Webster—Man's Man

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CHAPTER XV.—Continued.

Dolores looked up at Webster. "I'll stay here," she said simply. "I've found a job helping Mother Jenks. You and Don Juan may run along if you wish. I know you're as curious as children."

They were. It would have been impossible for any man with red corpuscles in his blood to harken to the shooting and shouts only three city blocks distant without yearning to see the fight itself.

"I'll return in 15 minutes, at the latest," he promised her, and with Don Juan Cafetero, who had helped himself to a rifle and bayonet from one of the wounded, he turned the corner into the next street which they followed west through a block plentifully sprinkled with the dead of both factions.

Don Juan led the way through an alley in the rear of the Catedral de la Santa Cruz to the door of the sacristy; as he placed his hand on the latch three rifle bullets struck around them, showering them with fragments of falling adobe.

"There's a house party in the neighborhood," yelled Don Juan and darted into the church, with Webster at his heels, just in time to escape another

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fusillade. They walked through the sacristy and passed through a door into the great cathedral, with its high, carved, gothic-arched ceiling. Through the thick-closed doors of the main entrance, lost in the dimness of space out in front, the sounds of the battle half a block away seemed very distant, indeed.

They passed the altar and Don Juan genuflected and crossed himself reverently. "I'll be afther makin' me confession," he whispered to Webster. "Wait for me, sor."

He leaned his rifle against the altar railing, crossed the church and touched lightly on the shoulder a monk kneeling in prayer before the altar of the Virgin; the latter bent his head while Don Juan whispered; then he rose and both went into the confessional, while Webster found a bench along the wall and waited.

Presently Don Juan came forth, knelt on the red-tiled floor and prayed—something, Webster suspected, he had not done for quite a while. And when he had finished his supplication and procured his rifle, Webster joined him, the monk unbolted the door and from the quiet of the house of God they passed out into the street and the tumult of hell.

"I've been clost to death this day," Don Juan explained, "an' the day is not done. Be the same token, 'tis long since I'd made me last confession; sure, until you picked me out av the mire, sor, 'tis little thought I had for the hereafter."

From their place they could see a dozen or more of Ricardo's hired fighters crouched under the shelter of the palace walls across the street. "I think we'll be safer there," Webster cried, as a couple of bullets struck the stone steps at their feet and ricocheted against the cathedral door. "That rifle of yours is making you a marked man, Don Juan."

They ran across the street and joined the men under the palace wall.

"What's this?" Don Juan demanded briskly. "Have ye not shmoked thim out yet?"

"Noddings doing," a young German answered. "Der chief has sent word dot we shall not artillery use on der palace. Men all aroundt it we haf, mit a machine gun commanding each gate; most of der poys have chust moved out west in der rear of der government troops."

"Then," Don Juan declared with conviction, "there'll be no fighting here to speak av, until later."

"Der is blenty of choy hunting selp-ers, mein freund. Der houses nereabouts vos filled mit dem."

"I'll have no cat fights in mine," Don Juan retorted. "Come wit' me, so, an' we'll be in at the death out beyant at the railroad embankment."

"Too late," Webster answered, for on the instant to the west the crackle of rifle and machine gun fire interluded with the staccato barks of a Maxim-Vickers broke out, swelling almost immediately to a steady outpouring of sound. "We'll stay here where we're safe for the finals. When General Ruey has cleaned up out there he'll come here to take command."

For half an hour the sounds of a brisk engagement to the west did not slacken; then with disconcerting suddenness the uproar died away fully 50 per cent.

"They're going in with the bayonet and machetes," somebody who knew remarked laconically. "Wait and you'll hear the cheering."

They waited fully ten minutes, but presently, as the firing gradually died away, they heard it, faint and indistinguishable at first, but gradually coming nearer. And presently the trapped men in the palace heard it, too. "Viva Ruey! Viva! Viva Ruey!"

