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CHILE ON THE WARPATH

Charles Maxwell Lancaster

Paul Thomas Manchester

On the hills of their redemption
They would hoist the skulls of Spaniards.

WHY DID Chile sever relations with the Axis? For over a year our statesmen had strained to wean this slim, vulnerable country away from neutrality. In our attempts to win Chile as a partial ally it was perfectly sensible to appeal to her self-interest, to have stressed the arguments of trade agreements, and promises of a favored nation status when once this global war was done. It would, however, be downright insolence and folly to assume that we have purchased Chile's new attitude or even that Chile was shamed into action by the Mexican Foreign Minister Padilla's eloquent plea for Pan-American unity against the German juggernaut or the bloody shafts of the Empire of the Rising Sun. Chile has a tradition of honor and freedom.

Until now our interest has been confined to Chile's copper and nitrates, locked in the bowels of her hills. Conceivably, it would pay more lasting dividends, if we would try to understand what she and all her sister republics of Latin America acknowledge to be the brightest gem in her coronet, a jewel that no invader can wrest from her, a treasure that no merchant can buy or carry away, for it belongs to the realm of the spirit. Strange and precious talisman, blood-blest love of homeland, fierce passion of indomitable free men that even quickened the pen of a Spanish conquistador! A soldier-poet, he sailed with Don García Hurtado de Mendoza in 1557 from Lima to Coquimbo and the Isle of Quiriquina, fought the Araucanian Indians at Penco, along the banks of the Biobío, and in the ravine of Purén, travelled to Imperial and Villarica, and joined the expedition that set out for the Strait of Magellan and discovered the Archipelago of Chiloé in the utmost southern confines of Chile. His name was Alonso de Ercilla, and his gift

to Chile was the epic poem, *La Araucana*, the first literary masterpiece of all the Americas.

Ercilla left Imperial in disgrace in 1559. He had offended Mendoza his "hasty, hothead general" by fingering his sword-hilt in a quarrel with Juan de Pineda. Mendoza, who witnessed this display of temper, considered that his presence had been outraged, and condemned both culprits to be beheaded. An unknown Spanish woman saved the lives of the two noblemen by going with an Indian girl to the quarters of Mendoza and pleading with him throughout the night to spare Ercilla and Pineda from the executioner's ax. No one knows the price she paid, nor does the record of García Hurtado de Mendoza's residence in Imperial contain her name. Suffice it to say that as the headsman's knife was about to descend, a courier rushed up with a reprieve. Ercilla remembered this injustice when he enumerated his services to his sovereign, Philip II:

I shall not relate how haply
Once our hothead captain stripling
Sent me to the square unjustly
To be publicly beheaded,
Nor my long incarceration,
So vexatious to the guiltless,
Nor a thousand other miseries
Worse by far to endure than dying.

This incident furnishes a clue to Ercilla's bitterness when he was exiled to Peru, and departed, calling Chile "an ingrate land." Now a Chilean town is named for him, and a statue is reared to his memory in Santiago. Now all the republics of South America, despite bristling national pride, see in his epic, *La Araucana*, the symbol of the spiritual solidarity of this continent. During his campaigns, and even while languishing in prison, he penned at night on random scraps of paper what he had seen during the embattled day. He admired and sympathized with the Araucanians, the unconquered and unconquerable tribe that had years earlier driven back the big-eared Incas and the invading expedition of Almagro, murdered Valdivia, and defeated Villagrán. Don Alonso studied their customs, their religion, the methods of warfare. He felt a personal shame for the Spaniard's cruelty to prisoners and hostages. Never before in the history of warfare has a soldier-poet spent laborious days and nights writing an epic poem to celebrate the prowess of the foe he fought.

