

Juan Manuel de Rosas as Viewed by Contemporary American Diplomats

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IN 1928 RICARDO LEVENE said two chief difficulties stood in the way of a final judgment of Juan Manuel de Rosas, the violent caudillo who ruled Argentina with an iron hand from 1829 to 1852. One was the stormy nature of that period, complicated by numerous events of external and internal policy. The other was lack of sufficient documentary evidence.¹ Nevertheless, while Levene wrote, countless documents relating to Rosa reposed in archives in Buenos Aires; but historians had not examined them.

Rosas had detractors who wrote freely and frankly about his cruelty and vengefulness. One of his political enemies, Rivera Indarte, alleged that Rosas assassinated 722 persons, shot 1,393, and beheaded 3,765.² Rippy points to another detractor who said that more than twenty thousand reputable men were either killed or exiled merely for differing with Rosas in political and administrative matters.³ Evidence abounds that much of the "Age of Rosas" was a reign of terror during which hundreds of Argentina's ablest citizens were shot down in cold blood, put in filthy prisons, or condemned to exile in Uruguay, Chile, Brazil, and Europe.

Rosas also had apologists who condoned his methods, stressed his patriotism, and praised him as a great administrator and public servant. In 1898 Ernesto Quesada, a lawyer, historian, and sociologist of Buenos Aires, said Rosas laid the foundation upon which the Argentine nation was subsequently built.⁴ Some twenty years later the Peruvian historian F. García Calderón wrote:

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¹ Ricardo Levene, *A History of Argentina*, trans. by William S. Robertson, (Chapel Hill, 1937), p. 440.

² William S. Robertson, "Foreign Estimates of the Argentine Dictator, Juan Manuel de Rosas", *HAHR*, X (May, 1930), 125.

³ J. Fred Rippy, *Historical Evolution of Hispanic America*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1945), p. 187.

⁴ Robertson, *loc. cit.*, p. 125.

Like all great American dictators, Rosas proved to be an eminent administrator of the public finances. In time of national disturbance and military expenditure he displayed an extraordinary zeal in organizing and publishing the national accounts. . . . Rosas was vigorous in assuring the service of the external debt; he accumulated neither loans nor fresh taxes. His economic policy was orderly and far-seeing. . . . His invulnerable dictatorship was based upon material progress and fiscal order.⁵

Another apologist praised Rosas for his successful stand against the Anglo-French intervention in the 1840's. According to Kirkpatrick:

Rosas, unsupported, had successfully maintained a truly American policy of resistance to European interference and had baffled the repeated attempts of two great powers to dictate to him. . . . A thorough creole, he understood the sentiment of his people; under his leadership the Province of Buenos Aires, with its 140,000 inhabitants, had borne, almost unaided, the burden of long military operations; and in 1848 when the blockade was withdrawn, he [was] . . . acclaimed as the triumphant champion of Argentine independence.⁶

From the foregoing comments it is obvious that the verdict of history upon Rosas has not been unanimous. His rightful place in the annals of Argentina has been baffling to historians. It is difficult to obtain an unbiased opinion from an Argentine about him. Historians therefore have tended to rely on the views of foreigners in their quest for a more complete judgment of Rosas. In 1930 the late Professor William Spence Robertson wrote an admirable article for the *HAHR* concerning foreign estimates of Rosas. In the belief that Frenchmen had the best insight into the character of the Latin race, Robertson based his article almost solely on the views of French contemporaries.⁷ He did not mention estimates of the tyrant emanating from American contemporaries.

Since the labors of Levene and Robertson on the subject, additional materials have been examined by scholars interested in Rosas. Among the most interesting of these sources are diplomatic despatches received by the American State Department during the Rosas regime. These documents show that most American diplomats accredited to the Río de la Plata area believed that Rosas possessed the traits of a caudillo of the most violent type. Their views concerning Rosas, however, vary greatly—from extreme adulation to utter con-

⁵ F. García Calderón, *Latin America: Its Rise and Progress*, trans. by Bernard Miall, 5th ed. (London, 1918), p. 144.

⁶ Frederick A. Kirkpatrick, *A History of the Argentine Republic* (Cambridge, England, 1931), p. 157.

⁷ Robertson, *loc. cit.*, p. 136.

demnation. Undoubtedly some of them, particularly in the early years, were prejudiced, for they seemed to judge Argentine conditions in terms of standards then prevailing in the United States. Some lacked experience as diplomats. Until the late 1840's the majority of them were neither facile in Spanish⁸ nor familiar with the temperament, traditions, and customs of the Argentines.

Nevertheless, American diplomats who served in Argentina frankly expressed their views of Rosas the man and Rosas the maker of policy. In general their estimates of the dictator are similar to those of contemporaries from other nations who came to Argentina. For clarity and candor, however, comments of the Americans are unsurpassed. American diplomats, particularly in the late 1840's and early 1850's, help us to arrive at a final estimate of Rosas. The purpose of this study is to present their views and to evaluate them in the light of contemporary and modern scholarly works relating to affairs in the Río de la Plata during the long regime of Rosas.

John M. Forbes was American *chargé d'affaires* at Buenos Aires when Rosas became governor of Buenos Aires province in 1829. On November 10 of that year Forbes called at the town residence of Rosas and was received in the most cordial manner. Rosas ordered the room cleared of other visitors. During their conversation, he spoke freely and frankly of the motives of his policies. Forbes was fully convinced that Rosas was noble and patriotic—a man of “magnanimity and moderation. . . .”⁹

Shortly thereafter Rosas was chosen governor by a junta selected from the membership of the legislature of Buenos Aires province. At the installation ceremony on December 8, 1829, Forbes closely observed Rosas, and shortly thereafter described him as moderately educated, and similar to strong-minded farmers in the United States who were the best guarantee of national liberty:

Rosas, however, differs from anything we have in our Country, inasmuch as he owes his great popularity among the gauchos, or common peasantry, to

⁸ For example, W. G. D. Worthington, special agent of the United States for seamen and commerce for Buenos Aires, Chile, and Peru, in 1818, commented humorously about his inability to understand Spanish. With reference to conversations with Gregorio Tagle, secretary of state for Buenos Aires, Worthington said “the Secretary speaks only Spanish and, though I confer with him always without an interpreter, I am very deficient in the language as yet. However, I can understand him as well as he can me—so that in this respect we are on a par.” Worthington to Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, Jan. 10, 1818, National Archives, Washington, D.C., State Department Diplomatic Despatches, Argentina (cited hereinafter as NA, SDDDA), vol. 1.