"All over but the shouting," Don Juan remarked disgustedly. "The lads in the palace will surrindher now. Sure Gineral Ruey was right afther all. For why should he shoot holes in the house he's goin' to live in, an' where, be the same token, he gives a dinner party this night?"

"I'm glad the end is in sight," Webster replied. "We have no interest in this revolution, John, and it isn't up to us to horn in on the play; yet if it went against the Ruey faction, I fear we'd be forced into active service in spite of ourselves. There is such a thing as fighting to save one's skin, you know."

Don Juan laughed pleasurably. "What a shame we missed the row out beyant at the railroad embankmint," he declared.

"I wish you'd kept out of it, Don Juan. What business had you in the fight at the cuartel? Suppose you'd been killed?"

"Small loss!" Don Juan retorted.

"I should have mourned you nevertheless, John."

"Would you that same?" Don Juan's buttermilk eyes lighted with affection and pleasure. "Would it put a pang in the heart of you, sor, to see me stretched?"

"Yes, it would, John. You're a wild, impulsive, lunatic, worthless Irishman, but there's a broad vein of pay ore in you, and I want you to live until I can develop it. When Mr. Geary returns to operate the mine, he'll need a foreman he can trust."

"And do you trust me, sor?"

"I do indeed, John. By the way, you never gave me your word of honor to cut out red liquor for keeps. Up till today I've had to watch you—and I don't want to do that. It isn't dignified for either of us, and from today on you must be a man or a mouse. If you prove yourself a man, I want you in my business; if you prove yourself a mouse, somebody else may have you. How about you John? The cantinas will be open tonight, and fire water will be free to the soldiers of the new republic. Must I watch you tonight?"

Don Juan shook his reckless red head. "I'll never let a drop of liquor cross my lips without your permission, sor," he promised simply. "I am the man and you are the master."

"We'll shake hands on that!" After the western habit of validating all verbal agreements with a hand shake, Webster thrust his hard hand out to his man, who took it in both of his and held it for half a minute. He wanted to speak, but couldn't; he could only bow his head as his eyes clouded with the tears of his appreciation. "Ah, sor," he blurted presently, "I'd die for ye an' welcome the chanst."

A wild yell of alarm broke out in the next block, at the north gate of the palace; there was a sudden flurry of rifle fire and cries of "Here they come! Stop them! Stop them! They're breaking out!"

Without awaiting orders the hired fighters along the wall—some 15 of them—leaped out into the street, forming a skirmish line, just as a troop of cavalry, with drawn sabers, swept around the corner and charged upon the devoted little line. "Sarros must be thryin' to make his get-away," Don Juan Cafetero remarked coolly, and emptied a saddle. "They threw open the big palace gate, 'an the guards are clearin' a way for him to the bay." He emptied another saddle.

In the meantime Ricardo's fire eaters had not been idle. The instant the guards turned into the street a deadly magazine fire had been opened on them. They had already suffered heavily winning through the gate and past the besiegers in front of it, but once they turned the corner into the next street they had the fire of but a handful of men to contend with. Nevertheless it was sufficiently deadly. Many of the horses in the front rank went down with their riders, forcing the maddened animals behind to clear their carcasses by leaping over them, which some did. Many, however, tripped and stumbled in their wild gallop, spilling their riders.

"Stay by the wall, you madman," Webster ordered. "There'll be enough left to ride down those men in the street and saber them!"

And there were! They died to a man, and the sadly depleted troop of guards galloped on, leaving Don Juan and Webster unscathed on the sidewalk, the only two living men unhurt in that shambles.

Not for long, however, did they have the street to themselves. Around the corner of the palace wall a limousine, with the curtains drawn, swung on two wheels, skidded, struck the carcass of a horse and turned over, catapulting the chauffeur into the middle of the street.

"Sarros!" shrieked Don Juan and ran to the overturned vehicle. It was quite empty.

"Bully boy, Senor Sarros," Webster laughed. "He's turned a pretty trick, hasn't he? Sent his guards out to hack a pathway for an empty limousine! That means he's hoping to draw the watchers from the other gate!"

