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ALBERTO BLEST GANA IN PARIS

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ABSTRACT: Today Alberto Blest Gana is best remembered as one of the most important Chilean authors of the XIXth Century, the creator of such important novels as *El Loco Estero* and *Martin Rivas*. Paradoxically, he spent the greater part of his life outside Chile, serving in the diplomatic service of his country. This article examines his diplomatic career as Chilean Minister in Paris which comprised his longest and most important diplomatic posting.

KEY WORDS: Alberto Blest Gana; Chilean Diplomatic Service; War of the Pacific

RESUMEN: Hoy se recuerda principalmente a Don Alberto Blest Gana como uno de los novelistas chilenos más importante del siglo XIX, el creador de novelas tan importantes como *El Loco Estero* y *Martin Rivas*. Paradojalmente, gran parte de su carrera lo paso fuera de Chila, dedicado al servicio diplomático de su país. El siguiente artículo versa sobre su carrera diplomático como el Ministro Chileno en Paris, lo que fue su puesto diplomático más largo y más importante.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Alberto Blest Gana; Servicio Diplomático Chileno; Guerra del Pacífico

Blest Gana was born in Santiago, Chile May 4, 1830. He was the son of an Irish doctor William Cunningham Blest, who had settled in Chile six or seven years before, and a Chilean woman, María de la Luz Gana y López. His father was an avid reader and a man of wide culture, who was responsible for the establishment of the School of Medicine, in 1833, and who influenced his sons not only through teaching them the English language, which was to be so important for the diplomatic career of Alberto but also HE imbued his sons with the “liberal and progressive doctrines” that their contemporaries noticed in them. In 1841 he entered the National Institute and in 1843 the Military Academy. In 1847 he was one of the military cadets that the Chilean Government sent to France to continue their studies. Blest Gana graduated there as a Military Engineer specializing in topography. When he returned to Chile in 1851 he became a professor at the Military Academy and in 1854 he

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entered the Ministry of War as a civilian employee. In 1864 he became the Governor of Colchagua, a position that he occupied until he was appointed in 1866 the Chilean Minister in Washington. At the same time, in 1853 he had begun to publish initially articles in newspapers which were then followed by short stories and novels. His literary career was interrupted by his appointment to Washington and he only began to write again after he had resigned from the diplomatic service in 1887. The sole exception to this was in 1867 when he published an article entitled *De Nueva York a Niagara*, which was an account of a trip to the famous waterfalls, and which included interesting comments on the American society of the period.¹ In 1868 he was appointed the Chilean Minister in London and in 1870 this appointment was extended to include that of Minister in France, and in effect he then became the senior Chilean representative in all of Europe with his headquarters in Paris.

Blest Gana was thus obliged to not only handle the affairs of his official posts in London and Paris but to also be ready at a moments notice to move anywhere in Europe (Madrid, Rome and Berlin) that the requirements of the Chilean Government might send him. He was also responsible for the supervision of all the Chilean consular representatives in Europe, who at this time formed a network of informants that maintained him and through him the Chilean government informed about whatever happened on the continent. Blest Gana was also the principal purchasing agent for the Chilean government, and was responsible for the negotiation of all loans involving European investors and bankers. In addition, he also was in charge of all activities involving European immigration to Chile. These responsibilities were carried out with the assistance of an extremely small diplomatic staff that consisted of in Paris during the greater part of his mission of not more than three assistants. At the start of the War of the Pacific in 1879, the entire staff of the legation in Paris consisted in addition to Blest Gana as Minister, Carlos Morla Vicuña as secretary and Captain Luis Alfredo Lynch as the Naval Attaché.²

No sooner had Blest Gana taken up his post in Paris than he found himself involved in the Franco-Prussian War. Through a series of extensive dispatches he maintained his government informed of what was happening in France and of the general diplomatic situation in Europe.³ Due to the German siege of Paris and the later fighting of the Commune, he was forced to remove the Legation to Boulogne-sur-Mer, despite the criticism he received in Chile for having done so, and London. He responded that the instability of the French capital and the requirements of maintaining contact with London made this necessary.⁴ However the Chilean Legation would be one of the first foreign diplomatic missions to return to Paris even as the fighting between the forces of the Versailles government and the Commune still raged in Paris. Blest Gana wrote in an account of the events of the time that: "While Galiffet's army surrounded the city and Thiers bombarded it from the Valerian hills, the life of the boulevards went on normally; the theatres functioned and foreigners filled the restaurants. Mr Blest mentioned one night, when on leaving the Vaudeville, he could hear in the Boulevard of the Italians, the roar of the cannon in Passy and Peré Lachaise. Paris lived its happy nights to the sinister glow of the bloody battle between the communists and the army of Versailles. This gives an idea of the character and the vitality of this marvellous capital: it continued to live in a way that was enviable to other cities, while the blood flowed from two enormous wounds"⁵.

