

Driftwood Spars

The Stories of a Man, a Boy, a Woman, and Certain Other People Who Strangely Met Upon the Sea of Life

Percival Christopher Wren

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DRIFTWOOD SPARS

THE STORIES OF A MAN, A BOY, A WOMAN, AND CERTAIN OTHER PEOPLE WHO STRANGELY MET UPON THE SEA OF LIFE

BY

CAPTAIN PERCIVAL CHRISTOPHER WREN, I.A.R.

AUTHOR OF "DEW AND MILDEW", "FATHER GREGORY", "SNAKE AND SWORD", ETC.

"Like driftwood spars which meet and pass
Upon the boundless ocean-plain,
So on the sea of life, alas!
Man nears man, meets, and leaves again"

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--MATTHEW ARNOLD

TO THE MEMORY OF MY BELOVED WIFE

NOTE.--This book was written in the year 1912

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IV. "MEET AND LEAVE AGAIN"

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN.

(Mainly concerning the early life of John Robin Ross-Ellison.)

Truth is stranger than fiction, and many of the coincidences of real life are truly stranger than the most daring imaginings of the fictionist.

Now, I, Major Michael Malet-Marsac, happened at the moment to be thinking of my dear and deeply lamented friend John Ross-Ellison, and to be pondering, for the thousandth time, his extraordinary life and more extraordinary death. Nor had I the very faintest notion that the Subedar-Major had ever heard of such a person, much less that he was actually his own brother, or, to be exact, his half-brother. You see I had known Ross-Ellison intimately as one only can know the man with whom one has worked, soldiered, suffered, and faced death. Not only had I known, admired and respected him--I had loved him. There is no other word for it; I loved him as a brother loves a brother, as a son loves his father, as the fighting-man loves the born leader of fighting-men: I loved him as Jonathan loved David. Indeed it was actually a case of "passing the love of women" for although he killed Cleopatra Dearman, the only woman for whom I ever cared, I fear I have forgiven him and almost forgotten her.

But to return to the Subedar-Major. "Peace, fool! Art blind as Ibrahim Mahmud the Weeper," growled that burly Native Officer as the zealous and over-anxious young sentry cried out and pointed to where, in the moonlight, the returning reconnoitring-patrol was to be seen as it emerged from the lye-bushes of the dry river-bed.

A recumbent comrade of the outpost sentry group sniggered.

My own sympathies were decidedly with the sentry, for I had fever, and "fever is another man". In any case, hours of peering, watching, imagining and waiting, for the attack that will surely come--and never comes--try even experienced nerves.

"And who was Ibrahim the Weeper, Subedar-Major Saheb?" I inquired of the redoubtable warrior as he joined me.

"He was my brother's enemy, Sahib," replied Mir Daoud Khan Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan, principal Native Officer of the 99th Baluch Light Infantry and member of the ruling family of Mekran Kot in far Kubristan.

"And what made him so blind as to be for a proverb unto you?"

"Just some little drops of water, Sahib, nothing more," replied the big man with a smile that lifted the curling moustache and showed the dazzling perfect teeth.

It was bitter, bitter cold--cold as it only can be in hot countries (I have never felt the cold in Russia as I have in India) and the khaki flannel shirt, khaki tunic, shorts and putties that had seemed so hot in the cruel heat of the day as we made our painful way across the valley, seemed miserably inadequate at night, on the windy hill-top. Moreover I was in the cold stage of a go of fever, and to have escaped sunstroke in the natural oven of that awful valley at mid-day seemed but the prelude to being frost-bitten on the mountain at midnight. Subedar-Major Mir Daoud Khan Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan appeared wholly unaffected by the 100 deg. variation in temperature, but then he had a few odd stone of comfortable fat and was bred to such climatic trifles. He, moreover, knew not fever, and, unlike me, had not experienced dysentery, malaria, enteric and pneumonia fairly recently.

"And had the hand of your brother anything to do with the little drops of water that made Ibrahim the Weeper so blind?" I asked.

"Something, Sahib," replied Mir Daoud Khan with a laugh, "but the hand of Allah had more than that of my brother. It is a strange story. True stories are sometimes far stranger than those of the bazaar tale-tellers whose trade it is to invent or remember wondrous tales and stories, myths, and legends."

"We have a proverb to that effect, Mir Saheb. Let us sit in the shelter of this rock and you shall tell me the story. Our eyes can work while tongue and ear play--or would you sleep?"

"_Nahin_, Sahib! Am I a Sahib that I should regard night as the time wholly sacred to sleep and day as the time when to sleep is sin? I will tell the Sahib the tale of the Blindness of Ibrahim Mahmud the Weeper, well knowing that he, a truth-speaker, will believe the truth spoken by his servant. To no liar would it seem possible.

"Know then, Sahib, that this brother of mine was not my mother's son, though the son of my father (Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan Mir Faquir Mahommed Afzul Khan), who was the youngest son of His Highness the Jam Saheb of Mekran Kot in Kubristan. And he, my father, was a great traveller, a restless wanderer, and crossed the Black Water many times. To Englistan he went, and without crossing water he also went to the capital of the Amir of Russia to say certain things, quietly, from the King of Islam, the Amir of Afghanistan. To where the big Waler horses come from he also went, and to where they take the camels for use in the hot and sandy northern parts."

"Yes, Australia" I remarked.

"Without doubt, if the Sahib be pleased to say it. And there, having taken many camels in a ship that he might sell them at a profit, he wedded a white woman--a woman of the race of the Highland soldiers of Englistan, such as are in this very Brigade."

"Married a Scotchwoman?"

"Without doubt. Of a low caste--her father being a drunkard and landless (though grandson of a Lord Sahib), living by horses and camels menially, out-casted, a jail-bird. Formerly he had carried the mail through the desert, a fine rider and brave man, but _sharab_[1] had loosened the thigh in the saddle and palsied hand and eye. On hearing this news, the Jam Saheb was exceeding wroth, for he had planned a good marriage for his son, and he arranged that the woman should die if my father, on whom be Peace, brought her to Mekran Kot. 'Tis but desert and mountain, Sahib, with a few big _jagirs_[2] and some villages, a good fort, a crumbling tower, and a town on the Caravan Road--but the Jam Saheb's words are clearly heard and for many miles.

[1] Wine.

[2] Estates.

"Our father, however, was not so foolish as to bring the woman to his home, for he knew that Pathan horse-dealers, camel-men, and traders would have taken the truth, and more than the truth, concerning the woman's social position to the gossips of Mekran Kot. And, apart from the fact that her father was a drunkard, landless, a jail-bird, out-casted by his caste-fellows, no father loves to see his son marry with a woman of another community, nor with any woman but her with whose father he has made his arrangements.

"So my father, bringing the fair woman, his wife, by ship to Karachi, travelled by the _relwey terain_ to Kot Ghazi and left her there in India, where she would be safe. There he left her with her _butcha_[3] my half-brother, and journeyed toward the setting sun to look upon the face of his father the Jam Saheb. And the Jam Saheb long turned his face from him and would not look upon him nor give him his blessing--and only relented when my father took to himself another wife, my mother, the lady of noble birth whom the Jam Saheb had desired for him--and sojourned for a season at Mekran Kot. But after I was born of this union (I am of pure and noble descent) his heart wearied, being with the fair woman at Kot Ghazi, for whom he yearned, and with her son, his own son, yet so white of skin, so blue of eye, the fairest child who ever had a Pathan father. Yea, my brother was even fairer than I, who, as the Huzoor knoweth, have grey eyes, and hair and beard that are not darkly brown.

[3] Baby.

"So my father began to make journeys to Kot Ghazi to visit the woman his first wife, and the boy his first-born. And she, who loved him much, and whom he loved, prevailed upon him to name my brother after _her_ father as well as after himself, the child's father (as is our custom) and so my brother was rightly called Mir Jan Rah-bin-Ras el-Isan Ilderim Dost Mahommed Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan."

"And what part of that is the name of his mother's father?" I asked, for the Subedar-Major's rapid utterance of the name conveyed nothing of familiar English or Scottish names to my mind.

"Jan Rah-bin-Ras el-Isan," replied Mir Daoud Khan; "that was her father's name, Sahib."

"Say it again, slowly."

"Jan Rah-bin-Ras el-Isan."

"I have it! Yes, but what?--John Robin Ross-Ellison? Good God! But I knew a John Robin Ross-Ellison when I was a Captain. He was Colonel of the Corps of which I was Adjutant, in fact--the Gungapur Volunteer Rifles.... By Jove! That explains a lot. John Robin Ross-Ellison!"

I was too incredulous to be astounded. It could not be.

"Han [4] Sahib, be shak! [5] Jan Rah-bin-Ras el-Isan Ilderim Dost Mahommed Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan was his name. And his mother called him Jan Rah-bin-Ras el-Isan and his father, Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan, called him Ilderim Dost Mahommed."

[4] Yes.

[5] Without doubt.

"H'm! A Scotch Pathan, brought up by an Australian girl in India, would be a rare bird--and of rare possibilities naturally," I murmured, while my mind worked quickly backward.

"My brother was unlike us in some things, Sahib. He was fond of the sharab called 'Whisky' and of dogs; he drank smoke from the cheroot after the fashion of the Sahib-log and not from the hookah nor the bidi; [6] he wore boots; he struck with the clenched fist when angered; and never did he squat down upon his heels nor sit cross-legged upon the ground. Yet he was true Pathan in many ways during his life, and he died as a Pathan should, concerning his honour (and a woman). Yea--and in his last fight, ere he was hanged, he killed more men with his long Khyber knife, single-handed against a mob, than ever did lone man before with cold steel in fair fight."

[6] Native cigarette.

Then it was so. And the Subedar-Major was John Robin Ross-Ellison's brother!

"He may have been foolishly kind to women, servants and dogs, and of a foolish type of honour that taketh not every possible advantage of the foe--but he was very brave, Huzoor, a strong enemy, and when he began he made an end, and if that same honour were affronted he killed his man. And yet he did not kill Ibrahim Mahmud the Weeper, who surely earned his death twice, and who tried to kill him in a manner most terrible to think of. No, he did not--but it shall be told.... And the white woman prevailed upon our father to make her man-child a Sahib and to let him go to the maktab [7] and madressah-tul-Islam [8] at Kot Ghazi, to learn the clerkly lore that gives no grip to the hand on the sword-hilt and lance-shaft nor to the thighs in the saddle, no skill to the fingers on the reins, no length of sight to the eye, no steadiness to the rifle and the lance, no understanding of the world and men and things. But our father corrected all this, that the learning might do him no harm, for oft-times he brought him to Mekran Kot (where my mother tried to poison him), and he took him across the Black Water and to Kabul and Calcutta and showed him the world. Also he taught him all he knew of the horse, the rifle, the sword, and the lance--which was no small matter. Thus, much of the time wasted at school was harmless, and what the boy lost through the folly of his mother was redeemed by the wisdom of his father. Truly are our mothers our best friends and worst enemies. Why, when I was but a child my mother gave me money and bade me go prove--but I digress. Well, thus my brother grew up not ignorant of the things a man should know if he is to be a man and not a babu, but the woman, his mother, wept sore whenever he was taken from her, and gave my father trouble and annoyance as women ever do. And when, at last, she begged that the boy might enter the service of the Sirkar as a wielder of the

pen in an office in Kot Ghazi, and strive to become a leading _munshi_[9] and then a Deputy-Saheb, a _babu_ in very fact, my father was wroth, and said the boy would be a warrior--yea, though he had to die in his first skirmish and ere his beard were grown. Then the woman wept and wearied my father until it seemed better to him that she should die and, being at peace, bring peace. No quiet would he have at Mekran Kot from my mother and his father, the Jam Saheb, while the woman lived, nor would she herself allow him quiet at Kot Ghazi. And was she not growing old and skinny moreover? And so he sent my brother to Mekran Kot--and the woman died, without scandal. So my brother dwelt thenceforward in Mekran Kot, knowing many things, for he had passed a great _imtahan_[10] at Bombay and won a _sertifcut_[11] thereby, whereof the Jam Saheb was very pleased, for the son of the Vizier had also gone to a _madresseh_ and won a _sertifcut_, and it was time the pride of the Vizier and his son were abated.

[7] School.

[8] Mohammedan High School.

[9] Clerk.

[10] Examination.

[11] Certificate.

"Now the son of the Vizier, Mahmud Shahbaz, was Ibrahim--and a mean mangy pariah cur this Ibrahim Mahmud was, having been educated, and he hated my brother bitterly by reason of the _sertifcut_ and on account of a matter concerning a dancing-girl, one of those beautiful fat Mekranis, and, by reason of his hatred and envy and jealousy, my mother made common cause with him, she also desiring my brother's death, in that her husband loved this child of another woman, an alien, his first love, better than he loved hers. But _I_ bore him no ill-will, Huzoor. I loved him and admired his deeds.

"Many attempts they made, but though my mother was clever and Ibrahim Mahmud and his father the Vizier were unscrupulous, my brother was in the protection of the Prophet. Moreover he was much away from Mekran Kot, being, like our father, a great traveller and soon irked by whatever place he might be in. And, one time, he returned home, having been to Germany on secret service (a thing he often did before he became a Sahib) and to France and Africa on a little matter of rifles for Afghanistan and the Border, and spoke to us of that very Somaliland to which this very _pultan_, the 99th Baluch Light Infantry, went in 1908 (was it?), and how the English were losing prestige there and would have to send troops or receive _boondah_[12] and the blackened face from him they called the Mad Mullah. And yet another time he returned from India bringing a Somali boy, a black-faced youth, but a good Mussulman, whom, some time before, he had known and saved from death in Africa, and now had most strangely encountered again. And this Somali lad--who was not a _hubshi_, a Woolly One, not a Sidi[13] slave--saved my brother's life in his turn. I said he was not a slave--but in a sense he was, for he asked nothing better than to sit in the shadow of my brother throughout his life; for he loved my brother as the Huzoor's dogs love their masters, yea--he would rather have had blows from my brother than gold from another. He it was who saved Mir Jan Rah-bin-Ras el-Isan from the terrible death prepared for him by Ibrahim Mahmud. It was during this visit to Mekran Kot that Mahmud Shahbaz, the Vizier, announced that he was about to send his learned son, the dog Ibrahim, to Englistan to become English-made first-class Pleader--what they called--' _Barishtar-at-Lar_' is it not, Sahib?"

[12] An insulting and contemptuous gesture.

[13] A class of negroes, much employed as sailors and boatmen, and called Seedebeboys.

"That's it, Mir Saheb," replied I, sitting alert with chattering teeth and shivering ague-stricken body. "Barrister-at Law.... Sit as close to

me as you can, for warmth.... Hark! Is that a signal?" as a long high wavering note rose from the dry river-bed before us and wailed lugubriously upon the night, rising and falling in mournful cadence.

"'Twas a genuine jackal-cry, Huzoor. One can always tell the imitation if jackals have sung one's lullaby from birth--though most Pathans can deceive white ears in the matter.... Well, this made things no pleasanter, for Ibrahim crowed like the dung-hill cock he was, and boasted loudly. Also my mother urged him to do a deed ere he left Mekran Kot for so long a sojourn in Belait.[14] And to her incitements and his own inclination and desires was added that which made revenge and my brother's death the chiefest things in all the world to Ibrahim Mahmud, and it happened thus.... But do I weary the Sahib with my babble?"

[14] Europe.

"Nay--nay--far from it, Mir Saheb," replied I. "The sentry of talk challenges the approaching skirmishers of sleep. The thong of narrative drives off the dogs of tedium. Tell on." And in point of fact I was now too credulous to be anything but astounded.... _John Robin Ross-Ellison_!

"Well, one day, my brother and I went forth to shoot sand-grouse, tuloor,[15] chikor,[16] chinkara[17] and perchance ibex, leaving behind this black body-servant Moussa Isa, the Somali boy, because he was sick. And it was supposed that we should not return for a week at the least. But on the third day we returned, my brother's eyes being inflamed and sore and he fearing blindness if he remained out in the desert glare. This is a common thing, as the Sahib knoweth, when dust and sun combine against the eyes of those who have read over-many books and written over-much with the steel pen upon white paper, and my brother was somewhat prone to this trouble in the desert if he exhausted himself with excessive _shikar_ and--other matters. And this angered him greatly. Yet it was all ordained by Allah for the undoing of that unclean dog Ibrahim Mahmud--for, returning and riding on his white camel (a far-famed pacer of speed and endurance) under the great gateway of the Jam's fort--high enough for a camel-rider to pass unstooping and long enough for a _relway_-tunnel--he came upon Mahmud Ibrahim and his friends and followers (for he had many such, who thought he might succeed his father as Vizier) doing a thing that enraged my brother very greatly. Swinging at the end of a cord tied to his hands, which were bound behind his back, was the boy Moussa Isa the Somali, apparently dead, for his eyes were closed and he gave no sign of pain as Ibrahim's gang of pimps, panders, bullies and _budmashes_[18] kept him swinging to and fro by blows of _lathis_[19] and by kicks, while Ibrahim and his friends, at a short distance, strove to hit the moving body with stones. I suppose the agony of hanging forward from the arms, and the blows of staff and stone, had stunned the lad--who had offended Ibrahim, it appeared, by preventing him from entering my brother's house--probably to poison his water-_lotah_[20] and _gurrah_[21]--at the door of which he, Moussa Isa, lay sick. My brother, Mir Jan, sprang from his camel without waiting for the driver to make it kneel, and going up to Ibrahim, he struck him with his closed, but empty, hand. Not with the slap that stings and angers, he struck him, but with the thud that stuns and injures, upon the mouth, removing certain of his teeth,--such being his anger and his strength. Rising from the ground and plucking forth his knife, Ibrahim sprang at my brother who, unarmed, straightway smote him senseless, and that is talked of in Mekran Kot to this day. Yea--senseless. Placing the thumb upon the knuckles of the clenched fingers, he smote at the chin of Ibrahim, and laid him, as one dead, upon the earth. Straight to the front from the shoulder and not downwards nor swinging sideways he struck, and it was as though Ibrahim had been shot. The Sahib being English will believe this, but many Baluchis and Pathans do not. They cannot believe it, though to me Subedar-Major Mir Daoud Khan Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan of the 99th Baluch

Light Infantry of the Army of the King Emperor of India, they pretend that they do, when I tell of that great deed.... Then my brother loosed Moussa Isa with his own hand, saying that even as he had served Ibrahim Mahmud so would he serve any man who injured a hair of the head of his body-servant. And Moussa Isa clave to my brother yet the more, and when a great Sidi slave entered the room of my brother by night, doubtless hired by Ibrahim Mahmud to slay him, Moussa Isa, grappling with him, tore out his throat with his teeth, though stabbed many times by the Sidi, ere my brother could light torch or wick to tell friend from foe. Whether he were thief or hired murderer, none could say--least of all the Sidi when Moussa Isa, at my brother's bidding, loosed his teeth from the man's throat. But all men held that it was the work of Ibrahim, for, on recovering his senses that day of the blow, he had walked up to my brother Mir Jan and said:--

[15] Bustard.

[16] A kind of partridge.

[17] Gazelle.

[18] Bad characters.

[19] Long staves.

[20] Brass cup or vase.

[21] Basin or pot.

"For that blow will I have a great revenge, O Jan Rah-bin-Ras el-Isan Ilderim Dost Mahommed Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan, descendant of Mirs and of _mlecca_ dogs, this year or next year, or ten years hence, or when thou art old, or upon thy first-born. By the sacred names of God, by the Beard of the Prophet, by the hilt and blade of this my knife, and by the life of my oldest son, I swear to have a vengeance on thee that shall turn men pale as they whisper it. _And may Allah smite me blind_ if I do not unto thee a thing of which children yet unborn shall speak with awe.'

"Thus spake Ibrahim, son of Mahmud, for though a dog, a mangy pariah cur, he was still a Pathan.

"But my brother laughed in his face and said but 'It would seem that I too have tortured a slave' whereat Ibrahim repeated again 'Yea--_may Allah smite me blind!_'

"And something of this coming to the ears of our father, now heir to the Jam of Mekran Kot, as his brothers were dead (in the big Border War they died), he prayed the Jam Saheb to hasten the departure of the Vizier's cub, and also told the Vizier that he would surely cut out his tongue if aught befell Mir Jan. So the Vizier sent Ibrahim to Kot Ghazi on business of investing moneys--wrung by knavery, doubtless, from litigant suitors, candidates, criminals, and the poor of Mekran Kot. And shortly after, the Jam Saheb heard of a new kind of gun that fires six of the fat cartridges such as are used for the shooting of birds, without reloading; and he bade Mir Jan who understood all things, and the ways of the European gun-shop at Kot Ghazi, to hasten forthwith and procure him a couple, and if none were in Kot Ghazi to send a _tar_[22] to Bombay for them, or even, if necessary, to Englistan, though at a cost of two rupees a word. With such a gun the Jam hoped to get better _shikar_ when sitting on his camel and circling round the foolish crouching grouse or _tuloor_, and firing at them as they sat. He thought he might fire twice or thrice at them sitting, and again twice or thrice at the remnant flying, and perchance hit some on the wing, after the wonderful manner of the Sahibs. So he sent my brother, knowing him to be both clever and honest and understanding the speech and ways of the English most fully.

[22] Telegram.

"Now it is many days' journey, Sahib, across the desert and the

mountains, from Mekran Kot in Kubristan to Kot Ghazi in India, but at Kot Ghazi is a fine bungalow, the property of the Jam Saheb, and there all travellers from his house may sojourn and rest after their long and perilous travel.

"Taking me and Mir Abdul Haq and Mir Hussein Ali and many men and servants, among whom was the body-servant, the boy Moussa Isa Somali, he set forth, a little depressed that we heard not the cry of the partridge in the fields of Mekran Kot as we started--not exactly a bad omen, but lacking a good one. And sure enough, ere we won to Kot Ghazi, his eyes became red and inflamed, very sore and painful to use. So, he put the tail of his _puggri_[23] about his face and rode all day from sun-rise to sun-set in darkness, his camel being driven by Abdulali Gulamali Bokhari--the same who later rose to fame and honour as an outlaw and was hanged at Peshawar after a brave and successful career. And being arrived, in due course, at Kot Ghazi, before entering the bungalow belonging to the Jam Saheb, he knelt his camel at the door of the shop of a European _hakim_--in English a--er--"

[23] Turban.

"Chemist, Mir Saheb," I suggested.

"Doubtless, since your honour says it--of a _kimmish_, and entering, to the Eurasian dog therein said in English, of which he knew everything (and taught me much, as your honour knows), 'Look you. I need lotion for my eyes, eye medicine, and a bath for them' and the man mixed various waters and poured them into a blue bottle with red labels, very beautiful to see, and wrote upon it. Also he gave my brother a small cup of glass, shaped like the mouth of the _pulla_ fish or the eye-socket of a man. And my brother, knowing what to do, used the things then and there, to the wonder of Abdul Haq and Hussein Ali, pouring the liquor into the glass cup, and holding it to his eyes, and with back-thrown head washing the eye and soothing it.

"Shahbas!"[24] quoth he. 'It is good,' and anon we proceeded to the gun-shop and then to the bungalow belonging to the Jam Saheb. And lo and behold, here we discovered the dog Ibrahim Mahmud, and my brother twisted the knife of memory in the wound of insult by ordering him to quit the room he occupied and seek another, since Mir Jan intended the room for his body-servant, Moussa Isa Somali--the servant of a Mir being more deserving of the room than the son of a Vizier! This was unwise, but my brother's heart was too great to fear (or to fathom) the guile of such a serpent as Ibrahim.

[24] Bravo! Excellent!

"And when he had bathed and prayed, eaten and drunk and rested, my brother again anointed his eyes with the liquid--which though only like water, was strong to soothe and heal. And our servants and people watched him doing this with wonder and admiration, and the news of it spread to the servants of Ibrahim Mahmud, who told their master of this cleverness of Mir Jan,--and Ibrahim, after a while, sent a message and a present to my brother, humbling himself, and asking that he too might see this thing.

"And Mir Jan, perhaps a little proud of his English ways, sat upon his _charpai_[25] and bathed his eyes in the little bath, until, wearying of the trouble of pouring back the liquid into the bottle, he would press the bottle itself to his eye and throw back his head. So his eyes were quickly eased of pain, and in the evening we all went forth to enjoy.

[25] Native cot or bed.

"On his return to the room, Mir Jan flung himself, weary, upon his _charpai_ and Moussa Isa lay across the doorway.

"In the morning my brother awoke and sitting on the _charpai_, took up the blue bottle, drew the cork, and raised the bottle towards his eyes. As he did this, Moussa Isa entered, and knowing not why he did so, sprang at his master and dashed the bottle from his hand. It fell to the ground but broke not, the floor being _dhurrie_[26]-covered.

[26] Carpet.

"In greatest amazement Mir Jan glanced from Moussa Isa to the bottle, clenching his hand to strike the boy--when behold! the very floor bubbled and smoked beneath the touch of the liquid as it ran from the bottle. By the Beard of the Prophet, that stone floor bubbled and smoked like water and the _dhurrie_ was burnt! Snatching up the bottle my brother dropped drops from it upon the blade of his knife, upon the leather of his boots, upon paint and brass and clothing--and behold it was liquid fire, burning and corroding all that it touched! To me he called, and, being shown these things, I could scarce believe--and then I cried aloud 'Ibrahim Mahmud! Thine enemy!... Oh, my brother,--thine eyes!' and I remembered the words of Ibrahim, '_a vengeance that shall turn men pale as they whisper it--a thing of which children yet unborn shall speak with awe_' and we rushed to his room,--to find it empty. He and his best camel and its driver were gone, but all his people and servants and _oont-wallahs_[27] were in the _serai_[28] and said they knew not where he was, but had received a _hookum_[29] over-night to set out that day for Mekran Kot. And, catching up a pariah puppy, I re-entered the house and dropped one drop from the blue bottle into its eye. Sahib, even _I_ pitied the creature and slew it quickly with my knife. And it was this that Ibrahim Mahmud had intended for the blue eyes of my beautiful brother. This was the vengeance of which men should speak in whispers. Those who saw and heard that puppy would speak of it in whispers indeed--or not at all. I felt sick and my fingers itched to madness for the throat of Ibrahim Mahmud. Had I seen him then, I would have put out his eyes with my thumbs. Nay--I would have used the burning liquid upon him as he had designed it should be used by my brother.

[27] Camel-men.

[28] Halting-enclosure, rest-house.

[29] Order.

"Hearing Mir Jan's voice, I hurried forth, and found that his white pacing-camel was already saddled and that he sat in the front seat, prepared to drive. 'Up, Daoud Khan' he cried to me 'we go a-hunting'--and I sprang to the rear saddle even as the camel rose. 'Lead on, Moussa Isa, and track as thou hast never tracked before, if thou wouldst live,' said he to the Somali, a noted _paggi_[30] even among the Baluch and Sindhi _paggis_ of the police at Peshawar and Kot Ghazi. 'I can track the path of yesterday's bird through the air and of yesterday's fish through the water,' answered the black boy; 'and I would find this Ibrahim by smell though he had blinded _me_', and he led on. Down the Sudder Bazaar he went unfaltering, though hundreds of feet of camels, horses, bullocks and of men were treading its dust. As we passed the shop of the European _hakim_, yes, the _kimmish_, my brother leapt down and entering the shop asked questions. Returning and mounting he said to me: "Tis as I thought. Hither he came last night, and, saying he was science-knowing failed B.Sc., demanded certain acids, that, being mixed, will eat up even gold--which no other acid can digest, nor even assail...."

[30] Tracker.

"_Aqua Regia_, or vitriol, I believe," I murmured, still marvelling ...
Ross-Ellison!

"Doubtless, if your honour is pleased to say so. 'He must have poured these acids into the bottle while we were abroad last night,' continued my brother. 'Oh, the dog! The treacherous dreadful dog!... 'Twas in a good hour that I saved Moussa Isa,' and indeed I too blessed that Somali, so mysteriously moved by Allah to dash the bottle from my brother's hand.

"Think you that Ibrahim Mahmud bribed Moussa and that he repented as he saw you about to anoint your eyes with the acid?' I asked of my brother.

"Nay--Moussa was with me until I returned,' replied he, 'and returning, I put the bottle beneath my pillow. Besides, Ibrahim had fled ere we returned to the bungalow. Moreover, Moussa would lose his tongue ere he would tell me a lie, his eyes ere he would see me suffer, his hand ere he would take a bribe against me. No--Allah moved his heart--rewarding me for saving his life at the risk of mine own, when he lay beneath a lion,--or else it is that the black dog hath the instincts of a dog and knows when evil threatens what it loves.' And indeed it is a wonderful thing and true; and Moussa Isa never knew how he knew, but said his arm moved of itself and that he wondered at himself as he struck the bottle from his master's hand. And, in time, we left the city and followed the road and found that Ibrahim was fleeing to Mekran Kot, doubtless to be far away when the thing happened, and also to get counsel and money from his father and my mother, should suspicion fall on him and flight be necessary. And anon even untrained eyes could see where he had left the Caravan Road and taken the shorter route whereby camels bearing no heavy load could come by steeper passes and dangerous tracks in shorter time to Mekran Kot, provided the rider bore water sufficient--for there was no oasis nor well. 'Enough, Moussa Isa, thou mayest return, I can track the camel of Ibrahim now that he hath left the road,' quoth my brother, breaking a long silence; but Moussa Isa, panting as he ran before, replied: 'I come, Mir Saheb. I shall not fall until mine eyes have beheld thy vengeance--in which perchance, _I_ may take a part. He called me "_Hubshi_".'

"He hath many hours' start, Moussa,' said my brother, 'and his camel is a good one. He will not halt and sleep for many hours even though he suppose me dead!'

"I can run for a day; for a day and a night I can run,' replied the Somali, 'and I can run until the hour of thy vengeance cometh. He called _me_ "_Hubshi_" ... and he ran on.

"Sahib, for the whole of that day he ran beside the fast camel, my brother drawing rein for no single minute, and when, at dawn, I awoke from broken slumber in the saddle, Moussa Isa was running yet! And then we heard the cry of the partridge and knew that our luck was good.

"He may have left the track,' quoth my brother soon after dawn, 'but I think he is making for Mekran Kot, to get money and documents and to escape again ere news of his deed--or the suspicion of him--reaches the Jam Saheb. We may have missed him, but I could not halt and wait for daylight. He cannot be far ahead of us now. This camel shall live on milk and meal and wheaten bread, finest _bhoosa_[31] and chosen young green shoots, and buds, and leaves--and he shall have a collar of gold with golden bells, and reins of silk, and hanging silken tassels, and he shall----" and then Moussa Isa gave a hoarse scream and pointed to the sky-line above which rose a wisp of smoke.

[31] Bran.

"It is he,' said my brother, and within the hour we beheld the little bush-tent of Ibrahim Mahmud (made with cloths thrown over a bent bush) and his camel, near to which, his _oont-wallah_ Suleiman Abdulla had

kindled a fire and prepared food. (Later this liar swore that he made the fire smoke with green twigs to guide the pursuit,—a foolish lie, for he knew not what Ibrahim had done, nor anything but that his master hastened.)

"Moussa Isa staggered to where Ibrahim Mahmud lay asleep, looked upon his face, and fell, seeming to be about to die.

"Making a little _chukker_[32] round, my brother drove the camel between Suleiman and the tent and made it kneel.

[32] Circuit, course.

"_Salaam aleikoum_[33] Mir Saheb,' said Suleiman, and my brother replied:--

[33] A Mussulman greeting.

"Salaam. Tend thou my camel and prepare food for me, and my brother, and my servant. And if thou wouldst not hang in a pig's skin, be wise and wary, and keep eyes, ears, and mouth closed.' And we drank water.

"Then, treading softly, we went to the tent where Ibrahim Mahmud slept and sat us down where we could look upon his face. There he slept, Sahib, peacefully, like a little child!--having left Mir Jan to die the death 'whereof men should speak with awe,' as he had threatened.

"We sat beside him and watched. Saying nothing, we sat and watched. An hour passed and an hour again. For another hour without moving or speaking we sat and Moussa Isa joined us and watched.

"Twas sweet, and I licked my lips and hoped he might not wake for hours, although I hungered. The actual revenge is very, very sweet, Sahib, but does it exceed the joy of watching the enemy as he lies wholly at your mercy, lies in the hollow of your hand and is your poor foolish plaything,—knave made fool at last? Like statues we sat, moving not our eyes from his face, and we were very happy.

"Then, suddenly, he awoke and his eyes fell on my brother--and he shrieked aloud, as the hare shrieks when hound or jackal seize her; as the woman shrieks when the door goes down before the raiders and the thatch goes up in flame.

"Thus he shrieked.

"We moved not.

"Why cryest thou, dear brother?' asked Mir Jan in a soft, sweet voice.

"I--I--thought thou wast a spirit, come to--' he faltered, and my brother answered:--

"And why should _I_ be a spirit, my brother? Am I not young and strong?'

"I dreamed,' quavered Ibrahim.

"I too have had a dream,' said my brother.

"Twas but a dream, Mir Jan. I will arise and prepare some--' replied Ibrahim, affecting ease of manner but poorly, for he had no real nerve.

"Thou wilt not arise yet, Ibrahim Mahmud,' murmured my brother gently.

"Why?'

"'Because thine eyes are somewhat wearied and I purpose to wash them with my magic water,' and as he held up the blue bottle with the red label Ibrahim screamed like a girl and flung himself forward at my brother's feet, shrieking and praying for mercy:--

"'_No, No!_' he howled; 'not _that!_ Mercy, O kingly son of Kings! I will give thee--"

"'Nay, my brother,--what is this?' asked Mir Jan softly, with kind caressing voice. 'What is all this? I do but propose to bathe thine eyes with this same magic water wherewith I bathed mine own, the day before yesterday. Thou didst see me do it--thou didst watch me do it.'

"'Mercy--most noble Mir! Have pity, 'twas not I. Mercy!' he screamed.

"'But, Ibrahim, dear brother' expostulated Mir Jan, 'why this objection to my magic water? It gave me great relief and my eyes were quickly healed. Thine own need care--for see--water gushes from them even now.'

"The dog howled--like a dog--and offered lakhs of rupees.

"'But surely, my brother, what gave me relief will give thee relief? Thou knowest how my eyes were soothed and healed, and that it is a potent charm, and surely _it is not changed_?' Mir Jan Rah-bin-Ras el-Isan was all Pathan then, Sahib, whatever he may have been at other times. I could not have played more skilfully with the dog myself.

"At last, turning to Moussa Isa he said:--

"'Our brother seemeth distraught, and perchance will do himself some injury if he be not tended with care and watched over. Bind him, to make sure that he hurt not himself in this strange madness that hath o'ertaken him, making him fancy harm even in this healing balm. Bind him tightly.' And at that, the treacherous, murderous dog found his manhood for a moment and made to spring to his feet and fight, but as he tried to rise, Moussa Isa kicked him in the face and fell upon him.

"'Shall I serve thee as I served thy _Hubshi_ hireling, thy Sidi slave?' he grunted and showed his sharp strong teeth.

"'Perchance 'twould cure him of his madness if we bled the poor soul a little,' cooed my brother, putting his hand to his cummerbund where was his long Afghan knife, and Ibrahim Mahmud lay still. Picking up his big, green turban from beside his rug, I bound his arms to his sides and then, going forth, got baggage-cords from the _oont-wallah_ and likewise his _puggri_, and Moussa Isa bound his feet and hands and knees.

"Then my brother called Suleiman Abdulla the _oont-wallah_, and bade Moussa Isa sleep--which he did with his knife in his hand, having bound his foot to that of Ibrahim.

"'Look, thou dog,' said Mir Jan to Suleiman, 'should this rat-flea escape, thy soul and thy body shall pay, for I will put out thine eyes with glowing charcoal and hang thee in the skin of a pig, if I have to follow thee to Cabul to do it--yea, to Balkh or Bokhara. See to it.' And Suleiman put his head upon my brother's feet, poured dust upon it and said 'So be it, Mir Saheb. Do this and more if he escape,' and we slept awhile.

"Anon we awoke, ate, drank and smoked, my brother smoking the cheroots of the Sahib-log and I having to be content with the _bidis_ of Suleiman as there was no hookah.

"And when we had rested we went and sat before the face of Ibrahim and

gazed upon him long, without words.

"And he wept. Like a woman he wept, and said 'Slay me, Mir Saheb, and have done. Slay me with thy knife.'

"But my brother replied softly and sweetly:--

"What wild words are these, Ibrahim? Why should I slay thee? Some matter of a quarrel there was concerning thy torturing of my servant--but I am not of them that bear grudges and nurse hatred. In no anger slay thee with my knife? Why should I injure thee? I do most solemnly swear, Ibrahim, that I will do thee no wilful hurt. I will but anoint thine eyes with the contents of this bottle just as I did anoint my own. Why should I slay thee or do thee hurt?"

"And I chuckled aloud. He was all Pathan then, Sahib, and handling his enemy right subtly.

"And Ibrahim wept yet more loudly and said again:--

"Slay me and have done.' Then my brother gave him the name by which he was known ever after, saying:--

"Why should I slay thee, Ibrahim, the Weeper?' and he produced the bottle and held it above that villain's face.

"His screams were music to me, and in the joy of his black heart Moussa Isa burst into some strange chant in his own Somali tongue.

"Nay, our friends must hear thy eloquence and songs, Ibrahim,' said my brother, after he had held the bottle tilted above the face of the Weeper for some minutes. "Twere greedy to keep this to ourselves.'

"Again and again that day my brother would say: 'Nay--I cannot wait longer. Poor Ibrahim's weeping eyes must be relieved at once,' and he would produce the bottle, uncork it, and hold it over Ibrahim's face as he writhed and screamed and twisted in his bonds.

"What ails thee, Ibrahim the Weeper?' he would coo. 'Thou knowest it is a soothing lotion. Didst thou not see me use it on mine own eyes?' Yea, he was true Pathan then, and I loved him the more.

"A hundred times that day he did thus and enjoyed the music of Ibrahim's screams, and by night the dog was a little mad. So, lest we defeat ourselves and lose something of the sport our souls loved, we left him in peace that night, if 'peace' it is to know that the dreadful death you have prepared for another now overhangs you. Moussa Isa kept watch through the night. And in the morning came Abdul Haq and Hussein Ali and the servants and oont-wallahs, save a few who had been sent with laden camels by the Caravan Road. And, when all had eaten and rested, my brother held durbar, [34] having placed Ibrahim Mahmud in the midst, bound, and looking like one who has long lain upon a bed of sickness.

[34] Meeting.

"This durbar proceeded with the greatest solemnity and no man smiled when my brother said: 'And now, touching the matter of my beloved and respected Ibrahim Mahmud, son of our grandfather's Vizier,--the learned Ibrahim, who shortly goeth (perhaps) across the black water to Englitan to become a great and famous pleader,--can any suggest the cause of the strange and distressing madness that hath come upon him so suddenly? For, behold, I have to keep him bound lest he do himself an injury, and constantly he crieth, "Kill me, Mir Saheb, kill me with thy knife and make an end." And when I go to bathe his poor eyes, so sore and red with weeping, behold he shrieketh like the relwey terain at Peshawar and

weepeth like a woman.'

"And Abdul Haq spoke and said: 'Is it so indeed, Mir Saheb?' And my brother said: 'It is so;' and Hussein Ali said: 'Is it so indeed, Mir Saheb?' And my brother said 'It is so;' and all men said the same thing gravely and my brother made the same answer.

"Sahib, I shall never forget the joy of that _durbar_ with Ibrahim the Weeper there, like a trapped rat, in the midst, looking from face to face for mercy.

"'Yea--it is so. It is indeed so,' again said my brother when all had asked. 'You shall see--and hear. Behold I will drop but one drop of my soothing lotion into each of his eyes!' ... and he turned to Ibrahim the Weeper, with the uncorked bottle in his hand--the bottle from which came forth smoke, though it was cold. But Ibrahim rolled screaming, and strove to thrust his face into the ground. 'It is strange indeed,' mused Abdul Haq, stroking his beard, while none smiled. 'Strange, in every truth. But thou hast not dropped the drops, Mir Saheb. Perchance he will arise and thank thee and be cured of this madness when he feels the healing anointment that so benefited thine own eyes. Oh, the cleverness of these European _hakims_,' and he raised hands and eyes in wonder as he sighed piously.

"'Yea--perchance he will,' agreed my brother and bade Moussa Isa hold him by the ears with his face to the sky while the _oont-wallahs_ kept him on his back. And Ibrahim's body heaved up those four strong men as it bent like a bow and bucked like a horse, while my brother removed the cork once again.

"His shrieks delighted my soul.

"'Tis a marvellous mystery to me,' sighed my brother. 'He knows how innocent and healing are these waters and yet he refuses them. He saw me use them on my own eyes--and surely the medicine is unchanged?' And he balanced the bottle sideways above the face of his enemy and allowed the devilish acid to well up and impend upon the very edge of the neck of the bottle, as he murmured: 'But a single drop for each eye! More I cannot spare--to-day. Perchance a drop for each ear to-morrow, and one for his tongue on the next day--if his madness spare him to us for so long.'

"Then, as Ibrahim, foaming, shrieked curses and cried aloud to Allah and Mohammed his Prophet, he said: 'Nay, this is ingratitude. He shall not have them to-day at all, but shall endure without them till sunrise to-morrow. Take him yonder, and lay him on that flat rock, bareheaded in the sun, that his tears may be dried for him.' ...

"Yea! I found no fault with my brother then, Sahib.

"He was a master in his revenge. And the _durbar_ murmured its applause, and praised and thanked my brother. Not one of them but had suffered at the hands of Mahmud Shahbaz, his father, the Vizier, or at the insolent hands of this his own son.... Then Mir Jan called to Moussa Isa, his body-servant, and said unto him:--

"'Hear, Moussa Isa, and make no tiny error if thou wouldst see to-morrow's sun and go to Paradise anon. Feed that carrion well and pretend to be filled with the pity that is the child of avarice. Ask what he will give thee to help him to escape. Affect to haggle long, and speak much of the difficulties and dangers of the deed. At length agree to put him on my fast camel this night at moon-rise, if thou art left as his guard and we are wrapt in slumber. Play thy part well, and show thy remorse at cheating thy master--even for a lakh[35] of rupees--yea, and show fear of what will happen to thee, and pretend distrust of him. At

length succumb again, and as the moon just shows above the mountains untie his bonds and do thus and thus--' and he whispered instructions while a light shone in the eyes of Moussa Isa, the Somali, and a smile played about his mouth.

[35] One hundred thousand.

"And Mir Jan told the matter that night to all and gave instructions.

"Moussa Isa meanwhile did everything as he was bid and, while we ate, he carried his own food to the Weeper, as though secretly.

"Long and merrily we feasted, pretending to drink to excess of the forbidden *_sharab_*, singing and behaving like toddy-laden coolies, and in time we staggered to our carpets, put on our *_poshteens_*, [36] pulled rugs over our heads and slept--not.

[36] Warm sheep-skin coats.

"From under his rug my brother kept watch. Shortly after, Moussa Isa arose from beside Ibrahim the Weeper and crawled like a snake to where the camels knelt in a ring, and there he saddled the swift white camel of Mir Jan, and I heard its bubbling snarl as he made it rise, and led it over near to where Ibrahim lay. There he made it kneel again, and, throwing the nose-rope over its head, he laid the loop thereof, with his stick, on the front seat of the saddle. This done, he crept back to Ibrahim Mahmud and feigned sleep awhile. Anon, none stirring, he began to untie with his teeth and knife-point the cords that bound the captive, and when, at length, the man was free, Moussa chafed his stiffened arms and legs, his hands and feet.

"When, after a time, Ibrahim tried to rise, he fell again and again, and the moon not yet having risen above the mountains, the avaricious-seeming Moussa again massaged and chafed the limbs of the villain Ibrahim, who earnestly prayed Moussa Isa to lay him on the saddle as he was--and depart ere some sleeper awoke. But Moussa said 'twould be vain to start until Ibrahim could sit in the saddle and hold on, and he continued to rub his arms and legs.

"But when the edge of the moon shone above the mountain, Moussa placed the arm of Ibrahim around his neck, put his arm round Ibrahim's body, and staggered with him to where the racing-camel knelt. After a few steps the strength of Ibrahim seemed to return, and, by the time they reached the camel, he could totter on his feet and stand without help. With some difficulty Moussa hoisted him into the rear saddle. Having done so, he thrust the stirrups upon his feet and commenced to unwind his *puggri*.

"'Mount, mount!' whispered Ibrahim.

"'Nay, I must tie thee on,' replied Moussa Isa and, knotting one end of the *_puggri_* to the back of the saddle, he passed it twice round Ibrahim and tied the other end near the first. This done, and Ibrahim being in a frantic fever of haste and fear and hope, Moussa Isa commenced to bargain, Ibrahim agreeing to every demand and promising even more.

"'Anything! anything!' he shrieked beneath his breath. 'Bargain as we go. You cannot ask too much. I and my father will strip ourselves for thee.' ... And having tortured him awhile, Moussa sprang into the saddle and brought the camel to its feet--as my brother's voice said, softly and sweetly:--

"'Wouldst thou leave us, O Ibrahim, my friend?' and my own chimed in:--

"'Could'st thou leave us, O Ibrahim, my brother's friend?' and the voice

of Abdul Haq followed with:--

"Shouldst thou leave us, O Ibrahim, my cousin's friend?' and Hussein Ali's voice added:--

"Do not leave us, O Ibrahim, my friend's friend.' Like the wolf-pack, every other voice in the camp in turn implored:--

"Never leave us, O Ibrahim, our master's friend.'

"Go! go!' shrieked Ibrahim, kicking with his heels at the camel's sides and striking at Moussa Isa, as that obedient youth, raising his stick, caused the camel to bound forward, and drove it, swiftly trotting--to where my brother lay, and there made it kneel again....

"Dost thou sleep, Huzoor?"

"Nay, Mir Saheb," I replied, "nor would I till your tale be done and I have seen the return of another reconnoitring-patrol. We might then take turns.... Nay, I will not sleep at all. 'Tis too near dawn--when things are wont to happen in time of war."

Little did the worthy Subedar-Major guess how, or why, his tale enthralled me.

