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from Spanish and Portuguese Domination: Volume 1

Thomas Cochrane

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I.



INVITATION TO TAKE COMMAND OF CHILIAN NAVY—ARRIVAL AT VALPARAISO—
FIRST EXPEDITION TO PERU—ATTACK ON SPANISH SHIPPING AT CALLAO—
DEPARTURE FOR HUACHO—CAPTURE OF SPANISH CONVOYS OF MONEY—
PAITA TAKEN—RETURN TO VALPARAISO TO REORGANIZE THE SQUADRON
—OFFER TO GIVE UP MY SHARE OF PRIZEMONEY TO THE REPUBLIC—
THIS OFFER DECLINED BY THE SUPREME DIRECTOR—POPULAR CONGRATULATIONS—ATTEMPT ON LADY COCHRANE'S LIFE.

IN the year 1817, Don Jose Alvarez, accredited agent of the government of Chili—as yet unacknowledged by European powers—applied to me to undertake the organization of a naval force in that country, capable of contending against the Spaniards; who, notwithstanding the successful revolt of the Chilenos by land, still maintained their predominance on the waters of the Pacific.

Having at that time no professional employment, in consequence of my unjust expulsion from the British naval service, by the machinations of the powerful political party which I had offended—and finding that Chili was making great efforts to create a navy, in furtherance of which object a war steamer had been placed on the stocks in London—I accepted the invitation, engaging to superintend her building and equipment, and to take her to Valparaiso when completed.

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REQUESTED TO SAIL IMMEDIATELY.

Meanwhile, Alvarez received orders from his Government, that, if his proposals had been accepted, no time must be lost in my departure, as the position of Chili was critical, the Spaniards threatening Valparaiso by sea, and being still in possession of the continent from Conception to Chiloe, where they were organizing the savage Indian tribes to carry desolation into the newly emancipated provinces. Reliable information had also been received, that the Court of Madrid was making strenuous efforts to recover its lost possessions by a powerful reinforcement to its Pacific squadron, against which the Chileno ships of war, in their present state, were not in a condition to contend.

Alvarez therefore begged me not to wait for the steamer, the completion and equipment of which he would hasten, but at once to sail for Chili in the *Rose* merchantman, then on the eve of departure. Knowing that the whole of Peru was in the hands of the Spaniards, and that they were also in possession of Valdivia, the strongest fortified harbour to the southward—from both of which there would be considerable difficulty in dislodging them after the arrival of the anticipated reinforcements—I embarked without delay; and on the 28th of November, 1818, landed at Valparaiso, accompanied by Lady Cochrane and our two children.

Our reception, both from the authorities and the people, was enthusiastic, the Supreme Director, General O'Higgins, coming from the seat of Government, Santiago, to welcome us. This excellent man

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RECEPTION AT VALPARAISO.

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was the son of an Irish gentleman of distinction in the Spanish service, who had occupied the important position of Viceroy of Peru. The son had, however, joined the patriots, and whilst second in command had not long before inflicted a signal defeat upon the Spaniards in the interior; in reward for which service the gratitude of the nation had elevated him to the Supreme Directorate.

A variety of *fêtes* was given at Valparaiso in honour of our arrival, these being prolonged for so many days as to amount to a waste of time. The same scenes were, however, re-enacted at the distant capital, whither the Supreme Director insisted on taking us, till I had to remind His Excellency that our purpose was rather fighting than feasting. Nevertheless, the reception we had met impressed me with so high a sense of Chilian hospitality, that, heartbroken as I had been by the infamous persecution which had driven me from the British navy, I decided upon Chili as my future home; this decision, however, being only an exemplification of the proverb "*L'homme propose—Dieu dispose.*"

The Chilian squadron had just returned from a successful cruise, the gallant Admiral Blanco Encalada, who commanded it, having captured a noble Spanish 50-gun frigate, the *Maria Isabel*, in the bay of Talcahuano.

The squadron consisted of the recently captured Spanish frigate, now named the *O'Higgins*, in honour of the Supreme Director; the *San Martin*, 56 guns, formerly the *Cumberland* Indiaman, which had been

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bought into the service; the *Lautaro*, 44 guns, also a purchased Indiaman; the *Galvarino*, 18 guns, recently the British sloop of war *Hecate*; the *Chacabuco*, 20 guns; and the *Aracauno*, 16 guns; a force which, though deficient in organization and equipment, was very creditable to the energy of a newly emancipated people.