In 1872 he was sent to Rome to negotiate with the Vatican over the differences of opinion that existed between the Catholic Church and the Chilean government over the rights of the church in Chile. This was to be the first of a series of diplomatic visits to Rome over the next several years due

to the continuing disagreements between Church and State. In this first visit he managed to achieve an agreement that reduced ecclesiastical privileges in Chile in return for a promise from the government to not employ the States power against the Church. However, his next visit to Rome in 1878 would not be so successful. He then carried out fruitless negotiations over the insistence of the Chilean government in designating Francisco de Paula Taforó as the new Archbishop of Santiago against the wishes of the majority of the Chilean clergy. Both before, during and after the War of the Pacific, he would repeat these visits to Rome and while he managed several times to have the question of this appointment reopened ultimately the Pope would reject this candidature. That the problem would only be solved in 1887 was due to the pretensions of the Chilean government to maintain the privileges that the Spanish crown had possessed over ecclesiastical appointments during the colonial period, and the insistence of the Vatican that under modern conditions these appointments should be made exclusively by the religious authorities.⁶

The year 1874 was typical of the kind of activities that Blest Gana had to face. That year he was forced to spend a considerable amount of time in London. This was due to the incident involving the steamship Tacna and the return to the international scene of Orelie-Antoine I, the so-called King of the Araucania. The steamship Tacna, which belonged to the Pacific Steamship Company, had caught fire off the coasts of Chile with the loss of several lives and all of the cargo. The Chilean government ordered the arrest of the ship's captain, Hyde, as it considered him to be responsible for the disaster, which had occurred in Chilean territorial waters and involved civil and commercial responsibilities. The British Minister in Chile, Horace Rumbold, did not accept this and presented a violent diplomatic note to the Chilean Foreign Ministry in which he termed the arrest of Hyde to be an insult to the British navy, and demanded his immediate release, the payment of £25,000 in indemnification and a salute to the British flag. Simultaneously, the Pacific squadron of the Royal Navy anchored in Valparaiso, called together an extraterritorial Court Martial and declared Hyde to be innocent. The Chilean Government asked Blest Gana to proceed to London in order to negotiate directly with the British authorities as they had broken off contact with the British representative in Chile. The social connections that he had established in Britain during his time there proved to be highly useful in this situation. On the one side he suggested to the Chilean government that they expel Hyde, with some sort of unofficial payment, while on the other hand he suggested to the Foreign Office the constitution of a "friendly arbitrator" in the form of the German Ambassador in Britain, Count Munster, who ruled strictly according to international law, with the result that this serious crisis came to nothing. The £25,000 was reduced to less than £200 and the salute to the flag became a note from the Chilean Legation in London to the Foreign Office regretting the incident.⁷

Although today the adventures of Orelie-Antoine I, King of Araucania and Patagonia may appear fantastic to our modern minds, when this French citizen attempted to establish an independent kingdom in the centre of the national territory of Chile, it was not a matter taken lightly by the Chilean authorities.⁸ Blest Gana was responsible for uncovering and frustrating the plans of this Frenchman and his supporters in Europe, at the level of the press, government and finance. Orelie-Antoine after his first expulsion from Chile, established himself in Paris at the end of 1872 in an attempt to gather funds for another expedition to the Araucania. As long as he received no support, Blest Gana preferred to ignore him at least publicly although he kept him under careful vigilance. However, on April 17, 1873 he informed Santiago officially that because of the partners he had allied himself with he had become dangerous: "If I had not seen with surprise that Tounens had found

accomplices who were experts in intrigue and determined to convert the illusions of this dreamer in either a sinister adventure or a criminal enterprise”⁹.

