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# SIMÓN BOLÍVAR: EL LIBERTADOR

- 1783 Born
- 1799 Traveled in Europe
- 1810 Joined the revolution in Venezuela
- 1813 Assumed the political dictatorship of Venezuela
- 1819 Victory at battle of Boyacá
- 1822 Victory at battle of Pichincha
- 1824 Victory at battle of Ayacucho
- 1826 Convened a general American congress in Panama
- 1826 Failed attempt on his life
- 1830 Died

By the early nineteenth century most of Latin America had been under Spanish rule for almost 300 years. And it was, from the beginning, a colonial rule of the most repressive sort. In the words of Bolívar himself,

We have been harassed by a conduct which has not only deprived us of our rights but has kept us in a sort of permanent infancy with regard to public affairs. . . . So negative was our existence that I can find nothing comparable in any other civilized society.<sup>1</sup>

But even in this unlikely environment the stirrings of revolutionary reaction had begun. Napoleon's invasion of Spain had upset Spanish authority in the New World. In the spring of 1810 a junta rose against the Spanish governor of Venezuela and expelled him. A year later Venezuela declared its independence.

Simón Bolívar had already joined the revolution. He was the son of a wealthy, aristocratic Spanish-Creole family in Venezuela who had been educated in Spain. Bolívar had traveled widely in Spain and in France, where he became acquainted with the liberal political and

<sup>1</sup>From "The Jamaican Letter," as excerpted in *The Liberator, Simón Bolívar, Man and Image*, ed. David Bushnell (New York: Knopf, 1970), p. 13.



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social works of Enlightenment writers. When he returned to Venezuela he entered the army of the new republic and soon emerged as the champion of strong government for the new republics of Hispanic America. Throughout the next year Bolívar defeated the Spaniards in six pitched battles and regained control of the capital. He entered Caracas on August 6, 1813, was given the title of *El Libertador*, and assumed the office of dictator.

In the following year he was defeated by the Spanish, who recaptured Caracas. Bolívar fled to Jamaica. In his exile there he wrote his most important political statement, "The Letter from Jamaica," in which he laid out his scheme for the reconstitution of Latin America. Bolívar proposed a series of constitutional republics, each with an hereditary upper house, an elected lower house, and a president elected for life.

In the meantime, in 1815, Spain had sent a massive expeditionary force to deal with its rebellious colonies, and Bolívar had returned to Venezuela to lead the opposition. He repeatedly defeated Spanish armies and began the organization of civil governments in Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Peru. By 1825 Bolívar had reached the apex of his career. His authority extended from the Caribbean to the Argentine border. He had achieved a series of treaties of alliance among Colombia, Peru, Mexico, Central America, and the United Provinces of Río de la Plata.

But the nascent nationalism of the new republics rebelled against Bolívar's centralist ideas and, civil war broke out again. Bolívar was able to quell the rebellion but not the desire for independence. He assumed dictatorial powers in 1828. This led to an abortive attempt on his life and the resumption of civil war. Bolívar realized that his continued stay in office presented a danger to the very states whose independence he had created. On May 8, 1830, he left Bogotá, planning to depart for Europe. Illness forced him to abandon his plans and, toward the end of 1830, the liberator of South America died in the house of a Spanish admiral in Santa Maria. In his final illness, he said in despair that with all his accomplishments he had only "plowed the sea."

## Memoirs of Simón Bolívar

### GENERAL H. L. V. DUCOUDRAY HOLSTEIN

These memoirs were not actually written by Bolívar. It is true that Bolívar was a prolific writer; a lifetime of high public office and military command left a large residue of official papers and correspondence. Some bits of autobiographical matter have been preserved, but, on the whole, Bolívar was much too busy—and too modest—to undertake his memoirs. Rather, this document was written by General H. L. V. Ducoudray Holstein, a friend, colleague, and associate and one of the many foreign officers attracted to Bolívar's cause. He had served as Bolívar's chief of staff and, as the general observed in his preface, "he lived in such intimacy" with Bolívar, "that he slept on various occasions in the same room with him" (p. 7). Thus, the accounts he gives are accurate in their particulars. The narrative excerpted here runs to his first liberation of Caracas in 1813.

Simon Bolívar was born in the city of Caracas, July 24th, 1783, and is the second son of Don Juan Vicente Bolívar y Ponte, a militia colonel in the plains of Aragua; his mother, Dona Maria Concepcion Palacios y Sojo; and both were natives of Caracas, and were Mantuanos.<sup>2</sup> They died; the first in 1786, the latter in 1789.

