

Hemming, The Adventurer

BY
THEODORE
ROBERTS

(Continued.)

CHAPTER VIII.

Captain Santosa Visits His Superior Officer.

"But what of starvation and ruin?" asked the other.

"I thought," replied the doctor, "that you were in command of the army. Ask those mud-faced soldiers of yours why this woman has nothing to feed to her child."

"I will ask them," said the commander-in-chief, and he ripped out an oath that did Scott's heart good to hear. He turned to the woman.

"I am sorry for this," he said, "and will see that all that was taken from you is safely returned. The President and I know nothing about it." He drew a wad of notes from his pocket and handed it to her. Then he looked at the doctor.

"If I did not like you, Scott, and respect you," he continued, "I'd punch your head for thinking this of me. But you had both the grace and courage to tell me what you thought."

"I don't think it now," said Scott, "and I don't want my head punched, either, for my flesh heals very slowly. But if I ever feel in need of a harshing, old man, I'll call on you. No doubt it would be painful, but there'd be no element of disgrace connected with it."

Hemming blushed, for compliments always put him out of the game. The woman suddenly stepped closer, and, smothering his hand to her face, kissed it twice before he could pull it away. He retreated to the door, and the doctor laughed. Safe in the saddle, he called to the doctor.

"My dear chap," he said, "you have inspired me to a confession. I, too, have soured on London."

"Let me advise you to try your luck again. A girl is sometimes put in a false light by circumstances—the greed of parents, for instance," replied Scott.

Hemming stared, unable to conceal his amazement.

"I have not always lived in Pernambuco," laughed Scott. "I have dined more than once at your mess. Fact is, I was at one time surgeon in the Sixty-Second."

"You are a dry one, certainly," said Hemming.

"It is unkind of you to remind me of it when the nearest bottle of soda is at least three miles away, and very likely warm at that," retorted the doctor. Hemming leaned forward in his saddle and grasped his hand.

"I will not take your advice," he said, "but it was kind of you to give it. Forgive me for mentioning it, Scott, but you are a hashed good sort."

"Man," cried the other, "didn't I tell you that I am hiding my head?" He slapped the white stallion smartly on the rump, and Hemming went up the trail at a canter.

Hemming got back to the village in time to change and dine with the family. The President's mind was elsewhere than at the table. He would look about the room, staring at the shadows beyond the candle-light, as if seeking something. He pushed the claret past him, and ordered rye whiskey. His kind face showed lines unknown to it a month before. Mrs. Tetsen watched him anxiously. Marion and the commander-in-chief talked together like well-tried comrades, laughing sometimes, but for the most part serious. Marion was paler than of old, but none the less beautiful for that. Her eyes were brighter, with a light that seemed to burn far back in them, steady and tender. Her lips were ever on the verge of smiling. Hemming told her all of his interview with the peasant woman, and part of his interview with Scott.

"There will be trouble soon," he said.

She begged him not to stir it up until Valentine was well enough to have a finger in it.

"You may not think him very clever," she said, "but even you will admit that he shoots straight, and has courage."

"I will admit anything in his favor," replied Hemming, "but as for his shooting, why, thank Heaven, I have never tested it."

"Wasn't he very rude to you one night?" she asked.

He laughed quietly. "The circumstances warranted it, but he was rude to the wrong person, don't you think?"

"No, indeed," she cried, "for no matter how minus a quantity your guilt, or how full of fault I had been, it would never have done for him to threaten me with a—"

"Service revolver?" said Hemming, "and one of my own at that."

"Fever is a terrible thing," she said, gazing at the red heart of the claret.

"My dear sister," said the Englishman, "a man would gladly offer more to win less."

They smiled frankly into one another's eyes.

"Then you do not think too badly of me?" she asked.

"I think everything that is jolly—of both of you," he replied.

"I like your friendship," she said, "for, though you seem such a good companion, I do not believe you give it lightly."

After the coffee and an aimless talk with Tetsen, Hemming looked in at Hicks and found him drinking chicken broth as if he liked it. The

invalid was strong enough to manage the spoon himself, but Marion held the bowl. Hemming went up to his own room, turned on the light above his desk, and began to write. He worked steadily until ten o'clock. Then he walked up and down the room for awhile, rolling and smoking cigarettes. The old ambition had him in its clutches. Pernambuco, with its heat, its dulness, its love and hate, had faded away. Now he played a bigger game—a game for the world rather than for half a battalion of little brown soldiers. A knock sounded on his door, and before he could answer it, Captain Santosa, glorious in his white and gold, stepped into the room. The sight of the Brazilian brought his dreams to the dust. "Damn," he said, under his breath.

Then he waved his subordinate to a seat.

"A drink?" queried Hemming, turning toward the bell.

"Not now," said the captain, "but afterward, if you then offer it to me." He swallowed hard, looked down at his polished boots, aloft at the ceiling, and presently at his superior officer's staring eye-glass. From this he seemed to gather courage.

"I have disturbed you at your rest, at your private work," he said, with a motion of the hand toward the untidy desk, "but my need is great. I must choose between disloyalty to you and the President. I have chosen, sir, and I now resign my commission. I will no longer ride and drink and eat with robbers and liars. It is not work for a gentleman." He paused and smiled pathetically. "I will go away. There is nothing else for my father's son to do."

