

Hemming, The Adventurer

BY THEODORE ROBERTS

(Continued.)

"What do you think of them?" he asked, waving his hand toward the troops.

"They look to me as if they were drilled with bran," answered the Englishman, "and their formation is all wrong."

"Ah," said Tetson, sadly crestfallen.

Presently he touched Hemming's knee.

"If you will take them in hand, — the whole lopsided consignment, from the muddy-faced colonel down, — why, I'll be your everlasting friend," he said.

Hemming stared at them, pondering.

"It will mean enemies for me," he replied.

"No, I can answer for everything but their drill," said the other.

Hemming saluted, and, wheeling the white stallion, rode alone up and down the uneven ranks. His face was set in severe lines, but behind the mask lurked mirth and derision at the pettiness of his high-styled officer.

"Commander-in-chief," he said, and, putting his mount to a canter, completely circled his command in a fraction of a minute.

"I shall begin to lick them into shape to-morrow," he said to Tetson.

The little officers, clanging their big cavalry sabres, marched their little brown troops away to the barracks. The President looked wistfully after them, and said: "I can mount three hundred of them, Hemming. I call it a pretty good army, for all its lack of style."

"I call it half a battalion of duffers," said Hemming to himself.

Later, the new commander-in-chief and the private secretary sat together in the former's quarters.

"I do not quite understand this Pernambuco idea," said Hemming, "is it business or is it just an unusual way of spending money?"

"I don't know what the old man is driving at myself," replied Hicks, "but of one thing I am sure: there's more money put into it than there is in it. The army is a pretty expensive toy, for instance. Just what it is for I do not know. The only job it ever tried was collecting rents, and it made a mess of that. We don't sell enough coffee in a year to stand those duffers a month's pay. We get skinned right and left back here and down on the coast. Mr. Tetson thinks he still possesses a clear business head, but the fact is he cannot understand his own book-keeping. It's no fun running a hundred-square-mile ranch, with a hundred down thrown in."

Hemming wrinkled his forehead, and

stared vacantly out of the window. Below him a gray parrot, the property of Miss Tetson, squawked in an orange tree.

"If I had money, I should certainly live somewhere else. Why the devil he keeps his wife and daughter here, I don't see."

Just then the secretary caught the faint strumming of a banjo, and left hurriedly, without venturing an explanation. He found Miss Tetson in her favourite corner of the garden, where roses grew thickest, and bread-fruit-trees made a canopy of green shade. A fountain splashed softly beside the stone bench whereon she sat, and near by stood a little brown crane watching the water with eyes like yellow jewels.

The girl has changed from her riding-habit into a white gown, such as she wore almost every day. But now Hicks saw her with new eyes. She seemed to him more beautiful than he had dreamed a woman could be. Yesterday he had thought, in his indolent way, that he loved her. Now he knew it, and his heart seemed to leap and pause in a mad sort of fear. The look of well-fed satisfaction passed away from him. He stood there between the roses like a fool, — he who had come down to the garden so carelessly, with some jest on his lips.

"Something will happen now," she said, and smiled up at him. Hicks wondered what she meant.

"It is too hot to have anything happen," he replied.

"That is the matter with us, — it is too hot, always too hot, and we are too tired," she said, "but Mr. Hemming does not seem to mind the heat. I think that something interesting will happen now."

This was like a knife in the man's heart, for he was learning to like the Englishman.

The girl looked at the little crane by the fountain. Hicks stood for a moment, trying to smile. But it was hard work to look as if he did not care. "Lord, what an ass I have been," he said to himself, but aloud he stammered something about their rides together, and their friendship.

"Oh, you can ride very well," she laughed, "but —"

She did not finish the remark, and the secretary, after a painful scrutiny of the silent banjo in her lap, went away to the stables and ordered his horse. But a man is a fool to ride hard along the bank of a Brazilian river in the heat of the afternoon.

From one of the windows of his cool room, Hemming watched the departure of the President's private secretary. He remembered what Tetson had said of the boy, — "too young to associate with me."

But youth is a thing easily mend-

ed, thought Hemming. Somehow — perhaps only in size — Hicks recalled O'Rourke to his mind; and back to him came the days of their good-comradeship. He wondered where O'Rourke was now, and what he was busy about. He had seen him last in Labrador, where they had spent a month together, salmon fishing, and up to that time O'Rourke had found no trace of Miss Hudson. Ellis's information had proved useless. Disgusted at the deception practised upon him, the poor fellow had ceased to speak of the matter, even with his dearest friend during night-watches by the camp-fire.

CHAPTER IV.

The Thing That Happened.

Hicks came along the homeward road at dusk. Lights were glowing above the strong walls and behind the straight trunks of the palms. A mist that one might smell lay along the course of the river. Hicks rode heavily and with the air of one utterly oblivious to his surroundings. But at the gateway of the officers' mess he looked up. Captain Santosa was in the garden, a vision of white and gold and dazzling smile. He hurried to the gate.

"Ah, my dear Hicks, you are in time for our small cocktails, and then dinner. But for this riding so hard, I can call you nothing but a fool."

"Thanks very much," replied the American, dismounting slowly, "and as to what you call me, old man, I'm not at all particular." The woe-begone expression of his plump face was almost ludicrous.

