

Irish Migration Studies in Latin America

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Bernardo O'Higgins: The Rebel Son of a Viceroy

By Alfredo Sepúlveda



Bernardo O'Higgins (1778-1842), by Narciso Desmadryl
(*Memoria Chilena*)

In the small hours of 9 July 1824, Bernardo O'Higgins, the man who had ruled newly-independent Chile with an iron fist, was recovering from malaria in Trujillo, Peru. He had relinquished power. His lifelong second-in-command Ramón Freire, who had served under him in almost every battle of the Chilean independence campaign, had banished him. It had been a bitter argument. The Chileans were on the verge of a civil war, and O'Higgins ultimately decided that there was no point in going to a war against Freire, who had become ruler of the southern province of Concepción.

Although it was not what he wanted, in January of 1823 O'Higgins surrendered power. It was a heated meeting with the Santiago leaders. Knives and swords were concealed among the audience, yet when Bernardo resigned, the small crowd roared in approval and saluted the brave men who had led the independence process.

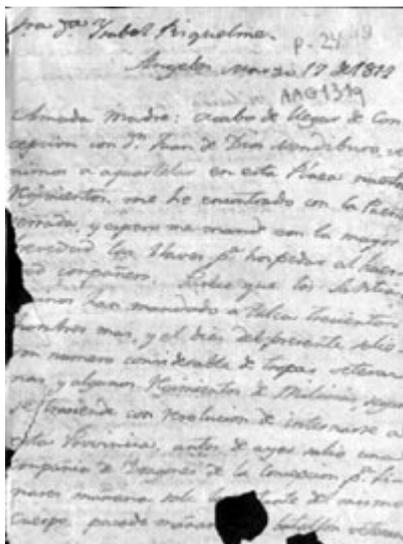
O'Higgins now found himself in Trujillo, Peru, experiencing a second exile. From Chile he had planned on travelling to Ireland, the land of his father Ambrose, a Sligo-born and Meath-raised man who at the age of thirty had gone to Spain, worked in commerce, travelled thence to South America, joined the Spanish Army in Chile and ended his eighty-year-old life as Viceroy of Peru. Shortly after leaving the Chilean port of Valparaíso, O'Higgins changed his mind. He disembarked in Callao, the main Peruvian port, and stayed in that country with his family: his mother, his half-sister and his two children, a boy and a girl.

He was not a stranger in that country. Along with the Argentine general José de San Martín, O'Higgins had set up a naval force that sailed from Chile and defeated the Spaniards in Peru. He was welcomed, given

property and a military title. However, the Spanish forces had re-taken Lima, and soon O'Higgins and his family were forced to flee northwards.

In Trujillo one day ran into another until O'Higgins received a letter. It was a warm-hearted message from Simon Bolívar, the leader of the South American independence process. He was seeking Chilean support, in the hope that O'Higgins few remaining friends in Chile might be interested in helping him to reconquer Peru. 'A brave general like yourself,' wrote Bolívar, 'feared by enemies and experienced among our officers and leaders, cannot do anything more than give a new degree of appreciation to our army [...] I offer you command [...] appropriate to the distinction of any leader who wants to distinguish himself in the battlefield, a Colombian regiment under your orders must achieve victory.' (Valencia, 1980: 420) [1]

Still suffering the after-effects of his bout of malaria, O'Higgins gained a new lease on life. All of a sudden, the excitement of the battle was upon him once again. Respected by friends and foes alike in battle for his bravery almost to the point of insanity, O'Higgins did not excel in many other fields. He was not a gifted politician, nor was he a member of the colonial aristocracy who ruled the central valley of Chile and controlled Chilean politics. O'Higgins had not married, but briefly kept a lover who gave him a son and then left him. He lived with his mother and sister. Neither was he a brilliant strategist. 'General O'Higgins was brave to the extreme,' wrote José de San Martín, one of his closest friends, many years later. 'But his military knowledge was nil.' (Ruiz, 2005: 228) [2] In battle, he stopped being Bernardo and became General O'Higgins, a man who fought side by side with officers and peasant-soldiers alike, who was shot and almost died, who had undertaken the incredible crossing of the Andes from neighbouring Mendoza into central Chile.