"I have nearly done, Sahib.... On the morrow my brother said: 'To-day I will make an end. After the evening prayer let all assemble and behold the anointing of the eyes of Ibrahim the Weeper with the same balm that he intended to be applied to mine.' And during the day men drove strong stakes deep into the ground, the distance between them being equal to the width of Ibrahim's head, which they measured--telling him why. Also pegs were driven into the ground convenient for the fastening of his hands and feet, and stones were collected as large as men could carry.

"And, after evening prayer and prostration we took Ibrahim, and forcing his head between the stakes so that he could not turn it, we tied his hands and feet to the pegs and weighted his body with the stones, being careful to do him no injury and to cause no such pain as might detract from the real torture, and lessen his punishment.

"And then Mir Jan stood over him with the bottle and said, softly and sweetly:--

"Ibrahim, my friend, thou didst vow upon me a vengeance, the telling of which should turn men pale, because I struck thee for torturing my servant. And now I return good for thine evil, for I take pity on thy weeping eyes and heal them. These several days thou hast refused this benefaction with floods of tears, and sobs and screams. Now, behold, and see how foolish thou hast been,' and he spilt a drop from the bottle, so that it fell near the face of Ibrahim, but not on it.

"And I was amazed to see that the stone upon which the drop fell did not bubble and boil. This prolongation and refinement of the torture I could appreciate and enjoy--but why did not the acid affect the stone? 'Twas as though mere cold water had fallen upon it. Nor was the bottle smoking as always hitherto.

"And even as I wondered, my brother quickly stooped and dashed some of the contents of the bottle in the eyes of Ibrahim the Weeper.

"With a shriek that pierced our ear-drums and must have been heard for many kos,[37] Ibrahim writhed and jerked so that the stones were thrown from his body and the pegs that held his feet and hands were torn from the ground. The stakes holding his head firmly, he flung his body over until his head was beneath it and then back again, and screamed like a

wounded horse. At last he wrenched his head free, and, holding his hands to his face--which appeared to be in no way injured--leapt up and ran round and round in circles, until he was seized, and, by my brother's orders, his hands were torn from his face.

[37] Kos = two miles.

"And behold, his eyes and face were unmarked and uninjured, and the liquid that dripped upon his clothing made no mark and did no hurt.

"_'Blind_', he shrieked, 'I am _blind!_ O Merciful Allah, my eyes!' and he fell, howling.

"'Now that is very strange,' said my brother, 'for I threw pure, plain, cold water in his face. See me drink of the remainder!' and he drank from the bottle, and so did I, in fear and wonder. Cold, pure, fair water it was, and nothing else!

"But Ibrahim the Weeper was blind. Stone blind to his dying day and never looked upon the sun again. Little drops of water had struck him blind. Nay, the Hand of Allah had struck him blind--him who had cried: '_May Allah strike me blind_ if I do not unto thee a thing of which children yet unborn shall speak with awe'. He had tried to do such a thing and God had struck him blind--though my brother, who was very learned, spoke of self-suggestion, and of imagination being sometimes strong enough to make the imagined come to pass. (He told of a man who died for no reason, on a certain day at a certain hour, because his father had done so and he believed that _he_ would also. But more likely it was witchcraft and he was under a curse.)

"Howbeit, little drops of pure water blinded Ibrahim the Weeper. And there the foreign blood of my poor brother showed forth. He could not escape the taint and was weak. At the last moment he had wavered and, like a fool, had forgiven his enemy."

"Was he a Christian?" I asked (and had often wondered in the past).

"_'Nahin_', Sahib! He was a Mussulman, my father having had him taught with special care by a holy _moulvie_, [38] by reason of the fact that his mother had had him sprinkled with holy water by her priests and had taught him the tenets of the Christian faith--doubtless a high and noble one since your honour is of it."

[38] Priest.

"He had been taught the Christian doctrines, then?"

"Without doubt, Sahib. Throughout his childhood; in the absence of his father. And doubtless this aided his foreign blood in making him act thus foolishly."

"Doubtless," I agreed, with a smile.

"Yea, at the last moment he had put his vengeance from him and behaved like a weak fool, throwing away the acid, cleaning the bottle and filling it with pure water. He had intended to give Ibrahim a fright (and also the opprobrious title of _the Weeper_), to teach him a lesson and to let him go--provided he swore on the Q'ran never to return to Mekran Kot when he left for England.... Such a man was my poor brother. But the hand of Allah intervened and Ibrahim the Weeper lived and died stone blind.... A strange man that poor brother of mine, strong save when his foreign blood and foreign religion arose like poison within him and made him weak.... There was the case of the English Sergeant Larnce-Ishmeet whom he spared and sent into the English lines in the little Border War."

"Lance-Sergeant Smith? What regiment?" I asked.

"I know not, Sahib, save that it was a British Infantry Regiment. (He was not Lance-Sergeant Ishmeet but Sergeant Larnce-Ishmeet.) We ... I mean ... they ... slew many of a Company that was doing rear-guard and their officers being slain and many men also, a Sergeant took them off with great skill. Section by section, from point to point he retired them, and our ... their ... triumphant joy at the capture and slaughter of the Company was changed to gnashing of teeth--for we lost many and the Company retired safely on the main body. But we got the Sergeant, badly wounded, and my brother would not have him slain. Rather he showed him much honour and had him borne to Mekran Kot, and when he was healed he took him to within sight of the outermost Khyber fort and set him free.... Yet was he not an enemy, Sahib, taken in war? Strange weaknesses had my poor brother...."

"I knew a Sergeant-Major Lawrence-Smith," I remarked, as light dawned on me after pondering "Larnce-Ishmeet." "He shot himself at Duri some time ago."

"He was a brave man," said Mir Daoud Khan. "Peace be upon him."

"And what became of your brother?" I asked, although I knew only too well--alas!

"He left Mekran Kot when I did, Sahib, for our father died, the old Jam Saheb was poisoned, and we had to flee or die. I never saw him again for he made much money (out of rifles), travelled widely, and became a Sahib (and I followed the _pultan_[39]). But he died as a Pathan should--for his honour. In Gungapur jail they hanged him (after the failure of the foolish attempt by some seditious Sikhs and Punjabis and Bengalis at a second Great Killing) and I do not care to speak of that thing even to--"

[39] Infantry Regiment.

A sputter of musketry broke out in the thick vegetation of the river-bed, crackled and spread, as Subedar-Major Mir Daoud Khan (once against the civilized, brave and distinguished officer) and I sprang to our feet and hurried to our posts--I, even at that moment, thinking how small a World is this, and how long is the long arm of Coincidence. Here was I, while waiting for what then seemed almost certain death, hearing from the lips of his own brother, the early history of the remarkable, secretive and mysterious man whom I had loved above all men, and whose death had been the tragedy of my life.

CHAPTER II.

THE BOY.

(Mainly concerning the early life of Moussa Isa Somali.)

Moussa Isa Somali never stole, lied, seduced, cheated, drank, swore, gambled, betrayed, slandered, blasphemed, nor behaved meanly nor cowardly--but, alas! he had personal and racial Pride.

It is written that Pride is the sin of Devils and that by it, Lucifer, Son of the Morning, fell.

If it be remembered that he fell for nine days, be realized that he must

have fallen with an acceleration of velocity of thirty-two feet per second, each second, and be conceded that he weighed a good average number of pounds, some idea will be formed of the violence of the concussion with which he came to earth.

In spite of the terrible warning provided by so great a smash there yet remain people who will argue that it is better to fall through Pride than to remain unfallen through lack of it. By Pride, Pride is meant of course--not Conceit, Snobbishness and Bumptiousness, which are all very damnable, and signs of a weak, base mind. One gathers that Lucifer, Son of the Morning, was not conceited, snobbish, nor bumptious. Nor was Moussa, son of Isa, Somali--but, like Lucifer, Son of the Morning, Devil, he fell, through Pride, and came to a Bad End.

One has known people who have owned to a sneaking liking and unwilling admiration for Lucifer, Son of the Morning--people of the same sort as those who find it difficult wholly to revere the prideless Erect when comparing them with the prideful Fallen--and, for the life of me, I cannot help a sneaking liking and unwilling admiration for Moussa Isa Somali, who fell through Pride.

There was something fine about him, even as there was about Lucifer, Son of the Morning, and one cannot avoid feeling that if both did not get more of hard luck and less of justice than some virtuous people one knows, they certainly cut a better figure. Of course it is a mistake to adopt any line of action that leads definitely to the position of Under-Dog, and to fight when you cannot win. It is not Prudent, and Prudence leads to Favour, Success, Decorations, and the Respect of Others if not of yourself. It is also to be remembered that whether you are a Wicked Rebel or a Noble True-Hearted Patriot depends very largely on whether you succeed or fail.

All of which is mere specious and idle special pleading on behalf of Moussa Isa, a sinful murderous Somali....

Most of the memories of Moussa Isa centred round scars. When I say "memories of Moussa Isa" I mean Moussa Isa's own memories, for there are no memories concerning him. The might, majesty, dominion and power of the British Empire were arrayed against him, and the Empire's duly appointed agents hanged him by the neck until he was dead--at an age when some people are yet at school, albeit he had gathered in his few years of life a quantity and quality of experience quite remarkable.

'Twas a sordid business, and yet Moussa Isa died, like many very respectable and highly belauded folk, from the early Christians in Italy to the late Christians in Armenia, for a principle and an idea.

He was black, he was filthy, he was savage, ignorant and ugly--but he had his Pride, both personal and racial, for he was a Somali. A Somali, mark you, not a mere Hubshi or Woolly One, not a common Nigger, not a low and despicable person--worshipping idols, eating human flesh, grubs, roots and bark--the "black ivory" of Arabs.

If you called Moussa Isa a Hubshi, he either killed you or marked you down for death, according to circumstances.

Had Moussa Isa lived a few centuries earlier, been of another colour, and swanked around in painful iron garments and assorted cutlery, he would have been highly praised for his fine and proper spirit. Poet, bard, and troubadour would have noted and published his quickness on the point of honour. Moussa would have been set to music and have become a source of income to the gifted. He would have become a Pillar of the Order of Knighthood and an Ornament of the Age of Chivalry. A wreath of laurels would have encircled his brow--instead of a rope of hemp encircling his neck.

For such fine, quick, self-respecting Pride, such resentment of insult, men have become Splendid Figures of the Glorious Past.

Autres jours autres moeurs.

How many people called him _Hubshi_, we know not; but we know, from his own lips, of the killing of some few. Of the killing of others he had forgotten, for his memory was poor, save for insult and kindness. And, having caught and convicted him in one or two cases the appointed servants of the British Empire first "reformed" and then slew him in their turn--thus descending to his level without his excuse of private personal insult and injury....

The scars on Moussa Isa's face with the hole in his ear were connected with one of his very earliest memories--or one of his very earliest memories was connected with the scars on his face and the hole in his ear--a memory of jolting along on a camel, swinging upside-down, while a strong hand grasped his foot; of seeing his father rush at his captor with a long, broad-bladed spear, of being whirled and flung at his father's head; and of seeing his father's intimate internal economy seriously and permanently disarranged by the two-handed sword of one of the camel rider's colleagues (who flung aside a heavy gun which he had just emptied into Moussa's mamma) as his father fell to the ground under the impact and weight of the novel missile. Though Moussa was unaware, in his abysmal ignorance, of the interesting fact, the great two-handed sword so effectually wielded by the supporter of his captor, was exactly like that of a Crusader of old. It was like that of a Crusader of old, because it was a direct lineal descendant of the swords of the Crusaders who had brought the first specimens to the country, quite a good many years previously. Indeed some people said that a few of the swords owned by these Dervishes were real, original, Crusaders' swords, the very weapons whose hilts were once grasped by Norman hands, and whose blades had cloven Paynim heads in the name of Christianity and the interests of the Sepulchre. I do not know--but it is a wonderfully dry climate, and swords are there kept, cherished, and bequeathed, even more religiously than were the Stately Homes of England in that once prosperous land, in the days before park, covert, pleasaunce, forest, glade, dell, and garden became allotments, and the spoil of the "Working"-man.

Picked up after the raid and pursuit with a faceful of gravel, sand, dirt, and tetanus-germs, Moussa Isa, orphan, was flung on a pile of dead Somali spearmen and swordsmen, of horses, asses, camels, negroes, (old) women and other cattle--and, crawling off again, received kicks and orders to clean and polish certain much ensanguined weapons sullied with the blood of his near and distant relatives. Thereafter he was recognized by the above-mentioned swordsman, and accorded the privilege of removing his own father's blood from the great two-handed sword before alluded to--a task of a kind that does not fall to many little boys. So willingly and cheerfully did Moussa perform his arduous duty (arduous because the blood had had time to dry, and dried blood takes a lot of removing from steel by one unprovided with hot water) that the Arab swordsman instead of blowing off the child's head with his long and beautiful gun, damascened of barrel, gold-mounted of lock, and pearl-inlaid of stock, allowed him to rim for his life that he might die a sporting death in hot blood, doing his devilmost. (These were not slavers but avengers of enmity to the Mad Mullah and punishers of friendship to the English.)

"How much law will you give me, O Emir?" asked the child.

"Perhaps ten yards, dog, perhaps a hundred, perhaps more.... Run!"

"_You_ could hit me at a thousand yards, O Emir," was the reply. "Let me

die by a shot that men will talk about...."

"Run, yelping dog," growled the Arab with a sardonic smile.

And Moussa ran. He also bounded, shied, dodged, ducked, swerved, dropped, crawled, zig-zagged and generally gave his best attention to evading the shot of the common fighting-man whom he had propitiatorily addressed as "_Emir_" though a mere wearer of a single fillet of camel-hair cord around his _haik_. Like a naval gunner--the Arab laid his gun and waited till the sights "came on," fired, and had the satisfaction of seeing the child fling up his arms, leap into the air and fall twitching to the ground. Good shot! The twitches and the last convulsive spasm were highly artistic and creditable to the histrionic powers of Moussa Isa, shot through the ear, and inwardly congratulating himself that he had yet a chance. But then he had had wide opportunity for observation, and plenty of good models, in the matter of sudden-death spasms and twitches, so the credit is the less. Anyhow, it deceived experienced Arab eyes at a hundred yards, and the performance may therefore be classed as good. To the reflective person it will be manifest that Moussa's reverence for the sanctity of human life received but little encouragement or development from the very beginning....

Returning refugees, a few days later, found Moussa very pleased-with himself and very displeased with uncooked putrid flesh. Being exceedingly poor and depressed as a result of the Mad Mullah's vengeful _razzia_, they sold Moussa Isa, friendless, kinless orphan, and once again cursed the false English who made them great promises in the Mahdi's troublous day, and abandoned them to the Mad Mullah and his Dervishes as soon as the Mahdi was happily dead.

The Mad Mullah they could understand; the English they could not. For the Mad Mullah they had no blame whatsoever; for the English they had the bitterest blame, the deepest hatred and the uttermost contempt. Who blames the lion for seeking and slaying his prey? Who defends the unspeakable creature that throws its friends and children to the lion--in payment of its debts and in cancellation of its obligations to those friends and children? In discussing the raid on their way to market with Moussa Isa, they mentioned the name of the Mad Mullah with respect and fear. When they mentioned the English they expectorated and made a gesture too significant to be particularized. And the tom-toms once again throbbed through the long nights, sending (by a code that was before Morse) from village to village, from the sea to the Nile, from the Nile to the Niger and the Zambesi, from the Mediterranean to the Cape, the news that once more the Mad Mullah had flouted that failing and treacherous race, the English, and slaughtered those who lived within their gates, under the shadow of their flag and the promise of their protection.

Ere Moussa Isa got his next prominent scar, the signal-drums throbbed out the news that the gates were thrown open, the flag hauled down, and the promises shamefully broken. That the representatives of the failing treacherous race now stood huddled along the sea-shore in fear and trembling, while those who had helped them in their trouble and had believed their word were slaughtered by the thousand; that the country was the home of fire and sword, the oasis-fields yielding nothing but corpses, the wells choked with dead ... red slaughter, black pestilence, starvation, misery and death, where had been green cultivation, fenced villages, the sound of the quern and the well-wheel, the song of women and the cry of the ploughman to his oxen. News and comments which did nothing to lessen the pride and insolence of the Jubaland tribesmen, of the Wak tribesmen, of the bold Zubhier sons of the desert, nor to strike terror to the hearts of the murderers of Captain Aylmer and Mr. Jenner, of slave-traders, game-poachers, raiders, wallowers in slaughter....

Another very noticeable and remarkable scar broke the fine lines and smooth contours of Moussa's throat and another memory was as indelibly established in his mind as was the said scar on his flesh.

At any time that he fingered the horrible ridged cicatrice, he could see the boundless ocean and the boundless blue sky from a wretched cranky canoe-shaped boat, in which certain Arab, Somali, Negro, and other gentlemen were proceeding all the way from near Berbera to near Aden with large trustfulness in Allah and with certain less creditable goods. It was a long, unwieldy vessel which ten men could row, one could steer with a broad oar, and a small three-cornered sail could keep before the wind.

But the various-clad crew of this cranky craft were gentlemen all, who, beyond running up the string-tied sail to the clothes-prop mast, or taking a trick at the wheel--another clothes-prop with a large disc of wood at the water-end, were far above work.

Trusting in Allah and Mohammed his Prophet is a lot easier than rowing a lineless, blunt-nosed, unseaworthy boat beneath a tropical sun. So they trusted in God, and permitted Moussa Isa, slave-boy, to do all that it was humanly possible for him to do.

Moussa did all that was expected of him, but not so Allah and Mohammed his Prophet.

The gentle breeze that (sometimes) carries you steadily over a glassy sea straight up the forty-fifth meridian of east longitude from Berbera to Aden in the month of October, failed these worthy trustful Argonauts, and they were becalmed.

But Time is made for slaves, and the only slave upon the Argosy was Moussa Isa, and so the becalming was neither here nor there. The cargo would keep (if kept dry) for many a long day--and the greater the delay in delivery, the greater the impatience of the consignees and their willingness to pay even more than the stipulated price--its weight in silver _per_ rifle. But food is made for men as well as slaves, and if you, in your noble trustfulness, resolutely decline to reduce your daily rations, there must, with mathematical certitude of date, arrive the final period to any given and limited supply. Though banking wholly with Heaven in the matter of their own salvation from hunger, the Argonauts displayed mere worldly wisdom in the case of Moussa Isa and gave him the minimum of food that might be calculated to keep within him strength adequate to his duties of steering, swarming up the mast, baling, cooking, massaging the liver of the Leading Gentleman, and so forth. And in due course, the calm continuing, these pious and religious voyagers came to the bitter end of their water, their rice, their _dhurra_, their dates--and all (except the salt and coffee which formed part of the ostensible, bogus cargo) that they had, as they too-slowly drifted into the track of those vessels that enter and leave the strait of Bab-el-Mandeb, the Gate of Tears, the tears of the starving, drowning, ship-wrecked and castaway.

Salt _per se_ is a poor diet, and, for the making of potable coffee, fresh water is very necessary.

Some of the Argonauts were, as has been said, Negro gentlemen. On the third day of absolute starvation, one had an Idea and made a suggestion.

The Leading Gentleman entertained it with an open mind and without enthusiasm.

The Tanga tout acclaimed it as a divine inspiration.

The one-eyed Moor literally smiled upon it. As his eye was single and

his body therefore full of light, he saw the beauty of the notion at once. Had it been full of food instead, we may charitably suppose he would not have remarked:--

"A pity we did not feed him up better".

For the suggestion concerned Moussa Isa and food--Moussa Isa as food, in point of fact. The venerable gentle-looking Arab, whose face beamed effulgent with benevolence and virtue, murmured:--

"He will have but little blood, the dog. None of it must be--er--_wasted_ by the--ah--butcher."

The huge man with the neat geometrical pattern of little scars, perpendicular on the forehead, horizontal on the cheeks and in concentric circles on the chest (done with loving care and a knife, in his infancy, by his papa) said only "_Ptwhack_" as he chewed a mouthful of coffee-beans and hide. It may have been a pious ejaculation or a whole speech in his own peculiar vernacular. It was a tremendous smacking of tremendous lips, and the expression which overspread his speaking countenance was of gusto, appreciative, and such as accords with lip-smacking.

But a very fair man (very fair beside the Negroes, Somalis, Arabs and others our little black and brown brothers), a man with grey-blue eyes, light brown hair and moustache, and olive complexion, said to the originator of the Idea in faultless English, if not in faultless taste "You damned swine".

A look of profoundest disgust overspread his handsome young face, a face which undoubtedly lent itself to very clear expression of such feelings as contempt, disgust and scorn, an unusual face, with the thin high-bridged nose of an English aristocrat, the large eyes and pencilled black brows of an Indian noble, the sallow yet cheek-flushed complexion of an Italian peasant-girl, and the firm lips, square jaw, and prominent chin of a fighting-man. It was essentially an English face in expression, and essentially foreign in detail; a face of extraordinary contradictions. The eyes were English in colour, Oriental in size and shape; the mouth and chin English in mould and in repose, Oriental in mobility and animation; the whole countenance English in shape, Oriental in complexion and profile--a fine, high-bred, strong face, upon which played shadows of cruelty, ferocity, diabolical cunning; a face admired more quickly than liked, inspiring more speculation than trust.

The same duality and contradiction were proclaimed in the hands--strong, tenacious, virile hands; small, fine, delicate hands; hands with the powerful and purposeful thumb of the West; hands with the supple artistic fingers and delicate finger-nails of the East.

And the man's name was in keeping with hands and face, with mind, body, soul, and character, for, though he would not have done so, he could have replied to the query "What is your name?" with "My name? Well, in full, it is John Robin Ross-Ellison Ilderim Dost Mahommed Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan, and its explanation is my descent from General Ross-Ellison, Laird of Glencairn, and from Mir Faquir Mahommed Afzul Khan, Jam of Mekran Kot".

In Piccadilly, wearing the garb of Piccadilly, he looked an Englishman of the English.

In Abdul Rehman Bazaar, Cabul, wearing the garb of Abdul Rehman Bazaar, he looked a Pathan of Pathans. In the former case, rather more sunburnt than the average loungee in Piccadilly; in the latter, rather fairer than the average Afghan and Pathan loafer in Abdul Rehman Bazaar.

"Walking down Unter den Linden in Berlin, with upturned moustache, he looked a most Teutonic German.

"You observed, my friend?" queried the Leading Gentleman (whose father was the son of a Negro-Arab who married, or should have married, a Jewess captured near Fez, and whose mother was the daughter of a Tunisian Turk by a half-bred Negress of Timbuctoo).

"I observed," replied the fair young man in the mongrel Arabic-Swahili lingua franca of the Red Sea and East African littorals "that it is but natural for dogs to prey upon dogs."

"There are times when the lion is driven to prey upon dogs, my dear son," interposed the mild-eyed, benevolent-looking Arab--a pensive smile on his venerable face.

"Yes--when he is old, mangy, toothless and deserving of nothing better, my dear father," replied the fair young man, and his glances at the white beard, scanty locks and mumbling mouth of the ancient gentleman had an unpleasantly personal quality. To the casual on-looker it would have seemed that an impudent boy deliberately insulted a harmless benevolent old gentleman. To the fair young man, however, it was well known that the old gentleman's name was famous across Northern and Eastern Africa for monstrous villainy and fiendish cruelty--the name of the worst and wickedest of those traders in "black ivory," one of whose side-lines is frequently gun-running. Also he knew that the benevolent-looking old dear was desirous that the Leading Gentleman, his partner, should join with him in a little scheme (a scheme revealed by one Moussa Isa, eaves-dropper) to give the fair young man some inches of steel instead of the pounds of Teutonic gold due for services (and rifles) rendered, when they should reach the quiet spot on the northern shore of the Persian Gulf where certain bold caravan-leaders would await them and their precious cargo--a scheme condemned by the Leading Gentleman on the grounds of the folly of killing the goose that laid the golden eggs. But then the wealthy Arab patriarch was retiring from the risky business (already nearly ruined and destroyed by English gun-boats) after that trip, and the Leading Gentleman was not. Thus it was that the attitude of the fair young man toward Sheikh Abou ben Mustapha Muscati did not display that degree of respect that his grey hairs and beautiful old face would appear to deserve.

The French-speaking Moslem Berber ex-Zouave, from Algiers, suggested that Moussa Isa, a slave, was certainly not fitting food for gentlemen who fight, hunt, travel, poach elephants, deal in "black ivory," run guns, and generally lead a life too picturesque for an over-"educated," utilitarian and depressing age--but what would you? "One eats--but yes, one eats, or one ceases to live, and one does not wish to cease to live--and therefore one eats" and he cocked a yellow and appraising eye at Moussa Isa. The sense of the meeting appeared to be that though one would not have chosen this particular animal, necessity knows no rule--and if the throat be cut while the animal be alive, one may eat of the flesh and break the Law by so much the less. Moussa Isa must be halalled.^[40] But the fair young man drawing a Khyber knife with two feet of blade, observed that it was now likely that there would be a plethora of food, as he would most assuredly cut the throat of any throat-cutter.

[40] To halal is to make lawful, here to cut the throat of a living animal in order that its flesh may be eatable by good Mussulmans.

Moussa Isa regarded him with the look often seen in the eye of an intelligent dog.

The venerable Arab smiled meaningly at the Leading Gentleman, and the Tanga tout asked if all were to hunger for the silly scruples of one.

"If the fair-faced Sheikh did not wish to eat of Moussa, none would urge it. Live and let live. The gentlemen were hungry; ..." but the fair young man unreasonably replied, "Then let them eat _thee_ since they can stomach carrion," and for the moment the subject dropped--largely because the fair young man was supposed always to carry a revolver, which was not a habit of his good colleagues. It was another evidence of his strange duality that revolver and knife were (rare phenomenon) equally acceptable to him, though in certain environment the pistol rather suggested itself to his left hand, while in others his right hand went quite unconsciously to his long knife.

In the present company no thought of the fire-arm entered his head--this was a knifing, back-stabbing outfit;--none here who stood up to shoot and be shot at in fair fight....

The Leading Gentleman looked many times and hard at Moussa Isa during the second day of his own starvation, which was the third of that of his companions and the fourth of Moussa's. The Leading Gentleman, who was as rich as he was ragged and dirty, wore a very beautiful knife, which (though it reposed in a gaudy sheath of yellow, green and blue beads, fringed with a dependent filigree, or lace work, of similar beads with tassels of cowrie-shells) hailed from Damascus and had a handle of ivory and gold, and an inlaid blade on which were inscribed verses from the Q'ran.

Moussa Isa knew the pattern of it well by the close of day. The Leading Gentleman took that evening to sharpening the already sharp blade of the knife. As he sharpened it on his sandal and the side of the boat, and tried its edge on his thumb, he regarded the thin body of Moussa Isa very critically.

His look blended contempt, anticipation, and anxiety.

He broke a long brooding silence with the remark:--

"The little dog will be thinner still, to-morrow"--a remark which evoked from the fair youth the reply: "And so will you".

Perhaps truth covered and excused a certain indelicacy and callousness in the statement of the Leading Gentleman, albeit the fair young man appeared annoyed at it. His British blood and instincts became predominant when the killing and eating of a fellow-creature were on the _tapis_--the said fellow-creature being on it at the same time.

A colleague from Dar-es-Salaam, who had an ear and a half, three teeth, six fingers, innumerable pockmarks and a German accent, said, "He will have little fat," and there was bitterness in his tone. As a business man he realized a bad investment of capital. The food in which they had wallowed should have gone to the fattening of Moussa Isa. Also a fear struck him.

"He'll jump overboard in the night--the ungrateful dog. Tie him up," and he reached for a coil of cord.

"He will not be tied up," observed the fair youth in a quiet, obstinate voice.

"See, my friend," said the Leading Gentleman, "it is a case of one or many. Better _that_ one," and he pointed to Moussa Isa, "than another," and he looked meaningfully at the fair young man.

"And yet, I know not," murmured the venerable Arab, "I know not. We are not in the debt of the slave. We _are_ in the debt of the Sheikh. It would cancel all obligations if the Sheikh from the North preferred to offer himself as--"

The young man's long knife flashed from its sheath as he sprang to his feet. "Let us eat monkey, if eat we must," he cried, pointing to the Arab--and, even as he spoke, the huge man with the scars, flinging his great arms around the youth's ankles, partly rose and neatly tipped him overboard. He had long hated the fair man.

Straightway, unseen by any, as all eyes were on the grey-eyed youth and his assailant, Moussa Isa cast loose the _toni_[41] that nestled beneath the stern of the larger boat. He was about to shout that he had done so when he realised that this would defeat his purpose, and also that the fair Sheikh was still under water.

[41] Small dug-out canoe.

"Good," murmured the old Arab, "now brain him as he comes up--and secure his body."

But the fair youth knew better than to rise in the immediate neighbourhood of the boat. Swimming with the ease, grace and speed of a seal, he emerged with bursting lungs a good hundred yards from where he had disappeared. Having breathed deeply he again sank, to re-appear at a point still more distant, and be lost in the gathering gloom.

"He is off to Cabul to lay his case before the Amir," observed the elderly Arab with grim humour.

"Doubtless," agreed the Leading Gentleman, "he will swim the 2000 miles to India, and then up the Indus to Attock." And added, "But, bear witness all, if the young devil turn up again some day, that _I_ had no quarrel with him.... A pity! A pity!... Where shall we find his like, a Prank among the Franks, an Afghan among Afghans, a Frenchman in Algiers, a nomad robber in Persia, a Bey in Cairo, a Sahib in Bombay--equally at home as gentleman or tribesman? Where shall we find his like again as gatherer of the yellow honey of Berlin and as negotiator in Marseilles (where the discarded Gras breech-loaders of the army grow) and in Muscat? Woe! Woe!"

"Or his like for impudence to his elders, harshness in a bargain, cunning and greed?" added the benevolent-looking Arab, who had gained a handsome sum by the murder.

"For courage," corrected the Leading Gentleman, and with a heavy sigh, groaned. "We shall never see him more--and he was worth his weight to me annually in gold."

"No, you won't see him again," agreed the Arab. "He'll hardly swim to Aden--apart from the little matter of sharks.... A pity the sharks should have so fair a body--and we starve!" and he turned a fatherly benevolent eye on Moussa Isa--whom a tall slender black Arab, from the hills about Port Sudan, of the true "fuzzy-wuzzy" type, had seized in his thin but Herculean arms as the boy rose to spring into the _toni_ and paddle to the rescue of his benefactor.

The Dar-es-Salaam merchant threw Fuzzy Wuzzy a coil of cord and Moussa Isa (who struggled, kicked, bit and finding resistance hopeless, screamed, "Follow the boat, Master," as he lay on his back), was bound to a cracked and salt-encrusted beam or seat that supported, or was supported by, the cracked and salt-encrusted sides of the canoe-shaped vessel.

Although very, very hungry, and perhaps as conscienceless and wicked a gang as ever assembled together on the earth or went down to the sea in ships, there was yet a certain reluctance on the part of some of the members to revert to cannibalism, although all agreed that it was

necessary.

Among the reluctant-to-commence were those who had no negro blood. Among the ready-to-commence, the full-blooded negroes were the most impatient.

Although very hungry and rather weak they were in different case from that of European castaway sailors, in that all were inured to long periods of fasting, all had crossed the Sahara or the Sus, lived for days on a handful of dates, and had tightened the waist-string by way of a meal. Few of them ever thought of eating between sunrise and sunset. The lives of the negroes were alternations of gorging and starving, incredible repletion and more incredible fasting; devouring vast masses of hippopotamus-flesh to-day, and starving for a week thereafter; pounds of prime meat to-day, gnawing hunger and the weakness of semi-starvation for the next month.

"At sunrise," said the Leading Gentleman finally.

Good! That left the so-desirable element of chance. It left opportunity for change of programme inasmuch as sunrise might disclose help in the shape of a passing ship. The matter would rest with Heaven, and pious men might lay them down to sleep with clear conscience, reflecting that, should it be the Will of Allah that His servants should not eat of this flesh, other would be provided; should other not be provided it was clearly the Will of Allah that His servants should eat of this flesh! Excellent--there would be a meal soon after sunrise.

And the Argonauts laid them down to sleep, hungry but gratefully trustful, trustfully grateful. But Moussa Isa watched the wondrous lustrous stars throughout the age-long, flash-short night and thought of many things.

Had the splendid, noble Sheikh from the North heard his cry and had he found the _toni_? How far had he swum ere his strength gave out or, with sudden swirl, he was dragged under by the man-eating shark? Would he remove his long cotton shirt, velvet waistcoat and baggy cotton trousers? The latter would present difficulties, for the waist-string would tangle and the water would swell the knot and prevent the drawing of string over string.

Moreover, the garments, though very baggy, were tight round the ankles. Would he cast off his beautiful yard-long Khyber knife? It would go to his heart to do that, both for the sake of the weapon itself and because he would have to go to his death unavenged, seized by a shark without giving it its death-wound. Had he heard and would he follow the boat in the moonlight, find the _toni_ and escape? Could he swim to Aden? They had said not--even leaving sharks out of consideration, and indeed it must be forty or fifty miles away. Judging by their progress they must have done about one hundred and fifty miles since they embarked at the lonely spot on the Berbera coast for the other lonely spot on the Aden coast, where certain whisperings with certain mysterious camel-riders would preface their provisioning for the voyage along the weary Hadramant coast to the Ras el Had and Muscat--just a humble boat-load of poor but honest toilers and tradesmen, interested in dried fish, dates, the pearl-fishery and the pettiest trading. No, he would never reach land, wonderful swimmer as he was. He would be lost in the sea as is the Webi Shebeyli River in the sands of the South, unless he followed the drifting boat and found the _toni_. Otherwise, he might be picked up, but he would have to keep afloat all night to do that, unless he had the extraordinary luck to be seen by dhow or ship before dark. That could hardly be, unless the same ship or dhow were visible from their own boat, and none had been seen.

No, he must be dead--and Moussa Isa would shortly follow him. How he wished he could have given his life to save him. Had he known, he would

have cried out, "Let them eat me, O Master," and prevented him from risking his life. If he should get the chance of striking one blow for his life in the morning he would bestow it upon the scar-faced beast who had tripped the fair Sheik overboard. If he could strike two he would give the second to the old Arab who flogged women and children to death with the _kourbash_, [42] as an amusement, and whose cruelties were famous in a cruel land; the old Evil who hated, and plotted the death of, the fair Sheikh, with the leader of the expedition in order that they might divide his large share of the gun-running proceeds and German subsidy. If he could strike a third blow it should be at the filthy Hubshi of the Aruwimi, the low degraded Woolly One from the dark Interior (of human sacrifice, cannibalism and ju-ju) who had proposed eating him. Yes--if he could grab the leader's knife and deal three such stabs as the Sheikh dealt the lion, at these three, he could die content. But this was absurd! They would _halal_ him first, of course, and unbind him afterwards.... They might unbind him first though, so as to place him favourably with regard to--economy. They would use the empty army-ration tin, shining there like silver in the moonlight, the tin with which he had done so much weary baling. Doubtless the leader and the Arab would share its contents. He grudged it them, and hoped a quarrel and struggle might arise and cause it to be spilt.

[42] Rhinoceros-hide whip.

An unpleasant death! Without cowardice one might dislike the thought of having one's throat cut while one's hands were bound and one watched the blood gushing into an old army-ration tin. Perhaps there would be none to gush--and a good job too. Serve them right. Could he cut his wrists on a nail or a splinter or with the cords, and cheat them, if there were any blood in him now. He would try. Yes, an unpleasant death. No one, no true Somali, that is, objected to a prod in the heart with a shovel-headed spear, a thwack in the head with a hammered slug, a sweep at the neck with a big sword--but to have a person sawing at your throat with weak and shaking hands is rotten....

One quite appreciated that masters must eat and slaves must die, and the religious necessity for cutting the throat while the animal is alive, according to the Law--and there was great comfort in the fact that the leader's knife was inscribed with verses of the Q'ran and would probably be used for the job. (The leader liked jobs of that sort.) Countless it would confer distinction in Paradise upon one already distinguished as having died to provide food for a band of right-thinking, religious-minded gentlemen, who, even in such terrible straits, forgot not the Law nor omitted the ceremonies....

Where now was the fair-faced master who so resembled the English but was so much braver, fiercer, so much more staunch? Though fair as they, and knowing their speech, he could not be of a race that led whole tribes to trust in them, called them "Friendlies" and then forsook them; came to them in the day of trouble asking help, and then scuttled away and deserted their allies, leaving them to face alone the Power whose wrath and vengeance their help-giving had provoked. Yet there were good men among them--there was Kafil [43] Bey for example. Kafil Bey whose last noble fight he had witnessed. If the fair-faced Sheikh had any of the weak English blood in his veins it must be of such a man as Kafil Bey.

[43] Corfield?

Was he still swimming? Had he been picked up? Was he shark's food? To think that _he_ should have come to his death over such a thing as a slave boy (albeit a Somali and no Hubshi).

This was an Emir indeed.

An idea!... He called aloud: "Are you there, Master? The _toni_ is loose

and must be near," again and again, louder and louder. Perhaps he was following and would hear. Again, louder still.

The one-eyed man, disturbed by the cry, stirred, threw his arms abroad, stretched, and put his foot on the mouth of a neighbour lying head-to-foot beside him. The neighbour snored loudly and turned his face sideways under the foot. He had slept standing jammed against the wall in the Idris of Omdurman, one of the most terrible jails of all time, and a huge foot on his face was a matter of no moment.

The Tanga tout suddenly emitted a scream, a blood-curdling scream, and immediately scratched his ribs like a monkey.... Moussa Isa held his peace.

Anon the scar-faced man turned over, moving others.

Could it be near dawn already, and were his proprietors waking up? He could see no change in the East, no paling of the lustrous stars. Was it an hour ago or eight hours ago that the night had fallen? Had he an hour to live or a night? Would he ever see Berbera again, steer a boat down its deep inlet, gaze upon its two lighthouses, its fort, hospital, barracks, piers, warehouses, bazaars; drive a camel along by its seven miles of aqueduct, look down from the hills upon this wonderful and mighty metropolis, greater and grander than Jibuti, Zeyla, Bulhar and Karam, surely the greatest and most marvellous port and city of the world, ere driving on through the thorn-bush and acacia-jungle into the vast waterless Haud? Would he ever again see the sun rise in the desert, smell the smoke of the camel-dung cooking-fires.... What was that? The sky was paling in the East, growing grey, a rose-pink flush on the horizon--dawn and death were at hand.

Before the heralds of the sun, the moon slowly veiled her face with lightest gossamer while the weaker stars fled. The daily miracle and common marvel proceeded before the tired eyes of the bound slave; the rim of the sun appeared above the rim of the sea; the moon more deeply veiled her face from the fierce red eye, and gracefully and gradually retired before the advance of the usurping conqueror--and the slave seemed to hear the fat croaking voice of the leader saying, "At sunrise".

Broad day and all but he asleep. Well--it had come at last. When would they awake? Was the toni anywhere near?

The man with the geometrical pattern of scars on his face and chest suddenly sat bolt upright like a released spring, yawned, looked at the sky and the limp sail, and then at Moussa Isa. As his eye fell upon the boy he smiled copiously, protruded a very red tongue between very white teeth, and licked huge blue-black lips. He leaned over and awakened the Leading Gentleman. Then he pointed to the Victim. Both watched the horizon where, beyond distant Bombay and China, the sun was appearing, rising with the rapidity of the minute hand of a big clock. Neither looked to the West.

The child knew that when the sun had risen clear of the sea, he might look upon it for a minute or two--and no more. A puff of wind fanned his cheek; the sail filled and drew. The boat moved through the water and the one-eyed gentleman, arising and treading upon the out-lying tracts of the sleepers, stumbled to the rudder, which was tied with coconut-fibre to an upright stake. The breeze strengthened and there was a ripple of water at the bows. Was he saved?

The one-eyed person looked more disappointed than pleased, and observed to the Leading Gentleman: "We cannot live to Aden, though the wind hold. We must eat," and he regarded the figure of Moussa Isa critically, appraisingly, with mingled favour and disfavour. His expressive

countenance seemed to say, "He is food--but he is poor food".

Nevertheless an unmistakable look of relief overspread his face as the Leading Gentleman replied with conviction, "We must eat..." and added, "This is but a dawn-breeze and will not take us half a mile".

"Then let us eat forthwith," said the one-eyed man, and he fairly beamed upon Moussa Isa, doubtless with the said light of which his body was full, in consequence of his singleness of vision. The whole party was by this time awake and Moussa Isa the cynosure of neighbouring eyes. The Leading Gentleman drew his beautiful knife from its tawdry sheath and gave it a last loving strop on his horny palm.

Willing hands dragged the head of Moussa Isa across the beam and willing bodies sat upon him, that he might not waste time, and something more precious, by thoughtless wriggling, delaying breakfast. The Leading Gentleman crawled to an advantageous position, and having bowed in prayer, sawed away industriously.

Moussa Isa wished to shriek to him that he was a fool and a bungler; that throats were not to be cut in that fashion, with hackings and sawing at the gullet. Knew the clumsy fumbler nothing of big blood-vessels?... but he could not speak.

"_That_ is not the way," said the benevolent-looking old Arab. "Stab, man, stab under the ear--don't cut ... not there, anyhow."

The Leading Gentleman tried the other side of the double-edged blade, continuing obstinately, and Moussa Isa contrived a strange sound which died away on a curious bubbling note and he grew faint.

Suddenly the one-eyed individual at the rudder screamed aloud, and disturbed the Leading Gentleman's earnest endeavour to prevent waste. Not from sensibility did the one-eyed scream, nor on account of his growing conviction that the Leading Gentleman was getting more than his share, but because, as all realized upon looking up, a great ship was bearing down upon them from the West.

So intent had all been upon the preparation of breakfast that the steamer was almost audible when seen.

Good! Here came water, rice, bread, sugar, flour, and perhaps meat, for poor castaways, and probably money--from kindly lady-passengers, this last, for the ship was obviously a liner. The wretched Moussa Isa's carcase was now superfluous--nay dangerous, and must be disposed of at once, for Europeans are most kittle cattle. They will exterminate your tribe with machine-guns, gin, small-pox, and still nastier things, but they are fearfully shocked at a bit of killing on the part of others. They call it murder. And though they will well-nigh depopulate a country themselves, they will wax highly indignant if any of the survivors do a little slaying, even if they kill but a miserable slave, like this Somali dog.

Heave him overboard.

No. Ships carry the "far-eye," the magic instrument that makes the distant near, that brings things from miles away to within a few yards. Doubtless telescopes were on them already. Keep in a close group round the body, smuggle it under the palm-mats and make believe to have been trying to kindle a fire in an old kerosine-oil tin.... Signals of distress appeared and Moussa Isa disappeared. The great steamer approached, slowed down, and came to a standstill beside the boat of the starving castaways. From her cliff-like side the passengers, crowding the rails of her many decks, looked down with interest upon a prehistoric craft in which lay a number of poor emaciated blacks and

Arabs, clad for the most part in scanty cotton rags. These poor creatures feebly extended skinny hands and feebly raised quavering voices, as they begged for water and a little rice, only water and a little rice in the name of Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate. Their tins, lotahs and goat-skins were filled, bags of rice, bread and flour were lowered to them; a box of sugar and a packet of biscuit were added; and a gentle little rain of coins fell as though from Heaven.

Kodaks clicked, clergymen beamed, ladies said, "How sweetly picturesque--poor dears"; the Captain murmured, "Damnedest scoundrels unhung--but can't leave 'em to starve"; the "poor dears" smiled largely and ate wolfishly; Moussa Isa bled, and the great steamer resumed her way.

"Pat" Brighte (she was Cleopatra Diamond Brighte who married Colonel Dearman of the Gungapur Volunteer Bines) found she had got a splendid snap-shot when her films were developed at Gungapur. A little later she got another when the look-out saw, and a boat picked up, a man who was lying in a little dug-out or _toni_. When able to speak, he told the _serang_[44] of the lascars that he was the sole survivor of a bunder-boat which had turned turtle and sunk. He understood nothing but Hindustani.... Miss Brighte pitied the poor wretch but thought he looked rather horrid....

[44] Native boatswain.

The hearts of the castaways were filled with contentment as their stomachs were filled with food, and so busily did they devote themselves to eating, drinking, and sleeping that they forgot all about Moussa Isa beneath the palm-mats.

When they chanced upon him he was just alive, and his wound was closed. The attitude in which he had been dumped down upon the cargo (the ostensible and upper strata thereof, consisting of hides and salt, with a hint of ostrich-feathers, coffee, frankincense and myrrh) had favoured his chance of recovery, for, thanks to a friendly bundle, his head was pressed forward to his chest and the lips of the gaping wound in his throat were shut.

Moussa Isa was tougher than an Indian chicken.

Near Aden his proprietors were captured by an officious and unsympathetic police (Moussa was sent to what he dreamed to be Heaven and later perceived to be a hospital) and while they went to jail, a number of bristly-haired Teutonic gentlemen at the Freidrichstrasse, Arab gentlemen at Muscat, and Afghan gentlemen at Cabul, were made to exercise the virtue of patience. So the would-be murderers of John Robin Ross-Ellison Ilderim Dost Mahommed unintentionally saved him from jail, but never received his acknowledgments....

Discharged from the hospital, Moussa became his own master, a gentleman at large, and, for a time, prospered in the coal-trade.

He steered a coal-lighter that journeyed between the shore and the ships.

One day he received a blow, a curse, and an insult, from the _maccudam_ or foreman of the gang that worked in the boat which he steered. Neither blows nor curses were of any particular account to Moussa, but this man Sulemani, a nondescript creature of no particular race, and only a man in the sense that he was not a woman nor a quadruped, had called him "_Hubshi_" Woolly One. Had called Moussa Isa of the Somal a _Hubshi_, as though he had been a common black nigger. And, of course, it was intentional, for even this eater of dogs and swine and lizards knew the great noble, civilized and cultured Somal, Galla, Afar and Abyssinian

people from niggers. Even an English hide-and-head-buying tripper and _soi-disant_ big-game hunter knew a Zulu from a Hottentot, a Masai from a Wazarambo, and a Somali from a Nigger!

The only question was as to _how_ the scoundrel should be killed, for he was large and strong, and never far from a shovel, crow-bar, boat-hook or some weapon. Not much hope of being able to fasten on his throat like a young leopard on a dibatag, kudu or impala buck.

As Moussa sat behind him at the tiller, he would regard the villain's neck with interest, his fat neck, just below and behind the big ear.

