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Hemming, The Adventurer

BY THEODORE ROBERTS

(Continued)
CHAPTER X.

By the time Hemming and O'Rourke reached Tampa, about thirty thousand men had gone under canvas in the surrounding pine groves and low-lying waste places. There were Westerners and Easterners, regulars and volunteers, and at Port Tampa a regiment of coloured cavalry. Troops were arriving every day. Colonel Wood and Lieutenant Colonel Roosevelt, with their splendid command of mounted infantry, had just pitched their shelter-tents in a place of scrub palmetto behind the big hotel. Taken altogether, it was an army that made Hemming stare.

The friends went to a quiet hotel with wide verandas, cool rooms, open fireplaces, and what proved equally attractive, reasonable rates. They inquired of the clerk about Mr. Hudson. He remembered the gentleman well, though he had spent only two days in the place. "He had a daughter with him," the man informed them, and turning to the front of the register, looked up the name. "There's the signature, sir, and you're welcome to it," he said. The correspondent examined it intently for some time.

"We know that that means Hudson," remarked O'Rourke, at last, "and I should guess John for the other sprawl."

"Sprawl is good," said Hemming, straightening his monocle, "but any one can see that Robert is the name."

"I've put a lot of study on it," said the clerk, "and so has the boss, and we've about agreed to call it Harold."

"Take your choice," said O'Rourke, "but tell me what you make of the address."

"Boston," cried the clerk. They stared at him. "You were all ready," said Hemming.

"Yes, sir," he replied, "for I've been thinking it over for some time."

"Why the devil didn't you ask him?" inquired O'Rourke, fretfully.

"Look here, colonel," said the hotel man, "if you know Mr. Hudson, you know darn well why I didn't ask him where he came from."

"High and haughty?" queried O'Rourke.

The clerk nodded.

"You had better reconsider your course, old chap," laughed the Englishman.

His friend did not reply. He was again intent on the register.

"I make seven letters in it," he said, "and I'll swear to that for an N."

"Is nothing," remarked the clerk, "that's a B."

"Yes, it is a B. I think and to the word looks like—well, like Balloon," said Hemming.

O'Rourke sighed. "Of course it is New York; see the break in the middle, and a man is more likely to come from there than from a balloon," he said.

"Some men go away in balloons," suggested the clerk.

Just then the proprietor of the hotel entered and approached the desk. He was an imposing figure of a man, tall and deep, and suitably dressed in the roughest of light tweeds. His face was round and clever. He shook hands with the new arrivals.

"Military men, I believe," he said.

"Not just now," replied Hemming.

"Do you know where Mr. Hudson is at present?" asked O'Rourke, in casual tones.

"Mr. Hudson, of Philadelphia? Why, no, sir. I can't say that I do," answered the big man.

"How do you know he's of Philadelphia?" asked the Englishman.

"He wrote it in the register; look for yourself," was the reply.

"No," said O'Rourke, mournfully, "but it is a very dry evening, and if you will honour us with your company as far as the bar, Mr.—"

"Stillman," delighted, sir," hastily replied the proprietor.

The three straightway sought that cool retreat, leaving the clerk to brood with wrinkled brow above the puzzle so unconsciously donated to him by a respectable one-time guest.

The weary delay in that town of sand and disorder at last came to an end, and Hemming and O'Rourke, with their passports countersigned by General Shafter, went aboard the Olivette.

Most of the newspaper men were passengers on the same boat. During the rather slow trip, they made many friends and a few enemies. One of the friends was a youth with a camera, sent to take pictures for the same weekly paper which O'Rourke represented. The landing in Cuba of a part of the invading forces and the correspondents was made at Matanzas, on the southern coast. The worst mismanagement of this landing has been written about often enough. O'Rourke and Hemming, unable to procure horses, set off towards Siboney on foot, and on foot they went through to Santiago with the ragged, hungry, wonderful army. They did their work well enough, and were thankful when it was admitted that the American army—up to a certain grade. Part of the time they had a merry Toronto journalist for mesquite, a peaceful family man who wore a round straw hat and low shoes throughout the campaign. During the marching (but not the fighting), O'Rourke happened upon several members of his old command. One of the meetings took place at mid-

night, when the Cuban warrior was in the act of carrying away Hemming's hold glasses and the Toronto man's blanket.

After the surrender of Santiago, Hemming received word to cover Porto Rico. He started at the first opportunity in a gunboat that had once been a harbour tug. O'Rourke who was anxious to continue his still hunt for the lady who had nursed him, reported to Florida, and from thence to New York.

In Porto Rico Hemming had an easy and pleasant time. He struck up an acquaintance that soon warmed to intimacy with a young volunteer lieutenant of infantry, by name Ellis. Ellis was a quiet, well-informed youth; in civil life a gentleman at large with a reputation as a golfer. With his command of sixteen men he was stationed just outside of Ponce, and under the improvised canvas awning before his door he and Hemming exchanged views and confidences. One evening, while the red eyes of their green cigars glowed and dimmed in the darkness, Hemming told of his first meeting with O'Rourke. He described the little boat tossed toward them from the vast beyond, the poncho belted with the wind, and the lean, undisputed adventurer smoking at the tiller. Ellis sat very quiet, staring toward the white tents of his men.

"Is that the same O'Rourke who was once wounded in Cuba, and later nearly died of fever in Tampa?" he asked, when Hemming was through.