Young Bolívar was sent to Spain at the age of 14, in compliance with the customs of the wealthy Americans of those times, who usually spent in one year in Europe, the amount of several years income at home; seeking offices and military decorations, that were often put up to the highest bidder, under the administration of Manuel Godoy, Prince of the Peace. The young Americans were likewise accustomed to go to Spain, to complete their education, and to pursue their studies in the profession of law, physic, or theology; for, according to the laws of the times, no American was

<sup>2</sup>Los Mantuanos, or los familias Mantuanas, were, in Caracas, a kind of nobility, and this is the distinctive title there of rich families of birth. In New Greneda, the opulent families of high birth, were never called Mantuanas; this distinction existed alone in Caracas.—Ed.

admitted to the bar, and allowed to practise in his profession in the Universities of old Spain, nor could he exercise his profession at home. Without a diploma from a University in Spain, no American could, at least in New Grenada, have the honor of being a Capuchin Friar! But as the object of young Simon was, to see the world, and not in any manner to study seriously, he paid little attention to any pursuit, other than that of pleasure, and of satisfying his desire to witness the different scenes of life. He, however, devoted some time to the study of Jurisprudence.

He was at this period lieutenant in the corps of militia in the plains of Aragua, of which his father had been commander. He had an elder brother, who died in 1815, and two sisters, who enjoyed an annual income of from 40 to 50,000 dollars, the produce of several considerable estates, and particularly of an extensive *Hato*, on which were raised large herds of cattle. These estates were at no great distance from the city of Caracas; and at one or other of them, Bolivar and his family usually resided. San Mateo, was, however, the place he always preferred. It was the largest of his possessions, where between 1000 and 1500 slaves were regularly kept, before the revolution. His residence in the valley of Aragua, not far from the lake of Valencia, was beautiful and striking.

From Spain Bolivar passed into France, and resided at Paris, where he remained a number of years, enjoying at an early period, all the pleasures of life, which, by a rich young man, with bad examples constantly before him, can, there, easily be found. I have remarked that whenever Bolivar spoke to me of the Palais Royal, he could not restrain himself from boasting of its delights. It was on such occasions, that all his soul was electrified; his physiognomy became animated, and he spoke and acted with such ardor as showed how fond he was of that enchanting abode, so dangerous to youth.

His residence in Paris, and especially at the Palais Royal, has done him great injury. He is pale, and of a yellowish colour, meagre, weak and enervated.<sup>5</sup>

Bolivar returned in 1802 to Madrid, where he married one of the daughters of Don Bernardo del Toro, uncle of the present Marquis of this name. His father in law, who was born in Caracas, resided in Madrid. Bolivar was but 19 years of age, and his lady 16. They returned in 1809, to Caracas, and lived in a retired manner on their estates. Shortly after, his lady was taken ill and died, without leaving any offspring.

<sup>5</sup>He was actually suffering from tuberculosis, from which he finally died.—Ed.

Bolivar acquired, in the course of his travels, that usage of the world, that courtesy and ease of manners, for which he is so remarkable, and which have so prepossessing an influence upon those who associate with him.

In the year 1823, Mr. Ackerman published in London, a very interesting monthly periodical in the Spanish language, under the title of "El Mensajero." It is entirely devoted to the affairs of the new Spanish republics. It contains, among other articles, *Biographical Sketch of Gen. Bolívar*, in which the author asserts that the young Bolivar, during his residence in Paris, gave himself up to all the possible amusements of young men of his age: "Still," said the author, "he was assiduous to obtain the dear object he has had always in view, as the accomplishment of all his wishes, and his ambition, namely, *that of making with eagerness, all possible acquaintances which might have been useful to him for the emancipation of his country!*"

I must beg leave to assert, that shortly before the revolution of the 19th April, 1810, at Caracas, the names of Gen. Miranda, Don Manuel Gual, the Corregidor T. M. Espana, Narino, Fea, and others, appeared on the list of those who declared their intention to liberate their country from the Spanish yoke. On the memorable day of the 19th April, when the Capt. Gen. Emparan was deposed, and his functions performed by a patriotic Junta, the chiefs of this revolution were the Alcade [Mayor] Don Martin Tobar, Don Francisco Salias, Carlos Manchado, Mariano Montilla, Joseph Felix Ribas, and others; but the name of Simon Bolivar is not among them; he was at his ease, on one of his estates, in the valley of Aragua, and refused to take any part in it, although his cousin, Joseph Felix Ribas, labored to engage him as an active associate. Shortly after, the Junta gave him his option of a civil or military post, under the new patriotic government. Their offer was refused, and the pressing solicitations of his friends and relations were of no avail. Finally, he accepted the appointment of a commission to London, with the grade of Colonel in the militia. M. Luis Mendez y Lope, who, during several years, was the agent of Venezuela at London, was at this time, his colleague in the mission.

