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Hemming, The Adventurer

BY THEODORE ROBERTS

(Continued)

Hemming was about to reply when an overgrown young man, a bookkeeper who had been listening nudged his elbow restlessly.

"Here's your mail," he said.

Hemming placed the half-dozen letters in his pocket. His face was quite pale, considering the length of time he had been in the tropics. He took the overgrown youth by the front of his jacket and shook him. Then he twisted him deftly and pushed him sprawling against his enraged employer. Both went down, sprawling viciously. The other inmates of the great room stared and waited. Most of them looked pleased. An office boy, who had received notice to leave that morning, sprang upon a table.

"Soak it to 'em, Dook. Soak it to 'em, you leave-up Charley. Boy can't stand dat sort o' health food."

Wells got to his feet. The bookkeeper scrambled up and nudged at Hemming. He was received in a grip that made him repeat his action.

"Mr. Wells," said Hemming, "I shall hold on to this gentleman, who does not seem to know how to treat his suspects, until he gets out, and in the meantime I'll write you for what money is due me, up to date. Please accept my resignation at the same time."

"I'll call a copper," sputtered Wells, who opened the door of the publishing house of S—'s Sons.

"Good Lord, what is the trouble?" he cried.

"I am trying to draw my pay," exclaimed Hemming.

The new arrival looked at the ruffled, confused Wells with eyes of contempt and suspicion.

"I'll wait for you, Mr. Hemming, on condition that you will lunch with me," he cried.

A few minutes later they left the building, and in his pocket Hemming carried a check for the sum of his back pay.

"A month from now," said his companion, "that check will be worth as much as your check is worth now. Even poor old Dooder had had all he could do to hold it together. He had the brains and down-cy, and that fellow had the money."

By the time lunch was over, Hemming found himself once more in harness, but harness of so many a kind that not a buckle galled. The bill was a roving commission from S—'s Sons to do articles of unusual people and unusual places for their illustrated weekly magazine. He spent the afternoon in reading and writing letters. He advised every one with whom he had

dealings of his new headquarters. He had a good collection of maps and sat up until three in the morning pondering over them. Next day he bought himself a camera, and overhauled his outfit. By the dawn of the third day after his separation from the apartment, he had decided to start northward, despite the season.

The climate of Perambuco was no longer his guide. Now the Quest of the little-known was his. It brought him close to many hearts, and taught him the secrets of all sorts and conditions of men in the span of a few years. It made him familiar with a hundred villages between Main in the North and Rio de Janeiro in the South. He found comfort under the white lights of strange cities, and sought peace in various wildernesses. Under the canvas roof, and the bark as under the face-aching shelters of the town, came over the dream of his old life for beddow.

End of Part I.

CHAPTER II.

The Unsuspected City.

Hemming happened upon the city of Perambuco on the evening of a sultry day in April. He manifested no surprise beyond straightening his monocle in his eye.

"Hope they have some English soap-water down there," he said in the heavy foliage about him, "but I suppose it would be hardly fair to expect an ice factory so far from the coast." For a second a vision of tall glasses and ice that clinked came to his mind's eye. He remembered the cool dining-rooms of his friends in Perambuco. He spurred his native-bred steed to a hesitating trot along the narrow, hot-iron path that led down to the valley. At a mud and timber hut set beneath bare manes, and heaved, by a tiny field, he drew rein. A woman sat before the door, looking cool and at her ease in heavy cotton dress. A naked child chased a pig among the bananas. Hemming greeted the woman in Portuguese. She eyed him humbly greeting in return. The pig and the baby came near to listen. Hemming, grunting his feet free from the stirrups, to straighten the kink out of his knees. He pushed back his hat, and lit a cigarette. "What is the name of the town?" he asked, smiling reassuringly.

The woman told him, standing respectfully on the earthen threshold. Such square shoulders and clear eyes as this Englishman's were not every day sights in Perambuco.

"May a stranger find entertainment there?" he inquired.

skirt of city by kind peasant woman, evening of April 6, 19— "Some climate and crops as Brazil. Eleven pounds in my pockets in Brazilian notes and small coin. What does Perambuco look like, M. I wonder? A dinner on a table, perhaps, and a couple of chapters for my book."