But Don Juan Cafetero was not listening; he was running at top speed for the south gate of the palace grounds—and Webster followed.

As they swung into the street upon which this south gate opened, Webster saw that it was deserted of all save the dead, for Sarros' clever ruse had worked well and had had the effect of arousing the curiosity of his enemies as to the cause of the uproar at the north gate, in consequence of which they had all scurried around the block to see what they could see, thus according Sarros the thing he desired most—a fighting chance and a half minute to get through the gate and headed for the steamship landing without interference.

Webster and Don Juan came abreast the high, barred gate in the thick, 20-foot masonry wall as the barrier swung back and a man, in civilian clothes, thundered through on a magnificent bay thoroughbred.

"That's him. Shtop the divil!" screamed Don Juan. "They'll do the decent thing be me if I take him alive."

To Webster, who had acquired the art of snap shooting while killing time in many a lonely camp, the bay charger offered an easy mark. "Hate to down that beautiful animal," he remarked—and pulled away.

The horse leaped into the air and came down stiff-legged; Sarros spurred it cruelly, and the gallant beast strove to gather itself into its stride, staggered and sank to its knees, as with a wild Irish yell Don Juan Cafetero reached the dictator's side.

Sarros drew a revolver, but before he could use it Don Juan tapped him smartly over the head with his rifle barrel, and the man toppled inertly to the ground beside his dying horse.

"More power to ye sor," Don Juan called cheerily and turned to receive Webster's approval.

What he saw paralyzed him for an instant. Webster was standing beside the gate, firing into a dozen of Sarros' soldiery who were pouring out of a house just across the street, where for an hour they had crouched unseen and unheard by the Ruey men at the gate. They were practically out of ammunition and had merely been awaiting a favorable opportunity to escape before the rebels should enter the city in force and the house-to-house search for snipers should begin. They had been about to emerge and beat a hasty retreat, when Sarros rode out at the gate, and with a rush they followed, gaining the sidewalk in time to be witnesses to the dictator's downfall.

For a moment they had paused, huddled on the sidewalk behind their officer, who, turning to scout the street up and down, beheld John Stuart Webster standing by the gate with an automatic in his hand. At the same instant Webster's attention had been attracted to the little band on the sidewalk; in their leader he recognized no less a personage than his late acquaintance, the fire eating Capt. Jose Benavides. Coincidentally Benavides recognized Webster.

It was an awkward situation. Webster realized the issue was about to be decided, that if he would have it in his favor, he should waste not one split-second before killing the mercurial Benavides as the latter stood staring at him. It was not a question, now, of who should beat the other to the draw, for each had already filled his hand. It was a question, rather, as to who should recover first from his astonishment. If Benavides decided to let bygones be bygones and retreat without firing a shot, then Webster was quite willing to permit him to pass unmolested; indeed, such was his aversion to shooting any man, so earnestly did he hope the Sobrantean would consider that discretion was the better part of valor, that he resolved to inculcate that idea in the Hotspur.

"Captain Benavides," he said suavely, "your cause is lost. If you care to escape aboard the steamer, I will see to it that you are not removed from her before she sails; if you care to surrender to me now, I give you my word of honor you will not be executed."

Benavides might have had, and doubtless did have, his faults, but cowardice was not one of them. And he did have the ghost of a sense of humor. An evil smile flitted over his olive features.

"Without taking into consideration the bayonets at my back," he replied, "it strikes me the odds are even now. And yet you patronize me."

Webster was nettled. "I'd rather do that than kill you, Benavides," he retorted. "Don't be a fool. Run along and sell your papers, and take your pitiful little sandal-footed brigands with you. Scat!"