If Bolivar, as stated in Mr. Ackerman's Magazine, had from his youth formed the idea of liberating his country, he would have seized this opportunity of joining the chiefs of the revolution, and would have accepted a post under the government of the Junta, and the Congress: He did neither, although the members of these two bodies in 1810 and 11, offered him any post that might suit his views. On his return from London, he retired to his estate, without taking any part in public affairs.

Mr. Ackerman's Magazine says, secondly, that Bolivar, *from the time*

of the earthquake,<sup>4</sup> came to join Miranda, who had then his head quarters at Vittoria, and that he was a colonel in the army. This is a mistake. Bolívar was named *eight months before* the earthquake, governor of the fortress of Porto Cabello; but he came not to join Miranda at Vittoria. After his secret departure from that fortress, and his leaving his garrison in the night, he dared not appear before Miranda; because he justly feared that he should be tried before a Court Martial, for having secretly in the night, together with some of his officers, and without leave or orders, left the strongest place in Venezuela, which Miranda had confided to his care. He sent Thomas Montilla, one of the officers who embarked with him, to Vittoria, with the news of this event, and with his excuses to Gen. Miranda; the particulars of which I mean to give in their proper place. Bolívar was then Lieutenant Colonel in Miranda's staff. . . .

All that can be said, with truth and impartiality, of Gen. Bolívar's patriotism, is, that it began with his being at the head of the army and the government; or, to speak more plainly; Gen. Bolívar began from 1813, to be a zealous and ardent patriot, because from January 7 that year, until the present day (July 1828) he has not ceased to have, either, the three powers, legislative, executive and judiciary, united in himself, or to have, together with the executive power, the direction of all civil and military operations: the congress of Colombia and Peru, having been entirely submissive to the wishes of its President, Liberator or Protector, as will be shown more particularly in the course of this Biography.

When the patriotic Junta assembled at Caracas, its members, among whom Bolívar had various friends, were anxious to see him taking an active part in their government; and proposals were made to him to choose a civil or a military office, with the assurance that his choice should be complied with, but in vain. He declined every office, under the pretext of the state of his health. At last the Junta proposed to him a mission to London, with the rank of colonel in the militia, and in company, with his friend Louis Lopez y Mendez. This offer he accepted; and they both departed for London in June, 1810.

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Bolívar had returned from England and at last assumed an active role in the revolution, taking up a military command.

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General Bolívar entered the western provinces of Venezuela. He was joined by many thousands of his countrymen, who driven to despair

<sup>4</sup>This earthquake, which occurred in 1812, devastated the city of Caracas.—Ed.

by the cruelties of the Spaniards, had no choice but to fight, or perish. He divided his forces into two strong corps, gave the command of one to his major general Ribas, and put himself at the head of the other. Both proceeded by forced marches, through different roads to Caracas, crossing the department of Truxillo and the province of Barinas. The Spaniards were beaten easily at Niquitao, Betioque, Barquisimeto and Barinas. At the last place, governor Tiscar, like general Cagigal, thought all was lost, and deserted his troops. He fled to St. Tomas de la Angostura, in the province of Guayana, where, like the other, he found himself in safety.

As soon as general Monteverde was apprised of the rapid progress of the patriots, he rallied his best troops at Lostaguanes, where general Ribas attacked him soon afterwards. The attack had but just commenced, when the greatest part of his cavalry, composed of natives, passed over to the patriots and soon decided the victory in their favor. Monteverde lost some hundreds of his men, and was obliged to shut himself up with the remainder, in the fortress of Porto Cabello. General Bolívar advanced rapidly upon Caracas, and found very little or no resistance on the part of the enemy, who had concentrated his forces against the column of general Ribas. As soon as governor Fierro heard of the approach of general Bolívar, he hastily assembled a great council of war, in which it was concluded to send deputies to Bolívar, proposing a capitulation. This was made and signed at Vittoria, about a year after the famous capitulation between general Miranda and Monteverde. By this treaty Bolívar promised that no one should be persecuted for his political opinions, and that every one should be at liberty to retire with his property from Venezuela, and go whithersoever he pleased.

