

## CHAPTER XI.

### FLORIDA AND TEXAS.

There still remained one question to be decided--a place favourable to the experiment had to be chosen. According to the recommendation of the Cambridge Observatory the gun must be aimed perpendicularly to the plane of the horizon--that is to say, towards the zenith. Now the moon only appears in the zenith in the places situated between  $0^{\circ}$  and  $28^{\circ}$  of latitude, or, in other terms, when her declination is only  $28^{\circ}$ . The question was, therefore, to determine the exact point of the globe where the immense Columbiad should be cast.

On the 20th of October the Gun Club held a general meeting. Barbicane brought a magnificent map of the United States by Z. Belltropp. But before he had time to unfold it J.T. Maston rose with his habitual vehemence, and began to speak as follows:--

"Honourable colleagues, the question we are to settle to-day is really of national importance, and will furnish us with an occasion for doing a great act of patriotism."

The members of the Gun Club looked at each other without understanding what the orator was coming to.

"Not one of you," he continued, "would think of doing anything to lessen the glory of his country, and if there is one right that the Union may claim it is that of harbouring in its bosom the formidable cannon of the Gun Club. Now, under the present circumstances--"

"Will you allow me--" said Barbicane.

"I demand the free discussion of ideas," replied the impetuous J.T. Maston, "and I maintain that the territory from which our glorious projectile will rise ought to belong to the Union."

"Certainly," answered several members.

"Well, then, as our frontiers do not stretch far enough, as on the south the ocean is our limit, as we must seek beyond the United States and in a neighbouring country this 28th parallel, this is all a legitimate casus belli, and I demand that war should be declared against Mexico!"

"No, no!" was cried from all parts.

"No!" replied J.T. Maston. "I am much astonished at hearing such a word in these precincts!"

"But listen--"

"Never! never!" cried the fiery orator. "Sooner or later this war will

be declared, and I demand that it should be this very day."

"Maston," said Barbicane, making his bell go off with a crash, "I agree with you that the experiment cannot and ought not to be made anywhere but on the soil of the Union, but if I had been allowed to speak before, and you had glanced at this map, you would know that it is perfectly useless to declare war against our neighbours, for certain frontiers of the United States extend beyond the 28th parallel. Look, we have at our disposition all the southern part of Texas and Florida."

This incident had no consequences; still it was not without regret that J.T. Maston allowed himself to be convinced. It was, therefore, decided that the Columbiad should be cast either on the soil of Texas or on that of Florida. But this decision was destined to create an unexampled rivalry between the towns of these two states.

The 28th parallel, when it touches the American coast, crosses the peninsula of Florida, and divides it into two nearly equal portions. Then, plunging into the Gulf of Mexico, it subtends the arc formed by the coasts of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana; then skirting Texas, off which it cuts an angle, it continues its direction over Mexico, crosses the Sonora and Old California, and loses itself in the Pacific Ocean; therefore only the portions of Texas and Florida situated below this parallel fulfilled the requisite conditions of latitude recommended by the Observatory of Cambridge.

The southern portion of Florida contains no important cities. It only bristles with forts raised against wandering Indians. One town only, Tampa Town, could put in a claim in favour of its position.

In Texas, on the contrary, towns are more numerous and more important. Corpus Christi in the county of Nuaces, and all the cities situated on the Rio Bravo, Laredo, Comalites, San Ignacio in Web, Rio Grande city in Starr, Edinburgh in Hidalgo, Santa-Rita, El Panda, and Brownsville in Cameron, formed a powerful league against the pretensions of Florida.

The decision, therefore, was hardly made public before the Floridan and Texican deputies flocked to Baltimore by the shortest way. From that moment President Barbicane and the influential members of the Gun Club were besieged day and night by formidable claims. If seven towns of Greece contended for the honour of being Homer's birthplace, two entire states threatened to fight over a cannon.

These rival parties were then seen marching with weapons about the streets of the town. Every time they met a fight was imminent, which would have had disastrous consequences. Happily the prudence and skill of President Barbicane warded off this danger. Personal demonstrations found an outlet in the newspapers of the different states. It was thus that the New York Herald and the Tribune supported the claims of Texas, whilst the Times and the American Review took the part of the Floridan deputies. The members of the Gun Club did not know which to listen to.

Texas came up proudly with its twenty-six counties, which it seemed to put in array; but Florida answered that twelve counties proved more than twenty-six in a country six times smaller.