Letter from Bernardo O'Higgins to his mother Isabel Riquelme, 17 March 1812
(*Memoria Chilena*)

From Trujillo, O'Higgins departed in search of Bolívar's army, somewhere in the Peruvian Andes. The journey took him an entire month, during which the sick man crossed scorching deserts and high mountains on a trip that seemed to have no end. His ambition was to once again engage in battle against the detested 'godos' or 'sarracens' which was the derogatory title that the American independence fighters bestowed upon their foes-. When O'Higgins finally located Bolívar's army, he found that he had no place in it. Stunned, Bolívar gave O'Higgins the highest formal honours, but delegated to him only menial jobs. The General ended up as the special court-martial judge for Chilean volunteers. The rainy season was approaching and Bolívar did not plan on attacking the royalists. He suggested that O'Higgins return to Lima, which had by then been reconquered by the patriots. In the Peruvian capital O'Higgins learned of the battle of Ayacucho and the confirmation of Peru's independence. General O'Higgins was cordially invited to a celebratory banquet in Lima a few weeks later. He went as a civilian and declared that his days as a soldier were over. 'Señor,' he toasted, addressing Bolívar, "America is free. From now on General O'Higgins does not exist; I am only Bernardo O'Higgins, a private citizen. After Ayacucho, my American mission is over.'

(Valencia, 1980: 430) [3]

From Chillán to Europe

Bernardo O'Higgins was born on 20 August 1778, in Chillán, a small village in southern Chile. His father, Ambrose Higgins, a Sligo-born 58-year-old military factotum in the service of the Spanish crown, was the most powerful man in what was known as 'the Frontier,' the region around the Bio-Bio river in southern Chile, no-man's land claimed by both the Spanish and the Mapuche. Though formally Ambrose's position was strictly military, by 1778 he had achieved renown in the eyes of the Spanish civilian authorities by defeating indigenous rebellions, and had been given *carte blanche* to operate in the region.

The previous summer, Ambrose O'Higgins had briefly camped on the estate of Simón Riquelme, a quiet, faint-hearted man who owned some land near Chillán. There he met and briefly courted Isabel, Simón's

eighteen-year-old daughter. Soon Isabel was pregnant. It is possible that Ambrose had given Simón a promise to marry his daughter. The reason for a delay in the engagement was that as a European officer O'Higgins had to ask permission to marry a local woman.

Ambrose never fulfilled his promise; there are no records of the marriage, and he was soon thereafter to be found south of the border in a military campaign. He never saw Isabel again. Nor did he see his son. Isabel was hidden from public view, and the baby given to a local matron. Isabel was married shortly afterwards to an old friend of her father who died two years later. From that marriage a girl was born, Rosa.

The presence of the illegitimate child haunted Ambrose O'Higgins at first and later became an obsession. He soon took the baby away from Chillán and the Riquelmes, and put him in the care of a friend in Talca, some 250 km north of Chillán. Later the young Bernardo was sent back to Chillán, to a school run by the Franciscans for the Mapuche aristocracy. The monarchism of the priests in Chillán was in opposition to new ideas born of the French revolution, which, even in this remote part of the world, were beginning to wield influence. In Chillán Bernardo briefly saw his mother again, but was soon moved on again by his father, this time to Lima, the viceregal capital, where the young Chilean was educated at the best schools available. At one school, the Convictorio Carolino, Bernardo probably first heard the ideas of the European enlightenment: one of the priests, Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza, was a remarkable enlightenment man, who believed in the power of mathematics and in the notion that he and his students were more Peruvian than Spanish. But yet again Bernardo had to leave, this time for a pressing reason. Ambrose had been nominated Viceroy of Peru, and an illegitimate son was not good for his reputation.

