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New Considerations on the Mission of Robert Dale Owen to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, 1853-1858

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Three studies have been previously written regarding the five-year mission of Robert Dale Owen as the accredited diplomat of the United States at the court of the Two Sicilies. The first was an address by Louis M. Sears to the Indiana Historical Society, entitled "Robert Dale Owen's Mission to Naples." This address still provides the basis for any study of the mission. In its available form, it unfortunately lacks footnotes, yet as a summary of the mission it is unlikely to be surpassed.

Second in importance for the student of the Owen mission is the chapter on diplomacy in the standard biography of Owen by Richard W. Leopold.² As a biographer Leopold is interested chiefly in the relation of the diplomatic episode to the remainder of Owen's many-sided career. There are footnotes referring to the important dispatches from Owen, but there are few interpretations of the mission which differ substantially from those previously reached by Sears.

A third article, "Some Correspondence of Robert Dale Owen," by Sears consists of a few personal letters written by Owen while he was in Naples, but they speak of little more than the beauty of the city.³ Neither Leopold, the

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¹ Indiana History Bulletin (Indianapolis, 1923-), VI, Extra No. 2 (May, 1929), 43-51.

² Robert Dale Owen: A Biography (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1940), 307-320.

³ Mississippi Valley Historical Review (Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1914-), X (1923-1924), 306-324.

biographer, nor any student of diplomatic history finds them of particular importance in evaluating the mission.

The present author has two reasons for desiring to add to the literature cited above. He has no intention of taking exception to the interpretation of either Sears or Leopold. But he wishes first, to give more details and a slightly different emphasis to certain phases of the mission, and second, to consider the mission in a more definite relation to diplomatic developments affecting American envoys to the other Italian nations at the same time.

The same documents used by Sears and Leopold have been used by the present author. These documents, the instructions of the state department to Owen and his dispatches to the secretaries of state, are in the National Archives in Washington.

Little has been published in English on American-Italian diplomatic relations. An important book by Leo F. Stock gives the complete text of diplomatic correspondence between the state department and United States envoys in Rome during the period of 1848-1868.

No such study exists for the kingdoms of Sardinia and the Two Sicilies, to which the United States also sent envoys. When Howard R. Marraro prepared his volume on the unification of Italy, he had access to all the documents then existing in the American embassy in Rome, but the dispatches of Owen were not among them.⁵

H. Nelson Gay published the most important studies in Italian, but he used the same documents as Marraro and hence had no documentary knowledge of Owen's mission.

As a matter of fact, the Owen mission is one of the brightest pages of the relations between the United States and the pre-unification Italian states. Owen was actually the most eminent of the men who represented the United

⁴ United States Ministers to the Papal States: Instructions and Dispatches 1848-1868 (Washington, 1933).

⁵ American Opinion on the Unification of Italy, 1846-1861 (New York, 1932).

^{6 &}quot;Relazioni fra l'Italia e gli Stati Uniti," Atti Congresso per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano (Milan, 1907), I, 134-136; "Le Relazioni fra l'Italia e gli Stati Uniti (1847-1871)," Nuova Antologia (Rome, 1866-), Series 5, CXXVII (1907), 657-671; "Uno screzio diplomatico fra il governo pontificio e il governo americano e la condotta degli sviszeri a Perugia il 20 Giugno 1859," Archivio Storico del Risorgimento Umbro, (1796-1870), (8 vols., Perugia, 1905-1912), III (1907), 113-201.

States at the courts of Naples, Rome, and Turin during the Italian Risorgimento. It was not until the appointment of George Perkins Marsh as first minister to the united Italy that another person of similar intellectual and cultural qualities was sent by the United States to Italy.

Likewise, Owen's mission was one of the most successful of any sent to the Italian states in the period. When he went to Naples, the United States and its citizens were victims of many kinds of vexations in the Two Sicilies; long before the end of his mission, he was able to report that all pending disputes had been adjusted satisfactorily. The adjustments were of such a nature that the United States won increased stature in the eyes of the Neapolitan government, without resorting to any threats. The adjustments also won the full respect of the Neapolitan government for Owen himself, so that the latter part of his ministry in Naples was distinguished by cordial relations between him and the king and the king's ministers. Owen negotiated two treaties with the Two Sicilies and won all points desired by the United States except one.

The American minister to Turin at the time of Owen's mission to Naples was John M. Daniel, a Virginia newspaper editor. Conditions at the two courts were similar, although considerably more liberalism was permitted at Turin. Yet Daniel in his first few months at Turin made a public spectacle of his dislike for the aristocratic traditions of European courts, so that his recall had to be considered. Although he continued in office longer than Owen and finally achieved a satisfactory diplomatic standing at Turin, his mission was always handicapped by his initial inadroitness.

At Rome, Owen's contemporary was Lewis Cass, Jr. The latter owed his post largely to the influence of his famous father. Appointed about the time of the Roman Revolution of 1849, the young Cass had one of the most exciting missions of any American in Italian history. He showed a great deal of skill during that revolution, main-

⁷ Dispatch No. 29, Owen to Secretary of State William L. Marcy, January 1, 1855.

⁸ William M. Malloy (comp.), Treaties, Conventions, International Acts, Protocols and Agreements between the United States of America and other Powers, 1776-1909 (2 vols., Washington, 1910), II, 1814-1824.

taining the neutrality of the United States and the respect of both the Mazzinian government and the papal government. The mission also was made notable by the presence in Italy of Margaret Fuller Ossoli during those trying years, by her assistance to the republican army in Rome and by Cass's services to her at the time of her difficult pregnancy. But after the revolutionary excitement was over, the Cass mission was an undistinguished one. Between 1853 and 1857, when his mission ended, there were no such achievements recorded for the legation at Rome as for Owen at Naples.

