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Simon Collier

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I

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1808–1833

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1808-1833

BY

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FOR
D.H.C. AND M.K.C.
in gratitude

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The violent transition from darkness to
noonday light—from rigid slavery to
absolute liberty—is very critical.

RAMÓN FREIRE (1825)

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PREFACE

This book is an attempt to describe the nature of the political ideas and attitudes which informed the procedures of the revolutionary creole elite in Chile from the start of the Spanish imperial crisis in 1808 to the effective stabilization of the new Republic under Diego Portales in the early 1830s. In Part I, the growth of revolutionary ideals is considered, and I pay particular attention to the complex creole reaction to the crisis of 1808–10, which was the point from which the Chilean revolution—like all the Latin American revolutions—started out. Part II is devoted to a general description of the ideas and attitudes which were common to all sections of the revolutionary leadership and the creole intelligentsia and it covers the whole period from 1810 to 1833. In Part III I take up the story from the final liberation of Chile in 1817, and try to depict the shifting political moods which affected the life of the country until Portales and the conservatives imposed the durable and successful mould which was to give Chile (as far as the rest of Spanish America was concerned) an untypical history for the remainder of the nineteenth century.

Chile has always been a country where the study of history has flourished. In the nineteenth century, Jaime Eyzaguirre claims, ‘to write history was a sign of intellectual quality’,¹ and Chile produced an unexampled generation of laborious historical scholars. In 1910 the Peruvian José de la Riva Agüero was able to comment somewhat enviously on ‘the multitudinous legion of historians which Chile—a country privileged in this—has engendered’.² The academic visitor from Europe is favourably impressed by the fact that Chile’s most famous historians, no less than the most famous Chilean generals and statesmen, are well represented in the statuary of Santiago. It is hardly surprising, in these circumstances, that the crucial quarter-century that saw the birth of the Chilean republic should have been subjected to prolonged and scholarly inquiry. The great narrative historians of the nineteenth century—

¹ *Fisonomía histórica de Chile* (2nd edn. 1958), p. 131.

² *Historia en el Perú* (Lima, 1910), p. 544.

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I am thinking particularly of Diego Barros Arana, Miguel Luis Amunátegui, and Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna—have left us an incomparable and detailed account of the period of independence, and in the course of their work they naturally touched on the question of political ideas. In the present century, a number of excellent writers have come closer to an accurate assessment of the ideas of the revolution. Luis Galdames has written a massive and comprehensive treatise on the constitutional development of the period, a treatise whose range extends far beyond the boundaries of what is normally understood as constitutional history.¹ But the modern work which has most stood out, by its sheer volume and by the provocative and forcefully stated conclusions it contains, is Francisco Antonio Encina's enormous *Historia de Chile desde la prehistoria hasta 1891*. Encina has called in question many of the most cherished interpretations of the great nineteenth-century scholars, and it is safe to say, I think, that no future history of Chile will wholly escape the influence of his monumental labour. Nevertheless, Encina's account of Chilean history has its faults. It can in no way be regarded as the equal of, for instance, Diego Barros Arana's. One is compelled to agree with Elías Almeyda Arroyo's contention that Encina 'arranges history to his taste and relates it as his prejudices dictate'.² These prejudices, I believe, are particularly serious as far as the independence period goes. Encina's marked hostility towards liberalism has led him to undervalue and even to distort the seriousness of purpose which characterized the activity of the Chilean liberals of the 1820s and 1830s. For Encina, the seven years of uncertainty (1823–30) that preceded what to him is the brilliant political epic of Diego Portales form a largely meaningless and discreditable interlude whose only purpose is to throw into sharp relief the creative achievement of his great hero. But despite these flaws, and despite the persistent intrusion of Spenglerian concepts (derived through Alberto Edwards) into his narrative, Encina must at least be credited with an imaginative historical intuition which has borne

¹ *Historia de Chile. La evolución constitucional desde 1810 hasta 1833* (1925).

² *La Historia de Chile de don Francisco Antonio Encina: Estudio crítico* (1952), p. 65. See also C. C. Griffin, 'Francisco Encina and Revisionism in Chilean History', *HAHR*, xxxvi (Durham, N.C., 1957), 1.