⁹ John M. Forbes to Secretary of State Martin Van Buren, Nov. 12, 1829, NA, SDDDA, vol. 3.

his having assimilated himself to the greatest extremity to their most singular mode of life, their dress, their labors, and even their sports; and it is said that he excels in every gymnastic exercise, even the most active and adroit, of that half savage race of men. In his manner he is extremely mild, and has something of the reflection and reserve of our Indian Chiefs. He affects no display of learning, but shews [*sic*] in all his conversation a full share of excellent judgment and knowledge of the affairs of his country, and a most cordial and sincere patriotism.¹⁰

Nearly all of Forbes' letters to Washington indicate that he was favorably impressed with Rosas. Unfortunately, Forbes died at his post of duty. Francis Baylies who succeeded him as chargé d'affaires at Buenos Aires early in 1832 did not regard the dictator so highly. At that time considerable ill-feeling prevailed between the governments of Buenos Aires and the United States, because of Argentine seizure of three American fishing vessels off the coasts of the Falkland Islands. This controversy reached a climax during the short-lived mission of Baylies to Buenos Aires, and led to a break in diplomatic relations in late 1832.¹¹ The strained relations between the two governments are clearly reflected in Baylies' letters to Washington.

Nevertheless, in a complimentary vein Baylies throws light on the physical characteristics of Rosas:

He possessed much personal beauty, having a large, commanding figure and a fine face—and he was a Rubeo [*sic*], a term applied to those with florid complexions and light eyes, indicating a descent from the pure Gothic race (the ancient lords of Spain) without any intermixture of Morish [*sic*] or Jewish blood. This race has always been held in much esteem by the common people both of Spain and South America.¹²

But Baylies deplored the dictator's ignorance of law, and lamented the fact that he was clothed with so much power. According to Baylies, Rosas had no knowledge either of international or even municipal law and no acquaintance with the common forms of public business. With his unlimited powers, Rosas could close courts of justice, suspend criminal and civil processes, imprison people by his own authority, and control the press.¹³

Rosas had long been associated with two brothers named Ancho-rena, one of whom later became his minister of foreign affairs. He had acted as manager of their extensive ranch lands. Baylies said they "have a commanding influence over the Governor. They are

¹⁰ Forbes to Van Buren, Dec. 9, 1829, NA, SDDDA, vol. 3.

¹¹ Graham H. Stuart, *Latin America and The United States*, 5th ed. (New York, 1955), pp. 353-355.

¹² Francis Baylies to Secretary of State Edward Livingston, July 24, 1832, NA, SDDDA, vol. 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*

facsimiles of the old Spaniards, proud, bigoted, narrow-minded, and oppressive—hating all foreigners. . . .”¹⁴

Baylies not only condemned the methods of Rosas, but also deprecated the lack of patriotism and want of integrity among Argentines in general. He said the Argentines

have no idea of that feeling which we call love of country—the business of government is a job, and its offices are considered as a kind of employment to gain money, a sort of license to take bribes. There is neither consistency, stability, or freedom in this Argentine *Republic*. The revolutions of these people are seditious; their knowledge, chicanery and trickery; their patriotism, bluster; their liberty, a farce. . . .

Baylies held that the United States should sign no treaty with authorities in Buenos Aires “for we would abide by it, and they would consider the violation of a treaty no greater offense than a lie told by a schoolboy. . . .”¹⁵

Baylies regretted most of all that he could not effect a satisfactory settlement of the controversy concerning the capture of the American fishing vessels off the Falklands. He became impatient at the evasion and procrastination of the Argentine authorities.¹⁶ After asking for passports for himself and his family, on August 18, 1832, Baylies suggested war as the only effective way to deal with authorities at Buenos Aires. He believed they wanted war with the United States “whom they rate generally as they would Chili or Peru. . . .”¹⁷ Baylies eventually received his passports, and started home late in September, 1832.¹⁸ The diplomatic hiatus was destined to last more than a decade.

In April, 1844, Harvey M. Watterson was sent to Buenos Aires as “Special Agent” of the State Department with instructions to obtain information concerning domestic and foreign affairs of Argentina, to give attention to interests of American citizens, to secure the restoration of American trade, to prepare the way for the settlement of American claims against Buenos Aires, and to seek the resumption of full diplomatic relations between that government and the United States.¹⁹ Watterson was most cordially received and treated with great respect and kindness by Rosas and other govern-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Baylies italicized the word “Republic.”

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Baylies to Livingston, Aug. 19, 1832, NA, SDDDA, vol. 4.

¹⁸ Baylies to Livingston, Sept. 26, 1832, NA, SDDDA, vol. 4.