Robert Dale Owen accepted the appointment as chargé d'affaires to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in a letter to Secretary of State William L. Marcy dated May 27, 1853. The letter, written from Washington, said Owen "hope[d] to set out on the business of the mission in four weeks from today."10 He experienced a much greater delay, however. Low water on the Ohio slowed his return to New Harmony. He was delayed further by the necessity of shopping in Philadelphia and New York for his "kit."11 Then he was ill for a week in Philadelphia after leaving Washington for New York and debarkation. After reaching New York, he was ill again for "eight or ten days." He finally sailed on August 4 on the "Devonshire," which was "reported the fastest packet-ship out of New York," but was "for her a tedious trip." It was September 1 when he arrived in London. By this time, his predecessor, Edward J. Morris, had already left Naples. He arranged to meet Morris in Paris, where the two men spent three days in discussion of the problems pertaining to the mission at Naples. Morris warned that September was an undesirable month to arrive So Owen and his family passed leisurely to in Naples. Lyons and Marseilles and embarked on the "Ville de Marseille." which landed at Naples five days later, October 17, after stops at Genoa, Leghorn, and Civitavecchia. On October 22, he was introduced to Commendatore Luigi Carafa, the Neapolitan foreign minister and a member of one of Naples' most famous families. He found the foreign minister "a man of kind and simple manners." Owen rented

⁹ Emma Detti, Margaret Fuller Ossoli e i suoi Corrispondenti (Florence, 1942), 318-346.

¹⁰ Unnumbered letter, Owen to Marcy, May 27, 1853.

¹¹ Dispatch No. 1, Owen to Marcy, October 22, 1853.

an apartment on the Riviera di Chiai at the Villa Reale, which was then Naples' only public park.¹² This was to be the United States legation while he remained there.

Owen first applied himself to ending the annoyances which had come into the relations between the United States and the Two Sicilies. These were numerous, but he found that most of them were related in one way or another and that almost all were centered in the port of Messina.

The first case was that of the American brig, "Governor Brown." On October 6, 1853, six days after that ship arrived at Messina, five men who identified themselves as customs agents came on board the vessel at dock, searched the hold and forecastle, and forced the captain and mate to open their personal cabins and trunks to minute examination. The consul at Messina, F. W. Behn of Kentucky, protested in vain. After he had made "every reasonable effort" to settle the case in Messina, he informed Owen, who took the case to Commendatore Carafa on November 25.18 Following an investigation and some correspondence, Carafa told Owen that the incident had been the usual customhouse inspection made with "urbanity and courtesy."14 He suggested that the consul at Messina should act with more "calmness." Owen had some reason to believe that Behn was too excited. From Commodore Silas H. Stringham, the commander of the United States Mediterranean squadron stationed at La Spezia, Owen learned that Behn had requested a naval vessel be sent to Messina for "moral effect." Since this went beyond consular authority, Commodore Stringham took no action. Owen, however, was inclined to believe that the weight of right was on Behn's side, and he replied to Carafa that the investigation was not normal and that it was not made until long after the normal time for customs inspections. He asserted that the inspection was intended as an example for other captains of vessels at Messina to indicate the annoyances they would face if agents selected by the port police there were not employed.16

Long before the settlement of the "Governor Brown"

¹² Ibid.

¹⁸ Dispatch No. 6, Owen to Marcy, February 8, 1854.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Dispatch No. 4, Owen to Marcy, November 28, 1853.

¹⁶ Dispatch No. 6, Owen to Marcy, February 8, 1854.

case, there was another protest over conditions at Messina. James Carbone, a native of Sicily who had emigrated to Massachusetts and had become a citizen of the United States, landed at Messina on the brig, "Chatham" November 15, 1853. Port police refused to permit him to go ashore. They charged he had been arrested on a political issue in 1852 and had been released only on condition that he leave the kingdom and not return. The consul proved that this was another Carbone, but he was unable to persuade the police to release the American. When the "Chatham" left the port, Carbone was confined to the port police station and its yard. Behn was told privately by the port police that the man was objectionable because he had associated with liberal exiles at Genoa when the "Chatham" stopped there. After three letters from Owen to Carafa, the man was set free December 22, 1853, on the consul's guarantee of his good behavior. He transacted his business and returned to Boston.17

The Bonanno case was a direct sequel to the "Governor Brown" case. Paolo Carbone (not related to James Carbone) had been assigned to the captain of the ship as his agent. The appointment was made by Malato, the commissary of marine police. Finding Paolo Carbone unsatisfactory, the captain dismissed him and employed an Italian citizen named Vincenzo Bonanno. On October 4, just two days before the tardy customs inspection of the "Governor Brown," Bonanno was imprisoned. The agent's wife told the ship's captain her husband would be released as soon as he reemployed Paolo Carbone. This the captain refused to do.18 When Owen protested, Carafa replied on April 8, 1854, that Bonanno had been arrested for violating the rotation system established by the port police to give equal employment to all agents.¹⁹ Owen objected because this compulsory rotation violated the article of the treaty of commerce giving citizens of each nation the right to commit the management of their affairs to such agents as they should choose.20 Ap-

¹⁷ Dispatch No. 4, Owen to Marcy, November 28, 1853; Dispatch No. 5, Owen to Marcy, February 4, 1854.

¹⁸ Owen to Carafa, January 13, 1854, enclosure in Dispatch No. 10, Owen to Marcy, April 11, 1854.

¹⁹ Dispatch No. 10, Owen to Marcy, April 11, 1854.

²⁰ Ibid.

parently, the Sicilian government found that Owen's point was well taken. Carafa replied that Bonanno's arrest had taken place solely because the man's conduct was "calculated to disturb public order" and "not by any means because he had been chosen by the captain of the 'Governor Brown.'" The foreign minister, however, informed Owen "that there has been issued, by the proper royal authorities, renewed orders that all captains of foreign ships shall be left at entire liberty in their choice of watermen."²¹ Owen felt he had won his point and that no reply was necessary.²²

On the Carbone case, however, he felt more strongly. He actually seems to have considered that a break in diplomatic relations might be necessary. On November 14, 1854, he wrote Marcy "I hope and confidently expect to succeed without resorting to extreme measures; since I exceedingly dislike the eclat and annoyance attendant even on a temporary rupture; and am of the opinion, in nine cases out of ten, even of what seems serious difficulty, a minister may, by prudent management, avert such a contingency."²³

It was the demand for an indemnity that brought the crisis which caused Owen to write in such ominous language. As Great Britain was later to learn in the Cagliari case, the question of indemnity was an insult to the pride of the Neapolitan government. Carbone filed his claim for damages in June, 1854, stating no precise figure. Owen computed the probable total at five hundred Neapolitan piasters, about four hundred and eighty dollars, and laid the claim before Carafa.24 In reply, the latter sent back a copy of a paper signed by Carbone in which the man denied he was After some correspondence with an American citizen.25 Behn at Messina, Owen decided that Carbone had signed the paper under duress. He, therefore, obtained a copy of Carbone's certificate of naturalization and sent it to Carafa as his reply.26

The case then came to a head quickly. Owen received a visit from an Englishman, a Mr. Fowls, the brother-in-law

²¹ Translation, Carafa to Owen, without date, included in Dispatch No. 12, Owen to Marcy, May 15, 1854.