Meanwhile, Orelie-Antione transferred his activities to England where he already had agents who were described by Blest Gana as simple adventurers who had already opened offices, placed advertisements in the newspapers and had circulated commercial companies with information about their plans for the Araucania. Unfortunately, for these crooks, one of these circulars was sent to Henry Roth & Sons, a company one of whose partners was Thomas K. Weir, the Chilean consul in London. Weir immediately took measures to advise British companies that dealt with South America that they should not trust the offers contained in these circulars.¹⁰ As a result of this publicity Orelie-Antoine made contact with Jacob Michaels, a London banker and speculator, with whom he signed a contract for a large loan intended to finance his expedition, guaranteed by land in the Araucania that the supposed king would deliver to the bondholders once his kingdom was established.¹¹ Blest Gana managed to get one of the conspirators to betray his associates, when he was in London, and show him the contracts between Orelie-Antoine and Jacob Michaels: “The person who showed me the contracts, only so that I could read them and under reserve, is a person who knows the secrets of the expedition in England, but who, as I believe, has decided that he can gain an advantage for his own interests from this secret. Having asked him for a copy of the contracts, he has shown himself to be willing to give them to me in return for a letter which would promise him the agency in England for all the purchases of the Chilean government. This price, which I would have considered to be too high, whether for copies of the signed contracts or the acquisition not of copies but of the originals, appeared inadmissible to me”¹².

The bonds issued for the nominal amount of £50,000 were never intended to be offered to British investors, who were traditionally sceptical about projects of this nature, but rather to French investors, who is was believed would be attracted to an apparently patriotic investment but which was supposed to bear the imprimatur of the *City of London*, the most important world financial centre of the period. In order to ensure this, the adventurers had the bonds stamped at Somerset House, the British Civil Registry, a transaction that the French investors could not be expected to know was legally meaningless.¹³ The conspirators also attempted to mobilize support through planting stories in the press, and they attempted to gather political support for their project within both the British and French governments.

Blest Gana employed two methods in order to defeat their plans. First, he attacked them using the same newspapers as they had used in order to cut off their possibilities of gaining investors: “this is a piratical attack launched against a nation that was a friend of both of them, prepared in their territory, with resources supplied by their citizens”¹⁴. At the same time, he used his diplomatic contacts in both the British and French governments and societies in order to denounce the project. He contacted Lord Granville, the British Foreign Secretary and Count Remuset, the French Foreign Minister, who received similar notes emphasizing that the Araucania was Chilean territory and that the plans of Orelie-Antoine and his associates were criminal in nature not only in terms of Chilean law but also as regards British and French law. Blest Gana also spoke with the Archbishop of Canterbury and Cardinal Manning in order to ensure that neither the Church of England nor the Catholic Church would provide the adventurers with the support that they had been seeking for their supposed missionary activities. Blest Gana was thus able to cut off their attempts to raise funds and supporters

with the result that when Orelie-Antoine finally left in April 1874 for Argentina he went alone where he was arrested and expelled from the country, thus ending his second and final attempt to establish his kingdom.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the greater part of Blest Gana's activities in both Paris and London involved little of what could be considered traditional diplomacy: the relations between states. A study of the diplomatic archives reveals that the greater part of his time was spent in handling commercial dealings and acting as the purchasing agent for different branches of the Chilean government. These activities ranged from the purchase of books for libraries, equipment for different government departments to the hiring of technical experts. The most complicated aspect of these activities was certainly the purchase of armaments for the army and navy. Fortunately, Blest Gana's training as a military engineer had prepared him technically for this arduous work.

Therefore in 1872 when the Chilean government decided to undertake the construction in Britain of the two medium sized ironclad battleships, the *Cochrane* and the *Blanco Encalada*, that would play a crucial role in the War of the Pacific, Blest Gana was placed in charge of the entire process. Upon receiving his orders, he proceeded to contract Mr. E. J. Reed, the former naval architect of the Royal Navy, as his consultant: "Lacking all special knowledge in this area, I immediately thought on receiving these instructions that the safest way to carry out such a delicate commission was to submit the case to a important authority in the area of naval construction, reserving for my decision based on the circumstances the degree of confidence that I should repose in him.¹⁶ They then considered a number of offers and designs from different shipbuilders, and finally placed the order for the first warship with the Earl Company of Hull. After observing the satisfactory process of construction of the first ship, the contract for the second one was placed with the same company. At the same time he contracted with Green Brothers of Greenwich for the construction of the steamship, which would later become the *Magallanes*, which was intended to patrol the Straits of Magellan. Also he immediately ordered the armaments for the three ships, so that there would no delay in readying them for active service.¹⁷