¹⁹ John F. Cady, *Foreign Intervention in the Río de la Plata 1838—50* (Philadelphia, 1929), p. 161.

ment officials, who hoped that diplomatic relations between the two governments would be completely reestablished. Watterson considered the dictator a grass-roots man of the highest order:

Rosas is a real General Jackson of a fellow—if I may use the expression. He may be wrong and no doubt is in many things—but that he believes he is right there is not the slightest question in my mind. I greatly admire his frankness. He has no concealment about him. . . . Set down Gov. Rosas as a gentleman—very great man—a man of the people—a man who understands human nature in all its various manifestations. He is one of nature's noblemen and a higher compliment I could not pay him.²⁰

When Watterson reached Buenos Aires, armed forces of that province, plus many Uruguayans, led by General Manuel Oribe, were engaged in a long war in Uruguay. Oribe's forces, backed by Rosas, held the back country of the Banda Oriental. They were fighting the *Colorado* faction in Montevideo, led by Fructuoso Rivera, aided by some 3,000 Frenchmen, 1,000 Italians, and 1,500 Negroes, most of whom had been recruited in Uruguay. France and England supported the Colorados. Watterson held the view, shared by his successors, that Rosas did not wish to terminate hostilities. While the dictator's troops were busy in Uruguay, there was no danger that their arms would be turned against him at home.²¹ It is clear, however, that Rosas aided Oribe mainly because he held that Oribe was the legal president of Uruguay and also because he wanted to oppose the Anglo-French intervention in every possible way.²² It was also evident that Rosas wished to restore cordial relations with the United States, hence the warm reception accorded Watterson.²³

William Brent, Jr. was appointed American chargé d'affaires to Argentina on August 13, 1844, when diplomatic relations were resumed. His instructions were essentially the same as those carried by Watterson. Brent served approximately two years in that position, during which the most perplexing problem confronting Rosas was the joint intervention in the Plata by France and England. Armed forces from those powers blockaded the Argentine coast, seized the island of Martín García, strategically located in the Plata estuary, captured the Argentine navy, and sent a joint expedition up the Paraná River. Brent fully sympathized with the government of

²⁰ Harvey M. Watterson to William Brent, Jr., chargé d'affaires to Buenos Aires, April 22, 1844, NA, SDDDA, vol. 4.

²¹ Watterson to Secretary of State John C. Calhoun, Sept. 5, 1844, NA, SDDDA, vol. 5.

²² Cady, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102.

²³ Watterson to Calhoun, Oct. 11, 1844, NA, SDDDA, vol. 5.

Rosas. He persistently condemned the intervention, because he was convinced that France and England had evil motives for their opposition to Oribe. And the blockade was most injurious to American interests in the Río de la Plata.²⁴

The most embarrassing situation facing Brent was caused by a private letter to Rosas written by Edward A. Hopkins, United States special agent to Paraguay. The dictator had never recognized the independence of Paraguay; he contended that by a treaty of 1811 Paraguay agreed to be a member of the Argentine Confederation.²⁵ For selfish, personal reasons, Hopkins was very anxious that Rosas recognize Paraguayan independence, and end his traditional policy of controlling trade and navigation on rivers in the Plata basin. Hopkins had grandiose schemes to promote construction of railways in Paraguay, and to exploit natural resources there, and elsewhere in the Plata basin. He made several unauthorized promises to the Paraguayan dictator, Carlos Antonio López, among which were immediate diplomatic recognition by the United States, a guarantee of Paraguayan independence, and free navigation on rivers in the Plata area.²⁶

Hopkins wisely waited until he was ready to leave Buenos Aires before he sent Rosas a personal letter which, for impertinence and impudence, probably has no parallel in the annals of American foreign relations. Laying aside all the niceties of diplomacy, Hopkins wrote:

I know that not in the wide world have you a man as a friend in whom you can confide, nor is there *one* among your own countrymen who will speak to you what he thinks and feels. . . . I want you to listen to one who dares to tell you what he feels and knows, so that if you are a man who loves American principles and liberty, you will meditate long and deeply upon it.

Hopkins then mentioned the deplorable state in which Argentina found herself: she was beset by civil war and attacked by foreign enemies; and there was a total want of public virtue. Hopkins proceeded to condemn the dictator's legislative, executive, and judicial systems. He urged Rosas to declare instantly the independence of Paraguay without reservation, leaving the navigation of the rivers to

²⁴ Cady, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-166.

²⁵ Brent to Secretary of State James Buchanan, Sept. 23, 1845, NA, SDDDA, vol. 5.

²⁶ Harold F. Peterson, "Edward A. Hopkins: A Pioneer Promoter in Paraguay," *HAHR*, XXII (May, 1942), 245-261; see also Victor Johnson, "Edward A. Hopkins and the Development of Argentine Transportation and Communication," *HAHR*, XXVI (Feb., 1946), 19-37.

the settlement of a general congress. He condemned the Rosas-controlled press, and asked why it was necessary to preface all editorials with "Death to the Savage Unitarians." He implored Rosas to "Show the world an example of moderation, and it will speak well for your heart and your head. . . ."²⁷

Hopkins' letter to Rosas caused Brent much embarrassment. Brent called the letter "a most extraordinary and insolent production." He suggested that the original letter be sent to the president of the United States who "should be made fully acquainted with this most singular conduct of their agent." Brent conferred at length with Argentine minister of foreign relations, Felipe Arana, concerning this letter, and awaited the permission of Rosas to send a copy of it to the American secretary of state.²⁸ Needless to say, Hopkins was recalled. But his letter to Rosas was destined to be a source of embarrassment for several years not only to Brent's successors in Buenos Aires, but also to officials in Washington.

Shortly after Hopkins' departure from Buenos Aires, Brent's conduct as a diplomat left something to be desired. Without instructions from the State Department, and at the request of Rosas, Brent offered his mediation between the governments of Buenos Aires and Paraguay. To that end he sent his son, George Lee Brent, and Joseph Graham, United States consul, as special agents to Paraguay. Such unauthorized action, together with Hopkins' blunders, created a difficult situation for Brent's successor as chargé d'affaires at Buenos Aires in June, 1846.²⁹

Of all American diplomats accredited to the government at Buenos Aires, Joseph Graham was the most consistently sympathetic toward the Rosas regime. Graham was American consul at Buenos Aires during the middle and late 1840's, and he served in the dual capacity of consul and chargé d'affaires from August 1852, until December, 1854. He got along well with authorities in Buenos Aires, and he was constantly on the lookout for ways to aid fellow Americans engaged in business there.

