

Webster=Man's Man

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CHAPTER XIV.—Continued.

We speeded the launch toward La Estrellita, and as the craft scraped in alongside the great steamer's companion landing, her skipper ran down the ladder to greet them and inquire eagerly of the trend of events ashore. "We left in a hurry the instant it started," Webster explained. "As Americans, we didn't figure we had any interest in that scrap, either way." He handed Dolores out on the landing stage, tossed their baggage after her and followed; Don Juan took the wheel, and the launch slid out and left them there.

At the head of the companion ladder Webster paused and turned for another look at Buenaventura. To the west three great fires now threw a lurid light skyward, mocking an equally lurid light to the east, that marked the approach of daylight. He smiled. "Those are the cantonment barracks burning," he whispered to Dolores. "Ricardo is keeping his word. He's driving the rats back into their own holes."

The weeks of clean living, of abstention from his wonted daily alcoholic ration, had inspired in Don Juan Cafetero a revival of all but defunct interest in life; conversely, in these stirring times, he was sensible of an equally acute interest in Sobrantean politics, for he was Irish; and flabby indeed is that son of the Green Little Isle who, wherever he may be, declines to take a hand in any public argument. For the love of politics, like the love of home, is never dead in the Irish.

It is instinct with them—the heritage, perhaps, of centuries of oppression and suppression, which nurtures rather than stifles the yearning for place and power. Now as Don Juan turned Leber's launch shoreward and kicked the motor wide open, he, too, descried against the dawn the glare of the burning cantonments west of the city, and at the sight his pulse beat high with the lust of battle, the longing to be in at the death in this struggle, where the hopes and aspirations of those he loved were at stake.

Two months previously a revolution would have been a matter of extreme indifference to Don Juan; he would have reflected that it was merely the outs trying to get in, and that if they succeeded, the sole benefit to the general public would be the privilege of paying the bill. Today, however, in the knowledge that he had an opportunity to fight beside white men and perchance even up some old scores with the Guardia Civil, it occurred suddenly to Don Juan that it would be a brave and virtuous act to cast his lot with the Ruey forces. He was a being reorganized and rebuilt, and it behooved him to do something to demonstrate his manhood.

Don Juan knew, of course, that should the rebels lose and he be captured, he would be executed; yet this contingency seemed a far-fetched one, in view of the fact that he had John Stuart Webster at his back, ready to finance his escape from the city. Also Don Juan had had an opportunity, in the hills above San Miguel de Padua, for a critical study of Ricardo Ruey and had come to the conclusion that at last a real man had come to liberate Sobrante; further, Don Juan had had ocular evidence that John Stuart Webster was connected with the revolution, for had he not snugged Ruey into the country? It was something to be the right-hand man of the president of a rich little country like Sobrante; it was also something to be as close to that right-hand man as Don Juan was to his master, Webster; consequently self-interest and his sporting code whispered to Don Juan that it behooved him to demonstrate his loyalty with every means at his command, even unto his heart's blood.

"Who knows," he cogitated as the launch bore him swiftly shoreward, "but what I'll acquit myself with honor and get a fine job under the new administration?" 'Tis the master's fight, I'm thinkin'; then, be the same token, 'tis John Joseph Cafferty's, win, lose or draw, an' may the devil damn me if I fall him after what he's done for me. Sure, if General Ruey wins, a crook at the master's finger will make me Jeffie political. An' if he does—hoo-ray! Hoo-ray!"

With his imagination still running riot, Don Juan made the launch fast to the little dock, down which he ran straight for the warehouse, where the Ruey mercenaries were still congregated, busily wiping the factory grease from the weapons which had just been distributed to them from the packing cases. A sharp voice halted him; he paused, panting, to find himself looking down the long blue barrel of a service pistol.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" the man behind the weapon demanded brusquely.

"I'm Private John J. Cafferty, the latest recruit to the Ruey army," Don Juan answered compositely. "Who did ye think I was? Private secretary to that divil Sarros? Man, dear, lower that gun at yours, for God knows I'm

nervous enough as it is. Have ye something ye could give me to fight wit' avic?"

