled if the Spanish authorities had not complacently allowed certain British subjects to embolden the Indians by imbuing them with the false belief that England would come to their support. On neither of these occasions did the desired European interposition result; yet it must be remembered that it was in connection with Jackson's invasion that England and the United States were brought to the verge of war.

These invasions were in some sense the culmination of Toledo's Florida intrigues. When they occurred, however, their author already had embarked for Spain. Before his departure, the break with his insurgent past was made public by what appears to have been a carefully prearranged plan. Toledo, it is known, contemplated sending an agent to Havana in the summer of 1816.⁸³ The ostensible object was to revolutionize Cuba; but it is perfectly well established that Toledo was not now, if he had ever been, a devotee of the cause. If, therefore, the agent went on the mission, and the evidence shows that he did, his object must have been different from the one assigned. Undoubtedly it had to do with Toledo's exit from the insurgent stage. In November a packet of letters, prepared, it appears, with design, was dispatched by the Captain General of Cuba to the Spanish minister in Washington.⁸⁴ On the way, also by design, no doubt, these letters were allowed to fall into the hands of insurgent agents by whom they were delivered to the editor of a news-

⁸³ The Captain General of Cuba to the Minister of War, June 12, 1816, Tréllés, *Discursos*, 97.

⁸⁴ Onís to Cevallos, November 23, December 4, 1816, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5554; same to *same*, December 7, 1816, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5641; Onís to Captain General of Cuba, December 8, 1816, A. G. I., Papeles de Cuba, Leg. 1898.

paper in Baltimore.⁸⁵ All except two communications in cipher, which could not be read, were published. Among these published letters was one from Toledo's father to Onis inclosing a bill of exchange for two thousand pesos to be delivered to the son in the event he fulfilled his promise; and another from the father to the son exhorting him to follow the path of honor and give proof of his true devotion to the king.

To his own government, Onis characterized the interception and publication of the letters as an outrageous act, unheard of among civilized nations. He would have complained to the authorities at Washington and brought suit against the publisher, but was advised by eminent counsel that nothing could be accomplished by such a course. In his opinion the worst of it was the probability that all the correspondence of the legation, both going and coming, was tampered with.⁸⁶ The reader of the despatches, indeed, is led to suspect that Onis always acted on this belief; that is, that he committed to the ordinary correspondence only what he was willing to have, or designed to have, any foreign government read, and that he carried on really secret communication by safer means. His complaints about the interception of the letters must therefore be taken with reserve, and likewise the further complaint that the publication of the letters spoiled a plan that he had projected with Toledo for bringing to an end forever the interference of the Americans in the Mexican revolt. The truth of the matter probably is that Toledo's 'defection' and departure were in exact accordance with a carefully laid plan.

Toledo's Florida intrigues did not end with his abandonment of American shores. He spent several

⁸⁵ *The Baltimore Patriot and Evening Advertiser*. The letters were published in the issues of December 2 and December 4, 1816.

⁸⁶ Onis to Cevallos, December 7, 1816, A. H. N., Est., Leg. 5641.

years at the Spanish court, in evident favor with the Cabinet to whom he gave advice on American affairs.⁸⁷ In the summer of 1819, while Spain was searching for some means of evading ratification of the treaty of cession signed at Washington on February 22 of that year, Toledo was sent to London to arrange, if possible, the sale of the province to Great Britain. The plan was for England to advance six million dollars by way of a loan to enable Spain to discharge the American claims and thus get rid of the treaty lately concluded at Washington. The Floridas would then be made over to Great Britain as security for the repayment of the loan.⁸⁸ On being informed of the mission by Wellesley, Castlereagh conceived that it might have consisted merely of a report put in circulation to feel the ground, or that it might have been connected with some "low intrigue" of the Camarilla at Madrid, or of persons interested in the recent grants of crown lands in the Floridas. By taking this view, which he made known to the Spanish ambassador, Castlereagh forestalled all negotiation.⁸⁹ Thus the last Florida intrigue with which Toledo was connected came to a fruitless end.

⁸⁷ Trelles, *Discursos*, 40-42.

⁸⁸ Wellesley to Castlereagh (Private and Confidential), July 6, 1819, F. O. 72/225.

⁸⁹ Castlereagh to Wellesley (Private and Confidential), July 21, 1819, F. O. 72/222.