Despite all his care the construction of these three ships would involve serious delays and cost overruns: there are certain efforts as regards material works that are condemned to sterility, no matter how energetic the efforts to make them effective. This is what happens above all with the construction of ships. Not even the British government with all of its precautions, or any other which comes to the British market, can assure the delivery in the time that has been fixed of these sorts of constructions. The proof of this is that the shipbuilders do not permit, as happened in my case, that a reward or prize for anticipated delivery be stipulated, as they are certain that they will not be able to meet it.¹⁸

The rumours of a possible war between Chile and Argentina, Bolivia and Peru only aggravated Blest Gana's difficulties due to the effects of Britain's neutrality legislation which had already impeded the delivery of previous warships during the War with Spain. Blest Gana made innumerable appeals to the Chilean Foreign Ministry that it was absolutely vital to avoid war until the ships were ready. Certainly the activities of the Peruvian representatives in London, who went as far as to insinuate to the Foreign Office that a state of war already existed between Chile and Peru, did nothing to alleviate

his problems. It was only the arrival of the *Cochrane* in Valparaiso on December 25, 1875 and the arrival of the *Blanco Encalada* on January 24, 1876 that finally ended the tension.¹⁹

During the 1870s, Blest Gana was also deeply involved in the purchase of equipment for the Chilean army. These consisted in Krupp field and mountain artillery as well as the first machine guns that Chile had ever possessed. In Belgium, he was responsible for the purchase of the Comblain rifles that would equip the regular infantry regiments of the army and in providing the finance for arms purchases in the United States, consisting in Spencer and Winchester carbines and ammunition for the cavalry.²⁰ He also was responsible for the supply of uniforms for both the navy and the army.²¹

The start of the War of the Pacific in 1879 would accelerate the purchase of arms in Europe centralised in the Chilean Legation in Paris. The speed with which Blest Gana acted enabled him to send large shipments of arms and munitions to Chile before Peru and Bolivia could invoke European neutrality legislation in order to block these shipments: "received following telegram 'Chile has declared war on Peru.' If this is true difficulties will increase because our enemies will watch us to see that neutrality laws are strictly applied²². He later warned that Chile had to be careful in stirring up embargoes against Peru and Bolivia as their agents could do the same against Chilean shipments. Especially as of the three nations at war Chile was the one most able to acquire large supplies of armaments"²³. These shipments were sent through the Straits of Magellan, thus avoiding the need to employ the more usual route through Panama which would have been open to Peruvian interception.²⁴ Thereafter, Blest Gana was generally successful throughout the war in seeing that Chile received a continuous supply of arms and munitions from European sources.²⁵

Therefore, Blest Gana's efforts to block Peruvian and Bolivian arms purchases concentrated on the Peruvian attempts to purchase warships. This became especially vital for Peru after the naval engagements of Punta Gruesa and Angamos in 1879; when the principal Peruvian capital ships had either been captured or destroyed, thus ensuring the Chilean naval supremacy that allowed unopposed amphibious operations against the coasts of Peru during the rest of the war. In order to carry this out Blest Gana established a network of agents throughout Europe that kept him informed of all the actions undertaken by Peruvian agents, wherever they were located. In this work he was ably assisted by Captain Luis Alfredo Lynch Zaldivar, who was the head of the Chilean Naval Commission in Paris, when the war began. Blest Gana generally remained at the centre of his web of agents in Paris, from where he was able to make best use of the diplomatic contacts that he had developed during his years in Europe. In addition to the Chilean consular agents, the Legation also employed numerous confidential agents, especially maritime authorities and the representatives of commercial houses, who provided information on suspicious shipments and purchases. It has been estimated based on the payments made through London that these agents probably consisted in around 300 persons.²⁶ Lynch Zaldivar, who had also developed extensive friendships among European naval officers and heads of dockyards, was responsible for travelling anywhere in Europe where the activities of enemy agents had to be stymied.

