

Hemming, The Adventurer

BY
THEODORE
ROBERTS

(Continued.)
Tarmont, who guessed Hemming's case, got into the habit of dropping in on his new friend at unseemly hours. If Hemming wanted to talk, Tarmont was ready to listen. If Hemming wanted to listen, Tarmont was glad to chat about his stay in England. If Hemming wanted to continue his work, Tarmont was delighted to smoke in silence—always those fat Eastern cigarettes—with his heels on any convenient piece of furniture that happened to be higher than his head. One night he brought a chap named Stanley along with him. On this occasion his visit was timed many hours earlier than usual—in fact, Hemming was only half-way through his first cigarette since dinner. Stanley interested Hemming from the first—all the more so because Tarmont whispered, while Stanley was examining a shelf of books that he would not stand for his companion's behaviour, or anything else, as he had met him for the first time only that morning.
Stanley looked and sounded like a man without a care in the world, though in his black hair shone threads of silver. His manner was of complete good-humour, despite the suggestion of heartless devilry in his dark eyes. His complexion was of a swarthy clearness, like a Spaniard's, and in the cleft of his massive chin gleamed a small triangular scar. Something about him suggested to Hemming a gull blown inland. He talked of a dozen things dear to Hemming's heart,—of salmon fishing in Labrador, of the sea's moods, of London, of polo, and of current literature,—treating each from the view-point of an outsider. The others were contented to sit quiet and listen. Many of his adventures by land and sea would have been laughed at by ordinary stay-at-homes, or even by Cook's tourists, but Hemming's knowledge of such things enabled him to see probabilities where Tarmont suspected lies. He was still spinning yarns when O'Rourke came in.
Several days passed before Hemming again saw Stanley—restless, painful days for Hemming, for Stanley's stories had reawakened all that was vagrant in his blood; the other side of his heart was longing for England, and pride and self-ordained duty held him in New York. Also, the condition of his dearest friend was getting on his nerves. To see the man who had so often sworn that change and adventure were the breath of life to him eyeing furniture with calculating glances, pricing dinner-sts, and drawing plans of cottages on the margins of otherwise neglected manuscripts, struck him as


verging on the idiotic. So he prowled about the town, and smoked more than Smith considered good for him. Late one night, upon leaving an uptown studio, where a pale youth made priceless posters and delectable coffee, he was overtaken by Stanley.
"Where are you off to?" asked Stanley.
"Home," replied Hemming.
"Are you sleepy?"
"No."
"Then I wish you'd let me come along. I want to talk."
Hemming assured him that he would be delighted to listen, and, hailing a belated cab, they drove to Washington Square. O'Rourke and Smith were both asleep. Hemming closed their doors, and lit a couple of candles to help the firelight make shadows up the walls. Then Stanley told something of his story. In his youth he had inherited a small fortune. At first he had spent it foolishly, but after years of knocking about, had learned how to save it, and even add to it. The sea had been his ambition and delight ever since his first days of freedom. Early in his career he had qualified as a navigator. He told of trading-schooners in Newfoundland and Labrador, in which he was interested; of a copper-mine somewhere that he had discovered himself, and sold to an English syndicate, of a venture in the sponge-fishery off the Florida coast, and of his apprenticeship to pearl-diving. He told of a bluntnosed old barque in which he owned a one-third interest and on which he had sailed as master for half a dozen voyages, doing a very profitable smuggling business on the side. He even confessed to an irregular career as a journalist in Australia.
"I have always found my profits," he said, "and managed to live well enough. It is an easy world, if you have any brains at all, but for all that, it is horrible. The longer a man lives—the oftener he saves himself from defeat—the grayer he makes his fun—then, when he lies awake at night, the more he has to sweat and pray about."
Hemming nodded. "They pile up," he remarked, then fearing that gloomy reflections might get the better of his guest's desire to talk, he asked him why he had given up his berth aboard the barque.
"Had important business to look after ashore," replied Stanley. In bending over the table to light a cigarette at a candle, he looked keenly at his host.
"And there was another reason—a damn sight better one," he said, quietly.
"He sank back in his chair and blew a thin thread of smoke."

