CHAPTER XX

Friends and Foes. Sucre’s Assassination. The Lees of Bitterness. An Upright Man’s Death
(1830)

Bolívar prepared to go to Cartagena, where he intended to sail for Jamaica or Europe. His melancholy was relieved by a message from Quito, in which the most prominent citizens asked him to select as his residence that city, where he was respected and admired. “Come,” they said, “to live in our hearts and to receive the homage of gratitude and respect due to the genius of America, the Liberator of a world.” The Bishop of Quito, Monsignor Rafael Lasso, also sent a communication, in his own name and in the name of the clergy, endorsing the petition. Bolívar did not accept this invitation. On May third, the constitution of Colombia was signed, and on the following day don Joaquín Mosquera and General Domingo Caicedo were elected President and Vice-President of Colombia, respectively. Bolívar showed his pleasure at the result, and uttered the following words:

“I am reduced to the private life which I have so much desired if the Congress wants any special proof of my blind obedience to the constitution and the laws, I am ready to give whatever may be asked.”
He left the palace and went to live in a private residence. There he received a delegation of the principal citizens of Bogotá, who placed in his hands a beautiful document containing the following words, especially worthy of notice:

“You conquered the plane upon which our future happiness will be built and, believing yourself to be an obstacle to that happiness, you resign voluntarily the first authority, protesting never again to take the reins of government. Such a noble, generous and magnanimous action places you above heroes. History has its pages filled with the actions of brave soldiers and fortunate warriors, but it can make them beautiful only with the actions of a Washington or a Bolívar. In private life, you will receive unmistakable proofs of our devotion to your person. We shall always remember your merits and services, and we shall teach our children to pronounce your name with tender emotions of admiration and gratitude.”

This document was signed on May 5, 1830, by Caicedo, the Vice-President, in the exercise of the executive power, the Archbishop of Bogotá, the members of the Cabinet and 2,000 distinguished citizens. Three days later, Bolívar left Bogotá, accompanied for six miles by the members of the Cabinet, the ministers of the diplomatic corps, many military men and citizens, and almost all the members of the foreign colonies. The following day, Congress passed a decree which is an honor to it and to Bolívar, by which homage of gratitude and admiration was paid him in the name of Colombia, and it was ordered that wherever Bolívar might choose to live he should be treated always with the respect and consideration due the first and best citizen of Colombia. In that same decree, it was ordered that a pension of 30,000 pesos per year, decreed to Bolívar in 1823, be punctually paid for life.

Among the many sad things which can be told of this man of sorrows, is the fact that this pension was sorely needed. In March of that year he
had been forced to sell his silver, and even then did not have enough money to pay for his trip.

On his way to the Caribbean, Bolívar received homage in all the towns he entered. He advised everybody to respect the law and to obey the government. Every day saw him poorer. His personal fortune in Venezuela had been greatly diminished, and possessions left to him by his ancestors were involved in litigation. Consequently, he could count on very little. He had planned to sail from Cartagena, but was unable to do so. From there he endeavored to secure some money from his relatives in Caracas, in which effort he failed.

While in Cartagena he received news of several insurrections in favor of the integrity of Colombia and of himself as head of the nation. Bolívar refused to heed these calls, and continued his life of poverty, embittered and saddened by the news received that Antonio José de Sucre, his beloved friend and lieutenant, the hero of Pichincha and Ayacucho, had been murdered on his way to Quito, on the 4th of June, while crossing a mountain called Berruecos. It is difficult to conceive how Sucre could have had enemies, he who was perhaps the purest and kindest figure of all the American War of Independence, all generosity, forgiveness and benevolence. He was riding alone when shot from an ambush. His orderly, who was at some distance behind him, rushed to the scene only to find that Sucre was dead. His corpse remained there that afternoon and all night. On the following day the soldier buried him in the forest.1

1. Sucre’s body was lost for a long while. In the Pantheon of Caracas there are three beautiful monuments: the one in the center contains Bolívar’s ashes; the one to the right, which we have already described, is devoted to Miranda; the one to the left is devoted to Sucre, and contains an expression of hope that some day Venezuela can pay homage to her great son. The body of Sucre has been found at last in Quito, and it is expected that very soon it will occupy its place near Bolívar, Sucre’s leader and friend. (See: Manuel Segundo Sánchez, Los Restos de Sucre, Caracas, 1918.)
That news was perhaps the last blow to Bolívar. The day he received it he was attacked with a severe cold, which he neglected and which developed into his fatal illness, an illness which had been long latent in his frail body. He remarked that the murder had perturbed his spirit. As a matter of fact, from the day he received the news, he sank rapidly in both mind and body.

