

# SQUIRE JOHN

## A TALE OF THE CUBAN WAR

BY ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

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### CHAPTER XVI.—Continued.

"Bravo!" cries Jack; "such sublime courage must always command my respect. I am at your side, señor. If there are ladies to protect, every man here, I am sure, will do his duty."

Jack undoubtedly means every word, although he dresses his language in this bombastic manner in order to match Roblado, who, impressed with the fact that his devotion to duty as a Spanish gentleman has borne fruit, eagerly reaches out his long thin hand.

"Sir, I salute you. Such sentiments of lofty courage must always bind the hearts of brave men in a common brotherhood. There are four of us—nay, six—to stand against the enemy. We will be a match for all they can bring against us."

"The battle, or massacre, whichever it may be, still goes on," remarks Spencer, who thus enters into the conversation for the first time.

"Then let us be making ready against a possible attack, for I am strongly inclined to believe some of the rebels will find their way along the back trail, looking for us, as the absence of my carriage from the train is sure to be noticed."

Hurrying to the side of the compartment, they proceed to do whatever is possible in order to protect the interior. All work with a vim—cushions are utilized, the guard brings various articles from his den, and in a very brief space of time quite a respectable showing is made.

"Come," says Jack, with considerable satisfaction, when Smithers appears with his arms filled with more "truck" with which to fill the cracks and crannies, "we are doing nobly, my dear fellow. But, honestly, do you imagine there is any possibility of our being attacked here?"—lowering his voice to a whisper.

"Well, it wouldn't surprise me," rejoins the other, slowly and seriously.

"But, if it should come—they are your friends, you know—would you



"The guerrilleros are here!"

open fire on them?" continues Travers, seeking to cut a Gordian knot by the most direct method.

"Not if they were Gomez and his men. I know them well, and their battle cry of Cuba libre is music to my ears. But there are others, sir."

"Others! You mean the Spanish soldiers may retreat this way?"

"Not at all. Have you not heard of the guerrilleros—the men who fight under no flag, who war upon every

one they meet, robbing pacific and belligerent alike?"

"Yes, I have heard of these devils. But why should you fear that they may descend upon us?" inquires Travers. They are standing just outside the carriage, with Ah Sin and the guard near by, ready to enter at any time should it be necessary, and as their conversation is carried on in low tones, the chances of its being overheard are slight indeed.

"These human birds of prey seem to have inside information as to when a battle is about to take place, and they hang round like dogs waiting to pick up the crumbs from the master's table. I only hope some day both Gomez and the Spaniards will turn round and hunt these miserable go-betweens to the death. If they are in the neighborhood and see us, we must expect to fight for our lives."

"Now I understand what you mean. The fires will draw them."

"That is a fact, sir, if they come at all."

"What we meant for our preservation may prove our ruin. Well, it often happens so. Perhaps it might be wise to extinguish them, and remain in the dark. We could have them ready to light if we heard a train coming."

"I should feel more at ease, sir. If you knew these guerrilleros as well as I do, you would be fully as anxious to avoid discovery by them, if it could be done."

"Perhaps I am even more so, since I have something to think of that does not bother your mind, Smithers"—turning his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the carriage, and the agent knows what he means.

"Suppose we call Señor Roblado out, then, and put him in possession of the facts?" continues Jack. "Whatever he decides, that we will do."

Smithers does not immediately reply, and Jack notices that his companion appears to be looking earnestly beyond the fire, shading his eyes with his hand in order that he may see the better.

"What has struck you?" he demands, quickly.

"I am afraid, sir, your suggestion, though a good one, comes a little too late. Look yonder at the moving figures—two, five, a dozen, twenty. Yes, I am sorry to say we have been discovered; the guerrilleros are here!"

### CHAPTER XVII.

#### "Guerra a Cuchillo!"

Although Smithers' words are startling enough to alarm the bravest, Travers does not show much indication of such a feeling, as, following the extended finger of his agent, he, too, readily discovers the moving figures.

They appear to come out of the woods in couples or little squads. At that distance, and with only the firelight to guide him, Jack can see that they are rough-looking men, some of them negroes, carrying guns and machetes; but that is as far as his observation goes.

How his companion is enabled to determine their identity as guerrillas, and not the patriots fighting under the banner of Gomez, is a puzzle too deep for Jack.

It is a time for prompt action. They will have to retreat to their rude fortress and meet the expected assault bravely.

"Where is the guard?" asked Smithers.

"And Ah Sin?" echoes Jack.

Both have, indeed, vanished temporarily. Nor do they appear to be inside the fire lines.

"We will have to leave them out.

There is hardly room for all inside, at any rate. Come, sir, let us enter."

At the door they meet the señor.

"What is wrong, gentlemen?" he asks, quick to catch the scent of danger in the air.

