

Hemming, The Adventurer

BY THEODORE ROBERTS

(Continued.)

"The poor fellows will be sadly disappointed when they get in and find the Tetsons and the money gone," remarked Hemming, calmly, "though their stupidity in thinking them still here beats me."

"There are some things of value in the house," replied Hicks.

"Oh, yes; they might melt the silver," suggested Hemming, "but the furniture would bother them. Of course they will tear up the place, and put us, and try to get revenge that way."

"Yes," replied Hicks, "but I have a little stone about me." He opened his linen tunic, and unfasted a narrow cartridge-belt. "I wear it next my skin," he said, "and it galls me a bit sometimes." He drew a brass shell from one of the loops and with his penknife extracted a cork and a wad of cotton wool. Then he shook something white and rough, but glowing dimly into the palm of Hemming's hand. He laughed softly.

"The bridegroom's gift to the bride," he said, "if the bridegroom gets to the church."

Hemming gazed at it in silence.

"Cut and polished, what would it be worth?" asked its owner. His voice was low and eager. He placed a trembling hand on his friend's knee: "I have seen diamonds in the rough before," replied Hemming, "but never one as large as this. Brazilian stones vary a good deal in quality. It may stand for a fortune, or perhaps for nothing more than a respectable cottage, with stables, a paddock, and an orchard, and maybe a shooting in Scotland."

"That would do for us," said Hicks, grinning like a schoolboy. "Old Tetson could manage the orchard, and Mrs. Tetson could see that he didn't get his feet wet." For a few moments he seemed to be following this dream of bucolic bliss.

Then he continued: "I bought it in Pernambuco last December from a drunken sailor, a cook or something like that, who had run away from a wind-jammer. He didn't think much of it. It had been given him by an old woman—at least, so he said, but more likely he stole it. I paid fifteen milreis for it,—fifteen milreis, with the exchange at ninepence."

"Put it away," said Hemming, "and keep that belt next your hide, no matter how much it galls."

Hicks replaced the stone in the empty shell, and the shell in his belt.

"And she thinks I haven't a cent," he whispered. "Isn't she a bricky?"

The Englishman leaned back, out of range of the open window, and relit

his cigar. Suddenly Hicks bent forward, listening.

"Did you hear that?" he said.

But Hemming had heard no unusual sound, only the footsteps of their guards, and the noise of men singing at the barracks.

"It's the first time I have heard an old Sam Peabody in Brazil," said the American.

"Who?" said Hemming, wondering if his friend's temperature had gone up again.

"It's a bird, some sort of sparrow we have in the North," replied Hicks. He left the hall quietly, and hung out of a window in his own room. Presently, from the shrubbery below him, came the familiar notes again. He wet his lips with his tongue, and whistled the clear call himself. He was answered immediately. He peered down into the dim garden. The only light was that of the stars. He could see nothing. No leaf stirred in the shrubbery, and there was neither sight nor sound of the enemy on that side of the house.

"If you don't intend to let us in," said a quiet voice, "you might pass out a couple of drinks."

"Whiskey and soda for me," said the voice of Captain Santosa.

Hicks ran down-stairs, and Hemming followed him. They unbarred a window, and Smith stood ready with his rifle at port. In crawled O'Rourke and Santosa, very wet as to clothing, but very dry inside.

"The Campbells have arrived," said O'Rourke, brushing mud from his leggings. Hemming for a moment was dumfounded at this unexpected appearance.

"God bless you, Bertram," he said at last, and they shook hands warmly.

"I thought, a few days ago, that it was chance that brought me to Brazil," said O'Rourke, "but really, little fellow, it must have been your guardian angel. What a chap you are for getting into silly messes. There seems to be a row whenever you arrive."

"This row is not Hemming's fault," protested Hicks. O'Rourke and Hemming laughed happily, for both felt that, together, they could pull out of the worst scrape ever invented.

"This gentleman would come," said Santosa, "and at a pace that nearly wore me to the bone."

Just then Smith held a tray toward the late arrivals.

"We left McPhey organizing a relief expedition to come by land," O'Rourke informed them, after quenching his thirst, "and the major, after doing his business, will bring a

party up by boat,—a company of two of government troops."

"Where did you leave the horses?" asked Hemming.

"Up the trail a little way, with a dusky admirer of yours," replied O'Rourke.

The besieged turned to the upper hall. Hicks gave a clear, though somewhat lengthy account of the rebellion. Santosa told them of his ride to Pernambuco and O'Rourke gave such news as he could of the outside world. Hemming, with his eyes on the dark blue square of the window, tried to formulate a plan by which five men might protect themselves and the property against five hundred a day or two longer. He knew that, if the colonel really intended violence, the crisis must soon come.

Santosa kicked off his boots and went to sleep on the floor. Hicks, seated with his rifle across his knee, also slipped away to the land of nod.

"If you have no objections," remarked O'Rourke, "I will take a bath. Hope the enemy won't make any hostile move while I'm splashing."