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fruit, for instance, in his exposition of the revolutionary mystique.¹ Encina may well have developed some of the themes of the revolution in a tendentious and unacceptable way, and in support of his generally anti-liberal viewpoint, yet one must also grant that he was one of the first to detect the very existence of certain themes.

'It is truly odd', wrote Sergio Villalobos R. in 1956, 'that, confronted by the richness of the material accumulated..., scholars have not felt themselves attracted to the theme of the Independence of Chile, which demands to be taken up once more.'² Since that date, there has in fact been something of a revival of interest in the independence period. Sergio Villalobos R. himself has provided us with a convincing reappraisal of the origins of the revolution of 1810;³ Hernán Ramírez Necochea has re-examined the relatively little-known economic background;⁴ and Néstor Meza Villalobos has reconsidered the period between 1806 and 1810.⁵ These are but three examples. Those historians, however, who have dealt more specifically with the question of political ideas have sometimes been less concerned with the independence period itself than with previous or subsequent historical developments leading into or out of the period. Thus Jaime Eyzaguirre's *Ideario y ruta de la emancipación chilena* (1957), which covers ideological history up to 1814, tries to connect the 1810 revolution with a broad Spanish tradition going back to St Isidore. A second work which comes immediately to mind, Ricardo Donoso's masterly *Las ideas políticas en Chile* (Mexico DF, 1946), starts with the end of the colonial era and proceeds to the close of the nineteenth century, connecting the liberal struggles of the independence period theme by theme with the anti-aristocratic and secularist struggles of many years later. It can, I think, be claimed that there has long been a need for an account of the ideology of the independence period in Chile, and for a

¹ Encina, *Historia*, x, 51-77.

² *Índice a la Colección de Historiadores y de Documentos relativos a la independencia de Chile* (1956), p. x.

³ *Tradición y reforma en 1810* (1961), in my opinion the most distinguished work on the background to the revolution of 1810 written by a Chilean this century.

⁴ *Antecedentes económicos de la independencia de Chile* (1959).

⁵ *La actividad política del Reino de Chile entre 1806 y 1810* (1958).

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general re-examination of the interplay of ideas and politics which was a major characteristic of that time. There is one further point which I ought to make here. Two main interpretations of the independence period have been common amongst Chilean historians: the traditional nineteenth-century liberal view, which conceived the emancipation as a contest between light and darkness, and the conservative or Hispanist view, which has been concerned to devalue the liberalism that became orthodox after 1810 and to justify the conservative reaction of 1829 onwards.¹ It is perhaps useful that a foreigner should try to recross the battlefield and establish what may be regarded as a fresh view of the scene. I have therefore committed myself to no very definite verdict on the events of 1808–33. I present no general conclusions as to the worthiness or unworthiness of the various ideas which manifested themselves in Chile at that time. My only aim is to define and describe them more clearly.

It need hardly be added that in the course of this work I have noticed other themes which would be well worthy of sustained investigation. Of these, two seem to me to be of some importance for a better understanding of the course of Chilean history. The whole issue of political groupings, touched on so far in a rather cursory way by a few scholars,² still needs a thorough examination. There is also a striking need for an adequate description of the composition of the creole elite which carried through the revolution. The elite was aristocratic in nature; this is plain. But it would be interesting to learn the effect of regional and economic divisions within the aristocracy on the development of party politics in the 1820s and 1830s, and also the extent of foreign and non-aristocratic elements in the revolutionary leadership. These two matters are very much bound up with one another, and a detailed investigation of them would serve to illuminate many aspects of the revolutionary process and its outcome that still remain obscure or slightly puzzling.

While this book is primarily a humble contribution to the

¹ Broadly speaking, Amunátegui, Barros Arana and Vicuña Mackenna in the nineteenth century, and Donoso in the twentieth, can be classed as liberals. Edwards, Encina and Eyzaguirre may be regarded as conservatives.

² Edwards and Frei, pp. 16–32; Encina, *Historia*, x, 12–18.