The man who had challenged him—a tank, swarthy individual from the Mexican border—looked him over with twinkling eyes. "You'll do, Cafferty, old timer," he drawled, "and if you don't, you'll wish you had. There's a man for every rifle just now, but I wouldn't be surprised if ther'd be a right smart more rifles than men before a great while. Help yourself to the gun o' the first man that goes down; in the meantime, hop into that there truck and keep the cartridge belt for the machine guns full up. You're just in time."

Without further ado Don Juan climbed into the truck. A little citadel of sheet steel had been built around the driver's seat, with a narrow slit in front through which the latter peered out. The body of the truck had been boxed in with the same material and housed two machine guns, emplaced, and a crew of half a dozen men crouched on the floor engaged in loading the belts. Four motor bicycles, with sturdy, specially-built side cars attached, and a machine gun in each side car, were waiting near by, together with a half-dozen country carts loaded with ammunition cases and drawn by horses.

"How soon do we start?" Don Juan demanded anxiously, as he crowded in beside one of his new-found comrades.

"I believe," this individual replied in the unmistakable accents of an Oxford man, "that the plan is to wait until five o'clock; by that time all the government troops that can be spared from the arsenal and palace will have been dispatched to the fighting now taking place west of the city. Naturally, the government forces aren't anticipating an attack from the rear, and so they will, in all probability, weaken their base. I believe that eases our task; certainly it will save us many men."

Don Juan nodded his entire approval to this shrewd plan of campaign and fell to stuffing cartridges in the web belting, the while he whistled softly, unmusically, and with puffing, hissing sounds between his snaggle teeth, until Sobrantean, gentleman (it was Doctor Pacheco) came out of the warehouse and gave the order to proceed.

They marched along the water front for four blocks and then turned up a side street, which happened to be the Calle de Concordia, thus enabling Mother Jenks, who was peering from the doorway of El Buen Amigo, to see them coming.

"Hah!" she muttered. "Enemys they're comin'. The worm is turnin'."



"Enemys, They're Comin'."

"Enemys, 15 years you've waited for vengeance, my love, but tody you'll get it."

She waddled out into the street and held up her hand in a gesture as authoritative and imperious as that of a traffic officer. "Batter-ry 'alt!" she croaked. She had heard the late "Enemys" give that command often enough to have acquired the exact inflection necessary to make an impression upon men accustomed to obeying such a command whenever given. Instinctively the column slowed up; some of the Foreign Legion, old coast artillerists, no doubt, came to a halt with promptness and precision; all stared at Mother Jenks.

"Ow about 'arf a dozen cases o' good brandy for the wounded?" Mother Jenks suggested. "An' 'ow about a bally old woman for a Red Cross nurse?"

"You're on, ma'am," the foreigner replied promptly, and translated the old lady's suggestion to Dr. Pacheco, who accepted gracefully and thanked Mother Jenks in purest Castilian. So a detail of six men was

told off to carry the six cases of brandy out of El Buen Amigo and load them on the ammunition carts; then Mother Jenks crawled up into the armored truck with the machine gun crew, and the column once more took up its line of rapid march.

The objective of this unsuspected force within the city was, as Ricardo Ruey shrewdly suspected it might be, poorly garrisoned. Usually a force of fully 500 men was stationed at the national arsenal, but the sharp, savage attack from the west, so sudden and unexpected, had thrown Sarros into a panic and left him no time to plan his defense carefully. His first thought had been to send all his available forces to support the troops bearing the brunt of the rebel attack, and it was tremendously important that this should be done very promptly, in view of the lack of information concerning the numerical force of the enemy; consequently he had reduced the arsenal force to 100 men and retained only his favorite troops of the guards and one company of the Fifteenth Infantry to protect the palace.