"The guerrilleros have come, señor. I am afraid we will have war to the knife," remarks Smithers; and Roblado, thrusting out his head, beholds the rough men already gathering about the fire that is down the incline.

He utters a favorite ejaculation.

"Senors, it looks as though we are in for it. I trust you will not forget your promise to assist in the defense of the ladies," the old Spaniard says, hoarsely.

Several exclamations in feminine voices from the dark interior announce that both Juanita and her step-sister



is rewarded by a low "Thank you."

have heard what manner of danger menaces them.

"You can depend upon us, señor," is the quiet response Jack makes.

The two men enter the compartment, and the door is barricaded. Ah Sin and the guard will have to look out for themselves when the storm cloud bursts.

It has hardly needed the words of Smithers to warn Travers of the desperate business ahead of them, and the only fear he experiences is for the safety of Jessie.

There is a peculiar satisfaction in being so close to this woman who has entered in and taken possession of his heart, although he is under bond not to betray his identity. Jack rather enjoys the situation, or at least he would if it were not for the deadly peril which hovers over the one he loves. At any rate, he is deeply grateful for the peculiar conditions that allow him the privilege of standing up in her defence.

Little is said within the car; the time for words has gone by, and action must take their place.

So far as they can see, the newcomers have not as yet fully grasped the true inwardness of the situation. Attracted by the light of the fires, they have arrived at the railroad, to find a carriage standing there; but what that vehicle of transportation actually contains is as yet but a surmise with them.

Jack does not fancy their looks at all.

He has been thrown in contact with crowds of rough men during his life on Texan plains and in Colorado mountains, but never in all his experience has he run across such a tough-looking lot as those assembling around the fire that was built for protection and has betrayed its trust.

Fully half of the guerrillas are blacks, and in the firelight they have the appearance of demons or gnomes. As to the others, the least said about them the better since their appearance does not go far toward reassuring the ladies when they venture to take an observation.

"Do you suppose they will attack

us?" asks Roblado, with considerable anxiety in his voice.

"I don't question it in the least," replies Smithers, who develops some of the qualities of a leader in this emergency.

"Then, if that be so, we should first of all endeavor to protect the ladies from flying lead. Col. Spencer, will you kindly vacate that corner? We can arrange it so that they may be safe there."

Spencer, of course, does so. Jack imagines the man is a trifle nervous and scared. Perhaps he has been drinking hard, and is not in good condition for proving his mettle. All the more reason, then, why those who have no such excuse should do their duty.

In arranging the cushions so as to protect the two girls, Jack chances to touch the hand of Jessie Cameron, and is amazed at the remarkable thrill that seems to run over his whole frame, just as might a shock from a galvanic battery.

"Come," he mutters to himself in some dismay: "I had no idea it had gone as far as that. This is really alarming."

Nevertheless, he continues to carry out his work, and is rewarded by a low "Thank you," that amply repays him for everything.

"What are they doing now?" he asks Smithers, who has been keeping watch.

"Gathered about the fire and talking the matter over, with many extravagant jestures. They seem a little afraid lest the carriage contain soldiers, and that they may raise a hornets' nest about their ears. But I am afraid the fiery orators who urge an immediate attack have the best of the bargain; for already some of them are advancing, and, from the way they hold their guns, they mean business."

It would be strange indeed if everyone within the railway carriage did not in a greater or less degree feel a sensation as if their nerves are strained to the utmost.

The situation warrants it. Deadly foes gather without—foes against whom ordinary methods of warfare may not avail, and who will prove to be veritable demons once the battle is on.

Quarter need be neither asked nor given, and the result of the coming engagement must be a survival of the fittest.

It is this fact that nerves the defenders of the carriage to do their very best.

Smithers is quite correct when he declares the most venturesome of the guerrillas are advancing to the attack.

The light of the fire discloses this fact, and as the men at bay crouch there beside the opening, watching this advance, they seem to live days in the few seconds that pass.

"It would be folly to let them get too close," says the señor, grinding his teeth.

"You are right. Therefore call out and warn them that they stand on the dead line."

Roblado is quick to accept this suggestion which Smithers advances. He raises his voice and sends out a hoarse bellow. The guerrillas hear, and instinctively pause; but, as if realizing from the tone in which they are addressed that they cannot have soldiers to deal with, they laugh his ponderous threats to scorn.

"Down!" cries Smithers, pulling Jack with him.

Several shots have sounded, and the bullets crash into the woodwork of the car.

(To be continued.)

#### Still Bitter.

"She says she was dying to speak to you yesterday when we saw you," remarked the peacemaker.

"Well," replied the belligerent girl, "why doesn't she then?"

"You mean you'd be glad to have her speak to you?"

"No; die."

All the world is the temple of God. Its worship is ministration. The commonest service is Divine service.—George Macdonald.