While the deputies were assembled at Vittoria, governor Fierro, seized, like Cagigal and Tiscar, by panic and terror, decamped in the night time, secretly, and so hastily that he left, as was afterwards ascertained, a very large amount of silver money. He left also more than 1500 Spaniards, at the discretion of the enemy. He embarked at Laguirea, and arrived in safety at the little island of Curacao. The flight of their governor, of which the inhabitants and the garrison were not informed, until day break the next morning, left the city in the greatest trouble, for he left not a single order. The Spanish party being dissolved, every one was left to provide for his own safety. Its principal chiefs, Monteverde, Cagigal, Fierro and Tiscar, acting in conformity, each to his own will, had all placed themselves in safety indeed, but without the least union or vigor: Monteverde remained in Porto Cabello without sending forth any order; Cagigal remained with Tiscar, at Angostura; and Fierro in the island of Curacao.

It was therefore an easy task for Bolívar to enter the capital of his

native land, and to take possession of the greatest part of Venezuela. His entry into Caracas, (August 4th, 1813,) was brilliant and glorious. The friends of liberty, who had suffered so severely, surrounded him from every corner of the country, and welcomed his arrival with many signs of joy and festivity. The enthusiasm was universal, reaching every class and sex of the inhabitants of Caracas. The fair sex came to crown their liberator. They spread the ground with many flowers, branches of laurel and olive, on his passage through the streets of the capital. The shouts of thousands were mingled with the noise of artillery, bells, and music, and the crowd was immense. The prisons were opened, and the unfortunate victims of liberty came forth with pale and emaciated faces, like spectres from their graves. But notwithstanding this appalling sight, the people indulged not their sentiments and feelings of vengeance against the authors of such cruel deeds. They committed no disorder. No European Spaniard, Isleno, friar or priest, was dragged from his hiding place, nor even sought for; all were happy, and thought only of rejoicing.

The entry of Gen. Bolívar into Caracas, was certainly the most gratifying event of his whole military career. And notwithstanding his enterprise and his victories were greatly facilitated by the astonishing pusillanimity of his enemies, he deserves great praise for his perseverance, and for the conception of such an undertaking, in which he sacrificed a considerable part of his fortune, to furnish his troops with the means of following him.

## A Patriotic Appraisal

FELIPE LARRAZÁBAL

Felipe Larrazábal was a distinguished nineteenth-century Venezuelan writer and an enormous admirer of Bolívar. His *Life of Bolívar*, from which the following excerpt is taken, appeared in 1865. It was the first documented, full-scale biographical study of Bolívar. It went through numerous editions and for many years it was the standard work. Though it was not an altogether bad work of scholarship, it was marred by the themes of ultra-patriotism, heroic virtue, and providentialism that became standard features of the Latin American Bolívarian literature and remain so even today.

In those times of obscurantism and oppression, God took from the treasures of his goodness a soul that He endowed with intelligence, justice, strength, and gentleness. "Go," He said, "carry light to the mansion of night; to make just and happy those who ignore justice and do not know liberty."

That soul was Bolívar's; this is the charge that Providence entrusted to him.

A noble and lofty spirit, humane, just, liberal, Bolívar in the virtues and talents of his person was one of the most gifted men the world has known; so perfect and unique, that in his goodness he was like Titus, in his good luck and successes Trajan, in his civility Marcus Aurelius, in his valor Caesar, in his wisdom and eloquence Augustus. Of great and very notable memory, unaffected and sociable with his friends, cultured and moderate in his pleasures, he knew how to join the gracefulness of the pen with the bravery of the sword. In danger he showed himself courageous, in toils strong, in adversity constant, in resolution ardent and of insurmountable integrity. Like Charlemagne, and better than Charlemagne, he had the skill to do great things with ease and difficult things quickly. Who ever conceived such vast plans? Who carried them out more smoothly? A sure and lively glance, a rapid intuition of things and of the moment, a prodigious spontaneity for improvising gigantic plans, the science of war reduced to a calculation of minutes, immense vigor of conception, and a fertile, creative, inexhaustible spirit . . . behold Bolívar. Victory in him was always inspiration. Skilled in war, unequalled in counsel, he was neither made proud by triumphs, nor broken by reverses, nor tempted by covetousness (the mortal poison of reason and truth), nor overcome by fatigue, nor stirred up by ambition. Light and perpetual honor of South America, and principally of Caracas his native land, the name of Bolívar will persist as long as the world endures!