"We were in Bahia with fish," he continued, "and I got foul of one of the hands—for the last time. The memory of his big face makes me feel ill to this day."
"What?" exclaimed Hemming. "Do you mean to tell me you let one of the crew lay you away?"
"Not quite," laughed Stanley, harshly. He touched the scar on his chin. "That's what he gave me with a knuckle-duster," he explained, "and what I gave him he took ashore to the hospital. His messmates were not particularly fond of him, but, for all that, I considered it wise to live quietly ashore for awhile."
"You must have handled him rather roughly," remarked the Englishman.
"I killed him," said Stanley. "I beat the life out of him with my bare fists."
"You beast," said Hemming, his face blanched with horror and disgust.
"Oh, cheer up, old Sunday-school teacher," replied Stanley, good-naturedly. "I had reason enough for killing the slob. He hit me first for one thing. Then there was a girl in the case—a little brown girl, who wouldn't look at a dirty brute like him, for all that he told to the contrary. He was ship's bully until he got aft to the cabin."
He emptied his glass, and looked, with an expression of bored expectancy, toward the darkest corner of the room.
"It's about time for him now," he said, "but maybe you don't believe in ghosts. He favours me with a sight of his ugly mug almost every night. Can you see him there?"
Hemming turned with a start, but only black shadows were in the corner. Stanley laughed.
"What a pity," he said, "for I am sure you would be more interested than I."
Hemming drew close to the fire, and when his back was turned, Stanley, with a wary eye, on the shadows, grabbed the decanter of Scotch and gulped down a quantity of raw liquor. In a moment he seemed himself again. He set the decanter softly back upon the table, and, with his hands in his trousers pockets, moved over to the window and looked out at the cold roofs, level against the dawn, and at the lift of the silent chimneys. His jaws were set hard, swelling the muscles under the swarthy skin. He feared a hand upon his shoulder—the heavy touch of a thick, toil worn hand. He gawked, dreading, the rank breath of the dead sea-man against his ear. Presently he turned his head, and looked again at the shadowy corner. It was lighter now. But crouched

there close to the floor, as he had crouched upon the hot deck, with red hands knuckle down, and blood upon the ugly, upturned face, was the bully of the barque. The candles burned softly, throwing their kindly radiance upon books and pictures. Hemming sat by the fire, puzzled, but at peace. Wrenching his gaze from the hideous apparition beyond, Stanley looked enviously at Hemming—at the clean, brave face, whereon hardships and adventures had hardened not a line.
Hemming fell asleep in his chair. When he opened his eyes, the room was full of sunlight and his guest had gone. He could hear O'Rourke splashing and singing in his bath, and Smith stood at his elbow with a cup of tea.
CHAPTER IV.
"The Dear, Dear Witchery of Song"
The two friends sat late over their breakfast.
"If anything happens to me before night, will you see that I am decently buried?" said O'Rourke.
"I don't see what more is to happen to you—except bankruptcy," retorted Hemming.
"Oh, I intend getting down to work again right away," O'Rourke hastened to say. "That is part of my trouble," he added. "You know that Mr. Hudson, for all his good points, has some jolly queer notions in his head. He had not known me more than a week before he asked me to let scribbling alone and give business a chance. I told him that scribbling was good enough for me. He said prose was bad, but to see a bushy chap, six feet high, writing poetry, simply made him sick. I was mad, but—well, I was also afraid. I know him better now. He made me promise not to mention the conversation to Helen, and tried to fire my soul with the desire for banking. He even offered me a job. Well, to oblige him, I determined to try to give up writing, and I've been struggling a long now for nearly three weeks. God I'm sick of it. Helen does not know, of course, what the matter is, and thinks I'm out of condition, or that her company is not inspiring; and all the time the finest things are swinging about my head, and my fingers are itching for a good corky penholder. Last night I realized that both my money and peace of mind were leaving me, so I turned out early this morning and wrote seven verses to Helen, and sketched out two stories, and an article on the Jamaica fruit trade, and now I'm going to tell old Hudson that he can go—I mean that I will consider his proposition a moment longer."
"And what about the lady?" asked Hemming.
"Who—Helen? Oh, she'll make it warm for her father when she hears about it. I can tell you," answered O'Rourke.
While Hemming interviewed Smith on household topics, O'Rourke scribbled a quatrain on his cuff, and then invented conversation between himself and Mr. Hudson. This form of amusement is exciting—better even than writing a dialogue. One cannot help figuring as the hero. The best time for it is when you are walking alone, late at night, perhaps in a rainstorm. The ideas swing along with your stride, and the words pat-

