

**THE LIBERATOR OF SOUTH AMERICA**  
(1783-1830).

THE minds of students have sometimes been exercised as to who is the greatest Captain of history. Alexander subduing Asia in his short span of thirty-three years, Hannibal victoriously crossing the Alps and threatening Rome, Julius Caesar over-running the then known world, Charlemagne, Saladin, Ghengis-Khan, Tamerlane, Washington, Napoleon, all have their apologists.

*‘ . . . certant; et adhuc sub iudice lis est.’*

The matter remains undetermined.

In military genius, in strategy, in constructive statesmanship Simon Bolivar was inferior to none of these. In patriotism, in disinterestedness, in Christian forbearance towards his enemies, in consideration for all who depended on him he can have but few rivals.

From the moment that in Rome, on Mount Aventine, in 1804, he promised his former tutor and friend, Father Rodriguez, to devote himself whole-heartedly to the interests of his country, he never swerved from this determination. Despite his detractors there is no evidence of ambition or self-seeking in any of his acts; rather do they disprove it. A loyal and faithful son of Holy Church we find him ever pointing out and following the path of honour and of duty. He controlled for years the resources of the former Spanish colonies which hailed him as ‘el Liberador’ and as ‘Father of the country’; which voted him time and again large personal subsidies, always steadfastly declined; and he died without a shilling of public money in his possession. Nay, more, nine-tenths of his own splendid patrimony had been expended on public

## *The Liberator of South America*

needs, though he was still comparatively young, forty-seven, and well aware of the sectaries plotting against him. On his death-bed he gathered strength to burn the papers he held revealing the machinations of his opponents lest when he was no more they might occasion a fratricidal struggle. When a young man entering into his possessions he gave in a single day freedom to over a thousand of his slaves. On the eve of the decisive engagement at Boyaca in 1819 he was so affected by the hardships and sufferings of his troops during their passage through the frightful ravines and precipices of the Cordilleras that he was ready to sacrifice the fruits of his previous successes if thereby he could mitigate their fatigues. He afterwards attributed the subsequent victory to the inspiriting exhortations to the soldiers of the Dominican friar, Fr. Ignacio Mariño, who accompanied him as chaplain.

Military strategists are even to-day lost in amazement at the records of the two hundred engagements which he fought, and his numerous adventures through the perilous and impassable ridges of the Andes. His large-hearted sympathy and prudent vision gave him an almost preternatural insight into the needs and interests of the peoples whom he directed, and the mass of correspondence and documentation he has left behind are a mine of wealth for the student who would wish to penetrate into the history of that time and region.

Had he lived to consolidate what he had so valiantly begun the story of the subsequent revolutions and upheavals in the north-western states of South America might never have been told, but now, one hundred years after his death, the value of his achievement can be perceived, and to estimate this value rightly it may be well to take a brief glance at his career.

Simon Bolivar was born at Caracas, now the capital of Venezuela, of wealthy Spanish parents, on July

## *Blackfriars*

24th, 1783. He lost his father in infancy and his mother when he was fifteen. His uncle and guardian sent him to Madrid to study for the law; he was in Paris at the fall of the Directory, November 9th, 1799, and completed his course in Madrid in 1801, where he married an accomplished Spanish lady, daughter of the Marquess del Toro, and with her set off homeward, intending to devote himself henceforward to the care of his vast estates. Some ten months, however, after their landing at Caracas his wife succumbed to the plague, leaving him utterly disconsolate; he cherished her memory to the end.

Seeking to distract his mind, he returned to Europe, visiting various countries on the way, and it was then he took the resolution to dedicate himself wholly to the service of his country, as has been previously related. For that end he applied himself to study in Madrid, the fruit of which can be seen in the laws and constitutions replete with wisdom and understanding that he gave to the states he liberated. On the journey he had assisted in Paris at the coronation of Napoleon in Notre Dame, December 2nd, 1804. The disorders in Spain following the dispossession of the rightful sovereign and the substitution of Napoleon's brother, Joseph, had influenced the Spanish American colonies, unwilling to accept the usurper, to agitate for independence, and Bolivar decided to return to his country. Taking the United States on his way he landed at Caracas in 1809, where the Governor, who had hitherto been wavering, was now resolved to accept the French control. Bolivar joined the opposing party, who soon recognised in him a born leader of men, no small part of the success of the *pronunciamiento* of April 1810 in Caracas being due to him. The new Government despatched him to England to secure the neutrality of that power. The British Cabinet, though no way averse to thwarting Napoleon, refused help, but

## *The Liberator of South America*

gave a formal promise of non-intervention, with which Bolivar returned home and commenced that valiant struggle he maintained for sixteen years with varying fortunes until the whole of the Spanish-speaking countries of South America had been freed. Bolivia, which had been named in his honour, and to which he had given a Constitution, declared him its 'perpetual protector' in 1826 and offered him at La Paz a crown of golden laurels, which he immediately placed on the head of his lieutenant, General Sucre, declaring that to this soldier the honour was rightfully due.

In the meantime the sectaries, impatient of his control, had engineered disturbances in the northern countries, to which, therefore, he retraced his steps. Proceeding to Bogota, the capital of Colombia, he re-established order, granted a general amnesty, and convoked a National Convention at Ocaña in March, 1828. Very reluctantly he accepted the supreme power on August 27th of that year and held it, at least in practice, till his death on December 17th, 1830, at Santa Marta, Colombia, the eleventh anniversary of the day he had given to Colombia its freedom. His last years were saddened by the jealousy and machinations of the sectaries. A plot to assassinate him failed; the ringleaders were condemned to death by the legal tribunals. He intervened, and commuted the sentence to one of banishment.

He had no illusions, as a sentence from his last message to the peoples he had liberated plainly shows: '*Me ruborizo al decirlo, la independencia es el único bien que hemos adquirido a costa de todos los bienes. Estos pueblos caerán infaliblemente en manos de la multitud desenfrenada*: I confess it with shame; independence is the only good we have achieved, and that at the cost of everything else; these countries will inevitably fall into the hands of an undisciplined faction.' But he builded better than he knew. He welded

## *Blackfriars*

together the Spanish colonisation and what it stood for, *viz.*, the preservation of the Catholic faith and the drawing into the fold of the native races, not their annihilation. It is his glory.

Bolivia, faithful to his tradition, has always protected the religious orders. At the recent sacerdotal jubilee of our Holy Father, its President cabled from Sucre: 'As the Catholic head of a Catholic nation I associate myself with your solemn celebration.'

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