On his mission to Paraguay, Graham proved himself a masterful diplomat. He and the younger Brent went on horseback to Santa Fe on a journey made hazardous by rain, high water, and bad roads.

²⁷ Hopkins to Rosas, March 19, 1846, NA, SDDDA, vol. 5. Rosas had always promised to call "a general Congress" of Argentine provinces in order to unite them and to write a constitution. Hopkins here taunts Rosas by mentioning the "general Congress."

²⁸ Brent to Arana, March 25, 1846, NA, SDDDA, vol. 5.

²⁹ William A. Harris, chargé d'affaires to Buenos Aires, to Buchanan, July 14, 1846, NA, SDDDA, vol. 6.

From Santa Fe they proceeded by boat up the Paraná. They interviewed the dictator, López, who called attention to many wrongs from Rosas and leveled "coarse epithets against him." Graham and Brent tried to reply several times, but López "was in such a state of excitement that he constantly interrupted us, and we concluded it was best to listen patiently 'till he had talked himself into a better humor which he did in about an hour." Graham apologized for the conduct of Hopkins and assured López that the United States opposed the Anglo-French intervention. Graham also said that on the question of Paraguayan independence, the United States did not "champion" Rosas, but was a friend to both Paraguay and the government at Buenos Aires.³⁰

Graham showed sympathy for the Rosas government by condemning the blockade of Argentine coasts as "palpably contrary to the laws of nations and established usages in its inception. . . . If we submit to such a blockade are we not committing a breach of neutrality and taking part with one of the belligerents?" Graham was also thinking of the best interests of American citizens in Buenos Aires who had large amounts of property there ready for shipment, some of which was of a perishable nature. He pointed out that "our merchants are suffering losses in various ways."³¹

That American merchants appreciated the services of Graham is shown late in 1845 by their petition to retain him as United States consul in Buenos Aires when James H. Tate had been sent to replace him. The petition in favor of Graham pointed to the critical state of affairs in Argentina, asserted that an experienced consul was an absolute necessity, said Graham had performed his duties with great satisfaction to his fellow citizens and to the Buenos Aires authorities as well, and averred that frequent changes of consuls were prejudicial to American interests there. The petitioners not only asked that Graham be retained, but also that his salary be raised.³² The State Department acted favorably on this petition. Mr. Graham continued his labors and "indeed rendered himself very acceptable to his own countrymen, as well as to the government and people" of Buenos Aires.³³

When William A. Harris landed at Buenos Aires on June 25, 1846, to succeed the elder Brent as chargé d'affaires, he was given a

³⁰ Joseph Graham and George L. Brent to Harris, Dec. 7, 1846, NA, SDDDA, vol. 6.

³¹ Graham to Brent, Feb. 28, 1846, NA, SDDDA, vol. 5.

³² Petition signed by fifty-eight United States' merchants in Buenos Aires to Buchanan, Dec. 1, 1845, NA, SDDDA, vol. 5.

³³ Harris to Buchanan, May 25, 1847, NA, SDDDA, vol. 6.

cold reception. The Argentines looked upon him with distrust, because they believed he had not come to make good the extravagant hopes which had been excited by his predecessor. Harris commented on the causes of Argentine ill-feeling toward the United States. He mentioned the blunders, mistakes, and follies of some of our public agents in that quarter. He said the Argentines were an exceedingly proud, sensitive, and jealous people. And they did not hesitate to complain about the kind of men who were sent to them as diplomats, particularly at the rank of *chargé d'affaires*. Harris reluctantly expressed his opinion that some American diplomats were not capable, that Argentine authorities were well warranted in drawing unfavorable conclusions about the American people, and that much had been done to lessen the United States in public esteem. The conduct of Mr. Hopkins was the final blow to American popularity. After having perpetrated his extravagant follies in Paraguay, he went to Buenos Aires to offer himself as mediator between that government and Paraguay. When asked for his authority for such a proceeding, he could give none.³⁴

Available evidence indicates that Harris was an able diplomat faced by many problems. That he was embarrassed by the blunders of some of his predecessors is obvious. Furthermore, at the time of his arrival in Buenos Aires, conditions in the Plata provinces were most distressing. The Anglo-French interventionists controlled trade and navigation along the coast and on the rivers. There were signs of discontent among caudillos in the up-river provinces, particularly in Entre Ríos and Corrientes. The Argentine people had long been weary of the iron dictatorship. Harris spoke of the terrorism which caused crushing fear among the population. Complaint by the people was not tolerated. There was no freedom of speech or even of thought. Yet in October, 1846, despite signs of disaffection in the back country, Harris was convinced that Rosas was the only man who could keep the Argentines together; and this the tyrant did largely through fear.³⁵

³⁴ Harris to Buchanan, July 14, 1846, NA, SDDDA, vol. 6.

³⁵ Harris to Buchanan, Oct. 10, 1846, NA, SDDDA, vol. 6. This letter further states that generals Urquiza and Madariaga, governors respectively of Santa Fe and Corrientes, had entered into a treaty aimed at creating a federal form of government with written constitutions for the states and federal government like those of the United States. They pledged that they would remain neutral in all wars entered into by Rosas without popular consent. Furthermore, they negotiated a treaty with Captain Hotham, agent for Great Britain and France, providing that, if those two powers would guarantee their independence, they would withdraw from the Argentine Confederation and declare the rivers open to their commerce.