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historiography of the Chilean revolution, it also has a more general application. The study of the political ideas of independence in Latin America—indeed, of Latin American political ideas in general—has remained surprisingly backward, though there are indications that this state of affairs is gradually being remedied. Though the outstanding personalities of the period, such as Simón Bolívar, have understandably attracted a certain amount of attention, relatively little interest has been shown in the political ideas of individual countries, of lesser-known politicians, or indeed of political parties. This present description of ideas in Chile between 1808 and 1833 may therefore be regarded as something of a case-study. It is to be hoped that others will examine the experience of some of the other republics of Latin America. Only in this way can it be established whether or not there really was a common pattern of political ideas throughout the continent. It is widely assumed that a common pattern did prevail—and so far there seems no reason to reject this view—but documentary proof of the assertion is still needed, and, perhaps more important, some knowledge of local variations could be gained from further work.

The course of Chilean history itself has provided very convenient limits for my present study. The beginning of the *revolución de la independencia* is quite clearly marked by the Spanish imperial crisis of 1808. Its close is defined with similar clarity by the conservative rebellion of 1829, which brought to an abrupt end the period of political experiment and gave Chile a constitutional form which, however unsatisfactory, remained intact for over a generation. Can my chosen period be regarded as a legitimate unit of study? It could certainly be argued that many of the more important issues then in debate had been decided one way or another by 1823, the year when Bernardo O'Higgins, having consolidated the independence of the republic, was forced into a premature retirement. Independence from the Empire, the liberal political philosophy, anti-colonialism—these were settled, as issues, by 1823. But in fact it took a further decade for certain other matters to be settled as firmly or as finally. The debates on federalism, on the right degree of executive authority, and on the organization of the Republic in general were all of

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them questions which remained undecided until after the *pro-nunciamento* of 1829. All in all, it can hardly be contended that the Chilean revolution, considered both as a domestic political process and as a dispute with the transatlantic motherland, ended before Portales. Political ferment of a revolutionary sort continued unabated up till then, after which it was rigidly suppressed and discouraged. I offer no apologies, therefore, for including the final phases of the independence period in this study, particularly since the interesting and important phase from 1823 to 1829 has long stood in need of reassessment.

Detailed narratives of the Chilean revolution are, naturally, available in Spanish,¹ and somewhat slenderer and less satisfactory versions in English as well.² For the convenience of the reader, however, I have incorporated a short narrative section into those chapters (2, 3, 6–9) which require this support. Without at least an outline of events—and this is all I pretend to supply here—the ideas discussed can become both vague and uninteresting. Only in Part II have I felt justified in abandoning a chronological scheme altogether, and for obvious reasons. It can hardly be denied that there was, during the revolutionary period, a basic stratum of political ideas together with a distinctive set of emotional attitudes, in short, a commonly accepted body of ideals. This body of doctrine, this ideology, can and should be treated analytically and separately, and this is what I have done in Part II. At the same time, there are many ideas and attitudes which cannot be considered except in relation to the events and moments which produced them. Thus the issue of independence, which to some

¹ Barros Arana, viii–xvi, is the most detailed narrative of the period 1808–33. Encina, *Historia*, vi–x, provides an alternative. Domingo Amunátegui Solar, *Nacimiento de la República de Chile* (1930), is a useful one-volume summary. For a general reference book on specific events and characters, see Jordi Fuentes and Lía Cortés, *Diccionario histórico de Chile* (1965). The careers of individuals may be followed in Pedro Pablo Figueroa, *Diccionario biográfico general de Chile* (1st edn. 1887; 2nd edn. 1888; 3rd edn. 3 vols. 1897–1901); for foreigners, see the same author's *Diccionario biográfico de extranjeros en Chile* (1900); an alternative (in some respects less detailed) biographical dictionary is Virgilio Figueroa, *Diccionario histórico y biográfico de Chile* (4 vols. 1925–31).

² A. S. M. Chisholm, *The Independence of Chile* (London, 1912); Luis Galdames, *A History of Chile*, trans. I. J. Cox (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1941), pp. 141–243; Harry Bernstein, *Modern and Contemporary Latin America* (Chicago, 1952), pp. 450–86; A. Curtis Wilgus, ed., *Argentina, Brazil and Chile since Independence* (Washington, D.C., 1935), p. 279–302.