If he only had a knife--such as the beauty that once cut his throat--or even a scrap of iron or of really hard pointed wood, honour could be satisfied and a stain removed from the scutcheon of Moussa Isa of the Somal race, insulted.

One lucky night he got his next scar, the fine one that ornamented his cheek-bone, and a really serviceable weapon of offence against the offender Sulemani.

On this auspicious night, a festive English sailor flung a bottle at him, in merry sport, as he passed beneath the verandah of the temple of Venus and Bacchus in which the sailor sprawled. It struck him in the face, broke against his cheek-bone, and provided him with a new scar and a serviceable weapon, a dagger, convenient to handle and deadly to slay. The bottle-neck was a perfect hilt and the long tapering needle-pointed spire of glass projecting from it was a perfect blade--rightly used, of course. Only a fool would attempt a heart-stab with such a dagger, as it would shatter on the ribs, leaving the fool to pay for his folly. But the neck-stab--for the big blood-vessels--oho! And Moussa Isa licked his chops just as he had seen the black-maned lion do in his own fatherland; just as did the lion from whom the fair Sheikh had saved him.

Toward the sailor, Moussa felt no resentment for the assault that had laid him bleeding in the gutter. Had he called him "_Hubshi_" it would have been a different matter--perhaps very different for the sailor. Moussa Isa regarded curses, cruelties, blows, wounds, attempts at murder, as mere natural manifestations of the attitude of their originators, and part of the inevitable scheme of things. Insults to his personal and racial Pride were in another category altogether.

Yes--the bottle must have been thus usefully broken by the hand of the Supreme Deity himself, prompted by Moussa's own particular and private _kismet_, to provide Moussa with the means of doing his duty by himself and his race, in the matter of the dog who had likened a long-haired, ringletty-haired aquiline-nosed, thin-lipped son of the Somals to a Woolly One--a black beast of the jungle!

Our young friend had never heard of the historical glass-bladed daggers of the _bravos_ of Venice, but he saw at a glance, as he rose to his feet and stared at the bottle, that he could do his business (and that of the foreman) with the fortunately--shaped fragment, and eke leave the point of the weapon in the wound for future complications if the blow failed of immediate fatal effect.

He bided his time....

One black night Moussa Isa sat on the stern of his barge holding to a rope beneath the high wall of the side of the P. & O. liner, _Persia_, in shadow and darkness undispelled by the flickering flare of a brazier of burning fuel, designed to illuminate the path of panting, sweating, coal-laden coolies up and down narrow bending planks, laid from the lighter to the gloomy hole in the ship's side.

The hot, still air was thick with coal-dust and the harmless necessary howls of the hundreds of sons of Ham, toiling at high pressure.

In the centre of a vast, silent circle of mysterious lamp-spangled sea and shore, and of star-spangled sky, this spot was Inferno, an offence to the brooding still immensity.

And suddenly Moussa Isa was dimly conscious of his enemy, of him who had insulted the great Somal race and Moussa Isa. On the broad edge of the big barge Sulemani stood, before, and a foot below him, in the darkness, yelling directions, threats, promises and encouragement to his gang. If only there had been a moon or light by which he could see to strike! Suddenly the edge of a beam of yellow light from a port-hole struck upon Sulemani's neck, illuminating it below and behind his ear. Mrs. "Pat" Dearman, homeward bound, had just entered her cabin and switched on the electric light. (When last she passed Aden she had been Miss Cleopatra Diamond Brighte, bound for Gungapur and the bungalow of her brother.)

It was Mrs. Pat Dearman's habit to read a portion of the Scriptures nightly, ere retiring to rest, for she was a Good Woman and considered the practice to be not only a mark of, but essential to, goodness.

Doubtless the Powers of Evil smiled sardonically when they noted that the light which she evoked for her pious exercise lit the hand of Moussa Isa to murder, providing opportunity. Moussa Isa weighed chances and considered. He did not want to bungle it and lose his revenge and his life too. Would he be seen if he struck now? The light fell on the very spot for the true infallible death-stroke. Should he strike now, here, in the midst of the yelling mob?

Rising silently, Moussa drew his dagger of glass from beneath his only garment, aimed at the patch of light upon the fat neck, and struck. Sulemani lurched, collapsed, and fell between the lighter and the ship without an audible sound in that dim pandemonium.

Even as the "dagger" touched flesh, the light was quenched, Mrs. Pat Dearman having realized that the stuffy, hot cabin was positively uninhabitable until the port-hole could be opened, after coaling operations were completed.

Moussa Isa reseated himself, grabbed the rope again, and with clear conscience, duty done, calmly awaited that which might follow.

Nothing followed. None had seen the deed, consummated in unrelieved gloom; the light had failed most timely....

The next person who mortally affronted Moussa Isa, committing the unpardonable sin, was a grievously fat, foolish Indian Mohammedan youth whose father supported four wives, five sons, six daughters and himself in idleness and an Aden shop.

It was a remarkably idle and unobtrusive shop and yet money flowed into it without stint, mysteriously and unostentatiously, the conduits of its flow being certain modest and retiring Arab visitors in long brown or white _haiks_, with check cotton head-dresses girt with ropes of camel-hair, who colloqued with the honest tradesman and departed as silently and unobtrusively as they came....

One of them, strangely enough, ejaculated "_Himmel_" and "_Donnerwetter_" as often as "_Bismillah_" and "_Inshallah_" when he swore.

The very fat son of this secretive house in an evil hour one inauspicious evening took it upon him to revile and abuse his father's

servant, one Moussa Isa, an African boy, as he performed divers domestic duties in the exiguous "compound" of the dwelling-place and refused to do the fat youth's behest ere completing them.

"Haste thee at once to the bazaar, thou dog," screamed the fat youth.

"Later on," replied Moussa Isa, using the words that express the general attitude of the East.

"Now, dog. Now, Hubshi, or I will beat thee."

"I will kill _you_," replied Moussa Isa, and again bided his time.

"Hubshi, Hubshi, Hubshi," goaded the misguided fat one.

His Kismet led the youth, some weeks later, to lay him down and sleep in the shade of the house upon some broad flagstones. Here Moussa found him and regretted the loss of his glass-dagger,--last seen in the neck of a foreman of coal-coolies toppling into the dark void between a barge and a ship,--but remembered a big heavy stone used to facilitate the scaling of the compound wall.

Staggering with it to the spot where the fat youth lay slumbering peacefully, Moussa Isa, in the sight of all men (who happened to be looking), dashed it upon his fez-adorned head, and established the hitherto disputable fact that the fat youth had brains.

To the Magistrate, Moussa Isa offered neither excuse nor prayer. Explanation he vouchsafed in the words:--

"He called _me_, Moussa Isa of the Somali, a _Hubshi!_"

Being of tender years and of insignificant stature he was condemned to flogging and seven years in a Reformatory School. He was too juvenile for the Aden Jail. The Reformatory School nearest to Aden is at Duri in India, and thither, in spite of earnest prayers that he might go to hard labour in Aden Jail like a man and a Somali, was Moussa Isa duly transported and therein incarcerated.

At the Duri Reformatory School, Moussa Isa was profoundly miserable, most unhappy, and deeply depressed by a sense of the very cruellest injustice.

For here they simply did not know the difference between a Somal and a woolly-haired dog of a negro. They honestly did not know that there was a difference. To them, a clicking Bushman was as a Nubian, an earth-eating Kattia as a Kabyle, a face-cicatrized, tooth-sharpened cannibal of the Aruwimi as a Danakil,--a _Hubshi_ as a Somal. They simply did not know. To them all Africans were _Hubshis_ (just as to an English M.P. all the three or four hundred millions of Indians are Bengali babus). They meant no insult; they knew no better. All Africans were black niggers and every soul in the place, from Brahmin to Untouchable, looked down upon the African, the Black Man, the Nigger, the Cannibal, the _Hubshi_, sent from Africa to defile their Reformatory and destroy their caste.

Here, the proud self-respecting Moussa, jealous champion of the honour of his, to him, high and noble race, found himself a god-send to the Out-castes, the Untouchables, the Depressed Classes, Mangs, Mahars, and Sudras,--they whose touch, nay the touch of whose very shadow, is defilement! For, at last, they, too, had some one to look down upon, to despise, to insult. After being the recipients-of-contempt as naturally and ordainedly as they were breathers-of-air, they at last could apply a salve, and pass on to another the utter contempt and loathing which they themselves received and accepted from the Brahmins and all those of

Caste. They had found one lower than themselves. _Moussa Isa of the Somali_ was the out-cast of out-casts, the pariah of pariahs, prohibited from touching the untouchables, one of a class depressed below the depressed classes--in short a _Hubshi!_

Even a broad-nosed, foreheadless, blubber-lipped aborigine from the hill-jungles objected to his presence!

In the small, self-contained, self-supporting world of the Reformatory, it was Moussa Isa against the World. And against the World he stood up.

It had to learn the difference between a Somali and a _Hubshi_ at any cost--the cost of Moussa's life included.

What added to the sorrow of the situation was the realization of how charming and desirable a retreat the place was in itself,--apart from its ignorant and stupid inhabitants.

Expecting a kind of torture-house wherein he would be starved, sweated, thrashed by brutal _kourbash_-wielding overseers, he found the most palatial and comfortable of clubs, a place of perfect peace, safety, and ease, where one was kindly treated by those in authority, sumptuously fed, luxuriously lodged, and provided with pleasant occupation, attractive amusements and reasonable leisure.

He had always heard and believed that the English were mad, and now he knew it.

As a punishment for murder he had got a birching that merely tickled him, and a free ticket to seven years' board, lodging, clothing, lighting, medical care, instruction and diversion!

Wow!

Were it not for the presence of the insolent, ignorant, untravelled, inexperienced, soft-living, lily-livered dogs of inhabitants, the place was the Earthly Paradise. They were the crocodile in the ointment.

A young Brahmin, son of a well-paid Government servant, and incarcerated for forgery and theft, was his most annoying persecutor. He was at great pains to expectorate and murmur "_Hubshi_" in accents of abhorrent contempt, whenever Moussa Isa chanced between the wind and his nobility.

The first time, Moussa replied with pitying magnanimity and all reasonableness:--

"I am not a _Hubshi_, but a Somali, which is quite different--even as a lion is different from a jackal or a man from an ape".

To which the Brahmin replied but:--

"_Hubshi_," and pointed out that there was danger of Moussa Isa's shadow touching him, if Moussa were not careful.

"I must kill you if you call me _Hubshi_, understanding that I am of the Somals," said Moussa Isa.

"_Hubshi_," would the Brahmin reply and loudly bewail his evil Luck which had put him in the power of the accursed Feringhi Government--a Government that compelled a Brahmin to breathe the same air as a filthy negro dog, a Woolly One of Africa, barely human and most untouchable, a living Contamination ... and Moussa cast about for a weapon.

His first opportunity arose when he found the Brahmin, who was in the book-binding and compositor department, working one day in the same

gardening-gang with himself.

He had but a watering-can by way of offensive weapon, but good play can be made with a big iron watering-can wielded in the right spirit and the right hand.

Master Brahmin was feebly tapping the earth with a kind of single-headed pick, and watching him, Moussa Isa saw that, in a quarter of an hour or so, he might plausibly and legitimately pass within a yard or two of this his enemy, as he went to and fro between the water-tap and the strip of flower-border that he was sprinkling.... Would they hang him if he killed the Brahmin, or would they feebly flog him again and give him a longer sentence (that he be supported, fed, lodged, clothed and cared for) than the present seven years?

There was no foretelling what the mad English would do. Sometimes they acquitted a criminal and gave him money and education, and sometimes they sent him to far distant islands in the South and there housed and fed him free, for life; and sometimes they killed him at the end of a rope.

Doubtless Allah smote the English mad to prevent them from stealing the whole world.... If they were not mad they would do so and enslave all other races--except their conquerors, the Dervishes, of course.... It was like the lying hypocrites to call the Great Mullah "the Mad Mullah" knowing themselves to be mad, and being afraid of their victorious enemy who had driven them out of Somaliland to the coast forts....

Oh, if they would only treat him, Moussa Isa, as an adult, and send him to the Aden Jail to hard labour. There folk knew a Somali from a _Hubshi_; a gentleman of Afar and Galla stock, of Arab blood, Moslem tenets, and Caucasian descent, from a common nigger, a low black Ethiopian, an eater of men and insects, a worshipper of idols and _ju-ju_.

In Aden, men knew a Somali from a _Hubshi_ as surely as they knew an Emir from a mere Englishman.

Here, in benighted, ignorant, savage India, the Dark Continent indeed, men knew not what a Somali was, likened him to a Negro, ranked him lower than a Hindu even--called him a _Hubshi_ in insolent ignorance. If only the beautiful Reformatory were in Berbera, and tenanted by Africans.

Better Aden Jail a thousand times than Duri Reformatory.

What a splendid joke if the dog of a Brahmin who persistently insulted him--even after he had been shown his error and ignorance--should be the unwitting means of his return to Aden--where a Somali gentleman is recognized. There is no harm about a Jail as such. Far from it. A jail is a wise man's paradise provided by fools. You have excellent and plentiful food, a roof against the sun, unfailing water supply, clothing, interesting occupation, and safety--protection from your enemies. No man harries you, you are not chained, you are not tortured; you have all that heart can desire. Freedom?... What _is_ Freedom? Freedom to die of thirst in the desert? Freedom to be disembowelled by the Great Mullah? Freedom to be sold as a slave into Arabia or Persia? Freedom to be the unfed, unpaid, well-beaten property of gun-runners in the Gulf, or of Arab _safari_ ruffians and "black-ivory" men? Freedom to be left to the hyaena when you broke down on the march? Freedom to die of starvation when you fell sick and could not carry coal? Thanks.

If the mad English provided beautiful refuges, and made the commission of certain crimes the requisite qualification for admission, let wise men qualify.

Take this Reformatory--where else could a little Somali boy get such safety, peace, food, and sumptuous luxury; everything the heart could desire, in return for doing a little gardening? Even a house to himself as though he were the honoured, favourite son of some chief.

To Moussa Isa, the dark and dingy cell with its bare stone walls, mud floor, grated aperture and iron door was a fine safe house; its iron bed-frame with cotton-rug-covered laths and stony pillow, a piece of wanton luxury; its shelf, stool and utensils, prideful wealth. If only the place were in Africa or Aden! Well, Aden Jail would do, and if the Brahmin's death led to his being sent there as a serious and respectable murderer, it would be a real case of two enemies on one spear--an insult avenged and a most desired re-patriation achieved.

That would be subtilty,--at once washing out the insult in the Brahmin's blood and getting sent whither his heart turned so constantly and fondly. They had treated him as a juvenile offender because he was so small and young, and because the killing of the fat Mussulman was his first offence, as they supposed. Surely they would recognize that he was a man when he had killed his second enemy--especially if he told them about Sulemani. What in the name of Allah did they want, to constitute a real sound criminal, fit for Aden Jail, if three murders were not enough? Well, he would go on killing until they did have enough, and were obliged to send him to Aden Jail. There he would behave beautifully and kill nobody until they wanted to turn him out to starve. Then, since murder was the requisite qualification, he would murder to admiration. He knew they could not send him over the way to the Duri Jail, since he belonged to Aden, had been convicted there, and only sent to the Duri Reformatory because Aden boasted no such institution....

Yes. The Brahmin's corpse should be the stepping-stone to higher things and the place where people knew a Somali from a Negro.

If only he were in the carpentry department with Master Brahmin, where there were axes, hammers, chisels, knives, saws, and various pointed instruments. Fancy teaching the young gentleman manners and ethnology with an axe! However, after one or two more journeys between the tap and the flower-bed, he would pass within striking-distance of the dog as he worked his slow way along the tract of earth he was supposed to be digging up with the silly short-handled pick.

Should he try and seize the pick and give him one on the temple with it? No, the Brahmin would scream and struggle and the overseer would be on Moussa Isa in a single bound. He must strike a sudden blow in the act of passing.

A few more journeys to the water-tap....

Now! "_Hubshi_" eh?

Halting beside the crouching Brahmin youth, Moussa Isa swung up the heavy watering-can by the spout and aimed a blow with all his strength at the side of his enemy's head. He designed to bring the sharp strong rim of the base behind the ear with the first blow, on the temple with the second, and just anywhere thereafter, if time permitted of a thereafter.

But the aggravating creature tossed his head as Moussa, with a grunt of energy, brought the vessel down, and the rim merely struck the top of the shaven skull. Another--harder. Another--with frenzied strength and the force of long-suppressed rage and sense of wrong.

And then Moussa was knocked head over heels and sat upon by the overseer in charge of the garden-gang, while the Brahmin twitched convulsively on the ground. He was by no means dead, however, and the sole immediate

results, to Moussa, were penal diet, solitary confinement in his palatial cell, a severe sentence of corn-grinding with the heavy quern, and most joyous recollections of the sound of the water-can on the pate of the foe.

"I have still to kill you, of course," he whispered to his victim, the next time they met, and the Brahmin went in terror of his life. He was a very clever young person and had passed an astounding number of examinations in the course of his brief career. But he was not courageous, and his "education" had given him skill in nothing practical, except in penmanship, which skill he had devoted to forgery.

"Why did you violently commit this dastardish deed, and assault the harmless peaceful Brahmin?" asked the Superintendent, a worthy and voluble babu, and then translated the question into debased Hindustani.

"He called me _Hubshi_, and I will kill him," replied Moussa.

"Oho! and you kill everyone who calls you _Hubshi_, do you, Master African?"

"I do. I wish to go to Aden Jail for attempting murder. It will be murder if I am kept here where none knows a man from a dog."

"Oho! And you would kill even _me_, I suppose, if I called you _Hubshi_."

"Of course! I will kill you in any case if I am not sent to Aden Jail."

The babu decided that it was high time for some other institution to shelter this touchy and truculent person, and that he would lay the case before the next weekly Visitor and ask for it to be submitted to the Committee at their ensuing monthly meeting.

The Visitor of the week happened to be the Educational Inspector. "Wants to leave India, does he?" said the Inspector, looking Moussa over as he heard the statement of the Superintendent. "I admire his taste. India is a magnificent country to leave."

The Educational Inspector, a very keen, thoughtful and competent educationist, was a disappointed man, like so many of his Service. He felt that he had, for quarter of a century, strenuously woven ropes of sand. When his liver was particularly sluggish he felt that for quarter of a century he had worked industriously, not at a useless thing, but at an evil thing--a terrible belief.

Moreover, after quarter of a century of faithful labour and strict economy, he found himself with a load of debt, broken health, and a cheaply educated family of boys and girls to whom he was a complete stranger--merely the man who found the money and sent it Home, visiting them from time to time at intervals of four or five years. India had killed his wife, and broken him.

He had had what seemed to him to be bitter experience also. An individual, notoriously slack and incompetent, ten years his junior, had been promoted over his head, because he was somebody's cousin and the kind of fatuous ass that only labours industriously in drawing-rooms and at functions, recuperating by slacking idly in offices and at duties--a paltry but paying game much practised by a very small class in India.

Another individual, by reason of his having come to India two boats earlier than the Inspector, drew Rs. 500 a month more than he did, this being the Senior Inspector's Allowance. That he was reported on as lazy, eccentric, and irregular, made no difference to the fact that he was a fortnight senior to, and therefore worth Rs. 500 a month more than, the

next man. The recipient regarded the extra trifle (L400 a year) as his bare right and merest due. The Inspector regarded it as an infamous piece of injustice and folly that for fifteen years the whole of this sum should go to a lazy fool because he happened to set sail from England on a certain date, and not a fortnight later. So he loathed and detested India where he had had bad luck, bad health and what he considered bad treatment, and sympathized with the desire of Moussa Isa.

"Why do you want to go back to Aden?" he inquired in the *lingua franca* of the Indian Empire, of Moussa whose heart beat high with hope.

"Because here, where there are no lions, wolves think a lion is a dog; here where there are no men, asses think a man is a monkey. I am a Somal, and these ignorant camels think I am a negro--a filthy Hubshi."

"And you tried to kill another boy because he called you 'Hubshi,' eh?"

"I did, Sahib, and I will kill him yet if I be not sent to Aden. If that fail I will kill myself also."

"Stout fella," commented the Inspector in his own vernacular, and added, musing aloud:--

"You'll come to the gallows through possessing pride, self-respect and determination, my lad. You're behind the times--or rather you maintain a spirit for which Civilization has no use. You must return to the Wilds of the Earth or else you must be content to become good, grubby, and grey, dull and dejected, sober and sorrowful, respectable and unenterprising--like me; and you must cultivate fat, propriety, smugness and the Dead Level.... What, you young Devil! You'd have self-respect and pride, would you; be quick upon the point of honour, eh? revive the duello, what? Get thee to a--er--less civilized and respectable age or place ... in other words, Mr. Toshiwalla, bring the case before the Committee of Visitors. I'll put up a note to the effect that he had better be sent back to Aden. This is a Reformatory, and there's nothing very reformatory about keeping him to plan murder and suicide because he has been (quite unjustifiably) transported as well as flogged and imprisoned. Yes, we'll consider the case. Meanwhile, keep a sharp eye on him--and give him all the corn-grinding he can do. Sweat the Original Sin out of him ... and see he does not secrete any kind of weapon."

Accordingly was Moussa segregated, and to the base women's-work of corn-grinding in the cook-house, wholly relegated. It was hard, soul-breaking work, ignoble and degrading, but he drew two crumbs of comfort from the bread of affliction. He was developing his arm-muscles and he was literally watering the said bread of affliction with the sweat of labour. As the heavy drops trickled from chin and nose into the meal around the grindstone, it pleased Moussa Isa to reflect that his enemy should eat of it. Since the shadow of Moussa was pollution to these travesties of men and warriors, let them have a little concrete pollution also. But in the cook-house, while arm and soul wearied together, one heavy day of copper sky and brazen earth, first eye and then foot, fell upon a piece of tin, the lid of some empty milk-tin or like vessel. The prehensile toes gathered in the trove, the foot gently rose and the fingers of the pendant left hand secured the disc, while the body swayed with the strenuous circlings of the right hand that revolved the heavy upper millstone.

That night, immediately after being locked in his cell, that there might be the fullest time for bleeding to death, he slashed and slashed while strength lasted at wrist and abdomen--but without succeeding in penetrating the abdominal wall and reaching the viscera.

This effected his transfer to the Reformatory hospital and underlined the remark of the Inspector in the Visitors' Book to the effect that one

Moussa Isa would commit suicide or murder, if kept at Duri, and would certainly not be "reformed" in any way. In hospital, Major Jackson of the Royal Army Medical Corps, a Visitor of the Duri Jail, paying his periodical visits, grew interested in the sturdy bright boy and soon came to like him for his directness, cheery courage, and refreshing views. When the boy was convalescent he took him on the surrounding Duri golf-links as his caddie in his endless games with his poor friend Sergeant-Major Lawrence-Smith, ex-gentleman.

Moussa was grateful and, fingering the scar on his throat, likened Major Jackson to his hero, the fair Sheikh who had saved him from the lion and had lost his life through intervening on Moussa's behalf in the boat. But he was not mad like these English. He would not, with infinite earnestness, seriousness and mingled joy at success and grief at failure, have pursued a little white ball with a stick, mile after mile, knocking it with infinite precautions, every now and then, into a little hole, and taking it out again.

No, his idea of sport across country with an iron-shod stick would rather have been lion-hunting with an assegai (yet, curiously enough, one, Robin Ross-Ellison, lived to play more than one game of golf with Major Jackson on these same Duri Links). To see this adult white man behaving so, coram publico, made Moussa bitterly ashamed for him.

And, as the sun set, Moussa Isa earned a sharp rebuke for inattentive slacking, as he stood sighing his soul to where it sank in the West over Aden and Somaliland.... Wait till his chance of escape arrived; he would journey straight for the sunset, day after day, until he reached a sea-shore. There he would steal a canoe and paddle and paddle straight for the sunset, day after day, until he reached a sea-shore again. That would be Africa or Arabia, and Moussa Isa would be where a Somal is known from a Hubshi.... Should he make a bolt for it now? No, too weak, and not fair to this kind Sahib who had healed him and sympathized with him in the matter of the ignorance and impudence of those who misnamed a son of the Somals.... In due course, the Committee of Visitors met at the Reformatory one morning, and found on the agenda paper inter alia the case of Moussa Isa, a murderer from Aden, his attempt at murder and suicide, and his prayer to be sent to Aden Jail.

On the Committee were the Director of Public Instruction, the Collector, the Executive Engineer, the Superintendent of Duri Jail, the Educational Inspector, the Cantonment Magistrate, Major Jackson of the Royal Army Medical Corps, and a number of Indian gentlemen. To the Chairman's inquiries Moussa Isa made the usual replies. He had been mortally affronted and had endeavoured to avenge the insult. He had tried to do his duty to himself--and to his enemy. He had been put to base women's-work as a punishment for defending his honour and he had tried to take his life in despair. Was there no justice in British lands? What would the Sahib himself do if his honour were assailed? If one rose up and insulted him and his race? Called him baboon, born of baboons, for example? Or had the Sahib no honour? Why should he have been transported when he was not sentenced to transportation? What had he done but defend his honour and avenge insults? Unless he were now tried for murder and suicide, and sentenced to hard labour in Aden Jail, he would go on murdering until they did send him there. If they said, "Well, you shan't go there, whatever you do," he would kill himself. If he could get no sort of weapon he would starve himself (he did not in his ignorance quote the gentle and joyous Pankhurst family) or hold his breath. So they had better send him, and that was all he had got to say about it.

"Send him for trial before the City Magistrate and recommend that he go to Aden Jail at once, before he hurts somebody else," said the native members of the Committee. "Why should we be troubled with the off-scourings of Aden?"

"Certainly not," opined the Collector of Duri. A pretty state of affairs if every criminal were to be allowed to select his own place of punishment, and to terrorize any penitentiary that had the misfortune to lack favour in his sight. Let the boy be well flogged for the assault and attempted suicide, and then let him rejoin the ordinary gangs and classes. It was the Superintendent's duty to watch his charges and keep discipline in what was, after all, a school.

"Sir, he is one violent and dangerous character and will assault the peaceful and mild. Yea--he may even attack _me_," objected the babu.

"Are we to understand that you admit your inability to maintain order in this Reformatory?" inquired the Director of Public Instruction from the Chair.

Anything but that. They were to understand, on the contrary, that the babu was respectfully a most unprecedented disciplinarian.

"You don't expect cock angels in a Reformatory, y' know," said the engineer, suddenly awaking to light a fat black cheroot. "Got to use the--ah--strong hand;--on their--ah--_you_ know," and he resumed his slumbers, puffing mechanically and unconsciously at his cheroot.

So Moussa Isa was flogged and sent back to gardening, lessons and drawing.

Yes--the Somali was taught drawing. Not mere utilitarian drawing-to-scale and making plans and elevations, but "freehand"-drawing, the reproducing of meaningless twirly curves and twiddly twists from symmetrical conventional "copies". He copied copies and drew lines--but never copied things, nor drew things. In time he could, with infinite labour, produce a copy of a flat "copy" that a really observant eye could identify with the original, but had you asked him to draw his foot or the door of the room, his desk, his watering-can or book, he would probably have replied, "_They_ are not drawing-copies," and would have laughed at your absurd joke. No, he was not taught to draw _things_, nor to give expression to impression.

And he had a special warder all to himself, who watched him as a cat watches a mouse. However, warders cannot prevent looks and smiles, and whenever Moussa Isa saw the Brahmin youth, he gave a peculiar look and a meaning smile. It was borne in upon the clever young man that the Hubshi looked at his neck, below his ear, when he smiled that dreadful smile.

Sometimes a significant gesture accompanied the meaning smile. For Moussa Isa had decided, upon the rejection of his prayer by the Committee, to wait until he was a little older and bigger, more like a proper criminal and less of a wretched little "juvenile offender," and then to qualify, by murder, for the Aden Jail--with the unoffered help of the Brahmin boy.

Allah would vouchsafe opportunity, and when he did so, Moussa Isa, his servant, would seize it. Doubtless it would come as soon as he was big enough to receive the privileges of an adult and serious criminal. Anyhow, the insult would be properly punished and the honour of the Somal race avenged....

Came the day when certain of the sinful inhabitants of the Duri Reformatory were to be conducted to a neighbouring Government High School, a centre for the official Drawing Examinations for the district, there to sit and be examined in the gentle art of Art.

To this end they had been trained in the copying of lines and in the painting of areas of conventional shape, not that they might be made to

observe natural form, express themselves in reproduction, render the inner outer, originate, articulate ... but that they might pass an examination in copying unnatural things in impossible colours. Thus it came to pass that, in the big hall of this school, divers of the Reformed found themselves copying, and colouring the copy of, a curious picture pinned to a blackboard--the picture of a floral wonder unknown to Botany, possessed of delicate mauve leaves, blue-veined, shaped some like the oak-leaf and some like the ivy; of long slender blades like those of the iris, but of tenderest pink; of beautiful and profusely chromatic blossoms, reminding one now of the orchid, now of the sunflower and anon of the forget-me-not; and likewise of clustering fulgent fruit.

And at the back of all these budding artists and blossoming jail-birds, and in the same small desk sat the Brahmin youth and--Oh Merciful Allah!--Moussa Isa, Somali.

The native gentleman in charge of the party from the Duri Reformatory had duly escorted his charges into the hall, handed them over to Mr. Edward Jones, the Head of the High School, and been requested to wait outside with similar custodians of parties. (Mr. Edward Jones had known very strange things to happen in Examination Halls to which the friends and supporters of candidates had access during the examination.)

To Mr. Edward Jones the thus deserted Brahmin boy made frantic and piteous appeal.

"Oh, Sir," prayed he, "let me sit somewhere else and not beside this African."

"You'll stay where you are," replied Mr. Edward Jones, suspicious of the appeal and the appellant. If the fat glib youth objected to the African on principle, Mr. Edward Jones would be glad, metaphorically speaking, to rub his Brahminical nose in it. If this were not his reason, it was, doubtless, one even less creditable. Mr. Edward Jones had been in India long enough to learn to look very carefully for the motive.

Moussa Isa licked his chops once again, and, as Mr. Jones turned away, the unhappy Brahmin cried in his anguish of soul:--

"Oh, Sir! Watch this African carefully."

"All will be watched carefully," was the suspicious and cold reply.

Moussa smiled broadly upon his erstwhile contemptuous and insulting enemy, and began to consider the possibilities of a long and well-pointed lead-pencil as a means of vengeance. Pencils were intended for marking fair surfaces--might one not be used on this occasion for the cleaning of a sullied surface, that of a besmirched honour?

One insulter of the Somal race had died by the stab of a piece of broken bottle. Might not another die by the stab of a lead-pencil?

Doubtful. Very risky. The stabbing and piercing potentialities of a lead pencil are not yet properly investigated, tabulated, established and known. It would be a pity to do small damage and incur a heavy corn-grinding punishment. He might never get another chance of vengeance either, if he bungled this one.

Well, there were three hours in which to decide ... and Moussa Isa commenced to draw, pausing, from time to time, to smile meaningfully at the Brahmin, and to lick his chops suggestively. Anon he rested from his highly uninteresting and valueless labours, laid his pencil on the desk, and gazed around in search of inspiration in the matter of the best method of dealing with his enemy.

His eye fell upon a picture of a lion that ornamented the wall of the hall; he stiffened like a pointer and fingered some scars on his right arm. He had never seen a picture of a lion before and, for a fraction of a second, he was shocked and alarmed--and then, while his body sat in an Indian High School hall, his spirit flew to an East African desert, and there sojourned awhile.

Moussa Isa was again the slave of an ivory-poaching, hide-poaching, specimen-poaching, slave-dealing gang of Arabs, Negroes, and Portuguese half-castes, led by a white man of the Teutonic persuasion. He could feel the smiting heat, see the scrub, jungle, and sand shimmering and dancing in the heat haze. He could see the line of porters, bales on heads, the Arabs on horseback, the white man in a litter swinging from a long bamboo pole beneath which half a dozen Swahili loped along. He could see the velvet star-gemmed night and the camp-fires, smell the smoke and the savoury odours of the cooking, hear the sudden shrieks and yells that followed the roar of the springing lion, feel the crushing crunch of its great teeth in his arm as it seized him from beside the nearest fire and stood over him.... Yes, that was the night when the fair Sheikh from the North had showed the mettle of his pastures and bound Moussa Isa to him for ever in the bonds of worshipping gratitude and love. For, while others shrieked, yelled, fled, flung burning brands and spears, or fired hasty, unaimed, ineffectual shots, the fair Sheikh from the North had sprung at the lion as it stood over Moussa Isa and driven his knife into its eye, and as it smote him to the earth, buried its fangs in his shoulder and started to drag him away, had stabbed upward between the ribs, giving it a second death-blow, transfixing its heart. Thus it was he had earned the name by which he was known from Zanzibar to Berbera, "He-who-slays-lions-with-the-knife," had earned the envy and hatred of the fat white man and the Arabs, the boundless admiration of the Swahili askaris, hunters and porters, and the deep dog-like affection of Moussa Isa....

And then Moussa's spirit returned to his body and he saw but the picture of a lion on a High School wall. He commenced to draw again and suddenly had an inspiration. Deliberately he broke the point of his pencil and, rising, marched up to the dais, whereon, at a table, sat Mr. Edward Jones.

Mr. Edward Jones had been shot with bewildering suddenness from Cambridge quadrangles into the Indian Educational Service. Of India he knew nothing, of education he knew less, but boldly took it upon him to combine the two unknowns for the earning of his living. If wise and beneficent men offered him a modest wage for becoming a professor and exponent of that which he did not know, he had no objection to accepting it; but there were people who wondered why it should be that, out of forty million English people, Mr. Edward Jones should be the chosen one to represent England to the youth of Duri, and asked whether there were no keen, strictly conscientious, sporting, strong Englishmen available; no enthusiastic educational experts left in all the British Isles, that Mr. Edward Jones of all people had come to Duri?

"What do you want?" he asked (how he hated these poverty-stricken, smelly, ignoble creatures. Why was he not a master at Eton, instead of at Duri High School. Why wouldn't somebody give him a handsome income for looking handsome and standing around beautifully--like these aide-de-camp Johnnies and "staff" people. Since there was nothing on earth he could do well, he ought to have been provided with a job in which he could look well).

"May I borrow the Sahib's knife?" asked Moussa Isa, "I have broken my pencil and cannot draw." Mr. Edward Jones picked up the penknife that lay on his desk, the cheap article of restricted utility supplied to Government Offices by the Stationery Department, and handed it to Moussa

Isa. Even as he took it with respectful salaam, Moussa Isa summed up its possibilities. Blade two inches long, sharp-pointed, handle six inches long, wooden; not a clasp knife, blade immovable in handle. It would do--and he turned to go to his seat and presumably to sharpen his pencil.

Idly watching the boy and thinking of other things, Jones saw him try the point of the knife on his thumb, walk up behind the other occupant of his desk, his Brahmin neighbour, seize that neighbour by the hair, push his head sharp over on to the shoulder, and plunge the knife into his neck; seat himself, and commence to draw with the unfortunate Brahmin's pencil.

Jones sprang to his feet and rushed to the spot, to find that he had not been dreaming. No--on the back seat drooped a boy bleeding like a stuck pig and another industriously drawing, his face illuminated by a smile of contentment.

Jones pressed his thumbs into the neck of the sufferer, as he called to an assistant-supervisor to run to the hospital for Dr. Almeida, hoping to be able to close the severed jugular from which welled an appalling stream of blood.

"It is quite useless, Sahib," observed Moussa, "nor can a doctor help. When one has got it there, he may give his spear to his son and turn his face to the wall. That dog will never say 'Hubshi' to a Somal again."

"Catch hold of that boy," said Mr. Edward Jones to another assistant-supervisor who clucked around like a perturbed hen.

"Fear not, Sahib, I shall not escape. I go to Aden Jail," said Moussa cheerfully--but he pondered the advisability of attempting escape from the Reformatory should he be sentenced to be hanged. It had always seemed an impossibility, but it would be better to attempt the impossible than to await the rope. But doubtless they would say he was too small and light to hang satisfactorily, and would send him to Aden. Thanks, Master Brahmin, realize as you die that you have greatly obliged your slayer....

* * * * *

"Now you will most certainly be hanged to death by rope and I shall be rid of troublesome fellow," said the Superintendent to Moussa Isa when that murderous villain was temporarily handed over to him by the police-sepoy to whom he had been committed by Mr. Jones.

"I have avenged my people and myself," replied Moussa Isa, "even as I said, I go to Aden Jail--where there are men, and where a Somal is known from a Hubshi"

"You go to hang--across the road there at Duri Gaol," replied the babu, and earnestly hoped to find himself a true prophet. But though the wish was father to the thought, the expression thereof was but the wicked uncle, for it led to the undoing of the wish. So convinced and convincing did the babu appear to Moussa Isa, that the latter decided to try his luck in the matter of unauthorized departure from the Reformatory precincts. If they were going to hang him (for defending and purging his private and racial honour), and not send him to Aden after all, he might as well endeavour to go there at his own expense and independently. If he were caught they could not do more than hang him; if he were not caught he would get out of this dark ignorant land, if he had to walk for a year....

When he came to devote his mind to the matter of escape, Moussa Isa

found it surprisingly easy. A sudden dash from his cell as the door was incautiously opened that evening, a bound and scramble into a tree, a leap to an out-house roof, another scramble, and a drop which would settle the matter. If something broke he was done, if nothing broke he was within a few yards of six-foot-high crops which extended to the confines of the jungle, wherein were neither police, telegraph offices, railways, roads, nor other apparatus of the enemy. Nothing broke--Duri Reformatory saw Moussa Isa no more. For a week he travelled only by night, and thereafter boldly by day, getting lifts in *_bylegharies_*, [45] doing odd jobs, living as the crows and jackals live when jobs were unavailable, receiving many a kindness from other wayfarers, especially those of the poorer sort, but always faring onward to the West, ever onward to the setting sun, always to the sea and Africa, until the wonderful and blessed day when he believed for a moment that he was mad and that his eyes and brain were playing him tricks.... After months and months of weary travel, always toward the setting sun, he had arrived one terrible evening of June at a wide river and a marvellous bridge--a great bridge hung by mighty chains upon mightier posts which stood up on either distant bank. It was a *_pukka_* road, a Grand Trunk Road suspended in the air across a river well-nigh great as Father Nile himself.

[45] Bullock carts.

On the banks of this river stood an ancient walled city of tall houses separated by narrow streets, a city of smells and filth, wherein there were no Sahibs, few Hindus and many Mussulmans. In a mud-floored miserable *_mussafarkhana_*, [46] without its gates, Moussa Isa slept, naked, hungry and very sad--for he somehow seemed to have missed the sea. Surely if one kept on due westward always to the setting sun, one reached the sea in time? The time was growing long, however, and he was among a strange people, few of whom understood the Hindustani he had learnt at Duri. Luckily they were largely Mussulmans. Should he abandon the setting sun and take to the river, following it until it reached the sea? He could take ship then for Africa by creeping aboard in the darkness, and hiding himself until the ship had started.... There might be no city at the mouth of the river when he got there. It might never reach the sea. It might just vanish into some desert like the *Webi-Shebeyli* in Somaliland. No, he would keep on toward the West, crossing the great bridge in the morning. He did so, and turned aside to admire the railway-station of the Cantonment on the other side of the river, to get a drink, and to see a train come in, if happily such might occur.

[46] Poor travellers' rest-house.

Ere he had finished rinsing his mouth and bathing his feet at the public water-standard on the platform, the whistle of a distant train charmed his ears and he sat him down, delighted, to enjoy the sights and sounds, the stir and bustle, of its arrival and departure. And so it came about that certain passengers by this North West Frontier train were not a little intrigued to notice a small and very black boy suddenly arise from beside the drinking-fountain and, with a strange hoarse scream, fling himself at the feet of a young Englishman (who in Norfolk jacket and white flannel trousers strolled up and down outside the first-class carriage in which he was travelling to Kot Ghazi from Karachi), and with every sign of the wildest excitement and joy embrace and kiss his boots....

Moussa Isa was convinced that he had gone mad and that his eyes and brain were playing him tricks.

Mr. John Robin Ross-Ellison (also Mir Ilderim Dost Mahommed Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan when in other dress and other places) was likewise more than a little surprised--and certainly a little moved, at the sight of Moussa Isa and his wild demonstrations of uncontrollable joy.

"Well, I'm damned!" said he in the _role_ of Mr. John Robin Ross-Ellison. "Rum little devil. Fancy your turning up here." And in the _role_ of Mir Ilderim Dost Mahommed Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan added in debased Arabic: "Take this money, little dog, and buy thee a _tikkut_ to Kot Ghazi. Get into this train, and at Kot Ghazi follow me to a house."

To the house Moussa Isa followed him and to the end of his life likewise, visiting _en route_ Mekran Kot, among other places, and encountering one, Ilderim the Weeper, among other people (as was told to Major Michael Malet-Marsac by Ross-Ellison's half-brother, the Subedar-Major.)

CHAPTER III.

THE WOMAN.

(And Augustus Grabble; General Murger; Sergeant-Major Lawrence-Smith; Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius Gosling-Green; Mr. Horace Faggit; as well as a reformed JOHN ROBIN ROSS-ELLISON.)

Sec. 1. MR. GROBBLE.

There was something very maidenly about the appearance of Augustus Clarence Percy Marmaduke Grobble. One could not imagine him doing anything unfashionable, perspiry, rough or rude; nor could one possibly imagine him doing anything ruthless, fine, terrible, strong or difficult.

One expected his hose to be of the same tint as his shirt and handkerchief, his dress-trousers to be braided, his tie to be delicate and beautiful, his dainty shoes to be laced with black silk ribbon,—but one would never expect him to go tiger-shooting, to ride a gay and giddy young horse, to box, or to do his own cooking and washing in the desert or jungle.

Augustus had been at College during that bright brief period of the attempted apotheosis of the dirty-minded little Decadent whose stock in trade was a few Aubrey Beardsley drawings, a widow's-cruse-like bottle of Green Chartreuse, an Oscar Wilde book, some dubious blue china, some floppy ties, an assortment of second-hand epigrams, scent and scented tobacco, a _nil admirari_ attitude and long weird hair.

Augustus had become a Decadent—a silly harmless conventionally-unconventional Decadent. But, as Carey, a contemporary Rugged blood, coarsely remarked, he hadn't the innards to go far wrong.

It was part of his cheap and childish ritual as a Decadent to draw the curtains after breakfast, light candles, place the flask of Green Chartreuse and a liqueur-glass on the table, drop one drop of the liquid into the glass, burn a stinking pastille of incense, place a Birmingham "god" or an opening lily before him, ruffle his hair, and sprawl on the sofa with a wicked French novel he could not read—hoping for visitors and an audience.

If any fellow dropped in and, very naturally, exclaimed, "What the devil _are_ you doing?" he would reply:—

"Wha'? Oh, sunligh'? Very vulgar thing sunligh'. Art is always superior to Nature. You love the garish day being a gross Philistine, wha'? Now I only live at night. Glorious wicked nigh'. So I make my own nigh'. Wha'? Have some Green Chartreuse--only drink fit for a Hedonist. I drink its colour and I taste its glorious greenness. Ichor and Nectar of Helicon and the Pierian Spring. I loved a Wooman once, with eyes of just that glowing glorious green and a soul of ruby red. I called her my Emerald-eyed, Ruby-souled Devil, and we drank together deep draughts of the red red Wine of Life----"

Sometimes the visitor would say: "Look here, Grobb, you ought to be in the Zoo, you know. There's a lot there like you, all in one big cage," or similar words of disapproval.

Sometimes a young fresher would be impressed, especially if he had been brought up by Aunts in a Vicarage, and would also become a Decadent.

During vac. the Decadents would sometimes meet in Town, and See Life--a singularly uninteresting and unattractive side of Life (much more like Death), and the better men among them--better because of a little sincerity and pluck--would achieve a petty and rather sordid "adventure" perhaps.

Augustus had no head for Mathematics and no gift for Languages, while his Classics had always been a trifle more than shaky. History bored him--so he read Moral Philosophy.

There is a somewhat dull market for second-hand and third-class Moral Philosophy in England, so Augustus took his to India. In the first college that he adorned his classes rapidly dwindled to nothing, and the College Board dispensed with the services of Augustus, who passed on to another College in another Province, leaving behind him an odour of moral dirtiness, debt, and decadence. Quite genuine decadence this time, with nothing picturesque about it, involving doctors' bills, alimony, and other the fine crops of wild-oat sowing.

At Gungapur he determined to "settle down," to "turn over a new leaf," and laid a good space of paving-stone upon his road to reward.

He gave up the morning nip, docked the number of cocktails, went to bed before two, took a little gentle exercise, met Mrs. Pat Dearman--and (like Mr. Robin Ross-Ellison, General Miltiades Murger and many another) succumbed at once.

Mrs. Pat Dearman had come to India (as Miss Cleopatra Diamond Brighte) to see her brother, Dickie Honor Brighte, at Gungapur, and much interested to see, also, a Mr. Dearman whom, in his letters to her, Dickie had described as "a jolly old buster, simply full of money, and fairly spoiling for a wife to help him blow it in." She had not only seen him but had, as she wrote to acidulous Auntie Priscilla at the Vicarage, "actually married him after a week's acquaintance--fancy!--the last thing in the world she had ever supposed ... etc." (Auntie Priscilla had smiled in her peculiarly unpleasant way as the artless letter enlarged upon the strangeness of her ingenuous niece's marrying the rich man about whom her innocent-minded brother had written so much.)

Having thoroughly enjoyed a most expensive and lavish honeymoon, Mrs. Pat Dearman had settled down to make her good husband happy, to have a good time and to do any amount of Good to other people--especially to young men--who have so many temptations, are so thoughtless, and who easily become the prey of such dreadful people and such dreadful habits.

Now it is to be borne in mind that Mrs. Dearman's Good Time was marred to some extent by her unreasoning dislike of all Indians, a dislike

which grew into a loathing hatred, born and bred of her ignorance of the language, customs, beliefs and ideals of the people among whom she lived, and from whom her husband's great wealth sprang.

To Augustus--fresh from very gilded gold, painted lilies and highly perfumed violets--she seemed a vision of delight, a blessed damozel, a living Salvation.