Young Bernardo then left for Europe. It remains a mystery whether Ambrose intended to place his son in the army, in a commercial company or to make him engage in further studies. At first he lived briefly in Cádiz, in the care of Ambrose's friend and former business partner Nicolás de la Cruz, a Chilean-born and extremely wealthy merchant. Then Bernardo moved or was moved to London for reasons unknown. We know for certain that he lived in Richmond-upon-Thames, in the 'care' of Spencer and Perkins, two watch-



Timothy Eeles's [Eales] Catholic school in Richmond
(*Ejército de Chile*)

makers who may have had an entrepreneurial connection with De la Cruz. Only a handful of documents have survived from this period of Bernardo's life. We know that in the last months of his London life, he attended and possibly lived at a private Catholic academy in Richmond run by a Timothy Eeles or Eales. Tradition has it that Bernardo courted Mr. Eales' daughter Charlotte, but the relationship ended abruptly. His last months in England were chaotic. Probably because of financial problems, or Bernardo's hectic social life, the watchmakers stopped supporting him and kept De la Cruz' money to pay off his debts. O'Higgins was left penniless and had to live with friends.

During this time he got in touch with Venezuelan independence leader Francisco de Miranda, an experienced revolutionary who had fought against the English in the American Revolution and served under the flag of the French Republic. Miranda was trying to form a network of young South American revolutionaries.

De la Cruz finally got the young man back to Spain, but more complications followed. Bernardo tried to return to Chile but his ship was captured by the English and he ended up in prison in Gibraltar. Eventually he made his way to Cádiz only to fall seriously ill with yellow fever. He almost died. By this time Ambrose had written to De la Cruz that he was no longer responsible for his son. It is to be supposed that

Bernardo's affiliation with Miranda was by then known in Madrid. However, Ambrose died while Bernardo's answer was on its way to Lima, and surprisingly left his son a generous inheritance, 'Las Canteras,' a sizeable tract of land in Southern Chile on the frontier with the Mapuche lands where Bernardo had been born.

From Landlord to National Leader

For a number of years, Bernardo was more landlord than revolutionary, although he continued writing letters to 'radical' friends he had met in Cádiz and who now lived in Buenos Aires. It was in those days that he befriended one of his most important mentors, Juan Martínez de Rozas, a former aide to his father and by then the most powerful man in Southern Chile, and a strong force in colonial politics. In 1811, Bernardo had to go to Santiago.

A few months before, due to Ferdinand VII's imprisonment in Bayonne, France, Santiago's aristocrats had formed a 'junta' that was to organise a National Congress that would rule *in lieu* of the captured king. Bernardo was sent as a representative of Los Angeles town to this congress. However, his role was small and menial. He served as a puppet of Martínez de Rozas. He subsequently got sick again and pretty much disappeared from local politics.



José Miguel Carrera (1785-1821)
(*Memoria Chilena*)

In the first year or so of the Chilean independence process, Martínez de Rozas and his party were in conflict with José Miguel Carrera, a hot-tempered young aristocrat who defied the establishment and claimed power for himself. Carrera and his two brothers were more radical than Martínez de Rozas in terms of leading the revolution. Soon regional tensions between Santiago and Concepción were impossible to overcome, and Martínez and Carrera were on the verge of war. Though O'Higgins put many of his peasants at the service of Concepción's army, Martínez awarded him only a minor military position, probably because of his illegitimate origin. O'Higgins' health became increasingly problematic, and by the end of 1812 he had abandoned everything and moved back to his estate.

In 1813, Peru's viceroy had decided to crush the revolutions in his domains (although technically Chile was not part of the Viceroyalty), and sent a professional army to return the situation to the status quo ante. Bernardo joined the army under the command of Carrera. He had never received any professional training, but managed to obtain

advice from Irish-born colonel John Mackenna, also a former associate of Ambrose. Mackenna never trained O'Higgins, but in a long letter told him who to contact: 'any dragoon sergeant.'

Now the war was for real. This was no longer a war between 'Chileans' and 'Spaniards,' but rather a civil confrontation between Chileans who did not recognise any authority from Lima and Chileans who supported Lima, aided by fresh troops from Peru and some Spanish-born officers. O'Higgins did not excel in the first stages of the campaign, although he did fight bravely at the disastrous siege of Chillán, where the patriots upheld their positions during a particularly rainy, cold and muddy winter.