²² Dispatch No. 12, Owen to Marcy, May 15, 1854.

²³ Dispatch No. 24, Owen to Marcy, November 14, 1854.

²⁴ Dispatch No. 17, Owen to Marcy, August 11, 1854.

²⁵ Dispatch No. 24, Owen to Marcy, November 14, 1854.

²⁸ Ibid.

of G. Castrone, the intendente (governor) of Messina. Owen was informed by Fowls that the difficulty at Messina lay chiefly in the refusal of Behn to accede to Malato's demand for a gratuity of one piaster per ship landing there. This gratuity and the compulsory rotation of agents regulated by the police were Malato's means of supplementing the small income he received from the Sicilian government. Owen informally offered to reduce his demand for damages if Malato were removed from office.27 Early in December, Owen was called to the office of Giovanni Cassisi, minister of Sicilian affairs. Cassisi admitted that his government was in the wrong, paid two hundred and fifty ducats indemnity (about two hundred dollars), and stated that Malato had been removed from office. In addition Cassisi said that the Neapolitan government desired to have no record of the transaction, which it considered uncomplimentary to itself. He asked that Owen be content to have the affair show only in the United States records and in the financial accounts of the city of Messina, which paid the indemnity. This arrangement was satisfactory to Owen.²⁸

Actually, the abuses against Americans and American vessels at Messina had ceased before the end of 1853.²⁹ But Owen, by firm action on the very first incidents which arose after his arrival and by the support of the American consul at Messina, had commanded the respect of the highest Sicilian authorities and had won an indemnity which—more than it would help Carbone, the damaged individual—would insure that no Sicilian city dare again allow itself to be cause for complaint by American ship captains. Behn's exequatur had been held up for a long time by the authorities who objected to his "excited" protests. His commission was transmitted to Owen on January 20, 1854;³⁰ previously he had been acting consul by appointment of Morris. No exequatur was issued by the Neapolitan government until the middle of September.³¹

Two incidents at Palermo brought action from Owen. In the first, he acted out of courtesy to another American

²⁷ Dispatch No. 25, Owen to Marcy, November 20, 1854.

²⁸ Dispatch No. 26, Owen to Marcy, December 6, 1854.

²⁹ Dispatch No. 6, Owen to Marcy, February 8, 1854.

³⁰ Instructions No. 3, Marcy to Owen, January 20, 1854.

³¹ Dispatch No. 20, Owen to Marcy, September 26, 1854.

government, Venezuela, which had no minister at Naples. Fortunato Corvaia was the son of a woman who lived at Palermo, but he was himself a naturalized citizen of Venezuela. His mother scheduled a birthday party for him. Since the date coincided with the birthday of Joachim Murat, the police at Palermo ordered the young man to leave the kingdom, and the Venezuelan minister at Paris asked Owen's good offices. In the course of the correspondence between the American minister and Carafa, the Neapolitan minister obliquely referred to what Owen called "the obnoxious doctrine" of "once a subject, always a subject." Owen made an equally oblique reply, which he believed left the point open for further debate. That was not necessary, however, since the deportation order against Corvaia was revoked. 32

The second case at Palermo also concerned a political arrest. Julius C. Kretchmar, retiring consul at Palermo, first reported the case to Owen on June 13, 1854. On that day the Palermo police applied to the consul for permission to search the home of a naturalized American citizen, Emanuel Sartorio, suspected of revolutionary designs. Following the search, Kretchmar—"to protect Mr. Sartorio"—appointed him acting consul until the new consul, J. Jenkins Ross of Pennsylvania, should arrive. Kretchmar left Palermo the next day. He said Sartorio, who was employed as chief clerk in a commercial house at Palermo, was "the only available person I can find to appoint" as acting consul.³³

On July 8, F. D. Ruosch, Brazilian vice-consul at Palermo, offered to call upon the director of police in an "endeavor to place before him Mr. Sartorio's case in a fair and impartial light." Owen also had a letter from Sartorio, stating that the "only evidence" found by police in his home was certain Masonic materials, Odd Fellows' books, political pamphlets, and some Protestant versions of the Bible. All of these, of course, were cause for criminal action in the Two Sicilies. The Brazilian chargé d'affaires at Naples authorized Owen to accept Ruosch's offer. Owen

³² Corvaia case is reported in two dispatches, No. 5, February 4, 1854, and No. 8, February 23, 1854.

³³ Mentioned without details in Dispatch No. 17, August 11, 1854. Outlined in detail in Dispatch No. 18, Owen to Marcy, August 17, 1854.

also asked the Neapolitan government officially to recognize Sartorio as acting consul until Ross arrived.³⁴

On July 29, Ruosch notified Owen that the director of police claimed to have "most evident proofs of his [Sartorio's] criminal designs against the royal government." In the course of the conversation, the director of police apparently used the word "convicted" despite the fact that Sartorio had not been tried. Meantime, Carafa refused to recognize Sartorio as acting consul, so Owen named Ruosch instead. He gave instructions to Ruosch that Sartorio must be assured of a fair trial and informed the acting consul that the United States insisted upon the right of its citizens to receive a just trial when charged in a foreign court.³⁵