"Incedit dea aperta," he murmured to himself, and wondered whether he had got the quotation right. Being a weak young gentleman, he straightway yearned to lead a Beautiful Life so as to be worthy to live in the same world with her, and did it--for a little while. He became a teetotaller, he went to bed at ten and rose at five--going forth into the innocent pure morning and hugging his new Goodness to his soul as he composed odes and sonnets to Mrs. Pat Dearman. So far so excellent--but in Augustus was no depth of earth, and speedily he withered away. And his reformation was a house built upon sand, for, even at its pinnacle, it was compatible with the practising of sweet and pure expressions before the glass, the giving of much time to the discovery of the really most successful location of the parting in his long hair, the intentional entangling of his fingers with those of the plump and pretty young lady (very brunette) in Rightaway & Mademore's, what time she handed him "ties to match his eyes," as he requested.

It was really only a change of pose. The attitude now was: "I, young as you behold me, am old and weary of sin. I have Passed through the Fires. Give me beauty and give me peace. I have done with the World and its Dead Sea Fruit. There is no God but Beauty, and Woman is its Prophet." And he improved in appearance, grew thinner, shook off a veritable Old Man of the Sea in the shape of a persistent pimple which went ill with the Higher Aestheticism, and achieved great things in delicate socks, sweet shirts, dream ties, a thumb ring and really pretty shoes.

In the presence of Mrs. Pat Dearman he looked sad, smouldering, despairing and Fighting-against-his-Lower-Self, when not looking Young-but-Hopelessly-Depraved-though-Yearning-for-Better-Things. And he flung out quick epigrams, sighed heavily, talked brilliantly and wildly, and then suppressed a groan. Sometimes the pose of, "Dear Lady, I could kiss the hem of your garment for taking an interest in me and my past--but it is too lurid for me to speak of it, or for you to understand it if I did," would appear for a moment, and sometimes that of, "Oh, help me--or my soul must drown. Ah, leave me not. If I have sinned I have suffered, and in your hands lie my Heaven and my Hell." Such shocking words were never uttered of course--but there are few things more real than an atmosphere, and Augustus Clarence could always get his atmosphere all right.

And Mrs. Pat Dearman (who had come almost straight from a vicarage, a vicar papa and a vicarish aunt, to an elderly, uxorious husband and untrammelled freedom, and knew as much of the World as a little bunny rabbit whom its mother has not brought yet out into the warren for its first season), was mightily intrigued.

She felt motherly to the poor boy at first, being only two years his junior; then sisterly; and, later, very friendly indeed.

Let it be clearly understood that Mrs. Pat Dearman was a thoroughly good, pure-minded woman, incapable of deceiving her husband, and both innocent and ignorant to a remarkable degree. She was the product of an unnatural, specialized atmosphere of moral supermanity, the secluded life, and the careful suppression of healthy, natural instincts. In justice to Augustus Clarence also it must be stated that the impulse to decency, though transient, was genuine as far as it went, and that he would as soon have thought of cutting his long beautiful hair as of thinking evil in connection with Mrs. Pat Dearman.

Yes, Mrs. Pat Dearman was mightily intrigued--and quickly came to the conclusion that it was her plain and bounden duty to "save" the poor, dear boy--though from what she was not quite clear. He was evidently unhappy and obviously striving-to-be-Good--and he had such beautiful eyes, dressed so tastefully, and looked at one with such a respectful devotion and regard, that, really--well, it added a tremendous savour to life. Also he should be protected from the horrid flirting Mrs. Bickker who simply lived to collect scalps.

And so the friendship grew and ripened--quickly as is possible only in India. The evil-minded talked evil and saw harm where none existed, proclaiming themselves for what they were, and injuring none but themselves. (Sad to say, these were women, with one or two exceptions in favour of men--like the Hatter--who perhaps might be called "old women of the male sex," save that the expression is a vile libel upon the sex that still contains the best of us.) Decent people expressed the belief that it would do Augustus a lot of good--much-needed good; and the crystallized male opinion was that the poisonous little beast was uncommon lucky, but Mrs. Pat Dearman would find him out sooner or later.

As for Mr. (or Colonel) Dearman, that lovable simple soul was grateful to Augustus for existing--as long as his existence gave Mrs. Dearman any pleasure. If the redemption of Augustus interested her, let Augustus be redeemed. He believed that the world neither held, nor had held, his wife's equal in character and nobility of mind. He worshipped an image of his own creation in the shape of Cleopatra Dearman, and the image he had conceived was a credit to the single-minded, simple-hearted gentleman.

Naturally he did not admire Augustus Clarence Percy Marmaduke Grobble (learned in millinery; competent, as modes varied, to discuss harem, hobble, pannier, directoire, slit, or lamp-shade skirts, berthes, butterfly-_motif_ embroideries, rucked ninon sleeves, chiffon tunics, and similar mysteries of the latest fashion-plates, with a lady undecided).

Long-haired men put Dearman off, and he could not connect the virile virtues with large bows, velvet coats, scent, manicure, mannerisms and meandering.

But if Augustus gave his wife any pleasure--why Augustus had not lived wholly in vain. His attitude to Augustus was much that of his attitude to his wife's chocolates, fondants, and crystallized violets--"Not absolutely nourishing and beneficial for you, Dearest;--but harmless, and I'll bring you a ton with pleasure".

Personally he'd as soon go about with his wife's fat French poodle as with Augustus, but so long as either amused her--let the queer things flourish.

Among the nasty-minded old women who "talked" was the Mad Hatter.

"Shameful thing the way that Dearman woman throws dust in her husband's eyes!" said he, while sipping his third Elsie May at the club bar. "He should divorce her. I would, to-morrow, if I were burdened with her."

A knee took him in the small of the back with unnecessary violence and he spun round to demand instant apology from the clumsy....

He found himself face to face with one John Robin Ross-Ellison newly come to Gungapur, a gentleman of independent means but supposed to be connected with the Political Department or the Secret Service or something, who stared him in the eyes without speaking while he poised a long drink as though wondering whether it were worth while wasting good

liquor on the face of such a thing as the Hatter.

"You'll come with me and clear the dust from Dearman's eyes at once," said he at last. "Made your will all right?"

The Hatter publicly apologised, then and there, and explained that he had, for once in his life, taken a third drink and didn't know what he was saying.

"If your third drink brings out the real man, I should recommend you to stick to two, Bonnett," said the young man, and went away to cogitate.

Should he speak to Dearman? No. He didn't want to see so good a chap hanged for a thing like the Bonnett. Should he go and slap Augustus Grobble hard and make him leave the station somehow? No. Sure to be a scandal. You can no more stop a scandal than a locust-cloud or a fog. The best way to increase it is to notice it. What a horrid thing is a scandal-monger--exhaling poison. It publishes the fact that it is poisonous, of course--but the gas is not enjoyable.

Well, God help anybody Dearman might happen to hear on the subject! Happily Mr. (or Colonel) Dearman heard nothing, for he was a quiet, slow, jolly, red-haired man, and the wrath of a slow, quiet, red-haired man, once roused, is apt to be a rather dangerous thing. Also Mr. Dearman was singularly elephantine in the blundering crushing directness of his methods, and his idea of enough might well seem more than a feast to some.

And Mr. Dearman suffered Augustus gladly, usually finding him present at tea, frequently at dinner, and invariably in attendance at dances and functions.

Augustus was happy and Good--for Augustus. He dallied, he adored, he basked. For a time he felt how much better, finer, more enjoyable, more beautiful, was this life of innocent communion with a pure soul--pure, if just a little insipid, after the real spankers he had hitherto affected.

He was being saved from himself, reformed, helped, and all the rest of it. And when privileged to bring her pen, her fan, her book, her cushion, he always kissed the object with an appearance of wishing to be unseen in the act. It was a splendid change from the Lurid Life and the mean adventure. Piquant.

Unstable as water he could not excel nor endure, however, even in dalliance; nor persevere even when adopted as the _fidus Achates_ of a good and beautiful woman--the poor little weather-cock. He was essentially weak, and weakness is worse than wickedness. There is hope for the strong bad man. He may become a strong good one. Your weak man can never be that.

There came a lady to the Great Eastern Hotel where Augustus lived. Her husband's name, curiously enough, was Harris, and wags referred to him as _the_ Mr. Harris, because he had never been seen--and like Betsey Prig, they "didn't believe there was no sich person". And beyond doubt she was a spanker.

Augustus would sit and eye her at meals--and his face would grow a little less attractive. He would think of her while he took tea with Mrs. and Mr. Dearman, assuring himself that she was certainly a stepper, a stunner, and, very probably,--thrilling thought--a wrong 'un.

Without the very slightest difficulty he obtained an introduction and, shortly afterwards, decided that he was a man of the world, a Decadent, a wise Hedonist who took the sweets of every day and hoped for more

to-morrow.

Who but a fool or a silly greenhorn lets slip the chances of enjoyment, and loses opportunities of experiences? There was nothing in the world, they said, to compare with War and Love. Those who wanted it were welcome to the fighting part, he would be content with the loving role. He would be a Dog and go on breaking hearts and collecting trophies. What a milk-and-water young ass he had been, hanging about round good, silly, little Mrs. Dearman, denying himself champagne at dinner-parties, earning opprobrium as a teetotaller, going to bed early like a bread-and-butter flapper, and generally losing all the joys of Life! Been behaving like a _backfisch_. He read his Swinburne again, and unearthed from the bottom of a trunk some books that dealt with the decadent's joys,--poets of the Flesh, and prosers of the Devil, in his many weary forms.

Also he redoubled his protestations (of undying, hopeless, respectful devotion and regard) to Mrs. Dearman, until she, being a woman, therefore suspected something and became uneasy.

One afternoon he failed to put in an appearance at tea-time, though expected. He wrote that he had had a headache. Perhaps it was true, but, if so, it had been borne in the boudoir of the fair spanker whose husband may or may not have been named Harris.

As his absences from the society of Mrs. Dearman increased in frequency, his protestations of undying gratitude and regard for her increased in fervour.

Mrs. Dearman grew more uneasy and a little unhappy.

Could she be losing her influence for Good over the poor weak boy? Could it be--horrible thought--that he was falling into the hands of some nasty woman who would flirt with him, let him smoke too many cigarettes, drink cocktails, and sit up late? Was he going to relapse and slip back into that state of wickedness of some kind, that she vaguely understood him to have been guilty of in the unhappy past when he had possessed no guardian angel to keep his life pure, happy and sweet, as he now declared it to be?

"Where's your young friend got to lately?" inquired her husband one day.

"I don't know, John," she replied, "he's always missing appointments nowadays," and there was a pathetic droop about the childish mouth.

"Haven't quarrelled with him, or anything, have you, Pat?"

"No, John dear. It would break his heart if I were unkind to him--or it would have used to. I mean it used to have would. Oh, you know what I mean. Once it would have. No, I have not been unkind to him--it's rather the other way about, I think!"

Rather the other way about! The little affected pimp unkind to Mrs. Dearman! Mr. (or Colonel) Dearman made no remark--aloud.

Augustus came to tea next day and his hostess made much of him. His host eyed him queerly. Very.

Augustus felt uncomfortable. Good Heavens! Was Dearman jealous? The man was not going to cut up jealous at this time of day, surely! Not after giving him the run of the house for months, and allowing him to take his wife everywhere--nay, encouraging him in every way. Absurd idea!

Beastly disturbing idea though--Dearman jealous, and on your track! A rather direct and uncompromising person, red-haired too. But the man was

absolutely fair and just, and he'd never do such a thing as to let a fellow be his wife's great pal, treat him as one of the family for ages, and then suddenly round on him as though he were up to something. No. Especially when he was, if anything, cooling off a bit.

"He was always most cordial--such a kind chap,--when I was living in his wife's pocket almost," reflected Augustus, "and he wouldn't go and turn jealous just when the thing was slacking off a bit."

But there was no doubt that Dearman was eyeing him queerly....

"Shall we go on the river to-morrow night, Gussie?" said Mrs. Dearman, "or have a round of golf, or what?"

"Let's see how we feel to-morrow," replied Augustus, who had other schemes in view. "Sufficient unto the day is the joy thereof," and he escorted Mrs. Dearman to the Gymkhana, found her some nice, ladies' pictorials, said, "I'll be back in a minute or two,"--and went in search of Mrs. "Harris".

"Well," said that lady, "been a good little boy and eaten your bread and butter nicely? Have a Lyddite cocktail to take the taste away. So will I." ...

"Don't forget to book the big punt," said the Siren an hour or so later. "I'll be ready for you about five."

Augustus wrote one of his charming little notes on his charming little note-paper that evening.

"KIND AND GRACIOUS LADYE,

"Pity me. Pity and love me. To-morrow the sun will not shine for your slave, for he will not see it. I am unable to come over in the evening. I stand 'twixt love and duty, and know you would counsel duty. Would the College and all its works were beneath the ocean wave! Think of me just once and I shall survive till the day after. Oh, that I could think your disappointment were but one thousandth part of mine. I live but for Thursday.

"Ever your most devoted loving slave,

"GUSSIE."

Mrs. Dearman wept one small tear, for she had doubted his manner when he had evaded making the appointment, and was suspicious. Mr. Dearman entered and noted the one small tear ere it trickled off her dainty little nose.

She showed him the note.

Mr. (or Colonel) Dearman thought much. What he said was "Hm!"

"I suppose he has got to invigilate at some horrid examination or something," she said, but she did not really suppose anything of the kind. Even to her husband she could not admit the growing dreadful fear that the brand she had plucked from the burning was slipping from her hand--falling back into the flames.

At a dinner-party that night a woman whom she hated, and wrote down an evil-minded scandal-monger and inventor and disseminator of lies, suddenly said to her, "Who is this Mrs. Harris, my dear?"

"How should I know?" replied Mrs. Dearman.

"Oh, I thought your young friend Mr. Grobble might have told you--he seems to know her very well," answered the woman sweetly.

That night Mr. Dearman heard his wife sobbing in bed. Going to her he asked what was the matter, and produced eau-de-Cologne, phenacetin, smelling-salts and sympathy.

She said that nothing at all was the matter and he went away and pondered. Next day he asked her if he could row her on the river as he wanted some exercise, and Augustus was not available to take her for a drive or anything.

"I should love it, John dear," she said. "You row like an ox," and John, who had been reckoned an uncommon useful stroke, felt that a compliment was intended if not quite materialized.

Mrs. Pat Dearman enjoyed the upstream trip, and, watching her husband drive the heavy boat against wind and current with graceful ease, contrasted him with the puny, if charming, Augustus--to the latter's detriment. He was so safe, so sound, so strong, reliable and true. But then he never needed any protection, care and help. It was impossible to "mother" John. He loved her devotedly and beautifully but one couldn't pretend he leaned on her for moral help. Now Augustus did need her or he had done so--and she did so love to be needed. _Had_ done so? No--she would put the thought away. He needed her as much as ever and loved her as devotedly and honourably.... The boat was turned back at the weir and, half an hour later, reached the Club wharf.

"I want to go straight home without changing, Pat; do you mind? I'll drop you at the Gymkhana if you don't want to get home so early," said Dearman, as he helped his wife out.

"Won't you change and have a drink first, John?" she replied. "You must be thirsty."

"No. I want to go along now, if you don't mind."

He did want to--badly. For, rowing up, he had seen something which his wife, facing the other way, could not see.

Under an over-hanging bush was a punt, and in the punt were Augustus and the lady known as Mrs. Harris.

The bush met the bank at the side toward his wife, but at the other side, facing Dearman, there was an open space and so he had seen and she had not. Returning, he had drawn her attention to something on the opposite bank. This had been unnecessary, however, as Augustus had effected a change of venue without delay. And now he did not want his wife to witness the return of the couple and learn of the duplicity of her snatched Brand.

(He'd "brand" him anon!)

* * * * *

Augustus Clarence Percy Marmaduke Grobble sat in the long cane chair in his sitting-room, a glass beside him, a cigarette between his lips, a fleshy poet in his hand, and a reminiscent smile upon his flushed face.

She undoubtedly was a spanker. Knew precisely how many beans make five. A woman of the world, that. Been about. Knew things. Sort of woman one could tell a good story to--and get one back. Life! Life! Knew it up and down, in and out. Damn reformation, teetotality, the earnest, and the strenuous. Good women were unmitigated bores, and he.... A sharp knock at the door.

"_Kon hai_"[47] he called. "_Under ao_"[48]

[47] Who's there.

[48] Come in.

The door opened and large Mr. Dearman walked in. He bore a nasty-looking malacca cane in his hand--somewhat ostentatiously.

"Hullo, Dearman!" said Augustus after a decidedly startled and anxious look. "What is it? Sit down. I'm just back from College. Have a drink?"

Large Mr. Dearman considered these things _seriatim_.

"I will sit down as I want a talk with you. You are a liar in the matter of just being back from College. I will not have a drink." He then lapsed into silence and looked at Augustus very straight and very queerly, while bending the nasty malacca suggestively. The knees of Augustus smote together.

Good God! It had come at last! The thrashing he had so often earned was at hand. What should he do? What _should_ he do!

Dearman thought the young man was about to faint.

"Fine malacca that, isn't it?" he asked.

"Ye-yes!"

"Swishy, supple, tough."

"Ye-yes!" (How could the brute be such a fool as to be jealous now--now when it was all cooling off and coming to an end?)

"Grand stick to thrash a naughty boy with, what?"

"Ye-yes!--Dearman, I swear before God that there is nothing between me and----"

"Shut up, you infernal God-forsaken cub, or I shall have to whip you. I----"

"Dearman, if you are jealous of me----"

"Better be quiet and listen, or _I_ shall get cross, and _you'll_ get hurt.... You have given us the pleasure of a great deal of your company this year, and I have come to ask you----"

"Dearman, I have not been so much lately, and I--"

"That's what I complain of, my young friend."

"What?"

"That's what I complain of! I have come to protest against your making yourself almost necessary to me, in a sense, and then--er--deserting me, in a sense."

"You are mocking me, Dearman. If you wish to take advantage of my being half your size and strength to assault me, you----"

"Not a bit of it, my dear Augustus. I am in most deadly earnest, as you'll find if you are contumacious when I make my little proposition. What I say is this. _I_ have grown to take an interest in you, Augustus. _I_ have been very kind to you and tried to make a better man of you.

"I_ have been a sort of mother to you, and you have sworn devotion and gratitude to me. I_ have reformed you somewhat, and you have admitted to me that I have made another man of you, Augustus, and that you love me for it, you love me_ with a deep Platonic love, my Augustus, and--don't you forget it."

"I admit that your wife----"

"Don't you mention my wife, Augustus, or you and I and that malacca will have a period of great activity. I was saying that I_ am disappointed in you, Augustus, and truly grieved to find you so shallow and false. I asked you to take me on the river to-night and you lied to me and took a very different type of--er--person. Such meanness and ingratitude fairly get me, Augustus. Now I never asked_ you to run after me and come and swear I had saved your dirty little soul alive, but since you did it, Augustus, and I_ have come to take a deep interest in saving the thing--why, you've got to stick it, Augustus--and if you don't--why, then I'll make you, my dear."

"Dearman, your wife has been the noblest friend----"

"_Will_ you come off it, Augustus? I don't want to be cruel. Now look here. I_ have got accustomed to having you about the house and employing you in those funny little ways in which you are a useful little animal. I am under no delusion as to the value of that Soul of yours--but, such as it is, I_ am determined to save it. So just you bring it round to tea to-morrow, as usual; and don't you ever be absent again without my permission. You began the game and I'll end it--when I think fit. Grand malacca that."

"Dearman, I will always----"

"Course you will. See you at tea to-morrow, Gussie. If ever my wife hears of this I'll kill you painfully. Bye-Bye."

Augustus was present at tea next day, and, thenceforth, so regular was he that Mrs. Dearman found, first, that she had been very foolish in thinking that her Brand was slipping back into the fire and, later, that Gussie was a bore and a nuisance.

One day he said in the presence of John:--

"I can't keep that golf engagement on Saturday, dear lady, I have to attend a meeting of the Professors, Principal and College Board".

"Have you seen my malacca cane, Pat," said Dearman. "I want it."

"But I really have!" said Augustus, springing up.

"Of course you have," replied Dearman. "What _do_ you mean?"

* * * * *

"John dear," remarked Mrs. Dearman one day, "I wish you could give Gussie a hint not to come quite so often. I have given him some very broad ones during the last few months, but he won't take them. He would from you, I expect."

"Tired of the little bounder, Pat?"

"Oh, sick and tired. He bores me to tears. I wish he were in Government Service and could be transferred. A Government man's always transferred as soon as he has settled to his job. I can't forbid him the house, very well, but I _wish_ he'd realize how weary I am of his poses and new socks."

* * * * *

Augustus Clarence Percy Marmaduke Grobble sat in the long cane chair in his sitting-room, a look of rebellious discontent upon his face. What could he do? Better chuck his job and clear out! The strain was getting awful. What a relentless, watchful brute Dearman was! To him entered that gentleman after gently tapping at the chamber door.

"Gussie," said he, "I have come to say that I think you weary me. I don't want you to come and play with me any more. But be a nice good boy and do me credit. I have brought you this malacca as a present and a memento. I have another, Gussie, and am going to watch you, so be a real credit to me."

And Gussie was.

So once again a good woman redeemed a bad man—but a trifle indirectly perhaps.

Then came General Miltiades Murger and Mr. John Robin Ross-Ellison to be saved.

During intervals in the salvation process, Mr. John Robin Ross-Ellison vainly endeavoured to induce Mr. Augustus Clarence Percy Marmaduke Grobble to lend his countenance, as well as the rest of his person, to the European Company of the Gungapur Fusilier Volunteer Corps which it was the earnest ambition of Ross-Ellison to raise and train and consolidate into a real and genuine defence organization, with a maxim-gun, a motor-cycle and car section, and a mounted troop, and with, above all, a living and sturdy esprit-de-corps. Such a Company appeared to him to be the one and only hope of regeneration for the ludicrous corps which Colonel Dearman commanded, and to change the metaphor, the sole possible means of leavening the lump by its example of high standards and high achievement.

To Augustus, however, as to many other Englishmen, the idea was merely ridiculous and its parent simply absurd.

The day dawned when Augustus, like the said many other Englishmen, changed his mind. In his, and their defence, it may be urged that they knew nothing of the activities of a very retiring but persevering gentleman, known to his familiars as Ilderim the Weeper, and that they had grown up in the belief that all England's fighting and defence can be done by a few underpaid, unconsidered, and very vulgar hirelings.

Perish the thought that Augustus and his like should ever be expected to do the dirty work of defending themselves, their wives, children, homes and honour.

Sec. 2. GENERAL MURGER.

In a temporary Grand Stand of matchboarding and canvas tout Gungapur greeted Mrs. Pat Dearman, who was quite At Home, ranged itself, and critically inspected the horses, or the frocks, of its friends, according to its sex.

Around the great ring on to which the Grand Stand looked, Arab, Pathan, and other heathen raged furiously together and imagined many vain things. Among them unobtrusively moved a Somali who listened carefully to conversations, noted speakers, and appeared to be collecting

impressions as to the state of public opinion--and of private opinion. Particularly he sought opportunities of hearing reference to the whereabouts and doings of one Ilderim the Weeper. In the ring were a course of stiff jumps, lesser rings, the judges' office, a kind of watch-tower from which a strenuous fiend with a megaphone bawled things that no living soul could understand, and a number of most horsily-arrayed gentlemen, whose individual status varied from General and cavalry-colonel to rough rider, troop sergeant-major and stud groom.

I regret to add that there was also a Lady, that she was garbed for riding in the style affected by mere man, and that she swaggered loud-voiced, horsey, slapping a boot.

Let men thank the good God for womanly women while such be--and appreciate them.

Behind the Grand Stand were massed the motor-cars and carriages of Society, as well as the Steward of the Gungapur Club, who there spent a busy afternoon in eating ices and drinking Cup while his myrmidons hurried around, washed glasses, squeezed lemons, boiled water and dropped things. Anon he drank ices and ate Cup (with a spoon) and was taken deviously back to his little bungalow behind the Club by the Head Bootlaire Saheb (or butler) who loved and admired him.

Beyond the big ring ran the river, full with the summer rains, giving a false appearance of doing much to cool the air and render the afternoon suitable to the stiff collars and "Europe" garments of the once sterner sex.

A glorious sea-breeze did what the river pretended to do. Beneath the shade of a clump of palms, scores of more and less valuable horses stamped, tossed heads, whisked tails and possibly wondered why God made flies, while an equal number of _syces_ squatted, smoked pungent _bidis_, and told lies.

Outside a tent, near by, sat a pimply youth at a table bearing boxes of be-ribboned labels, number-inscribed, official, levelling.

These numbers corresponded with those attached to the names of the horses in the programme of events, and riders must tie one round each arm ere bringing a horse up for judgment when called on.

Certain wretched carping critics alleged that this arrangement was to prevent the possibility of error on the part of the Judges, who, otherwise, would never know whether a horse belonged to a General or a Subaltern, to a Member of Council or an Assistant Collector, to a Head of a Department or a wretched underling--in short to a personage or a person.

You find this type of doubter everywhere--and especially in India where official rank is but the guinea stamp and gold is brass without it.

Great, in the Grand Stand, was General Miltiades Murger. Beside Mrs. Dearman, most charming of hostesses, he sate, in the stage of avuncular affection, and told her that if the Judges knew their business his hunter would win the Hunter-Class first prize and be "Best Horse in the Show" too.

As to his charger, his hack, his trapper, his suitable-for-polo ponies, his carriage-horses he did not worry; they might or might not "do something," but his big and beautiful hunter--well, he hoped the Judges knew their business, that was all.

"Are you going to show him in the ring yourself, General?" asked Mrs. Dearman.

"And leave your side?" replied the great man in manner most avuncular and with little reassuring pats upon the lady's hand. "No, indeed. I am going to remain with you and watch Rissaldar-Major Shere Singh ride him for me. Finest horseman in India. Good as myself. Yes, I _hope_ the Judges for Class XIX know their business. I imported that horse from Home and he cost me over six thousand rupees."

Meanwhile, it may be mentioned, evil passions surged in the soul of Mr. John Robin Ross-Ellison as he watched the General, and witnessed his avuncular pappings and confidential whisperings. Mr. Ross-Ellison had lunched with the Dearmans, had brought Mrs. Dearman to the Horse Show, and was settling down, after she had welcomed her guests, to a delightful, entrancing, and thrilling afternoon with her--to be broken but while he showed his horse--when he had been early and utterly routed by the General. The heart of Mr. Ross-Ellison was sore within him, for he loved Mrs. Dearman very devotedly and respectfully.

He was always devotedly in love with some one, and she was always a nice good woman.

When she, or he, left the station, his heart died within him, life was hollow, and his mouth filled with Dead Sea fruit. The world he loved so much would turn to dust and ashes at his touch. After a week or so his heart would resurrect, life would become solid, and his mouth filled with merry song. He would fall in love afresh and the world went very well then.

At present he loved Mrs. Dearman--and hated General Miltiades Murger, who had sent him for a programme and taken his seat beside Mrs. Dearman. There was none on the other side of her--Mr. Ross-Ellison had seen to that--and his prudent foresight had turned and rent him, for he could not plant a chair in the narrow gangway.

He wandered disconsolately away and instinctively sought the object of the one permanent and unwavering love of his life--his mare "Zuleika," late of Balkh.

Zuleika was more remarkable for excellences of physique than for those of mind and character. To one who knew her not, she was a wild beast, fitter for a cage in a Zoo than for human use, a wild-eyed, screaming man-eating she-devil; and none knew her save Mr. John Robin Ross-Ellison, who had bought her unborn. (He knew her parents.)

"If you see an ugly old cove with no hair and a blue nose come over here for his number, just kick his foremost button, _hard_," said Mr. Ross-Ellison to her as he gathered up the reins and, dodging a kick, prepared to mount. This was wrong of him, for Zuleika had never suffered any harm at the hands of General Miltiades Murger, "'eavy-sterned amateur old men" he quoted in a vicious grumble.

A wild gallop round the race-course did something to soothe the ruffled spirit of Mr. Ross-Ellison and nothing to improve Zuleika's appearance--just before she entered the show-ring.

On returning, Mr. Ross-Ellison met the Notable Nut (Lieutenant Nottinger Nutt, an ornament of the Royal Horse Artillery), and they talked evil of Dignitaries and Institutions amounting to high treason if not blasphemy, while watching the class in progress, with young but gloomy eyes.

"I don't care what _any_body says," observed the Notable Nut. "You read the lists of prize-winners of all the bally horse-shows ever held here and you'll find 'em all in strict and decorous order of owner's rank. 'Chargers. First Prize--_Lieutenant-General_ White's "Pink Eye". Second Prize--_Brigadier-General_ Black's "Red Neck". Third Prize--_Colonel_

Brown's "Ham Bone". Highly commended--Major Green's "Prairie Oyster". Nowhere at all--Second-Lieutenant Blue's "Cocktail,"--and worth all the rest put together. I tell you I've seen horse after horse change hands after winning a First Prize as a General's property and then win nothing at all as a common Officer's or junior civilian's, until bought again by a Big Pot. Then it sweeps the board. I don't for one second dream of accusing Judges of favouritism or impropriety any kind, but I'm convinced that the glory of a brass-bound owner casts a halo about his horse that dazzles and blinds the average rough-rider, stud-groom and cavalry-sergeant, and don't improve the eyesight of some of their betters, when judging."

"You're right, Nutty," agreed Mr. Ross-Ellison. "Look at that horse 'Runaway'. Last year it won the First Prize as a light-weight hunter, First Prize as a hack, and Highly Commended as a charger--disqualified from a prize on account of having no mane. It then belonged to a Colonel of Dragoons. This year, with a mane and in, if possible, better condition, against practically the same horses, it wins nothing at all. This year it belongs to a junior in the P.W.D. one notices."

"Just what I say," acquiesced the aggrieved Nut, whose rejected horse had been beaten by another which it had itself beaten (under different ownership) the previous year. "Fact is, the judges should be absolutely ignorant as to who owns the horses. They mean well enough, but to them it stands to reason that the most exalted Pots own the most exalted horses. Besides, is it fair to ask a troop sergeant-major to order his own Colonel's horse out of the ring, or the General's either? They ought not to get subordinates in at all. Army Veterinary Colonels from other Divisions are the sort of chaps you want, and some really knowledgeable unofficial civilians--and, as I say, to be in complete ignorance as to ownership. No man to ride his own horse--and none of these bally numbers to prevent the Judges from thinking a General's horse belongs to a common man, and from getting the notion that a subaltern's horse belongs to a General."

"Yes" mused Mr. Ross-Ellison, "and another thing. If you want to get a horse a win or a place in the Ladies' Hack class--get a pretty girl to ride it. They go by the riders' faces and figures entirely.... Hullo! Class XIX wanted. That's me and Zuleika. Come and tie the labels on my arms like a good dog."

"Right O. But you haven't the ghost of a little look in," opined the Nut. "Old Murger has got a real corking English hunter in. A General will win as usual--but he'll win with by far the best horse, for once in the history of horse-shows."

Dismounting and handing their reins to the syces, the two young gentlemen strolled over to the table where presided he of the pimples and number-labels.

A burly Sikh was pointing to the name of General Miltiades Murger and asking for the number printed thereagainst.

The youth handed Rissaldar-Major Shere Singh two labels each bearing the number 99. These, the gallant Native Officer proceeded to tie upon his arms--putting them upside down, as is the custom of the native of India when dealing with anything in any wise reversible.

Mr. Ross-Ellison approached the table, showed his name on the programme and asked for his number--66.

"Tie these on," said he returning to his friend. "By Jove--there's old Murger's horse," he added--"what a magnificent animal!"

Looking up, the Nut saw Rissaldar-Major Shere Singh mounting the

beautiful English hunter--and also saw that he bore the number 66. Therefore the labels handed to him were obviously 99, and as 99 he tied on the 66 of Mr. Ross-Ellison--who observed the fact.

"I am afraid I'm all Pathan at this moment," silently remarked he unto his soul, and smiled an ugly smile.

"Not much good my entering Zuleika against that mare," he said aloud. "It must have cost just about ten times what I paid for her. Never mind though! We'll show up--for the credit of civilians," and he rode into the ring--where a score of horses solemnly walked round and round the Judges and in front of the Grand Stand....

General Murger brought Mrs. Dearman a cup of tea, and, having placed his topi [49] in his chair, went, for a brandy-and-soda and cheroot, to the bar behind the rows of seats.

[49] Sun-helmet.

On his return he beheld his superb and expensive hunter behaving superbly and expensively in the expert hands of Rissaldar-Major Shere Singh.

He feasted his eyes upon it.

Suddenly a voice, a voice he disliked intensely, the voice of Mr. Dearman croaked fiendishly in his ear: "Why, General, they've got your horse numbered wrongly!"

General Miltiades Murger looked again. Upon the arm of Rissaldar-Major Shere Singh was the number 66.

Opening his programme with trembling fingers he found his name, his horse's name, and number 99!

He rose to his feet, stammering and gesticulating. As he did so the words:--

"Take out number 66," were distinctly borne to the ears of the serried ranks of the fashionable in the Grand Stand. Certain military-looking persons at the back abandoned all dignity and fell upon each other's necks, poured great libations, danced, called upon their gods, or fell prostrate upon settees.

Others, seated among the ladies, looked into their bats as though in church.

"Has Ross-Ellison faked it?" ran from mouth to mouth, and, "He'll be hung for this".

A minute or so later the Secretary approached the Grand Stand and announced in stentorian tones:

"First Prize--General Murger's Darling, Number 99".

While behind him upon Zuleika, chosen of the Judges, sat and smiled Mr. John Robin Ross-Ellison, who lifted his voice and said: "Thanks--No!--This horse is mine and is named Zuleika." He looked rather un-English, rather cunning, cruel and unpleasant--quite different somehow, from his ordinary cheery, bright English self.

* * * * *

"Old" Brigadier General Miltiades Murger was unique among British Generals in that he sometimes resorted to alcoholic stimulants beyond

reasonable necessity and had a roving and a lifting eye for a pretty woman. In one sense the General had never taken a wife--and, in another, he had taken several. Indeed it was said of him by jealous colleagues that the hottest actions in which he had ever been engaged were actions for divorce or breach of promise, and that this type of imminent deadly breach was the kind with which he was best acquainted. Also that he was better at storming the citadel of a woman's heart than at storming anything else.

No eminent man is without jealous detractors.

As to the stimulants, make no mistake and jump to no hasty conclusions. General Murger had never been seen drunk in the whole of his distinguished and famous (or as the aforesaid colleagues called it, egregious and notorious) career.

On the other hand, the voice of jealousy said he had never been seen sober either. In the words of envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness it declared that he had been born fuddled, had lived fuddled, and would die fuddled. And there were ugly stories.

Also some funny ones--one of which concerns the, Gungapur Fusilier Volunteer Corps and Colonel Dearman, their beloved but shortly retiring (and, as some said, their worthy) Commandant.

Mr. Dearman was a very wealthy (and therefore popular), very red haired and very patriotic mill-owner who tried very hard to be proud of his Corps, and, without trying, was immensely proud of his wife.

As to the Corps--well, it may at least be said that it would have followed its beloved Commandant anywhere (that was neither far nor dangerous), for every one of its Officers, except Captain John Robin Ross-Ellison, and the bulk of its men, were his employees.

They loved him for his wealth and they trusted him absolutely--trusted him not to march them far nor work them much. And they were justified of their faith.

Several of the Officers were almost English--though Greeks and Goa-Portuguese predominated, and there was undeniably a drop or two of English blood in the ranks, well diffused of course. Some folk said that even Captain John Robin Ross-Ellison was not as Scotch as his name.

On guest-nights in the Annual Camp of Exercise (when the Officers' Mess did itself as well as any Mess in India--and only took a few hundred rupees of the Government Grant for the purpose) Colonel Dearman would look upon the wine when it was bubbly, see his Corps through its golden haze, and wax so optimistic, so enthusiastic, so rash, as roundly to state that if he had five hundred of the Gungapur Fusiliers, with magazines charged and bayonets fixed, behind a stout entrenchment or in a fortified building, he would stake his life on their facing any unarmed city mob you could bring against them. But these were but post-prandial vapourings, and Colonel Dearman never talked nor thought any such folly when the Corps was present to the eye of flesh.

On parade he saw it for what it was--a mob of knock-kneed, sniffing lads with just enough strength to suck a cigarette; anaemic clerks, fat cooks, and loafers with just enough wind to last a furlong march; huge beery old mechanics and ex-"Tommies," forced into this coloured galley as a condition of their "job at the works "; and the non-native scum of the city of Gungapur--which joined for the sake of the ammunition-boots and khaki suit.

There was not one Englishman who was a genuine volunteer and not half a dozen Parsis. Englishmen prefer to join a corps which consists of

Englishmen or at least has an English Company. When they have no opportunity of so doing, it is a little unfair to class them with the lazy, unpatriotic, degenerate young gentlemen who have the opportunity and do not seize it. Captain Ross-Ellison was doing his utmost to provide the opportunity--with disheartening results.

However--Colonel Dearman tried very hard to be proud of his Corps and never forgave anyone who spoke slightly of it.

As to his wife, there was, as stated, no necessity for any "trying". He was immensely and justly proud of her as one of the prettiest, most accomplished, and most attractive women in the Bendras Presidency.

Mrs. "Pat" Dearman, _nee_ Cleopatra Diamond Brighte, was, as has been said, consciously and most obviously a Good Woman. Brought up by a country rector and his vilely virtuous sister, her girlhood had been a struggle to combine her two ambitions, that of being a Good Woman with that of having a Good Time. In the village of Bishop's Overlay the former had been easier; in India the latter. But even in India, where the Good Time was of the very best, she forgot not the other ambition, went to church with unflinching regularity, read a portion of the Scriptures daily; headed subscription lists for the myriad hospitals, schools, widows'-homes, work-houses, Christian associations, churches, charitable societies, shelters, orphanages, rescue-homes and other deserving causes that appeal to the European in India; did her duty by Colonel Dearman, and showed him daily by a hundred little bright kindnesses that she had not married him for his great wealth but for his--er--his--er--not exactly his beauty or cleverness or youthful gaiety or learning or ability--no, for his Goodness, of course, and because she loved him--loved him for the said Goodness, no doubt. No, she never forgot the lessons of the Rectory, that it is the Whole Duty of Man to Save his or her Soul, but remembered to be a Good Woman while having the Good Time. Perhaps the most industriously pursued of all her goodnesses was her unflagging zealous labour in Saving the Souls of Others as well as her own Soul--the "Others" being the young, presentable, gay, and well-placed men of Gungapur Society.

Yes, Mrs. Pat Dearman went beyond the Rectory teachings and was not content with personal salvation. A Good Woman of broad altruistic charity, there was not a young Civilian, not a Subaltern, not a handsome, interesting, smart, well-to-do, well-in-society, young bachelor in whose spiritual welfare she did not take the deepest personal interest. And, perhaps, of all such eligible souls in Gungapur, the one whose Salvation she most deeply desired to work out (after she wearied of the posings and posturings of Augustus Grobble) was that of Captain John Robin Ross-Ellison of her husband's corps--an exceedingly handsome, interesting, smart, well-to-do, well-in-society young bachelor. The owner of this eligible Soul forebore to tell Mrs. Pat Dearman that it was bespoke for Mohammed the Prophet of Allah--inasmuch as _almost_ the most entrancing, thrilling and delightful pursuit of his life was the pursuit of soul-treatment at the hands, the beautiful tiny white hands, of Mrs. Pat Dearman. Had her large soulful eyes penetrated this subterfuge, he would have jettisoned Mohammed forthwith, since, to him, the soul-treatment was of infinitely more interest and value than the soul, and, moreover, strange as it may seem, this Mussulman English gentleman had received real and true Christian teaching at his mother's knee. When Mrs. Pat Dearman took him to Church, as she frequently did, on Sunday evenings, he was filled with great longings--and with a conviction of the eternal Truth and Beauty of Christianity and the essential nobility of its gentle, unselfish, lofty teachings. He would think of his mother, of some splendid men and women he had known, especially missionaries, medical and other, at Bannu and Poona and elsewhere, and feel that he was really a Christian at heart; and then again in Khost and Mekran Kot, when carrying his life in his hand, across the border, in equal danger from the bullet of the Border Police,

Guides, or Frontier Force cavalry-outposts and from the bullet of criminal tribesmen, when a devil in his soul surged up screaming for blood and fire and slaughter; during the long stealthy crawl as he stalked the stalker; during the wild, yelling, knife-brandishing rush; as he pressed the steady trigger or guided the slashing, stabbing Khyber knife, or as he instinctively _hallaed_ the victim of his _shikar_, he knew he was a Pathan and a Mussulman as were his fathers.

But whether circumstances brought his English blood to the surface or his Pathan blood, whether the day were one of his most English days or one of his most Pathan days, whether it were a day of mingled and quickly alternating Englishry and Pathanity he now loved and supported Britain and the British Empire for Mrs. Dearman's sake. Often as he (like most other non-officials) had occasion to detest and desire to kick the Imperial Englishman, championship of England and her Empire was now his creed. And as there was probably not another England-lover in all India who had his knowledge of under-currents, and forces within and without, he was perhaps the most anxiously loving of all her lovers, and the most appalled at the criminal carelessness, blind ignorance, fatuous conceit, and folly of a proportion of her sons in India.

Knowing what he knew of Teutonic intrigue and influence in India, Ceylon, Afghanistan, Aden, Persia, Egypt, East Africa, the Straits Settlements, and China, he was reminded of the men and women of Pompeii who ate, drank, and were merry, danced and sang, pursued pleasure and the nimble denarius, while Vesuvius rumbled.

Constantly the comparison entered his mind.

He had sojourned with Indian "students" in India, England, Germany, Geneva, America and Japan, and had belonged to the most secret of societies. He had himself been a well-paid agent of Germany in both Asia and Africa; and he had been instrumental in supplying thousands of rifles to Border raiders, Persian bandits, and other potential troublers of the _pax Britannica_. He now lived half his double life in Indian dress and moved on many planes; and to many places where even he could not penetrate unsuspected, his staunch and devoted slave, Moussa Isa, went observant. And all that he learnt and knew, within and without the confines of Ind, _by itself_ disturbed him, as an England-lover, not at all. Taken in conjunction with the probabilities of a great European War it disturbed him mightily. As mightily as unselfishly. To him the dripping weapon, the blazing roof, the shrieking woman, the mangled corpse were but incidents, the unavoidable, unobjectionable concomitants of the Great Game, the game he most loved (and played upon every possible occasion)--War.

While, with one half of his soul, John Robin Ross-Ellison might fear internal disruption, mutiny, rebellion and civil war for what it might bring to the woman he loved, with the other half of his soul, Mir Ilderim Dost Mahommed Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan dwelt upon the joys of battle, of campaigning, the bivouac, the rattle of rifle-fire, the charge, the circumventing and slaying of the enemy, as he circumvents that he may slay. Thus, it was with no selfish thought, no personal dread, that he grew, as said, mightily disturbed at what he knew of India whenever he saw signs of the extra imminence of the Great European Armageddon that looms upon the horizon, now near, now nearer still, now less near, but inevitably there, plain to the eyes of all observant, informed and thoughtful men.[50]

[50] Written in 1912.--AUTHOR.

What really astounded and appalled him was the mental attitude, the mental condition, of British "statesmen," who (while a mighty and ever-growing neighbour, openly, methodically, implacably prepared for the war that was to win her place in the sun) laboured to reap votes by

sowing class-hatred and devoted to national "insurance" moneys sorely needed to insure national _existence_.

To him it was as though hens cackled of introducing time-and-labour-saving incubators while the fox pressed against the unfastened door, smiling to think that their cackle smothered all other sounds ere they reached them or the watch-dog.

Yes--while England was at peace, all was well with India; but let England find herself at war, fighting for her very existence ... and India might, in certain parts, be an uncomfortable place for any but the strong man armed, as soon as the British troops were withdrawn--as they, sooner or later, most certainly would be. Then, feared Captain John Robin Ross-Ellison of the Gungapur Fusiliers, the British Flag would, for a terrible breathless period of stress and horror, fly, assailed but triumphant, wherever existed a staunch well-handled Volunteer Corps, and would flutter down into smoke, flames, ruin and blood, where there did not. He was convinced that, for a period, the lives of English women, children and men; English prosperity, prestige, law and order; English rule and supremacy, would in some parts of India depend for a time upon the Volunteers of India. At times he was persuaded that the very continuance of the British Empire might depend upon the Volunteers of India. If, during some Black Week (or Black Month or Year) of England's death-struggle with her great rival she lost India (defenceless India, denuded of British troops), she would lose her Empire,--be the result of her European war what it might. And knowing all that he knew, he feared for England, he feared for India, he feared for the Empire. Also he determined that, so far as it lay in the power of one war-trained man, the flag should be kept flying in Gungapur when the Great European Armageddon commenced, and should fly over a centre, and a shelter, for Mrs. Dearman, and for all who were loyal and true.

That would be a work worthy of the English blood of him and of the Pathan blood too. God! he would show some of these devious, subterranean, cowardly swine what war _is_, if they brought war to Gungapur in the hour of India's danger and need, the hour of England and the Empire's danger and need.

And Captain John Robin Ross-Ellison (and still more Mir Ilderim Dost Mahommed Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan), obsessed with the belief that a different and more terrible 1857 would dawn with the first big reverse in England's final war with her systematic, slow, sure, and certain rival, her deliberate, scientific, implacable rival, gave all his thoughts, abilities and time to the enthralling, engrossing game of Getting Ready.

Perfecting his local system of secret information, hearing and seeing all that he could with his own Pathan ears and eyes, and adding to his knowledge by means of those of the Somali slave, he also learnt, at first hand, what certain men were saying in Cabul and on the Border--and what those men say in those places is worth knowing by the meteorologist of world-politics. The pulse of the heart of Europe can be felt very far from that heart, and as is the wrist to the pulse-feeling doctor, is Afghanistan and the Border to the head of India's Political Department; as is the doctor's sensitive thumb to the doctor's brain, is the tried, trusted and approved agent of the Secret Service to the Head of all the Politicals.... What chiefly troubled Captain John Robin Ross-Ellison of the Gungapur Fusiliers was the shocking condition of those same Fusiliers and the blind smug apathy, the fatuous contentment, the short memories and shorter sight, of the British Pompeians who were perfectly willing that the condition of the said Fusiliers should remain so.