Acting under hastily given telephone orders, the commanding officer at the cantonment barracks had detailed a few hundred men to fight a rear-guard action while the main army fell back in good order behind a railway embankment which swept in wide arc around the city and offered a safe route westward. This position had scarcely been attained before the furious advance of the rebels drove in the rear guard, and pending the capture of the arsenal, Ricardo realized his operations were at an impasse. Promptly he dug himself in, and the battle developed into a brisk affair of give and take, involving meager losses to both factions, but an appalling wastage of ammunition.

The arsenal, a large, modern concrete building with tremendously thick walls reinforced by steel, would have offered fairly good resistance to the average field battery. Surrounding it on all four sides was a reinforced concrete wall 30 feet high, with machine gun bastions at each corner and a platform along the wall, inside and 25 feet from the ground, which afforded foot room for infantry which could use the top five feet of the wall for protection while firing over it. There was but one entrance, a heavy, barred steel gate which was always kept locked when it was not necessary to have it opened for ingress or egress. Given warning of an attack and with sufficient time to prepare for it, 100 of the right sort of fighting men could withstand an indefinite siege by a force not provided with artillery heavier than an ordinary field gun. With a full realization of this, therefore, Ricardo and his confederates had designed to accomplish by strategy that which could not be done by the limited forces at their command.

As the column approached the neighborhood of the arsenal, three detachments broke away from the main body and disappeared down side streets, to turn at right angles later and march parallel with the main command. Each of these detachments was accompanied by one unit of the motorcycle mounted machine gun battery with its white crew; two blocks beyond the arsenal square each detachment leader so disposed his men as to offer spirited resistance to any sortie that might be made by the troops from the palace in the hope of driving off the attackers of the arsenal.

Having thus provided for protection during its operations, the main body nominally under Dr. Pacheco but in reality commanded by the chief of the machine gun company, proceeded to operate. With the utmost assurance in the world the armored truck rolled down the street to the arsenal entrance, swung in and pointed its impudent nose straight at the iron bars while the hidden chauffeur called loudly and profanely in Spanish upon the sentry to open the gate and let him in—that there was necessity for great hurry, since he had been sent down from the palace by the president himself, for machine guns to equip this armored motorcar. The sentry immediately called the officer of the guard, who peered out, observed nothing but the motortruck, which seemed far from dangerous, and without further ado inserted a huge key in the lock and turned the bolt. The sentry swung the double gates ajar, and with a prolonged and raucous roar of its horn the big car loafed in. The sentry closed the gate again, while the officer stepped up to turn the key in the lock. Instead, he died with half a dozen pistol bullets through his body, and the sentry sprawled beside him.

The prolonged roar of the motor-horn had been the signal agreed upon to apprise the detachment waiting in a secluded back street that the truck was inside the arsenal wall. With a yell they swept out of the side street and down on the gate, through which they poured into the arsenal grounds. At sound of the first shot at the gate, the commandants of the garrison

which had been drawn up in a double rank for reveille roll call, realized he was attacked, and that swift measures were necessary. Fortunately for him, his men were standing at attention at the time, preparatory to receiving from him one of those anti-battle exhortations so dear to the Latin soul.

A sharp command, and the little garrison had fixed bayonets; another command, and they were in line of squads; before the autotrack could be swung sideways to permit a machine gun to play on the Sobranteans in close formation, the latter had thrown out a skirmish line and were charging; while from the guardhouse window, just inside the gate, a volley, poured into the unprotected rear of the truck following its passage through the gate, did deadly execution. The driver, a bullet through his back, sagged forward into his steel-clad citadel; both machine gun operators were wounded, and the truck was stalled. The situation was desperate.

"I'm a gone goose," mourned Don Juan Cafetero, and he leaped from the shambles to the ground, with some hazy notion of making his escape through the gate. He was too late. Two men, riding tandem on a motorcycle with a machine gun in the specially constructed side-car, appeared in the entrance and leaped off; almost before Don Juan had time to dodge behind the motortruck to escape possible wild bullets, the machine gun was sweeping the oncoming skirmish line. Don Juan cheered as man after man of the garrison pitched on his face, for the odds were rapidly being evened now, greatly to the pleasure of the men charging through the gate to support the machine gun. Out into the arsenal yard they swept, forcing the machine gun crew to cease firing because of the danger of killing their own men; with a shock bayonet met bayonet in the center of the yard, and the issue was up for prompt and final decision.