Their first successful operation resulted in the prevention of the sale of two French warships, the *Gloire* and the *Solferino*, to a Nicaraguan agent, who was actually acting as a front for Peruvian agents. These ships were intended to replace the *Independencia*, which had been lost at the Battle of

Punta Gruesa. Once the French government had been informed of the true nationality of the prospective purchasers, they maintained their neutrality, rejecting the sale.²⁷

The next problem involved Spain. Since 1865, a state of war had existed between Spain and Peru and Chile, although a perpetual truce had been signed between the two countries. Chile would finally sign a definitive peace treaty with Spain in 1883. Once the War of the Pacific had begun, Peru immediately unilaterally signed a peace treaty with Spain and was then able to begin negotiations for the purchase of armaments in that country. These activities gained urgency once the *Huascar* was lost. Once Blest Gana received information both from Chile and Panama of the departure of Peruvian representatives to Spain, he immediately took steps to block these activities. In November 1879, he paid a visit to the Marquis de Molins, the Spanish Ambassador in France, and informed him that Chile expected that the truce that existed between Chile and Spain, should ensure the most careful neutrality on the part of the King of Spain, despite their peace treaty with Peru. The ambassador replied that the Spanish government had every intention of maintaining cordial relations with the Government of Chile and following a course of strict neutrality as regards the belligerents. At the same time, Lynch Zaldivar travelled to Madrid and sought a private interview with the King of Spain, Alfonso XII, during which he informed him of the Peruvian intentions. These assurances were reiterated in an official note transmitted November 11, 1879 from the Spanish Foreign Minister, the Duke of Tetuán, to Blest Gana.²⁸

No sooner was this difficulty surmounted than another one presented itself at the other end of Europe in the Ottoman Empire.²⁹ The Turkish navy possessed a British built ironclad, the *Felkz-Bolend* of 2,500 tons, heavily armed, with nine inch armour, double propellers and a top speed of 13 knots. Due to the crippling debts weighing down the Ottoman finances, the Sultan had decided to put this ship up for sale. Therefore the Turkish government was highly interested when apparent representatives of the Japanese Empire presented themselves and offered to purchase the warship for the amount of £250,000; especially as they had the support of the Sultan's personal banker, a Greek by the name of Jafiri. Unbeknownst to the Sultan, but well-known to Jafiri, these so-called Japanese were actually Peruvians and their plan was that once they had taken delivery of the ship it would leave for Singapore, via the Suez Canal, from where it would cross the Pacific to Guayaquil, where a Peruvian crew would be awaiting it.³⁰

Fortunately for Chile, the Commander-in-Chief of the Turkish Navy was an English officer, Admiral Hobart Pasha, who was both an acquaintance of Lynch Zaldivar and who had no interest in seeing the fleet under his command diminished in size. Apparently he discovered the plot and informed Blest Gana in Paris that it would be possible to prevent the sale if a Chilean emissary was dispatched quickly enough and with an ample supply of money with which to bribe the Turkish officials. Lynch Zaldivar reached Constantinople aboard the Orient Express and with the able assistance of Hobart Pasha distributed substantial amounts of money among the advisers to the Sultan, among whom was the Minister of Marine, who had already been bribed by the Peruvians. Sources indicate that this consisted in an immediate payment of £3,000 to be followed by a further payment of the same amount six months later.³¹ Once the Sultan was informed of the true facts of the case, he ordered the sale to be cancelled.³²