Marcy on September 9 gave his "cordial approbation" of Owen's judgment and of the "humanity and commendable zeal" of the Brazilian vice-consul in the case. He also authorized a protest to the government of the Two Sicilies if Sartorio's trial was "manifestly arbitrary and illegal." Marcy told Owen he took no exception to the refusal of the Neapolitan government to recognize Sartorio in any consular capacity.³⁶

Ruosch notified Owen on October 10 that Sartorio had "not been disturbed," and that the Palermo director of police had expressed to the Brazilian vice-consul in an interview "a hope that the matter might be arranged."³⁷

This case, like that of Carbone, was settled informally. Once more it was Cassisi, the minister of Sicilian affairs, who informed Owen of the settlement. He took the American envoy aside at the New Year's day palace reception in 1855 and asserted that the search of Sartorio's house had produced definite proof of the latter's Masonic connections—for which he said the man ought to be prosecuted under Sicilian law. But he added that King Ferdinand II, "anxious to give to the government of the United States additional proof of his great desire to cultivate the most friendly relations, and desiring further, to testify his good will to myself [Owen] individually, had instructed . . . all proceedings against Mr. Sartorio to be withdrawn; in the hope that the warning he

³⁴ Dispatch No. 18, Owen to Marcy, August 17, 1854.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Instructions No. 9, Marcy to Owen, September 9, 1854.

⁸⁷ Dispatch No. 21, Owen to Marcy, October 21, 1854.

had received would induce him to abstain, in future, from everything that is contrary to the law of the land."38

Thus Owen's good judgment and the restraint he showed in pressing the case, which involved a man clearly guilty under Sicilian law, had once more resulted in a solution satisfactory to the United States and highly complimentary to the American envoy. Sartorio's name appears again in dispatches in 1855. Ross stayed at Palermo only a few months—from October, 1854, to April, 1855. When he resigned, he renewed the recommendation that Sartorio be appointed acting consul. He said there was no other person in Palermo suitable and that the Sicilian authorities there no longer had any objection to Sartorio. Owen apparently took Ross's word without any attempt to check it. He told the state department that he had "regretfully" accepted the arrangement, but at the same time he transmitted to Washington the request of a Mr. MacAuley, former United States consul at Venice, to be appointed to the post at Palermo.39 The Neapolitan government, however, refused to recognize Sartorio, even in a temporary capacity. Owen, therefore, temporarily appointed Henry H. Barstow, a retired Massachusetts schoolteacher, whom Ross had rejected.40 Owen's later experience with Barstow indicated that the man was a satisfactory choice, and he obtained a permanent appointment for him.41 It was unfortunate that Owen found it impossible to travel to Palermo and Messina and hence knew his consuls in those cities only by their letters or by the comments of other people. He remained in Naples and kept the legation open the entire five years of his mission, there being no secretary of legation to leave in charge.

Owen had two other protests for the Neapolitan government. One was over an insult to the coat of arms of the United States displayed over the vice-consulate at Girgenti. This incident was reported by Kretchmar at Palermo. Prince Satriano, lieutenant general of Sicily, promptly apologized. The arms were repaired at the town's expense and the mayor expressed his regret to the vice-consul.⁴²

⁸⁸ Dispatch No. 29, Owen to Marcy, January 1, 1855.

³⁹ Dispatch No. 39, Owen to Marcy, April 23, 1855.

⁴⁰ Dispatch No. 40, Owen to Marcy, May 7, 1855.

⁴¹ Instructions No. 23, Marcy to Owen, September 26, 1856.

⁴² Dispatch No. 10, Owen to Marcy, April 11, 1854; Dispatch No. 11, Owen to Marcy, May 8, 1854.

The other case concerned a guarantee of good conduct required by Neapolitan police, which had to be put on the passports of all foreigners traveling in the kingdom by consuls or ministers of the travelers' nation. Owen learned that the British minister, Sir William Temple, had refused to do more than place a simple visa on the passport. Owen addressed a note, for which he gives no date, to Carafa, demanding the same rights. He got no answer and the police refused to give travel permits to Americans who did not bring the ministerial or consular guarantee that they would conduct themselves peacefully and not become public charges. After a two-months delay, Owen finally obtained from Carafa the information that the police authorities had decided to accept the endorsement "bon pour le journer" in lieu of all other guarantees.48 Thus Owen had won from the Neapolitan government equality of treatment with the British.

After Owen had been in Naples nine months, he was promoted from chargé d'affaires to minister resident at the same time similar promotions were given at other legations in Italy.44 The increase in salary and expenses was welcome. Owen was ill in the late spring of 1854 with a fever he hoped would be "acclimating in effect." In the late summer of that year, he kept his legation open through a cholera epidemic which took 2,242 lives in Naples within a week.46 The cholera then moved to Messina and Owen estimated that one person in three died in that city during the epidemic. He noted that the mortality was increased by refusal of many persons to accept medical care because of a belief that the disease was being spread by the government and that physicians would only assist in spreading the plague.47 The United States consul at Messina, Behn, did heroic service during the epidemic, and the governor of the city, Castrone, sent a special letter of commendation for Behn's work to General Filangieri, then the lieutenant general of the island. A copy was sent to Owen, who translated it as follows: "I cannot conclude the present communication without bringing

⁴⁸ Dispatch No. 8, Owen to Marcy, February 23, 1854.

⁴⁴ Instructions No. 6, Marcy to Owen, July 17, 1854.

⁴⁵ Dispatch No. 13, Owen to Marcy, May 25, 1854.

⁴⁶ Dispatch No. 17, Owen to Marcy, August 11, 1854.