If a large part of fortune is for a man to come in his epoch (for eminent individuals often depend on the times), we must confess that Bolívar came in the proper day. From the time he appeared on the grandiose scene of the South American revolution, he excited expectation and symbolized determination. Prompt in thinking as in doing, he combined, as if once again in Caesar, the favors of nature and the splendors of art.

A great excellence, of an intense singularity, that excites the admiration and moves and captivates the will . . .

If there has been a man in whom the passion to command would be excusable; if there was one in whose breast ambition, asleep or in suspense, could powerfully awaken, it was BOLÍVAR! . . . To have opened the way for himself across the ruins of a powerful empire and

to increase in virtue and in fortune until he touched the limit of greatness and of human glory; to liberate Venezuela, New Granada, and Ecuador, beginning his bold undertaking with 250 men; to pursue the Spaniards to beyond the Desaguadero in [Upper] Peru and conquer their armies in Junín and Ayacucho; these are exploits worthy of immortality, which, inspiring admiration, might also give pretext for the burning love of power. More than 40,000 soldiers of Spain, directed by excellent leaders, backed by fortified places and ports and by the moral strength of 300 years of domination, occupied and defended these very rich and vast possessions. Bolívar with his talent and his constancy brought an army out of nothing and tore them away forever! . . . The peoples greeted him with the tender title of "Liberator," and millions of men entrusted him with their existence, their repose and liberty. Well then, that genius without rival, who knew how to conquer all obstacles and crown himself with laurels; that man who could boast of his work and grow dizzy with his own omnipotence had no ambition; he never used his good fortune to increase his riches, nor did he allow his spirit to be perverted with the poison of vanity or of presumption. In all the periods of glory and prosperity for the republic, he renounced supreme command. Twenty years he served Colombia in the capacity of soldier and magistrate, and in that long period of time he reconquered the fatherland, freed three republics, conjured away many civil wars, and four times returned his omnipotence to the people, gathering together *spontaneously* four constituent congresses. BOLIVAR, then, destroyed the deceptions of his enemies and overcame their black accusations with the ingenuousness of his conduct. Emulation has been unable to stain him and malice has been blinded by the brilliance of truth.

On a certain occasion, in Lima (1825), the Liberator was receiving the visit of his friends; and the conversation became more and more interesting with the recollection of the victories that from Carabobo to Ayacucho had given independence to South America. "I hope that history will take account of my name," Bolívar said, "because, in the end, it is something to have humbled the Lion of Castile from Caracas and the Caribbean Sea to the Andes of Peru. . . ." Those who were present, all enthusiasts for the Liberator, vied in admiring his dazzling career and finally fell to discussing the "necessity of Bolívar's remaining in command." Various were the reasons adduced to support this opinion, which the Liberator attacked saying that his aspiration had not been command, but to contribute to the freedom of America, whose grievous and cruel sacrifices could not be tolerated with indifference and calm.

When the party was ended, the Liberator entered his private room and wrote a most beautiful letter to his sister María Antonia, in Cara-

cas. Abandoned to the intimacy of fraternal trust and speaking to her with his soul on his lips, he said, "Next year I shall go there without fail, to live in retirement and in the delights of domestic quiet. Now America is free and I have no more to do. I loathe command, and the agitation of public life is detestable to me, now that the cause that put the sword in my hands has disappeared. In Caracas, in Anauco or any other point I shall live content."

What words! What simple and sublime style! Now America is free and I have no more to do! . . . It resembles what Moses said: "And God finished His work and rested. . . ."

## A Modern Bolívar

J. B. TREND

The following excerpt is taken from *Bolívar and the Independence of Spanish America* by the British historian J. B. Trend. The part of the narrative excerpted deals with the last few years of Bolívar's life and the foiled attempt to assassinate him. In this section the author presents his view that Bolívar was not only the liberator of Spanish America but, in a real sense, its dictator. It is in this regard a thoroughly revisionist work, as far as possible distant from such authoritative books as Larrazábal's *Life of Bolívar*.

