

CHAPTER XXIV.

1817.

EXECUTION OF POLICARPA SALABARRIETA.

WHILST these things were passing at Guayana, others very different were being executed at Santa Fé. They are not connected, it is true, intimately with the life of Bolívar; but all is bound and related to the grand undertaking which he directed; virtues, talents, valor, martyrdom, sacrifices, an account of which it will not be thought strange that the relation of acts worthy of remembrance, executed at such a great distance, should be omitted.

In the same days that the Liberator was instituting the Council of State at Angostura, thus placing the lasting foundations of the independence of the country; whilst he was expelling tyranny, and by his vast genius was checking the devastating torrent of insubordination and discord, the heroic POLICARPA SALABARRIETA was mounting the steps of the scaffold, erected in the Great Square of Santa Fé; dragged thereto by the hands of the tyrants. These two altars were separated by three hundred leagues; on the one hope was worshipped, on the other shone the halos of *immortality!*

It had already been seen with horror from the beginning of the war, that the arms of Boves, Lizón, and other Spanish chieftains, were not only directed against the brave defenders of the independence, but also against the loving and weak sex, always worthy of esteem and respect. The Señora Merced Abrego, a native of Oscura, accused of having embroidered a brigadier-general's uniform for General Bolívar, was beheaded by Lizón; *after having drawn amongst his followers to know to whom should fall the happy chance of cutting off her head.* The Señora Josepha Figueras, of Barcelona, was murdered by Morales, thus canceling a debt of two hundred dollars which he owed her. Boves beheaded Carmen Mercié, at Cumana, regarding with pleasure the convulsions of the fetus which she carried in her womb, thus dying without having lived! Other acts less cruel, but outrageous, are recorded of Aldama and Morillo. The first caused the Señora Leonor Guerra to be publicly whipped through the streets of Cumana, because she refused to give information which he desired. The second dismissed from his presence, with gross expressions and loud cries, more than 800 of the principal ladies of Bogota, who had proceeded in a body to implore pardon for their sons, husbands and brothers! But as yet, no scaffold had been erected to see a woman die on it; and, it could be said, that these outrages, and that innocent blood shed pitilessly—tortures which did not merit the mournful consecration of the scaffold—were the work of extermination of an unmerciful war, spreading calamity on all sides!

The viceroy, Don Juan Samano, was reserved to give the dreadful spectacle of the execution of the young lady, sacrificed formally, and even boasting of such

cruelty. A graceful, brave and handsome girl, of virtuous habits, of a sweet and discreet disposition. POLICARPA SALABARRIETA was enthusiastic for independence, and favored and assisted, inasmuch as she was allowed, the oppressed patriots. About this time an insurrection had broke out at Casanare, headed by the monk Ignacio Marino, who, from the beginning of the revolution, fought against the royalists. Other guerrillas were also formed at Cauca and Socorro; and many of the Bogotan patriots resolved to proceed to Casanare, and to the places where the small forces of the independents were posted. Policarpa loved and was beloved by Alejo Savarain, an officer of the Republic, whom the Spaniards had condemned to serve as a soldier in their ranks. The young lady influenced the young man, and persuaded him to fly from slavery and to go to Casanare with other companions. She herself provided what was necessary for the flight of eight persons, of which five were soldiers; and I cannot say how she succeeded in obtaining exact dates of the Spanish forces in the capital and surrounding provinces, which information she sent to the Republican chiefs of Casanare.

Unfortunately, Alejo was surprised, and the letters found on his person discovered the complicity of Policarpa.

Samano threw her into a dungeon; judging her by a military tribunal. The judges were unable to extract anything from that heroine; they could not find out her accomplices. They could not seduce or intimidate her by anything. Finally, she was condemned by a court-martial to be shot in the back, with seven others, amongst them, Alejo Savarain!

Morillo had already caused a father to step the scaffold in the presence of his son, and a son in the presence of the father. . . but it was reserved to Samano to give the last proof of damnable wickedness, causing two lovers to perish at one time, beholding mutually their painful agonies! . . .

Policarpa Salabarieta died on the 14th of November, 1817.

She died calm and unmoved, amazing her executioners by her firmness. "*My blood,*" she said, on going out to the scaffold, "*shall soon be revenged by the liberators of the country!*"

The death of that courageous and generous woman, sacrificed to liberty, caused a profound impression at Santa Fé—The people were amazed.

There was not a feeling heart which did not deplore that premature death, a sublime mourning expressed in the presence of such a noble sacrifice, and the remembrance of so much agony.

We greet thee a thousand times, virgin of Columbia! Honor and glory, American star! Dying, thou didst give us a lesson of heroism and loyalty, and on the scaffold didst thou triumph over the implacable Samano! The scaffold is your sanctuary: as it was that of Caldas, of Torices, of Torres, of Gutierrez, of Lozano, of Rovira. . . of that generation of braves, of just and wise men born like constellations to illumine our own desolation, and afterwards converted into ashes by the iron hand of despotism. Your name shall be eternal. . . and that of your executioner also. Samano condemned thee to death, and thou didst condemn him to the execration of posterity. Yes: the tyrant will not die; but he shall be a tyrant. . . an executioner!

The patriots of that epoch composed an anagram of the name of Policarpa Salabarieta:

YACE POR SALVAR LA PATRIA. She dies to save her country.