Clearly the first step towards a decently reliable and efficient corps in Gungapur was the abolition of the present one, and, with unformulated intentions towards its abolition, Mr. Ross-Ellison, by the kind

influence of Mrs. Dearman, joined as a Second Lieutenant and speedily rose to the rank of Captain and the command of a Company. A year's indefatigable work convinced him that he might as well endeavour to fashion sword-blades from leaden pipes as to make a fighting unit of his gang of essentially cowardly, peaceful, unreliable, feeble nondescripts. That their bodies were contemptible he would have regarded as merely deplorable, but there was no spirit, no soul, no tradition--nothing upon which he could work. "Broken-down tapsters and serving-men" indeed, in Cromwell's bitter words, and to be replaced by "men of a spirit".

They must go--and make way for men--if indeed men could be found, men who realized that even an Englishman owes something to the community when he goes abroad, in spite of his having grown up in a land where honourable and manly National Service is not, and those who keep him safe are cheap hirelings, cheaply held....

On the arrival of General Miltiades Murger he sat at his feet as soon as, and whenever, possible; only to discover that he was not only uninterested in, but obviously contemptuous of, volunteers and volunteering. When, at the Dearmans' dinner-table, he endeavoured to talk with the General on the subject he was profoundly discouraged, and on his asking what was to happen when the white troops went home and the Indian troops went to the Border, or even to Europe, as soon as England's inevitable and final war broke out, he was also profoundly snubbed.

When, after that dinner, General Miltiades Murger made love to Mrs. Dearman on the verandah, he also made an enemy, a bitter, cruel, and vindictive enemy of Mr. Ross-Ellison (or rather of Mir Ilderim Dost Mahommed Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan).

Nor did his subsequent victory at the Horse Show lessen the enmity, inasmuch as Mrs. Dearman (whom Ross-Ellison loved with the respectful platonic devotion of an English gentleman and the fierce intensity of a Pathan) took General Miltiades Murger at his own valuation, when that hero described himself and his career to her by the hour. For the General had succumbed at a glance, and confided to his Brigade-Major that Mrs. Dearman was a dooced fine woman and the Brigade-Major might say that he said so, damme.

As the General's infatuation increased he told everybody else also--everybody except Colonel Dearman--who, of course, knew it already.

He even told Jobler, his soldier-servant, promoted butler, as that sympathetic and admiring functionary endeavoured to induce him to go to bed without his uniform.

At last he told Mrs. Dearman herself, as he saw her in the rosy light that emanated from the fine old Madeira that fittingly capped a noble luncheon given by him in her honour.

He also told her that he loved her as a father--and she besought him not to be absurd. Later he loved her as an uncle, later still as a cousin, later yet as a brother, and then as a man.

She had laughed deprecatingly at the paternal affection, doubtfully at the avuncular, nervously at the cousinly, angrily at the brotherly,--and not at all at the manly.

In fact--as the declaration of manly love had been accompanied by an endeavour to salute what the General had called her damask-cheek--she had slapped the General's own cheek a resounding blow....

"Called you 'Mrs. Darlingwoman,' did he!" roared Mr. Dearman upon being informed of the episode. "Wished to salute your damask cheek, did he!

The boozy old villain! Damask cheek! Damned cheek! Where's my dog-whip?" ... but Mrs. Dearman had soothed and restrained her lord for the time being, and prevented him from insulting and assaulting the "aged roue"--who was years younger, in point of fact, than the clean-living Mr. Dearman himself.

But he had shut his door to the unrepentant and unashamed General, had cut him in the Club, had returned a rudely curt answer to an invitation to dinner, and had generally shown the offender that he trod on dangerous ground when poaching on the preserves of Mr. Dearman. Whereat the General fumed.

Also the General swore that he would cut the comb of this insolent money-grubbing civilian.

Further, he intimated his desire to inspect the Gungapur Fusiliers "on Saturday next".

Not the great and terrible Annual Inspection, of course, but a preliminary canter in that direction.

Doubtless, the new General desired to arrive at a just estimate of the value of this unit of his Command, and to allot to it the place for which it was best fitted in the scheme of local defence and things military at Gungapur.

Perhaps he desired to teach the presumptuous upstart, Dearman, a little lesson....

The Brigade Major's demy-official letter, bearing the intimation of the impending visitation--fell as a bolt from the blue and smote the Colonel of the Gungapur Fusiliers a blow that turned his heart to water and loosened the tendons of his knees.

The very slack Adjutant was at home on leave; the Sergeant-Major was absolutely new to the Corps; the Sergeant-Instructor was alcoholic and ill; and there was not a company officer, except the admirable Captain John Robin Ross-Ellison, competent to drill a company as a separate unit, much less to command one in a battalion. And Captain John Robin Ross-Ellison was away on an alleged shikar-trip across the distant Border. Colonel Dearman knew his battalion-drill. He also knew his Gungapur Fusiliers and what they did when they received the orders of those feared and detested evolutions. They walked about, each man a law unto himself, or stood fast until pushed in the desired direction by blasphemous drill-corporals.

Nor could any excuse be found wherewith to evade the General. It was near the end of the drill-season, the Corps was up to its full strength, all the Officers were in the station--except Captain Ross-Ellison and the Adjutant. And the Adjutant's absence could not be made a just cause and impediment why the visit of the General should not be paid, for Colonel Dearman had with some difficulty, procured the appointment of one of his Managers as acting-adjutant.

To do so he had been moved to describe the man as an "exceedingly smart and keen Officer," and to state that the Corps would in no way suffer by this temporary change from a military to a civilian adjutant, from a professional to an amateur.

Perhaps the Colonel was right--it would have taken more than that to make the Gungapur Fusiliers "suffer".

And all had gone exceeding well up to the moment of the receipt of this terrible demi-official, for the Acting-Adjutant had signed papers when and where the Sergeant-Major told him, and had saluted the Colonel

respectfully every Saturday evening at five, as he came on parade, and suggested that the Corps should form fours and march round and round the parade ground, prior to attempting one or two simple movements--as usual.

No. It would have to be--unless, of course, the General had a stroke before Saturday, or was smitten with *_delirium tremens_* in time. For it was an article of faith with Colonel Dearman since the disgraceful episode--that a "stroke" hung suspended by the thinnest of threads above the head of the "aged roue" and that, moreover, he trembled on the verge of a terrible abyss of alcoholic diseases--a belief strengthened by the blue face, boiled eye, congested veins and shaking hand of the breaker of hearts. And Colonel Dearman knew that he must not announce the awful fact until the Corps was actually present--or few men and fewer Officers would find it possible to be on parade on that occasion.

Saturday evening came, and with it some five hundred men and Officers--the latter as a body, much whiter-faced than usual, on receipt of the appalling news.

"Thank God I have nothing to do but sit around on my horse," murmured Major Pinto.

"Don't return thanks yet," snapped Colonel Dearman. "You'll very likely have to drill the battalion"--and the Major went as white as his natural disadvantages permitted.

Bitterly did Captain Trebizondi regret his constant insistence upon the fact that he was senior Captain--for he was given command of "A" Company, the post of honour and danger in front of all, and was implored to "pull it through" and not to stand staring like an owl when the Colonel said the battalion would advance; or turn to the left when he shouted "In succession advance in fours from the right of Companies".

And in the orderly-room was much hurried consulting of Captain Ross-Ellison's well-trained subaltern and of drill-books; and a babel of such questions as: "I say, what the devil do I do if I'm commanding Number Two and he says 'Deploy outwards'? Go to the right or left?"

More than one gallant officer was seen scribbling for dear life upon his shirt-cuff, while others, to the common danger, endeavoured to practise the complicated sword-brandishment which is consequent upon the order "Fall out the Officers".

Colonel Dearman appealed to his brothers-in-arms to stand by him nobly in his travail, but was evidently troubled by the fear that some of them would stand by him when they ought to march by him. Captain Petropaulovski, the acting-adjutant, endeavoured to moisten his parched lips with a dry tongue and sat down whenever opportunity offered.

Captain Euxino Spoophitophiles was seen to tear a page from a red manual devoted to instruction in the art of drill and to secrete it as one "palms" a card--if one is given to the palming of cards. Captain Schloggenboschenheimer was heard to promise a substantial *_trink-geld_*, *_pour-boire_*, or vot-you-call-tip to Sergeant-Instructor Progg in the event of the latter official remaining mit him and prompting him mit der-vord-to-say ven it was necessary for him der-ting-to-do.

Too late, Captain Da Costa bethought him of telephoning to his wife (to telephone back to himself imploring him to return at once as she was parlous ill and sinking fast), for even as he stepped quietly toward the telephone-closet the Sergeant-Major bustled in with a salute and the fatal words:--

"'Ere's the General, Sir!"

"For God's sake get on parade and play the man this day," cried Colonel Dearman, as he hurried out to meet the General, scoring his right boot with his left spur and tripping over his sword _en route_.

* * * * *

The General greeted the Colonel as a total stranger, addressed him as "Colonel," and said he anticipated great pleasure from this his first visit to the well-known Gungapur Fusiliers. He did, and he got it.

Dismounting slowly and heavily from his horse (almost as though "by numbers") the General, followed by his smart and dapper Brigade-Major and the perspiring Colonel Dearman, strode with clank of steel and creak of leather, through the Headquarters building and emerged upon the parade-ground where steadfast stood seven companies of the Gungapur Fusilier Volunteers in quarter column--more or less at "attention".

"Shun!" bawled Colonel Dearman, and those who were "at ease" 'shunned, and those who were already 'shunning took their ease.

"_Shun_!" again roared the Colonel, and those who were now in that military position relinquished it--while those who were not, assumed it in their own good time.

As the trio drew nigh unto the leading company, Captain Trebizondi, coyly lurking behind its rear rank, shrilly screamed, "'A' Gompany! Royal Salutes! Present Arrrrms!" while a volunteer, late a private of the Loyal Whitechapel Regiment, and now an unwilling member of this corps of auxiliary troops, audibly ejaculated through one corner of his mobile mouth:--

"Don't you do nothink o' the sort!" and added a brief orison in prejudice of his eyesight.

Certain of "A's" stalwarts obeyed their Captain, while others took the advice of the volunteer--who was known to have been a man of war in the lurid past, and to understand these matters.

Lieutenant Toddywallah tugged valiantly at his sword for a space, but finding that weapon coy and unwilling to leave its sheath, he raised his helmet gracefully and respectfully to the General. His manner was always polished.

"What the devil are they doing?" inquired the General.

"B," "C," "D," "E," "F," and "G" Companies breathed hard and protruded their stomachs, while Sergeant-Instructor Progg deserved well of Captain Schloggenboschenheimer by sharply tugging his tunic-tail as he was in the act of roaring:--

"_Gomm_--!" the first syllable of the word "Company," with a view to bestowing a royal salute likewise. Instead, the Captain extended the hand of friendship to the General as he approached. The look of _nil admirari_ boredom slowly faded from the face of the smart and dapper Brigade-Major, and for a while it displayed quite human emotions.

Up and down and between the ranks strode the trio, the General making instructive and interesting comments from time to time, such as:--

"Are your buttons of metal or bone, my man? Polish them and find out."

"What did you cook in that helmet?"

"Take your belt in seven holes, and put it where your waist was."

"Are you fourteen years old yet?"

"Personally I don't care to see brown boots, patent shoes nor carpet slippers with uniform."

"And when were you ninety, my poor fellow?"

"Get your belly out of my way."

"Put this unclean person under arrest or under a pump, please, Colonel."

"Can you load a rifle unaided?" and so forth.

The last-mentioned query "Can you load a rifle unaided?" addressed to a weedy youth of seventeen who stood like a living mark-of-interrogation, elicited the reply:--

"Nossir".

"Oh, really! And what can you do?" replied the General sweetly.

"Load a rifle Lee-Metford," was the prompt answer.

The General smiled wintrily, and, at the conclusion of his peregrination, remarked to Colonel Dearman:--

"Well, Colonel, I can safely say that I have never inspected a corps quite like yours"--an observation capable of various interpretations--and intimated a desire to witness some company drill ere testing the abilities of the regiment in battalion drill.

"Let the rear company march out and go through some movements," said he.

"Why the devil couldn't he have chosen Ross-Ellison's company," thought Colonel Dearman, as he saluted and lifted up his voice and cried aloud:--

"Captain Rozario! March 'G' Company out for some company-drill. Remainder--stand easy."

Captain Rozario paled beneath the bronze imparted to his well-nourished face by the suns of Portugal (or Goa), drew his sword, dropped it, picked it up, saluted with his left hand and backed into Lieutenant Xenophontis of "F" Company, who asked him where the devil he was going to--hein?...

To the first cold stroke of fright succeeded the hot flush of rage as Captain Rozario saw the absurdity of ordering him to march his company out for company drill. How in the name of all the Holy Saints could he march his company out with six companies planted in front of him? Let them be cleared away first. To his men he ejaculated:--

"Compannee----!" and they accepted the remark in silence.

The silence growing tense he further ejaculated "Ahem!" very loudly, without visible result or consequence. The silence growing tenser, Colonel Dearman said encouragingly but firmly:--

"Do something, Captain Rozario".

Captain Rozario did something. He drew his whistle. He blew it. He replaced it in his pocket.

Nothing happening, he took his handkerchief from his sleeve, blew his

nose therewith and dropped it (the handkerchief) upon the ground. Seven obliging volunteers darted forward to retrieve it.

"May we expect the evolutions this evening, Colonel?" inquired General Murger politely.

"We are waiting for you to move off, Captain Rozario," stated Colonel Dearman.

"Sir, how can I move off with oll the rest in my front?" inquired Captain Rozario reasonably.

"Form fours, right, and quick march," prompted the Sergeant-Major, and Captain Rozario shrilled forth:

"Form right fours and march quick," at the top of his voice.

Many members of "G" Company turned to their right and marched towards the setting-sun, while some turned to their left and marched in the direction of China.

These latter, discovering in good time that they had erred, hurried to rejoin their companions--and "G" Company was soon in full swing if not in fours....

There is a limit to all enterprise and the march of "G" Company was stayed by a high wall.

Then Captain Rozario had an inspiration.

"About turn," he shrieked--and "G" Company about turned as one man, if not in one direction.

The march of "G" Company was stayed this time by the battalion into which it comfortably nuzzled.

Again Captain Rozario seized the situation and acted promptly and resourcefully.

"Halt!" he squeaked, and "G" Company halted--in form an oblate spheroid.

Some of its members removed their helmets and the sweat of their brows, some re-fastened bootlaces and putties or unfastened restraining hooks and buttons. One gracefully succumbed to his exertions and fainting fell, with an eye upon the General.

"Interestin' evolution," remarked that Officer. "Demmed interestin'. May we have some more?"

"Get on, Captain Rozario," implored Colonel Dearman. "Let's see some company-drill."

"One hundred and twenty-five paces backward march," cried Captain Rozario after a brief calculation, and "G" Company reluctantly detached itself from the battalion, backwards.

"Turn round this away and face to me," continued the gallant Captain, "and then on the left form good companee."

The oblate spheroid assumed an archipelagic formation, melting into irregularly-placed military islands upon a sea of dust.

"Oll get together and left dress, please," besought Captain Rozario, and many of the little islands amalgamated with that on their extreme right while the remainder gravitated to their left--the result being

two continents of unequal dimensions.

As Captain Rozario besought these disunited masses to conjoin, the voice of the General was heard in the land--

"Kindly order that mob to disperse before it is fired on, will you, Colonel? They can go home and stay there," said he.

Captain Rozario was a man of sensibility and he openly wept.

No one could call this a good beginning--nor could they have called the ensuing battalion-drill a good ending.

"Put the remainder of the battalion through some simple movements if they know any," requested the General.

Determined to retrieve the day yet, Colonel Dearman saluted, cleared his throat terrifically and shouted: "'Tallish, 'shun!" with such force that a nervous man in the front rank of "A" Company dropped his rifle and several "presented" arms.

Only one came to the "slope," two to the "trail" and four to the "shoulder".

Men already at attention again stood at ease, while men already at ease again stood at attention.

Disregarding these minor contretemps, Colonel Dearman clearly and emphatically bellowed:--

"The battalion will advance. In succession, advance in fours from the left of companies--"

"Why not tell off the battalion--just for luck?" suggested General Murger.

"Tell off the battalion," said Colonel Dearman in his natural voice and an unnaturally crestfallen manner.

Captain Trebizondi of "A" Company glared to his front, and instead of replying "Number One" in a loud voice, held his peace--tight.

But his lips moved constantly, and apparently Captain Trebizondi was engaged in silent prayer.

"Tell off the battalion," bawled the Colonel again.

Captain Trebizondi's lips moved constantly.

"Will you tell off the dam battalion, Sir?" shouted the Colonel at the enrapt supplicant.

Whether Captain Trebizondi is a Mohammedan I am not certain, but, if so, he may have remembered words of the Prophet to the effect that it is essential to trust in Allah absolutely, and expedient to tie up your camel yourself, none the less. Captain Trebizondi was trusting in Allah perchance--but he had not tied up his camel; he had not learnt his drill.

And when Colonel Dearman personally and pointedly appealed to him in the matter of the battalion's telling-off, he turned round and faced it and said--

"Ah--battalion--er--" in a very friendly and persuasive voice.

Then a drill corporal took it upon him to bawl Number One as Captain Trebizondi should have done, some one shouted Number Two from "B" Company, the colour-sergeant of "C" bawled Number Three and then, with ready wit, the Captains of "D," "E," and "F" caught up the idea, and the thing was done.

So far so good.

And the Colonel returned to his first venture and again announced to the battalion that it would advance in succession and in fours from the left of companies.

It bore the news with equanimity and Captain Trebizondi visibly brightened at the idea of leaving the spot on which he had suffered and sweated--but he took no steps in the matter personally.

He tried to scratch his leg through his gaiter.

"'A' Company going this evening?" inquired the General. "Wouldn't hurry you, y'know, but--I dine at nine."

Captain Trebizondi remembered his parade-manners and threw a chest instead of a stomach.

The jerk caused his helmet to tilt forward over his eyes and settle down slowly and firmly upon his face as a fallen cliff upon the beach beneath.

"The Officer commanding the leading company appears to be trying to hide," commented General Murger.

Captain Trebizondi uncovered his face--a face of great promise but no performance.

"Will you march your company off, sir," shouted Colonel Dearman, "the battalion is waiting for you."

With a look of reproachful surprise and an air of "Why couldn't you say so?" the harassed Captain agitated his sword violently as a salute, turned to his company and boomed finely:--

"March off!"

The Company obeyed its Commander.

Seeing the thing so easy of accomplishment Captains Alessandropoulos, Schloggenboschenheimer, Da Costa, Euxino, Spoophitophiles and Jose gave the same order and the battalion was in motion--marching to its front in quarter-column instead of wheeling off in fours.

Unsteadily shoulder from shoulder,
Unsteadily blade from blade,
Unsteady and wrong, slouching along,
Went the boys of the old brigade.

"Halt," roared Colonel Dearman.

"Oh, don't halt 'em," begged General Murger, "it's the most entertainin' show I have ever seen."

The smart and dapper Brigade-Major's mouth was open.

Major Pinto and Captain-and-Acting-Adjutant Petropaulovski forgot to cling to their horses with hand and heel and so endangered their lives.

The non-commissioned officers of the permanent staff commended their souls to God and marched as men in a dream.

On hearing the Colonel's cry of "Halt" many of the men halted. Not hearing the Colonel's cry of "Halt" many of the men did not halt.

In two minutes the battalion was without form and void.

In ten minutes the permanent staff had largely re-sorted it and, to a great extent, re-formed the original companies.

Captain Jose offered his subaltern, Lieutenant Bylegharicontractor, a hundred rupees to change places with him.

Offer refused, with genuine and deep regret, but firmly.

"Shall we have another try, Colonel," inquired General Murger silkily. "Any amount of real initiative and originality about this Corps. But I am old-fashioned enough to prefer drill-book evolutions on the barrack-square, I confess. Er--let the Major carry on as it is getting late."

Colonel Dearman's face flushed a rich dark purple. His eyes protruded till they resembled those of a crab. His red hair appeared to flame like very fire. His lips twitched and he gasped for breath. Could he believe his ears. "_Let the Major carry on as it is getting late_"! Let him step into the breach "as it is getting late!" Let the more competent, though junior, officer take over the command "as it is getting late". Ho!--likewise Ha! This aged roue, this miserable wine-bibbing co-respondent, with his tremulous hand and boiled eye, thought that Colonel Dearman did not know his drill, did he? Wanted the wretched and incompetent Pinto to carry on, did he?--as it was getting late.

Good! Ha! Likewise Ho! "Let Pinto carry on as it was getting late!"

Very well! _If it cost Colonel Dearman every penny he had in the world he would have his revenge on the insolent scoundrel_. He might think he could insult Colonel Dearman's wife with impunity, he might think himself entitled to cast ridicule on Colonel Dearman's Corps--but "let the Major carry on as it is getting late!" By God that was too much!--That was the last straw that breaks the camel's heart--and Colonel Dearman would have his revenge or lose life, honour, and wealth in the attempt.

Ha! and, moreover, _Ho_!

The Colonel knew his battalion-drill by heart and backwards. Was it _his_ fault that his officers were fools and his men damn-fools?

Major Pinto swallowed hard, blinked hard, and breathed hard. Like the Lady of Shallott he felt that the curse had come upon him.

"Battalion will advance. Quick march," he shouted, as a safe beginning. But the Sergeant-Major had by this time fully explained to the sweating Captain Trebizondi that he should have given the order "Form fours. Left. Right wheel. Quick march," when the Colonel had announced that the battalion would advance "in succession from the left of companies".

Like lightning he now hurled forth the orders. "Form fours. Left. Right wheel. Quick march.", and the battalion was soon under way with one company in column of fours and the remaining five companies in line....

Time cures all troubles, and in time "A" Company was pushed and pulled back into line again.

The incident pleased Major Pinto as it wasted the fleeting minutes and gave him a chance to give the only other order of which he was sure.

"That was oll wrong," said he. "We will now, however, oll advance as 'A' Company did. The arder will be 'Battalion will advance. In succession, advance in fours from the right of companees.' Thenn each officer commanding companees will give the arder 'Form fours. Right. Left wheel. Quick march' one after thee other."

And the Major gave the order.

To the surprise of every living soul upon the parade-ground the manoeuvre was correctly executed and the battalion moved off in column of fours. And it kept on moving. And moving. For Major Pinto had come to the end of his tether.

"Do something, man," said Colonel Dearman with haughty scorn, after some five minutes of strenuous tramping had told severely on the morale of the regiment.

And Major Pinto, hoping for the best and fearing the worst, lifted up his voice and screamed:--

"On the right form battalion_!"

Let us draw a veil.

The adjective that General Murger used with the noun he called the Gungapur Fusiliers is not to be printed.

The address he made to that Corps after it had once more found itself would have led a French or Japanese regiment to commit suicide by companies, taking the time from the right. A Colonel of Romance Race would have fallen on his sword at once (and borrowed something more lethal had it failed to penetrate).

But the corps, though not particularly British, was neither French nor Japanese and was very glad of the rest while the General talked. And Colonel Dearman, instead of falling on his sword, fell on General Murger (in spirit) and swore to be revenged tenfold.

He would have his own back, cost what it might, or his name was not Dearman--and he was going Home on leave immediately after the Volunteer Annual Camp of Exercise, just before General Murger retired....

"I shall inspect your corps in camp," General Murger had said, "and the question of its disbandment may wait until I have done so."

Disbandment! The question of the disbandment of the fine and far-famed Fusiliers of Gungapur could wait till then, could it? Well and good! Ha! and likewise Ho!

On Captain John Robin Ross-Ellison's return from leave, Colonel Dearman told that officer of General Murger's twofold insult--to Colonel Dearman's wife and to Colonel Dearman's Corps. On hearing of the first, Captain Ross-Ellison showed his teeth in a wolfish and ugly manner, and, on hearing of the second, propounded a scheme of vengeance that made Colonel Dearman grin and then burst into a roar of laughter. He bade Captain Ross-Ellison dine with him and elaborate details of the scheme.

* * * * *

To rumours of General Murger's failing health and growing alcoholism Colonel Dearman listened with interest--nay, satisfaction. Stories of

seizures, strokes and "goes" of *delirium tremens* met with no rebuke nor contradiction from him--and an air of leisured ease and unanxious peacefulness pervaded the Gungapur Fusiliers. If any member had thought that the sad performance of the fatal Saturday night and the winged words of General Murger were to be the prelude to period of fierce activity and frantic preparation, he was mistaken. It was almost as though Colonel Dearman believed that General Murger would not live to carry out his threat.

The corps paraded week by week, fell in, marched round the ground and fell out again. There was no change of routine, no increase of work, no stress, no strain.

All was peace, the corps was happy, and in the fullness of time (and the absence of the Adjutant) it went to Annual Camp of Exercise a few miles from Gungapur. And there the activities of Captain John Robin Ross-Ellison and a large band of chosen men were peculiar. While the remainder, with whom went Colonel Dearman, the officers, and the permanent staff, marched about in the usual manner and enjoyed the picnic, these others appeared to be privately and secretly rehearsing a more specialized part--to the mystification and wonder of the said remainder. Even on the great day, the day of the Annual Inspection, this division was maintained and the "remainder" were marched off to the other side of the wood adjacent to the Camp, some couple of hours before the expected arrival of the General, who would come out by train.

The arrangement was that the horses of the General and the Brigade-Major should await those officers at the camp station, and that, on arrival, they would be mounted by their owners who would then ride to the camp, a furlong distant. Near the camp a mounted orderly would meet the General and escort him to the spot where the battalion, with Colonel Dearman at its head, would be drawn up for his inspection.

A large bungalow, used as the Officers' Mess, a copse, and a hillock completely screened the spot used as the battalion parade-ground, from the view of one approaching the Camp, and the magnificent sight of the Gungapur Fusiliers under arms would burst upon him only when he rounded the corner of a wall of palms, cactus, and bamboos, and entered by a narrow gap between it and a clump of dense jungle.

* * * * *

General Murger was feeling distinctly bad as he sat on the edge of his bed and viewed with the eye of disfavour the *choti hazri* [51] set forth for his delectation.

[51] "Little presence," early breakfast, *petit dejeuner*.

As he intended to inspect the Volunteers in the early morning and return to a mid-day breakfast, the *choti hazri* was substantial, though served on a tray in his bedroom.

The General yawned, rubbed his eyes and grunted.

"Eggs be demmed," said he.

"Toast be demmed," he said.

"Tea be demmed," he shouted.

"*Pate de fois gras* be demmed," shouted he.

"Jobler! Bring me a bottle of beer," he roared.

"No, bring me a brandy-cocktail," roared he.

For the brandy-cocktail the General felt better for a time but he wished, first, that his hand would not shake in such a way that hair-brushing was difficult and shaving impossible; secondly, that the prevailing colour of everything was not blue; thirdly, that he did not feel giddy when he stood up; fourthly, that his head did not ache; fifthly, that his mouth would provide some other flavour than that of a glue-coated copper coin; sixthly, that things would keep still and his boots cease to smile at him from the corner; seventhly, that he had not gone to the St. Andrew's dinner last night, begun on _punch a la Romaine_, continued on neat whisky in _quaichs_ and finished on port, liqueurs, champagne and haphazard brandy-and-sodas, whisky-and-sodas, and any old thing that was handy; and eighthly, that he had had a quart of beer instead of the brandy-cocktail for _choti hazri_.

But that could easily be remedied by having the beer now. The General had the beer and soon wished that he hadn't, for it made him feel very bad indeed.

However, a man must do his dooty, ill or well, and when the Brigade-Major sent up to remind the General that the train went at seven, he was answered by the General himself and a hint that he was officious. During the brief train-journey the General slumbered.

On mounting his horse, the General was compelled to work out a little sum.

If one has four fingers there must be three inter-finger spaces, eh? Granted. Then how the devil are four reins to go into three places between four fingers, eh? Absurd idea, an' damsilly. However, till the matter was referred to the War Office and finally settled, one could put two reins between two fingers or pass one outside the lill' finger, what? But the General hated compromises.... The mounted orderly met the General, saluted and directed him to the entrance to the tree-encircled camp and parade-ground.

At the entrance, the General, leading, reined in so sharply as to throw his horse on its haunches--his mouth fell open, his mottled face went putty-coloured, and each hair that he possessed appeared to bristle.

He uttered a deep groan, rubbed his eyes, emitted a yell, wheeled round and galloped for dear life, with a cry, nay a scream, of "_I've got 'em at last_," followed by his utterly bewildered but ever-faithful Brigade-Major, who had seen nothing but foliage, scrub, and cactus. To Gungapur the General galloped without drawing rein, took to his bed, sent for surgeon and priest--and became a teetotaler.

And what had he seen?

The affair is wrapped in mystery.

The Brigade-Major says nothing because he knows nothing, as it happens, and the Corps declared it was never inspected. Father Ignatius knows what the General saw, or thinks he saw, and so does the Surgeon-General, but neither is in the habit of repeating confessions and confidences. What Jobler, at the keyhole, understood him to say he had seen, or thought he had seen, is not to be believed.

Judge of it.

"I rode into the dem place and what did I behold? A dem pandemonium, Sir, a pantomime--a lunatic asylum, Sir--all Hell out for a Bank Holiday, I tell you. There was a battalion of Red Indians, Negroes, Esquimaux, Ballet Girls, Angels, Sweeps, Romans, Sailors, Pierrots, Savages, Bogeymen, Ancient Britons, Bishops, Zulus, Pantaloons,

Beef-eaters, Tramps, Life-Guards, Washerwomen, Ghosts, Clowns and God-knows-what, armed with jezails, umbrellas, brooms, catapults, pikes, brickbats, _kukeries_, [52] pokers, clubs, axes, horse-pistols, bottles, dead fowls, polo-sticks, assegais and bombs. They were commanded by a Highlander in a bum-bee tartan kilt, top-hat and one sock, with a red nose a foot long, riding on a rocking horse and brandishing a dem great cucumber and a tea-tray made into a shield. There was a thundering great drain-pipe mounted on a bullock-cart and a naked man, painted blue, in a cocked-hat, laying an aim and firing a penny-pistol down the middle of it and yelling 'Pip!'

[52] Ghurka knives.

"There was a chauffeur in smart livery on an elephant, twirling a steering-wheel on its neck for dear life, and tooting a big motor-horn.. There was a fat man in a fireman's helmet and pyjamas, armed with a peashooter, riding a donkey backwards--and the moke wore two pairs of trousers!... As I rubbed my poor old eyes, the devil in command howled 'General salaam. Pre_sent_-legs'--and every fiend there fell flat on his face and raised his right leg up behind--I tell you, Sir, I fled for my life, and--no more liquor for me." ...

When ex-Colonel Dearman heard any reference to this mystery he roared with laughter--but it was the Last Muster of the fine and far-famed Gungapur Fusiliers, as such.

The Corps was disbanded forthwith and re-formed on a different basis (of quality instead of quantity) with Lieutenant-Colonel John Robin Ross-Ellison, promoted, in command--he having caught the keen eye of that splendid soldier and gentleman Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Barnet, K.C.V.O., K.C.S.I. (G.O.C., XVIth Division), as being the very man for the job of re-organizing the Corps, and making it worth its capitation-grant.

"If I could get Captain Malet-Marsac as Adjutant and a Sergeant-Major of whom I know (used to be at Duri--man named Lawrence-Smith) I'd undertake to show you something, Sir, in a year or two," said Lieutenant-Colonel Ross-Ellison.

"Malet-Marsac you can certainly have," replied Sir Arthur Barnet. "I'll speak to your new Brigadier. If you can find your Lawrence-Smith we'll see what can be done." ...

And Lieutenant-Colonel Ross-Ellison wrote to Sergeant-Major Lawrence-Smith of the Duri Volunteer Rifles to know if he would like a transfer upon advantageous terms, and got no reply.

As it happened, Lieutenant-Colonel Ross-Ellison, in very different guise, had seen Sergeant Lawrence-Smith extricate and withdraw his officerless company from the tightest of tight places (on the Border) in a manner that moved him to large admiration. It had been a case of "and even the ranks of Tuscany" on the part of Mir Jan Rah-bin-Ras el-Isan Ilderim Dost Mahommed.... Later he had encountered him and Captain Malet-Marsac at Duri.

Sec. 3. SERGEANT-MAJOR LAWRENCE-SMITH.

Mrs. Pat Dearman was sceptical.

"Do you mean to tell me that _you_, a man of science, an eminent medical man, and a soldier, believe in the supernatural?"

"Well, you see, I'm 'Oirish' and therefore unaccountable," replied Colonel Jackson (of the Royal Army Medical Corps), fine doctor, fine scholar, and fine gentleman.

"And you believe in haunted houses and ghosts and things, do you? _Well_!"

The salted-almond dish was empty, and Mrs. Dearman accused her other neighbour, Mr. John Robin Ross-Ellison. Having already prepared to meet and rebut the charge of greediness he made passes over the vessel and it was replenished.

"Supernatural!" said she.

"Most," said he.

She prudently removed the dish to the far side of her plate--and Colonel Jackson emptied it.

Not having prepared to meet the request to replenish the store a second time, it was useless for Mr. Ross-Ellison to make more passes when commanded so to do.

"The usual end of the 'supernatural,'" observed Mrs. Dearman with contempt.

"Most usual," said he.

"More than 'most,'" corrected Mrs. Dearman. "It is the invariable end of it, I believe. Just humbug and rubbish. It is either an invention, pure and simple, or else it is perfectly explicable. Don't you think so, Colonel Jackson?"

"Not always," said her partner. "Now, will you, first, believe my word, and, secondly, find the explanation--if I tell you a perfectly true 'supernatural' story?"

"I'll certainly believe your word, Colonel, if you're serious, and I'll try and suggest an explanation if you like," replied Mrs. Dearman.

"Same to me, Mrs. Dearman?" asked Mr. Ross-Ellison. "I've had 'experiences' too--and can tell you one of them."

"Same to you, Mr. Ross-Ellison," replied Mrs. Dearman, and added: "But why only one of them?"

Mr. Ross-Ellison smiled, glanced round the luxuriously appointed table and the company of fair women and brave men--and thought of a far-distant and little-known place called Mekran Kot and of a phantom cavalry corps that haunted a valley in its vicinity.

"Only one worth telling," said he.

"Well,--first case," began Colonel Jackson, "I was once driving past a cottage on my way home from College (in Ireland), and I saw the old lady who lived in that cottage come out of the door, cross her bit of garden, go through a gate, scuttle over the railway-line and enter a fenced field that had belonged to her husband, and which she (and a good many other people) believed rightly belonged to her.

"There goes old Biddy Maloney pottering about in that plot of ground again,' thinks I. 'She's got it on the brain since her law-suit.' I knew it was Biddy, of course, not only because of her coming out of Biddy's house, but because it was Biddy's figure, walk, crutch-stick, and patched old cloak. When I got home I happened to say to Mother: 'I saw

poor old Bidy Maloney doddering round that wretched field as I came along'.

"'What?' said my mother, 'why, your father was called to her, as she was dying, hours ago, and she's not been out of her bed for weeks.' When my father came in, I learned that Bidy was dead an hour before I saw her--before I left the railway station in fact! What do you make of that? Is there any 'explanation'?"

"Some other old lady," suggested Mrs. Dearman.

"No. There was nobody else in those parts mistakable for Bidy Maloney, and no other old woman was in or near the house while my father was there. We sifted the matter carefully. It was Bidy Maloney and no one else."

"Auto-suggestion. Visualization on the retina of an idea in the mind. Optical illusion," hazarded Mrs. Dearman.

"No good. I hadn't realized I was approaching Bidy Maloney's cottage until I saw her coming out of it and I certainly hadn't thought of Bidy Maloney until my eye fell upon her. And it's a funny optical illusion that deceives one into seeing an old lady opening gates, crossing railways and limping away into fenced fields."

"H'm! What was the other case?" asked Mrs. Dearman, turning to Mr. Ross-Ellison.

"That happened here in India at a station called Duri, away in the Northern Presidency, where I was then--er--living for a time. On the day after my arrival I went to call on Malet-Marsac to whom I had letters of introduction--political business--and, as he was out, but certain to return in a minute or two from Parade, I sat me down in a comfortable chair in the verandah----"

"And went to sleep?" interrupted Mrs. Dearman.

"I _nevah_ sleep," quoted Mr. Ross-Ellison, "and I had no time, if any inclination. Scarcely indeed had I seated myself, and actually while I was placing my _topi_ on an adjacent stool, a lady emerged from a distant door at the end of the verandah and walked towards me. I can tell you I was mighty surprised, for not only was Captain Malet-Marsac a lone bachelor and a misogynist of blameless life, but the lady looked as though she had stepped straight out of an Early Victorian phonograph-album. She had on a crinoline sort of dress, a deep lace collar, spring-sidey sort of boots, mittens, and a huge cameo brooch. Also she had long ringlets. Her face is stamped on my memory and I could pick her out from a hundred women similarly dressed, or her picture from a hundred others...."

"What did you do?" asked Mrs. Dearman, whose neglected ice-pudding was fast being submerged in a pink lake of its own creation.

"Do? Nothing. I grabbed my _topi_, stood up, bowed--and looked silly."

"And what did the lady do?"

"Came straight on, taking no notice whatsoever of me, until she reached the steps leading into the porch and garden.... She passed down these and out of my sight.... That is the plain statement of an actual fact. Have you any 'explanation' to offer?"

"Well--what about a lady staying there, unexpectedly and unbeknownst (to the station), trying on a get-up for a Fancy Dress Ball. Going as 'My ancestress' or something?" suggested Mrs. Dearman.

"Exactly what I told myself, though I knew it was nothing of the kind.... Well, five minutes later Malet-Marsac rode up the drive and we were soon fraternizing over cheroots and cold drinks.... As I was leaving, an idea struck me, and I saw a way to ask a question--which was burning my tongue,--without being too rudely inquisitive.

"By the way,' said I, 'I fear I did not send in the right number of visiting cards, but they told me there was no lady here, so I only sent in one--for you.'

"There is no lady here,' he replied, eyeing me queerly. 'What made you think you had been misinformed?'

"Well,' said I bluntly, 'a lady came out of the end room just now, walked down the verandah, and went out into the garden. You'd better see if anything is missing as she's not an inhabitant!'

"No--there won't be anything missing,' he replied. 'Did she wear a crinoline and a general air of last century?'

"She did,' said I.

"Our own private ghost,' was the answer--and it was the sort of statement I had anticipated. Now I solemnly assure you that at that time I had never heard, read, nor dreamed that there was a 'ghost' in this bungalow, nor in Duri--nor in the whole Northern Presidency for that matter....

"What's the story?' I asked, of course.

"Mutiny. 1857,' said Malet-Marsac. 'Husband shot on the parade-ground. She got the news and marched straight to the spot. They cut her in pieces as she held his body in her arms. Lots of people have seen her--anywhere between that room and the parade-ground.'

"Then you have to believe in ghosts--in Duri, or how do you account for it?' I asked.

"I don't bother my head,' he replied. 'But I have seen that poor lady a good many times. And no one told me a word about her until after I had seen her.'"

And then Mrs. Dearman suddenly rose, as her hostess "caught" the collective female eye of the table.

"Was all that about the 'ghosts' of the old Irishwoman and the Early Victorian Lady true, you fellows?" asked John Bruce, the Professor of Engineering, after coffee, cigars and the second glass of port had reconciled the residue or sediment to the departure of the sterner sex.

"Didn't you hear me say my story was true?" replied Colonel Jackson brusquely. "It was absolutely and perfectly true."

"Same here," added Mr. Ross-Ellison.

"Then on two separate occasions you two have seen what you can only believe to be the ghosts of dead people?"

"On one occasion I have, without any possibility of error or doubt, seen the ghost of a dead person," said Colonel Jackson.

"Have you ever come across any other thoroughly substantiated cases of ghost-seeing--cases which have really convinced you, Colonel?" queried Mr. Ross-Ellison--being deeply interested in the subject by reason of

queer powers and experiences of his own.

"Yes. Many in which I fully believe, and one about which I am certain. A very interesting case--and a very cruel tragedy."

"Would you mind telling me about it?" asked Mr. Ross-Ellison.

"Pleasure. More--I'll give you as interesting and convincing a 'human document' about it as ever you read, if you like."

"I shall be eternally grateful," replied the other.

"It was a sad and sordid business. The man, whose last written words I'll give you to read, was a Sergeant-Major in the Volunteer Rifles (also at Duri where I was stationed, as you know) and he was a gentleman born and bred, poor chap." ["Lawrence-Smith," murmured Mr. John Robin Ross-Ellison with an involuntary movement of surprise. His eyebrows rose and his jaw fell.] "Yes, he was that rare bird a gentleman-ranker who remained a gentleman and a ranker--and became a fine soldier. He called himself Lawrence-Smith and owned a good old English name that you'd recognize if I mentioned it--and you'd be able to name some of his relatives too. He was kicked out of Sandhurst for striking one of the subordinate staff under extreme provocation. The army was in his blood and bones, and he enlisted."

"Excuse me," interrupted Mr. Ross-Ellison, "you speak of this Sergeant-Major Lawrence-Smith in the past tense. Is he dead then?"

"He is dead," replied Colonel Jackson. "Did you know him?"

"I believe I saw him at Duri," answered Mr. Ross-Ellison with an excellent assumption of indifference. "What's the story?"

"I'll give you his own tale on paper--let me have it back--and, mind you, every single word of it is Gospel truth. The man was a gentleman, an educated, thoughtful, sober chap, and as sane as you or I. I got to know him well--he was in hospital, with blood-poisoning from panther-bite, for a time--and we became friends. Actual friends, I mean. Used to play golf with him. (You remember the Duri Links.) In mufti, you'd never have dreamed for a moment that he was not a Major or a Colonel. Army life had not coarsened him in the slightest, and he kept some lounge-suits and mess-kit by Poole. Many a good Snob of my acquaintance has left my house under the impression that the Lawrence-Smith he had met there, and with whom he had been hail-fellow-well-met, was his social equal or superior.

"He simply was a refined and educated gentleman and that's all there is about it. Well--you'll read his statement--and, as you read, you may tell yourself that I am as convinced of its truth as I am of anything in this world.... He was dead when I got to him.

"The stains, on the backs of some of the sheets and on the front of the last one, are--blood stains...."

And at this point their host suggested the propriety of joining the ladies....

Colonel Jackson gave Mr. Ross-Ellison a "lift" in his powerful motor as far as his bungalow, entered, and a few minutes later emerged with a long and fat envelope.

"Here you are," said he. "I took it upon myself to annex the papers as I was his friend. Let's have 'em back. No need for me to regard them as 'private and confidential' so far as I can see, poor chap. Good-night."

Having achieved the haven of loose Pathan trousers and a muslin shirt (worn over them) in the privacy of his bed-room, Mr. Ross-Ellison, looking rather un-English, sat on a camp-cot (he never really liked chairs) and read, as follows, from a sheaf of neatly-written (and bloodstained) sheets of foolscap.

* * * * *

I have come to the point at which I decide to stop. I have had enough. But I should like to ask one or two questions.

1. Why has a man no right to quit a world in which he no longer desires to live? 2. Why should Evil be allowed to triumph? 3. Why should people who cannot see spirit forms be so certain that such do not exist, when none but an ignorant fool argues, "I believe in what I can see"?

With regard to the first question I maintain that a man has a perfect right to "take" the life that was "given" him (without his own consent or desire), provided it is not an act of cowardice nor an evasion of just punishment or responsibility. I would add--provided also that he does not, in so doing, basely desert his duty, those who are in any way dependent on him, or those who really love him.

I detest that idiotic phrase "while of unsound mind". I am as sound in mind as any man living, but because I end an unbearable state of affairs, and take the only step I can think of as likely to give me peace--I shall be written down mad. Moreover should I fail--in my attempt to kill myself (which I shall not) I should be prosecuted as a criminal!

To me, albeit I have lived long under strict discipline and regard true discipline as the first essential of moral, physical, mental, and social training, to me it seems a gross and unwarrantable interference with the liberty of the individual--to deny him sufficient captaincy of his soul for him to be free to control it at the dictates of his conscience, and to keep it Here or to send it There as may seem best. Surely the implanted love of life and fear of death are sufficient safeguards without any legislation or insolent arrogant interference between a man and his own ego? Anyhow, such are my views, and in perfect soundness of mind and body, after mature reflection and with full confidence in my right so to do, I am about to end my life here.

As to the second question, "Why should Evil be allowed to triumph?" I confess that my mind cannot argue in a circle and say, "You are born full of Original Sin, and if you sin you are Damned"--a vicious circle drawn for me by the gloomy, haughty, insincere and rather unintelligent young gentleman whom I respectfully salute as Chaplain, and who regards me and every other non-commissioned soldier as a Common, if not Low, person.

He would not even answer my queries by means of the good old loop-hole, "It is useless to appeal to Reason if you cannot to Faith" and so beg the question. He said that things were because the Lord said they were, and that it was impious to doubt it. More impious was it, I gathered, to doubt him, and to allude to Criticisms he had never read.

His infallible "proof" was "It is in the Bible".

Possibly I shall shortly know why an Omnipotent, Omniscient, Impeccable Deity allows this world to be the Hell it is, even if there be no actual Hell for the souls of his errant Creatures (in spite of the statements of the Chaplain who appears to have exclusive information on the subject, inaccessible to laymen, and to rest peacefully assured of a Real Hell for the wicked,--nonconforming, and vulgar).

At present I cannot understand and I do not know--though I am informed and infused with a burning and reverent desire to understand and to know--why Evil should be allowed to triumph, as in my own case, as well as in those of millions of others, it does. And thirdly, why does the man who would never deny beauty in a poem or picture because he failed to see it while others did, deny that immaterial forms of the dead exist, because he has never seen one, though others have?

I know of so many many men who would blush to be called "I-believe-what-I-see men," who yet laugh to scorn the bare idea of the materialization and visualization of visitants from the spirit world, because they have never seen one. I have so often met the argument, "The ghost of a man I might conceive--but I can _not_ conceive the appearance of the ghost of a pair of trousers or of a top-hat," offered as though it were unanswerable. Surely the spirit, aura, shade, ghost, soul, ego--what you will--can permeate and penetrate and pervade clothing and other matter as well as flesh?

Well, once again, I do not know,--and yet I have seen, not once but repeatedly, not by moonlight in a churchyard, but under the Indian sun on a parade-ground, the ghost of a man _and of all his accoutrements,--of a rifle, of a horse and all a horse's trappings_.