Bolívar had never had any great illusions on the possibility of applying democratic principles wholeheartedly in South America; and some of his biographers have considered that, once in supreme command, he took little trouble to conceal his impatience with doubting liberals. The first thing was to restore order; and he did not hesitate to sacrifice personal liberties in order to do so. To stamp out anarchy, he employed all the forces of reaction; and the chief forces which could serve his purpose, in a country where all political tradition had been lost in the wars of independence, were just those forces which were most damaging to his political ideals: the army and the church. The army was represented by ambitious generals who were hoping to carve provinces for themselves out of the remains of the Colombian Union; there was not one of sufficient stature to dream of succeeding Bolívar. Sucre might have done so, but he was murdered not long before Bolívar's own death. There remained the clergy, supported by

the religiosity of the rich and the fanaticism of the poor; and these, Bolívar resolved to exploit. His decrees show him bent on suppressing liberalism, which all dictators have invariably regarded as the fountainhead of anarchy; and he increased the army to something like four times its original size. With the church on his side, and the army—and his own personal influence, which was still considerable—Bolívar thought that the Colombian Union might still be saved.

Bolívar's dictatorship was at once acknowledged by Páez.<sup>5</sup> The astute *llanero* saw that the independence of Venezuela was now assured; it was already a state within a state, and he meant to keep a free hand in the country which he already ruled. Bolívar realized this; yet he was always conciliatory, and his letters to Páez are written in the friendliest terms.

In Colombia, Bolívar's enemies took to conspiracy, though Páez would not let them cross the border and conspire on Venezuelan soil. "Behead Bolívar," one of their wits remarked, "cut off his feet, and you are left with *oliva*, the symbol of peace and tranquillity." Their aim, as one of the survivors described it, 25 years afterwards, was to capture Bolívar and his ministers and put Santander<sup>6</sup> at the head of the government. Santander was certainly privy to the plot. There was talk of assassination; but an attempt on Bolívar, when riding with two friends near Bogotá, was frustrated by Santander himself. That was on the 21st September [1826]; the next attempt was fixed for the 28th. But on the 25th one of the conspirators was arrested, and the others determined to act that same night before he could give anything away under cross-examination.

Bolívar had been warned, but he thought that the usual guard at the Presidential Palace—the old *Palacio de San Carlos*—was enough. O'Leary was away; all the other aides, except one, were on sick leave. The Liberator, too, was feeling ill and depressed. The faithful who saw eye to eye with him were few. His presence still aroused enthusiasm and devotion, but he could not himself be everywhere at once. Even his presence was not so effective as it used to be. Formerly he had only to appear in person, and the waverers became loyal again; a few days or weeks of office-work and personal rounds of inspection had always put things to rights. Now, however, there were intrigues against him personally. That, perhaps, was natural with a dictator; and in Peru, too, they had insisted on his assuming dictatorial powers. The stigma of dictatorship never left him, and his personal intervention in any question was branded by his enemies as dictatorial. The plot in Bogotá was

against his dictatorial power. Though the organizers were middle-aged intriguers and wire-pullers, the actual executants were mainly young men, with the fanatical faith of storm-troopers, relying on methods of terrorism. "We could not flatter ourselves with the thought of success, except by the impression of terror which the news of Bolívar's death would produce on our opponents." One of the assassins is speaking. Vice-President Santander, without being directly implicated himself, seems to have known that a new attempt was to be made; yet he gave Bolívar no warning, and did nothing to check the movement. He too had been intriguing against the Liberator, as intercepted letters showed. Bolívar had good reason to be discouraged.

On the night of the attempt the conspirators hid in the cathedral till midnight. It had been raining—the climate of Bogotá has been compared to a cold spring in Paris—but there was bright moonlight. One brigade of artillery had been won over by the conspirators; each knew exactly what he had to do, and they felt confident of success. The clock struck 12. They came out of the cathedral and got to work.

In his depression, and the rain, and the chilly afternoon, Bolívar had sent for Manuela Saenz.<sup>7</sup> She grumbled at having to go out just then, but duly came to the Palace. Bolívar was having a hot bath. She read to him while he lay in it, and then put him to bed. He seemed to have a feverish cold, and she stayed with him.