⁴⁷ Dispatch No. 20, Owen to Marcy, September 26, 1854.

to Your Excellency's notice the fact that Mr. Behn, the American consul has given rare proofs of courage and self-devotion, which cannot be too much admired. He has been physician, attendant, father, benefactor, in every case where his attendance could be required. In a word he has omitted nothing which could merit the gratitude of a country stricken down by the hand of God under so dreadful a calamity. He visited and assisted me in those terrible days, when I saw myself abandoned by all others; and I feel deeply the grateful duty which impels me to make known, to the head of the government, the good offices thus rendered by a foreigner during moments of such universal desolation."⁴⁸

A treaty regarding the rights of neutrals in time of war and a treaty of amity, commerce, and navigation may be accredited to Owen. The first was similar to one negotiated in 1854 between the United States and Russia. A draft treaty was sent by the state department to all its envoys in Europe. Owen, who was able to obtain the desired treaty, had his first interview with Carafa regarding this matter on October 21, 1854, and presented the draft at that time. Four days later, Carafa informed him that the Neapolitan government was prepared to conclude and sign the treaty. Full powers were sent to Owen on November 29, and he acknowledged receipt of them on January 1, 1855. The treaty was signed on January 13, and Marcy notified Owen of senatorial ratification on March 10.49

The treaty of commerce was negotiated almost as quickly, but not without obstacles. When Marcy instructed Owen to negotiate a new treaty, he had stressed the importance of obtaining an article guaranteeing to United States citizens the right of worship and interment in the Two Sicilies. From the time he first received these instructions, Owen doubted whether any such clause could be obtained. He told Marcy immediately that he anticipated

⁴⁸ Quoted in Dispatch No. 22, Owen to Marcy, October 23, 1854.

⁴⁹ Instructions No. 6, Marcy to Owen, September 8, 1854; Dispatch No. 21, Owen to Marcy, October 21, 1854; Dispatch No. 23, Owen to Marcy, October 25, 1854; Instructions No. 10, Marcy to Owen, November 29, 1854; Dispatch No. 29, Owen to Marcy, January 1, 1855; Dispatch No. 30, Owen to Marcy, January 13, 1855; Instructions No. 13, Marcy to Owen, March 10, 1855.

⁵⁰ Instructions No. 12, Marcy to Owen, February 6, 1855.

"no relaxation of the exclusive bigotry which for ages has prevailed here."51 Yet he tried with all his ability to carry out Marcy's instructions and wrote that he "did not give way until I had completely satisfied myself that I must surrender the article, while saving the treaty, or lose treaty and article together." He added, "It would probably have been as easy to extort such an article from Spain under Ferdinand the Catholic and his consort, as now from Naples, under her Ferdinand, not less Catholic." The Neapolitan plenipotentiaries argued that in practice foreigners had no reason to complain of any persecution for conscience' sake in Naples. Indeed the only annoyance recorded along this line was the arrest of Sartorio, and his real crime was not possession of Protestant literature so much as possession of Masonic literature. At the time the treaty was being negotiated, there were three American families residing in Naples, and two of these families had only two members each. In the winter tourist season, there were sometimes "upwards of a hundred Americans" in Naples at one time, but few of them remained more than a week or two. Occasionally a few American families resided in Sicily, but the total was probably never more than five, so far as can be judged from the dispatches of the American minister. Actually it was only in Naples where there was any need at all of a place for American Protestant worship. Owen doubted whether any church would have been built, even if the permission had been given. All the Americans permanently resident in Naples, he said, went to the Anglican chapel in the British legation. It was large and had "at all times, vacant seats."52 In Naples, likewise, there was no particular need for a cemetery for American Protestants, since the one owned by the British was open, "by express agreement with the Neapolitan government," to all Protestants. Owen found it "spacious and handsome" and noted that a burial place could be obtained in it at any time for twenty dollars.58

Ferdinand's plenipotentiaries for the commercial treaty were Commendatore Carafa, Prince Comitivi, and Don Giuseppe Arpino, the advocate general. Because Carafa was ill at that time and hence played no part in the negotiations,

⁵¹ Dispatch No. 33, Owen to Marcy, March 11, 1855.

⁵² Dispatch No. 48, Owen to Marcy, October 2, 1855.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

the greater part of the work took place between Owen and Don Giuseppe. Owen looked upon the advocate general as the chief spokesman in the Naples government in favor of a modern attitude toward commerce with the outside world.54 More often than not, the American minister thought the prevailing policy in the Two Sicilies "to have very much of the Chinese character" of non-intercourse. He was of the opinion that the Sicilian government at least awoke to the fact that their commercial system was behind the times and imperatively demanded reform.55 The steps which had been taken toward reform—opening of indirect trade, abolition of differential duties, and consideration of a free port— Owen credited to the influence of Don Giuseppe, whom he called "the ablest public official I have met in Sicily." The American commercial treaty was the advocate general's last official achievement. Scarcely a week after it was signed, he died suddenly, "some say of cholera, some say of apoplexy."56

Owen spent almost a month in preparing the draft treaty upon the basis of Marcy's instructions. presented it to Carafa in June. 57 No further negotiations took place until the end of the summer. Then in three meetings Owen, Prince Comitivi, and Don Giuseppe agreed upon the treaty.⁵⁸ According to the Hoosier Democrat, the final document was "not only more liberal, especially in its commercial bearings, than that [the treaty] it replaces; but it is the most liberal [treaty] yet obtained by any foreign power from the government of the Two Sicilies." He added "It places our vessels, whether engaged in direct or indirect trade, on the same footing as national vessels; it abolishes all differential duties; several important rights of person and property are more strongly guarded in it; provision is made for the surrender of fugitive criminals, and for personal and commercial protection in case of war; the principle of ingress to blockaded ports is determined; the terms of blockade and contraband of war are defined."59 Owen could

⁵⁴ Dispatch No. 41, Owen to Marcy, June 20, 1855; Dispatch No. 49, Owen to Marcy, October 6, 1855.

⁵⁵ Dispatch No. 47, Owen to Marcy, September 7, 1855.

⁵⁶ Dispatch No. 49, Owen to Marcy, October 6, 1855.

⁵⁷ Dispatch No. 41, Owen to Marcy, June 20, 1855.

⁵⁸ Dispatch No. 46, Owen to Marcy, September 7, 1855.

⁵⁹ Dispatch No. 48, Owen to Marcy, October 2, 1855.

make no claim that the treaty was a liberal one, except in comparison with other treaties which had been signed by the Two Sicilies. It was still far behind treaties in effect among the principal commercial nations of the world.