ter with the rain. But O'Rourke, in his mood, found nine o'clock in the morning good enough, and by the time Hemming was ready to go out, had made sixteen different wrecks of poor Hudson's ideas on the subject of authorship as a profession. His courage returned to its normal elevation, and as they walked along he entertained Hemming with his brave dreams of the future.
The friends parted company at the door of Hemming's publishers: O'Rourke took a car for an uptown resident quarter. He might have seen Mr. Hudson at his office which was on Broadway, but he wanted to see Helen first, and assure himself of her support.
Helen was pleased, though surprised, at seeing him so early. She received him in the morning-room, which was delightfully informal. He asked her to ride with him at four o'clock, and spoke as if this was his reason for calling. But she thought of the neat lettering on the otherwise spotless cuff, and without so much as "by your leave" took hold of his wrist, pushed back his coat-sleeve, and read the quatrain.
"My dear boy," she said "it is fine. And I was just beginning to fear that this old town had made you stupid, or—of that my companionship makes you dull. I wondered if, after all, I was not inspiring."
"You not inspiring!" exclaimed O'Rourke. "Why, I have had to smother more inspirations during the last few weeks than I ever had before in all my life. There's more inspiration in one of your eyelashes than in all the hair on all the heads of all the other people in the world."
"Silly," she said.
O'Rourke did not retort in words. "But why did you smother the inspirations, you boy?" she asked presently.
"I can't tell you now," he replied. "But at four o'clock I'll confess all. You want the red mare, I suppose. I'm off now to see your father. Wish me luck, little girl."
Helen smiled.
"I hope you don't let all your cats out of their bags as easily as that," she said. "But it will save you the trouble of making confession later. Yes, the red mare, please. And, dear boy, I'll have a little talk with father at lunch, and he will never make you smother your dear inspirations again. There, that will do. Now run away and be a good boy. Really, you behave as if you were afraid of never finding me again."
"Oh, I've made sure of you this time," he said. Then he remembered the seven verses, and pulling them from his pocket, read them aloud. The fire in the morning-room was wonderfully cheerful. The clock clicked softly, and chimed once or twice, unneeded. They talked a great deal, and made plans for the future, and O'Rourke smoked a cigarette. When Mr. Hudson came home to his lunch, he found them still engaged in conversation beside the morning-room fire. They looked guiltily at the clock. O'Rourke bowed to Mr. Hudson, and extended his hand.
"I have decided, sir, to stick to scribbling," said he.
"Did you ever think of not sticking to it?" she asked. O'Rourke gazed straight ahead, and had the grace to blush. A—truthful woman

can always—well, act—with more ease than a truthful man.
"I am not fit for anything else," he said.
"Dear me, dear me," said Hudson, glancing nervously at his daughter. "I haven't a doubt that you are right, Bertram. A man should be the best judge himself of what he is good for."
"And now," said the lady, "you may stay to lunch. But you must hurry away right afterward for the horses."
So O'Rourke remained to lunch, and was vastly entertaining, and Mr. Hudson thawed again, having decided, during the soup, to accept the inevitable.
(To be continued.)
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