Texas bragged of its 33,000 inhabitants; but Florida, much smaller, boasted of being much more densely populated with 56,000. Besides, Florida accused Texas of being the home of paludian fevers, which carried off, one year with another, several thousands of inhabitants, and Florida was not far wrong.

In its turn Texas replied that Florida need not envy its fevers, and that it was, at least, imprudent to call other countries unhealthy when Florida itself had chronic "vomito negro," and Texas was not far wrong.

"Besides," added the Texicans through the New York Herald, "there are rights due to a state that grows the best cotton in all America, a state which produces holm oak for building ships, a state that contains superb coal and mines of iron that yield fifty per cent. of pure ore."

To that the American Review answered that the soil of Florida, though not so rich, offered better conditions for the casting of the Columbiad, as it was composed of sand and clay-ground.

"But," answered the Texicans, "before anything can be cast in a place, it must get to that place; now communication with Florida is difficult,

whilst the coast of Texas offers Galveston Bay, which is fourteen leagues round, and could contain all the fleets in the world."

"Why," replied the newspapers devoted to Florida, "your Galveston Bay is situated above the 29th parallel, whilst our bay of Espiritu-Santo opens precisely at the 28th degree of latitude, and by it ships go direct to Tampa Town."

"A nice bay truly!" answered Texas; "it is half-choked up with sand."

"Any one would think, to hear you talk," cried Florida, "that I was a savage country."

"Well, the Seminoles do still wander over your prairies!"

"And what about your Apaches and your Comanches--are they civilised?"

The war had been thus kept up for some days when Florida tried to draw her adversary upon another ground, and one morning the Times insinuated that the enterprise being "essentially American," it ought only to be attempted upon an "essentially American" territory.

At these words Texas could not contain itself.

"American!" it cried, "are we not as American as you? Were not Texas and Florida both incorporated in the Union in 1845?"

"Certainly," answered the Times, "but we have belonged to America since 1820."

"Yes," replied the Tribune, "after having been Spanish or English for 200 years, you were sold to the United States for 5,000,000 of dollars!"

"What does that matter?" answered Florida. "Need we blush for that? Was not Louisiana bought in 1803 from Napoleon for 16,000,000 of dollars?"

"It is shameful!" then cried the Texican deputies. "A miserable slice of land like Florida to dare to compare itself with Texas, which, instead of being sold, made itself independent, which drove out the Mexicans on the 2nd of March, 1836, which declared itself Federative Republican after the victory gained by Samuel Houston on the banks of the San Jacinto over the troops of Santa-Anna--a country, in short, which voluntarily joined itself to the United States of America!"

"Because it was afraid of the Mexicans!" answered Florida.

"Afraid!" From the day this word, really too cutting, was pronounced, the situation became intolerable. An engagement was expected between the two parties in the streets of Baltimore. The deputies were obliged to be watched.

President Barbicane was half driven wild. Notes, documents, and letters

full of threats inundated his house. Which course ought he to decide upon? In the point of view of fitness of soil, facility of communications, and rapidity of transport, the rights of the two states were really equal. As to the political personalities, they had nothing to do with the question.

Now this hesitation and embarrassment had already lasted some time when Barbicane resolved to put an end to it; he called his colleagues together, and the solution he proposed to them was a profoundly wise one, as will be seen from the following:--

"After due consideration," said he, "of all that has just occurred between Florida and Texas, it is evident that the same difficulties will again crop up between the towns of the favoured state. The rivalry will be changed from state to city, and that is all. Now Texas contains eleven towns with the requisite conditions that will dispute the honour of the enterprise, and that will create fresh troubles for us, whilst Florida has but one; therefore I decide for Tampa Town!"

The Texican deputies were thunderstruck at this decision. It put them into a terrible rage, and they sent nominal provocations to different members of the Gun Club. There was only one course for the magistrates of Baltimore to take, and they took it. They had the steam of a special train got up, packed the Texicans into it, whether they would or no, and sent them away from the town at a speed of thirty miles an hour.



But they were not carried off too quickly to hurl a last and threatening sarcasm at their adversaries.

Making allusion to the width of Florida, a simple peninsula between two seas, they pretended it would not resist the shock, and would be blown up the first time the cannon was fired.

"Very well! let it be blown up!" answered the Floridans with a laconism worthy of ancient times.