

Hemming, The Adventurer

BY
**THEODORE
ROBERTS**

(Continued)

Hemming was about to reply when an overgrown young man, a book-keeper, who had been listening, nudged his elbow roughly.

"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 twirled him deftly and pushed him sprawling against his enraged employer. Both went down, swearing 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 hang-up Chawley. Dey can't stand dat sort o' health food."

Wells got to his feet. The book-keeper scrambled up and rushed at Hemming. He was received in a grip that made him repent his action.

"Mr. Wells," said Hemming, "I shall hold on to this gentleman, who does not seem to know how to treat his superiors, until he cools off, and in the meantime I'll trouble 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. The door opened, and the head of the publishing house of S—'s Sons entered.

"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.

"In a month from now," said his companion, "that concern will not be worth as much as your check is written for. Even poor old Dodder had all he could do to hold it together. He had the brains and decency, and that fellow had the money."

By the time lunch was over, Hemming found himself once more in harness, but harness of so easy a fit that not a buckle galled. The billet 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 syndicate, he had decided to start northward, despite the season.

The clamour of battle was no longer his guide. Now the Quest of the Little-known was his. It brought him close to many hearths, and taught him the hearts of all sorts and conditions of men. In the span of a few years, it made him familiar with a hundred villages between Nain 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 far-shining shelters of the town, came over the dream of his old life for bedfellow.

PART II. CHAPTER I. The Unsuspected City.

Hemming happened upon the city of Pernambuco 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 soda-water down there," he said to 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 Pernambuco. He spurred his native-bred steed to a hesitating trot along the narrow, hoof-worn path that led down to the valley. At a mud and timber hut set beneath banana-trees, and backed by a tiny field, he drew rein. A woman sat before the door, looking cool and at her ease in her scanty cotton dress. A naked child chased a pig among the bananas. Hemming greeted the woman in Portuguese. She gave him humble greetings in return. The pig and the baby came near to listen. Hemming swung his feet free from the stirrups, to straighten the kink out of his knees. He pushed back his pith helmet, 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 everyday sights in Pernambuco. "May a stranger find entertainment there?" he inquired.

"Yes," she replied, "and the great man who owns it is generous to strangers. He is a big man, full of wisdom, smoking eternally a yellow cigar not of this country."

Hemming dismounted, the better to rest his horse. Although he had ridden 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 milreis had dwindled since leaving Pernambuco a week before to a sum equalling 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 after thieves. 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 roofs and clumps of foliage in the valley, thinking, maybe of his own regiment, of Aldershot during a review, of the hill batteries that had supported the infantry advance in India, and of the fifty regiments under canvas in Tampa.

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

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

"It is a pleasure," cried she, "to slake the thirst of so distinguished a senior."

Hemming bowed gravely, a smile lifting 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 yellow 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 patches of manioc.

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

skirts of city by kind peasant woman, evening of April 6, 19—.

Same climate and crops as Brazil. Eleven pounds in my pockets in Brazilian notes and small coin. What does Pernambuco hold for H. H. I wonder? A dinner of two, perhaps, and a couple of chapters for my book."

Presently the twisting path met a highway between royal palms. Good-sized villas, their walls all blue and white with glazed tiles, their roofs dusky red, or else flat and railed about 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 resident sections of Pernambuco. For months he had lived in just such a house, and lolled in just such a garden.

"The old Dutch influence," he said, tossing his cigarette over the nearest wall. A bullock-cart came creaking along the road, the patient cattle, with heads held low and a straight yoke across their wrinkled necks, the driver walking at their heels, sombre with dust, and daintily puffing a cigarette. The cart was loaded with sacks of sugar, which sent up a heavy sickly smell. Hemming hailed the driver.

"Where does the governor live, my friend?"

"The President, senior? There behind the white panthers." With the stock of his rawhide whip, the fellow pointed to an iron gate, set between posts of red brick, topped with marble panthers. Each panther held a shield between its front paws. Hemming threw the bullock-driver a coin, and rode on the pavement, the better to examine the armorial design on the shields. He laughed softly.

"Familiar," he said, "ah, yes, a good enough old Devonshire shield. I have admired it in the dining room of the Governor of Newfoundland. Now I doff my hat to it at the entrance of a president's residence. Dash it all, I have outgrown dismay, and a jolly good thing, too." He flicked a leaf of his knee with the tip of his glove.

"Queer I never heard about this before,—and what the deuce is a Brazilian doing with those arms? Can this be where that crazy American whom old Farrington told me about hangs out?" His brow cleared, and he bowed to the expressionless panthers.

A sentry, who had been standing a few paces off, with a cavalry sabre at his shoulder and a cigarette in his mouth, now drew near and saluted. Hemming returned the salute sharply. This same custom of smoking on sentry-go had jarred on him many a time in Pernambuco. He had noticed the same thing in Bahia.

"I would see the President," he said, and passed his card to the soldier. From a small guard-house just inside the wall came several more white-clad men. One of these hurried away with Hemming's card, and presently returned. The gates were swung wide open; Hemming rode in at a dress-parade trot, travel-stained, straight of back, his monocle flashing in his eye. Soldiers posted here and there among the palms and roses and trim flower-beds stood at attention as he passed. He drew rein and dismounted at the foot of the marble steps. A tall,

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 led the way into a large tiled room, containing a billiard-table of the American kind, a roll-top desk, and an office chair. The windows of the room were all 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. Even 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 starched; well, so do I sometimes. Please fall into that chair."

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

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

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

The servant bowed and retired.

"I see the illustrated weeklies of both New York and London," continued Tetsou, "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 Barrecker."

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

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

"I know the head of your house at home, Colonel Bruce-Gostwycke, and another distinguished member of it in the colonies, Sir Henry Renton," replied Hemming. "But," he continued, briskly, twisting his moustache, "you are something bigger than that here. Why do you hold this little half dead county family so high?"

(To be continued.)

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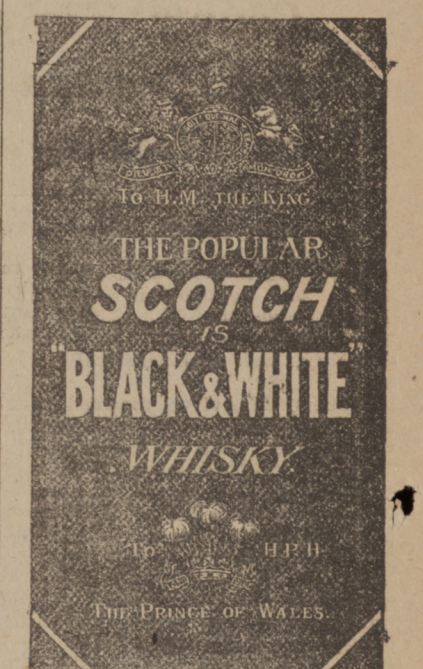
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