

The Venezuelan Sesquicentennial Publications, Part III

JANE DE GRUMMOND*

- El Cabildo metropolitano de Caracas y la Guerra de Emancipación.* Edited and collected by MONS. NICOLÁS EUGENIO NAVARRO. Caracas, 1960. Biblioteca de la Academia Nacional de la Historia. Sesquicentenario de la Independencia. Vol. 34. Documents. Notes. Indices. Appendices. Pp. 475. Paper
- Epistolario de la primera república I.* Edited by JOHN BOULTON FOUNDATION. Caracas 1960. Vol. 35. Documents. Notes. Indices. Pp. 257. Paper
- Epistolario de la primera república II.* Caracas, 1960. Vol. 36. Documents. Notes. Indices. Pp. 445. Paper.
- Testimonios de la época emancipadora.* Edited by ARTURO USLAR PIETRI. Caracas, 1960. Vol. 37. Documents. Notes. Indices. Pp. 529. Paper
- José Domingo Díaz—Recuerdos sobre la rebelión de Caracas.* Edited by ÁNGEL FRANCISCO BRICE. Caracas, 1960. Vol. 38. Notes. Indices. Pp. 600. Paper.
- La independencia de Venezuela ante las cancillerías europeas.* By FLORALIGIA GIMÉNEZ SILVA. Caracas, 1960. Vol. 39. Notes. Bibliography. Indices. Pp. 403. Paper.
- El pensamiento constitucional hispanoamericano hasta 1830 I.* Caracas, 1961. Vol. 40. Documents. Notes. Pp. 431. Paper.
- El pensamiento constitucional hispanoamericano hasta 1830 II.* Caracas, 1961. Vol. 41. Documents. Notes. Pp. 594. Paper.
- El pensamiento constitucional hispanoamericano hasta 1830 III.* Caracas, 1961. Vol. 42. Documents. Notes. Pp. 484. Paper.
- El pensamiento constitucional hispanoamericano hasta 1830 IV.* Caracas, 1961. Vol. 43. Documents. Notes. Pp. 388. Paper.
- El pensamiento constitucional hispanoamericano hasta 1830 V.* Caracas, 1961. Vol. 44. Documents. Notes. Appendices. Indices. Pp. 395. Paper.
- El movimiento emancipador de Hispanoamérica. Vols. I-IV.* Edited by MESA REDONDA DE LA COMISIÓN DE HISTORIA DEL INSTITUTO

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PANAMERICANO DE GEOGRAFÍA E HISTORIA. Caracas, 1961. Academia Nacional de la Historia. Sesquicentenario de la Independencia. Notes. Bibliography. Pp 371, 460, 523, 502. Paper.

Francisco de Miranda y el antiguo régimen español. Vol. V. By LÁUTICO GARCÍA, S. J. Caracas, 1961. Academia Nacional de la Historia. Mesa Redonda de la Comisión de Historia del Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia. Sesquicentenario de la Independencia. Notes. Appendices. Bibliography. Indices. Pp. 525. Paper.

One afternoon in August, 1947, Rudolf Dolge presented the writer of this review article to Monseñor Nicolás Navarro. She listened for an hour while the two old scholars argued about Venezuela's past. So, when she opened volume 34 of the *Sesquicentenario de la Independencia* series, she was disappointed not to find any *estudio preliminar* which might have eulogized Monseñor Navarro, and explained why and how he determined which extracts from the Records of the Cabildo Metropolitano should be published. What is the nature of the unpublished parts? Can one get, from the excerpts selected, a fair estimate of the role of the Cathedral Chapter during the times when patriots or royalists were in control in Caracas?

Very few of the leading patriots in Spanish America kept diaries during the struggle for independence. Years later some of them wrote *recuerdos* or *memorias* but these lack the freshness, spontaneity, and veracity found in the writings of a participant who records the hopes and fears, successes and failures of each day or week as history unfolds.