Benavides' hand, holding his pistol, had been hanging loosely at his side. With his furious glance meeting Webster's unfalteringly, with the merest movement of his wrist and scarcely without movement of his forearm, he threw up his weapon and fired. Scarcely a fifth of a second had elapsed between the movement of his wrist and the pressure of his finger on the trigger; Webster, gazing steadily into the somber eyes, had noted no hint of the man's intention, and was caught actually off his guard.

The bullet tore through his biceps, momentarily paralyzing him, and his automatic dropped clattering to the sidewalk; as he stooped and recovered it, Benavides fired again, creasing the top of his left shoulder. The Sobrantean took aim for a third and finishing shot, but when he pulled the trigger the hammer fell on a defective cartridge, which gave to John Stuart Webster all the advantage he craved. He planted a bullet in Benavides' abdomen with his first shot, blew out the duellist's brains with his second, and whirled to meet the charge of the little sandal-footed soldados, who, seeing their leader fallen, had without an instant's hesitation and apparently by mutual consent decided to avenge him.

Webster backed dazedly toward the wall, firing as he did so, but he was too dizzy to shoot effectively, and the semicircle of bayonets closed in on his front. He had wounded three men without stopping them; a second more, and their long, eighteen-inch bayonets would have been in his vitals, when into the midst of the melee, from the rear, dashed Don Juan Cafetero, shrieking like a fiend and swinging his rifle, which he held grasped by the barrel.

Webster saw a bayonet lunging toward him. He lifted his leg and caught the point on his boot-heel while with his last cartridge he killed the man behind the bayonet, just as the latter's next-rank man thrust straight and true in under the American's left arm, while a third man jabbed at his stomach and got the bayonet home in his hip. These two thrusts, delivered almost simultaneously, by their impact carried their victim backward against the wall, against which his head collided with a smart thud. He fell forward on his face; before his assailants could draw back for a finishing thrust, in case the gringo needed it, which they doubted, Don Juan Cafetero had brained them both.

Standing above the man he loved, with the latter's body between his outspread legs, Don Juan Cafetero stood for the final accounting, his but-

Webster Planted a Bullet in Benavides' Abdomen.

termilk eyes gleaming hatred and warmadness, his lips drawn back from his snaggle teeth, his breast rising and falling as they closed in around him. For a few seconds he was visible swinging his rifle like a flail, magnificent, unterrified—and then a bayonet slipped in under his guard. It was the end.

With a final great effort that used up the last strength in his drink-corroded muscles he hurled his rifle into the midst of his four remaining enemies, before he swayed and toppled full length on top of Webster, shielding with his poor body the man who had fanned to flame the dying ember of manhood in the wreck that drink and the devil had cast up on the Caribbean coast.

For Don Juan Cafetero it had been a long, joyous, thirsty day, but at last the day was done. And in order to make certain, a soldado jabbed him once more through the vitals before he fled with the other survivors.

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For half an hour after Webster left her to assist the great-hearted Mother Jenks in the rough care of the wounded, Dolores, absorbed in her work of mercy, gave all of her thought to the grim task before her. The cries, followed by the sudden, savage outbreak of fire when the guards made their dash from the palace, brought Webster and Don Juan to mind instantly. In a quick access of terror and apprehension she clung, trembling, to stolid old Mother Jenks.

"Somebody's breakin' in or breakin' out," the veteran decided calmly. "Come to the corner, dearie, an' 'ave a look."

She half dragged Dolores to the corner, from which they had an unobstructed view down the cross-street to its intersection three blocks distant with the Calle San Rosario; consequently they saw the dozen or more survivors of that ill-fated dash from the north gate of the palace flash for a second across their line of vision. Mother Jenks croaked dismally, like a disreputable old raven; she was trying to cheer.

"The rats are leavin' the sinkin' ship," she wheezed. "Come an' see them tyke the devils as killed my sainted 'Enery." She broke eagerly from Dolores' detaining grasp and ran down the street. Dolores hesitated a moment; then, reasoning that her duty lay in pursuing Mother Jenks and preventing her from rushing headlong into the conflict, she followed.