Harris believed that Rosas would deal firmly with any attempts by the British and French to settle the intervention by negotiation. Such an attempt was made in May, 1847, when the French Count, Walewski, and an Englishman, Lord Howden, arrived in Buenos Aires. With reference to these agents, Harris said: "If they bring matters to an adjustment, it will be by making concessions, never by demanding them; this Genl. Rosas had declared since they have arrived . . . and my Lord and the Count will find in him an obstacle to their purposes, as strong as the mighty current of La Plata itself with which to contend."³⁶

Harris hoped the Howden-Walewski attempt at negotiation would be successful. He was concerned about the commercial interests of neutral nations, particularly those of the United States. He desired business operations to return to a high level. Aware of the Argentine tendency to procrastinate, Harris urged Howden to be patient with the Argentines, for they tended toward tardiness in all their relations with agents of other governments. To secure peace, it was absolutely necessary to allow the greatest latitude possible to their slow mode of proceeding.³⁷ Harris pointed out that Argentines and foreign nationals alike wanted to see a peaceful solution of the intervention. All members of the diplomatic corps in Buenos Aires, including Arana, hoped for an arrangement satisfactory to all parties. But Rosas remained unmoved and immovable.³⁸

Among other things, Howden and Walewski proposed a general peace and amnesty for all political offenses, surrender of the island of Martín García and other places held by the British and French, restitution of the Buenos Aires navy with a salute of twenty-one guns, and confirmation of the independence of Uruguay. Rosas firmly refused to confirm the independence of Uruguay, a stand which, Harris said,

strengthens the conclusion that I have long since drawn of his purpose to bring that and all other provinces of the Plata under one consolidated Government which he would govern and control as he now does those of the Argentine Confederation. . . . A war with Brazil is one of the movements of this policy, which . . . will take place in less than three months if these difficulties with England and France are adjusted.³⁹

Harris bitterly condemned the blockade, and contended that it was never intended to be effective. He called it a "paper blockade" of all ports in the Argentine Confederation, embracing some 700

³⁶ Harris to Buchanan, May 16, 1846, NA, SDDDA, vol. 6.

³⁷ Harris to Buchanan, June 16, 1846, NA, SDDDA, vol. 6.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

leagues of coastline. In order to enforce it the interventionists placed two small vessels before the port of Buenos Aires alone. They compelled all vessels from overseas ports to stop at Montevideo and unload their goods; import duties were then collected. Goods bound for Buenos Aires were reloaded in small vessels of fifteen to twenty tons each, after export duties were collected on them at Montevideo. The usual import duties were collected when the produce was unloaded at Buenos Aires. Likewise three duties were collected on all produce bound from Buenos Aires through Montevideo to ports beyond the Sea.⁴⁰

Harris said Rosas was contemplating closing his own ports, and would do so if he could induce General Justo José de Urquiza, governor of Entre Ríos, to close ports in that province.⁴¹ Harris also said that if Rosas closed the port of Buenos Aires to all vessels touching at Montevideo, it would hurt his people and foreign businessmen in Buenos Aires as well. But such a development would be a "death blow to Montevideo for it would deprive that government of all pecuniary means, and the people of subsistence. Governor Rosas has all the energy necessary to adopt such a measure, and it may be that he will soon carry it out."⁴²

Overseas trade with the port of Buenos Aires, however, was not limited. Despite the intervention, the value and volume of commerce of Buenos Aires grew during the Rosas regime. In 1837, for example, Buenos Aires exported 823,635 ox hides; in 1851, 2,601,140 ox hides. There were similar increases in exports of wheat, wool, and tallow.⁴³

From conversations with Rosas and Arana, Harris gained the impression that the dictator did not want the question of the blockade settled. Harris held that as long as the blockade continued, Rosas could retain his power; he could divert public attention from himself, control rebellious elements, and make himself stronger every day. He could keep his chiefs busy, and keep them at a distance from the capital.⁴⁴ Harris believed that Rosas wanted the situation to remain unchanged as long as he was at the head of the Argentine Confederation. The dictator, Harris held, had to keep the army on a war footing in order to stay in power.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Harris to Buchanan, Sept. 16, 1847, NA, SDDDA, vol. 6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Harris to Buchanan, Aug. 2, 1847, NA, SDDDA, vol. 6.

⁴³ Miron Burgin, *The Economic Aspects of Argentine Federalism, 1820-1852* (Cambridge, Mass., 1946), p. 275.

⁴⁴ Harris to Buchanan, June 17, 1848, NA, SDDDA, vol. 6.

⁴⁵ Harris to Buchanan, Jan. 15, 1849, NA, SDDDA, vol. 6.

By January, 1849, conditions were such in England and France that both powers desired to terminate the intervention. France had just been rocked by political revolution. England was having domestic difficulties. In April, 1849, Rosas submitted to both powers the terms under which he was willing to settle the trouble in the Río de la Plata. Harris predicted that if both governments unconditionally accepted them, Rosas would find an excuse not to withdraw his army from Uruguay. In such a situation he would foment difficulties between Buenos Aires and Brazil to the point of war and keep his forces in Uruguay to menace or attack the Brazilian frontier.⁴⁶ Thus, once the intervention ended, Rosas would continue his war policy, keep some of his discontented chieftains in Uruguay, and maintain his position in Buenos Aires.

If the problems pertaining to the foreign intervention were perplexing, equally so were those relating to claims by United States citizens against the government at Buenos Aires. American diplomats were always instructed to give attention to the adjustment of claims. In the early years, when internal and external strife troubled Argentine leaders, little or no effort was made to collect claims. Harris was the first American diplomat to attempt to settle such questions. During his mission, from mid-1846 until late 1851, he gained a strong impression that Rosas would not pay any claims against his government.