Fortunately there are collections of letters in the archives of Venezuela which take the place of diaries. From these the *Comisión Editora de la Academia Nacional de la Historia* selected enough for the two volumes of *Epistolario de la primera república* (volumes 35 and 36). The *Comisión* chose letters in which actors or witnesses reported events of the first phase of the revolution, or letters of founders of the First Republic written after 1812 which give a clear exposition of their thinking with regard to Venezuelan policy. The source of each letter is indicated and whether or not it had previously been published. Those published for the first time in this series are from four sources: (1) *Archivo de la Academia de la Historia*, (2) *Archivo del Libertador*, (3) *Archivo General de la Nación*, and (4) *Sección Venezolana del Archivo de la Gran Colombia*, organized by *Fundación John Boulton*. None of Bolívar's letters are included in this

Epistolario since the *Comisión Editora* has other plans for those of the Liberator.

The authors of some of the letters are well known, others are not. Along with the names of Francisco de Miranda, Juan Germán Roscio, Cristóbal de Mendoza, José Cortés Madariaga, Francisco Espejo, Francisco Isnardi, Antonio Muñoz Tébar, Francisco Policarpo Ortiz, José Antonio Anzoátegui, Manuel Palacio Fajardo, Miguel Peña, José Rafael Revenga, Pedro Gual, José Félix Ribas, Martín Tovar Ponte, Francisco Rodríguez del Toro, Andrés Bello, Miguel José Sanz, Francisco Javier de Ustáriz and others, one finds the names of José María Casañas, Francisco Febles, Juan Luis Camón, Luis Latouche, Juan Evangelista González, Guillermo Palacios, John Semple and Francisco Yepes.

A brief glance at a few of the letters will give some idea of the value of this *Epistolario*. During 1811 and 1812 Juan Germán Roscio in Caracas wrote letters to Domingo González, Intendent of Barinas. These letters give us details about Miranda's expedition against Valencia, conspiracies of discontented royalists, the "effervescence" of pardos, and the economy, politics and diplomatic relations of Venezuela. Dr. Manuel Pérez Vila, in the *Estudio Preliminar*, points out a significant aspect of this correspondence. The Intendent of Barinas, after reading the letters of Roscio, sent them to Miguel de Pomba in Bogotá; and the letters de Pomba wrote the Intendent were forwarded to Roscio. This triangular correspondence places in strong relief the ideological and spiritual ties which united the men of the 19th of April with those of the 20 of July.

The one letter of Francisco Espejo speaks volumes. Written from Victoria on May 12, 1812, it tells General Miranda that Espejo and his companion have not sent a mission to London but they have sent one to the Antilles to get men and arms. They had more faith in privateers bringing them help from St. Barts, Haiti, and Louisiana than in diplomats securing recognition and support from Great Britain.

Volume 39, *La independencia de Venezuela ante las cancillerías europeas*, is a study of such diplomatic negotiations. The author, Floraligia Giménez Silva, began to work on this thesis in the *Biblioteca Nacional de Caracas*. Then she went to Spain and continued her research in the archives of Seville and Madrid. She did not neglect the chancelleries of Russia, Austria, Prussia, and the Holy See; but her main theme is the impact of England and France on Spain and Venezuela.

For this reason the figure of Napoleon is of great interest. Eng-

land and Spain were defending their liberty against his imperialism. Americans were quick to see that those powers had no monopoly on liberty; that if they were defending their inalienable right against Napoleonic domination, then it was the inalienable right of Americans to throw off the yoke of Spain.

For more than 600 years England had considered Castile her enemy and the possessions of Castile hers to exploit. The intentions of England were shown in a particular way after the failure of General John Whitelocke to retake Buenos Aires. The court-martial verdict against him states: "With this disgraceful event has disappeared all hope of opening new markets for our produce. . . ."

At this moment Napoleon placed his brother Joseph on the throne of Spain. England suddenly discovered that Spain was her "natural ally" and proceeded to use her to help break the power of England's mortal foe. So when Simón Bolívar, Luis López Méndez, and Andrés Bello arrived in London in the late summer of 1810, the British Foreign Secretary told them of the dangers to which Spain and England were exposed by the separation of a colony from Spain. He urged that Venezuela remain loyal to her Mother Country. Dr. Giménez Silva points out that England maintained her characteristic attitude of extending the hand half way to both Venezuela and Spain in the hope of finding her best advantage. Then England let the colony and the mother country weaken each other. By not helping Venezuela (her alibi being that she was acting as mediator—and this went on for more than five years) and by preventing war material reaching Venezuelan patriots, England played a major role in the collapse of the first two Venezuelan Republics.