The relief of the Chileans lasted only a short time as during 1880 they would have to prevent the sale to Peru of a British torpedo boat and another ship in Denmark. Far more serious was the construction of two warships in the German shipyard Howaldt in Kiel, the *Socrates* and the *Diogenes*, which were nearing completion in June 1881, and the German government saw absolutely no reason to prevent their delivery. These ships had been modified to pass as merchant ships but evidently the plan was once they had left Germany to arm them in British ports.³³ Blest Gana sent Lynch Zaldivar to Kiel to investigate where he discovered clear signs that these ships were not intended to service as merchant vessels but rather as warships. Once in possession of that information, realizing that a conventional diplomatic approach would fail, Blest Gana travelled to Alsace where his intimate friend, Prince of Hohenlohe, the former German ambassador in Paris, was now the governor. The prince after listening to Blest Gana wrote a letter to the Emperor of Germany and the delivery of the ships was delayed until Blest Gana could make arrangements to have them held until the end of the war in Britain. Once the war had ended the *Diogenes* was armed with two Armstrong six inch rifled guns and three Nordenfelt 57mm quick firing guns, and once it reached Callao it was renamed the *Lima*. The *Socrates* remained in England and was renamed the *Callao* until in 1888 it was purchased by the United States and called the *Topeka*. This is an excellent example of how Blest Gana's personal contacts enabled him to do things that were impossible through regular diplomatic channels and that no other Chilean diplomat could have achieved. Of equal importance were his contacts in literary circles and with the press, that allowed him to so effectively counteract the well financed Peruvian and Bolivian propaganda that inundated Europe, and which had the support of most of the other South American legations in that continent.³⁴

Among the most complex negotiations that Blest Gana would successfully undertake during the war were those with the International Committee of Peruvian Bondholders, who represented European investors who had loaned money to Peru upon the guarantee provided by the Guano and Nitrate deposits in Peruvian territory that Chilean forces occupied during the first months of the war.³⁵ At the start of the war, in order to deny these important economic resources to the Peruvian government, the Chilean navy destroyed the chutes and docks at Peru's southern guano deposits, thus preventing the ships chartered by the Peruvian Guano Company from loading cargoes. The British government complained that this action not only seriously caused serious losses to British shipping but also to British bondholders, to whom the whole of the Peruvian guano deposits were hypothecated as security for their loans. At the request of the Russell Committee, that represented the British bondholders, the Foreign Office unsuccessfully asked Chile to permit the reconstruction of the guano facilities so that the production of the southern deposits could be exported, with the guarantee that the profits from these shipments would only be applied to the benefit of the bondholders.³⁶

Once in November 1879, Chilean forces had definitively occupied the Peruvian province of Tarapacá, the Russell Committee decided that instead of trying to deal with the highly unsatisfactory Peruvian authorities, it would be better to reach an agreement with the Chilean government over their claims that the Peruvian government had not only hypothecated the Guano deposits to them but had also extended this to the nitrate deposits in this area. The directors of the International Committee of Bondholders approached the Chilean consulate in London with the following proposition that was transmitted to Blest Gana in Paris: "Chile as the possessor of the ports through which the export of guano and nitrates from the Peruvian littoral, would oppose the actions of the Peruvian agents, who

are trying at the moment to obtain the intervention of Her Majesty's Government in their favour, so that they will be able to continue exporting those fertilizers under the pretext that they are intended to continue the payments on the Peruvian debt. The representative of Chile should assure Her Majesty's Government that it is not the intention of his government to prevent the service of this debt but rather to prevent the Government of Peru continuing its exports under this pretext and then converting these resources into armaments so as to continue the war. In return, the Chilean Minister will promise Her Majesty's Government that exports will be allowed; on the basis that the British government will guarantee that the profits from the sales will be dedicated entirely to the service of the Peruvian debt. In return the International Committee of Peruvian Bondholders will deliver to the Chilean government an annual payment of £400,000 payable from next July onwards, an amount equal to that which the Peruvian government received from the Peruvian Guano Company and which would be taken from the profits of the sales of guano and nitrates. This fund would be considered an advance on the indemnification which the Chilean government will be claiming from Peru.³⁷ During the next few months the French bondholders, followed by the bondholders in the other European countries approached Blest Gana with offers similar to that which had been made by the British bondholders.³⁸

The initial reply of the Chilean government through Blest Gana was that while the government would equally respect the interests of the different groups of bondholders as far as it concerned the guano deposits, it could not accept their claims that the Peruvian government had also hypothecated the nitrate deposits, as these deposits had been owned and operated by private companies when the loans had been contracted. The different national committees replied that a decree of the Peruvian government promulgated at the time when the nitrate deposits had been nationalised had given them that right.³⁹ Ultimately the agreement that Blest Gana negotiated and which was promulgated on February 22, 1880, in an edict issued by the Chilean commander-in-Chief and which was confirmed in a decree issued by the government on March 1, specifically applied only to the guano deposits and not to the nitrate deposits. The edict stated that the bondholders would be able to export guano from the Peruvian deposits occupied by the Chilean army, subject to the payment of a royalty of 30 shillings per ton, the nomination of a committee to deal with the Chilean government, and the appointment of a consignee acceptable to the government. Pending the conclusion of a contract of assignment, the bills of lading were to be drawn in favour of the Chilean Minister of Finance and a representative of the bondholder's committee.⁴⁰