Don Juan's Hibernian blood thrilled; he cast about for a weapon in this emergency, and his glance rested on the body of the dead officer beside the gate. To possess himself of the latter's heavy "cut-and-thrust" sword was the work of seconds, and with a royal good will Don Juan launched himself into the heart of the scrimmage.



Launched Himself Into the Heart of the Scrimmage.

He had a hazy impression that others were striking and stabbing at him; that men crowded and breathed and pressed and swore and grunted around him, that the fighting-room was no better than it might have been, but was rapidly improving. Then the gory fog lifted, and Doctor Pacheco had Don Juan by the hand; they stood together in the arsenal entrance, and the little Doctor was explaining to the war-mad Don Juan that all was over in so far as the arsenal was concerned—the survivors of the garrison having surrendered—that now, having the opportunity, he, Doctor Pacheco, desired to thank Don Juan Cafetero for his life. Don Juan looked at him amazedly, for he hadn't the slightest idea what the Doctor was talking about. He spat, gazed around at the litter of corpses on the arsenal lawn, and nodded his red head approvingly.

In an incredibly short space of time the news that the arsenal had been captured and that Sarros was besieged in the palace spread through the city. The sight of the red banner of revolution floating over the arsenal for the first time in fifteen years brought hundreds of willing recruits to the rebel ranks, as Ricardo Ruey had anticipated; these were quickly supplied with arms and ammunition; by ten o'clock a battalion had been formed and sent off, together with the machine gun company, to connect with the San Bruno contingent advancing from the south to turn the flank of the government troops, while the equipping of an additional battalion proceeded within the arsenal. As fast as the new levies were armed, they were hurried off to re-enforce the handful of white men who had, after clearing the arsenal, advanced on the palace and now, with machine guns from the arsenal commanding all avenues of escape from the trap wherein Sarros found himself, were calmly awaiting developments, merely keeping an eye open for snipers.

Thus the forenoon passed away. By one o'clock Don Juan Cafetero—who in

the absence of close-range fighting had elected himself ordnance sergeant-passed out the last rifle and ammunition. He was red with slaughter, slippery with gun-grease, dripping with perspiration, and filthy with dust and dirt. "Begorra," he declared, "a cowld bottle av beer would go fine now." Then, recalling his limitations, he sighed and put the thought from him. It revived in him, however, for the first time since he had left the steamer, a memory of John Stuart Webster, and his promise to the latter to report on the progress of the war. So Don Juan sought Doctor Pacheco in his headquarters and learned that a signal-man, hellographing from the roof of the arsenal, had been in communication with General Ruey, who reported the situation well in hand, with no doubt of an overwhelming victory before the day should be over. This and sundry other bits of information Don Juan gleaned and then deserted the Sobrantean revolutionary army quite as casually as he had joined it, to make his precarious way down the Calle San Rosario to the bay.

CHAPTER XV.

Throughout the forenoon Webster and Dolores, from the deck of the steamer, watched the city. By ten o'clock the sounds of battle had swelled to a deeper, steadier roar, and refugees arriving brought various and fragmentary stories of the fighting. From this hedge-podge of misinformation, however, Webster decided that Ricardo's troops were forcing the issue, for the men charging through the gate to support the machine gun. Out into the arsenal yard they swept, forcing the machine gun crew to cease firing because of the danger of killing their own men; with a shock bayonet met bayonet in the center of the yard, and the issue was up for prompt and final decision.

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"Who has won?" a voice called, and another, evidently a humorist and a shrewd judge of human nature, replied: "Why ask foolish questions? The rebels, of course. That fellow's Irish and the Irish are born rebels. Look at the scoundrel. He's black with gun grease and burned powder where he isn't red with blood. The butcher!"

