

Old Squire.

The Romance of a Black Virginian.

By B. K. BENSON.

Author of "Who Goes There?" "A Friend With the Countersign," "Bayard's Courier," etc.

CHAPTER XI.

APART.

"Endurance is the crowning quality. And patience all the passion of great hearts."

—Lowell.

Squire's horse could do but little more. The old man was alone in the land of the stranger, and knew not how to overtake his friends, yet he must try; though the case would have been hopeless for a soldier, for a slave it was only difficult.

"I dunno w'ich a-way dey's a-gwine to go," he mumbled; "ef I knowed w'ich a-way dey's a-gwine to go, an' w'ich a-way dey's a-gwine to come back ag'in, den I might cut acrost an' git a-haid of 'em." . . . but I dunno w'ich a-way dey's a-gwine to go. W'en we come oveh heah once befo', we cravved away up high an' den we cravved back ag'in into de Filiginy away down low. . . . but den we didn't cravved away up high dis time. . . . Dis dam hoss is done run me, feh shoo."

The beast had sunk down on the road and now refused to budge. Squire took off the trappings, thrust his head through the bridle, and every other part of his shoulders, and pushed on. He must out-march Stuart's cavalry, already many miles ahead. But his load was heavy, and the heat was great. Before he had covered half a mile, seeing that he was only breaking himself down, he went a little distance into the wood and held a consultation.

"Dis ain't nothin' but one thing dat ole Squah kin do now. He ain't got to keep awn up dis road, an' he ain't got to try to keesh up wid 'em no mo'; he's got to get out acrost an' w'ich a-way dey's a-gwine to go, an' w'ich a-way dey's a-gwine to come back ag'in, den I might cut acrost an' git a-haid of 'em." . . . but I dunno w'ich a-way dey's a-gwine to go. W'en we come oveh heah once befo', we cravved away up high an' den we cravved back ag'in into de Filiginy away down low. . . . but den we didn't cravved away up high dis time. . . . Dis dam hoss is done run me, feh shoo."

Totally ignorant in regard to his immediate surroundings, as well as to the larger geography of this and every other region, the negro was at an utter loss for a clue to help his decision, and he remained long as he was, unwilling to take any step that might be for the worse. But at length he came to his own decision.

"I knows dese w'at I use a-gwine to do. I's dese a-gwine to do lak I use to do w'en I was got to hunt de cows; 's dese I's a-gwine to do. Now, you heah me?"

He held his left palm, bow-like, before him, and spat in it; then the broad right forefinger descended violently upon the artificial kasket, he intently watching for the direction in which the smitten waters would fly.

At once he stooped, picked up the bridle only, and began to walk rapidly toward the northwest. . . . A mile north of the spot where he had encountered the Federal Captain, Morgan led his friends again into the highroad. Squire was directed to ride a furling in the advance, for this and every other region, could not be hoped for; no more squads of Yankees must be met. The speed was not pressed, for all the horses were showing signs of fatigue. Squire rode on, still still had a little hope that Squire would overtake them.

Squire saw that many wheels had churned the crumpled leaves left by the cavalry; many tracks, but not the broad tracks of cannon. Stuart had begun his march without encumbrance of wagons—whence these parallel lines had obliterated two main hoof prints? Squire rode on, looking sharply ahead, but thinking of the tracks.

"I'm afraid of those wagons," thought Squire; "if Stuart has captured them, he ought to burn them. However, if he doesn't he will play into our hands, for we'll soon overtake those same wagons; but he will play into the Yankee's hands, too. I believe Stuart has captured a wagon train, and he'll hang to it like grim death to a dead nigger."

Squire met civilians, whom he passed without conversation. Some of them looked at him curiously.

Back at the rear Morgan had observed the tracks. "See those wagon tracks, Charley?" "Yes, w'at you reckon made 'em?" "I'm going to get down and see if I can tell which way they went."

But with the experience Morgan was unable to determine, and he remounted and rode on. There were many small hoof prints—those of mules, no doubt, pointing north, and a few pointing south; but in the road, between the ruts and outside, the dust had been torn here and compacted there, and so trodden everywhere—one hoof print in the morning, and then, if he could not decide, but at length a small brook was crossed, and he cried: "There, Joe! See that?"

"Beyond a doubt we're following them; the wheels have slung the wet mud all about over here." . . . "How do you know they're not far ahead of you?" "Cause they're g'wine slow." "Cause they're g'wine slow?" "Cause they're g'wine slow?" "Cause they're g'wine slow?"



"DIS AIN'T NO HISS IS DONE BUILT ME, FEH SHOO!"

tracks were now imprinted with a greater number of wheels, the ruts broken into at every step.

Squire halted, bending over, leading his horse. "Our men," he exclaimed, and began to mount. "Yes, he continued, 'fully a fourth of 'em are barbed-wire. The General has put a rear-guard behind the wagons. We under what regiment it is.'"

The four held a council. Armstrong was for going dead ahead and rapidly, in order to end the thing; he had no fear that Squire wouldn't make his way. Joe left everything to Morgan. Squire advised prudence; it was evident, he maintained, that haste was not the thing needed now; the only thing to fear was the cavalry following Stuart's rear. Morgan, on the other hand, was for approaching the squad of observation carefully, then flank 'em, and reach Stuart's rear before they could get without being seen; then the rest would be easy.

