

I hope also for the success
of your lordship's visit to
England not only in getting
subscriptions to the Cathedral
funds, but in interesting
the national mind there
in helping and sustaining
the Church now so happily
reared by the agency of
your lordship principally.
Mr Hoapili & wife arrived
here some fortnight ago.
He called but I did not
see him. I do not know
what he proposes to do.
My own health is pretty good
and is improving by my
stay on Olowai. I hope to
hear from you soon.
Yours very faithfully,
Kamehameha.

A NOTE ON THE RECIPROCITY TREATY OF 1867

Who does not see, then, that . . . the Pacific Ocean, its shores,
its islands, and the vast regions beyond, will become the chief
theatre of events in the world's great hereafter?

—WILLIAM H. SEWARD, 1852

DURING the coming year, a new National Administration and a new session of Congress will consider Statehood for Hawaii. Diplomatic relations between Hawaii and the government of the United States will be reviewed in detail even as far back as September 19, 1820 when the first "Agent of the United States for Commerce and Seamen" was appointed to represent American interests in Hawaii.

Among the interesting episodes in the long series of events which must result in eventual statehood was the struggle surrounding the Reciprocity Treaty of 1867. This treaty was signed in San Francisco on May 21, 1867, but it failed of ratification and was finally killed in the United States Senate on June 1, 1870. Nevertheless, the proceedings of this period played an essential part in the subsequent annexation of Hawaii.

The letter reproduced herewith from King Kamehameha V to Bishop Staley affords interesting side-lights on the events and the people of the times. Bishop Staley had sailed on July 13, 1867 for San Francisco on the first leg of his journey to England to enlist support for the Anglican Church in the Hawaiian Islands. He was a confidant and sometime member of the King's Privy Council. The actors in the three-year struggle who are mentioned in the King's letter are: Charles de Varigny, General Edward M. McCook and William H. Seward.

De Varigny, a Frenchman, was Kamehameha's Minister of Foreign Affairs, having succeeded to that office following the death of R. C. Wylie. General McCook was appointed U.S. Minister

Resident at Honolulu on March 21, 1866 and served until May of 1869. Seward, former Senator from New York, was Secretary of State in President Andrew Johnson's cabinet as he had been in that of Abraham Lincoln.

General McCook had little more than settled in the Islands when he reported to Mr. Seward on September 3, 1866, "The health of the present King is most precarious. When he dies the race of Hawaiian kings dies with him, and I feel confident that he will not name a successor . . . in [which] event the government of the United States may be called upon to arbitrate the future of this country."

On a trip to Washington early in 1867, General McCook was authorized to negotiate a reciprocity treaty. Meanwhile, Kamehameha V had appointed his Minister of Finance, Charles Coffin Harris, to proceed to Washington as his special commissioner. The paths of the two crossed in San Francisco, where they met quietly and drafted the treaty which they signed on May 21, 1867.

Before the treaty was to be presented to the Hawaiian Legislature, however, two interesting developments were to take place. The United States was to take formal possession of a portion of what is now recognized as a part of the Hawaiian archipelago, and General McCook was to toy with the idea of purchasing the Islands.

The *U.S.S. Lackawanna*, Captain Reynolds, had been for some time in Hawaiian waters. Captain Reynolds had earlier antagonized the Hawaiian government when, as a resident of the Islands, he had advocated their annexation. Furthermore, the presence of the *Lackawanna* was reminiscent of two earlier events when British and French warships had threatened the sovereignty of Hawaii. De Varigny notified McCook, "Before entering into consideration of the treaty of reciprocity, His Majesty and his Government desire your excellency to use your influence in securing the departure from this Kingdom of the *Lackawanna*." On July 30, the *Lackawanna* departed on a mission "to take formal possession of Middlebrook [Midway] Island."

Midway atoll crowns the summit of the next to the last peak from the northwest end of Hawaii's submerged mountain chain. It was occupied by the United States at the request of the Pacific Mail Steamship Line which had established a coal depot at Midway in June of 1867. Two years later, Congress appropriated \$50,000 to

blast a channel through the reef, but the money disappeared long before the reef did, and the project was abandoned in the autumn of 1870.

Midway, however, was never released by the United States, even in 1886-87 when Hawaii took possession of the remainder of the chain from Nihoa to and including Ocean (or Cure) Island, beyond Midway. Midway was the first fruit of Secretary of State Seward's imperialist policy. Its acquisition increased the area of the United States by one and a half square miles. Nonetheless, it definitely set a precedent with reference to acquiring non-contiguous territory. Its formal acquisition on August 28, 1867 preceded by seven weeks Secretary Seward's purchase of the 590,884 square miles which constituted Russian America, as that territory which was to become Alaska was then known.

On June 7, 1867, after having signed the reciprocity treaty but before leaving San Francisco, General McCook wrote a private note to Secretary Seward, "I think their sovereignty [i.e. of the Hawaiian Islands] could be purchased from the present King. . . . Will you permit me to suggest that you sound Mr. Harris on the subject?"

A month later, Secretary Seward replied, "You are at liberty to sound the proper authority on the large subject mentioned in your note and ascertain probable conditions. You may confidentially receive overtures and communicate the same to me. I will act upon your suggestion in that relation in regard to a party now here."

It is doubtless these overtures to which the King referred in his letter to Bishop Staley when he wrote, "I replied that it was useless to talk of buying a portion of these Islands as they are not for sale."

Having disposed of this question, and having secured the departure of Captain Reynolds, the King called the Legislature in extra session on September 2, 1867 as mentioned in the King's letter. On Tuesday, September 10, the Assembly passed the act, and it was signed and returned by the King the following day. The treaty had been accepted and ratified as fully as it could be by the Hawaiian government. It was now up to the American Senate.