In a letter to Secretary of State John M. Clayton, Harris wrote: "It seems to be the . . . policy of the Government never to settle or pay any of the many just and meritorious claims against it as long as it is possible to avoid it."⁴⁷ The most notable claim against the government at Buenos Aires was that of Thomas Lloyd Halsey, who had made a loan to rebel leaders there during the war of independence. On July 26, 1826, a commission named by that government examined this claim, and found that the amount due Halsey was \$79,439. No payments were made, however, and the controversy dragged on for years. The delay stemmed in part from the many changes in government and the chaotic situation in Argentina prior to the advent of Rosas. Moreover, the hiatus in diplomatic relations between Argentina and the United States from 1832 to 1844 doubtless added to the delay. Harris made repeated attempts to collect the claim—to no avail. Early in September, 1850, he had a private interview with Rosas concerning this claim, but no definite results were obtained.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Harris to Buchanan, April 9, 1849, NA, SDDDA, vol. 6.

⁴⁷ Harris to Clayton, July 23, 1849, NA, SDDDA, vol. 6.

⁴⁸ Harris to Clayton, Sept. 8, 1850, NA, SDDDA, vol. 7

That the funds were available was not to be doubted. According to Harris, "At this moment there are about thirty millions of dollars of paper money in the public chest, equal to about two and a quarter millions of hard dollars. There is no lack of means. The public credit, the public treasury, and the whole country, never were in so prosperous a condition."⁴⁹

In October, 1851, Rosas finally arranged to pay the Halsey claim. The sum of \$10,000 was paid immediately, and the balance was to be paid on an installment basis by the government at Buenos Aires. Harris was greatly relieved after this arrangement was made. He wrote to Secretary of State Daniel Webster: "And I can truly add that the discussion and adjustment of this matter with the extraordinary man who rules these people with such crushing and ferocious despotism . . . has been one of the most painful, harrassing, and annoying affairs in which it has ever been my lot to be engaged."⁵⁰

Harris was disturbed not only by the dictator's procrastination in the adjustment of claims of American nationals in Argentina, but also by the miserable condition of monetary affairs. He said:

The paper system here [in Buenos Aires] is certainly the worst and the most irresponsible that has ever been known to exist. It is based on nothing—absolutely nothing! There is no promise, or obligation, or pretense of obligation upon anybody, personal or corporate, to pay anything! It is a mere collection of individuals, by the direction and authority of the Governor, whose business it is to issue as much of this paper as he pleases to direct.

Harris pointed out that, at the beginning of the blockade by France and England, Rosas assumed authority to issue \$2,500,000 in paper each month. Most of this money circulated in Buenos Aires province alone, which had a population of approximately 150,000. It was practically worthless. Harris commented further: "The wonder is not that it is worth so little, but that it is worth anything at all. But the fiat of that extraordinary Man causes it to circulate and to be considered of some value, in spite of the universal laws which govern such things."⁵¹

Harris here seems quite unfair in his inference that Rosas did not care about finances. The facts show that the dictator had consistently favored a sound monetary policy, but he was confronted with such circumstances that it was impossible to avoid inflation. Rosas saw the dangers of inflation in March, 1837, and was determined to avoid further issues of paper money. It is possible that he

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Harris to Webster, Oct. 14, 1851, NA, SDDDA, vol. 7.

⁵¹ Harris to Buchanan, June 4, 1847, NA, SDDDA, vol. 6.

could have kept his word had it not been for the French blockade of March, 1838, which was disastrous to the financial system. Hence in 1840 the legislature passed a bill directing the mint to issue 12,000,000 pesos in paper currency. It was not until January, 1846, that Rosas was again compelled to resort to the printing press. The Anglo-French blockade had cut off most of the revenues. Within thirty-two months after the start of the blockade the mint issued 73,600,000 pesos—an average monthly issue of 2,300,000 pesos, which was 200,000 pesos per month *less* than the figure given by Harris. Other issues were subsequently made, and by the end of 1851 the quantity of paper money in circulation rose to 125,264,294 pesos. According to Burgin, this was the secret of Rosas' ability to avoid bankruptcy. Rosas reluctantly abandoned borrowing, and began issuing currency as a means of financing deficits. The latter method was more effective, and it met less opposition.⁵²

By May, 1851, the political situation in the Río de la Plata was rapidly deteriorating. Tension between Buenos Aires and Brazil was mounting. Brazil had an army of 30,000 on the borders of Uruguay. On May 29, Brazil joined Urquiza in a military alliance. Ill-feeling between Rosas and Urquiza had reached an irreconcilable point. Paraguay and Corrientes were struggling for political and commercial rights. Harris correctly predicted that shortly allied forces from Entre Ríos, Corrientes, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Brazil, led by Urquiza, would strike against Rosas and overthrow his regime.⁵³

In the fall of 1851 John S. Pendleton succeeded Harris as chargé d'affaires at Buenos Aires. In September of that year Pendleton revealed his first impressions of Rosas in a letter to Secretary of State Webster. He called the dictator's regime "the most simple and rigorous despotism in the civilized world." He said Rosas was assisted in his administration by no person except his daughter. Rosas assumed all the power of the state, made the laws, executed them, controlled the currency, and impressed individuals into the army and navy. His enemies, either imaginary or real, were liable to be shot without arraignment or trial of any sort.⁵⁴

On January 2, 1852, Pendleton foretold that within a month Urquiza would march upon Buenos Aires with 25,000 men. According to Pendleton, Urquiza's army was composed partly of 6,000 men from Brazil, chiefly German mercenaries who were more effective

⁵² Burgin, *op. cit.*, pp. 209, 214-216.

⁵³ Harris to Webster, May 4, 1851, NA, SDDDA, vol. 7; Levene, *op. cit.*, p. 437.