When Alonso de Ercilla returned to Spain after eight adventurous years in the New World, his fame was assured. Fifty editions were made of his poem in Spain, several in his lifetime; *La Araucana* was the best-seller in Spain in the 16th century; it was translated into Dutch, German, and French. Of the Englishmen who attempted to translate the long work of 21,000 odd lines, one died before one quarter was completed; the other lost his mind. Ercilla had many imitators, among whom Pedro de Oña, a Chilean lawyer, produced in his *Arauco Tamed* panegyric poetry distinguished for imagery and erudition. De Oña had not participated in the campaigns against the freedom-loving Araucanians and was infected with the literary malady of the times, gongorism. Much of his work is sheer fancy devoted not to historical accuracy, but to the embellishment of Mendoza's reputation. Horrified that Don García Hurtado de Mendoza, son of the Peruvian viceroy, leader of Ercilla's expedition into Chile, had in the poet's song been but "a silent pause," de Oña crooks the knee to his martial idol:

Fame's a phantom frothing on a swollen ocean;
 My talent is a tiny fragile bark.
 I am the poor and tremulous Amiclas,
 Who dread the tempest and the ravening shark;
 But be my Caesar, noble Don Hurtado,
 As birth hath made you more renowned than he,
 And Scylla's frightfulness shall never halt me,
 Nor gluttonous mouths on Time's tempestuous sea.

In *La Araucana* Ercilla invoked the name of his king and his God. He dedicated the poem to King Philip II, in memory of the years he had spent in his service when the prince had sailed to England to marry Mary Tudor, and as captain in Chile, and gentleman-lancer in Peru. How like Cardinal Wolsey's is his lament that fools, who hang on princes' favors, become paupers of the spirit! In his quest of truth and fair dealing he recognized but one tribunal.

Seer of hearts, thou understandest
 With what zeal mine own loves justice!
 Thou who hast in thoughts of goodness
 Sunset's end and dawn's beginning,
 Grant me equal breath. Breathe greatness
 To inform my pen adventurous!

This young campaigner received at the age of twenty-three an indelible impression of the hardships of war.

Not substantial vapourish dishes
Nor rich wine, oft racked and pungent,
Nor the wains of rest habitual
Carted heavy-laden languor
To mine eyes. Scant, mouldy hardtack
From the hands of niggards given,
And rain water flat, insipid,
These alone sustained existence.

And at times my fare consisted
Of two handfuls weighed of barley,
Which with watery brine was served us,
Cooked with herbs since salt was lacking.
Regal couch whereon I slumbered
Was the slime of humid marshes.
Ever armed, alert each instant,
Pen I held in hand, and spear-shaft!

With him we see the Indians loosing boulders from the mountain-sides, leaping over wide moats with the aid of pikestaffs, scaling the ramparts, hurling stones from catapults, sinking the Spaniards in the quagmire. We hear the wild pawing of stampeding horses driven with rowels through the fortress gates, animals with manes aflame, piteous creatures

That like wind-swept leaves in autumn
Stormed the plains of their salvation.

In the Indians' tribal councils the chieftains indulged in braggadocio and drunken bouts. The supreme war leader of the Araucanians was selected by a contest of brawn. A massive log was dragged into a clearing and stalwarts vied with one another in holding it on their shoulders. The one-eyed Caupolicán bore it longest.

Slowly paced the prudent savage
In the daybreak's hastening brightness,
Sun cut down the lengthening shadows,
But he never shrank in purpose.
In the West the light was waning,
But his heart's flame never flickered.
Stars appeared in myriad radiance,
Gleaming on that tireless hero.

Peering moonbeams lamped the tourney
From their dampened lodge of shadows,
Ridding somber field and forest
Of their murky veil of darkness.

Still Caupolicán ne'er wavered
 From his wager; but renewing
 Strength, he stood and bore his burden,
 As if by no weight afflicted.

The eloquence of Chief Colocolo and Lautaro is Homeric in quality. Its original lustre shines through the fabric of the epic, even in translation.

"What blind rage, oh Araucanians,
 Drags you senseless to perdition?
 Will your hands pluck Indian hearts out
 And not dare resist the tyrant?
 In your reach are Christian devils.
 Why turn knives against your brothers?
 If desire for death has moved you,
 Let it not be so ignoble.