The siege could not make Chillán surrender, dissipating Carrera's support in Santiago. Then came the battle of El Roble. In the middle of the fighting, Carrera fled while O'Higgins took command and surprisingly won the battle, allegedly shouting 'To die with honour or live with glory!'. The Santiago junta took command of the army away from Carrera and gave it to O'Higgins.

In the battlefields things were a little more complicated. Carrera enjoyed a high level of support among his men, as did O'Higgins. Bernardo was now assisted by John Mackenna. Martínez had died in exile in Mendoza. O'Higgins met Carrera in Concepción, where Carrera finally surrendered the army command to Bernardo and left the city. However, en route to Santiago, the royalists kidnapped and jailed Carrera in Chillán.

Thus the road to victory was opened up for O'Higgins and his supporters. The war, a savage campaign fought mostly by poor peasants in rags with no option but to fight alongside their landlords, had left the

land exhausted: no money, no food, no stock to feed the thousands of men in arms. Both sides signed a treaty by the Lircay river in May 1814 to end hostilities. O'Higgins was one of the signatories. In his prison cell Carrera cursed him.

Feuds: O'Higgins and José Miguel Carrera

For years, Chilean historians were divided between those who supported Carrera and those who supported O'Higgins. The Irish-Chilean eventually won out. Santiago's main street is named after O'Higgins, as is the Military Academy, and an entire administrative region a few kilometres south of Santiago bears the name of 'Sixth Region of the Liberator, General Bernardo O'Higgins.' Bernardo's grave is situated in front of the Presidential Palace, while Carrera's skull has allegedly been recently discovered in the basement of a private house in Santiago.

The hatred between the two men was not extinguished by their deaths. Supporters of O'Higgins claim that the general was tricked by Santiago's junta, and that he actually wanted to keep waging war because by May 1814, he thought he could win it. Carrerians despise O'Higgins because he accepted as one of the treaty's points the restitution of the Spanish flag and the King's coat of arms. However the treaty included the liberation of all prisoners. Soon Carrera and his brother Luis were in route to Talca, where O'Higgins' army was located, instead of being shipped to Valparaíso as had been agreed. Carrera was now a bigger threat to the junta than the royalists, and in July 1814 he staged a new *coup d'état* that resulted in Mackenna being exiled to Mendoza as O'Higgins's ally.

O'Higgins decided to ignore the royalists in Southern Chile and moved the whole patriot army to Santiago, to defy Carrera. They clashed in the infamous and often forgotten battle of Tres Acequias, where O'Higgins was defeated, though he suffered only minor losses. While he was preparing to attack Carrera the next day, O'Higgins received a message. The Treaty of Lircay had been ignored by the Viceroy and a powerful army of professional soldiers fresh from Lima, as well as volunteers from Chile's southern and staunchly royalist provinces of Chiloé and Valdivia, had disembarked in Talcahuano, a few kilometres from Concepción. Carrera always thought that O'Higgins had had some sort of secret agreement with the Chilean royalists in order to attack him. But the Viceroy, who saw all supporters of independence as dangerous revolutionaries did not make any distinctions. The two men decided to put an end to their differences and prepare to battle the enemy, led now by a new royalist leader, General Mariano Osorio.

It was a weak alliance. O'Higgins agreed to renounce his position as Army commander and serve under Carrera. Preparations for the mother of all battles followed. The army was in a disastrous condition. Tres Acequias had destroyed most of the canons. Carrera raised a group of neophyte recruits, who in the space of a few weeks became officers. Most of the veterans had already died or deserted. The battle was to be in Rancagua, 90 km south of Santiago a strategic location for Central Chile. None of its resources had been touched by the war. The successive waves of patriot divisions sent to the war down south had still had their own resources when they arrived in Rancagua, and thus the city and its neighbouring farms had not been pillaged.