A few days after my arrival a commission was issued, conferring upon me the title of "Vice-Admiral of Chili, Admiral and Commander in Chief of the Naval Forces of the Republic." Admiral Blanco, with patriotic liberality, relinquishing his position in my favour, though, from his recent achievement, justly entitled to retain it; paying me also the additional compliment of personally announcing to the ships' companies the change which had been effected.

My advent was regarded by the captains of the squadron with great jealousy, the more so, as I had brought with me from England officers upon whom I could place implicit reliance. It so happened that two of the Chilian commanders, Captains Guise and Spry, had shortly before arrived from England with the *Hecate*, which had been sold out of the British navy, and bought by them on speculation. The Buenos Ayrean Government having declined to purchase her, they had brought her on to Chili, where the Government took her and received her former owners into its service. These officers, together with Captain Worcester, a North American, got up a cabal, the object of which was to bring about a divided command

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HOISTING FLAG.

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between myself and Admiral Blanco, or, as they expressed it—"two commodores and no Cochrane." Finding that Admiral Blanco would not listen to this, they persuaded one or two of the inferior ministers—whose jealousy it was not difficult to excite—that it was dangerous and discreditable to a republican Government to allow a nobleman and a foreigner to command its navy, and still more so, to allow him to retain his title; the object being to place Admiral Blanco in the chief command, with myself as his second—by which arrangement, as he had not been accustomed to manage British seamen, they expected to control him as they pleased. Admiral Blanco, however, insisted on reversing our positions, offering his services as second in command, in which arrangement I gladly acquiesced. This insignificant squabble would not be worth narrating, but for its bearing on subsequent events; as well as enabling me to confer a pleasing testimony to the patriotic disinterestedness of Admiral Blanco, who is still one of the brightest ornaments of the Republic which he so eminently aided to establish.

On the 22nd of December my flag was hoisted on board the *O'Higgins*, after which the greatest despatch was used to get the squadron ready for sea. Anxious to avoid delay, on the 16th of January I sailed with four ships only, the *O'Higgins*, *San Martin*, *Lautaro*, and *Chacabuco*; leaving Admiral Blanco to follow with the *Galvarino*, *Aracauno*, and *Puyrredon*. A mutiny having broken out on board the *Chacabuco*, it became necessary to enter Coquimbo,

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MY SON CARRIED ON BOARD.

where the leading mutineers were landed, tried, and punished.

I shall here narrate an incident which occurred on our departure. Lady Cochrane, with her children, had returned from Santiago to Valparaiso, to take leave of me on embarkation. She had just gone ashore, and the last gun had been fired to summon all hands on board, when, hearing a loud *hurrah* near the house where she resided, she went to the window, and saw our little boy—now Lord Cochrane, but then scarcely more than five years old—mounted on the shoulders of my flag-lieutenant, waving his tiny cap over the heads of the people, and crying out with all his might, “*Viva la patria!*” the mob being in a frenzied state of excitement.

The child had slipped out of Lady Cochrane’s house with the officer, insisting on being carried to his father; with which request the lieutenant, nothing loth, complied. To the horror of Lady Cochrane, she saw her boy hurried down to the beach amidst the shouts of the multitude, and, before she could interfere, placed in a boat and rowed off to the flag-ship, which was at the time under weigh, so that he could not be sent ashore again; there being no alternative but to take him with us, though without clothes—which were afterwards made for him by the sailors—and with no other attendance save that which their rough but kindly natures could administer.

On our way along the coast we received information that the *Antonio* was about to sail from Callao for

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PLAN OF ATTACK.

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Cadiz, with a considerable amount of treasure, so that, in the hope of intercepting her, we cruized just out of sight of the port till the 21st of February. As she did not make her appearance, preparations were made to put in execution a plan which had been formed to attack the Spanish shipping during the Carnival, when, in the height of that festival, less vigilance than ordinary might reasonably be expected. We had previously ascertained that the naval force in the harbour consisted of the frigates *Esmeralda* and *Venganza*, a corvette, three brigs of war, a schooner, twenty-eight gun-boats, and six heavily-armed merchantmen; the whole being moored close in under the batteries, which mounted upwards of 160 guns, whilst the aggregate force of the shipping was 350 guns, as appeared from an official account of their armament.