"I heard something of this—no longer ago than to-day," said Hemming.

Santosa lit a cigar and puffed for awhile in silence. "I winked at it too long," he said, at last, "for I was dreaming of other things. So that I kept my own hands clean I did not care. Then you came, and I watched you. I saw that duty was the great thing, after all—even for a soldier. And I saw that even a gentleman might earn his pay decently."

Hemming smiled, and polished his eye-glass on the lining of his dinner-jacket.

"Thank you, old chap. You have a queer way of putting it, but I catch the idea," he said.

The captain bowed. "I will go away, but not very far, for I would like to be near, to help you in any trouble. Our dear friend Valentine, whom I love as a brother, is not yet strong. The President, whom I honour, is not a fighter, I think. The ladies should go to the coast."

"You are right," said Hemming, "but do not leave us for a day or two. I will consider your resignation. Now for a drink."

He rang the bell, and then pulled a chair close to Santosa. When Smith had gone from the room, leaving the decanter and soda-water behind him, the two soldiers touched glasses and drank. They were silent. The Brazilian felt better now, and the Englishman was thinking too hard to talk. A gust of wind banged the wooden shutters at the windows. It was followed by a flash of lightning. Then came the rain, pounding and splashing on the roof, and hammering the palms in the garden.

"That's sudden," said Hemming.

"Things happen suddenly in this country," replied Santosa.

Hemming leaned back and crossed his legs.

"Have you seen Hicks since the fever bowled him?" he asked.

"No," replied the captain, "no, I have not seen him, but he is my friend and I wish him well. Is it not through our friends, Hemming, that we come by our griefs? It has seemed so to me."

Hemming glanced at him quickly, but said nothing. Santosa was a gentleman, and might safely be allowed to make confessions.

"When I first came here," continued the captain, "I was poor, and the Brazilian army owed me a whole year's back pay. I had spent much on clothes and on horses, trying hard to live like my father's son. Mr. Tetsen offered me better pay, and a gay uniform. I was willing to play at soldiering, for I saw that some gain might be made from it, outside the pay. My brother officers saw this also, and we talked of it often. Then Miss Tetsen came to Pernambuco. I rode out with her to show her the country. I told her of my father, and of how, when they carried him in from the field, they found that the Order of Bolivar had been driven edgewise through his tunic and into his breast by the blow of a bullet. And when I saw the look on her face, my pride grew, but changed in some way, and it seemed to me that the son of that man should leave thieving and the crushing of the poor to men of less distinction."

"Sometimes my heart was bitter within me, and my fingers itched for the feel of Valentine's throat. But I hope I was always polite, Hemming. He got lightly to his feet, and held out his hand.

"Young ladies talk so in convent schools," he said.

"Not at all," replied Hemming, gravely, "and I can assure you that your attitude toward all concerned has left nothing to be desired. I will look you up at your quarters after breakfast."

Captain Santosa went through the gardens, humming a Spanish love-song. He turned near a fountain and looked up at a lighted window. His white uniform gleamed in the scented hush. He kissed his fingertips to the window. "The end of that dream," he said, lightly, and his eyes were as unflattering as ever. The water dripped heavily on the gold of his uniform.

Hemming went in search of the President, and found him in the bil-

lard-room, idly knocking the balls about with a rasping cue.

"Have a game, like a good chap," urged the great man.

The commander-in-chief shook his head.

"Not now, sir. I came to tell you something about the army," he replied. He was shocked at Tetsen's sudden pallor. The yellow cigar was dropped from nerveless fingers and smeared a white trail of ash across the green cloth.

"What do they want?" asked Tetsen, in a husky voice.

"Oh they take whatever they want," replied Hemming; "the taxes that are due you, and something besides from the unprotected." Then he related the case of the poor woman. When he had finished Tetsen did not speak immediately. His benevolent face wore an expression that cut Hemming to the heart.

"I must think it over," he said, wearily, "I must think it over."

(To be continued.)

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THE KING'S NEW TITLE.

London, Oct. 17.—At a farewell banquet to a number of leading French physicians who have been visiting the London hospitals, Dr. Sir Wm. Broadbent, physician in ordinary to the king, in toasting his majesty, conferred a new title upon him. Referring to the king's influence on international politics, Dr. Broadbent said that he had shown himself to be "the lightning conductor of Europe."

Special features of interest will be added to the Evening Times as the work of organization is further advanced.

SUICIDE OF A CANADIAN

Who Invented a High Power Explosive... He Hanged Himself.

New York, Oct. 17.—The body of a man, supposed to be Milton S. Talbot, of Montreal, Canada, who was the inventor of a high power explosive, was found hanging in the woods in Pelham Bay Park today.

A diary found in one of the pockets of the dead man had the name of Talbot in it, and showed that he was at one time employed as an electrical engineer in Durban, Natal, South Africa, and that he came to London, Sept. 4. Several newspapers also spoke of Talbot and referred to his invention of an explosive more powerful than dynamite, which the British government was then testing.

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