The negotiations, despite the disagreement over the religious article, were most cordial. After the second meeting, Don Giuseppe took Owen into a private conference to express the "particular wish" of King Ferdinand that the United States should name a minister plenipotentiary to There had been no corresponding increase in the Naples. rank of the Sicilian chargé d'affaires at Washington, Baron Winspeare, when Owen was promoted to minister resident. The advocate general explained this was because the Two Sicilies did not have the rank of minister resident in its diplomatic corps. He further stated that Ferdinand would immediately reciprocate the appointment of a minister plenipotentiary. The proposed promotions, however, were never made. He also expressed the king's desire for a fortnightly steamship line between New York and Naples or to southern Italy in general.60

Owen took advantage of the conversation to urge the Neapolitan government to establish a free port area at Naples, where material destined for other countries could be left in bond until transshipped. Don Giuseppe said it could be officially stated that one would shortly be designated. The project apparently died with the advocate general, as there appeared to be no inclination on the part of the United States state department to press the issue. Owen urged Marcy to take the initiative in pressing the matter with the Neapolitan chargé in Washington, but so far as available records show nothing was done.⁶¹

After the treaty was signed, there was a long delay in its ratification. This may have been due partly to congressional objections because of the omission of the article on religious freedom. Actual and official objection, however, was taken to such technical clauses as extradition and bankruptcy matters. The treaty was to take effect only if ratified and a copy deposited in Naples within a year after it had been signed. During the summer of 1856, Owen took frequent occasion to call this clause to the attention of Marcy

⁶⁰ Dispatch No. 46. Owen to Marcy, September 7, 1855.

⁶¹ Ibid., Dispatch No. 49, Owen to Marcy, October 6, 1855.

and to urge that congress act without further delay. Meanwhile, King Ferdinand personally inquired whether some difficulty had arisen. It was not until August, 1856, that Marcy notified Owen the treaty had been ratified. Ratification, however, took place in an unusual way. In order not to miss the twelve-months deadline and at the same time to meet the objections, the senate ratified an amended treaty, which had never been presented to the Two Sicilies. Marcy believed the amendemnts were "too unimportant" to be rejected at Naples. This proved to be the case.

Nevertheless, the tender sensibilities of the court at Caserta were wounded by what seemed the high-handed The timing of the American action was American action. also unfortunate. The undiplomatic method of ratification used by the senate came to the knowledge of the Neapolitan government just at the time that British-French intervention was expected and while the crisis was occupying the full attention of the cabinet of the Two Sicilies. When the crisis had eased, Carafa explained to Owen how the Bourbon feelings had been wounded by the senate's action. A few days later, the ratifications were exchanged, after the government of the Two Sicilies formally placed on record its objections to the ratification of the treaty by the President before the questions involved had been submitted to Naples. 63

Both Sears and Leopold show a degree of surprise that Owen's correspondence is devoid of criticism of Ferdinand II. The traditional history of Italian unification treats the last Bourbon king of Naples as "il re bomba," a completely reactionary and ridiculous figure. Of course, this is in fact an exaggeration. Ferdinand II was indeed one of the most reactionary monarchs of his time—his ideas were those of the Congress of Vienna but two revolutionary cycles later. Yet he seems to have had certain admirable traits in addition to his piety. And it was in his kingdom and under his rule that the first railroad in Italy was built—not in the supposedly more advanced Piedmont or Tuscany.

Robert Dale Owen was an experienced politician and a conscientious diplomat. He did not make his antipathies

⁶² Instructions No. 22, Marcy to Owen, August 21, 1856; Dispatch No. 60, Owen to Marcy, May 24, 1856, and other dispatches of 1856.

⁶³ Dispatch No. 67, Owen to Marcy, October 4, 1856; Dispatch No. 68, Owen to Marcy, October 20, 1856; Dispatch No. 69, Owen to Marcy, November 8, 1856.

so apparent as did Daniel, the minister at Turin. Owen was accredited as the United States envoy to Ferdinand II and believed it his duty to keep on the best possible terms with the sovereign at whose court he was assigned. He met the king rarely but found him always friendly in attitude, both toward the United States and toward its minister. It is interesting but apparently true that the uncompromising autocrat at Caserta was less suspicious of American democracy than was the constitutional monarch at Turin. Owen found suspicion of America among the police of the Two Sicilies but not, as Daniel did, among the officials of the court.

But the fact that Owen was not critical of Ferdinand II should not blind the student to the fact that he was often sharply critical of the Neapolitan government. It has already been seen how forcefully and effectively he went about the eradication of an official at Messina whose corrupt practices infringed upon the treaty rights of American merchant marine captains. Notice has also been given to his harsh criticism of the commercial policies of the Two Sicilies. Yet these are only a few of the critical passages to be found in his dispatches.

Owen had scarcely arrived in Naples when he began his reproaches at the quarantine policies of the Two Sicilies. His original instructions from Marcy were that he should make the kingdom's "unjust and severe quarantine restrictions" a matter "for early attention" and formal protest if desirable. Scarcely had Owen been received by King Ferdinand than he gave instructions to Behn, the consul at Messina, that "measures thus high-handed should be checked at once." He promised the consul that he would "suffer none such, coming under my notice, to pass, without satisfaction." A week later he wrote Marcy that during his "brief residence," barely a month, he had "clearly perceived that nothing but constant vigilance on the part of our consuls

⁶⁴ Although it is probable that Owen did see Ferdinand at diplomatic receptions at least once a year, his dispatches mention only four conversations with Ferdinand II—at the time of his presentation, No. 2, November 21, 1853; at the time of his presentation as minister resident, No. 20, September 26, 1854; at the time the king inquired about the delay in ratifying the commercial treaty, No. 60, May 24, 1856; and at the time of Owen's leave-taking, No. 94, September 20, 1858.