Manuela described what happened next:

"It was about 12 when the Liberator's dogs began to bark; and there was a peculiar noise which must have been the fight with the sentries, but no shooting. I woke the Liberator, and the first thing he did was to pick up a sword and a pistol and try to open the door. I stopped him and made him dress, which he did quite calmly but quickly. He said: 'Bravo! Well, here I am dressed; what do we do now? Barricade ourselves in?' He tried to open the door again, but I prevented him. Then I remembered something I had once heard the General say. 'Didn't you tell Pepe Paris, I said, that that window would do for an occasion like this?' 'You're right,' he answered and went over to the window. I prevented him getting out at first, because there were people passing; but he managed it when they had gone, just as the door was being broken open [in the next room]. I went to meet them, to give him time to get away; but I didn't have time to see him jump, or to shut the window. As soon as they saw me, they seized me and said: 'Where's Bolívar? I told them he was at a meeting, which was the first thing that occurred to me. They searched the outer room carefully and went on

<sup>5</sup>Páez was the president of Venezuela.—Ed.

<sup>6</sup>Santander was the vice president of Colombia.—Ed.

<sup>7</sup>Since 1822 and their meeting during Bolívar's conquest of Peru, she had been Bolívar's mistress and the passion of his life.—Ed.

to the second, and when they saw the window open, they exclaimed: 'He's got away! He's escaped.' I said: 'No, señores, he has not got away: he's at a meeting' . . . I said I knew there was a meeting, and that the Liberator went to it every night, but I didn't know where it was. At this they grew very angry, and dragged me away with them until we found Ibarra [an A.D.C.] lying wounded on the floor. 'So they've killed the Liberator?' he asked. 'No, Ibarra,' I said, 'the Liberator's alive.' I know it was stupid of us to talk, and I began to bandage him with a handkerchief. They asked me more questions; but as they couldn't get anything more they took me back to the room where they found me, and I brought the wounded man along too.

"Suddenly I heard the sound of heavy boots. I looked out of the window and saw Colonel Ferguson, running along from the house where he had been in bed with a sore throat. He saw me in the moonlight, which was bright just then. He asked for the Liberator, but I said I didn't know; and I couldn't tell him because of the guards they had left there, but I warned him not to come in because they would kill him. He answered that he would die doing his duty. In a moment I heard a shot . . . and then the blow on the head with a sabre which left him dead. . . .

"The Liberator had taken a pistol, and a sword which someone or other had given him in Europe. When he jumped into the street, his cook happened to be passing and went along with him. The General stood in the river [under a bridge] for some time; and then sent the man to see what was happening at the barracks. . . . I went as far as the cathedral, and there I saw the Liberator on a horse, talking to Santander and Padilla, with a crowd of soldiers cheering."

The rising was over in a few hours. By 4 a.m., Bolívar was back in the Presidential Palace. The conspiracy was crushed, but he had caught a chill from which he never recovered. It went to his lungs, and the effects of this attack of pleurisy never left him. The conspirators were rounded up, except for two or three who lived to conspire another day: one to write an impenitent account of the affair many years afterwards in Europe, and another to return and even become President of the Republic. Bolívar's first thought was to pardon them all; but the decision did not rest with him, and the faithful General Urdaneta had them dealt with summarily. Fourteen were shot. Santander was condemned to death, as accessory; but the sentence was commuted to one of banishment and loss of military rank, though he, too, eventually returned to be President of the Republic.

Bolívar was overwhelmed mentally and physically. He never recovered from the shock, and the tuberculosis made rapid strides. His letters, more voluble than ever, are sometimes incoherent, and his postscripts illegible.

"I am so worried," he wrote on November 15th, 1828, "that I shall go away to the country for several months, to a place where there are nothing but Indians. . . . I can't put up any longer with such ingratitude. I'm not a saint, I've no wish to suffer martyrdom. Only the luck of having a few good friends keeps me going in this torture."

The dictatorship continued, either under Bolívar personally, or exercised by others in his name. Reaction was energetically pursued, centralism accentuated. "The Liberator," a Venezuelan historian has remarked, "in spite of his understanding of the French Revolution, and his knowledge of British constitutional practice, had become a doctrinaire administrator of the Latin type. He thought in 1828 as if he were living in ancient Rome—the ancient Rome of the eighteenth-century *philosophes*. He still believed in political 'virtue' and held that dictatorship was a sovereign remedy in times of emergency; but in this way he fell into what seem to us now the greatest errors of his public life." He did not pretend that dictatorship could be a permanent system of government; "his good intentions are as evident as the error in his calculations." His reliance on the army and the church, and his persecution of liberalism, have already been referred to. Like most dictators since his time, he found himself obliged to interfere with the text-books read in schools and colleges. The books to which his attention was specially drawn were written by an Englishman—Bentham—who had personally sent Bolívar some of his writings, translated into Spanish by a liberal Catalan exile in London. They were removed from the list of works prescribed for study, although afterwards they were reinstated, and held their place for nearly a hundred years.