⁵⁴ Pendleton to Webster, Sept. 22, 1851, NA, SDDDA, vol. 7.

than the native forces. The rest of the troops were from Paraguay, Corrientes, and Entre Ríos. Furthermore, Oribe, lieutenant of Rosas in Uruguay, had surrendered to Urquiza in July, 1851—a fact which was not published in the Rosas-controlled press in Buenos Aires.⁵⁵ Rosas had an army about equal in numbers to that of Urquiza. In the belief that the dictator could place absolutely no dependence on his own soldiers, Pendleton said “The moment they see a chance of reasonably safe escape, they will *all* go over, in my opinion.”⁵⁶

For many years foreigners in Buenos Aires—Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans, and persons from all European countries as well as from the United States—had felt secure because of the policies of Rosas. Their sympathies had been generally with his government, which maintained public order and gave them many advantages. An Englishman named Wilfrid Latham, who spent some twenty-four years in Argentina chiefly during the Rosas regime, said “the recognition and thorough comprehension on the part of the governing classes, of the importance and policy of national good faith, is a feature which necessarily must weigh with capitalists, and produce its fruits in the development of the incalculable resources of the country.”⁵⁷ He goes on to point out the great opportunities in the Plata basin not only for capitalists, but also for all classes of people: “no man need want employment for a day who can work; and working, he will earn good wages in every class of labour and every trade.”⁵⁸ By 1852, however, Rosas had lost the support of foreigners; he no longer had their money influence which had been a potent element in his favor.⁵⁹

The inevitable clash between the armies of Rosas and Urquiza began at Monte Caseros, February 2, 1852. Rosas and Urquiza were in command of their respective forces, which met about five o'clock in the morning. The fighting continued four or five hours, and the forces of Rosas were decisively defeated. While the battle raged, Pendleton proceeded with English, Portuguese, French, and other diplomats to Urquiza's camp in the hope of bringing an end to hostilities.⁶⁰

It was obvious that Rosas doubted the loyalty of his officers. He had twelve generals under his command, but he trusted only two to

⁵⁵ Levene, *op. cit.*, p. 437.

⁵⁶ Pendleton to Webster, Jan. 2, 1852, NA, SDDDA, vol. 8. The word “all” was italicized by Pendleton.

⁵⁷ See *The States of the River Plate: their Industries and Commerce* (London, 1866), p. 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁵⁹ Pendleton to Webster, Jan. 2, 1852, NA, SDDDA, vol. 8.

⁶⁰ Pendleton to Webster, Feb. 2, 1852, NA, SDDDA, vol. 8.

be present in the battle of Monte Caseros. Of those two, one, Panchecho, deserted after the first charges; and the other, Pinedo, fell dead of apoplexy early in the battle.⁶¹

Early on February 4 Pendleton, together with other diplomats in Buenos Aires visited Urquiza's camp, interviewed the victor of Monte Caseros, and attempted to prevent further bloodshed. But the English minister, Mr. Robert Gore, did not remain with the group. He made an excuse to return to Buenos Aires for the night, and rejoined the diplomats early the next morning. According to Pendleton, his real object was to assist in the escape of Rosas, who had, by a prearrangement with Mr. Gore, fled from the battlefield to Gore's house in disguise. Rosas was promptly taken aboard the British steamer, the *Centaur*, at anchor about four miles out in the estuary, in full view of Buenos Aires. There was general indignation in the city toward Gore under whose arrangements Rosas and his daughter escaped.⁶²

Pendleton predicted that Urquiza would, without opposition, be elected first president of the Argentine Confederation. Relations between the two men were most cordial. Early in April, 1852, Pendleton said Urquiza was "very unlike Genl. Rosas in everything except that impulsiveness and decision which I take to be the natural effect of long continued and absolute authority within his own particular sphere." Pendleton referred to the forthcoming constitutional convention to be held at Rosario on May 25, and said Urquiza had invited him to accompany him to that meeting. Pendleton promised to do so.⁶³

In general, Pendleton concurs with other appraisers of Rosas, but he tends to exaggerate in expressing his views, and some of his statements are rather brash. Nevertheless, he aids us in arriving at a final judgment of the tyrant. In the first place he contended that Rosas had a bad influence on the Argentine population as a whole. He held that in the early years of the century the people of the Argentine Confederation were by far the most gallant and enlightened in any Spanish American country. They had played the leading role in the liberation of their neighbors—especially Chile, Peru, and Bolivia. But Rosas had opposed "everything that was decent or respectable among his people. . . ." Such a policy, persisting for more than twenty years, had caused deterioration in the quality of the entire population of the Río de la Plata.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Pendleton to Webster, Sept. 23, 1852, NA, SDDDA, vol. 8.

⁶² Pendleton to Webster, Feb. 8, 1852, NA, SDDDA, vol. 8.

⁶³ Pendleton to Webster, April 3, 1852, NA, SDDDA, vol. 8.

⁶⁴ Pendleton to Webster, March (n.d.), 1852, NA, SDDDA, vol. 8.

It is reasonable to assume that Rosas had a more direct influence over the people of Buenos Aires city and province than he had over the population in the other provinces. After independence the influx of foreigners into Argentina steadily increased. By mid-nineteenth century the population of the province, estimated variously at 150,000 to 200,000 persons, was composed of approximately half foreigners—English, French, Germans, Italians, Portuguese, and others. According to Latham, who resided for several years in Buenos Aires during the Rosas regime, this substantial element in the population freely pursued every trade and calling, and had many business establishments, including foreign banks, commercial houses, shops, and wholesale and retail general stores. Moreover, they enjoyed freedom of religion. They constructed hospitals and schools. The British had a newsroom, libraries, daily newspapers, a cricket club, and a race course.⁶⁵ Rosas solicited the support of these foreigners, and it seems clear that he in no way caused them to deteriorate in quality.