Morgan decided in favor of Squire's policy, and the party moved on, George leading the way. "Dan," says Squire, "I'm a-thinkin' dat ole Squire must ha' fell in with that Yankee Cap'n w'at he's talkin' about."

"I'm p'it him single against any 'em, big or little. The man that gets the best of Squire, has got to get up mighty soon in de mornin'." "They'll not be likely to trouble him much," said Morgan. "I don't think they'd be hard on him, even if he should tell 'em he belongs. But he may be delayed by his horse."

"I'll bet he gets to Lee's army before Stuart does," says Armstrong. "Hello! hear that? Stand by Squire now, boys; 's he's got to get down and see if I can tell which way they went."

The three broke into a gallop forward, and Squire followed them. Squire halted by its side in the bushes, intently watching and listening; and now every man could hear a far clatter of approaching wheels from the north. "Hide and let 'em pass," ordered the Sergeant, and the group rode away into the wood.

The dismounted and went back to watch the road. The sound of hoofs was distinct, and increasing—coming, and soon he saw a mournful group on the road before him. Three Federals were riding in the front at a slow walk. A center group was composed of two living men and two dead, the bodies lying across the horses which had doubtless been ridden by the men recently slain. The wagon train separated, and the group rode away into the wood.

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were no more vigorous than their whose speed he desired to outstrip. Squire dismounted. "What you goin' to do?" asked Joe.

"I'm going to foot it. My horse'll give out if I don't."

George had not originated; many of the worst mounted of the troopers were ready to foot along behind their horses, for the march was a slow walk, easy for a footman to equal. Squire's companions followed his example and the four went forward, slowly gaining distance on the moving column which was compelled to preserve its marching ranks. Rests were frequent; the Confederates were barely averaging two miles to the hour. At one of these rests, seeing that a great gain had been made, Squire proposed to take time to hunt food—to give the animals one good rest, and then push on. He had some greenbacks, he said, and the Maryland farmers would sell them hay, oats, corn, anything . . . if that whole regiment which they had passed were to halt, they would demand it; they could find feed enough within a mile. Morgan consented, and Squire and Joe went off and returned loaded with oats and dry grass, just what the graying horses had needed.

At dark, Morgan's men reached Fitz Lee's Brigade at Westminster, where but few hours previously the 4th Va. had encountered the 1st Del. under Maj. Knight, who lost 67 out of 95 men in a shocked brave but unwise. At Westminster the tired Confederates found ample supplies

wide and straight for a long distance, and the moon gave a great light. He was very hungry. What with hunger and weakness, having had no rest for 36 hours, old Squire went to sleep.

While the slave lay there in the woods, Hancock's Corps began to march by within a stone's throw of his hiding-place.

CHAPTER XII. AWAITING THE VERDICT. "Of all the paths that lead to love, Pity's the straightest."

Surgeon Lacy believed that the rest of a day and two nights, and especially the conservative effect of the bags of pounded ice which with judicious admissibility had been placed at his patient's disposal, justified him in searching for the ball which he doubted not was somewhere near the spine. Possibly the Doctor felt that he would not be able to find it, but he would rather work nor look did he betray nervousness or fear.

Though Miss West had known almost from the first that the wounded man was Andrew Morgan, brother of Daniel, yet at sight of the pale face she had been shocked greatly by the wonderful resemblance which for all time thereafter made her feel that something more than mere resemblance was here—something that approached identity in form, in feature, and in mind. While not allowing herself to be surprised by the resemblance, she nevertheless gave much help to the Surgeon, who demanded without hesitation anything he conveyed to be helpful. Jennie convinced that the troops before him were Federal—brought fresh water, pounded the ice, and relieved the Surgeon of so many anxious cares, that she never gave almost undivided attention to his critical case.

When came the supreme moment of probing for the ball, Jennie waited in the passage, ready to lend any aid possible if she should be called on; but so well had she obeyed the Doctor's injunctions that nothing, which under the conditions could be done, was wanting. She kept her place in the hall, almost breathless, suffering a suspense which her own conscious acknowledgment of her cruelty made none the less intolerable. She could hear his footsteps—her father's and the Surgeon's, as first one and then the other moved about in preparation for the work which she had seen her father do. She felt and she knew that his life on whom all her hopes of joy now hung, was being put into the scales of life against death. She was thinking no thought of herself, but all of him whom she had so suddenly loved. Suddenly? Yes, but if she had been at that moment, she would have known that this love of hers had its origin in the very helplessness of the being whom she was loving. Her love was more maternal than passionate. He was her possession, she was not his, and there could be no claimant against her claims—no rival but death. Yes, death, and she would fight for his life, even to the death of herself. She was thinking no thought of herself, but all of him whom she had so suddenly loved. Suddenly? Yes, but if she had been at that moment, she would have known that this love of hers had its origin in the very helplessness of the being whom she was loving. Her love was more maternal than passionate. He was her possession, she was not his, and there could be no claimant against her claims—no rival but death. Yes, death, and she would fight for his life, even to the death of herself. She was thinking no thought of herself, but all of him whom she had so suddenly loved. Suddenly? Yes, but if she had been at that moment, she would have known that this love of hers had its origin in the very helplessness of the being whom she was loving. 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