Venezuela was doing her best to thrust the dagger still deeper in Bolívar’s heart. Since she had decided to withdraw from the Union, it was resolved by Congress that no negotiations should be exchanged between Venezuela and Nueva Granada while “General Simón Bolívar remains in the territory of old Colombia.” One representative proposed, as a provision for the continued relations between Venezuela and Nueva Granada, the expulsion of General Bolívar from all the territory of Colombia, and his motion was accepted. Most of the former friends of the dying man were now his bitter enemies, all due to the ambition of Páez and the intrigues of his partisans and of those who, in good faith, believed that idealistic Republican principles could meet the practical needs of Colombia.

The President of Colombia, Mosquera, committed so many errors in government that he lost his prestige and was forced to leave Bogotá. The government then passed into the hands of Caicedo. A military insurrection overthrew the President and the Vice-President, and the military element proclaimed Bolívar chief of the republic, granting him full powers. General Urdaneta, old friend and constant companion of Bolívar, was entrusted provisionally with the executive power, and he organized a cabinet. He at once sent a commission to meet the Libertador in Cartagena. Many friends wrote Bolívar beseeching him to return to Bogotá to establish public order. The foreign representatives also used their influence to induce Bolívar to accept authority, for he was the only guaranty of peace.¹

¹. Among the foreign representatives who showed pleasure at the idea of Bolívar’s accepting the power was the representative of the United States.
It is worthy of notice that the reputation of Bolívar as an ambitious man was discredited in the State Department at Washington by the very person thought to be its originator. When Watts was in Bogotá, in his correspondence with Clay (No. 19, Nov. 28, 1826), he asserted that he did not believe in the anti-Republicanism of Bolívar, who had consolidated the departments and acted with prudence and discretion. Watts expressed his firm conviction that Bolívar would not act as dictator but in conformity with the constitution, stating also the fact that Bolívar had refused the Bolivian and Peruvian dictatorships. In his communication of March 2, 1827 (No. 26), Watts denies the rumors of the monarchial ambitions of Bolívar, and says that he has nothing but the greatest magnanimity. On March 15, Watts himself asked Bolívar to assume power.

All these stories of disinterestedness seem to be contradicted in the correspondence of Harrison and Van Buren. In his note of May 27, 1829 (No. 13), Harrison speaks of monarchical plots, expressing his belief that Bolívar is behind them, founding his assertions only on the opposition of Bolívar to foreign princes. He is very free in speaking of plans, but he gives no precise data about them. In his note of July 28, 1829 (No. 18), Harrison states that the monarchists are determined to put Bolívar on the throne, and adds that he saw a letter of "a man in high position who has enjoyed the entire confidence of Bolívar, but who is now in complete opposition to all his schemes of personal aggrandizement." Bolívar, according to this letter, intended to become the monarch of Colombia, Perú and Bolivia. Then Harrison mentions the printing of a paper on the evils of free government, and states that that paper, of which he had seen a single copy, had the purpose of making propaganda in favor of Bolívar, but had been suppressed for fear that it would injure Bolívar's cause. All this sounds very much like personal hostility, and shows that the practice of some diplomatic representatives of making trouble for the countries where they are accredited instead of representing their own country in a dignified manner is not new.

After the correspondence of Harrison, we find the papers of Moore to Van Buren. In No. 10 of December 21, 1829, Moore affirms that Bolívar had no monarchical designs and encloses a letter of Bolívar to O'Leary, ridiculing monarchical government. That letter is dated August 21, 1829, and in it Bolívar suggests the election of another president. Moore accuses Harrison of insulting the Colombian government. The author is indebted to Dr. Julius Goebel, Jr., for the references to these papers.
Bolívar, declining to accept command of the insurrection and condemning the movement, sent General O’Leary to the assembly provisionally organized to advise them to use the right of petition and to inform them that he condemned all other actions. He reiterated his offer to serve as a citizen and as a soldier, and repeated that he would not accept any position except as the majority of the people willed. In a letter to Urdaneta he said that between him and the presidency there was “a bronze wall,” which was the law. He advised them to wait until the election could be held, and said that he would then assume the executive power in case he were chosen in free elections held according to the law. This letter was the last public defense of his career. The last principle he sought to establish was the most sound of Republican principles.