After showing that at the end of 1812 and the beginning of 1813 Castlereagh was trying to convince Spain that Britain was sincerely helping her preserve her empire. Dr. Giménez Silva asserts: ". . . by February of 1813 English aid to the insurgents, *which existed since the beginning of the revolution*, was discussed in the Ministries for already there were a great many Englishmen definitely employed in the service of the insurgents."

This reviewer would like Dr. Giménez Silva to name half a dozen Englishmen, or three, or even one Englishman who helped Bolívar at this time. There were English observers in all the ports on the Main and in the capitals. English merchants were petitioning the British Government to change its policy so they could profit from sales to patriots, but what single Englishman was with Bolívar? Where was he at the end of 1812 and the beginning of 1813?

Bolívar obtained a passport from Monteverde toward the end of

August, 1812, and left for the English-held island of Curaçao forty miles from the Venezuelan coast. He arrived there on September 2 and wrote to a friend in Caracas saying: "My reception was miserable for no sooner had I arrived than my baggage was confiscated for two very strange reasons: first, because they were in the same house as those of Miranda; and second, because the *Celoso* had contracted debts in Puerto Cabello which I must now pay because I was commandant at Puerto Cabello when the debts were contracted."¹

The six weeks Bolívar remained at Curaçao were weeks of humiliation for he had no money and lived on the charity of others. At the end of October he left for Cartagena. Soon he was commissioned to clear royalists from the lower Magdalena. By the middle of January when he entered Ocaña he had opened the Magdalena to patriot navigation. He had opened the road to Cúcuta as well—and beyond that lay the natural entry route to Venezuela.

On February 9, 1813, Bolívar left Ocaña with 400 men and began the march to Cúcuta. From Ocaña the road snakes for thirty-five miles through great cracks cut to profound depths in the mud-cake plain. Those cracks are the only paths. They were sculpt in remote times when mountain torrents opened them. They are almost too narrow to walk through and at times are subterranean. As the sun never penetrates to the bottom of these high-walled streets, the ground is always wet and slippery which makes passage not only disagreeable but dangerous. On emerging from the caverns the path, far from getting better, follows the scarp edge of the mountains where a false step would precipitate the traveller to sure death in torrents raging beneath him. Constant rains and tempests make these uninhabited places "terribly sublime." The traveller has to carry with him his food for many days.

What Englishman accompanied Bolívar or sent guns and ammunition through those thirty-five miles of slits in the mud?

By simple strategy Bolívar took the fortified height of La Aguada which he was not strong enough to storm. When a day's march from La Aguada, he sent one of his men to the top of a mountain overlooking the fort, which was on a hill. The patriot threw a note to the fort below. It was addressed to one of Manuel del Castillo's officers and assumed that the men in the fort were Castillo's. The note said Bolívar was near, he would attack the town of La Aguada in the front at four in the morning, and that Castillo was to attack from the rear.

¹ Vicente Lecuna (ed.) *Cartas del Libertador*, 11 vols. (Caracas, 1929-48), I, 27-28.

Surprised and frightened, the royalists fled to Salazar de las Palmas. Bolívar pursued, routed them, occupied Salazar, and thus began his "admirable campaign." When the people heard of his approach they deserted their Spanish officers. These fled leaving guns and ammunition behind. So Bolívar's invasion of Venezuela was a triumphal march to Caracas.

As soon as Bolívar entered Caracas he sent a messenger under a flag of truce to Monteverde and offered to give up all his Spanish prisoners in exchange for patriot prisoners at Puerto Cabello. Monteverde refused the offer. He knew troops, supplies, and warships were coming from Spain.

At this point there was an uprising of blacks in the valleys of the Tuy; Tomás Boves was threatening Bolívar from the south (from the Guariqueño llanos); and there was great danger that José Yañez from the Apure llanos would unite with Boves. A few Spaniards and Canary Islanders had instigated the black revolt. Bolívar sent Campo Elías to deal with this situation. He crushed the revolt and shot the leaders. Survivors fled to the mountains and isolated themselves.

