Abraham Lincoln papers

From Thomas Corwin to A. C. Allen[1], May 18, 1862

1 Allen was the U.S. consul at Minatitla, Mexico.

Copy Private

Mexico May 18th 1862

Dear Sir

Two days ago Plumb[2] reached here with the two treaties ratified, and a dispatch saying the "President could suggest no plan by which aid could be given to Mexico. In the mean time my treaty of the 5th of April is by this time, before him, with the reasons which you carried with you. Since that events have transpired which make it conclusive, that if this treaty is not ratified, England & France will absorb Mexico, and we shall have less to do with it, than we have with the African Kingdom of Dahomy. A treaty with England has been celebrated here, giving one fourth of the eleven millions promised by us to secure British claims amounting now, under treaties, to about sixty seven millions. It is provided, that if our treaty is not ratified, that all the public lands and church property is given to England to be administered as in our treaty, by a board of two Englishmen and three Mexicans, so that England, having a mortgage on the commerce of all the Ports, and the entire internal resources of Mexico, owns it—

2 Edward L. Plumb was the former American minister to Mexico.

Who is so stupid as not to see what is to result to us of the United States, our trade from the time this takes place, will not be worth annually half a million— Tehuantepec will be given to England or France, Doblado told me yesterday that a French company had for several years wanted it, and he (in case our treaty is rejected) held it in reserve for England or France. If our treaty is ratified, we have a hold in the future of Mexico, by settling all her immense vacant lands with our people, and room enough in the tierra Caliente for two millions of free negroes, who could live in peace and honor with the only people of the white race known to us, who do, as you know, treat the black man and woman on a footing of perfect equality. Shufeldt[3] is here, and has presented a plan for colonizing free blacks on the vacant lands on Tehuantepec. But this Government cannot contract now for any such purpose. She has mortgaged her vacant lands to the United States by our treaty, and if that is not ratified, then by her late treaty with England, these lands — all of them, are mortgaged to

England. Now if our treaty is ratified, we save our foothold on Mexico, and her enduring friendship, and we secure a home for all the free negroes in the United States for twenty years to come— If not, we lose forever the friendship and commerce of Mexico, and we lose also the best chance ever presented of colonizing the free negroes, which if not sent somewhere will be a lasting plague to us. But with our hold on the public lands here, this great end can be attained with less expense by four to one, than effort made anywhere else, and then by losing Tehuantepec, we lose forever the control of the commerce of the east.

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3 Robert W. Shufeldt, a career naval officer, was appointed consul general to Cuba in 1861.

It is possible that our government cannot see that this eleven millions, will be four times over expended, if we do indeed enter earnestly upon the very popular plan now proposed of colonizing our free blacks.— If England gets this mortgage, she must (by treaty already made) — if ours is rejected — she will make any territory we get of her or through her, cost us five times, as the price at which we could obtain it from the board under our treaty, and then, after all, Mexico is Europeanized, and not Americanized, — we shall have a powerful and ambitious, and envious neighbor on our frontier, which will lead to wars, costing in time to come, untold millions of treasure, and thousand upon thousand of lives. Surely this eleven millions which (if the treaty be ratified) will be raised quite as soon as we have to pay it, should not scare us away from the immense advantages this treaty gives us.

I shall see Shuffeldt in the morning, and know more about his arrangement (if any is attempted) in the way of Colonization.

Shufeldt has presented his petition to colonize the blacks in the Isthmus; it is refused by Doblado.

His reply is founded on the fact, that by treaty with us, all public lands are ours, and if our treaty is not ratified, then he is bound to give them in the same terms to England. In either event it is for the United States or the board of Commissioners, to say how these lands shall be disposed of, so that if our treaty is rejected, and we wish to colonize, twenty or one hundred thousand negroes, we must go to a board composed of two Englishmen and three Mexicans, the latter three, from our cutting off all friendship with Mexico, will be Englishmen to all intents and purposes, our commerce gone for fifty years, and the control of the trade of Asia forever under the control of England or France, for Tehuantepec goes too— Shufeldt has his eyes now open and declares he will go to Washington and urge the ratification of the treaty. If he comes you will not fail to confer with, and aid him.

Plumb came here against the treaty. If he continues so at Washington, you will know what the influence is and where it comes from.

My fixed opinion is that Sir Charles wishes our treaty to be rejected, if it is, England is Mexico— She will then gird us round by Canada on the North, and Mexico on the South, our commerce on this continent will not then be worth a Steam-boat.

I am amazed at the blindness of our people. Eleven millions of Dollars is all they seem to see, and this is regarded as a mere donation to Mexico, for which we get nothing. Well, I have done my duty, and the event will shew where the fatal error lies[4]

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4 Lincoln submitted both treaties to the Senate on June 23, but they were not ratified. See *Collected Works*, V, 281-82.

Yours faithfully

Thos. Corwin