In the last days of September 1814, O'Higgins was sent to the city, although Carrera was not completely convinced of the location. He wanted to fight in Pelequén, a stretch of land comprising two mountain ranges south of Rancagua. But the patriots had not had time to fortify the Pelequén hills, and therefore O'Higgins and Carrera's brother Juan José agreed to wait for Osorio in Rancagua.



Battle of Rancagua, October 1814 in: *El ostracismo del general D. Bernardo O'Higgins*, by B. Vicuña Mackenna (Valparaíso, 1860).
(*Memoria Chilena*)



Crossing of the Andes by San Martín and O'Higgins,
by Martín Boneo (1865)
(*Instituto Nacional Sanmartiniano*)

Osorio's forces were highly superior. The patriot forces held on for two days, until the royalists decided to set fire to the city. O'Higgins desperately called for José Miguel Carrera's division, still north of Rancagua. But Carrera either betrayed O'Higgins or O'Higgins did not understand the coded message Carrera sent him. From the bell tower of Rancagua's church O'Higgins saw Carrera's division advancing and then turning around and leaving. Carrera claimed that in the coded message he had told O'Higgins to leave, and as he approached the town he believed that he was leading his men to certain death. O'Higgins maintained that Carrera had compromised his forces by leaving.

Thousands of O'Higgins' men died that day. O'Higgins himself, in one of the acts of bravery for which he was famous, pushed forward with a few men and managed to escape.

What followed in Santiago was hellish. The patriots were defeated, the city ransacked, the public treasury lost. Most of the men committed to the cause of an independent Chile fled to Mendoza in Argentina. It was a disastrous exodus through the snow on a virtually unpassable track that even the mules found difficult to navigate. O'Higgins and Carrera would never again speak to each other, but would meet again in Mendoza, then under the command of José de San Martín.

Alliances: O'Higgins and José de San Martín

From their very first meeting, O'Higgins and San Martín found in each other kindred spirits. O'Higgins was humble and well-mannered, and had no problem in acknowledging San Martín's authority on the eastern side of the Andes, unlike Carrera. Rivalries between the two Chilean factions came to a head in Mendoza. Carrera managed to keep a small army and stationed himself in a Mendoza neighbourhood. Carrera even took some police in Mendoza prisoner when they arrived to investigate a raucous and drunken 'meeting' between Chilean soldiers and beautiful *cuyanas*.

O'Higgins, on the other hand, was considered by San Martín to be the leader of the Chilean emigrés. The Argentine leader took O'Higgins' side, believing that the defeat at Rancagua was Carrera's fault. Mendoza was now in danger. The Viceroy could launch an attack on the United Provinces from Chile any minute.

The United Provinces had been trying to secure their position by attacking Peru from Bolivia, but had so far been unsuccessful. During 1815 and part of 1816, the governor of Mendoza tried to convince the authorities in Buenos Aires to organise the invasion of Chile. It was not an easy task and required something that had never been done in terms of military logistics, making four thousand men safely cross the Andes, properly dressed, armed and fed. It was a monumental job, and a very expensive one. With Supreme Director Pueyrredón in power in Buenos Aires, San Martín finally had real support. The expedition would cross the Andes in the summer of 1817.

The expedition was successful. O'Higgins commanded two battalions mostly formed by black slaves from Cuyo who would earn their freedom if they survived the fighting. The Army of the Andes crossed the mountains and on 17 February 1817, clashed with the royalists in Chacabuco, a few kilometres north of Santiago. It was a clear victory, but O'Higgins charged when he was not supposed to and compromised the whole operation. The royalist forces fled Santiago and then disbanded. Some went to Lima, some to Talcahuano. San Martín hesitated in pursuing them, leaving the royalists able to win back strength in Talcahuano.



Battle of Chacabuco, 1817
(*Memoria Chilena*)

When San Martín declined the position of Supreme Director of Chile, O'Higgins stepped into the fray. But soon he left town and moved south to engage in war. O'Higgins attempted to manage state affairs as best as he could. He stayed at Concepción, which had been occupied by the Patriots, and participated, in the midst of the rainy and cold winter, in the siege of Talcahuano (as well as battling the Mapuche, who had allied themselves with the royalists).