When news of these patriot "atrocities" reached the English governor at Curaçao he was concerned for the safety of Britain's allies, and wrote the following to Bolívar:

Government House, Curaçao,
September 4, 1813

Sir,

Having been informed that many European Spaniards are now confined in the prisons of La Guira [sic] and Caracas, in consequence of the part they took in the late unfortunate disturbances of Venezuela, and who possibly may suffer death; I have the honour to address you on this subject. Although I am perfectly sure, from the well known humanity of your character, that you will take no measure of that kind, nevertheless, as there may be persons vested with authority, in the above places, who may not be possessed of your generous sentiments, and who may, perhaps, from erroneous principles, recur to acts of cruelty, I esteem it a duty of humanity to intercede in their favour, and request you to grant them passports to leave the province. The brave are always merciful. I am, &c.

J. Hodgson.²

Bolívar answered this letter the day he received it, October 2. He was not snared by Hodgson's assumption that he, Bolívar, was a very fine person but that some of his colleagues might not be so fine. Bolívar wasted no words on Hodgson. He said:

The attention which I ought to pay to a British officer, and to the cause of America, places me under the necessity of manifesting to your Excellency

² William Walton, *An Exposé on the Dissensions of Spanish America* (London, 1814), pp. xxxii-xxxiii.

the unhappy causes of the conduct which, in spite of myself, I observe to the Spaniards who within the last year have wrapt Venezuela in ruins. . . . A capitulation last year delivered up to the Spaniards all the independent territory of Venezuela, but at the same time that Monteverde swore to the people of Venezuela the religious fulfilment of his offered promises, the most barbarous and impious infraction was seen. Towns were sacked, buildings burnt, the fair sex outraged, an entire people imprisoned. . . . How many respectable old men and venerable clergy were bound in stocks and other infamous fetters, confounded with criminals, and exposed to the scorn of a brutal soldiery, as well as the vilest of men? How many expired, bent down under the weight of insupportable chains, deprived of air, or starved with hunger and misery? At the time the Spanish constitution was being published, as a shield to civil liberty, hundreds of victims were dragged away, loaded with chains, to deadly and loathsome vaults, without any cause being assigned for such proceedings, nay, without even the origin or political opinions of the victims being known. *We did not then see any feeling souls intercede for suffering humanity, nor claim the compliance of a compact which interested the whole world.* . . .

Let your Excellency place yourself for a moment in our situation, and then ask, what kind of conduct ought to be observed toward our oppressors? . . . Placed by my strongest sentiments under the necessity of being clement with many Spaniards, I have left them amongst us at full liberty, yet their heads were scarcely free from the avenging knife before they stirred up the unfortunate people. The atrocities recently committed by them equal the most horrid of all. In the valleys of Tuy and Tacata, and in the towns of the West where one would have thought that civil war could never have carried its desolating ravages, these wretches have already raised monuments of their savage cruelty. Women, young children, the aged have been found skinned with their eyes and entrails torn out. . . .

In vain would you solicit in favour of those who are now detained in our prisons, passports for your island or for any other point out of Venezuela. To the great injury of the public peace we have already experienced the fatal consequences of this measure; for we can assert that almost all who have obtained passports, notwithstanding the oaths by which they were bound, have disembarked on the points in possession of the enemy, in order again to enlist themselves in the parties of assassins which disturb these defenceless towns. In their very prisons they are plotting. . . .³

Hodgson's conduct, hostile to the patriots, was approved in London. At the same time Britain assured Spain of continued military and financial help, and hoped that in exchange she would open her American ports to merchant ships of His Majesty.

Volume 38 is a reprint of *Recuerdos sobre le rebelión de Caracas* in which the author displays his loyalty to monarchy and his bias against those who were for independence. This book was first published in Spain in 1829. The author, José Domingo Díaz, was born in Caracas. He was an abandoned infant whom two priests reared.

³ *Ibid.*, xxxiii-xl.

He graduated in medicine in 1794, practised his profession, and held a number of offices in Caracas until the revolution when tragedy intensified his bitterness against those disloyal to his God and his king. He wrote his *Recuerdos* in Spain after Venezuela had achieved her independence.