⁶⁵ Instructions No. 1, Marcy to Owen, July 2, 1853.

and the legation will prevent breaches of treaty and of international comity, of grave character" in connection with the quarantine rules of the Two Sicilies.⁶⁶

In the spring of 1854, Owen complained to Marcy of the "exceedingly high postal rates," and added: "The Sicilian government, in this as in other things, is going backwards while the rest of the world is progressing." Later in the same year, in connection with the Sartorio case, he referred to the Two Sicilies as a "government of arbitrary or despotic character."⁶⁷

In 1856, Owen wrote three long dispatches regarding the abuses in connection with monetary exchange in the Two Sicilies. Complaints had been made by travelers and merchants of various nations. When Great Britain decided it was not a proper matter for diplomatic protest, the United States and other nations made no representations to the Neapolitan government. But Owen made his own opinion clear to Marcy when he said, "The Neapolitan government mint has been converted into a source of heavy profit, legitimate and unusual, and especially onerous to foreigners." ¹⁸⁸

Owen doubted the sincerity of the government of the Two Sicilies in its relations with Great Britain in 1855. He found it "evident" in his conversation with Don Giuseppe "that the feeling of this government against England is strong and becoming embittered; and that, not regarding the permanent interests of the two countries as coincident, they do not expect to establish cordial relations with her."69

The American minister's sharpest political comment was made in 1857. A short time earlier he had thought it necessary to ask that a United States warship come to Naples to protect Americans and American interests there in the face of the possibility of a revolution. Sending the ship back to La Spezia, he told Marcy: "I do not indeed, regard the public affairs of this kingdom as, by any means, in a settled condition. Yet after careful enquiry, I find no sufficial reason to anticipate any immediate outbreak. Months

⁶⁶ Owen to Behn, November 23, 1853, enclosure in Dispatch No. 3, Owen to Marcy, November 28, 1853.

⁶⁷ Dispatch No. 11, Owen to Marcy, May 8, 1854; Dispatch No. 18, Owen to Marcy, August 17, 1854.

⁶⁸ Dispatch No. 58, Owen to Marcy, March 31, 1856; Dispatch No. 56, Owen to Marcy, February 22, 1856.

⁶⁹ Dispatch No. 47, Owen to Marcy, September 7, 1855.

seem to me as likely to elapse as days, before the occurrence of such an event. It can, however, in my opinion, be ultimately averted, only by a change of policy in the Sicilian government, of which, for the present, there are no indications."⁷⁰

Such comments as these should refute any implication that Owen was untrue to his training as a "western democrat" or was blind or callous to the faults of the government to which he was accredited.

Twice in the latter years of his mission at Naples, Owen requested the presence of an American warship in the The request by Behn, acting consul at Messina, for a naval vessel for "moral effect" in the Sicilian harbor, was apparently ignored by Commodore Stringham, then commanding the Mediterranean squadron stationed at La Spezia. Commodore Breese, who commanded the squadron in 1856 and 1857, responded quickly to Owen's requests for naval support. In the crisis of the fall of 1856, when both the British and French ministers demanded and obtained their passports, the "Congress" was sent to Naples until Owen ascertained that the British and French fleets would not, "for the present," enter the Bay of Naples. In 1857, after an attempt on the life of Ferdinand II and some other violence at Naples which Owen believed was intended to "prepare the way for a revolution," the minister yielded to the pleas of tourists then in the city, and once more asked Commodore Breese for a warship. This time the "Susquehanna" was sent and remained about a month.71

Owen skillfully avoided any entanglements with other missions in Naples. Although Marcy had instructed him to concert with other nations' diplomats for a new code of quarantine, and although France temporarily broke diplomatic relations with Naples over the incident, Owen never got the United States into a position where such a breach had even to be considered on the issue. He reported some relaxation in the "arbitrary and vexatious" quarantine rules by the royal decree of May 15, 1854.⁷² But the troubles

⁷⁰ Dispatch No. 75, Owen to Marcy, March 1, 1857.

⁷¹ Dispatch No. 4, Owen to Marcy, November 28, 1853; Dispatch No. 68, Owen to Marcy, October 20, 1856; Dispatch No. 69, November 8, 1856; Dispatch No. 73, Owen to Marcy, January 30, 1857.

⁷² Instructions No. 1, Marcy to Owen, July 2, 1853; Dispatch No. 3, Owen to Marcy, November 29, 1853; Dispatch No. 14, Owen to Marcy, June 6, 1854.

did not cease. In the fall of the same year, he authorized Lowther, the British chargé d'affaires, in a protest over vexation of travelers at the border, to state that the American legation, as well as the British, "will suffer no cases of unjust exclusion or detention to pass without suitable reparations." Yet he avoided getting the United States into any share of the antipathy which the Neapolitan government had for the British. During the Crimean War, in which both the United States and the Two Sicilies were neutral and during which they signed a treaty regarding neutral rights, the Russian and Prussian ministers called upon Owen to discuss neutrality. But he avoided aligning himself in any way with those diplomats.

Both the previous students of the Owen mission have noted that there was little of historical importance in the latter part of the period Owen was in Naples. There was a certain slackening of activity after 1854. Owen's dispatch of January 1, 1855, reported there was not a single issue remaining between the United States and the Two Sicilies. Yet in the following two years, he did keep up a fairly busy diplomatic schedule of activity. The negotiation of the two treaties got the greatest attention in this period. But there were other important pieces of work for Owen.

The state department wrote to all three of its ministers in Italy regarding reports of abuses of the consular system in the peninsula. The minister in Naples made an attempt to discover whether any such abuses existed in his jurisdiction. He got enough information that he assured Marcy there seemed to be no serious abuses of the consular privilege in the Two Sicilies. But if there were no abuses, the modern student will be surprised when he learns the conditions Owen reports. According to Owen, there were three good consuls at the time he left—A. Hammett in Naples, F. W. Behn in Messina, and H. H. Barstow at Palermo. They received a thousand dollars a year and were forbidden by law to engage in private business or to make charges to the travelers and merchant ship captains whom they served. 76

⁷⁸ Dispatch No. 24, Owen to Marcy, November 14, 1854.

⁷⁴ Dispatch No. 21, Owen to Marcy, October 21, 1854.

⁷⁵ Dispatch No. 29, Owen to Marcy, January 1, 1855.

⁷⁶ Instructions No. 11, Marcy to Owen, December 18, 1854; Dispatch No. 35, Owen to Marcy, April 10, 1855; Dispatch No. 39, Owen to Marcy, April 23, 1855; Dispatch No. 76, Owen to Marcy, March 4, 1857.