During most of 1817 and the beginning of 1818, O'Higgins' job was waging war. He fought in the mornings and afternoons, then went home to Concepción. There he met Rosario Puga, a good-looking married woman, and they became lovers. The sexual mores of the colonial era were gone, and the war made possible this very unlikely union. Puga later bore Bernardo a son, Demetrio. [4]

After a failed attempt to take Talcahuano in early December 1817, and facing the arrival of new royalist troops from Lima and Spain, again commanded by Osorio, O'Higgins, on the advice of San Martín, who had managed to recover in Santiago, left Concepción. The strategy was one of terra nullius: the whole town of Concepción was evacuated and its inhabitants began a sorrowful journey towards Santiago. Meanwhile, O'Higgins managed to move the Army to Talca. There he engaged in a disastrous battle against Osorio. At first, the Patriots were winning. Then they stayed the night at a place called Cancharayada, but didn't suspect that Osorio would counter-attack. O'Higgins almost died that night - a bullet destroyed his right elbow.

There were rumours of a tragedy in Santiago, Mendoza and Buenos Aires. O'Higgins and San Martín were presumed dead, and many Chileans began preparing for a change of government. Then Manuel Rodríguez, Carrera's friend who ironically had served as a guerrilla leader and a spy for San Martín during the Spanish rule that followed Rancagua, threatened to stage a Carrera-sponsored coup. His famous *cri-de-guerre*

'Citizens: we still have a fatherland!' motivated the depressed patriots in Santiago. All this was more than O'Higgins could muster. On the verge of death, pale and sick due to loss of blood, he left San Fernando, where he was recovering, and in a hurried journey arrived in Santiago in less than two days. Exhausted, he got to the presidential palace and almost fainted. Rodríguez' coup was successfully quashed.

While O'Higgins was delirious, San Martín rallied a force of 4,000 to attack Osorio at Maipú. Now a Santiago suburb, Maipú was a war at Santiago's gates. The people began hearing the canons on the morning of 5 April 1818. A feverish O'Higgins heard them too. He instantly mounted his horse and headed to the battlefield. When he arrived, the fight was over and had been won by San Martín, and the two men embraced. It had been a massacre for Osorio. Almost all of his 5,000 men were either dead or captured. Spain would never again organise such a force to attack Chile.

Supreme Director

Chilean independence was now complete, except for the southern region. Talcahuano, Valdivia and Chiloé remained royalist strongholds. Bandits roamed the countryside. O'Higgins tried to restore order and give some sort of national presence to his government. Although a theoretical democrat and admirer of the English monarchy, he soon decided that the best form of government in Chile at the time was a dictatorship. His dictatorship.

Tired of so many wars, most Chileans supported O'Higgins, and Carrera's support base disappeared. Two Carrera brothers, Luis and Juan José, who were held captive in Mendoza after they tried to sneak into Chile to overthrow O'Higgins while he was waging war in the south, were tried and executed. O'Higgins always claimed that he had pardoned the two men, but that the letter of clemency had arrived in Mendoza just hours after the Carreras died. Then Manuel Rodríguez, who had been offered a position in a foreign embassy but refused, was shot dead near Santiago. O'Higgins again claimed that he had no responsibility for the killing, which had been carried out by soldiers, but never fully managed to prove that he had not given the order.

At the beginning of his administration, the Lautaro Lodge, a clandestine Argentine pro-independence organisation to which O'Higgins had been affiliated in Mendoza, had some influence. Then internal quarrels among the 'brothers' led to its dissolution.



First Chilean armada in 1818, by Thomas J. Somerscales
(*Memoria Chilena*)

O'Higgins greatest obsession was the building of a fleet that would sail to Peru and depose Viceroy Pezuela. However, Buenos Aires was in anarchy and therefore no more money would be forthcoming in the wake of the battle of Maipú. Moreover, San Martín had been ordered to return to Buenos Aires and fight in the civil war. He refused and instead stayed in Chile and began preparing the invasion of Peru.