Secondly, Pendleton held the view that Rosas had a detrimental effect upon the younger generation of Argentina. The dictator had eliminated all persons whose talents or character qualified them to exert any influence upon the public mind. Most of them were murdered; some escaped and went into exile. The estates of educated families were confiscated; intellectuals became destitute; and all the younger people grew up in ignorance and poverty. The men appointed to positions of public trust and authority were generally selected for their very worst qualities.⁶⁶ Most intellectuals migrated, but they were few in numbers. Speaking of Rosas, Whitaker says “even under his tyranny there was still no mass migration—the famous exiles of that period, mostly intellectuals, were only a handful of the total population.”⁶⁷ Nevertheless they were the literate, civic-minded element, and their departure doubtless delayed progress toward political stability for many years.

Thirdly, Pendleton was convinced that the economic policies of Rosas were designed to benefit Buenos Aires province alone, to the detriment of all the interior provinces. According to him, the dictator controlled not only the tariff system, but also all other aspects of the economy of all provinces of the Argentine Confederation. By a decree of Rosas, all Argentine imports and exports passed through the port of Buenos Aires. The only exception was a little border trade

⁶⁵ Latham, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

⁶⁶ Pendleton to Webster, Sept. 23, 1852, NA, SDDDA, vol. 8.

⁶⁷ Arthur P. Whitaker, *The United States and Argentina* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), pp. 29-30.

between Argentina and Chile, where produce was packed by donkeys over the Andes; this was permitted only because it could not be prevented. Thus the whole Confederation was kept tributary to the city of Buenos Aires. For twenty years, less than one per cent of the public revenues were expended annually beyond the suburbs of the city of Buenos Aires. The entire Confederation was compelled to pay to Buenos Aires the duties on imports and exports, the whole amount of public fines, penalties, and confiscations, transit duties, charges for passports, and contributions in all forms of taxation. Prices of goods imported into the interior provinces were more than doubled. Residents of the back country were compelled to take low prices for their exports; such products usually went for a third to a fourth of their real value. In a word the city of Buenos Aires absorbed most of the surplus production of the fourteen Argentine provinces.⁶⁸

The economic system of Rosas was iniquitous, to be sure. It was especially oppressive during the struggle against France in the 1830's and against France and England in the 1840's. But Argentina was struggling for national survival, and Rosas had a right to call upon the whole nation to contribute to the common defense. From the point of view of provincial economic interests, however, nothing was gained. According to Burgin, "during the second blockade the riparian provinces were inclined to side with the blockaders not only in order to shorten the agony of commercial isolation but also in order to break the *porteño* monopoly of Argentina's foreign commerce."⁶⁹

Rosas favored foreign merchants, many of whom came to Argentina early in his public career. Most business enterprises were in their hands. They were eager to make fortunes as quickly as possible, and leave the country. They knew that freedom of trade on rivers in the Río de la Plata area would mean more business for the back country provinces, and less business in Buenos Aires where they had their establishments. They knew that this increased business would be divided among a dozen ports, which, according to Pendleton, were superior to the port of Buenos Aires. Hence foreign merchants caused much trouble after the fall of Rosas. The Urquiza regime wanted to destroy the ascendancy of Buenos Aires, distribute trade all along the river, and break the monopoly which foreign merchants in Buenos Aires had so long enjoyed.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Pendleton to Webster, Dec. 28, 1852, NA, SDDDA, vol. 8.

⁶⁹ Burgin, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-285.

⁷⁰ Pendleton to Webster, Dec. 28, 1852, NA, SDDDA, vol. 8.

From the foregoing considerations, it is clear that American diplomats accredited to the government of Buenos Aires in the early years held Rosas in higher esteem than those who served in the late 1840's and early 1850's. Their missions were relatively short-lived. The tenure of Forbes and Baylies, from the advent of Rosas to the dictatorship in late 1829 until the break in diplomatic relations, totaled about three years—a period which was too brief and too early to lend a full view of Rosas, his policies, and his methods. The Watterson mission lasted just a few months in the summer and fall of 1844, hardly sufficient time to make an accurate appraisal of Rosas. Harris and Pendleton, however, were in a position to look back upon the regime, and to view it in proper perspective. Both deplored the methods of Rosas. Both denounced nearly all aspects of the dictatorship.

Rosas is a negative memory in Argentina. He left behind him the black legend of Argentine history—a legend which Argentines in general wish to forget. There is no monument to him in the entire nation; no park, plaza, or street bears his name. When he died in England in 1877, at eighty-four years of age, his relatives requested a funeral mass for him in Buenos Aires, but the government forbade it.⁷¹

Despite the fact that Argentines want to forget Rosas, his name was revived when Perón began ruling in the Rosas tradition in the early and middle 1950's.⁷² During the preceding decade, caudillismo had been on the decline all over Latin America. When Perón resorted to the methods of Rosas, it became abundantly clear where the latter stands in the over-all picture. With the fall of Perón in 1955, Argentines repudiated the type of government epitomized by these dictators. Since that time it has been increasingly evident that people all over Latin America want an end of dictatorship. With the progressive abandonment of dictatorial rule the trend is toward liberal democracy and social reform.

⁷¹ Ysabel F. Rennie, *The Argentine Republic* (New York, 1945), p. 62. For a charitable estimate of Rosas see Charles E. Chapman, *Republican Hispanic America: A History* (New York, 1947), p. 328. See also Emilio Ravignani, *Inferencias sobre Juan Manuel de Rosas y otros ensayos* (Buenos Aires, 1945), for an objective account of Rosas.

⁷² After Perón reverted to the Rosas tradition several scholarly articles called attention to literature of the Rosas and Perón periods. Among these are Joseph R. Barager, "The Historiography of the Río de la Plata Area Since 1830," *HAHR*, XXXIX (November, 1959), 588-642; Fritz L. Hoffman, "Perón and After: A Review Article," *HAHR*, XXXVI (November, 1956), 510-528; and Fritz L. Hoffman, "Perón and After, Part II (Conclusion)," *HAHR*, XXXIX (May, 1959), 212-233. For a lively but unscholarly comparison of Rosas and Perón see Fleur Cowles, *Bloody Precedent* (New York, 1952).