Other repressive measures against liberalism followed, and by 1829 very few of the liberal principles remained which had inspired the declaration of Venezuelan independence—indeed, throughout the length and breadth of Great Colombia the only revolutionary idea which was still intact was the firm resolve never to return to the domination of Spain.

### Review and Study Questions

1. Given his background and heritage, why, in your opinion, did Bolívar finally join the revolution?
2. How do you account for the adulatory tone of so much of the Latin American Bolivarian literature?



3. Was Bolívar a true dictator or only a conservative advocate of strong central government? Discuss.
4. How well-taken does Trend's revisionism seem to be? Discuss.

### Suggestions for Further Reading

The bibliography on Simón Bolívar is enormous, the great bulk of it in Spanish. The source materials have been collected by the great Venezuelan Bolívar scholar, Vicente Lecuna in *Cartas de Libertador*, 12 vols. But a two-volume selection from that collection has been translated and is the standard English source, *Selected Writings of Bolívar*, compiled by Vicente Lecuna, ed. Harold A. Bierck, tr. Lewis Bertrand, vol. I (1810-1822), vol. II (1823-1830) (New York: The Colonial Press, Inc., 1951), largely comprising letters and a few public documents. Other contemporary sources include General H. L. V. Ducoudray Holstein, *Memoirs of Simón Bolívar* . . . (Boston: S. G. Goodrich and Co., 1829), excerpted in this chapter; and a similar collection of memorials by another close friend and associate, the Irish volunteer officer General Daniel Florencio O'Leary, abridged from O'Leary's much longer work under the title *Bolívar and the War of Independence*, tr. and ed. Robert F. McNerney, Jr. (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1970). There is, in addition, a further collection of *The Detached Recollection of General D. F. O'Leary*, ed. R. A. Humphreys (London: The Athlone Press, 1969). There are several useful collections from Bolívar and his contemporaries as well as from some later scholars of Bolívar in *The Liberator, Simón Bolívar, Man and Image*, ed. David Bushnell (New York: Knopf, 1970), excerpted in this chapter. *Simón Bolívar, The Hope of the Universe*, intro. and notes J. L. Salcedo-Bastardo (Paris: UNESCO, 1983) is a series of edited selections from Bolívar's own writings. A selection of his political writings are available in *The Political Thought of Bolívar, Selected Writings*, ed. Gerald E. Fitzgerald (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971). A useful, though badly outdated guide not only to these materials but a much larger selection is R. A. Humphreys, *Latin American History: A Guide to the Literature in English* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1958).

There are more than 5,000 biographies of Bolívar. The best in English is still Gerhard Masur, *Simón Bolívar* (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 1969), although Donald E. Worcester, *Bolívar* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1977) is a good, balanced, straightforward account, as is J. B. Trend, *Bolívar and the Independence of Spanish America* (New York: Harper, 1968), excerpted for this chapter. Waldo Frank, *Birth of a World, Bolívar in Terms of his Peoples* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951) presents Bolívar in

somewhat broader terms, as does J. L. Calcedo-Bastardo, *Bolívar, A Continent and its Destiny*, ed. and tr. Annella McDermot (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1977). The intellectual setting for Bolívar's revolution is dealt with in Victor Andrés Belaunde, *Bolívar and the Political Thought of the Spanish American Revolution* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1938), the standard work, and Bernard Moses, *The Intellectual Background of the Revolution in South America* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966 [1926]).

Salvador de Madariaga, *Bolívar* (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1952) is a massive revisionist biography of Bolívar in which the great Spanish scholar is somewhat hostile to Bolívar and defensive of the Spanish colonial system. Irene Nicholson, *The Liberator, A Study of Independence Movements in Spanish America* (New York and Washington: Praeger, 1969) deals also with the Spanish colonial system and its opponents, including Bolívar. This is a competent survey of the existing research on the subject. Victor W. von Hagen, *The Four Seasons of Manuela, A Biography, The Love Story of Manuela Sáenz and Simón Bolívar* (Boston and New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pierce and Little, Brown and Co., 1952) is the best biography of Bolívar's fascinating mistress.