O'Higgins decided that securing Chilean independence was more important than rebuilding the country, and understood that the existence of a Viceroy in Lima made matters uncertain O'Higgins took out a British loan that seriously compromised Chile's finances and finally got together a force of twenty-five

vessels commanded by Lord Thomas Cochrane, a British officer who had proven himself in the eyes of the Supreme Director by taking Valdivia, a Spanish stronghold in Southern Chile, some months before. Cochrane would sail to Peru and San Martín would command the troops in combat. The naval expedition sailed from Valparaíso on 20 August 1820, O'Higgins' forty-second birthday.

Meanwhile O'Higgins founded the Military Academy, the Naval School, a public market for Santiago, and instigated important developments in agricultural infrastructure. At the same time, he fought fiercely against Santiago's aristocracy and church, particularly on the issue of taxes. Santiago's archbishop was exiled.

O'Higgins had few close friends and most of the time he took refuge in the patio of the government house where he had a green parrot whom he used as a confessor. In 1821 his nemesis José Miguel Carrera, who had fought with the federal forces in Argentina's civil war, formed a gang of Chilean soldiers and indigenous peoples and began stealing from the *estancias* in Argentina. He was eventually caught in Mendoza and shot. O'Higgins was not directly responsible, but did not spare Carrera's life.

Rosario Puga had been acting as Bernardo's wife while still legally married to another man. The relationship did not prosper and Rosario was soon engaged to a supporter of Carrera and became pregnant. During all this time, O'Higgins' family was his mother Isabel and his half-sister Rosa, who lived with him in the government palace. Isabel and Rosa became social figures in the small Santiago world - Rosa was a patron of the arts, and engaged in the financing and production of many plays. When Puga left O'Higgins, she took away Bernardo's son Demetrio.

Problems with the aristocracy, the church, the Carrerians and the virtual bankruptcy of the government were exacerbated by an earthquake in 1822 and a controversial autocratic constitution passed by O'Higgins that same year. Ramón Freire, formerly his closest ally, suddenly rallied the province of Concepción against O'Higgins. Soon the province of Coquimbo followed. With civil war pending, O'Higgins resigned from government in January 1823 and departed for Peru with his family.

Exile and Breakdown

As O'Higgins had informed Bolívar's guests at the banquet, after 1824 he had become a farmer, but was not very successful. He kept in touch with some friends, but his dreams of a political comeback were impossible to achieve. After briefly courting Mariscal Andrés de Santa Cruz, the ambitious Bolivian general who created the Peruvian-Bolivian confederacy and then went to war against Chile, O'Higgins descended into anonymity.

In 1842 he was finally re-installed in the Chilean rank of officer and was given permission to return. While Bernardo O'Higgins was preparing to board the ship, he fell seriously ill and died in October 1842.

His body was not brought back to Chile until 1869. His soul probably still haunts the Chilean countryside where he gave the best part of his life among the mud, horses and blood of so many battles.

Alfredo Sepúlveda

Notes

[1] Un bravo general como usted, temido de los enemigos y experimentado entre nuestros oficiales y jefes, no puede menos que dar un nuevo grado de aprecio a nuestro ejército... Ofrezco a usted un mando... propio a distinguir a cualquier jefe que quiera señalarse en un campo de gloria, porque un cuerpo de Colombia a las órdenes de usted debe contar con la victoria.

[2] El general O'Higgins era bravo hasta el extremo, pero sus conocimientos militares eran nulos.

[3] Señor, la América está libre. Desde hoy el general O'Higgins ya no existe; soy sólo el ciudadano particular Bernardo O'Higgins. Después de Ayacucho mi misión está concluida.

[4] According to Pamela Pequeño's documentary *La hija de O'Higgins* (2001), Bernardo O'Higgins had a daughter, Petronila, by Patricia Rodríguez, his mother's nanny. As Ambrosio had done to him, Bernardo O'Higgins never acknowledged any of his children.

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