"Turn your spirit's heat and weapons
 On the breasts of those who put you
 In subjection's thrall with combat
 Manifest to all, and shameful.
 Fling from you the yoke outrageous.
 Show your stern heroic mettle.
 Spill no blood of friends and neighbors,
 Left to flow for your redemption."

Romantic legend has it that when General Valdivia was captured, Lautaro, a former servant of the Spanish leader, poured molten gold down his throat, crying: "I know how well you have loved gold. Now taste it to the full!" Ercilla makes Lautaro a hero. He beckons his fellow Araucanians back to battle from a bridge which he manned alone, shouting words to chide and challenge:

"Oh blind people, terror-guided,
 Where are turned your breasts so fearful?
 Here a thousand years of honor
 Crumble, fade with your successes.
 On this day they lose their power,
 Law and privilege unbroken.
 You, once masters free and dreaded,
 Now are slaves abject and fallen.

"Stained is your once clear escutcheon,
 And on generous trunk you've grafted
 Plague incurable and sorrow,
 Lasting shame and long dishonor."

Later, "in a sunken cup-like dingle, chaliced in the cordillera," he braids himself for failure to annihilate the Spaniards:

"How may passion's heat preserve me
From the roll call of the guilty?
Did I not by oaths vainglorious
Swear to assume a Titan's burden?
Who deserves vituperation
More than I, whose beck they followed,
I, who pledged but one year's conquest
From the one Pole to the other?

"Whilst we were a radiant company
By Spain's walls bemocked and blinded,
Thrice the moon has smiled derision
On our sore-mismanaged legions;
Phaeton's coach has rolled in splendor
From the Scorpion to Aquarius.
We at length turn back, defeated,
With a hundred soldiers missing.

"If in death I might be certain
Shame would color not my passing,
How my flaccid arm would shatter
With my lance this heart now breaking!
But my foes would wreak their vengeance,
Battening on glory's viands,
If they thought I feared their power
As a coward faint and cringing.

"By Hell's potence everlasting,
I avouch, if Death disdains me
One year more, I'll boot these upstarts
Out of Chile, soak the landscape
With their blood. No summer, winter,
Heat or cold will snap war's cordage
Till in deep domains infernal
They will whine for sanctuary."

Ercilla is at his best in his descriptions of landscapes and the car of battle. We can be grateful that, unlike most of his contemporary fellow-poets, he was not versed in classical lore or weighed down the artificial baggage of mythology.

At a distance flowed Itata
From the mountain glacier's freshets,
Gushing through umbrageous forests,

Ribboned cataracts and gorges.
 There the trees with amorous murmuring
 Crease the pillow of contentment,
 Vying with the flowers in beauty,
 Scarlet, azured, gilt, albescent.

Seven leagues from Penco's turrets
 Lay this gladsome, fertile region,
 Opulent and self-sufficient
 To sustain embattled prowlers.
 On the East, the cordillera
 Rimmed a wall of high-capped ridges
 Whence the dagger-swift Itata
 Plunged its silver tribute seaward.

evitably, his depiction of the sacking and burning of Concepción
 reminds us of the Nazi air-bombardment of London.

High and low the sparks were scattered.
 By their din the sky was threatened.
 Dense, black smoke and flame-tongues darting
 Covered o'er the hapless city.
 Shook the earth, and blazes crackled,
 Seeking to escape to heaven.
 Crashed the richly carved woodwork
 Now reduced to powdered ashes.

Lost the fecund golden city,
 Gracing most the globe's wide compass,
 Where most riches and most treasures
 Are reported to be buried!
 Oh how many lives are weeping,
 For whom constant war were better!
 Poverty is greater misery
 For the ones who once have prospered.

uniacal butchery and feline cunning characterized the warfare of the
 aucanians, who were not merely defending their homeland, but were
 aggressive hornets to plague the invaders at every turn. The Spaniards,
 sometimes helped by their women, even the pregnant, learned to re-
 spect the fury of a fanatical enemy.