“The source of legality,” he wrote, “is the free will of the people; not the agitation of a mutiny nor the votes of friends.”

From Cartagena he went to a town called Soledad, and then to Barranquilla, where he remained during October and November, receiving daily news of the insults with which Venezuela was rewarding his services, and knowing very little of the good work of his friends, for he still had friends in several sections of the countries he had set free. All Nueva Granada was in favor of his assuming power as supreme chief of the republic. Ecuador proclaimed him father of his country and protector of Southern Colombia, and the government of Bolivia, learning that he was going to Europe, decided to appoint him its ambassador to the Holy See.

But Bolívar was preparing for his last voyage. He planned to go to Santa Marta, where his friends urged him to rest. His physician heartily approved, thinking that there his health might improve. When he arrived at Santa Marta, on the 1st of December, he had to be carried in a chair. Subsequent to an examination by a French and an American physician, he was sent to a country place called San Pedro Alejandrino, situated
about three miles from Santa Marta, where he obtained temporary relief. On the 10th there were symptoms of congestion of the brain, but they disappeared. The same day he drafted his will and, not desiring to die without speaking again to his fellow citizens, issued his last proclamation, which read as follows:

“Colombians, you have witnessed my efforts to establish freedom where tyranny formerly reigned. I have worked unselfishly, giving up my fortune and my tranquillity. I resigned the command when I was convinced that you did not trust my disinterestedness. My foes availed themselves of your credulity and trampled upon what is most sacred to me—my reputation as a lover of freedom. I have been a victim of my persecutors, who have led me to the border of the tomb. I forgive them.

“Upon disappearing from your midst, my love prompts me to express my last wishes. I aspire to no other glory than the consolidation of Colombia; all must work for the invaluable blessing of union; the peoples, obeying the present government, in order to free themselves from anarchy; the ministers of the Sanctuary, by sending prayers to Heaven; and the soldiers, by using their swords to protect the sanctions of social order.

“Colombians, my last wishes are for the happiness of our country. If my death can help to destroy the spirit of partisanship, and strengthen union, I shall tranquilly descend to my grave.”

After this act he became delirious and, calling his servant, he said: “Joseph, let us go away. They are throwing us out of here. Where shall we go?” On the 17th of December, at one o’clock in the afternoon, the great man of the South, one of the greatest men in the history of the world, died. On that same day, eleven years before, in Angostura, Colombia had been created by his genius. He died at the age of forty-seven and one-half years.
"Few men have lived such a beautiful life in the whirlpool of action; nobody has died a more noble death in the peace of his bed."1


His death was the end of Colombia.

For twelve years his remains rested in Santa Marta, and then they were carried to Caracas, where they now lie in the Pantheon, between two empty coffins, that of Miranda on his right and that destined for Sucre on his left.

There the Venezuelans honor him as the protecting genius of their country. They have blotted from the memory of man the ingratitude of their forefathers. They live in constant veneration of the great man, and consider him as the creator and protector of their country, and the greatest source of inspiration to live austerely and united within Venezuela, since they cannot form a part of that greater country, the dream of which went with Bolívar to his tomb.

A patriot, a general as great as the greatest who ever lived, a statesman possessing an exceptional wisdom and a vision which has been justified by a century of American history, a loyal friend, a man of generous and liberal nature, always forgiving, always opening his arms wide to his enemies, always giving all that he had in material wealth and in spiritual gifts, a conqueror of the oppressors of his country, a founder of three nations (which later were converted into five, by the disruption of Colombia); the man who consolidated the independence of America, making his power felt as far as the provinces of the River Plata and Chile; a symbol of freedom, even in Europe where his name was like a flag to all those who fought oppression; a sincere República—all this was Simón Bolívar, and he was something more. He was the best personification of his own race, the Spanish race, which made him the brother of Morillo, Latorre and Rodil, a race which lives in twenty nations of the earth and
in whose memory all names now stand equal, if they represent the same principles, whether they were written in Covadonga or Carabobo, by the sword of Pelayo or by the sword of Bolívar.

A man who writes of Bolívar's life, actions and sorrows, can hardly retain the serenity of the historian, but surrenders to that deep emotion composed of profound awe and human love, and, though his work may have been begun impersonally, it ends with the creation in his heart of those deep feelings which at times have no better expression than tears.