Evidently the fleeing guards had scurried around a corner into a cross-street shortly after Dolores and Mother Jenks had seen them gallop past, for the firing down the Calle San Rosario had ceased entirely by the time they reached it. They stood a moment at the corner, gazing up the street at the dead—man and beast—with the wounded crawling out of the shambles to the sidewalk.

Mother Jenks nodded approvingly as triumphant shouts from the north gate told her the Ruey men were pouring into the palace; with their arms about each other the two women watched and waited—and presently the national flag on the palace came fluttering down from its staff, to be raised again with the red banner of revolution fluttering above it, the insignia of a nation reborn.

"My lamb," Mother Jenks said softly to Dolores, "the war is over. Wot's the matter with goin' in the south gate an' wytin' on the palace steps for the provisional president to make his grand ountray? If we 'esitate five minutes they'll have a bloomin' guard on both gates, arskin' us 'oo we are an' wot we want."

"But Mr. Webster will come back to that back street looking for me; I must go back and wait there for him."

"Wyte, nothink!" Mother Jenks overruled the girl's protest roughly. "'E'll 'ave gone into the palace with the crowd for a look-see; we'll meet 'im there an' syve 'im the trouble o' 'untin' for us. Come!" And she half dragged the shrinking girl toward the gate, a block distant, where only a few minutes before Webster and Don Juan Cafetero had made their ineffectual stand.

"Don't look at the blighters, honey," Mother Jenks warned Dolores when, in approaching the gate, she caught sight of the bodies strewed in front of it. "My word! Regular bally mess—an' all spiggoties! Cawn't be. Must 'ave been some white meat on this bird, as my sainted 'Enery uster s'y. Hah! Thought so! There's a red-headed 'un! Gawd's truth! An' 'e done all that—Gor' strike me pink! It's Don Juan Cafetero."

Mother Jenks stepped over the gory corpses ringed around Don Juan and knelt beside him. "Don Juan!" she cried. "You bally, interferin' blighter, you've gone an' got it!"

She ran her strong old arms under his dripping body, lifted him and laid his red head on her knee, while with her free hand she drew a small flask of brandy from her dress pocket.

Don Juan opened his buttermilk eyes and gazed up at her with slowly dawning wonder, then closed them again, drowsily, like a tired child. Mother Jenks pressed the flask to his blue lips; as the brandy bit his tongue he rolled his fiery head in feeble protest and weakly set his teeth against the lip of the flask. Wondering, Mother Jenks withdrew it—and then Don Juan spoke.

"Have ye the masther's permission, allanah? I give him me worrd av honor—not—to dhrink—till—he—give—permission. He—was good—to me—troth he was—God—love—me—boss—"

His jaw dropped loosely; his head rolled sideways; but ere his spirit fled, Don Juan Cafetero had justified the faith of his master. He had kept his word of honor. He had made good on his brag to die for John Stuart Webster and welcome the chance! Mother Jenks held his body a little while, gazing into the face no longer rubicund; then gently she eased it to the ground and for the first time was aware that Dolores knelt in the dirt opposite to her striving to lift the body upon which Don Juan had been lying.

The strength of Dolores was unequal to the task; so Mother Jenks, hardened, courageous, calm as her sainted 'Enery at his inglorious finish, rose and stepped around to her side to help her. She could see this other was a white man, too; coolly she stooped and wiped his gory face with the hem of her apron. And then she recognized him!

"Lift him up! Give him to me!" Dolores sobbed. "Oh, Caliph, my poor dear, big-hearted blundering boy!"

She got her arm under his head; Mother Jenkins aided her; and the limp body was lifted to a sitting position; then Dolores knelt on one knee, supporting him with the other, and drew his head over on her shoulder; with her white cheek cuddled against his, she spoke into his deaf ears the little, tender, foolish words that mothers have for their children, that women have for the stricken men of their love. She pleaded with him to open his eyes, to speak to her and tell her he still lived; so close was his face to hers that she saw an old but very faint white scar running diagonally across his left eyebrow—and kissed it.