Santosa whistled, and presently an orderly came and took Valentine's horse. The two entered the building arm in arm, and the secretary swayed as he walked.

Five or six of the native officers were already in the mess-room, swallowing mild swizzles, and talking quietly. They greeted Hicks affectionately.

"This man," said Santosa, "had his horse looking like a shaving brush, and I know nothing in English so suitable to call him as this," and he swore vigorously in Portuguese.

"Stow that rot," said Hicks, "can't you see I'm fit as a fiddle; and for Heaven's sake move some liquor my way, will you?" His request was speedily complied with, and he helped himself recklessly from the big decanter.

The dinner was long and hot, and Valentine Hicks, forgetting utterly his Harvard manner, dropped his head on the table, between his claret-glass and coffee-cup, and dreamed

heavily dreams. The swarthy Brazilians talked and smoked, and sent away the decanters to be refilled. The stifling air held the tobacco smoke above the table. The cotton-clad servants moved on noiseless feet.

"These Americans, — dear heaven," spoke a fat major, softly.

"I am fond of Hicks," said Santosa, laying his hand on the youth's unconscious shoulder. A slim lieutenant, who had held a commission in a Brazilian regiment stationed in Rio, looked at the captain.

"The Americans are harmless," he said. "They mind their own business, — or better still, they let us mind it for them. The President — bah! And our dear Valentine. If he gets enough to eat, and clothes cut in the English way, and some one to listen to his little stories of how he used to play golf at Harvard, he is content. But this Englishman, — this Senor Hemming, — he is quite different."

"Did not you at one time play golf?" asked Santosa, calmly.

"Three times, in Florida," replied the lieutenant, "and with me played a lady, who talked at her ease and broke two clubs in one morning. She was of a fashionable convent named Smith, but this did not deter her from the free expression of her thoughts."

"Stir up Senor Hicks, that we may hear two fools at the same time," said the colonel.

"Take my word for it, colonel, that Valentine is not a fool," said Santosa, lightly. "He is very young."

"Have you nothing to say for me?" asked the slim lieutenant, good-naturedly.

"You know what I think of you all," replied Santosa, without heat. The conversation was carried on in Portuguese, and now ran into angry surmises as to the President's reason for placing Hemming in command.

It was close upon midnight when Hicks awoke. He straightened himself in his chair and blinked at Santosa, who alone, of the whole mess, remained at table.

"You have had a little nap," said the Brazilian.

Hicks looked at him for awhile in silence. Then he got to his feet, and leaned heavily on the table.

"I'll walk home, old tea-cosy. Tell your nigger to give me something to eat, will you?"

"You do not look well, my dear Valentine. You had better stay here until morning," said Santosa.

Hicks swore, and then begged the other's pardon.

"Am I drunk, old chap? Do I look that way?" he asked.

Captain Santosa laughed. "You look like a man with a grudge against some one," he answered. "Perhaps you have a touch of fever, otherwise I know you would have good taste enough to conceal the grudge. A gentleman suffers — and smiles."

It was past two o'clock in the morning, and Hemming was lying flat on his back, smoking a cigarette in the dark. He had been writing verses, and letters which he did not intend to mail, until long past midnight. And now he lay wide-eyed on his bed, kept awake by the restless play of his thoughts.

His windows were all open, and he could hear a stirring of wind in the crests of the taller trees. His reveries were disturbed by a stumbling of feet in the room beyond, and suddenly Valentine Hicks stood in the doorway. By the faint light Hemming made out the big, drooping shoulders and the attitude of weariness. He sat up quickly, and pushed his feet into slippers, and

"That you, Hicks?" he asked.

"Don't talk to me, your damn traitor!" said Hicks.

Hemming frowned, and tossed his cigarette into the night.

"If you will be so good as to turn on the light, I'll get the quinine," he said.

The secretary laughed.

"Quinine!" he cried: "you fool! I believe an Englishman would recommend some blasted medicine to a man in hell."

"You're not there yet," replied Hemming. He was bending over an open drawer of his desk, feeling among papers and bottles for the box of pills. Hicks drew something from his pocket and laid it softly on the table.

"Good morning," he said. "I intended to kick up a row but I've changed my mind. Hand over your pills and I'll go to bed."

When he awoke next day, it was only to a foolish delirium. The doctor looked at him, and then at Hemming.

"I suppose you can give it a name," he said.

Hemming nodded.

"I've had it myself," he replied.

The President, followed by his daughter, came into the room. Hicks recognized the girl.

"Marion," he said, and when she bent over him, "something has happened after all."

She looked up at Hemming with a colourless face. Her eyes were brave enough, but the pitiful expression of her mouth touched him with a sudden painful remembrance. During the hours of daylight the doctor and Miss Tetson watched by the bedside, moving silently and speaking in whispers in the darkened room.

The doctor was an Englishman somewhat beyond middle age, with a past well buried. In the streets and on the trail his manner was short almost to rudeness. He spoke bitterly and lightly of those things which most men love and respect. In the sick-room, he it in the rich man's villa or in the mud hut of the plantation labourer, he spoke softly, and his hands were gentle as a woman's.

(To be continued.)

Lady Henry Somerset is a great grand-daughter of one of Marie Antoinette's maids of honour.

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