Some struck ground, quite gravely wounded,
 Pierced their backs, their bowels ripped open,
 Others punctured through their foreheads.
 Some with throats slit, died in honor.
 Others craving means and mercy,

With their eyes torn from their sockets,
Were compelled to run, ne'er stopping,
Over dangerous crags and fissures.

Lautaro, as fierce as his brothers despite his short-lived domesticity in Valdivia's garrison, "loosened blood-lakes on the plaza."

Scarcely had the headstrong savage
Landed firmly in the plaza
When he swung his bulky cudgel
And dispersed his lurking foemen.
Fine-meshed mail, stout armor-plating,
Helmets were not worth a copper.
Raining blows they could not suffer.
Skulls and brains were mashed and mangled.

Some fell, bruised and badly crippled;
Others swooned from life-long damage.
Through their chests he drove their neck-bones,
And their ribs and spines he fractured,
As if all their bones were beeswax,
They were twisted, crushed, and moulded,
As he forced his way, unflinching,
Through the armored human thicket.

Though at the outset Ercilla had vowed he would not sing of "ladies, love or graces," he occasionally brings in a picture of the Araucanian woman and suggests the love motif. He recognized the validity of the tender passion as a relief from the desolation and slaughter that brim his pages. One such scene presents forebodings of Lautaro's death at the hands of the Spaniards. He and his beautiful wife, Guacolda, dream the same dream of doom, as she lies in his arms, in a shack near the battleground.

Their retreat had one lane only
Occupied with hawk-eyed sentries.
Other paths lacked trails or footprints
Since the land was almost barren.
On that night the savage slumbered
In the arms of fair Guacolda,
Whom he loved with flaming passion,
Who for him felt equal ardor.

The Araucan was divested
Of his cumbrous martial trappings.

That night only fate disposed him
 To repose and sweet caresses.
 Heavy nightmares pressed his eyelids.
 He awoke, distressed and anxious,
 And Guacolda, taut and breathless,
 Asked him why he seemed so startled.

"Dear beloved," Lautaro answered,
 "Just this instant I was dreaming
 That a scowling Spaniard faced me
 With ferocity depicted
 In his mien. With hands of violence
 He squeezed out my heart and robbed me
 Of my manliness. I woke then,
 Overcome with rage and sorrow."

In a troubled tone she murmured:
 "I, alas, have dreamed this, also.
 Happiness I e'er distrusted.
 Now your end is knelled, and weeping
 Drowns my hope's eterne tomorrow.
 Why should I bewail bereavement?
 Death can ravel up my worries!
 Death can intercept my journey!

"Spectral visions, soon unveiling,
 Will attempt to mar love's banquet,
 Leave our bridal bed forsaken.
 Never shall they separate us!
 Such a blow I cannot suffer,
 But in other blows there's solace.
 When cold earth receives your body,
 Mine shall lie in death above you!"

In Siqueiros' recently painted mural of Latin American historical figures, the panel devoted to Chile emblazons two Indian heroes, Araucanians both, and both towering giants in Don Alonso's epic. One is Caupolicán, the Indian warlord, whose one eye was sightless from birth, "like a precious blood-red garnet." The other is the *cacique* Galvarino, who spewed defiance at the Spaniards, when captured, and as "a salutary example" was mutilated by having both

hands severed at the wrist. Ercilla was an eye-witness of this atrocity, for which he curses the cruelty of his compatriots. Nauseated, he exclaims:

I was present when on tree-stump
His right hand he laid, unquailing.
With one slash 'twas lopped, but gayly
Next his left hand was extended,
Which alike sprung, detruncated.
Blinking not, his brow unwrinkled,
With disdain and scorn he also
Bowed his neck for execution.

Rang his voice: "Cut clean this gullet,
Parched, and for your blood e'er thirsty!
Death I fear not! No coercion,
No austere abuse can hurt me.
No one loses, no one profits
By this fiendish amputation.
Myriad hands remain stout-fisted
To drive home their blades of vengeance.