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extent dominated the '*Patria Vieja*', and the first years of the O'Higgins regime, ceased to be a real talking-point after 1820 or so. The federalist movement, too, appeared and then disappeared within a circumscribed moment of time. To have forced themes like these into a general analytical framework would, of course, have been easy enough. But it would also have been totally unacceptable to those who, like myself, see ideas as the life-blood of political history and who believe that in nearly all circumstances 'there is something in history to which justice can be done only by the narrative method'.¹

I was enabled to do the research on which my doctoral thesis and this book are based thanks to the financial assistance of the Department of Education and Science; Trinity Hall, Cambridge; and the University of Chile. To these three bodies I express my warmest thanks.

In the preparation of this book I have naturally incurred many debts of a more personal nature, and it is proper and pleasant to acknowledge these here. The chief of these debts, beyond all question, is to Dr John Street, who supervised my postgraduate work. To him I owe many hours of just criticism and balanced advice, and it is true to say that without his constant and friendly encouragement this book would not have been written in the first place. His deep understanding of Latin American history and of its distinctive problems has been invaluable throughout, though it is only fair to add that he is in no way responsible for the mistakes and errors of interpretation which may doubtless be found in this study.

I must also most warmly thank Sr Sergio Villalobos R. for the unfailing assistance he gave me during my stay in Chile in 1963, and similarly Professor Eugenio Pereira Salas, who did so much to make that visit possible. I gratefully acknowledge the help afforded me in Santiago de Chile by Don Guillermo Feliú Cruz (Director), Sr Manuel Cifuentes, and Sr Ricardo Dartnell, of the Biblioteca Nacional; and Don Juan Eyzaguirre (Director) and Sra Nora Hansen of the Archivo Nacional. Many other kind

¹ Herbert Butterfield, *The Present State of Historical Scholarship: An Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge, 1965), p. 22.

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Chilean friends, too numerous to mention individually, made my experience of their incomparable land a rich and varied one.

To those who helped to make my work in England a practical possibility, I owe an equal debt of gratitude: above all, Mr C. W. Crawley and Mr Graham Storey, of Trinity Hall. My colleagues Dr Gordon Brotherston and Mr Richard Ogle of the University of Essex have given freely of their advice on certain points of translation.

S. D. W. C.

The Old Rectory
Sutton, Bedfordshire
18 September 1966

ABBREVIATIONS

- A.B.A. Archivo de don Diego Barros Arana (Sala Medina, Biblioteca Nacional, Santiago).
- A.M.I. Archivo del Ministerio del Interior (Archivo Nacional, Santiago).
- AR L. Valencia Avaria, ed., *Anales de la República* (1951).
- Arch.O'H. *Archivo de don Bernardo O'Higgins*. In progress (1946-).
- Arch.S.M. *Documentos del Archivo de San Martín* (Buenos Aires, 1910-11).
- AUC *Anales de la Universidad de Chile*.
- A.V.M. Archivo de don Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna (Archivo Nacional, Santiago).
- BACH *Boletín de la Academia Chilena de Historia*.
- CAPC *Colección de antiguos periódicos chilenos*. In progress (1951-).
- C.C.M.M. Colección de copias de manuscritos de don José Toribio Medina (Sala Medina, Biblioteca Nacional).
- CHDI E. Matta Vial and G. Feliú Cruz, ed., *Colección de historiadores y de documentos relativos a la independencia de Chile* (1900-54).
- F.O. Foreign Office Papers (Public Record Office, London).
- F.V. Fondo Varios (Archivo Nacional).
- HAHR *Hispanic American Historical Review*.
- RCHG *Revista Chilena de Historia y Geografía*.
- SCL V. Letelier, ed., *Sesiones de los Cuerpos Lejislativos de la República de Chile, 1811-1845* (1887-1908).

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Other books and articles, of limited relevance to the subject of this study, are cited in full in the footnotes. Unless otherwise stated, all such works were published in Santiago de Chile.

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