A direct attack with our small force seemed, therefore, a thing not at present to be attempted; but in its place I had formed the design to cut out the frigates during the carnival, which terminated on the 23rd. Knowing that two North American ships of war were daily expected at Callao, it was arranged to take in the *O'Higgins* and *Lautaro*, under American colours, leaving the *San Martin* out of sight behind San Lorenzo, and if the ruse were successful, to make a feint of sending a boat ashore with despatches, and in the meantime suddenly to dash at the frigates, and cut them out. Unfortunately, one of those thick fogs, so common on the Peruvian coast, arose, in which the *Lautaro* parted company, and did not rejoin the flag-

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ship for four days afterwards, when the carnival being at an end, our plan was rendered abortive.

The fog, which in the climate of Peru often continues for a considerable length of time, lasted till the 29th, when hearing heavy firing, and imagining that one of the ships was engaged with the enemy, I stood with the flag-ship into the bay; the other ships, imagining the same thing, also steered in the direction of the firing, when the fog clearing for a moment, we discovered each other, as well as a strange sail near us; which, when taken possession of by the flag-ship, proved to be a Spanish gun-boat, with a lieutenant and twenty men, who, on being made prisoners, informed us that the firing was a salute in honour of the Viceroy, who had that morning been on a visit of inspection to the batteries and shipping, and was then on board the brig of war *Pezuela*, which we saw crowding sail in the direction of the batteries.

The fog again coming on, suggested to me the possibility of a direct attack, which, if not altogether successful, would give the Spaniards such an idea of our determination of purpose, as would inspire them with respect for the Chilian squadron, and might induce their ships to refrain from the protection of their commerce; in which case a blockade would prevent the necessity of separating our small force in chase of them, should they evince a desire of getting to sea.

Accordingly, still maintaining our disguise under American colours, the *O'Higgins* and *Lautaro* stood towards the batteries, narrowly escaping going ashore

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ATTACK ON THE BATTERIES.

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in the fog. The Viceroy having no doubt witnessed the capture of the gun-boat, had, however, provided for our reception, the garrison being at their guns, and the crews of the ships of war at their quarters. Notwithstanding the great odds, I determined to persist in an attack, as our withdrawing without firing a shot, would produce an effect upon the minds of the Spaniards the reverse of that intended; having sufficient experience in war to know that moral effect, even if the result of a degree of temerity, will not unfrequently supply the place of superior force.

The wind falling light, I did not venture on laying the flag-ship and the *Lautaro* alongside the Spanish frigates, as at first intended, but anchored with springs on our cables, abreast of the shipping, which was arranged in a half-moon of two lines, the rear rank being judiciously disposed so as to cover the intervals of the ships in the front line. A dead calm succeeding, we were for two hours exposed to a heavy fire from the batteries, in addition to that from the two frigates, the brigs *Pezuela* and *Maypeu*, and seven or eight gun-boats; nevertheless, the northern angle of one of the principal forts was silenced by our fire.

A breeze springing up, we weighed anchor, standing to and fro in front of the batteries, and returning their fire; when Captain Guise, who commanded the *Lautaro*, being severely wounded, that ship sheered off, and never again came within range. As from want of wind, or doubt of the result, neither the *San Martin* nor *Chacabuco* had ever got within fire,

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ENEMY'S SQUADRON.

the flag-ship was thus left alone to continue the action ; but as this, from want of co-operation on the part of the other ships, was useless, I was reluctantly compelled to relinquish the attack, and withdrew to the island of San Lorenzo, about three miles distant from the forts ; the Spaniards, though nearly quadruple our numbers, exclusive of their gun-boats, not venturing to follow us.

The annexed was the Spanish naval force present :

Frigates.—Esmeralda, 44 guns ; Venganza, 42 guns ; Sebastiana, 28 guns.

Brigs.—Maypeu, 18 guns ; Pezuela, 22 guns ; Potrilla, 18 guns ; and one, name unknown, 18 guns.

Schooner, name unknown, one long 24, and 20 culverins.

Armed Merchantmen.—Resolution, 36 guns ; Cleopatra, 28 guns ; La Focha, 20 guns ; Guarmey, 18 guns ; Fernando, 26 guns ; San Antonio, 18 guns.

Total, fourteen vessels, of which ten were ready for sea ; and twenty-seven gun-boats.

In this action my little boy had a narrow escape. As the story has been told by several Chilian writers somewhat incorrectly, I will recapitulate the circumstances.

When the firing commenced, I had placed the boy in my after-cabin, locking the door upon him ; but not liking the restriction, he contrived to get through the quarter gallery window, and joined me on deck, refusing to go down again. As I could not attend to him, he was permitted to remain, and, in a miniature midshipman's uniform, which the seamen