

FRANK NORRIS

THE SURRENDER OF SANTIAGO

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to General / Shafter, July 17, 1898:*

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FOR two days we had been at the headquarters of the Second Brigade (General McKibben's), so blissfully contented because at last we had a real wooden and tiled roof over our heads that even the tarantulas—Archibald shook two of them from his blanket in one night—had no terrors for us.

The headquarters were in an abandoned country seat, a little six-roomed villa, all on one floor, called the Hacienda San Pablo. To the left of us along the crest of hills, in a mighty crescent that reached almost to the sea, lay the army, panting from the effort of the first, second and third days of the month, resting on its arms, its eyes to its sights, Maxim, Hotchkiss and Krag-Jorgenson held ready, alert, watchful, straining in the leash, waiting the expiration of the last truce that had now been on for twenty-four hours.

That night we sat up very late on the porch of the hacienda,

singing "The Spanish Cavalier"—if you will recollect the words, singularly appropriate—"The Star-Spangled Banner," and

'Tis a way we had at Caney, sir,
'Tis a way we had at Caney, sir,
'Tis a way we had at Caney, sir,
To drive the Dons away,

an adaptation by one of the General's aides, which had a great success.

Inside, the General himself lay on his spread blankets, his hands clasped under his head, a pipe in his teeth, feebly applauding us at intervals and trying to pretend that we sang out of tune. The night was fine and very still. The wonderful Cuban fireflies, that are like little electric lights gone somehow adrift, glowed and faded in the mango and bamboo trees, and after a while a whip-poor-will began his lamentable little plaint somewhere in the branches of the gorgeous vermilion Flamboyana that overhung the hacienda.

The air was heavy with smells, smells that inevitable afternoon downpours had distilled from the vast jungle of bush and vine and thicket all up and down the valley. In Cuba everything, the very mud and water, has a smell. After every rain, as soon as the red-hot sun is out again, vegetation reeks and smokes and sweats, and these smells steam off into the air all night, thick and stupefying, like the interior of a cathedral after high mass.

The orderly who brought the despatch should have dashed

up at a gallop, clicked his spurs, saluted and begun with "The commanding General's compliments, sir," et cetera. Instead, he dragged a very tired horse up the trail, knee-deep in mud, brought to, standing with a gasp of relief, and said, as he pushed his hat back from his forehead:

"Say, is here where General McKibben is?"

We stopped singing and took our feet down from the railing of the veranda. In the room back of us we heard the General raise on an elbow and tell his orderly to light a candle. The orderly went inside, drawing a paper from his pocket, and the aides followed. Through the open window we could plainly hear what followed, and see, too, for that matter, by twisting a bit on our chairs.

The General had mislaid his eyeglasses and so passed the despatch to one of his aides, saying: "I'll get you to read this for me, Nolan." On one knee, and holding the despatch to the candle-light, Nolan read it aloud.

It began tamely enough with the usual military formulas, and the first thirty words might have been part of any one of the many despatches the General had been receiving during the last three days. And then "to accompany the commanding General to a point midway between the Spanish and American lines and there to receive the surrender of General Toral. At noon, precisely, the American flag will be raised over the Governor's Palace in the city of Santiago. A salute of twenty-one guns will be fired from Captain Capron's battery. The regimental bands will play 'The Star-Spangled Banner' and the troops will cheer. Shafter."

There was a silence. The aide returned the paper to the General and straightened up, rubbing the dust from his knee. The General shifted his pipe to the other corner of his mouth. The little green parrot who lived in the premises trundled gravely across the brick floor, and for an instant we all watched her with the intensest attention.

"Hum," muttered the General reflectively between his teeth. "Hum. They've caved in. Well, you won't have to make that little reconnaissance of yours down the railroad, after all, Mr. Nolan." And so it was that we first heard of the surrender of Santiago de Cuba.

We were up betimes the next morning. By six o'clock the General had us all astir and searching in our blanket rolls and haversacks for "any kind of a black tie." It was an article none of us possessed, and the General was more troubled over this lack of a black tie than the fact that he had neither vest nor blouse to do honor to the city's capitulation.

But we had our own troubles. The flag was to be raised over the city at noon. Sometime during the morning the Spanish General would surrender to the American. The General—our General—and his aides, as well as all the division and brigade commanders, would ride out to be present at the ceremony—but how about the correspondents?

Almost to a certainty they would be refused. Privileges extended to journalists and magazine writers had been few and very far between throughout the campaign. We would watch the

affair through glasses from some hilltop, two miles, or three maybe, to the rear. But for all that, we saddled our horses and when the General and his staff started to ride down to corps headquarters, fell in with the aides, and resolved to keep up with the procession as far as our ingenuity and perseverance would make possible.

It was early when we started and the heat had not yet begun to be oppressive. All along and through the lines there were signs of the greatest activity. Over night the men had been withdrawn from the trenches and were pitching their shelter tents on the higher and drier ground, and where our road crossed the road from Caney to Santiago we came upon hundreds of refugees returning to the city whence they had been driven a few days previous.

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