But the United States Senate was not in a receptive mood to Secretary Seward's plans of imperialistic expansion. King Kamehameha V showed a thorough understanding of the temper of Washington when he predicted that Mr. Seward would "like very

much to have something of the purchase of these Islands as a sort of 'bunkum' to appear in their newspaper."

Andrew Johnson and his Secretary of State were not popular at Washington. On the death of Abraham Lincoln, Johnson had succeeded to the presidency. He had been a War Democrat from the seceded state of Tennessee and had accepted vice-presidency on the Union-Republican ticket in 1864. He now nominally headed a party of which he was not really a member. He had no personal following either in the South or the North, and had no party organization behind him.

Seward, who had been assaulted at the time of Lincoln's assassination, recovered and continued in Johnson's cabinet. He was one of few who remained loyal to the new president in the quarrel with the Republican radicals over Reconstruction. He therefore shared the unpopularity which was heaped on Johnson. The sensational program of expansion upon which Seward launched may, therefore, have been inspired by the hope that it would improve the standing of the Administration. However, the immediate effect was to bring ridicule on his efforts.

Consideration of the Reciprocity Treaty with Hawaii was naturally affected by the nation's attitude toward other treaties which were under consideration. The Danish Treaty, formally signed on October 24, 1867, provided for the purchase of the Virgin Islands (except Santa Cruz) for \$7,500,000. The ink was scarcely dry when the island suffered an earthquake, a hurricane and a tidal wave. The Senate failed to ratify the treaty!

Principal among the expansionist plans of Secretary Seward was the purchase of the enormous Arctic expanse of Russian America. There were a number of sound reasons for Russia's unloading of Alaska at the time she did. And Seward was undoubtedly too eager a purchaser to be a good bargainer; but the final price of \$7,200,000 amounted to but one and nineteen-twentieths cents an acre. Even a Yankee horse-trader might not consider this excessive, especially when it is realized that the existence of great mineral wealth in Alaska was already known.

Nevertheless, the temper of the times led to every kind of insult being heaped on Seward. The proposed territory was called "Seward's Folly," "Walrussia," "Johnson's Polar Bear Garden," and "Seward's

Icebox." When the public learned that Seward, in his eagerness to conclude the treaty, had called his staff together at midnight to prepare the document and had signed it with the Russian minister at four o'clock on the morning of March 30, 1867, it termed the transaction "a dark deed done in the night." No wonder "a sort of 'bunkum' to appear in their newspaper" was urgently desired by Secretary Seward!

The Senate approved the Alaska treaty on April 9, 1867; but the House balked at making the necessary appropriation until July 14, 1868 when it finally passed after strenuous lobbying.

Meanwhile, the Hawaiian Treaty of Reciprocity wearily battled its way through endless meetings. The economic merits or demerits of the treaty received scant attention, since its political implications overshadowed all other considerations. Would reciprocity hasten or retard eventual annexation?

On September 12, 1867, twelve days before the date of King Kamehameha's letter reproduced herein, Secretary Seward wrote to General McCook as follows: "Circumstances have transpired here which induce a belief that a strong interest, based upon a desire for annexation of the Sandwich Islands will be active in opposing a ratification of the reciprocity treaty. It will be argued that the reciprocity treaty will tend to hinder and defeat an early annexation, to which the people of the United States are supposed to be strongly inclined. . . . It is proper that you should know for your own information, that a lawful and peaceful annexation of the islands to the United States with the consent of the people of the Sandwich Islands, is deemed desirable by this government; and that if the policy of annexation should really conflict with the policy of reciprocity, annexation is in every case to be preferred."

General McCook countered the foregoing opinion with the argument "that improverishing the country [through the defeat of the treaty] will produce an exodus of the larger part of the American population, and with these will go American influence and all hope of a peaceable acquisition. On the contrary this treaty will stimulate American emigration and fix American influence, so that upon the death of the present King the Government will quietly pass into our hands."

Zephaniah Spalding, a secret agent of the United States government who arrived at Honolulu in December of 1867, opposed the

treaty, contending that it was "foolish to pluck by force a pear which was bound to fall when ripe into the right basket." He wrote his father that the ministers of the Hawaiian government "never wanted 'reciprocity' or any other connection with the United States, but they entertained the subject to quiet the demand for annexation, intending to kill it in the end."

Domestic considerations and election-year politics also were factors in the debate. Secretary Seward wrote Mr. Spalding on July 5, 1868, "The public attention sensibly continues to be fastened upon the domestic questions which have grown out of the late civil war. . . . The periodical Presidential and Congressional elections are approaching. Each of the political parties seems to suppose that economy and retrenchment will be prevailing considerations in that election."

Senator Grimes of Iowa, chairman of the Committee on Naval Affairs bluntly opposed the treaty, believing that the United States should take possession at once. Senator Fessenden of Maine shared this view, but he was also influenced by the loss of revenue which would result from enactment.

When the treaty came to final vote, it was evident that it suffered from its association with the Andrew Johnson administration. Some there were who opposed it in the belief that all reciprocity treaties were unconstitutional. Others believed that internal problems were most pressing or advanced the argument of expense against territorial expansion. Little was heard from the American sugar producers which was strange in view of their opposition to reciprocity in 1855. But perhaps the controlling votes were cast by those who favored outright annexation or who believed that reciprocity would retard annexation.

Final disposition of the Reciprocity Treaty of 1867 was made in the United States Senate on June 1, 1870 when it failed of ratification, receiving only twenty favorable votes to nineteen against it, instead of the necessary two-thirds vote. Only half of the total membership of seventy-eight senators was recorded as voting.

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