Once the war ended, the government was finally convinced of the need for a good foreign service. In 1884, Marcial Martínez became head of the Legation in London, although Blest Gana remained the Chilean representative in Paris. At the same time a Legation was opened in Berlin, and the Paris Legation was reinforced with additional personnel. Blest Gana was now able to relax and to think about the possibility of renewing the literary work that he had abandoned so many years ago. When President Domingo Santa María, an old friend of Blest Gana, and an admirer of both his literary work and of his twenty year career as a diplomat, left office in 1886, he wrote Blest Gana that: "this letter is undoubtedly the last one that I will send you having to do with public affairs, given that, in a few days I will be leaving the Presidency of the Republic. I would no be fair to you if I did not assure you how great are my thanks for the careful and useful services that you have carried out during my administration. I will always remember you with gratitude, and it will always be my duty to

recommend the care with which you have conducted all the business confided to the Legation which you head”⁴¹.

What a contrast with the treatment Blest Gana received from the next president of Chile, José Manuel Balmaceda, who within 12 days of taking power in September 1886 decides to remove Blest Gana from his position as Minister to France on the urgings of his brother José Ezequiel Balmaceda. José Ezequiel Balmaceda made a whole series of ridiculous accusations against Blest Gana, including one that his long stay outside of Chile in France had rendered him anti-Chilean, commenting: “Anyone would be welcome if only for the reason of seeing Gana leave his post.” Blest Gana replied to Balmaceda’s letter with one of his own that refuted the accusations against him and defended his proceedings while in charge of the Legation, and presented his resignation. Balmaceda made the attempt to offer him the Legation in Washington but it was too late. At the moment of his retirement Blest Gana was the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and enjoyed a prestige that was European wide. In order to cover up this mistake in Chile it was said that he was too old and the accusation that he was “dechilianized” after twenty years abroad was spread through the press. In fact, when Blest Gana finally died in Paris in 1920 he had outlived all of his accusers. Balmaceda’s mistake was a tragic one as when the Civil War of 1891 broke out, Blest Gana still enjoyed enormous prestige in diplomatic circles and would employ all of his influence in favour of the Congressional side, completely putting Balmaceda’s representative in the shade. Blest Gana continued to live in France where his daughters had married, returning to his writing and completing some of his greatest works, such as “El Loco Estero”, “Las Trasplantados” and “Durante la Reconquista” In 1898 he would undertake diplomatic missions for the Chilean government in London, Berlin and Paris related to the frontier problems with Argentina and in 1901 he would head the Chilean delegation to the Second Interamerican Conference in Mexico City.⁴²

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³ Alberto Blest Gana (Paris) to Ministry, April 15, 1870, Vol. 29A, N° 20; Alberto Blest Gana (London) to Ministry, August 1, 1870, Vol. 29A, N° 21; Alberto Blest Gana (Paris) August 15, 1870, Vol 29A, N° 23. Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Chile.

⁴ Alberto Blest Gana (Boulogne) to Ministry, September 15, 1870, Vol. 29A, N° 25. Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores.

⁵ Eduardo Balmaceda, *De Mi Tierra y Francia* (Paris: Ediciones Ercilla, 1934), 127.

⁶ Mario Barros Van Buren, *Historia Diplomática de Chile* (Santiago: Ed. Andrés Bello, 1971), 421; Hernán Poblete, *Alberto Blest Gana y Su Obra* (Santiago: Pehuén Editores Limitada, 1995), 199-200.

⁷ Barros Van Buren (1971), 332.

⁸ Hamish Stewart, "Alberto Blest Gana y el Rey de la Araucanía y Patagonia", *Revista de Historia* 15 n° 1, 43-52.

⁹ Alberto Blest Gana (Paris) to the Ministry, April 17, 1873, Vol. 50A, 69-73. Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Chile.

¹⁰ Alberto Blest Gana (Paris) to Ministry, June 6, 1873, Vol. 50A, 196-199. Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Chile.

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