I have been a teetotaller for years, I have never had sunstroke and I am as absolutely sane as ever a man was.

And further I am in no sense remorseful, repentant, or "dogged by the spectre of an evil deed".

I killed Barker intentionally. Were he alive again I would kill him again. I punished him myself because the law could not punish him as he deserved, and I in no way regret or deplore my just and judicial action. There are deeds a gentleman must resent and punish--with the extreme penalty. No, it is in no sense a case of the self-tormented wretch driven mad by the awful hallucinations of his guilty, unhinged mind. I am no haunted murderer pursued by phantoms and illusions, believing himself always in the presence of his victim's ghost.

All people who have read anything, have read of the irresistible fascination that the scene of the murder has for the murderer, of the way in which the victim "haunts" the slayer, and of how the truth that "murder will out" is really based on the fact that the murderer is his own most dangerous accuser by reason of his life of terror, remorse, and terrible hallucination.

My case is in no wise parallel.

I am absolutely without fear, regret, remorse, repentance, dread or terror in the matter of my killing Sergeant Barker. Exactly how and why I killed him, and how and why I am about to kill myself, I will now set forth, without the slightest exaggeration, special pleading or any other deviation from the truth....

I am to my certain knowledge the eighth consecutive member of my family, in the direct line, to follow the profession of arms, but am the first to do so without bearing a commission. My father died young in the rank of Captain, my grandfather led his own regiment in the Crimea, my great-grandfather was a Lieutenant-General, and, if I told you my real name, you could probably state something that he did at Waterloo.

I went to Sandhurst and I was expelled from Sandhurst--very rightly and justly--for an offence, or rather the culminating offence of a series of offences, that were everything but mean, dishonest or underhand. I was wild, hasty, undisciplined and I was lost for want of a father to thrash me as a boy, and by possession of a most loving and devoted mother who

worshipped, spoiled--and ruined me.

I enlisted under an assumed name in my late father's (and grandfather's) old Regiment of Foot and quickly rose to the rank of Sergeant-Major.

I might have had a commission in South Africa but I decided that I preferred ruling in hell to serving in heaven, and declined to be a grey-haired Lieutenant and a nuisance to the Officers' Mess of the Corps I would not leave until compelled.

In time I was compelled and I became Sergeant-Major of the Volunteer Rifle Corps here and husband of a--well--de mortuis nil nisi bonum.

Why I married I don't know.

The English girl of the class from which soldiers are drawn never attracted me in the very least, and I simply could not have married one, though a paragon of virtue and compendium of housewifely qualities.

Admirable and pretty as Miss Higgs, Miss Bloggs, or Miss Muggins might be, my youthful training prevented my seeing beyond her fringe, finger-nails, figure, and aspirates, to her solid excellences;--and from sergeants'-dances I returned quite heart-whole and still unlighted to the Colonel's cook. But Dolores De Souza was different.

There was absolutely nothing to offend the most fastidious taste in her speech, appearance, or manners. She was convent-bred, accomplished, refined, gentle, worthless and wicked. The good Sisters of the Society of the Broken Heart had polished the exterior of the Eurasian orphan very highly--but the polish was a thin veneer on very cheap and unseasoned wood.

It is a strange fact that, while I could respect the solid virtues of the aspirateless Misses Higgs, Bloggs or Muggins, I could never have married one of them; yet, while I knew Dolores to be a heartless flirt, and more than suspected her to be of most unrigid principle, I was infatuated with her dark beauty, her grace, her wiles and witchery--and asked her to become my wife.

The good Sisters of the Society of the Broken Heart had taught Dolores to sing beautifully, to play upon the piano and the guitar, to embroider, to paint mauve roses on pink tambourines and many other useful arts, graces and accomplishments--but they had not taught her practical morality nor anything of cooking, marketing, plain sewing, house-cleaning or anything else of house-keeping. However, having been bred as I had been bred, I could take the form and let the substance go, accept the shapely husks and shout not for the grain, and prefer a pretty song, and a rose in black hair over a shell-like ear, to a square meal. I fear the average Sergeant-Major would have beaten Dolores within a week of matrimony, but I strove to make loss, discomfort, and disappointment a discipline,--and music, silk dresses and daintiness an aesthetic re-training to a barrack-blunted mind.

In justice to Dolores I should make it clear that she was not of the slatternly, dirty, lazy, half-breed type that pigs in a peignoir from twelve to twelve and snores again from midnight to midday. She was trim and dainty, used good perfume or none, rose early and went in the garden, loathed cheap and showy trash whether in dress, jewellery, or furniture; and was incapable of wearing fine shoes over holey stockings or a silk gown over dirty linen. No--there was nothing to offend the fastidious about Dolores, but there was everything to offend the good house-keeper and the moralist.

Frequently she would provide no dinner in order that we might be

compelled to dine in public at a restaurant or a hotel, a thing she loved to do, and she would often send out for costly sweets and pastry, drink champagne (very moderately, I admit), and generally behave as though she were the wife of a man of means.

And she was an arrant, incorrigible, shameless flirt.

Well--I do not know that a virtuous vulgar dowd is preferable to a wicked winsome witch of refined habits and person, and I should probably have gone quietly on to bankruptcy without any row or rupture, but for Burker. Having been bred in a "gentle" home I naturally took the attitude of "as you please, my dear Dolores" and refrained from bullying when quiet indication of the inevitable end completely failed. Whether she intended to act in a reasonable manner and show some wifely traits when my L250 of legacy and savings was quite dissipated I do not know. Burker came before that consummation.

A number of gentlemen joined the Duri Volunteer Corps and formed a Mounted Infantry troop, and, though I am a good horseman, I was not competent to train the troop, as I had never enjoyed any experience of mounted military work of any kind. So Sergeant Burker, late of the 54th Lancers, was transferred to Duri as Instructor of the Mounted Infantry Troop. Naturally I did what I could to make him comfortable and, till his bungalow was furnished after a fashion, gave him our spare room.

Sergeant Barker was the ideal Cavalryman and the ideal breaker of hearts,--hearts of the Mary-Ann and Eliza-Jane order.

He was a black-haired, blue-eyed Irishman with a heart as black as his hair, and language as blue as his eye--a handsome, plausible, selfish, wicked devil with scarcely a virtue but pride and high courage. I disliked him at first sight, and Dolores fell in love with him equally quickly, I am sure.

I don't think he had a solitary gentlemanly instinct.

Being desirous of learning Mounted Infantry work, I attended all his drills, riding as troop-leader, and, between close attention to him and close study of the drill-book, did not let the gentlemen in the ranks know that, in the beginning, I knew as little about it as they did.

And an uncommonly good troop he soon made of it, too.

Of course it was excellent material, all good riders and good shots, and well horsed.

Burker and I were mounted by the R.H.A. Battery here, and the three drills we held, weekly, were seasons of delight to a horse-lover like myself.

Now the horse I had was a high-spirited, powerful animal, and he possessed the trait, very common among horses, of hating to be pressed behind the saddle. Turning to look behind while "sitting-easy" one day I rested my right hand on his back behind the saddle and he immediately lashed out furiously with both hind legs. I did not realize for the moment what was upsetting him--but quickly discovered that I had only to press his back to send his hoofs out like stones from a sling. I then remembered other similar cases and that I had also read of this curious fact about horses--something to do with pressure on the kidneys I believe.

One day Burker was unexpectedly absent and I took the drill, finding myself quite competent and au fait.

The same evening I went to my wife's wardrobe, she being out, to try and

find the keys of the sideboard. I knew they frequently reposed in the pocket of her dressing-gown.

In the said pocket they were--and so was a letter in the crude large handwriting of Sergeant Burker.

I did not read it, but I did not see the necessity of a correspondence between my wife and such a man as I knew Sergeant Burker to be. They met often enough, in all conscience, to say what they might have to say to each other.

At dinner I remarked casually: "I shouldn't enter into a correspondence with Burker if I were you, Dolly. His reputation isn't over savoury and--" but, before I could say more, my wife was literally screaming with rage, calling me "Spy," "Liar," "Coward," and demanding to know what I insinuated and of what I accused her. I replied that I had accused her of nothing at all, and merely offered advice in the matter of correspondence with Burker. I explained how I had come to find the letter and stated that I had not read it.

"Then how do you know that we--" she began, and suddenly stopped.

"That you--what?" I inquired.

"Nothing," she said.

At the next Sergeants' Dance at the Institute I did not like Burker's manner to my wife at all. It was--well, amorous, and tinged with a shade of proprietorship. I distinctly heard him call her "Dolly," and equally distinctly saw an expressively affectionate look in her eyes as he hugged her in the waltzes--whereof they indulged in no less than five.

My position was awkward and unpleasant. I loathe a row or a scene unspeakably--though I delight in fighting when that pastime is legitimate--and I was brought into daily contact with the ruffian and I disliked him intensely.

I was very averse from the course of forbidding him the house and thus insulting my wife by implication--since she obviously enjoyed his society--and descending to pit myself against the greasy cad in a struggle for a woman's favour, and that woman my own wife. Nor could I conscientiously take the line of, "If she desires to go to the Devil let her," for a man has as much responsibility for his wife as for his children, and it is equally his duty to guide and control her and them. Women may vote and may legislate for men--but on men they will ever depend and rely.

No, the position of carping, jealous husband was one that I could not fill, and I determined to say nothing, do nothing and be watchful--watchful, that is, to avoid exposing her to temptation. I did my best, but I was away from home a good deal, visiting the out-station detachments of the Corps.

Then, one day, the wretched creature I called "butler" came to me with an air of great mystery and said: "Sahib, Sergeant Burker Sahib sending Mem Sahib bundle of flowers and _chitti_[53] inside and diamond ring yesterday. His boy telling me and I seeing. He often coming here too when Sahib out. Both wicked peoples."

[53] Note.

I raised my hand to knock his lies down his throat--and dropped it. They were not lies, I knew, and the fellow had been faithful to me for many years and--the folly of childish human vanity--I felt he knew I was a "gentleman," and I liked him for it.

I paid him his wages then and there, gave him a present and a good testimonial and discharged him. He wept real tears and shook with sobs of grief--easy grief, but very genuine.

When Dolores came home from the Bandstand I said quietly: "Show me the jewellery Burker sent you, Dolly. I am very much in earnest, so don't bluster."

She seemed about to faint and looked very frightened--perhaps my face was more expressive than a gentleman's should be.

"It was only a little thing for my birthday," she whined. "Can't I keep it? Don't be a tyrant or a fool."

"Your next birthday or your last?" I asked. "Please get it at once. We'll settle matters quietly and finally."

I fear the poor girl had visions of the doorstep and a closed door. Two, perhaps, for I am sure Burker would not have taken her in if I had turned her out, and she may have thought the same.

It was a diamond ring, and the scoundrel must have given a couple of months' pay for it--if he had paid for it at all. I thrust aside the sudden conviction that Burker's own taste could not have been responsible for its choice and that it was selected by my wife.

"Why should he give you this, Dolores?" I asked. "Will you tell me or must I go to him?" And then she burst into tears and flung herself at my feet, begging for mercy.

Mercy!

Qui s'excuse s'accuse.

What should I do?

To cast her out was to murder her soul quickly and her body slowly, and I could foresee her career with prophetic eye and painful clearness.

And what could the Law do for me?

Publish our shame and perhaps brand me that wretched thing--the willingly deceived and complaisant husband.

What could I do by challenging Burker?

He was a champion man-at-arms, a fine boxer, and a younger, stronger man, I should merely experience humiliation and defeat. What _could_ I do?

If I said, "Go and live with your Burker," I should be committing a bigger crime than hers, for if he did take her in, it would not be for long.

I sat the night through, pondered the question carefully, looked at it from all points of view and--decided that Burker must die. Also that he must not drag me to jail or the scaffold as he went to his doom. If I shot him and was punished, Dolores would become a--well, as I have said, her soul would die quickly and her body slowly. I had married Dolores and I must do what lay in my power to protect Dolores. But I simply could not kill the hound in some stealthy secret manner and wait for the footsteps of warrant-armed police for the rest of my life.

What could I do? Or rather--for the question had narrowed to that--how

could I kill him?

And as the sun struck upon my eyes at dawn, an idea struck upon my mind.

I would leave it to Fate and if Fate willed it so, Burker should die.

If Burker stood behind my charger, Fate sat with down-turned thumb.

I would not seek the opportunity--but, by God, I would take it if it offered.

If it did not, I would go to Burker and say to him quietly: "Burker, you must leave this station at once and never see or communicate with my wife in any way. Otherwise I have to kill you, Burker--to execute you, you understand." ...

A native syce from the Artillery lines led my charger into the little compound of my tiny bungalow.

Having buckled on my belt I went out, patted him, and gave him a lump of sugar. He nuzzled me for more, and, as he did so, I placed my hand on his back, behind the saddle, and pressed. He lashed out wildly.

I then trotted across the _maidan_[54] to the Volunteer Headquarters and parade-ground.

[54] Plain; level tract of ground.

Several gentlemen of the Mounted Infantry were waiting about, some standing by their horses, some getting bandoliers, belts, and rifles, some cantering their horses round the ground.

Sergeant Burker strode out of the Orderly Boom.

"Morning, Smith," said he. "How's the Missus?"

I looked him in the eye and made no reply.

He laughed, as jeering, evil, and caddish a laugh as I have ever heard. I almost forgot my purpose and had actually turned toward the armoury for a rifle and cartridge when I remembered and controlled my rage.

If I shot him, then and there, I must go to the scaffold or to jail forthwith, and Dolores must inevitably go to a worse fate. Had I been sure that she could have kept straight, Burker would have been shot, then and there.

"Fall in," he shouted, but did not mount his horse.

The gentlemen assembled with their horses and faced him in line, dismounted, I in front of the centre of the troop. How clearly I can see every feature and detail of that morning's scene, and hear every word and sound.

"Tell off by sections," commanded Burker.

"One, two, three, four--one, two, three, four...."

There were exactly six sections.

"Flanks of sections, proof."

"Section leaders, proof."

"Centre man, proof."

"Prepare to mount."

"Mount."

"Sections right."

"Sections left."

The last two words were the last words Burker ever spoke. Passing on foot along the line of mounted men, to inspect saddlery, accoutrements, and the adjustment of rifle-buckets and slings, he halted immediately behind me, where I sat on my charger in front of the centre of the troop.

I could not have placed him more exactly with my own hands. _Fate sat with down-pointing thumb_.

Turning round, as though to look at the troop, I rested my hand on my horse's back--just behind the saddle--and pressed hard. He lashed out with both hoofs and Sergeant Burker dropped--and never moved again.

The base of his skull was smashed like an egg, and his back was broken like a dry stick....

The terrible accident roused wide sympathy with the unfortunate man, the local reporter used all his adjectives, and a military funeral was given to the soldier who had died in the execution of his duty.

On reaching home, after satisfying myself at the Station Hospital that the man was dead, I said to my poor, pale and red-eyed wife:--

"Dolores, Sergeant Burker met with an accident this morning on parade. He is dead. Let us never refer to him again."

She fainted.

I spent that night also in meditation, questioning myself and examining my soul--with every honest endeavour to be not a self-deceiver.

I came to the conclusion that I had acted rightly and in the only way in which a gentleman could act. I had snatched Dolores from his foul clutches, I had punished him without depriving Dolores of my protection, and I had avenged the stain on my honour.

"You have committed a treacherous cowardly murder," whispered the Fiend in my ear.

"You are a liar," I replied. "I did not fear the man and I took this course solely on account of Dolores. I was strong enough to accept this position--and to risk the accusation of murder, from my conscience, from the Devil, or from man."

Any doubt I might otherwise have had was forestalled and inhibited by the obvious Fate that placed Burker in the one spot favourable to my scheme of punishment.

God had willed it?

God had not prevented it.

Surely God was consenting unto it....

And Dolores? I would forgive her and offer her the choice of remaining with me or leaving me and receiving a half of my income and

possessions--both alternatives being contingent upon good conduct.

At dawn I prepared tea for her, and entered our bedroom. Dolores had wound a towel round her neck, twisted the ends tightly--and suffocated herself.

She had been dead for hours....

At the police inquiry, held the same day, I duly lied as to the virtues of the "deceased," and the utter impossibility of assigning any reason for the rash and deplorable act. The usual smug stereotyped verdict was pronounced, and, in addition to expressing their belief that the suicide was committed "while of unsound mind," the officials expressed much sympathy with the bereaved husband.

Dolores was buried that evening and I returned to an empty house.

I believe opinion had been divided as to whether I was callous or "stunned"--but the sight of her little shoes caused pains in my throat and eyes. Had Burker been then alive I would have killed him with my hands--and teeth. Yes, teeth.

I spent that night in packing every possession and trace of Dolores into her boxes, and then in trying to persuade myself that I should have acted differently.

I could not do so. I had acted for the best--so let God who gave me free-will, intelligence, conscience and opportunity, approve the deed or take the blame.

And let God remember how that opportunity came so convincingly--so impellingly--and if He would judge me and ask for my defence I would ask him who sent Burker here, and who placed him on that fatal spot?

Does God sit only in judgment?

Does God calmly watch His creatures walking blindfold to the Pit--struggling to tear away the bandage as they walk? Can He only judge, and can He never help?

"_Pray_"

Is God a petty-minded "jealous" God to be propitiated like the gods of the heathen?

Must we continually ask, or, not asking, not receive?

And if we know not to ask aright and to demand the best and highest?

Cannot the well-fed, well-read, well-paid Chaplain give advice?

"_God knoweth best. Ask unceasingly. Pray always_"

Why?--if. He knows best, is All Merciful, All Powerful?

"_Praise_"

Is God a child, a savage, a woman? Shall I offer adulation that would sicken _me_.

"_God is our Father which art in heaven_"

Would I have my son praise me to my face continually--or at all. Would I compel him to pester me with demands for what he desired,--good, bad and indifferent?

And would I give him what he asked regardless of what was best for him--or say, "If you ask not, you receive not?" Give me a God finer and greater and juster and nobler than myself--something higher than the Chaplain's jealous, capricious, inconsequent and illogical God. Anthropomorphism!

Is there a God at all?

I shall soon know.

If so--

Oh Thou, who man of baser earth didst make
And ev'n with Paradise devised the Snake,
For all the Sin the face of wretched man
Is black with--Man's forgiveness give--and take!

At dawn I said aloud:--

"This Chapter is closed. The story of Burker and Dolores is written. I may now strive to forget."

I was wrong.

Major Jackson of the R.A.M.C. came to see me soon after daylight. He gave me an opiate and I slept all that day and night. I went on parade next morning, fresh, calm, and cool--and saw _Burker riding toward the group of gentlemen who were awaiting the signal to "fall in"_.

I say I was fresh, calm, and cool.

I was.

And there was Burker--looking exactly as in life, save for a slight nebulosity, a very faint vagueness of outline, and a hint of transparency.

I had been instructed by the Adjutant to assume the post of Instructor (as the end of the Mounted Infantry drill season was near)--and I blew the "rally" on my whistle as many of the gentlemen were riding about, and shouted the command: "Fall in".

Twenty living men and one dead faced me, twenty dismounted and one mounted. I called the corporal in charge of the armoury.

"How many on parade?" I asked.

He looked puzzled, counted, and said:--

"Why--twenty, ain't there?"

I numbered the troop.

Twenty--and Burker.

"Tell off by sections."

Five sections--and Burker.

"Sections right."

A column of five sections--and Burker, in the rear.

I called out the section-leader of Number One section.

"Are the sections correctly proved?" I asked, and added: "Put the troop back in line and tell-off again".

"Five sections, correct," he reported.

I held that drill, with five sections of living men, and a single file of dead, who manoeuvred to my word.

When I gave the order "With Numbers Three for action dismount," or "Right-hand men, for action dismount," Burker remained mounted. When I dismounted the whole troop, Burker remained mounted. Otherwise he drilled precisely as Number Twenty-one would have drilled in a troop of twenty-one men.

Was I frightened? I do not know.

At first my heart certainly pounded as though it would leap from my body, and I felt dazed, lost, and shocked.

I think I was frightened--not of Burker so much as of the unfamiliar, the unknown, the impossible.

How would you feel if your piano suddenly began to play of itself? You would be alarmed and afraid probably, not frightened of the piano, but of the fact.

A door could not frighten you--but you would surely be alarmed at its persistently opening, each time you shut, locked, and bolted it, if it acted thus.

Of Burker I had no fear--but I was perturbed by the fact that the dead could ride with the living.

When I gave the order "Dismiss" at the end of the parade Burker rode away, as he had always done, in the direction of his bungalow.

Returning to my lonely house, I sat me down and pondered this appalling event that had come like a torrent, sweeping away familiar landmarks of experience, idea, and belief. I was conscious of a dull anger against Burker and then against God.

Why should He allow Burker to haunt me?...

Why should Evil triumph?...

Was I haunted? Or was it, after all, but a hallucination--due to grief, trouble, and the drug of the opiate?

I sat and brooded until I thought I could hear the voices of Burker and Dolores in converse.

This I knew to be hallucination, pure and simple, and I went to see my friend (if he will let me call him what he is in the truest and highest sense) Major Jackson of the R.A.M.C.

He took me for a long ride, kept me to dinner, and manufactured a job for me--a piece of work that would occupy and tire me.

He assured me that the Burker affair was pure hallucination and staked his professional reputation that the image of Burker came upon my retina from within and not from without. "The shock of the deaths of your wife and your friend on consecutive days has unhinged you, and very naturally so," he said.

Of course I did not tell him that I had killed Burkner, though I should have liked to do so. I felt I had no right to put him in the position of having to choose between denouncing me and condoning a murder--compounding a felony.

Nor did I see any reason for confessing to the Police what I had done (even though Dolores was dead) and finishing my career on the scaffold.

One owes something to one's ancestors as well as to oneself. Well, perhaps it was a hallucination. I would wait.

At the next drill Burkner was present and rode as Number Three in Section Six.

As there were twenty-three (living) on parade I ordered Number Twenty-three to ride as Number Four of his section and leave a blank file.

Burkner rode in that blank file and drilled so, throughout--save that he would not dismount.

Once, as the troop rode in column of sections, I fell to the rear and, coming up behind, struck with all my might at that slightly nebulous figure, with its faint vagueness of outline and hint of transparency.

My heavy cutting-whip whistled--and touched nothing. I was as one who beats the air. Section Six must have thought me mad.... Twice again the dead man drilled with the living, and each time I described what happened to Major Jackson.

"It is a persistent hallucination," said he; "you must go on leave."

"I won't run from Burkner, nor from a hallucination," I replied.

Then came the end.

At the next drill, twenty-one gentlemen were present and Number Twenty-one, the Sessions Judge of Duri, a Scot, kept staring with looks of amazement and alarm at Burkner, who rode as Number Four on his flank, making an odd file into a skeleton section. I was certain that he saw Burkner.

As the gentlemen "dismissed" after parade, the Judge rode up to me and, with a white face, demanded:--

"Who the devil was that rode with me as Number Twenty-four? It was--it was--like--Sergeant Burkner."

"It _was_ Sergeant Burkner, Sir," said I.

"I knew it was," he replied, and added: "Man, you and I are fey."

"Will you tell Major Jackson of this, Sir?" I begged. "He knows I have seen Burkner's ghost here before, and tells me it is a hallucination."

"I'll go and see him now," he replied. "He is an old friend of mine, and--he's a damned good doctor. Man--you and I are fey." He rode to where his trap, with its spirited cob, was awaiting him, dismounted and drove off.

As everybody knows, Mr. Blake of the Indian Civil Service, Sessions Judge of Duri, was thrown from his trap and killed. It happened five minutes after he had said to me, with a queer look in his eyes, and a queer note in his voice, "Man! you and I are fey".... So it is no hallucination and I am haunted by Burkner's ghost. Very good. I will

fight Burker on his own ground.

My ghost shall haunt Burker's ghost--or I shall be at peace.

Though the religion of the Chaplain has failed me, the religion of my Mother, taught to me at her knee, has implanted in me an ineradicable belief in the ultimate justice of things, and the unquenchable hope of "somehow good".

I am about to go before my Maker or to obliteration and oblivion. If the former, I am prepared to say to Him: "You made me a man. I have played the man. I look to you for justice, and that is--compensation and not 'forgiveness'. Much less is it punishment. You have treated me ill and given me no help. You have bestowed free- _will_ without free- _dom_ . Compensate me or know Yourself unjust."

To a servant or child who spoke so to me and with equal reason, I would reply:--

"Compensation is due to you and not 'forgiveness'--much less punishment," and I would act accordingly.... Why should I cringe to God--and why should He love a cringer more than I do?

God help Men and Women--and such Children as are doomed to grow up to be Men and Women.

As I finish this sentence I shall put my revolver in my mouth and seek Justice or Peace....

* * * * *

"Bad luck," murmured Mr. Robin Ross-Ellison, "that was the man of all men for me! A gentleman, wishful to die.... That is the sort that _does_ things when swords are out and bullets fly. Seeks a gory grave and gets a V.C. instead. He and Mike Malet-Marsac and I would have put a polish on the new Gungapur Fusiliers.... Rough luck...."

He was greatly disappointed, for his experiences in the bazaars, market-places, secret-meeting houses, and the bowers of Hearts' Delights,--the Rialtos of Gungapur (he disguised, now as an Afghan horse-dealer, now as a sepoy, now as a Pathan money-lender, again as a gold-braided, velvet waistcoated, swaggering swashbuckler from the Border)--his experiences were disquieting, were such as to make him push on preparations, perfect plans, and work feverishly at the "polishing" of his re-organized Corps.

Also the reports of his familiar, a Somali yclept Moussa Isa, were disquieting, disturbing to a lover of the Empire who foresaw the Empire at war in Europe.

Moussa Isa also knew that there was talk among Pathan horse-dealers and _budmashes_ of the coming of one Ilderim the Weeper, a mullah of great influence and renown, and talk, moreover, among men of other race, of a Great Conspiracy.

Moussa was bidden to take service as a mill-coolie in one of Colonel Dearman's mills, and to report on the views and attitude of the thousands who laboured therein. This he did and there learnt many interesting facts.

Sec. 4. MR. AND MRS. CORNELIUS GOSLING-GREEN.

It was Sunday--and therefore John Bruce, the Engineering College Professor, was exceptionally busy. On a-week-day he only had to deliver his carefully prepared lectures, interview students, read and return essays, take the chair at meetings of college societies, coach one or two "specialists," superintend the games on the college gymkhana ground, interview seekers after truth and perverters of the same, write letters on various matters of college business, visit the hostel, set question papers and correct answers, attend common-room meetings, write articles for the college magazine and papers for the Scientific, Philosophical, Shakespearean, Mathematical, Debating, Literary, Historical, Students', Old Boys', or some other "union" and, if God willed, get a little exercise and private study at his beloved "subject" and invention, before preparing for the morrow.

On Sundays, the thousand and one things crowded out of the programme were to be cleared up, his home mail was to be written, and then arrears of work had to be attacked.

At four o'clock he addressed Roy Pittenweem and Mrs. MacDougall, his dogs, and said:--

"There's a bloomin' bun-snatch somewhere, you fellers, don't it?". Though a Professor and one of the most keen and earnest workmen in India, his own college blazers were not quite worn out, and Life, the great Artist, had not yet done much sketching on the canvas of his face--in spite of his daily contact with the Science Professor, William Greatorex Bonnett, B.A., widely known as the Mad Hatter, the greatest of whose many great achievements is his avoidance of death at the hands of his colleagues and acquaintance.

Receiving no reply beyond a wink and a waggle, he dropped his blue pencil, rose, and went to the table sacred to litter; and from a wild welter of books, pipes, papers, golf-balls, hats, cigar-boxes, dog-collars, switches, cartridges and other sediment, he extracted a large gilt-edged card and studied it without enthusiasm or bias.

"Large coat of arms," he murmured--"patience--no--a pay-sheet on a monument asking for time; item a hand, recently washed; ditto, a dicky bird--possibly pigeon plucked proper or gull argent; guinea-pig regardant and expectant; supporters, two bottliwallahs rampant. Crest, a bum-boat flottant, and motto '_Cinq-cento-percentum_'. All done in gold. Likewise in gold and deboshed gothic, the legend 'Sir and Lady Fuggilal Potipharpar, At Home. To meet Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius Gosling-Green, M.P. Five p.m. C.T.' ... Now what the devil, Roy Pittenweem, _is_ C.T.? Is it 'Curious Time' or 'Cut for Trumps' or a new decoration for gutter plutocrats? It _might_ mean 'Calcutta Time,' mightn't it, as the egregious Phossy and his gang would have it? Well, we'll go and look upon the Cornmealious Gosling-Green, M.P.'s, and chasten our soul from sinful pride--ain't it, Mrs. MacDougall?" and the Professor strolled across to the Sports Club for a cup of tea.

In the midst of cheery converse with a non-moral and unphilosophic Professor of Moral Philosophy, a fat youth of the name of Augustus Grobble whose life was one long picturesque pose, he sprang to his feet, remarking: "I go, Augustus, I am bidden to behold some prize Gosling-Greens or something, at 5 p.m., D.V. or D.T. or C.T. or L.S.D. or otherwise. Perhaps it was S.T. which means 'Standard Time,' and as I said, I go, Augustus."

Augustus Grobble was understood to return thanks piously....

"Taxi, Sahib?" inquired the messenger-boy at the door.

"Go to," said the Professor. "Also go call me a _tikka-gharri_[55] and select a _very_ senior horse, blind, angular, withered, wilted, and

answering to the name, most obviously, of Skin-and-Grief--lest I be taken by the Grizzly-Goslings for a down-trodden plutocrat and a brother--and not seen for the fierce and 'aughty oppressor that I am."

[55] Public conveyance.

"Sahib?"

"_Tikka-gharri lao_, [56] you lazy little 'ound! Don't I speak plain English?" The Professor made it a practice to "rot" when not working--hoping thus even in India to retain sanity and the broad and wholesome outlook, for he was a very short-tempered person, easily roused to dangerous wrath.

[56] Bring.

A carriage, upholding a pony who, in return, spasmodically moved the carriage which gave evidence of having been where moths break through and steal, lumbered into the Club garden, and the Professor, imploring the jehu not to let the pony "die on him" in the Hibernian sense of the expression, gingerly entered.

"Convey me to the gilded Potipharparian 'alls, Arthur," said he.

"Sahib?"

"Why _don't_ you listen? _Palangur Hill ki pas_ [57] And don't forget you've to get me there at 5 p.m. C.T. or S.T.--I leave it to you, partner."

[57] To.

On arrival, the Professor concluded that if he had arrived at 5 p.m. C.T. he ought to have come at 5 p.m. S.T., or vice versa; as what he termed 'the show' was evidently about over. Fortune favours all sorts of people.

His hostess, who looked as though she had come straight out of the Bible _via_ Bond Street, and his host, who looked as though he had never come out of Petticoat Lane at all, both accused him of being unable to work out the problem of "Find Calcutta Time given the Standard Time," and he professed to be proud to be able to acknowledge the truth of the compliment.

"Come and be presented to Meester and Meesers Carneelius Garsling-Green, M.P.," said the lady, waddling before him; and her husband echoed:--

"Oah, yess. Come and be presented to Meester and Meesers Garsling-Green," waddling after him.

Mr. Cornelius Gosling-Green, M.P., proved to be a tall, drooping, melancholy creature, with "Dundreary" whiskers, reach-me-down suit of thick cloth, wrong kind of tie, thickish boots, and no presence. Without "form" and void.

Mrs. Cornelius Gosling-Green was a Severe Person, tiny, hard-featured and even more garrulous than her husband, who watched her anxiously and nervously as he answered any question put in her presence....

"And, oh, why, _why_ are not you Mohammedans _loyal_?" said Mrs. Cornelius Gosling-Green, to a magnificent-looking specimen of the Mussulman of the old school--stately, venerable, courteous and honourable--who stood near, looking as though he wondered what the devil he was doing in that galley.

Turning from his friend, Mir Ilderim Dost Mahommed Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan, a fine Pathan, "Loyal, Madam! Loyal! Believe me we Mohammedans are most intensely and devotedly loyal," he replied. "You have indeed been misled. Though you are only spending a month in India for collecting the materials for your book or pamphlet, you must really learn that much. We Mohammedans are as loyal as the English themselves.--More loyal than some in fact," he added, with intent. The Pathan smiled meaningly.

"Ah, that's just it. I mean 'Why aren't you Mohammedans loyal to poor India?'"

The man turned and left the marquee and the garden without another word.

"Poor bleeding India," corrected the Professor.

"And are you a friend and worker for India?" continued the lady, turning to him and eyeing him with severity.

"I am. I do my humble possible in my obscure capacity, Mrs. Grisly-Gosling," he replied. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Grossly-Grin----that is--er--Gosling-Green, I should say."

Be sure your sins will find you out. Through wilful perversion of the pleasing name the Professor had rendered himself incapable of enunciating it.

"And what do you do for India,--write, speak, organize, subscribe or what?" asked the lady with increasing severity.

"I work."

"In what capacity?"

"I am a professor at the Government Engineering College, here in Gungapur."

"O-h-h-h-h! You're one of the overpaid idlers who bolster up the Bureaucracy and batten on the...."

"Allow me to assure you that I neither bolster, batten, nor bureau, Mrs. Grizzling--I mean Gosling Green. Nor do I talk through my hat. I----" the Professor was beginning to get angry and to lose control.

"Perhaps you are one of us in disguise--a Pro-Native?"

"I am intensely Pro-Native."

The tall Pathan stared at the Professor.

"Oh, good! I beg your pardon! Cornelius, this gentleman is a Government professor and is with us!" said this female of the M.P. species.

"That's right," gushed the Gosling. "We want a few in the enemy's camp both to spy out their weakness and to embarrass them. Now about this University business. I am going to take it up. That history affair now! Scandalous! I cannot tell you what a wave of indignation swept over England when that syllabus was drawn up. Nothing truly Liberal about the whole course, much less Radical. I at once said: 'I will see this righted. I will go to India, and I will beard the....'"

"I think it was I who said it, Cornelius," remarked his much better half, coldly.

"Yes, my dear Superiora, yes. Now with your help I think we can do

something, Professor. Good. This is providential. We shall be able to embarrass them now! Will you write me----"

"You are going a little too fast, I think," said the Professor. "I am a 'Pro-Native' and a servant of the Pro-Native Government of India. As such, I don't think I can be of any service to twenty-one-day visitors who wish to 'embarrass' the best friends of my friends the Natives, even supposing I were the sort of gentle Judas you compliment me by imagining me. I----"

"You distinctly say you are Pro-Native and then----"

"I repeat I am intensely Pro-Native, and so are the Viceroy, the Governors, the entire Civil Service, the Educational Service, the Forest Service, the P.W.D., the Medical Service, the Army, and every other Service and Department in India as well as every decent man in India. We are all Pro-Native, and all doing our best in our respective spheres, in spite of a deal of ignorant and officious interference and attempted 'embarrassment' at the hands of the self-seeking, the foolish, the busy-body, the idle--not to mention the vicious. What a charming day it is. I have so enjoyed the honour of meeting you."

* * * * *

"Well, my Scroobious Bird! And have they this day roasted in India such a Gosling as shall never be put out?" inquired the non-moral and unphilosophic Professor of Moral Philosophy, a little later.

"No, my Augustus," was the reply. "It's a quacking little gosling, and won't lead to any great commotion in the farm-yard. Nasty little bird--like a sat-bai or whatever they call those appalling things 'seven-sister' birds, aren't they, that chatter and squeak all day."

"Have a long drink and tell us all about it," replied Mr. Augustus Clarence Percy Marmaduke Grobble.

"Oh, same old game on the same old stage. Same old players. Leading lady and gent changed only. Huge great hideous bungalow, like a Goanese wedding-cake, in a vast garden of symmetrically arranged blue and red glazed 'art' flower-pots. Lofty room decorated with ancestral portraits done by Mr. Guzzlebhoj Fustomji Paintwallah; green glass chandeliers and big blue and white tin balls; mauve carpet with purple azure roses; wall-paper, bright pink with red lilies and yellow cabbages; immense mouldy mirrors, and a tin alarm clock. Big crowd of all the fly-blown rich knaves of the place who have got more than they want out of Government or else haven't got enough. Only novelty was a splendid Pathan chap, got-up in English except for the conical cap and puggri. Extraordinarily like Ross-Ellison, except that he had long black Pathan hair on his shoulders. Been to England; barrister probably, and seemed the most viciously seditious of the lot. Silly ignorant Goslings in the middle saying to Brahmins, 'And you are Muscleman, aren't you, or are you a Dhobi?' and to Parsis, 'I suppose you High Caste gentlemen have to bathe every day?' shoving their awful ignorance under the noses of everybody, and inquiring after the healths of the 'chief wives'. Silly fatuous geese!--and then talking the wildest piffle about the 'burning question of the hour' and making the seditious rotters groan at their ineptitude and folly, until they cheer them up sudden-like with a bit of dam' treason and sedition they ought to be jailed for. Jailed. I nearly threw a fit when the old geezer, in a blaze of diamonds and glory, brought up old Phossy and presented him to the Gander, and he murmured:--

"'My deah friend,' as Phossy held on to his paw in transports, 'to think of their casting you into jail,' and old Mother Potiphar squeaked: 'Oh, this is not the forger of that name--but the eminent

politeecian'_. But poor Gosly had thought he had been a political prisoner! Meant no offence. And then some little squirt of an editor primed him with lies about the University and the new syllabus, and straightway the Gander tried to get me on the 'embarrass the Government' lay, and talked as though he knew all about it. 'I'll get some of the ladies of my committee sent out here as History-lecturers at your University,' says he. 'They'll teach pure Liberal History and inculcate true ideas of liberty and self-government.' I wanted to go outside and be ill. Good old 'Paget M.P.'--takes up a 'Question' and writes a silly pamphlet on it and thinks he's said the last word.--Written thousands.--Don't matter so long as he does it in England.--Just the place for him nowadays.--But when he feels he's shoved out of the lime-light by a longer-haired Johnny, it's rough luck that he should try and get back by spending his blooming committee's money coming here and deludin' the poor seditionist and seducin' your Hatter from his allegiance to his salt.... Awful old fraud really--no ability whatever. Came to my college to spout once, in my time. Lord! Still he was a guest, and we let him go. Run by his missus really, I think. Why can't she stop at home and hammer windows? They say she went and asked the Begum of Bhopal to join her in a 'mission and crusade'. Teach the Zenana Woman and Purdah Lady to Come Forth instead of Bring Forth. Come Forth and smash windows. Probably true. Silly Goslings. Drop 'em.... What did you think of our bowling yesterday? With anything like a wicket your College should be...."

* * * * *

Entering his lonely and sequestered bungalow that evening Mir Ilderim Dost Mahommed changed his Pathan dress for European dining-kit, removed his beard and wig, and became Mr. Robin Ross-Ellison. After dinner he wrote to the eminent Cold weather Visitor to India, Mr. Cornelius Gosling-Green, as follows--

"DEAR SIR,

"As I promised this afternoon, when you graciously condescended to honour me with your illuminating conversation, I enclose the papers which I guaranteed would shed some light on certain aspects of Indian conditions, and which I consider likely to give you food for thought.

"As I was myself educated in India, was brought up to maturity with Indian students, and have lived among them in many different places, I may claim to know something about them. As a class they are gentle, affectionate, industrious, well-meaning and highly intelligent. They are the most malleable of human metal, the finest material for the sculptor of humanity, the most impressionable of wax. In the right hands they can be moulded to anything, by the right leader led to any height. And conversely, of them a devil can make fiends. By the wrong leader they can be led down to any depth.

"The crying need of India is noble men to make noble men of these fine impressionable youths. Read the enclosed and take it that the writer (who wrote this recently in Gungapur Jail) is typical of a large class of misled, much-to-be-pitied youths, wrecked and ruined and destroyed--their undoing begun by an unspeakably false and spurious educational ideal, and completed by the writings, and the spoken words of heartless unscrupulous scoundrels who use them to their own vile ends.

"Read, Sir, and realize how truly noble, useful and beautiful is your great work of endeavouring to embarrass our wicked Government, to weaken its prestige here and in England, to encourage its enemies, to increase discontent and unrest, to turn the thoughts of students to matters political, and, in short, to carry on the good work of the usual Self-advertising Visitation M.P.

"Humbly thanking your Honour, and wishing your Honour precisely the successes and rewards that your Honour deserves,

"I remain,

"The dust of your Honour's feet,

"ILDERIM DOST MAHOMMED."

And Mr. Cornelius Gosling-Green, M.P., read as follows:--

... And so I am to be hanged by the neck till I am dead, am I? And for a murder which I never committed, and in the perpetration of which I had no hands? Is it, my masters? I trow so. But I can afford to spit--for I did commit a murder, nevertheless, a beautiful secret murder that no one could possibly ever bring to my home or cast in my tooth.

"Well, well! Hang me and grin in sleeve--and I will laugh on other side of face while dancing on nothing--for if you think you are doing me in eye, I know I have done you in eye!

"Yes. I murdered Mr. Spensonly, the Chief Secretary of the Nuddee River Commission.

"As the Latin-and-Greeks used to say, 'Solo fesit'!

"You think Mr. Spensonly died of plague? So he did. And who caused him to have plague? In short, who plagued him? (Ha! Ha! An infinite jest!) You shall know all about it and about, as Omar says, for I am going now to write my autobiography of myself, as all great so-called Criminals have done, for the admiration of mankind and the benefit of posterity. And my fellow-brothers and family-members shall proudly publish it with my photo--that of a great Patriot Hero and second Mazzini, Robespierre, Kossuth, Garibaldi, Wallace, Charlotte Corday, Kosciusko, and Mr. Robert Bruce (of spider fame).

"And I shall welcome death and embrace the headsman ere making last speech and dying confession. Having long desired to know what lies Beyond, I shall make virtue of necessity and seize opportunity (of getting to know) to play hero and die gamish.

"Not like the Pathan murderer who walked about in front of condemned cell with Koran balanced on head, crying to his Prophet to save him, and defying Englishes to touch him. Of course they cooked his geese, Koran or not. One warder does more than many Prophets in Gungapur Jail. (He! He! Quite good epigram and nice cynicality of educated man.) The degraded and unpolished fellow decoyed two little girls into empty house to steal their jewellery, and cut off fingers and noses and ears to get rings and nose-jewels and ear-drops, and left to die. Holy Fakir, gentleman of course! Pooh! and Bah! for all holy men. I give spurnings to them all for fools, knaves, or hypocrites. There are no gods any more for educated gentleman, except himself, and that's very good god to worship and make offering to (Ha! Ha! What a wit will be lost to the silly world when it permits itself to lose me.)

"Well, to return to the sheep, as the European proverb has it. I was born here in Gungapur, which will also have honour of being my death-and-cremation place, of poor but honest parent on thirty rupees a mensem. He was very clever fellow and sent five sons to Primary School, Middle School, High School and Gungapur Government College at cost of over hundred rupees a month, all out of his thirty rupees a mensem. He always used proverb 'Politeness lubricates wheels of life and palm also,' and he obliged any man who made it worth his while. But he fell into bad odours at hands of Mr. Spensonly owing to folly of

bribing-fellow sending cash to office and the letter getting into Mr. Spenonly's post-bag and opening by mistake.

"But the Sahib took me up into his office to soften blow to progenitor and that shows he was a bad man or his luck would not have been to take me in and give chance to murder him.

"My good old paternal parent made me work many hours each night, and though he knew nothing of the subjects he could read English and would hear all my lessons and other brothers', and we had to say Skagger Rack, Cattedgat, Scaw Fell and Helvellyn, and such things to him, and he would abuse us if we mis-arranged the figures and letters in CaH_2O_2 and H_2SO_4 and all those things in bottles. Before the Matriculation Examination he made a Graduate, whom he had got under his thumb-nail, teach us all the answers to all the back questions in all subjects till we knew them all by heart, and also made us learn ten long essays by heart so as to make up the required essay out of parts of them. He nearly killed my brother by starvation (saving food as well as punishing miscreant) for failing--the only one of us who ever failed in any examination--which he did by writing out all first chapter of Washington Irving for essay, when the subject was 'Describe a sunrise in the Australian back-blocks'. As parent said, he could have used 'A moonlight stroll by the sea-shore' and change the colour from silver to golden. But the fool was ill--so ill that he tried to kill himself and had not the strength. He said he would rather go to the missionaries' hell, full of Englishes, than go on learning _Egbert, Ethelbald, Ethelbert, Ethelwulf, Ethelred, Alfred, Edward the Elder, Edred, Edwy, Edgar, Ethelred the Unready_, and _If two triangles have two sides of the one equal to two angles of the other each to each and the sides subtended equal then shall the bases or fourth sides be equal each to each or be isosceles_.

"Well, the progenitor kept our noses in the pie night and day and we all hated the old papa piously and wished he and we and all teachers and text-books were burned alive.

"But we were very much loved by everybody as we were so learned and clever, and whenever the Collector or anybody came to School, the Head Master used to put one of us in each room and call on us to answer questions and recite and say capes and bays without the map, and other clever things; and when my eldest brother left I had to change coat with another boy and do it twice sometimes, in different rooms.

"Sometimes the Educational Inspector himself would come, but then nothing could be done, for he would not ask questions that were always asked and were in the book, like the teachers and Deputy Inspectors did, but questions that no one knew and had to be thought out then and there. That is no test of Learning--and any fool who has not troubled to mug his book by heart might be able to answer such questions, while the man who had learnt every letter sat dumb.

"I hated the school and the books I knew by heart, but I loved Mr. Ganeshram Joshibhai. He was a clever cunning man, and could always tweak the leg of pompous Head Master when he came to the room, and had beautiful ways of cheating him when he came to examine--better than those of the other teachers.

"Before we had been with him a month he could tell us things while being examined, and no one else knew he was doing it. The initial letters of each word made up the words he wanted to crib to us, and when he scratched his head with the right hand the answer was 'No,' while with the left hand it was 'Yes'. And the clever way he taught us sedition while teaching us History, and appearing to praise the English!

"He would spend hours in praising the good men who rebelled and fought

and got Magnum Charter and disrespected the King and cheeked the Government and Members of Council. We knew all about Oliver Cromwell, Hampden, Pim, and those crappies, and many a boy who had never heard of Wolsey and Alfred the Great knew all about Felton the jolly fine patriot who stabbed the Member of Council, Buckingham Esquire, in back.