Presently strong arms took him from her; clinging to somebody—she knew not whom—she followed, moaning broken-heartedly, while eight men, forming a rude litter with four rifles passed under his body, bore Webster to the shade of a tufted palm inside the palace gate.

As they laid Webster down for a moment there Dolores saw a tall, youthful man, of handsome features and noble bearing, approach and look at him. In his eyes there were tears, a sob escaped him as with a little impulsive, affectionate movement he patted John Stuart Webster's cheek.

"My friend!" the fainting Dolores heard him murmur. "My great-hearted, whimsical, lovable John Webster. You made it possible for me to meet you here tonight—and this is the meeting!"

(To be continued)

DIALECTS MANY AND VARIED

Genesis of the Traveling American May Be Pretty Well Recognized by His Speech.

A survey just completed shows that 33 languages are in daily use in New York, not including three or four kinds of English. There is highbrow English, lowbrow English and the R-less variety, besides the strange, inexplicable cockney kind, which gives all "er" sounds the sound of "oi." We say inexplicable, for we have never seen explained why in certain New York vernacular third is "thoid," bird is "boid" and curse is "coise."

Sometime, somewhere, that enunciation must have begun—whether on the Bowery or in Harlem or even in Broadway, nobody seems to know. Was it in existence in 1860? The New York literature of that era does not seem to so indicate. The converse of the bootblacks and juvenile street sweepers of the mild and innocuous fiction of those days reveal almost a Sunday school diction. The "coise" has swept over Manhattan since then. It came with the melting pot and may be part of it, for all we know.

The United States is large enough to contain a number of dialects and already it does contain them, so that one's genesis is pretty well distinguished by his speech. We know New England by its "loffing" laugh and they know us by our "larfing" one. "Ask" in some parts of the South is as flattened out almost as the "a" in "bake," while still remaining "osk" in Massachusetts.

Our e pluribus unum language is truly that kind, and likely to become more pluribus as the country grows older.—St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

TOMBS THAT ARE INDIVIDUAL

Resting Places of Chinese Rulers So Constructed as to Reveal Character of Occupants.

At the Tung Ling, or Eastern Tombs of the Manchus, nature has worked hand in hand with man to produce a harmonious whole, writes Roy Chapman Andrews in Asia Magazine. Most of the trees about the tombs have been planted, but they have been so cleverly chosen and placed that they look as if they had grown just where, in nature's scheme of things, they ought to be. There is nothing glaringly artificial in the appearance of the park.

Although the tombs are alike in general plan, they are at the same time as individual as were the emperors themselves. Each is a subtle expression of the character of the one who sleeps beneath the yellow roof. The tomb of Ch'ien-Lung, the artist emperor, lies not far away from that of the empress dowager. Stately, beautiful in its simplicity, it is an indication of his life and deeds. In striking contrast is the palace built by the empress, for her eternal dwelling. Extravagantly decorated, vainglorously declaring to the world the millions spent upon it, it represents admirably the personality of the iron-willed ruler who in life held her place by force and intrigue and lavish expenditure and who was determined to be known, even in death as the greatest of the great. But a hundred years from now when Ch'ien-Lung's mausoleum, like the painting of an old master, has been made even more beautiful by the touch of age, that of the empress will be worn and tarnished.

Young Author Falls Down.

A young author sends me the manuscript of a story. He claims he has a new idea. His "new idea" is this: A young man and woman are married in the usual way, and, during their honeymoon, love each other with great devotion.

But in a year the young man finds he has tired of his wife, from seeing her so much; from too close association. He supposes, of course, that she has not tired of him; such a possibility does not enter his mind. However, he resolves to be a square man and confess to his wife just how he feels. She also talks frankly, and it develops that the wife is as tired of the husband as the husband is of the wife.

I am compelled to report to the young author that this is no development of a new fact in life.—E. W. Howe's Monthly.