Hemming lit another cigar, and continued his watch by the open window. His arm pained him a good deal, so it was not hard to keep awake. He heard the guards tramping about, and now and then a few words of conversation, or a snatch of laughter. He heard music and shouting in the distance, and sometimes the faint and hurried clatter of hoofs. All the windows in the town seemed alight. A cool wind stole across the palms. His thoughts left the foolish, drunken men without, and the adventurers within, and journeyed, with the wind, far beyond the black palms and the little city. The report of a rifle brought him to his feet with a jump. Hicks also was out of his chair. Santosa was pulling on his boots. They hurried down-stairs followed by O'Rourke in a bath-towel.

"If it's a fight," said O'Rourke, "I'll dry myself and join you. If it's just skirmishing, I'll go back to my tub."

"They found Smith at his post in the billiard-room," said Hemming.

"Family quarrel, I believe, sir," replied the valet. "Two people have been talking English for quite a while, just a little way off that window. Then some one fired a shot, and they dusted. Think it was one of the guards, sir, who fired. Drunk, I suppose."

"What were they talking about?"

asked Hemming.

"Well, sir, I couldn't catch much of it," replied Smith, "but there was something said about Mr. Tetson's steamer, the Alligator, and about the firemen and engineers being prisoners. From what I could gather, she was captured about half a mile downstream to-night on her way up. One of the men said that he had got a job on her, because he had some important business to attend to up here."

"The devil!" exclaimed Hicks. "I bet they had a letter for me."

CHAPTER XIII.
The Unexpected Sailor.

Morning came, and with it the colonel, on Hemming's white stallion.

"I see," said he, in Portuguese, "that Captain Santosa has returned."

Hemming nodded. The colonel pressed a tremulous hand to a flushed forehead.

"Damn it," he cried, "I would not have done so. This place is the devil. The ice factory has shut down, and my drink has been warm for two days."

"Very interesting," replied the Englishman, "but if you have nothing more important to tell me, you will excuse me if I return to my bed."

The colonel raised his hand.

"One moment," said he.

Then he ordered his men out of earshot. He rolled a cigarette, and lit it with unseemly deliberation.

"I have been remarkably polite and friendly," he said, "but now I have your steamer, and the crew in prison, and unless, my dear fellow, you can agree—" He stopped, and removed his hat, the better to rub his brow. Hemming yawned.

"The army," continued the Brazilian, "is in a dangerous mood. Unless you give me five thousand milreis to-night,—only five thousand milreis,—I fear that I can restrain my brave soldiers no longer. But say nothing of it to Sonor Cuddlehead."

"Give me time to shave," said Hemming, "and then—"

"And then?" asked the colonel.

"Why, and then," repeated Hemming, "tell the little beasts not to be restrained any longer. As for the money—you may go to the devil for that."

The colonel sighed, and mopped his neck with his wilted handkerchief.

"It is too warm to fight," he said.

"You will find it so," retorted the Englishman.

The colonel looked up helplessly.

"My army," he sighed, "how can I restrain it? I hate to fight, and my head aches. But my army must have some money."

"I don't see my way to help you," said Hemming.

"The revolution is a failure unless you surrender and pay," cried the colonel. "Don't you understand, my dear Hemming? I do not like bloodshed, but—well, you have ruined our gentler plan."

"You might carry away the table silver," replied Hemming, "but there is no money. That has all gone to the coast. No doubt the house and all furniture, and even the forks and spoons, belong by now to the Brazilian government. It would be foolish

of you to damage government property for the sake of a few pounds. It would mean trouble, my friend."

The colonel sagged in his saddle like a bag of meal.

"I cannot argue," he said listlessly. "It is too hot to talk. My head aches—the devil take it. You should not have sent the money."

A touch of sun," suggested Hemming.

The fat Brazilian looked at the blue sky through bloodshot, half-closed eyes.

"The sun," he said, "why, yes, the sun. Damn the sun."

He swayed for a moment, and then slid in a heap to the ground. His men had been watching him, and now two of them ran forward and carried the yielding, flabby body to the nearest fountain.

"Sun and whiskey," commented Hemming. Then he returned to his bedroom and commenced to shave.

By this time the little garrison was astir. Hicks, with a sandwich in one hand and his rifle in the other, opened the shutters of one of the Tower windows and looked out. Not ten feet away stood a man in a blue cotton shirt, and dirty canvas trousers. The blotchy, grinning face and bowed legs struck him with an unpleasant sense of familiarity.

"Hallo, mister," said the stranger. "I'd like to 'ave a word wid one of you gent's."

"Which one?" asked Hicks.

"There you 'ave me," replied the man. "Ye see, I was drunk an' it were a dark night. Don't know as I'd know 'im without puttin' a few questions." He took a couple of steps toward the open window. Hicks put the remaining portion of the sandwich into his mouth, and shifted the rifle.

"Ease off that thar gun a p'int or two," cried the sailor.

Hicks had been taught, while young not to talk with his mouth full. So he made no answer.

"I ain't looking fer no trouble," said the seaman. "All I want is ter come aboard an' 'ave a quiet jaw wid you and yer mates, afore this blasted old craft 'awls down 'er colours."

"What about?" asked Hicks.

"That thar dimund, skipper," replied the man, with an evil grin.

Hicks changed colour. O'Rourke stuck his head out of the window. He glared at the man in the blue shirt for several seconds.

(To be continued.)

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Weary Willie—Vagrancy.—Philadelphia Press.

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