"We learnt whole History book at home and he spent all History lessons telling us about Plots, all the English History Plots and foreign too, and we knew about the man who killed Henry of Navarre, as well as about the killing of French and American Presidents of to-day. He showed always why successful plots succeeded and the others failed. And he gave weeks to the American Independence War and the French Revolution.

"And all the Indian History was about the Mutiny and how and why it failed, when he was not showing us how the Englishes have ruined and robbed India, and comparing the Golden Age of India (when no cow ever died and there was never famine, plague, police nor taxes) with the miserable condition of poor bleeding India to-day.

"He was a fine fellow and so clever that we were almost his worshippers. But I am not writing his autobiography but my own, so let him lapse herewith into posterity and well-merited oblivious.

"At the College when we could work no longer, we who had never learnt crickets and tennis and ping-pongs, would take a nice big lantern with big windows in four sides of it, and sit publicly in the middle of the grass at the Gardens (with our books for a blind) and make speech to each other about Mother India and exhort each other to join together in a secret society and strike a blow for the Mother, and talk about the heroes who had died on the scaffolding for her, or who were languishing in chokey and do _poojah_ to their photos. But the superior members did no _poojah_ to anything. Then came the Emissary in the guise of a holy man (and I thought it the most dangerous disguise he could have assumed, for I wonder the police do not arrest every sannyasi and fakir on suspicion) and brought us the Message. And he took us to hear the blind Mussulman they call Ilderim the Weeper.

"All was ready and nothing lacked but the Instrument.

"Would any of us achieve eternal fame and undying glory by being the next Instrument?

"We wouldn't. No jolly fear, and thanks awfully.

"But we agreed to make a strike at the College and to drop a useless Browning pistol where it would be found, and in various other ways to be unrestful. And one of us, whom the Principal would not certify to sit for his F.E. and was very stony hard-up, joined the Emissary and went away with him to be a Servant and perhaps an Instrument later on (if he could not get a girl with a good dowry or a service of thirty rupees a mensem), he was so hungry and having nothing for belly.

"Yes, as Mr. Ganeshram Joshibhai used to say, that is what the British Government does for you—educates you to be passed B.A. and educated gent., and then grudges to give you thirty rupees a mensem and expects you to go searching for employment and food to put in belly! Can B.A. work with hands like _maistri_?

"Then there came the best of all my friends, a science-knowing gentleman who gave all his great talents to bomb. And the cream of all the milky joke was that he had learnt all his science free, from Government, at school and college, and he not only used his knowledge to be first-class superior anarchist but he got chemicals from Government own laboratory.

"His brother was in Government Engineering College and between them they

did much--for one could make the bomb and the other could fill it.

"But they are both to be hanged at the same time that I am, and I do not grudge that I am to be innocently hanged for their plot and the blowing up of the _bhangi_ by mistake for the Collector, for I have long aspired to be holy martyr in Freedom's sacred cause and have photo in newspapers and be talked about.

"Besides, as I have said, I am not being done brown, as I murdered Mr. Spensonly, the Engineer.

"How I hated him!

"Why should he be big and strong while I am skinny and feeble--owing to night-and-day burning midnight candle at both ends and unable to make them meet?

"Besides did he not bring unmerited dishonour on grey hairs of poor old progenitor by finding him out in bribe-taking? Did he not bring my honoured father's aforesaying grey hairs in sorrow to reduced pension?

"Did he not upbraid and rebuke, nay, reproach me when I made grievous little errors and backslippers?

"A thousand times Yea.

"But I should never have murdered him had I not caught the Plague, so out of evil cometh good once more.

"The Plague came to Gungapur in its millions and we knew not what to do but stood like drowning man splitting at a straw.

"Superstitious Natives said it was the revenge of Goddess Kali for not sacrificing, and superstitious Europeans said it was a microbe created by their God to punish unhygienic way of living.

"Knowing there are no gods of any sort I am in a position to state that it was just written on our foreheads.

"To make confusion worse dumbfounded the Government of course had to seize horns of dilemma and trouble the poor. They had all cases taken to hospital and made segregation and inspection camps. They disinfected houses and burnt rags and even purdah women were not allowed to die in bosom of family. Of course police stole lakhs of rupees worth of clothes and furniture and said it was infected. And many good men who were enemies of Government were falsely accused of being plague-stricken and were dragged to hospital and were never seen again.

"Terrible calamities fell upon our city and at last it nearly lost me myself. I was seized, dragged from my family-bosom, cast into hospital and cured. And in hospital I learned from fellow who was subordinate-medical that rats get plague in sewers and cesspools and when they die of it their fleas must go elsewhere for food, and so hop on to other rat and give that poor chap plague too, by biting him with dirty mouths from dead rat, and then he dies and so _in adfinitum_, as the poet has it. But suppose no other rat is handy, what is poor hungry flea to do? When you can't get curry, eat rice! When flea can't get rat he eats man--turns to nastier food. (He! He!)

"So when flea from plague-stricken rat jumps on to man and bites him, poor fellow gets plague--_bus_.[58]

[58] Finale, enough, the end.

"Didn't friends and family-members skeddaddle and bunk when they saw rat

after I told them all that! But I didn't care, I had had plague once, and one cannot get it twice. Not one man in thousand recovers when he has got it, but I did. Old uneducated fool maternal parent did lots of thanks-givings and _poojah_ because gods specially attentive to me--but I said 'Go to, old woman. It was written on forehead.'

"And when I returned to work, one day I had an idea--an idea of how to punish Mr. Spensonly for propelling honoured parent head first out of job, and idea for striking blow at British prestige. We had our office in private bungalow in those days before new Secretariat was built, and it was unhealthy bungalow in which no one would live because they died.

"Mr. Spensonly didn't care, and he had office on top floor, but bottom floor was clerks' office who went away at night also. Now it was my painful duty to go every morning up to his office-room and see that peon had put fresh ink and everything ready and that the _hamal_ had dusted properly. So it was not long before I was aware that all the drawers were locked except the top right-hand drawer, and that was not used as there was a biggish hole in the front of it where the edge was broken away from the above, some miscreant having once forced it open with tool.

"And verily it came to pass that one day, entering my humble abode-room, I saw a plague-rat lying suffering from _in extremis_ and about to give up ghost. But having had plague I did not trouble about the fleas that would leave his body when it grew stiff and cold, in search of food. Instead I let it lie there while my food was being prepared, and regretted that it was not beneath the chair of some enemy of mine who had not had plague, instead of beneath my own ... that of Mr. Spensonly for example!...

"It was Saturday night. I returned to the office that evening, knowing that Mr. Spensonly was out; and I went to his office-room with idle excuse to the peon sitting in verandah--and in my pocket was poor old rat kicking bucket fast.

"Who was to say _I_ put deceasing rat in the Sahib's table-drawer just where he would come and sit all day--being in the habit of doing work on Sunday the Christian holy day (being a man of no religion or caste)? What do I know of rats and their properties when at death's front door?

"Cannot rat go into a Sahib's drawer as well as into poor man's? If he did no work on Sunday very likely the fleas would remain until Monday, the rat dying slowly and remaining warm and not in _rigour mortuis_. Anyhow when they began to seek fresh fields and pastures new, being fed up with old rat--or rather not able to get fed up enough, they would be jolly well on the look out, and glad enough to take nibble even at an Englishman! (He! He!) So I argued, and put good old rat in drawer and did slopes. On Monday, Mr. Spensonly went early from office, feeling feverish; and when I called, as in duty bound, to make humble inquiries on Tuesday, he was reported jolly sickish with Plague--and he died Tuesday night. I never heard of any other Sahib dying of Plague in Gungapur except one missionary fellow who lived in the native city with native fellows.

"So they can hang me for share in bomb-outrage and welcome (though I never threw the bomb nor made it, and only took academic interest in affair as I told the Judge Sahib)--for I maintain with my dying breath that it was I who murdered Mr. Spensonly and put tongue in cheeks when _Gungapur Gazette_ wrote column about the unhealthy bungalow in which he was so foolish as to have his office. When I reflect that by this time to-morrow I shall be Holy Martyr I rejoice and hope photo will be good one, and I send this message to all the world--

"Oh be...."

* * * * *

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Gosling-Green, M.P., liked this Pathan gentleman so well after reading his letter and enclosure. Before long they liked him very much less--although they did not know it--which sounds cryptic.

Sec. 5. MR. HORACE FAGGIT.

"Fair cautions, ain't they, these bloomin' niggers," observed Mr. Horace Faggit, as the train rested and refreshed itself at a wayside station on its weary way to distant Gungapur.

Colonel Wilberforce Wriothsley, of the 99th Baluch Light Infantry, apparently did not feel called upon to notice the remark of Horace, whom he regarded as a Person.

"Makes you proud to think you are one of the Ruling Rice to look at the silly blighters, don't it?" he persisted.

"No authority on rice," murmured the Colonel, without looking up from his book.

Stuffy old beggar he seemed to the friendly and genial Horace, but Horace was too deeply interested in India and Horace to be affected by trifles.

For Mr. Horace Faggit had only set foot in his Imperial Majesty the King Emperor's Indian Empire that month, and he was dazed with impressions, drunk with sensations, and uplifted with pride. Was he not one of the Conquerors, a member of the Superior Society, one of the Ruling Race, and, in short, a Somebody?

The train started again and Horace sank back upon the long couch of the unwonted first-class carriage, and sighed with contentment and satisfaction.

How different from Peckham and from the offices of the fine old British Firm of Schneider, Schnitzel, Schnorrer & Schmidt! A Somebody at last--after being office-boy, clerk, strap-hanger, gallery-patron, cheap lodger, and paper-collar wearer. A Somebody, a Sahib, an English gent., one of the Ruling and Upper Class after being a fourpenny luncher, a penny-'bus-and-twopenny--tuber, a waverer 'twixt Lockhart and Pearce-and-Plenty.

For him, now, the respectful salaam, precedence, the first-class carriage, the salutes of police and railway officials, hotels, a servant (elderly and called a "Boy"), cabs (more elderly and called "gharries"), first-class refreshment and waiting rooms, a funny but imposing sun-helmet, silk and cotton suits, evening clothes, deference, regard and prompt attention everywhere. Better than Peckham and the City, this! My! What tales he'd have to tell Gwladwys Gwendoline when he had completed his circuit and returned.

For Mr. Horace Faggit, plausible, observant, indefatigably cunning, and in business most capable ("No bloomin' flies on 'Orris F." as he would confidently and truthfully assure you) was the first tentative tentacle advanced to feel its way by the fine old British Firm of Schneider, Schnitzel, Schnorrer & Schmidt, in the mazy markets of the gorgeous Orient, and to introduce to the immemorial East their famous jewellery and wine of Birmingham and Whitechapel respectively; also to introduce certain exceeding-private documents to various gentlemen of Teutonic

sympathies and activities in various parts of India--documents of the nature of which Horace was entirely ignorant.

And the narrow bosom of Horace swelled with pride, as he realized that, here at least, he was a Gentleman and a Sahib.

Well, he'd let 'em know it too. Those who did him well and pleased him should get tips, and those who didn't should learn what it was to earn the displeasure of the Sahib and to evoke his wrath. And he would endeavour to let all and sundry see the immeasurable distance and impassable gulf that lay between a Sahib and a nigger--of any degree whatsoever.

This was the country to play the gentleman in and no error! You could fling your copper cash about in a land where a one-and-fourpenny piece was worth a hundred and ninety-two copper coins, where you could get a hundred good smokes to stick in your face for about a couple of bob, and where you could give a black cabby sixpence and done with it. Horace had been something of a Radical at home (and, indeed, when an office-boy, a convinced Socialist), especially when an old-age pension took his lazy, drunken old father off his hands, and handsomely rewarded the aged gentleman for an unswervingly regular and unbroken career of post-polishing and pub-pillaring. But now he felt he had been mistaken. Travel widens the horizon and class-hatred is only sensible and satisfactory when you are no class yourself. When you have got a position you must keep it up--and being one of the Ruling Race was a position undoubtedly. Horace Faggit would keep it up too, and let 'em see all about it.

The train entered another station and drew in from the heat and glare to the heat and comparative darkness.

Yes, he would keep up his position as a Sahib haughtily and with jealousy,--and he stared with terrible frown and supercilious hauteur at what he mentally termed a big, fat buck-nigger who dared and presumed to approach the carriage and look in. The man wore an enormous white turban, a khaki Norfolk jacket, white jodhpore riding-breeches that fitted the calf like skin, and red shoes with turned-up pointed toes. His beard was curled, and his hair hung in ringlets from his turban to his shoulders in a way Horace considered absurd. Could the blighter be actually looking to see whether there might be room for him, and meditating entry? If so Horace would show him his mistake. Pretty thing if niggers were to get into First-Class carriages with Sahibs like Horace!

"'Ere! What's the gaime?" he inquired roughly. "Can't yer see this is Firs-Class, and if you got a Firs-Class ticket, can't yer see there's two Sahibs 'ere? Sling yer 'ook, _sour_.[59] Go on, _jao_!"[60]

[59] Pig.

[60] Go away.

The man gave no evidence of having understood Horace.

"Sahib!" said he softly, addressing Colonel Wilberforce Wriothsley.

The Colonel went on reading.

"_Jao_, I tell yer," repeated Horace, rather proud of his grasp of the vernacular. "Slope, _barnshoot_."[61]

[61] An insulting epithet.

"Sahib!" said the man again.

The Colonel looked up and then sprang to his feet with outstretched hand.

"_Bahut salaam_, [62] Subedar Major Saheb," he cried, and wrung the hand of the "big fat buck-nigger" (who possessed the same medal-ribbons that he himself did) as he poured forth a torrent of mingled Pushtu, Urdu, and English while the Native Officer alternately saluted and pressed the Colonel's hand to his forehead in transports of pure and wholly disinterested joy.

[62] Hearty greeting.

"They told me the Colonel Sahib would be passing through this week," he said, "and I have met all the trains that I might look upon his face. I am weary of my furlough and would rejoin but for my law-suit. Praise be to Allah that I have met my Colonel Sahib," and the man who had five war decorations was utterly unashamed of the tear that trickled.

"How does my son, Sahib?" he asked in Urdu.

"Well, Subedar Major Saheb, well. Worthily of his father--whose place in the _pultan_ may he come to occupy."

"Praise be to God, Sahib! Let him no more seek his father's house nor look upon his father's face again, if he please thee not in all things. And is there good news of Malet-Marsac Sahib, O Colonel Sahib?" Then, with a glance at Horace, he asked: "Why does this low-born one dare to enter the carriage of the Colonel Sahib and sit? Truly the _relway terain_ is a great caste-breaker! Clearly he belongs to the class of the _ghora-log_, the common soldiers." ...

"Oo was that,--a Rajah?" inquired the astounded Horace, as the train moved on.

"One of the people who keep India safe for you bagmen," replied the Colonel, who was a trifle indignant on behalf of the insulted Subedar Major Mir Daoud Khan Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan of the 99th Baluch Light Infantry.

"No doubt he thought I was another officer," reflected Horace. "They think you're a gent, if you chivvy 'em."

At Umbalpur Colonel Wilberforce Wriothsley left the train and Mr. Faggit had the carriage to himself--for a time.

And it was only through his own firmness and proper pride that he had it to himself for so long, for at the very next station a beastly little brute of a black man actually tried to get in--in with _him_, Mr. Horace Faggit of the fine old British Firm of Schneider, Schnitzel, Schnorrer & Schmidt, manufacturers of best quality Birmingham jewellery and "importers" of a fine Whitechapel wine.

But Horace settled _him_ all right and taught him to respect Sahibs. It happened thus. Horace lay idly gazing at the ever-shifting scene of the platform in lordly detachment and splendid isolation, when, just as the train was starting, a little fat man, dressed in a little red turban like a cotton bowler, a white coat with a white sash over the shoulder, a white apron tucked up behind, pink silk socks, and patent leather shoes, told his servant to open the door. Ere the stupefied Horace could arise from his seat the man was climbing in! The door opened inwards however, and Horace was in time to give it a sharp thrust with his foot and send the little man, a mere Judge of the High Court, staggering backwards on to the platform where he sprawled at full length, while his turban, which Horace thought most ridiculous for a grown man, rolled in the dust. Slamming the door the "Sahib" leant out and jeered, while the

insolent presumptuous "nigger" wiped the blood from his nose with a corner of the dhoti or apron-like garment (which Horace considered idiotic if not improper)....

But Homer nodded, and--Horace went to sleep.

When he awoke he saw by the dim light of the screened roof-lamp that he was not alone, and that on the opposite couch a native had actually made up a bed with sheets, blankets and pillow, undressed himself, put on pyjamas and gone to bed! Gord streuth, he had! He'd attend to him in the morning--though it would serve the brute right if Horace threw him out at the next station--without his kit. But he looked rather large, and Mercy is notoriously a kingly attribute.

In the morning Mir Jan Rah-bin-Ras el-Isan Mir Ilderim Dost Mahommed of Mekran Kot, Gungapur, and the world in general, awoke, yawned, stretched himself and arose.

He arose to some six feet and three inches of stature, and his thin pyjamasuit was seen to cover a remarkably fine and robustious figure--provided with large contours where contours are desirable, and level tracts where such are good. As he lay flat back again, Horace noted that his chest rose higher than his head and the more southerly portion of his anatomy, while the action of clasping his hands behind his neck brought into prominence a pair of biceps that strained their sleeves almost to bursting. He was nearly as fair as London-bred Horace, but there were his turbanned conical hat, his curly toed shoes, his long silk coat, his embroidered velvet waistcoat and other wholly Oriental articles of attire. Besides, his vest was of patterned muslin and he had something on a coloured string round his neck.

"What are you doing 'ere?" demanded Horace truculently, as this bold abandoned "native" caught his eye and said "Good-morning".

"At present I am doing nothing," was the reply, "unless passive reclining may count as being something. I trust I do not intrude or annoy?"

"You do intrude and likewise you do annoy also. I ain't accustomed to travel with blacks, and I ain't agoing to have you spitting about 'ere. You got in when I was asleep."

"You were certainly snoring when I got in, and I was careful not to awaken you--but not on account of any great sensation of guilt or fear. I assure you I have no intention of spitting or being in any way rude, unmannerly, or offensive. And since you object to travelling with 'blacks' I suggest--that you leave the carriage."

Did Horace's ears deceive him? Did he sleep, did he dream, and were visions about? Leave the carriage?

"Look 'ere," he shouted, "you keep a civil tongue in your 'ead. Don't you know I am a gentleman? What do you mean by getting into a first-class carriage with a gentleman and insulting 'im? Want me to throw you out before we reach a station? Do yer?"

"No, to tell you the truth I did not realize that you are a gentleman--and I have known a great number of English gentlemen in England and India, and generally found them mirrors of chivalry and the pink of politeness and courtesy. And I hope you won't try to throw me out either in a station or elsewhere for I might get annoyed and hurt you."

What a funny nigger it was! What did he mean by "mirrors of chivalry". Talked like a bloomin' book. Still, Horace would learn him not to

presoom.

The presumptuous one retired to the lavatory; washed, shaved, and reappeared dressed in full Pathan kit. But for this, there was nothing save his very fine physique and stature to distinguish him from an inhabitant of Southern Europe.

Producing a red-covered official work on Mounted Infantry Training, he settled down to read.

Horace regretted that India provided not his favourite _Comic Cuts and Photo Bits_.

"May I offer you a cigarette and light one myself?" said the "black" man in his quiet cultured voice.

"I don't want yer fags--and I don't want you smoking while I got a empty stummick," replied the Englishman.

Anon the train strolled into an accidental-looking station with an air of one who says, "Let's sit down for a bit--what?" and Horace sprang to the window and bawled for the guard.

"Ere--ask this native for 'is ticket," he said, on the arrival of that functionary. "Wot's 'e doing in 'ere with _me_?"

"Ticket, please?" said the guard--a very black Goanese.

The Pathan produced his ticket.

"Will you kindly see if there is another empty first-class carriage, Guard?" said he.

"There iss one next a'door," replied the guard.

"Then you can escape from your unpleasant predicament by going in there, Sir," said the Pathan.

"I shall remine where I ham," was the dignified answer.

"And so shall I," said the Pathan.

"Out yer go," said the bagman, rising threateningly.

"I am afraid I shall have to put you to the trouble of ejecting me," said the Pathan, with a smile.

"I wouldn't bemean myself," countered Horace loftily, and didn't.

"One often hears of the dangerous classes in India," said the Pathan, as the train moved on again. "You belong to the most dangerous of all. You and your kind are a danger to the Empire and I have a good mind to be a public benefactor and destroy you. Put you to the edge of the sword--or rather of the tin-opener," and he pulled his lunch-basket from under the seat.

"Have some chicken, little Worm?" he continued, opening the basket and preparing to eat.

"Keep your muck," replied Horace.

"No, no, little Cad," corrected the strange and rather terrible person; "you are going to breakfast with me and you are going to learn a few things about India--and yourself."

And Horace did....

"Where are you going?" asked the Pathan person later.

"I'm going to work up a bit o' trade in a place called Gungerpore," was the reply of the cowed Horace.

But in Gungapur Horace adopted the very last trade that he, respectable man, ever expected to adopt--that of War.

CHAPTER IV.

"MEET AND LEAVE AGAIN."

"So on the sea of life, Alas!
Man nears man, meets and leaves again."

Sec. 1.

It had come. Ross-Ellison had proved a true prophet (and was to prove himself a true soldier and commander of men).

Possibly the most remarkable thing about it was the quickness and quietness, the naturalness and easiness with which it had come. A week or two of newspaper forecast and fear, a week or two of recrimination and feverish preparation, an ultimatum--England at war. The navy mobilized, the army mobilizing, auxiliaries warned to be in readiness, overseas battalions, batteries and squadrons recalled, or re-distributed, reverses and "regrettable incidents,"--and outlying parts of India (her native troops massed in the North or doing garrison-duty overseas) an archipelago of safety-islands in a sea of danger; Border parts of India for a time dependent upon their various volunteer battalions for the maintenance, over certain areas, of their civil governance, their political organization and public services.

In Gungapur, as in a few other Border cities, the lives of the European women, children and men, the safety of property, and the continuance of the local civil government depended for a little while upon the local volunteer corps.

Gungapur, whose history became an epitome of that of certain other isolated cities, was for a few short weeks an intermittently besieged garrison, a mark for wandering predatory bands composed of _budmashes_ outlaws, escaped convicts, deserters, and huge mobs drawn from that enormous body of men who live on the margin of respectability, peaceful cultivator today, bloodthirsty dacoit to-morrow, wielders of the spade and mattock or of the _lathi_ and _tulwar_ [63] according to season, circumstance, and the power of the Government; recruits for a mighty army, given the leader and the opportunity--the hour of a Government's danger.

[63] Quarter-staff and sword.

As had been pointed out, time after time, in the happy and happy-go-lucky past, the practical civilian seditionist and active civilian rebel is more fortunately situated in India than is his foreign brother, in that his army exists ready to hand, all round him, in the thousands of the desperately poor, devoid of the "respectability" that accompanies property, thousands with nothing to lose and high hopes of

much to gain, heaven-sent material for the agitator.

Thanks to the energy of Colonel John Robin Ross-Ellison, his unusual organizing ability, his personality, military genius and fore-knowledge of what was coming, Gungapur suffered less than might have been expected in view of its position on the edge of a Border State of always-doubtful friendliness, its large mill-hand element, and the poverty and turbulence of its general population.

The sudden departure of the troops was the sign for the commencement of a state of insecurity and anxiety which quickly merged into one of danger and fear, soon to be replaced by a state of war.

From the moment that it was known for certain that the garrison would be withdrawn, Colonel Ross-Ellison commenced to put into practice his projected plans and arrangements. On the day that Mr. Dearman's coolies (after impassioned harangues by a blind Mussulman fanatic known as Ibrahim the Weeper, a faquir who had recently come over the Border to Gungapur and attained great influence; and by a Hindu professional agitator who had obtained a post at the mills in the guise of a harmless clerk) commenced rioting, beat Mr. Dearman to death with crowbars, picks, and shovels, murdered all the European and Eurasian employees, looted all that was worth stealing, and, after having set fire to the mills, invaded the Cantonment quarter, burning, murdering, destroying,--Colonel Ross-Ellison called out his corps, declared martial law, and took charge of the situation, the civil authorities being dead or cut off in the "districts".

The place which he had marked out for his citadel in time of trouble was the empty Military Prison, surrounded by a lofty wall provided with an unassailable water-supply, furnished with cook-houses, infirmary, work-shop, and containing a number of detached bungalows (for officials) in addition to the long lines of detention barracks.

As soon as his men had assembled at Headquarters he marched to the place and commenced to put it in a state of defence and preparation for a siege.

While Captain Malet-Marsac and Captain John Bruce (of the Gungapur Engineering College) slaved at carrying out his orders in the Prison, other officers, with picked parties of European Volunteers, went out to bring in fugitives, to commandeer the contents of provision and grain shops, to drive in cattle, to seize cooks, sweepers and other servants, to shoot rioters and looters in the Cantonment area, to search for wounded and hidden victims of the riot, to bury corpses, extinguish fires, penetrate to European bungalows in the city and in outlying places, to publish abroad that the Military Prison was a safe refuge, to seize and empty ammunition shops and toddy shops, to mount guards at the railway-station, telegraph office, the banks, the gate-house of the great Jail, the Treasury and the Kutcherry,[64] and generally, to use their common sense and their rifles as the situation demanded.

[64] Collector's Court and Office.

Day by day external operation became more restricted as the mob grew larger and bolder, better armed and better organized, daily augmented and assisted from without. The last outpost which Colonel Ross-Ellison withdrew was the one from the railway-station, and that was maintained until it was known that large bridges had been blown up on either side and the railway rendered useless. In the Jail gate-house he established a strong guard under the Superintendent, and urged him to use it ruthlessly, to kill on the barest suspicion of mutiny, and to welcome the first opportunity of giving the sharpest of lessons.

In this matter he set a personal example and behaved, to actual rioters,

with what some of his followers considered unnecessary severity, and what others viewed as wise war-ending firmness.

When remonstrated with by Mr. Cornelius Gosling-Green (caught, alas! with his admirable wife in this sudden and terrible maelstrom), for shooting, against the Prison wall, a squad of armed men caught by night and under more than suspicious circumstances, within Cantonment limits, he replied curtly and rudely:--

"My good little Gosling, I'd shoot you with my own hand if you failed me in the least particular--so stick to your drill and hope to become a Corporal before the war is over".

The world-famous Mr. Cornelius Gosling-Green, M.P., hoping to become a Corporal! Meanwhile he was less--a private soldier, doing four hard drills a day--not to mention sentry-go and fatigues. Like Augustus Clarence Percy Marmaduke Grobble, he grumbled bitterly--but he obeyed, having been offered the hard choice of enrolment or exclusion.

"I'll have no useless male mouths here," had said Colonel Ross-Ellison. "Enroll or clear out and take your chance. I'll look after your wife."

"But, my dear Sir...."

"'Sir' without the 'my dear,' please."

"I was about to say that I could--ah--assist, advise, sit upon your councils, give you the benefit of my--er--experience, ..." the Publicist had expostulated.

"Experience of war?"

"No--er--I----"

"Enroll or clear out--and when you have enrolled remember that you are under martial law and in time of war."

A swift, fierce, masterful man, harsh and ruthless making war without kid gloves--that it might end the sooner and be the longer remembered by the survivors. The flag was to be kept flying in Gungapur, the women and children were to be saved, all possible damage was to be inflicted on the rebels and rioters, more particularly upon those who led and incited them. The Gosling-Greens and Grobbles who could not materially assist to this end could go, those who could thwart or hinder this end could die.

Gleams of humour enlivened the situation. Mrs. Gosling-Green (nee a Pounding-Pobble, Superiora Pounding-Pobble, one of the Pounding-Pobbles of Putney) was under the orders, very much under the orders, of the wife of the Sergeant-Major, and early and plainly learnt that good woman's opinion that she was a poor, feckless body and eke a fushionless, not worth the salt of her porridge--a lazy slut withal.

Among the "awkward squads" enrolled when rioting broke out and the corps seized the old Prison, were erstwhile grave and reverend seniors learning to "stand up like a man an' look prahd o' yourself" at the orders of the Sergeant-Major. Among them were two who had been Great Men, Managers signing per and pro, Heads of Departments, almost Tin Gods, and one of them, alas, was at the mercy of a mere boy whom he had detested and frequently "squashed" in the happy days of yore. The mere boy (a cool, humorous, and somewhat vindictive person, one of the best subalterns of the Corps and especially chosen by Colonel Ross-Ellison when re-organizing the battalion after its disbandment) was giving his close attention to the improvement of his late manager, a pompous, dull and silly bureaucrat, even as his late manager had done for him.

"Now, Private Bulliton," he would urge, "_do_ learn which is your right hand and which is your left. And _do_ stand up.... No--don't drop your rifle when you are told to 'shoulder'. _That's_ better--we shall make something of you yet. Head up, man, head up! Try and look fierce. Look at Private Faggit--he'll be a Sergeant yet" ... and indeed Private Horace Faggit was looking very fierce indeed, for he desired the blood of these interfering villains who were hindering the development of the business of the fine old British firm of Messrs. Schneider, Schnitzel, Schnorrer & Schmidt and the commissions of their representative. Also he felt that he was assisting at the making of history. 'Orace in a bloomin' siege--Gorblimey!--and he, who had never killed anything bigger than an insect in his life, lusted to know how it felt to shove your bayonet into a feller or shoot 'im dead at short ryng. So Horace drilled with alacrity and zest, paid close attention to aiming-instruction and to such visual-training and distance-judging as his officer, Captain John Bruce, could give him, and developed a military aptitude surprising to those who had known him only as Horace Faggit, Esquire, the tried and trusted Representative of the fine old British Firm of Schneider, Schnitzel, Schnorrer & Schmidt.

To Captain Malet-Marsac, an unusually thoughtful, observant and studious soldier, it was deeply interesting to see how War affected different people how values changed, how the Great became exceeding small, and the insignificant person became important. By the end of the first month of what was virtually the siege of the Military Prison, Horace Faggit, late office-boy, clerk, and bagman, was worth considerably more than Augustus Grobble, late Professor of Moral Philosophy; Cornelius Gosling-Green, late Publicist; Edward Jones, late (alleged) Educationist, of Duri formerly; and a late Head of a Department,--all rolled into one--a keen, dapper, self-reliant soldier, courageous, prompt, and very bloodthirsty.

As he strolled up and down, supervising drills, went round the sentry-posts by night, or marched at the head of a patrol, Captain Malet-Marsac would reflect upon the relativity of things, the false values of civilization, and the extraordinary devitalising and deteriorating results of "education". When it came to vital issues, elementals, stark essential manhood,--then the elect of civilization, the chosen of education, weighed, was found not only wanting but largely negligible. Where the highly "educated" was as good as the other he was so by reason of his games and sports, his _shikar_, or his specialized training--as in the case of the engineers and other physically-trained men.

Captain John Bruce, for example, Professor of Engineering, was a soldier in a few weeks and a fine one. In time of peace, a quiet, humorous, dour and religious-minded man, he was now a stern disciplinarian and a cunning foe who fought to kill, rejoicing in the carnage that taught a lesson and made for earlier peace. The mind that had dreamed of universal brotherhood and the Oneness of Humanity now dreamed of ambushes, night-attacks, slaughterous strategy and magazine-fire on a cornered foe.

Surely and steadily the men enclosed behind the walls of the old Prison rose into the ranks of the utterly reliable, the indefatigable, the fearless and the fine, or sank into those of the shifty, unhearty, unreliable, and unworthy--save the few who remained steadily mediocre, well-meaning, unsoldierly, fairly trustworthy--a useful second line, but not to be sent on forlorn hopes, dangerous reconnoitring, risky despatch-carrying, scouting, or ticklish night-work. One siege is very like another--and Ross-Ellison's garrison knew increasing weariness, hunger, disease and casualties.

Mrs. Dearman's conduct raised Colonel Ross-Ellison's love to a burning, yearning devotion, and his defence of Gungapur became his defence of

Mrs. Dearman. For her husband she appeared to mourn but little--there was little time to mourn--and, for a while, until sights, sounds and smells became increasingly horrible, she appeared almost to enjoy her position of Queen of the Garrison, the acknowledged Ladye of the Officers and men of the Corps. Until she fell sick herself, she played the part of amateur Florence Nightingale right well, going regularly with a lamp--the Lady with the Lamp--at night through the hospital ward. Captain John Bruce was the only one who was not loud in her praises, though he uttered no dispraises. He, a dour and practical person, thought the voyage with the Lamp wholly unnecessary and likely to awaken sleepers to whom sleep was life; that lint-scraping would have been a more useful employment than graciousness to the poor wounded; that a woman, as zealous as Mrs. Dearman looked, would have torn up dainty cotton and linen confections for bandages instead of wearing them; that the Commandant didn't need all the personal encouragement and enheartenment that she wished to give him--and many other uncomfortable, cynical, and crabby thoughts. Captain Malet-Marsac loved her without criticism.

Mrs. Cornelius Gosling-Green, after haranguing all and sundry, individually and collectively, on the economic unsoundness, the illogic, and the unsocial influence of War, took to her bed and stayed there until she found herself totally neglected. Arising and demanding an interview with the Commandant, she called him to witness that she entered a formal protest against the whole proceedings and registered her emphatic---until the Commandant, sending for Cornelius (whose duties cut him off, unrepining, from his wife's society), ordered him to remove her, silence her, beat her if necessary--and so save her from the unpleasant alternative of solitary confinement on bread and water until she could be, if not useful, innocuous.

Many a poor woman of humble station proved herself (what most women are) an uncomplaining, unconsidered heroine, and more than one "subordinate" of mixed ancestry and unpromising exterior, a brave devoted man. As usual, what kept the flag flying and gave ultimate victory to the immeasurably weaker side was the spirit, the personality, the force, the power, of one man.

To Captain Malet-Marsac this was a revelation. Even to him, who knew John Robin Ross-Ellison well, and had known and studied him for some time at Duri and elsewhere, it was a wonderful thing to see how the quiet, curious, secretive man (albeit a fine athlete, horseman and adventurous traveller) stepped suddenly into the fierce light of supreme command in time of war, a great, uncompromising, resourceful ruler of men, skilful strategist and tactician, remarkable both as organizer, leader, and personal fighter.

Did he ever sleep? Night after night he penetrated into the city disguised as a Pathan (a disguise he assumed with extraordinary skill and which he strengthened by a perfect knowledge of many Border dialects as well as of Pushtoo), or else personally led some night attack, sally, reconnaissance or foraging expedition. Day after day he rode out on Zuleika with the few mounted men at his command, scouting, reconnoitring, gleaning information, attacking and slaughtering small parties of marauders as occasion offered.

From him the professional soldier, his adjutant, learned much, and wondered where his Commandant had learned all he had to teach. Captain Malet-Marsac owned him master, his military as well as his official superior, and grew to feel towards him as his immediate followers felt toward Napoleon--to love him with a devoted respect, a respecting devotion. He recognized in him the born guerrilla leader--and more, the trained guerrilla leader, and wondered where on earth this strange civilian had garnered his practical military knowledge and skill.

Wherever he went on foot, especially when he slipped out of the Prison for dangerous spy-work among the forces of the mutineers, rebels, rioters and _budmashes_ of the city, he was followed by his servant, an African, concerning whom Colonel Ross-Ellison had advised the servants of the Officers' Mess to be careful and also to bear in mind that he was not a _Hubshi_. Only when the Colonel rode forth on horseback was he separated from this man who, when the Colonel was in his room, invariably slept across the door thereof.

On night expeditions, the Somali would be disguised, sometimes as a leprous beggar, as stable-boy, again as an Arab, sometimes as a renegade sepoy from a Native Border Levy, sometimes as a poor fisherman, again as a Sidi boatman, he being, like his master, exceptionally good at disguises of all kinds, and knowing Hindustani, Arabic, and his native Somal dialect.

He was an expert bugler, and in that capacity stuck like a burr to the Colonel by day, looking very smart and workmanlike in khaki uniform and being of more than average usefulness with rifle and bayonet. Not until after the restoration of order did Mr. Edward Jones, formerly of the Duri High School, long puzzled as to where he had seen him before, realize who he was.

* * * * *

In a low dark room, dimly lighted that evening by wick-and-saucer _butties_, squatted, lay, sat, stood and sprawled a curious collection of scoundrels. The room was large, and round the four sides of it ran a very broad, very low, and very filthy divan, intended for the rest and repose of portly _bunnias_, [65] _seths_, [66] brokers, shopkeepers and others of the commercial fraternity, what time they assembled to chew pan and exchange lies and truths anent money and the markets. A very different assembly now occupied its greasy lengths _vice_ the former habitues of the _salon_, now dispersed, dead, robbed, ruined, held to ransom, or cruelly blackmailed.

[65] Dealers.

[66] Money-lenders.

In the seat of honour (an extra cushion), sat the blind faquir who, with his clerkly colleague, had set the original match to the magazine by inciting the late Mr. Dearman's coolies. Apparently a relentless, terrible fanatic and bitter hater of the English, for his councils were all of blood and fire, rapine and slaughter, he taunted his hearers with their supine cowardice in that the Military Prison still held out, its handful of defenders still manned its walls, nay, from time to time, made sallies and terrible reprisals upon a careless ill-disciplined enemy.

"Were I but as other men! Had I but mine eyes!" he screamed, "I would overwhelm the place in an hour. Hundreds to one you are--and you are mocked, robbed, slaughtered."

A thin-faced, evil-looking, squint-eyed Hindu whose large, thick, gold-rimmed goggles accorded ill with the sword that lay athwart his crossed legs, addressed him in English.

"Easy to talk, Moulvie. Had you your sight you could perhaps drill and arm the mob into an army, eh? Find them repeating rifles and ammunition, find them officers, find them courage? Is it not? Yes."

"Hundreds to one, Babu," grunted the blind man, and spat.

"I would urge upon this august assemblée," piped a youthful weedy person, "that recremination is not argument, and that many words butter

no parsneeps, so to speak. We are met to decide as to whether the treasure shall be removed to Pirgunge or still we keep it with us here in view of sudden sallies of foes. I hereby beg to propose and my honourable friend Mister----"

"Sit down, crow," said the blind faquir unkindly and there was a snigger. "The treasure will be removed at once--this night, or I will remove myself from Gungapur with all my followers--and go where deeds are being done. I weary of waiting while pi-dogs yelp around the walls they cannot enter. Cowards! Thousands to one--and ye do not kill two of them a day. Conquer and slay them? Nay--rather must our own treasure be removed lest some night the devil, in command there, swoop upon it, driving ye off like sheep and carrying back with him----"

"Flesh and blood cannot face a machine-gun, Moulvie," said the squint-eyed Hindu. "Even your holy sanctity would scarcely protect you from bullets. Come forth and try to-morrow."

"Nor can flesh and blood--such flesh and blood as Gungapur provides--surround the machine-gun and rush upon it from flank and rear of course," replied the blind man. "Do machine guns fire in all directions at once? When they ran the accursed thing down to the market-place and fired it into the armed crowd that listened to my words, could ye not have fled by other streets to surround it? Had all rushed bravely from all directions how long would it have fired? Even thus, could more have died than did die? Scores they slew--and retired but when they could fire no longer.... And ye allowed it to go because a dozen men stood between it and you----," and again the good man spat.

"I do not say 'Sit down, crow' for thou art already sitting," put in a huge, powerful-looking man, arrayed in a conical puggrri-encircled cap, long pink shirt over very baggy peg-top trousers, and a green waistcoat, "but I weary of thy chatter Blind-Man. Keep thy babble for fools in the market-place, where, I admit, it hath its uses. Remain our valued and respected talker and interfere not with fighting men, nor criticize. And say not 'The treasure will be removed this night,' nor anything else concerning command. I will decide in the matter of the treasure and I prefer to keep it here under mine hand...."

"Doubtless," sneered the blind man. "Under thy hand--until, in the end, it be found to consist of boxes of stones and old iron. Look you--the treasure goes to-night or I go, and certain others go with me. And suppose I change my tune in the market-place, Havildar Nazir Ali Khan, and say certain words concerning thee and thy designs, give hints of treachery--and where is the loud-mouthed Nazir Ali Khan?..." and his blind eyes glared cold ferocity at the last speaker who handled his sword and replied nothing.

The secret of the man's power was clear.

"The treasure will be removed to night," he repeated and a discussion of limes, routes, escort and other details followed. A dispute arose between the big man addressed as Havildar Nazir Ali Khan and a squat broad-shouldered Pathan as to the distance and probable time that a convoy, moving at the rate of laden bullock-carts, would take in reaching Pirgunge.

The short thick-set Pathan turned for confirmation of his estimate to another Pathan, grey-eyed but obviously a Pathan, nevertheless.

"I say it is five kos and the carts should start at moonrise and arrive before the moon sets."

"You are right, brother," replied the grey-eyed Pathan, who, for his own reasons, particularly desired that the convoy should move by moonlight.

This individual had not spoken hitherto in the hearing of the blind faquir, and, as he did so now, the blind man turned sharply in his direction, a look of startled surprise and wonder on his face.

"Who spoke?" he snapped.

But the grey-eyed man arose, yawned hugely, and, arranging his puggri and straightening his attire, swaggered towards the door of the room, passed out into a high-walled courtyard, exchanged a few words with the guardian of a low gateway, and emerged into a narrow alley where he was joined by an African-looking camel-man.

The blind man, listening intently, sat motionless for a minute and then again asked sharply:--

"Who spoke? Who spoke?"

"Many have spoken Pir Saheb," replied the squat Pathan.

"Who said '_You are right, brother_', but now? Who? Quick!" he cried.

"Who? Why, 'twas one of us," replied the squat Pathan. "Yea, 'twas Abdulali Habbibullah, the money-lender. I have known him long...."

"Let him speak again," said the blind man.

"Where is he? He has gone out, I think," answered the other.

"Call him back, Hidayetullah. Take others and bring him back. I must hear his voice again," urged the faquir.

"He will come again, Moulvie Saheb, he is often here," said the short man soothingly. "I know him well. He will be here to-morrow."

"See, Hidayetullah," said the blind faquir "when next he comes, say then to me, 'May I bring thee tobacco, Pir Saheb,' if he be sitting near, but say 'May I bring thee tobacco, Moulvie Saheb,' if he be sitting afar off. If this, speak to him across the room that I may hear his voice in answer, and call him by his name, Abdulali Habbibullah. And if I should, on a sudden, cry out 'Hold the door,' do thou draw knife and leap to the door...."

"A _spy_, Pir Saheb?" asked the interested man.

"That I shall know when next I hear his voice--and, if it be he whom I think, thou shalt scrape the flesh from the bones of his face with thy knife and put his eyeballs in his mouth. But he must not die. Nay! Nay!"

The Pathan smiled.

"Thou shalt hear his voice, Pir Saheb," he promised.

* * * * *

An hour later the African-looking camel-man and the Pathan approached the gates of the Military Prison and at a distance of a couple of hundred yards the African imitated the cry of a jackal, the barking of a dog and the call of the "Did-ye-do-it" bird.

Approaching the gate he whispered a countersign and was admitted, the gate being then held open for the Pathan who followed him at a distance of a hundred yards. Entering Colonel Ross-Ellison's room the Pathan quickly metamorphosed himself into Colonel Ross-Ellison, and sent for his Adjutant, Captain Malet-Marsac.

"Fifty of the best, with fifty rounds each, to parade at the gate in half an hour," he said. "Bruce to accompany me, you to remain in command here. All who can, to wear rubber-soled shoes, others to go barefoot or bandage their boots with putties over cardboard or paper. No man likely to cough or sneeze is to go. Luminous-paint discs to be served out to half a dozen. No rations, no water,--just shirts, shorts and bandoliers. Nothing white or light-coloured to be worn. Put a strong outpost, all European, under Corporal Faggit on the hill, and double all guards and sentries. Shove sentry-groups at the top of the Sudder Bazaar, West Street and Edward Road.--_You_ know all about it.... I've got a good thing on. There'll be a lot of death about to-night, if all goes well."

Half an hour later Captain Bruce called his company of fifty picked men to "attention" as Colonel Ross-Ellison approached, the gate was opened and an advance-guard of four men, with four flankers, marched out and down the road leading to the open country. Two of these wore each a large tin disc painted with luminous paint fastened to his back. When these discs were only just visible from the gate a couple more disc-adorned men started forth, and before their discs faded into the darkness the remainder of the party "formed fours" and marched after them, all save a section of fours which followed a couple of hundred yards in the rear, as a rear-guard. In silence the small force advanced for an hour, passed some cross-roads, and then Colonel Ross-Ellison, who had joined the advance-guard, signalled a halt and moved away by himself to the right of the road.

In the shadow of the trees, the moon having risen, Captain Bruce ordered his men to lie down, announcing in a whisper that he would have the life of anyone who made a sound or struck a match. This was known to be but half in jest, for the Captain was a good disciplinarian and a man of his word.

Save for the occasional distant bark of the village-dogs, the night was very still. Sitting staring out into the moon-lit hazy dusk in the direction in which his chief had disappeared, Captain John Bruce wondered if he were really one of a band of armed men who hoped shortly to pour some two and a half thousand bullets into other men, really a soldier fighting and working and starving that the Flag might fly, really a primitive fighting-man with much blood upon his hands and an earnest desire for more--or whether he were not a respectable Professor who would shortly wake, beneath mosquito-curtains, from a very dreadful dream. How thin a veneer was this thing called Civilization, and how unchanged was human nature after centuries and centuries of---

Colonel Ross-Ellison appeared.

"Bring twenty-five men and follow me. Hurry up," he said quietly, and, a minute later, led the way from the high-road across country. Five minutes marching brought the party, advancing in file, to the mouth of a nullah which ran parallel with the road. Along this, Colonel Ross-Ellison led them, and, when he gave the signal to halt, it was seen that they were behind a high sloping bank within fifty yards of the high-road.