The *Academia Nacional de la Historia* wished to include this volume in its *Sesquecentenario* series, edited and annotated, to show wherein the author deviates too far from the truth. Ángel Francisco Brice wrote the *Estudio preliminar* and many of the footnotes. He is unduly concerned about the way Díaz misrepresented the patriot cause. Both sides in a war usually report the results of an action to suit their own propaganda purposes. One scene that Díaz describes more than compensates for all his distortions. It may have happened, or Díaz may have invented it. In either case it shows that royalists were aware of the genius of Bolívar; that they respected and feared it.

Díaz wrote:

It was four in the afternoon. The Caracas sky was extremely clear and bright. An infinite calm made the unbearable heat more intense. Some drops of water fell but I could not see the slightest cloud as I left my house and walked toward the Cathedral. I was about a hundred paces from the Plaza of San Jacinto when the earth began to move with a terrifying roar. I ran to the middle of the plaza. Balconies from the Post Office fell at my feet, the Cathedral fell upon its foundations, and in the midst of dust and death I witnessed the destruction of a city that had enchanted those who lived there and those who came from afar.

The silence of tombs followed that inexplicable din. In that moment I found myself alone. I heard groans coming from the Cathedral ruins and climbed upon them to look within. I saw about forty persons crushed to death or dying. I will never forget that moment. On top of the biggest heap of rubble I saw *don Simón Bolívar* with his sleeves rolled up, searching. Supreme terror and despair were etched on his face. He saw me and shouted these blasphemous words: "If nature is against us, we will defy her and force her to obey us!"

In July, 1817, Bolívar's forces entered Angostura and battled royalists down the Orinoco. Only a few vessels escaped and reached the island of Grenada. Morillo was at Margarita when he learned of the loss of Guayana. He evacuated Margarita and returned to Caracas to defend it against Bolívar.

When Admiral Brion took stock at the end of the Orinoco campaign, he found he had captured 14 war vessels with 73 cannon and lesser guns, 330 muskets, abundant munitions, 160,000 pesos in gold

and silver, and 300,000 pesos in copper. The total value of the effects captured amounted to \$1,000,000.⁴

The patriot navy, increased in size and well supplied, now dominated the river and the sea from the Orinoco to Margarita. Bolívar wrote José Antonio Páez on September 15, saying:

This decisive victory over the enemy navy gives us eternal preponderance, and fixes irrevocably the destiny of Guayana, Barinas and even of New Granada. The Orinoco will always be ours, and nothing can obstruct this channel by which we will receive from the outside and carry to the interior elements to make war as long as the Spaniards continue their efforts to subdue us.⁵

When news of patriot successes reached England, she was suffering from drought, unemployment, decreased wages, strikes, and riots. This situation was aggravated at the end of 1817 when Britain began to withdraw her Napoleonic veterans from France and Flanders. Six thousand officers and men were dismissed from the army by the end of 1817 and 33,000 more by the end of 1818. Similar reductions were made in the Royal Navy. By September 30, 1818, it had only 13 admirals, vice-admirals, and rear-admirals employed out of a total of 183; only 62 captains out of a total of 852; and only 494 lieutenants out of a total of 3,923.⁶

The dismissed officers found it easy to believe that they could achieve brilliant military or naval careers in the service of Venezuela; especially since British merchants and manufacturers were willing to equip foreign expeditions—this was an opportunity to dispose of accumulated stocks at a profit. By the end of 1818 a few hundred English officers and troops had arrived at Angostura and several hundred more came in 1819.

The British Government did not officially approve, nor did it prevent, their leaving England.

El pensamiento constitucional hispanoamericano hasta 1830 (5 volumes, 40-44) is a compilation of all the constitutions produced within the Latin American republics from their independence to 1830, plus the 1812 Constitution of Cádiz. Volume I contains those of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Central America, and Colombia (Bolívar's Colombia); Volume II, those of Colombia (continued), Costa Rica, Cuba, and Chile; Volume III, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti (six con-

⁴ Vicente Lecuna, *Crónica rezonada de las guerras de Bolívar*, 3 vols. (Caracas, 1950), II, 56; *Kingston Royal Gazette*, October 4-11, 1817.

⁵ Daniel Florencio O'Leary, *Memorias del General O'Leary*, 32 vols. (Caracas, 1879-1914), XV, 295.