"If you think to win some vantage
By begrudging me Death's ransom,
Here I choose to die and spite you;
If you wish me life, I loathe it!
Joyfully I join my fathers,
Dying, whilst you live, remorseful.
With my death I'd fain displease you.
"Tis my lone, last dart and quiver!"

By a treacherous ruse Caupolicán is captured, and while being led away, he meets up with his squaw, Fresia. She, the queen of all the Araucanians, cannot curb her contempt for her husband for permitting his hands to be shackled. She screams her horror and disdain, and flings down his male-child at his feet.

"Had you died, I'd bless the tidings.
Joy would shroud me 'neath the cypress.

"Take your son, our knot of union,
Whereby licit love enchained me

To your soul. All shock of anguish
 From these fecund breasts is shrivelled.
 Rear him, as your rippling sinews
 Have assumed a sexless languor.
 I reject the name of mother
 To the scion of degradation!"

Yet Caupolicán does not for this lose dignity when he faces sentence from his captors. His tone is haughty as he speaks to Reinoso.

"I am Chief Caupolicano,
 Dashed to earth, by Fate o'ertopped.
 I have absolute dominion
 Over Araucanian heroes.
 Peace is in my hand and choosing,
 And each compact's confirmation,
 Since my providential office
 Curbs the earth in bestial bondage.

"In Tucapel I slew Valdivia,
 And I left Purén dismantled.
 I am he who throttled Penco,
 He who won so many battles;
 But the opposing bowl inverted
 Of the sky, beringed with triumphs,
 Bows me at thy feet to beg thee
 For my life a short span longer.

"Tend more glorious aspirations!
 Be not drowned in shallow waters!
 All that Fortune claims in handsel
 Is that thou shouldst sip the chalice
 Of her dewy mead. Heed Hazard!
 Know thy happy time! Thou hast me
 In thy power. My corpse will profit
 Thee no more than chaff unsifted."

These were prophetic words, for the Araucanians, driven back into the fastnesses of the hills, harassed the Spaniards through 250 bloody years. It did not matter that Caupolicán turned Christian. He was condemned to be impaled, and afterwards to be pierced by arrows, since he rejected death at the hands of a Negro garrotter.

To the pole of execution
Strode he, where the atrocious sentence
Was to fall, his face contemptuous,
Smirking at the jowls of horror,
Saying: "Since my star is baleful,
And prepares this bitter banquet,
Let it come, for it I hunger!
Stingless is the woe that's final!"

Again Ercilla expresses sympathy and pity for a brave heart so atrociously stilled.

Methinks I can sense compassion
From the cruelest, hardened hearer,
New apprised of this barbaric
Crime, wherefrom, sire, I was absent.
I had gone on other conquests
Of remote, unseen revolters.
Had I been there at that season,
I'd have stayed the execution.

He concludes Canto XXXVII, an old and broken man. He had fought well and had been rewarded. He had written the greatest epic poem of the Spanish conquest, and all save a few jealous rivals applauded him. But he had fallen into "craven disfavor" with his monarch, perhaps because of failure on a diplomatic mission to the Duke of Brunswick. His marriage to Doña María de Bazán had fattened his income despite the wariness of his mother-in-law, who held the purse-strings of the dowry. Honor-laden, he had travelled in Italy, Germany, and Portugal. Yet Don Alonso's closing song is desolate:

As my leaky craft is pitching
In the final haven's offing,
And unknown to wisest helmsmen
Is the fragile port recessive,
Winged time I ponder, wishing
Breath's cessation, ere oblivion
Seal my chart of life uncertain,
Writ through the errant years distractive.

Though with tardy resignation
I await my final summons,
Anywhere I know 'tis never
Late to turn to God, our Pilot.
Ne'er His clemency was artful.
Sinners great need not be cowards,
As their God is good, and mindful
Not of sinfulness, but service.

I, who free of reins, have given
To the world my flowering lifetime,
Following dreams and hopes delusive
Aye o'er cliff-strewn paths abysmal,
Seeing how few fruits I've gathered,
And how much my God is slighted,
Knowing now my fault, hereafter
I must weep and sing no longer.