He placed the twisting path next to highway, between royal palms, God-sized villas, their walls all blue and white with black tiles, their roofs shaggy with white stones, each in its separate garden. The gardens were enclosed by high walls of brick, such as he has seen many times in the region of the coast. Although he had ridden his horse, although he had ridden on all that day and the day before, he felt no fatigue himself. The tropical sun, the narrow water-cut paths, and the clambering vines held in the heated air and luring him with strange flowers, brought him no terror. But he polished his monocle and sighed uneasily, for his store of miles had dwindled since leaving Perambuco a week before to a sum amounting about eleven pounds in English money.

"Has this man an army?" he asked.

"Truly a great army," replied the woman, "for I have seen it myself riding atop chivava. It numbers five hundred men, all armed, and wearing white tunics, and all paid for by this man. He must be richer than a king to support so grand an army."

Hemming smiled toward the white and red roots and clumps of foliage in the valley, thinking, maybe of his own regiment of Aldershot during review of the hill batteries that had supported the infantry advance in India, and of the fifty regiments under craves in Tampa.

"I crave a drink," he said, "a finger of your good cassia in a bowl of cool water."

The woman brought it, smiling with hospitality, and would not accept the huge bill which he held out to her.

"It is a pleasure," cried she, "to please the thirst of so distinguished a guest."

Hemming bowed gravely, a smile lighting his upturned, pale moustache. The baby came close, on all fours, and examined his yellow riding-boots and straight spurs. Hemming patted the small one's limp black hair.

"This is a kindly world," he said in English, then to the woman, "let thy son wear this ring—see, it fits his thumb. Should any man ask the name of his friend, say 'It is Hemming, an Englishman.'"

He pushed the child gently toward his mother, and, swinging to his saddle, rode down toward the city. His gray eyes took in everything—the following fruit, the fields of cane, the mud huts of the poor, the thin horses of the charcoal-burners crowding out of the trail to let him pass, and the hush of manioc.

All this he beheld with satisfaction. In a thin book he made a note: thus Perambuco, name of town, evidently run by a governor of independent spirit. Army of 500, evidently mounted infantry. Welcomed to out-

heavily built man, dressed in a black frock coat and white trousers, came down to meet him. A man in livery took his horse.

"Mr. Hemming," said the large man, "I am the President." He popped a fat, yellow cigar into his mouth, and shook hands. "Come in," he said. "He led the way into a large tiled room, containing a billiard-table of the American kind, a full-top desk, and an office chair. The windows of the room opened on one side, and opened on a corner of the garden in which a fountain tossed merrily. The President sank into a chair in the easiest manner, and threw one leg over the arm of it. Then he noticed, with a quick twinkle in his blue eyes, Hemming in the middle of the floor, erect and unsmiling.

"Mr. Hemming," he said, "I want your respect, but none of that stiff-backed ceremony between gentlemen. I am neither Roosevelt nor Albert Edward. For Morgan is a bigger man than I am, though I still hope you have been in the English army, and you like to have things straddled, well, so do I sometimes. Please fall into that chair."

Hemming blushed and sat down. The man was evidently crazy. "My name is Teton," said the President. He rang the bell and a native servant entered.

"Thank you, a Scotch and soda," said Hemming.

"Ah, I know it," laughed the other, "though I always take rye myself."

The servant bowed and retired.

"I'll see the illustrated weeklies of both New York and London," continued Teton, "and I always look for your articles. I like them. I know something about your family, also. Hemming, I have 'Burke's Landed Gentry' and 'Who's who' on my desk. You are a grandson of Sir Bertram Hemming of Barraker."

"Yes," replied Hemming, both surprised and embarrassed.

"Well," said the President, "I have some blood in me too. My mother's grandmother was a Gaskwyke. Did you notice the three stars and six thistles?"

"I know the head of your house at home, Colonel Bruce-Gostwycke, and another distinguished member of it in the colonies, Sir Henry Terton," replied Hemming. "But," he continued, "I never heard of this Gaskwyke. Did you notice the three stars and six thistles?"

"Why do you hold this little half dead county family so high?"

(To be continued.)

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