⁶ Alfred Hasbrouck, *Foreign Legionaries in the Liberation of Spanish South America* (New York, 1928), pp. 36-38.

stitutions from 1801 to 1816), Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Nueva Granada; IV, Nueva Granada (continued), Paraguay, Peru, Santo Domingo, and Uruguay; V, Venezuela and the 1812 Constitution of Cádiz.

The *Comisión Editora* included four types of documents in volume 37: (1) *Testimonios de próceres*, (2) *Documentos y correspondencia de juntas provinciales*, (3) *Periódicos de la primera república*, and (4) *Impresos de la época*. It resolved to give this volume the title *Testimonios de la época emancipadora*. Actually, the whole *Sesquicentenario* series could bear this title. Enough subjects for theses and dissertations to supply a whole generation of graduate students can be found in these 44 volumes.

As part of the *Sesquicentenario* celebration the *Academia Nacional de la Historia* established a Round Table for the *Comisión de Historia del Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia* on the theme "The Hispanic American Emancipation Movement." The *Comisión Organizadora* had a complex and time-consuming task made more difficult by the plethora of possibilities. Dr. Cristóbal L. Mendoza, Director of the *Academia Nacional de la Historia*, served as chairman. The other members of the committee were Dr. Héctor García Chuecos, Dr. Carlos Felice Cardot, Ramón Díaz Sánchez, Alfredo Boulton, Dr. Guillermo Morón (secretary) and Professor Domingo Miliani (assistant secretary).

Formal invitations were sent to historians and specialists not only of Venezuela but of foreign nations as well. Then the committee prepared for the following simultaneous discussion groups:

- I. Historical sources for the emancipation movement, local and general historiography;
- II. National literature in the Americas before emancipation, 18th century emancipation movements (diverse nature of, similarities and differences), the formation of a liberal democratic consciousness and a specific economic-social reality (antecedents of the independence movement);
- III. Ideological, political and military connections of American emancipation;
- IV. Participation of various ethnic groups in the war for independence and the role of emancipation as an integration force, participation of various social and economic groups in the war of independence and repercussions, social and economic realizations;
- V. Possibilities of a general synthesis of American emancipation movements.

The Round Table was held in Caracas during the first ten days of July, 1960. Historians from Spain, Sweden, England, the United States, and all the Latin American nations except Nicaragua, Panama, Brazil, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic presented a total of 57 papers. The five divisions of the Round Table held their sessions in the *Palacio de las Academias*. Plenary sessions were held in the auditorium of that building.

The program was as follows: Friday, July 1—reception of delegates and guests; Saturday, July 2—preparatory session, solemn installation of the Round Table, *criollo* luncheon at the *Restaurant Venezuela*; Sunday July 3—floral offering at the *Panteón Nacional*, visit to historical places followed by a “*copa de champagne*” in the new meeting place of the *Sociedad Bolivariano*; Monday through Thursday, July 4 through July 7—simultaneous meetings of the five divisions; Friday, July 8—plenary sessions; Saturday, July 9—closing sessions ending with a cocktail party given by the *Academia Nacional de la Historia* at the *Hotel Tamanaco*; Sunday, July 10—visit to *Ciudad Universitaria* and to the *Escuela Militar de Venezuela*; Monday, July 11—farewells to delegates and guests.

The records of the Round Table, including papers that were read, fill the four volumes which bear the title *El movimiento emancipador de Hispanoamérica, actas y ponencias*. A fifth volume was added to this Round Table series, *Francisco de Miranda y el antiguo régimen español* by Láutico García, S. J.

The main purpose of this doctoral dissertation, which embraces only the years 1750 to 1790, is to analyze Miranda's position within the compass of four cardinal points: *Patria, Ley, Cultura, and Religión*. The author begins by saying that it is difficult to understand this human eminence that was Miranda. Then he examines the *criollo* who grew to manhood when Caracas was a convent. At the age of twenty the *criollo* abandoned his home and native city and went to Europe where, during the next twenty years, he became *El Ilustrado*.

Dr. Láutico García concludes that Miranda did not profess Roman Catholicism all his life, and that his philosophic deism was not strongly colored by anti-Protestant Catholicism but by anti-Roman Catholic Christianity. The last paragraph is:

“Pero Mirando no fue ateo.”