"Faugh-a-ballagh!" he shrieked. "We've got the devils cornered now. Twill be over two hours hence."

Don Juan tied up the launch at the gangway and leaped up the ladder, three steps at a time. "Glory be to God," he panted and hurled himself into Webster's arms. "I was in it! I was. I got back in time to catch up wit' the lads at the warehouse; an' they were the fine, fightin' devils. I'll gamble you. Och, twas a grand bit av a fight—whilst it lasted. They put me in the motor-truck, lordin' the belts wit' cartridges as fast as the gunners emptied them, but faith they couldn't keep me there. I got into the heart of the scrimmage in the yard at the arsenal an' faith 'twas well for that little Docthor Pacheco I did. Twas wurrk to me likin'. I'd a mache-

"You bloodthirsty scoundrel!" Webster shook the war-mad son of Erin. "I told you not to mix in it, but to hang around on the fringe of the fight, and bring us early news. Suppose you'd been killed? Who would have come for us then? Didn't I tell you we had a dinner engagement on the palace?"

"Me on the fringes av a fight?" sputtered Don Juan, amazed and outraged. "Take shame for yerself, sor. There was never the likes av me hung around the fringes av a fight, an' ye know it."

"I'm amazed that you even remembered your instructions," Webster rasped at him.

"Sure, our division had el'aned up nicely an' I had nothin' else to do, God bless ye. They were beslegin' the palace when I left, an' small chance av takin' it for a couple av hours; what fightin' there was on the outside was street shootin'—an' not to me likin'."

"Is it quite safe to bring Miss Ruey ashore, John?"

"Tis safe enough at the Hotel Ma-teo. We have the city for half a mile beyant, in the rear av them—an' they're not fightin' to get to the bay. The guards an' some av the Fifteenth infantry regiment are in the palace an' the cuartel close by, an' them that we failed to get in the arsenal having surrendered—that now, having the opportunity, he, Doctor Pacheco, desired to thank Don Juan Cafetero for his life. Don Juan looked at him amazedly, for he hadn't the slightest idea what the Doctor was talking about. He spat, gazed around at the litter of corpses on the arsenal lawn, and nodded his red head approvingly.

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"Hah! So here you are, my lamb," she greeted Dolores. "Right-o. Just where yer ought to be. Gor' bless yer sweet face. Let these poor misfortunate lads see that the sister o' the new president ain't too proud to care for 'em. Ere, issa. 'Old up the 'ead o' this young cockerel with the 'ole in 'e's neck. Ere, lad. Tyke a brace now! 'Ere's some o' your own people, not a lot o' bloom'in' yellow bellies, come to put something else in yer neck—some think that'll stimulate yer."

"The 'young cockerel,' a blond youth of scarce 20 summers, twisted his head and grinned up at Dolores as she knelt beside him to lift him up. "Here, here, sister," he mumbled, "you'll get that white dress dirty. Never mind me. It's just a flesh wound, only my neck has got stiff and I'm weak from loss of blood."

Mother Jenks winked at Webster as she set a glass of brandy to the stricken adventurer's lips. "Give me a bit o' the white meat, as my sainted 'Ere used to say," she murmured complacently.

House stood wide open; within was a litter of greasy rags and broken packing cases, with Leber, quite mystified, sitting on a keg of nails and staring curiously at it all.

Guided by Don Juan Cafetero, Webster and Dolores passed on up the Calle San Rosario. Occasionally a bullet, fired two or three miles to the west, droned lazily overhead or dropped with a sharp metallic sound on the corrugated-iron roofs of a building. At the hotel the proprietor alone was in evidence, seated behind the desk smoking in profound indifference.

In response to Webster's eager inquiries for the latest news from the front, the placid fellow shrugged and murmured: "Quién sabe?" Evidently for him such stirring scenes had long since lost their novelty; the bloom was off the peach, as it were.