Under these three consuls, there were several vice-consuls or more properly consular agents. Hammett had none in his jurisdiction on the mainland. Each of the other two had two consular agents responsible to him. In the Messina area, there were John B. Leavo, who had been vice-consul at Catania since 1847, and Nuncio Stella, who had been vice-consul at Syracuse since 1845. In the Palermo area were vice-consuls—similarly Italian subjects—at Trapani and Girgenti.⁷⁷ Of these latter two, Owen seems to have been unable to learn even the names, because of the fact that just about the time the state department made its inquiry, the consul at Palermo, Ross, resigned and left the island. There were some American ships calling at all six of the Sicilian ports. The greater number, of course, went to Messina and Palermo, where the consuls were American citizens. It was impossible, as has been noted, for Owen to travel to any of the consulates to exercise any supervision or to make any inspection. If the poorly paid consuls and the unpaid vice-consuls did not seek to extract some financial benefit from the persons they served, they were persons of unusually high principle. It is altogether probable that the complaints to the state department were more justified than Owen would admit.

Owen had numerous chores to perform which partake of consular characteristics. In 1854, an American ship "Devonshire," a different vessel from the one which gave Owen a tedious crossing of the Atlantic, went ashore near Brindisi. Circumstances made the minister think there might be fraud in connection with the sale of the ship at a price far below the insured value. There was no United States consul or consular agent on the Adriatic coast. Owen, however, got Commodore Turner, then commanding at La Spezia, to investigate the matter. The naval officer reported there seemed to be no fraud.⁷⁸

In 1855, Owen received two piasters from the Neapolitan government for delivery to three American women tourists. The women had been robbed at Pozzuoli by some soldiers.

⁷⁷ Dispatch No. 35, Owen to Marcy, April 10, 1855; Dispatch No. 39, Owen to Marcy, April 23, 1855.

⁷⁸ Dispatch No. 19, Owen to Marcy, August 24, 1854; Dispatch No. 20, Owen to Marcy, September 26, 1854; Dispatch No. 21, Owen to Marcy, October 21, 1854.

The loot was recovered when the soldiers were arrested. He sent it to the women, who had gone back to a hotel in Rome. Owen refused to ask an audience with King Ferdinand on behalf of an American woman who had a lawsuit in a court of the Two Sicilies. Nevertheless, she won the case. The minister reported that two Sicilian sea captains had assisted in saving two American brigs and was authorized by the state department to award medals to the two officers. Owen also had to make arrangements to ship home a mentally deranged American resident of Naples. Moreover, he thanked the Neapolitan government for sending a warship to tow a distressed American brig to port for repair. To

Owen had been nominated for the Neapolitan post by President Franklin Pierce. On the day of President James Buchanan's inauguration, he made a formal request to be Sears believes that the minister was not eager to be recalled. It may be that some of the Hoosier Democrat's political friends were interceding with President Buchanan to reappoint him. The state department archives, however, do not show any such intercession. Owen did not leave the Neapolitan post until his successor arrived, which was eighteen months after Buchanan took office. might be sufficient evidence to assume that he was not anxious to return to America. Many another envoy had left his post before a successor was nominated. But it is equally true that Owen made no extraordinary exertions of any kind during the portion of his tenure in the Buchanan administration. He sent his quarterly legation accounts on schedule, delivered the ceremonial letters dispatched to him for King Ferdinand, reported briefly on the settlement of the Cagliari case between the United Kingdom and the Two Sicilies, reported than an American livestock breeder had been given two goats from the herd of Ferdinand II, delivered an American government gift of Audubon's Birds of America to the Neapolitan government and in due time received in return two volumes on Herculaneum and Pompeii, and noted that the December 16, 1857, earthquake in the Basilicata cost fourteen thousand lives. Just about the

⁷⁹ Dispatch No. 31, Owen to Marcy, February 27, 1855; Instructions No. 14, Marcy to Owen, July 10, 1855; Dispatch No. 45, Owen to Marcy, August 6, 1855; Dispatch No. 51, Owen to Marcy, October 29, 1855; Instructions No. 17, Marcy to Owen, February 14, 1856; Dispatch No. 72, Owen to Marcy, January 9, 1857.

only thing of real interest in the last eighteen months of his mission was a minor incident of a British subject who posed as an American and in the course of the masquerade borrowed money from Owen and others in Naples. The losses were made up and the man permitted to leave the kingdom for the Papal States.⁸⁰

Owen learned the name of his successor, Joseph R. Chandler of Pennsylvania, in July of 1858.81 Chandler was presented to King Ferdinand on September 20 of that year, as the final ceremony of Owen's mission to Italy. In his last dispatch he wrote, "In closing my mission to this court, prolonged now to upwards of five years and a quarter. I should be doing injustice to my own feelings did I not bear testimony to the uniform and active kindness and unvarying courtesy with which I have been treated here, both socially and in my official capacity, by all ranks and classes . . . from king down to the humblest. . . . Imperturable good nature, evinced in a thousand little good offices, and especially conspicuous in the kindness of the poor to those who are poorer than themselves, is a marked characteristic of Neapolitan character: a character which may cover a multitude of sins. No one who has resided for years in this, one of the most beautiful regions of the civilized world, can leave it without regret: a regret tempered, in my case, by the prospect of returning, once more, to a country of liberty and progress."82

The state department expressed its gratitude for Owen's service by giving him pay, not only for the time spent in returning home, but also for a month's "leave of absence" in addition.⁸³

So Dispatch No. 76, Owen to Marcy, March 4, 1857; Dispatch No. 91, Owen to Secretary of State Lewis Cass, June 10, 1858; Dispatch No. 89, Owen to Cass, May 8, 1858; Dispatch No. 81, Owen to Cass, August 21, 1857; Dispatch No. 85, Owen to Cass, November 15, 1857; Dispatch No. 90, Owen to Cass, May 29, 1858; Dispatch No. 92, Owen to Cass, June 30, 1858.

⁸¹ Dispatch No. 93, Owen to Cass, July 18, 1858.

⁸² Dispatch No. 94, Owen to Cass, September 20, 1858.

⁸³ Instructions No. 27, Cass to Owen, August 31, 1857.