"Yes, the same man," said Hemming, "and as decent a chap as ever put foot in stirrup. Do you know him?"

"No, but I have heard a deal about him," replied the lieutenant. It did not surprise Hemming that a man should hear about O'Rourke. Surely the good old chap had worked hard enough (in his own daring, vagrant way) for his reputation. He brushed a mosquito away from his neck, and smoked on in silence.

"I have heard a romance connected with your friend O'Rourke," said Ellis, presently, in a voice that faltered. Hemming picked up his ears at that.

"Yes, I tell me what you have heard," he said.

"It is not so much what I've heard as who I heard it from," began the lieutenant, "and it's rather a personal yarn. I met a girl, not long ago, and we seemed to take to each other from the start. I saw her frequently and I got broken up on her. Then I found out that, though she liked me, she did not love me one little bit. She admired my form at golf, and considered my conversation edifying,

but when it came to love, why, there was some one else. Then she told me about O'Rourke. She had nursed him in Tampa for several months, and just before the time old Hudson had resuscitated his fortune."

"O'Rourke told me something about it," said Hemming. He thought, at the time, that he was as good as dead, so he did not let her know how he felt about her. Afterward the doctors told him he was sound as a bell, and ever since—telling this last Cuban business—he has been looking for her."

"But he does not know that she loves him?" queried Ellis.

"I really couldn't say," replied Hemming.

Ellis shifted his position, and with deft fingers unrolled the leaf of his moist cigar. In a dim sort of way he wondered if he could give up the girl. In time, perhaps, she would love him—if he could keep O'Rourke out of sight. A man in the little camp began to sing a sentimental negro melody. The clear, sympathetic tenor rang, like a bugle-call across the stagnant air. A band, with its wilful pathos, tinkled and strummed.

"Listen," that is, Ellis, my sergeant. He is a member of the Harvard Glee Club," said the lieutenant. Hemming listened, and the sweet voice awoke the bitter memories of his own address.

"What is Miss Hudson's address?" he asked.

"She is now in Europe, with her father," replied his companion. "Their home is in Marlow, New York State."

"May I let O'Rourke know?" asked Hemming.

"Certainly," replied Ellis, scarce above a whisper. He wondered what that unsuspected devil had sprung to power within him, keeping him from telling that the home in Marlow was by this time in the hands of strangers, and that the Hudsons intended living in New York after their return from Europe.

O'Rourke had asked Hemming to write to him now and then, to the Army and Navy Club at Washington where the letters would be sure to find him sooner or later; so Hemming wrote him the glad information from Porto Rico.

Hemming recovered his wits. "I want a copy of 'Where Might Is Right,' by Hemming," he said. He laid aside his gloves and stick, and opened the book with loving hands. His first book. The pride of it must have been very apparent on his tanned face, for the man behind the counter smiled.

"I have read that book myself," ventured the man. "I always read a book that I sell more than twenty copies of in one day."

Hemming glowed, and continued his scrutiny of the volume. On one of the first pages was printed, "Authorized American Edition." The name of the publishers was S—'s Sons.

"Where do S—'s Sons hang out?" he asked, as he paid for the book.

"Just five doors below this," said the man.

"I'll look in there," decided Hemming, "before I call on Dodder."

The war correspondent was cordially received by the head of the great publishing house. He was given a comprehensive account of the arrangements made between his London and New York publishers, and these proved decidedly satisfactory. The business talk over, Hemming prepared to go.

"I hope you will look me up again before you leave town," said the head of the firm, as they shook hands.

Arrived in the outer office of the New York News Syndicate, Hemming inquired for Mr. Dodder. The clerk stared at him with so strange an expression that his temper suffered.

"Well, what the devil is the matter?" he exclaimed.

"Mr. Dodder is dead," replied the youth. Just then Wells came from an inner room, caught sight of the Englishman, and approached.

"So you're back, are you?" he remarked, with his hands in his pockets. Hemming was thinking of the big, kind-hearted manager, and replied by asking the cause of his death. "Apoplexy. Are you ready to call for the Philippines? Why didn't you wait in Porto Rico for orders?"

"Keep cool, my boy," said Hemming's brain to Hemming's heart. Hemming himself said, with painful politeness: "I can be ready in two days, Mr. Wells, but first we must make some new arrangements as to expenses and salary."

"Do you think you are worth more than you get?" sneered Wells. "Has that book that you wrote, when we were paying you to do work for us, given you a swelled head?"

(To be continued.)

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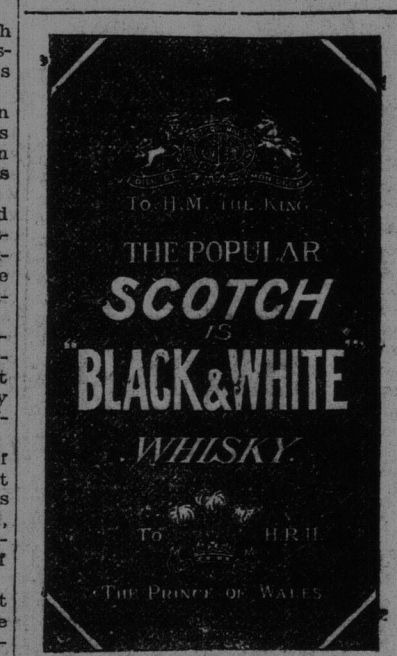
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