"Now," said the Colonel to Captain John Bruce, "I'm going to leave you here. Let your men lie below the top of the bank and if any man looks over, till your command 'Up and fire,' kick his face in. You will peep through that bit of bush and no one else will move. Do nothing until I open fire from the other side. The moment I open fire, up your lot come and do the same. Magazine, of course. The moon will improve as it rises more. You'll fix bayonets and charge magazines now. I expect a pretty big convoy--and before very long. Probably a mob all round a couple of bylegharies [67] and a crowd following--everybody distrusting every one, as it is treasure, looted from all round. Don't shoot the bullocks, but I particularly want to kill a blind bloke who may be with 'em, so if

we charge, barge in too, and look out for a blinder and don't give him any quarter--give him half instead--half your sword. He's a ringleader--and I want him for auld lang syne too, as it happens. He doesn't look blind at all, but he would be led.... Any questions?"

[67] Bullock-carts.

"No, Sir. I'm to hide till you fire. Then fire, magazine, and charge if you do. A blind man to be captured if possible. The bullocks not to be shot, if possible."

"Eight O. Carry on," and the Colonel strode back to where the remaining twenty-five waited, under a Sergeant. These he placed behind an old stone wall that marked the boundary of a once-cultivated patch of land, some forty yards from the road, to which the ground sloped sharply downwards.

A nice trap if all went well.

All went exceeding well.

Within an hour and a half of the establishment of the ambush, the creaking of ungreased wheels was heard and the loud nasal singing of some jovial soul. Down the silent deserted road came three bullock-carts piled high with boxes and escorted by a ragged regiment of ex-sepoys, ex-police, mutineers, almost a battalion from the forces of the wild Border State neighbouring Gungapur. A small crowd of variously armed uniformless men preceded the escort and carts, while a large one followed them.

No advance-guard nor flanking-parties guaranteed the force from ambush or attack.

Suddenly, as the carts crossed a long culvert and the escort perforce massed on to the road, instead of straggling on either side beneath the trees, a voice said coolly in English "Up and fire," and as scores of surprised faces turned in the direction of the voice the night was rent with the crash of fifty rifles pouring in magazine fire at the rate of fifteen rounds a minute. Magazine fire at less than fifty yards, into a close-packed body of men. Scarcely a hundred shots were returned and, by the time a couple of thousand rounds had been fired (less than three minutes), and Colonel Boss-Ellison had cried "Ch-a-a-r-ge" there was but little to charge and not much for the bayonet to do. Of the six bullocks four were uninjured.

"Load as many boxes as you can on two carts, and leave half a dozen men to bring them in. They'll have to take their chance. We must get back _ek dum_,"[68] said Colonel Ross-Ellison.

[68] At once.

Even as he spoke, the sound of distant firing fell upon the ears of the party and the unmistakable stammer-hammer racket of the maxim.

"They're attacked, by Jove," he cried. "I thought it likely. There may have been an idea that we should know something of this convoy and go for it. All ready? Now a steady double. We'll double and quick-march alternately. Double _march_."

* * * * *

Near the Military Prison was a low conical hill, bare of vegetation and buildings, a feature of the situation which was a constant source of anxiety to Colonel Ross-Ellison, for he realized that life in the beleaguered fortress would be very much harder, and the casualty rate

very much higher, if the enemy had the sense to occupy it in strength and fire down into the Prison. Against this contingency he always maintained a picket there at night and a special sentry to watch it by day, and he had caused deep trenches to be dug and a covered way made in the Prison compound, so that the fire-swept area could be crossed, when necessary, with the minimum of risk. Until the night of the convoy-sortie, however, the enemy had not had the ordinary common sense to grasp the fact that the hill was the key of the situation and to seize it.

"Bloomin' cold up 'ere, Privit Greens, wot?" observed Corporal Horace Faggit to the famous Mr. Cornelius Gosling-Green, M.P., in kindly and condescending manner, as he placed him back to back with Private Augustus Grobble on the hill-top. "But you'll keep awake all the better for that, me lad.... Now you other four men can go to sleep, see? You'll lie right close up agin the feet o' Privits Greens an' Grabbles, and when they've done their two hours, they'll jes' give two o' you a kick and them two'll rise up an' take their plaices while they goes to sleep. Then them two'll waike 'tother two, see? An' if hannyone approaches, the sentry as is faicin' 'im will 'ollerah't 'Alt! 'Oo comes there?' an' if the bloke or blokes say, 'Friend,' then 'e'll say 'Hadvance one an' give the countersign,' and if he can't give no countersign, then blow 'is bleedin' 'ead off, see?... Now _I_ shall visit yer from time to time, an' let me find you spry an' smart with yer,' _'Alt,' 'Oo comes there?_ see? An' if either sentry sees anythink suspicious down below there--let 'im send the other sentry across fer me over in the picket there, see? 'E'll waike up the others meanwhile an' they'll all watch out till I comes and gives orders, see? An' if you're attacked afore I come, then retire firing. Retire on the picket, see? We won't shoot yer. Don't make a bloomin' blackguard-rush for the picket though. Jest retire one by one firin' steady, see? Now I'm goin' back to the picket. Ow! an' don' fergit the reconnoitrin' patrol. Don' go an' shoot at 'em as they comes back. 'Alt 'em for the countersign as they comes out, and 'alt 'em fer it agin as they comes in, see? Right O. Now you keep yer eyes skinned, Greens and Grobbles."

Private Cornelius Gosling-Green, M.P., had never looked really impressive even on the public platform in over-long frock-coat and turned-down collar. In ill-fitting khaki, ammunition boots, a helmet many sizes too big, and badly-wound putties, he looked an extremely absurd object. Private Augustus Grobble looked a little more convincing, inasmuch as his fattish figure filled his uniform, but the habit of wearing his helmet on the back of his neck and a general congenital unmilitariness of habit and bearing, operated against success.

Two unhappier men rarely stood back to back upon a lonely, windy hill-top. Both were very hungry, very sleepy and very cold, both were essentially men of peace, and both had powerful imaginations--especially of horrors happening to their cherished selves.

Both were dealers in words; neither was conversant with things, facts, deeds, and all that lay outside their inexpressibly artificial and specialized little spheres. Each had been "educated" out of physical manliness, self-reliance, courage, practical usefulness, adaptability, "grit" and the plain virile virtues.

Cornelius burned with a peevish indignation that he, writer of innumerable pamphlets, speaker at innumerable meetings, organizer of innumerable societies, compiler of innumerable statistics, author of innumerable letters to the press, he, husband of the famous suffragist worker, speaker, organizer and leader, Superiora Gosling-Green (a Pounding-Pobble of the Pounding-Pobbles of Putney), that he, Cornelius Gosling-Green, Esq., M.P., should be stuck there like a common soldier, with a heavy and dangerous gun and a nasty sharp-pointed bayonet, to

stand and shiver while others slept. To stand, too, in a horribly dangerous situation ... he had a good mind to resign in protest, to take his stand upon his inalienable rights as a free Englishman. Who should dare to coerce a Gosling-Green, Member of Parliament, of the Fabian Society, and a hundred other "bodies". His Superiora did all the coercing he wanted and more too. He would enter a formal protest and tender his resignation. He had always, hitherto, been able to protest and resign when things did not go as he wished.

He yawned, and again.

"I can see as well sitting or kneeling as I can standing," he remarked to Private Augustus Grobble.

"It is a great physiological truth," replied Augustus, and they both sat down, leaning against each other for warmth and support, back to back.

The soul of Augustus was filled with a melancholy sadness and a gentle woe. To think that he, the loved of many beautiful Wimmin should be suffering such hardships and running such risks. How his face was falling in and how the wrinkles were gathering round his eyes. Some of the beautiful and frail, of whom he thought when he gave his usual toast after dinner, "To the Wimmin who have loved me," would hardly recognize the fair boy over whom they had raved, whose poems they had loved, whose hair, finger-nails, eyes, ties, socks and teeth they had complimented. A cruel, cruel waste. But how rather romantic--the war-worn soldier! He who knew his Piccadilly, Night Clubs, the theatres, the haunts of fair women and brave men, standing, no--sitting, on a lonely hill-top watching, watching, the lives of the garrison in his hands.... He would return to those haunts, bronzed, lined, hardened--the man from the edge of the Empire, from the back of Beyond, the man who had Done Things--and talk of camp-fires, the trek, the Old Trail, smells of sea and desert and jungle, and the man-stifled town, ... battle, ... brave deeds ... unrecognized heroism ... a medal ... perhaps the ... and the nodding head of Augustus settled upon his chest.

His deep breathing and occasional snores did not attract the attention of Private Gosling-Green, as Private Gosling-Green was sound asleep. Nor did they awaken the weary four who made up the sentry group--Edward Jones, educationist; Henry Grigg, barber; Walter Smith, shopman; Reginald Ladon Gurr, Head of a Department--and whose right it was to sleep so long as two of the six watched.

* * * * *

"Let there be no mistake then," said the burly Havildar Nazir Ali Khan to one Hidayetulla, squat thick-set Pathan, "at the first shot from the hill your party, ceasing to crawl, will rush upon the picket, and mine will swoop upon the gate bearing the tins of kerosene oil, the faggots and the brushwood. All those with guns will fire at the walls save the Border State company who will reserve their fire till the gate is opened or burnt down. The dogs within must either open it to extinguish the fire, or it must burn. On their volley, all others will charge for the gate with knife and sword. Do thou win the hill-top and keep up a heavy fire into the Prison. There will be Lee-Metford rifles and ammunition there ready for thy taking--ha-ha!"

"And if we are seen and fired on as we stalk the picket on the hill?"

"Then their first shot will, as I said, be the signal for your rush and ours. Understandest thou?"

"I understand. 'Tis a good plan of the blind Moulvie's."

"Aye! He can _plan_,--and talk. We can go and be shot, and be blamed if

his plans miscarry," grumbled the big man, and added, "How many have you?"

"About forty," was the reply, "and all Khost men save seven, of whom four are Afghans of Cabul, two are Punjabis, and one a Sikh."

"Is it three hours since the treasure started? That was the time the Moulvie fixed for the attack."

"It must be, perhaps," replied the other. "Let us begin. But what if the hill be not held, or if we capture it with the knife, none firing a shot?"

"Then get into good position, make little sungars where necessary, and, all being ready, open fire into the Prison compound.... At the first shot--whatever be thy luck--we shall rush in our thousands down the Sudder Bazaar, West Street and Edward Street, and do as planned. Are thy forty beneath the trees beyond the hill?"

"They are. I join them now," and the squat broad-shouldered figure rolled away with swinging, swaggering gait.

Suddenly Private Augustus Grobble started from deep sleep to acutest wide-eyed consciousness and was aware of a man's face peering over a boulder not twenty yards from him--a hideous hairy face, surmounted by a close-fitting skull-cap that shone greasy in the moonlight. The blood of Augustus froze in his veins, he held his breath, his heart shook his body, his tongue withered and dried. He closed his eyes as a wave of faintness swept over him, and, as he opened them again, he saw that the man was crawling towards him, and that between his teeth was a huge knife. The terrible Pathan, the cruel dreadful stalker, the slashing disemboweller was upon him!--and with a mighty effort he sprang to his feet and fled for his life down the hill in the direction of the Prison. His sudden movements awoke Private Green, who, in one scared glance, saw a number of terrible forms arising from behind boulders and rushing silently and swiftly towards him and his flying comrade. Leaping up he fled after Grabble, running as he had never run before, and, even as he leapt clear of the sleeping group, the wave of Pathans broke upon it and with slash and stab assured it sound sleep for ever, all save Edward Jones, who, badly wounded as he was, survived (to the later undoing of Moussa Isa, murderer of a Brahmin boy).

Of the four Pathans who had surprised the sentry group, one, with a passing slash that re-arranged the face of Reginald Ladon Gurr, sped on after the flying sentries. But that the man was short and stout of build and that the fugitives had a down-hill start, both would have died that night. As it was, within ten seconds, a tremendous sweep of the heavy blade of the long Khyber knife caused Private Gosling-Green to lose his head completely and for the last time. Augustus Grobble, favoured of fortune for the moment, took flying leaps that would have been impossible to him under other circumstances, bounded and ran unstumbling, gained the shadow of the avenue of trees, and with bursting breast sped down the road, reached the gate, shouted the countersign with his remaining breath, and was dragged inside by Captain Michael Malet-Marsac.

"Well?" inquired he coldly of the gasping terrified wretch.

When he could do so, Augustus sobbed out his tale.

"Bugler, sound the alarm!" said the officer. "Sergeant of the Guard put this man in the guard-room and keep him under arrest until he is sent for," and, night-glasses in hand, he climbed one of the ladders leading to the platform erected a few feet below the top of the well-loopholed wall, just as a shot was fired and followed by others in rapid

succession on the hill whence Grobble had fled.

The shot was fired by Corporal Horace Faggit and so were the next four as he rapidly emptied his magazine at the swiftly charging Pathans who rose out of the earth on his first shot at the man he had seen wriggling to the cover of a stone. As he fired and shouted, the picket-sentry did the same, and, within a minute of Horace's first shot, ten rifles were levelled at the spot where the rushing silent fiends had disappeared. Within thirty yards of them were at least half a dozen men--and not a glimpse of one to be seen.

"I got one, fer keeps, any'ow," said Horace in the silence that followed the brief racket; "I see 'im drop 'is knife an' fall back'ards...."

Perfect silence--and then ... bang ... and a man standing beside Horace grunted, coughed, and scuffled on the ground.

"Get down! Get down! You fools," cried Horace, who was himself standing up. "Wha's the good of a square sungar if you stands up in it? All magazines charged? It's magazine-fire if there's a rush."....

Silence.

"Fire at the next flash, all of yer," he said, "an' look out fer a rush." Adding, "Bli' me--'ark at 'em dahn below," as a burst of fire and a pandemonium of yells broke out.

A yellow glare lit the scene, flickered on the sky, and even gave sufficient light to the picket on the hill-top to see a wave of wild, white-clad, knife-brandishing figures surge over the edge of the hill and bear down upon them, to be joined, as they passed, by those who had sunk behind stones at the picket's first fire.

"Stiddy," shrilled Horace. "Aim stiddy at the b----s. Fire," and again the charging line vanished.

"Gone to earf," observed Horace in the silence. "Nah look aht for flashes an' shoot at 'em...."

Bang! and Horace lost a thumb and a portion of his left cheek, which was in line with his left thumb as he sighted his rifle.

Before putting his left hand into his mouth he said, a little unsteadily:--

"If I'm knocked aht you go on shootin' at flashes and do magazine-fire fer rushes. If they gets in 'ere, we're tripe in two ticks."

Then he fainted for a while, came to, and felt much better. "Goo' job it's the left fumb," he observed as he strove to re-charge his magazine. The dull thud of bullet into flesh became a frequent sound. The last observation that Horace made to the remnant of his men was:--

"Bli' me! they're all rahnd us now--like flies rahnd a fish-barrer. Dam' swine!..."

* * * * *

Firing steadily at the advancing mobs the street-end pickets retired on the Prison and were admitted as the surging crowds amalgamated, surrounded the walls, and opened a desultory fire at the loopholes and such of the defenders as fired over the coping from ladders.

One detachment, with some show of military discipline and uniform, arrayed itself opposite the gate and a couple of hundred yards from it,

lining the ditch of the road, and utilizing the cover and shadow of the trees. Suddenly a large party, mainly composed of Mahsuds, and headed by a very big powerful man, made a swift rush to the gate, each man bearing a bundle of faggots or a load of cut brushwood, save two or three who bore vessels of kerosene oil. With reckless courage and daring, they ran the gauntlet of the loopholes and the fire from the wall-top, piled their combustibles against the wooden gate, poured gallons of kerosene over the heap, set fire to it, and fled.

The leaping flames spread and shot forth licking tongues and, in a few minutes, the pile was a roaring crackling furnace.

The mob grew denser and denser toward the gate side of the Prison, leaving the remaining portions of the perimeter thinly surrounded by those who possessed firearms and had been instructed to shoot at loopholes and at all who showed themselves over the wall. It was noticeable to Captain Malet-Marsac that the ever-increasing mob opposite the fire left a clear front to the more-or-less uniformed and disciplined body that had taken up a position commanding the gate.

That was the game was it? Burn down the gate, pour in a tremendous fire as the gate fell, and then let the mob rush in and do its devilmost....

What was happening on the hill-top? The picket must be holding whatever force had attacked it, for no shots were entering the Prison compound and the only casualties were among those at the loopholes and on the ladders and platforms round the walls. How long would the gate last? Absolutely useless to attempt to pour water on the fire. Even if it were not certain death to attempt it, one might as well try to fly, as to quench that furnace with jugs and _chatties_[69] of water.

[69] Bowls.

There was nothing to be done. Every man who could use a rifle was at loophole or embrasure, ammunition was plentiful, all non-combatants were hidden. Every one understood the standing-orders in case of such an emergency....

The gate was on fire. It was smoking on the inner side, warping, cracking, little flames were beginning to appear tentatively, and disappear again.

"_Now_ bugler!" said Captain Malet-Marsac, and Moussa Isa's _locum tenens_ blew his only call--a series of long loud G's.... The gate blazed, before long it would fall.... A hush fell upon the expectant multitude without, the men of the more-or-less uniformed and disciplined party raised their rifles, a big burly man bawled orders....

With a crash and leaping fountain of sparks the gate fell into the dying fire, a mighty roar burst from the multitude, and a crashing fusillade from the rifles of the uniformed men....

As their magazine-fire slackened, dwindled to a desultory popping, and ceased, the mob with a howl of triumph surged forward to the gaping gateway, trampled and scattered the glowing remnants of the fire, swarmed yelling through, and--found themselves face to face with a stout semicircular rampart of stone, earth and sandbags, which, loopholed, embrasured and strongly manned, spanned the gateway in a thirty-yard arc. From the centre of it, pointing at the entrance, looked the maxim gun.

"_Fire_" shouted a voice, and in a minute the place was a shambles. Before Maxim and Lee-Metford were too hot to touch, before the baffled foe fell back, those who surged in through the gate climbed, not over a wall of dead, but up on to a platform of dead, a plateau through which

ran a valley literally blasted out by the ceaseless maxim-fire....

And, as the less fanatical, less courageous, less bloodthirsty withdrew and gathered without and to one side, where they were safe from that terrible fire-belching rampart that was itself like the muzzle of some gigantic thousand-barrelled machine-gun, they were aware, in their rear, of a steady tramp of running feet and of the orders:--

"From the centre _extend_! At the enemy in front; fixed sights; _fire_," and of a withering hail of bullets.

Colonel Ross-Ellison had arrived in the nick of time. It was a "crowning mercy" indeed, the beginning of the end, and when (a few days later), over a repaired bridge, came a troop-train, gingerly advancing, the battalion of British troops that it disgorged at Gungapur Road Station found disappointingly little to do in a city of women, children, and eminently respectable innocent, householders.

* * * * *

On the hill-top, at dawn, Colonel Ross-Ellison and Captain Malet-Marsac found all that was left of the picket and sentry-group,--of the latter, three mangled corpses, the headless deserter, and a just-living man, horribly slashed. It was Moussa Isa Somali who improvised a stretcher and lifted this poor fellow on to it and tended him with the greatest solicitude and faithful care. Was he not Jones Sahib who at Duri gave him the knife wherewith he cleansed his honour and avenged his insulted People?

Of the picket, nine lay dead and one dying. Of the dead, one had his lower jaw neatly and cleanly removed by a bullet. Two had bled to death.

"Ullo, Guvner!" whispered Corporal Horace Faggit through parched cracked lips. "We kep' 'em orf. We 'eld the bleedin' fort," and the last effect of the departing mind upon the shot-torn, knife-slashed body was manifested in a gasping, quavering wail of--

"Owld the Fort fer Hi am comin'"

Jesus whispers still.

"Owld the Fort fer Hi am comin,'"

--By Thy graice we will.

Each of these corpses Moussa Isa carried reverently down to the Prison that they might be "buried darkly at dead of night" with the other heroes, in softer ground without the walls--a curious funeral in which loaded rifles and belted maxim played their silent part. Apart from the honoured dead was buried the body of Private Augustus Grabble, shot against the Prison wall by order of Colonel Ross-Ellison for cowardice in the face of the enemy and desertion of his post. So was that of Private Green, deserter also. After the uninterrupted ceremony, Moussa Isa, in the guise of an ancient beggar, lame, decrepit, and bandaged with foul rags, sought the city and the news of the bazaar.

Limping down the lane in which stood the tall silent house that his master often visited, he saw three men emerge from the well-known low doorway.

Two approached him while one departed in the opposite direction. One of these two held the arm of the other.

"I must hear his voice again. I have not heard his voice again," urged this one insistently to the other.

"Nay--but I have heard thine, thou Dog!" said Moussa Isa to himself, and turning, followed.

In a neighbouring bazaar the man who seemed to lead the other left him at the entrance to a mosque--a dark and greasy entry with a short flight of stone steps.

As he set his foot upon the lowest of these, a hand fell upon the neck of the man who had been led, and a voice hissed:--

"_Salaam! O Ibrahim the Weeper!_ Salaam! A '_Hubshi_' would speak with thee...." and another hand joined the first, encircling his throat....

"Art thou dead, Dog?" snarled Moussa Isa, five minutes later....

Moussa Isa never boasted (if he realized the fact) that the collapse of the revolt and mutiny in Gungapur, before the arrival of troops, was due as much to the death of its chief ringleader and director, the blind faquir, as to the disastrous repulse of the great assault upon the Military Prison.

Sec. 2.

It had gone. Nothing remained but to clear up the mess and begin afresh with more wisdom and sounder policy. It was over, and, among other things now possible, Colonel John Robin Ross-Ellison might ask the woman he loved whether she could some day become his wife. He had saved her life, watched over her, served her with mind and body, lived for her. And she had smiled upon him, looked at him as a woman looks at the man she more than likes, had given him the encouragement of her smiles, her trust, affectionate greeting on return from danger, prayers that he would be "careful" when he went forth to danger.

He believed that she loved him, and would, after a decent interval, even perhaps a year hence, marry him.

And then he would abandon the old life and ways, become wholly English and settle down to make her life a happy walk through an enchanted valley. He would take her to England and there, far from all sights, sounds and smells of the East, far from everything wild, turbulent, violent, crush out all the Pathan instincts so terribly aroused and developed during the late glorious time of War. He would take himself cruelly in hand. He would neither hunt nor shoot. He would eat no meat, drink no alcohol, nor seek excitement. He would school himself until he was a quiet, domesticated English country-gentleman--respectable and respected, fit husband for a delicately-bred English gentlewoman. And if ever his hand itched for the knife-hilt, his finger for the trigger, his cheek for the rifle-butt, his nostrils for the smell of the cooking-fires, his soul for the wild mountain passes, the mad gallop, the stealthy stalk--he would live on cold water until the Old Adam were drowned.

He would be worthy of her--and she should never dream what blood was on his hands, what sights he had looked on, what deeds he had done, what part he had played in wild undertakings in wild places. English would be to the back-bone, to the finger tips, to the marrow; a quiet, clean, straight-dealing Englishman of normal tastes, habits, and life.

Strange if, with all his love of fighting, he could not fight (and conquer) himself. Yes--his last great fight should be with himself.... He would call, to-day, at the bungalow to which Mrs. Dearman, prior to starting for Home, had removed as soon as the carefully-guarded

Cantonment area was pronounced absolutely safe as a place of residence for the refugees who had been besieged in the old Military Prison.

She would be sufficiently "straight" in her bungalow, by this time, to permit of a formal mid-day call being a reasonable and normal affair....

"Good-morning, Preserver of Gungapur," said Mrs. Dearman brightly; "have the Victoria Cross and the Distinguished Service Order materialized yet--or don't they give them to Volunteers? What a shame if they don't!"

"I want something far more valuable and desirable than those, Mrs. Dearman," said Colonel Ross-Ellison as he took the extended hand of his hostess, who was a picture of coolness and health.

"Oh?--and--what is that?" she asked, seating herself on a big settee with her back to the light.

"You," was the direct and uncompromising reply of the man who had been leading a remarkably direct and uncompromising life for several years.

Mrs. Dearman trembled, flushed and paled.

"What do you mean?" she managed to say, with a fine affectation of coolness, unconcern, and indifference.

"I mean what I say," was the answer. "I want you. I cannot live without you. I want to take care of you. I want to devote my life to making you happy. I want to make you forget this terrible experience and tragedy. You are lonely and I worship you. I want you to marry me--when you can--later--and let me serve you for the rest of my life. Make me the happiest and proudest man in the world and I will strive to be the noblest."

He was very English then--in his fine passion. He took her hand and it was not withdrawn. He bent to look in her eyes, she smiled, and in a second was in his embrace, strained to his breast, her lips crushed by his.

For a minute he could not speak.

"I cannot believe it," he whispered at length. "Is this a dream?"

"You are a very concrete dream--dear," said Mrs. Dearman, re-arranging crushed and disarranged flowers at her breast, blushing and laughing shyly.

The man was filled with awe, reverence and a deep longing for worthiness.

The woman felt happy in the sense of safety, of power, of pride in the love of so fine a being.

"And how long have you loved me?" she murmured.

"Loved you, Cleopatra? Dearest--I have loved you from the moment my eyes first fell on you.... Poor salt-encrusted, weary, bloodshot eyes they were too," he added, smiling, reminiscent.

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Dearman, puzzled.

"Ah--I have a secret to tell you--a confession that will open those beautiful eyes wide with surprise. I first saw you when you were Cleopatra Brighte."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Mrs. Dearman in great surprise. "When ever

when?"

"I'll tell you," said the man, smiling fondly. "You have my photograph. You took it yourself--on board the 'Malaya'."

"I?" said Mrs. Dearman. "What _are_ you talking about?"

"About you, dearest, and the time when I first saw you--and fell in love with you;--love at first sight, indeed."

"But I never photographed you on board ship. I never saw you on a ship. I met you first here in Gungapur."

"Do you remember the 'Malaya' stopping to pick up a shipwrecked sailor, a castaway, in a little dug-out canoe, somewhere in the Indian Ocean, when you were first coming out to India? But of course you do--you have the snap-shot in your collection...."

"Why--yes--I remember, of course--but that was a horrid, beastly _native_. The creature could only speak Hindustani. He was the sole survivor of the crew of some dhow or bunder-boat, they said.... He lived and worked with the Lascars till we got to Bombay. Yes...."

"I was that native," said Colonel Ross-Ellison.

"_You_," whispered Mrs. Dearman. "_You_," and scanned his face intently.

"Yes. I. I _am_ half a native. My father was a Pathan. He----"

"_What_?" asked the woman hoarsely, drawing away. "_What_? _What_ are you saying?"

"I am half Pathan--my father was a Pathan and my mother an Australian squatter's daughter."

"_Go_," shrieked Mrs. Dearman, springing to her feet. "_Go_. You wretch! You mean, base liar! To cheat me so! To pretend you were a gentleman. Leave my house! Go! You horrible--_mongrel_--you---. To take me in your arms! To make love to me! To kiss me! Ugh! I could die for shame! I could _die_----"

The face of the man grew terrible to see. There was no trace of the West in it, no sign of English ancestry, the face of a mad, blood-mad Afghan.

"_We will both die_," he gasped, and took her by the throat.

* * * * *

A few minutes later a Pathan in the dirty dress of his race fled from Colonel Ross-Ellison's bungalow in Cantonments and took the road to the city.

Threading his way through its tortuous lanes, alleys, slums and bazaars he reached a low door in the high wall that surrounded an almost windowless house, knocked in a particular manner, parleyed, and was admitted.

The moment he was inside, the custodian of the door slammed, locked and bolted it, and then raised an outcry.

"Come," he shouted in Pushtoo. "The Spy! The Feringhi! The Pushtoo-knowing English dog, that Abdulali Habbibullah," and he drew his Khyber knife and circled round Ross-Ellison.

A clatter of heavy boots, the opening of wooden "windows" that looked

inward on to the high-walled courtyard, and in a minute a throng of Pathans and other Mussulmans entered the compound from the house--some obviously aroused from heavy slumber.

"It is he," cried one, a squat, broad-shouldered fellow, as they stood at gaze, and long knives flashed.

"Oho, Spy! Aha, Dog! For what hast thou come?" asked one burly fellow as he advanced warily upon the intruder, who backed slowly to the angle of the high walls.

"To die, Hidayetullah. To die, Nazir Ali Khan. To die slaying! Come on!" was the reply, and in one moment the speaker's Khyber knife flashed from his loose sleeve into the throat of the nearest foe.

As he withdrew it, the door-keeper slashed at his abdomen, missed by a hair's-breadth, raised his arm to save his neck from a slash, and was stabbed to the heart, the knife held dagger-wise. Another Pathan rushing forward, with uplifted knife held as a sword, was met by a sudden low fencing-lunge and fell with a hideous wound, and then, whirling his weapon like a claymore in an invisibly rapid Maltese cross of flashing steel, the man who had been Ross-Ellison drove his enemies before him, whirled about, and established himself in the opposite corner, and spat pungent Border taunts at the infuriated crowd.

"Come on, you village curs, you landless cripples, you wifeless sons of burnt fathers! Come on! Strike for the credit of your noseless mothers! Run not from me as your wives ran from you--to better men! Come on, you sweepers, you swine-herds, you down-country street-scrapers!" and they came on to heart's content, steel clashed on steel and thudded on flesh and bone.

"Get a rifle," cried one, lying bleeding on the ground, striving to rise while he held his right shoulder to his neck with his partly severed left hand. As he fainted the shoulder gaped horribly.

"Get a cannon," mocked Ross-Ellison. "Get a cannon, dogs, against one man," and again, whirling the great jade-handled knife, long as a short sword, he rushed forward and the little mob gave ground before the irresistible claymore-whirl, the unbreakable Maltese cross described by the razor-edge and needle-point.

"It is a devil," groaned a man, as his knife and his hand fell together to the ground, and he clapped his turban on the stump as a boy claps his hat upon some small creature that he would capture.

The madman whirled about in the third corner and, as he ceased the wild whirl, ducked low and lunged, lessening the number of his enemies by one. This lunge was a new thing to men who could only slash and stab, a new thing and a terrible, for it could not be parried save by seizing the blade and losing half a hand.

"Come on, you growing maidens! Come on, grandmothers! Come on, you cleaners of pig-skins, you washers of dogs! Come on!" and as he shouted, the door crashed down and a patrol of British soldiers, attracted by the noise, and delayed by the stout door, burst into the courtyard.

"At the henemy in front, fixed sights," shouted the corporal in charge. And added an order not to be found in the drill-book: "Blow 'em to 'ell if they budes."

In the hush of surprise his voice arose, addressing the fighters: "_Bus_[70] you bleedin' soors,[71]" said Corporal Cook. "_Bus_;" and you _dekhho_[72] 'ere. If any of you _jaos_[73] from where 'e is, I'll

pukkaro[74] 'im and give 'im a punch in the _dekho_."

[70] Enough, stop.

[71] Swine.

[72] Look.

[73] Jao = go (imperative).

[74] Seize (imperative).

And, as bayonets rose breast-high and fingers curled lovingly round triggers, every knife but that of Ross-Ellison disappeared as by magic, and the Corporal beheld a little crowd of innocent men endeavouring to secure a dangerous lunatic at the risk of their lives--terrible risk, as the bodies of five dead and dying men might testify.

"I give myself up to you as a murderer, Corporal," said he who had been Colonel John Robin Ross-Ellison. "I am a murderer. If you will take me before your officer I will confess and give details."

"I'm agoin' to take you bloomin' well all," replied the surprised Corporal. "Chuck down that there beastly carvin' knife. You seem a too 'andy cove wiv' it."

At the Corporal's order of, "Prod 'em all up agin that wall and shoot any bloke as moves 'and or 'oof," the party of panting, bleeding and perspiring ruffians was lined up, relieved of its weapons, and duly marched to the guard-room.

Here, one of the gang (later identified as the man who had been known as John Robin Ross-Ellison, and who insisted that he was a Baluchi) declared that he had just murdered Mrs. Dearman in her drawing-room and made a full statement--a statement found to be only too true, its details corroborated by a trembling _hamal_ who had peeped and listened, as all Indian servants peep and listen.

* * * * *

Duly tried, all members of the gang received terms of imprisonment (largely a prophylactic measure), save the extraordinary English-speaking Baluchi, who had long imposed, it was said, upon Gungapur Society in the days before that Society had disappeared in the cataclysm.

A few days before the date fixed for the execution of this very remarkable desperado, Captain Michael Malet-Marsac, Adjutant of the Gungapur Volunteer Corps, received two letters dated from Gungapur Jail, one covering the other. The covering letter ran:--

"MY DEAR MALET-MARSAC,

"I forward the enclosed. Should you desire to attend the execution you could accompany the new City Magistrate, Wellson, who will doubtless be agreeable.

"Yours sincerely,

"A. RANALD, Major I.M.S."

The accompaniment was from John Robin Ross-Ellison Mir Ilderim Dost Mahommed Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan.

"MY DEAR OLD FRIEND,

"For the credit of the British I am pretending to be a Baluchi. I am not a Baluchi and I hope to die like a Briton--at any rate like a man. I have been held responsible for what I did when I was not responsible,

and shall be killed in cold blood by sane people, for what I did in hot blood when quite as mad as any madman who ever lived. I don't complain—I _ex_plain. I want you to understand, if you can, that it was not your friend John Ross-Ellison who did that awful deed. It was a Pathan named Ilderim Dost Mahommed. And yet it was I." ["Poor chap is mad!" murmured the bewildered and horrified reader who had lived in a kind of nightmare since the woman he loved had been murdered by the man he loved. "The strain of the war has been too much for him. He must have had sunstroke too." He read on, with misty sight.]

"And it is I who will pay the penalty of Ilderim Dost Mahommed's deed. As I say, I do not complain, and if the Law did not kill me I would certainly kill myself—to get rid of Ilderim Dost Mahommed.

"I have thought of doing so and cheating the scaffold, but have decided that Ilderim will get his deserts better if I hang, and I may perhaps get rid of him, thus, for ever.

"Will you come? I would not ask it of any living soul but you, and I ask it because your presence would show me that you blindly believe that it was not John Robin Ross-Ellison who killed poor Mrs. Dearman, and that would enable me to die quite happy. Your presence would also be a great help to me. It would help me to feel that, whatever I have lived, I die a Briton—that if I could not live without Ilderim Dost Mahommed I can die without him. But this must seem lunatic wanderings to you.

"I apologize for writing to you and I hesitated long. At length I said, 'I will tell him the truth—that the deed was not done by Ross-Ellison and perhaps he will understand, and come'. Mike—_John Robin Ross-Ellison did not murder Mrs. Dearman_.

"Your distracted and broken-hearted ex-friend,

"J.R. ROSS-ELLISON."

"He _was_ 'queer' at times," said Captain Michael Malet-Marsac. "There was a kink somewhere. The bravest, coolest, keenest chap I ever met, the finest fighting-man, the truest comrade and friend,—and from time to time something queer peeped out, and one was puzzled.... Madness in the family, I suppose.... Poor devil, poor, poor devil!" and Captain Malet-Marsac stamped about and swore, for his eyes tingled and his chin quivered.

Sec. 3.

Captain Michael Malet-Marsac alighted from his horse at the great gate of the Gungapur Jail, loosed girths, slid stirrup irons up the leathers to the saddle, and handed his reins to the orderly who had ridden behind him.

"Walk the horses up and down," said he, for both were sweating and the morning was very cold. Perhaps it was the cold that made Captain Michael Malet-Marsac's strong face so white, made his teeth chatter and his hands shake. Perhaps it was the cold that made him feel so sick, and that weakened the tendons of his knees so that he could scarcely stand—and would fain have thrown himself upon the ground.

With a curious coughing sound, as though he swallowed and cleared his throat at the same moment, he commenced to address another order or remark to the mounted sepoy, choked, and turned his back upon him.

Striding to the gate, he struck upon it loudly with his hunting-crop,

and turning, waved the waiting orderly away.

Not for a king's ransom could he have spoken at that moment. He realized that something which was rising in his throat must be crushed back and swallowed before speech would be possible. If he tried to speak before that was done--he would shame his manhood, he would do that which was unthinkable in a man and a soldier. What would happen if the little iron wicket in the great iron door in the greater wooden gates opened before he had swallowed the lump in his throat, had crushed down the rising tumult of emotion, and a European official, perhaps Major Ranald himself, spoke to him? He must either refuse to answer, and show himself too overcome for speech--or he must--good God forbid it--burst into tears. He suffered horribly. His skin tingled and he burnt hotly from head to foot.

And then--he swallowed, his will triumphed--and he was again as outwardly self-possessed and nonchalant as he strove to appear.

He might tremble, his face might be blanched and drawn, he might feel physically sick and almost too weak and giddy to stand, but he had swallowed, he had triumphed over the rising flood that had threatened to engulf him, and he was, outwardly, himself again. He could go through with it now, and though his face might be ghastly, his lips white, his hand uncertain, his gait considered and careful, he would be able to chat lightly, to meet Ross-Ellison's jest with jest--for that Ross-Ellison would die jesting he knew....

Why did not the door open? Had his knock gone unheard? Should he knock again, louder? And then his eye fell upon the great iron bell-pull and chain, and he stepped towards it. Of course--one entered a place like this on the sonorous clanging of a deep-throated bell that roused the echoes of the whole vast congeries of buildings encircled by the hideous twelve-foot wall, unbroken save by the great gatehouse before which he stood insignificant. As his shaking hand touched the bell-pull he suddenly remembered, and withdrew it. He was to meet the City Magistrate outside the jail and enter with him. He could gain admittance in no other way.

He looked at his watch. Seventeen minutes to seven. Wellson should be there in a minute--he had said, "At the jail-entrance at 6.45". God send him soon or the new-found self-control might weaken and a rising tide creep up and up until it submerged his will-power again.

With an effort he swallowed, and turning, strode up and down on a rapid, mechanical sentry-go.

A guard of police-sepoys emerged from a neighbouring guard-room and "fell in" under the word of command of an Inspector. They were armed with Martini-Henry rifles and triangular-bladed bayonets, very long. Their faces looked cruel, the stones of the gate-house and main-guard looked cruel, the beautiful misty morning looked cruel.

Would that damned magistrate never come? Didn't he know that Malet-Marsac was fighting for his manhood and terribly afraid? Didn't he know that unless he came quickly Malet-Marsac would either leap on his horse and ride it till it fell, or else lose control inside the jail and either burst into tears, faint, or--going mad--put up a fight for his friend there in the jail itself, snatch weapons, get back to back with him and die fighting then and there--or, later, on the same scaffold? His friend--by whose side he had fought, starved, suffered, triumphed--his poor two-natured friend....

Could not one of these cursed clever physicians, alienists, psychologists, hypnotists--whatever they were--have cut the strange savagery and ferocity out of the splendid John Robin Ross-Ellison?...

A buffalo passed, driven by a barely human lout. The lout was free--the brainless, soulless bovine lout was free in God's beautiful world--and Ross-Ellison, soldier and gentleman, lay in a stone cell, and in quarter of an hour would dangle by the neck in a pit below a platform--perhaps suffering unthinkable agonies--who could tell?... His old friend and commandant--

Would Wellson never come? What kept the fellow? It was disgraceful conduct on the part of a public servant in such circumstances. Think what an eternity of mental suffering each minute must now be to Ross-Ellison! What was he doing? What were they doing to him? _Could_ the agony of Ross-Ellison be greater than that of Malet-Marsac? It must be a thousand times greater. How could that tireless activity, that restless initiative, that cool courage, that unfathomable ingenuity be quenched in a second? How could such a wild free nature exist in a cell, submit to pinioning, be quietly led like a sheep to the slaughter? He who so loved the mountain, the wild desert, the ocean, the free wandering life of adventure and exploration.

Would Wellson never come? It must be terribly late. Could they have hanged Ross-Ellison already? Could he have gone to his death thinking his friend had failed him; had passed by, like the Levite, on the other side; had turned up a sanctimonious nose at the letter of the Murderer; had behaved as some "friends" do behave in time of trouble?

Could he have died thinking this? If so, he must now know the truth, if the Parsons were right, those unconvincing very-human Parsons of like passions, and pretence of unlike passions. Could his friend be dead, his friend whom he had so loved and admired? And yet he was a murderer--and he had murdered ... _her_....

Captain Michael Malet-Marsac leant against a tree and was violently sick.

Curse the weak frail body that was failing him in his hour of need! It had never failed him in battle nor in athletic struggle. Why should it weaken now. He _would_ see his friend, and bear himself as a man, to help him in his dreadful hour.

Would that scoundrel never come? He was the one who should be hanged.

A clatter of hoofs behind, and Malet-Marsac turned to see the City Magistrate trot across the road from the open country. He drew out his watch accusingly and as a torrent of reproach rose to his white parched lips, he saw that the time was--exactly quarter to seven.

"Morning, Marsac," said the City Magistrate as he swung down from the saddle. "You're looking precious blue about the gills."

"Morning, Wellson," replied the other shortly.

To the City Magistrate a hanging was no more than a hair-cut, a neither pleasing nor displeasing interlude, hindering the doing of more strenuous duties; a nuisance, cutting into his early-morning report--writing and other judicial work. He handed his reins to an obsequious sepoy, eased his jodhpores at the knee, and rang the bell.

The grille-cover slid back, a dusky face appeared behind the bars and scrutinized the visitors, the grille was closed again and the tiny door opened. Malet-Marsac stepped in over the foot-high base of the door-way and found himself in a kind of big gloomy strong-room in which were native warders and a jailer with a bunch of huge keys. On either side of the room was an office. Following Wellson to a large desk, on which reposed a huge book, he wrote his name, address, and business,

controlling his shaking hand by a powerful effort of will.

This done, and the entrance-door being again locked, bolted, and barred, the jailer led the way to another pair of huge gates opposite the pair through which they had entered, and opened a similar small door therein. Through this Malet-Marsac stepped and found himself, light-dazzled, in the vast enclosure of Gungapur Jail, a small town of horribly-similar low buildings, painfully regular streets, soul-stunning uniformity, and living death.

"Morning, Malet-Marsac," said Major Ranald of the Indian Medical Service, Superintendent of the jail. "You look a bit blue about the gills, what?"

"Morning, Ranald," replied Malet-Marsac, "I _am_ a little cold."

Was he really speaking? Was that voice his? He supposed so.

Could he pretend to gaze round with an air of intelligent interest? He would try.

A line of convicts, clad in a kind of striped sacking, stood with their backs to a wall while a native warder strode up and down in front of them, watching another convict placing brushes and implements before them. Suddenly the warder spoke to the end man, an elderly stalwart fellow, obviously from the North. The reply was evidently unsatisfactory, perhaps insolent, for the warder suddenly seized the grey beard of the convict, tugged his head violently from side to side, shook him, and then smote him hard on either cheek. The elderly convict gave no sign of having felt either the pain or the indignity, but gazed straight over the warder's head. Of what was he thinking? Of what might be the fate of that warder were he suddenly transported to the wilds of Kathiawar, to lie at the mercy of his late victim and the famous band of outlaws whom he had once led to fame—a fame as wide as Ind?

There was something fine about the old villain, once a real Robin Hood, something mean about the little tyrant.

Had Ranald seen the incident? No, he stood with his back to a buttress looking in the opposite direction. Did he always stand with a wall behind him in this terrible place? How could he live in it? A minute of it made one sick if one were cursed with imagination. Oh, the horror of the prison system—especially for brave men, men with a code of honour of their own—possibly sometimes a higher code than that of the average British politician, not to mention the be-knighted cosmopolitan financier, friend of princes and honoured of kings.

Could not men be segregated in a place of peace and beauty and improved, instead of being segregated in a dull hell and crushed? What a home of soulless, hopeless horror!... And his friend was here.... Could he contain himself?... He must say something.

"Do you always keep your back to a wall when standing still, in here?" he asked of Major Ranald.

"I do," was the reply, "and I walk with a trustworthy man close behind me." "Would you like to go round, sometime?" he added.

"No, thank you," said Malet-Marsac. "I would like to get as far away as possible and stay there."

Major Ranald laughed.

"Wouldn't like to visit the mortuary and see a post-mortem?"

"No, thank you."

"What about the Holy One?" put in the City Magistrate. "Did you 'autopsy' him? A pleasure to hang a chap like him."

"Yes, the brute. I'll show you his neck vertebrae presently if you like. Kept 'em as a curiosity. An absolute break of the bone itself. People talk about pain, strangulation, suffocation and all that. Nothing of the sort. Literally breaks the neck. Not mere separation of the vertebrae you know. I'll show you the vertebra itself--clean broken...."

Captain Malet-Marsac swayed on his feet. What should he do? A blue mist floated before his eyes and a sound of rushing waters filled his ears. Was he fainting? He must not faint, and fail his friend. And then, the roar of the waters was pierced and dominated by the voice of that friend saying--

"Hul_lo_! old bird. Awf'ly good of you to turn out, such a beastly cold morning."

John Robin Ross-Ellison had come round an adjacent corner, a European warder on either side of him and another behind him, all three, to their credit, as white as their white uniforms and helmets. On his head was a curious bag-like cap.

Ross-Ellison appeared perfectly cheerful, absolutely natural, and without the slightest outward and visible sign of any form of perturbation.

"Morning, Ranald," he continued. "Sorry to be the cause of turning you out in the cold. Gad! isn't it parky. Hope you aren't going to keep me standing. If I might be allowed I'd quote unto you the words which a pretty American girl once used when I asked if I might kiss her--'Wade right in, Bub!_"

"Fraid I can't 'wade in' till seven o'clock--er--Ross-Ellison," answered the horribly embarrassed Major Ranald. "It won't be long."

"Right O, I was only thinking of your convenience. I'm all right," said the remarkable criminal, about to suffer by the Mosaic law at the hands of Christians, to receive Old Testament mercy from the disciples of the New, to be done-by as he had done.

An Indian clerk, salaaming, joined the group, and prepared to read from an official-looking document.

"Read," said Major Ranald, and the clerk in a high sing-song voice, regardless of punctuation, read out the charge, conviction and death-warrant of the man formerly calling himself John Robin Ross-Ellison, and now professing and confessing himself to be a Baluchi. Having finished, the clerk smiled as one well pleased with a duty well performed, salaamed and clacked away in his heelless slippers.

"It is my duty to inquire whether you have anything to say or any last request to make," said Major Ranald to the prisoner.

"Well, I've only to say that I'm sorry to cause all this fuss, y' know--and, well, yes, I would like a smoke," replied the condemned man, and added hastily: "Don't think I want to delay things for a moment though--but if there is time...."

"It is four minutes to seven," said Major Ranald, "and tobacco and matches are not supposed to be found in a Government Jail."

Ross-Ellison winked at the Major and glanced at a bulge on the right

side of the breast of the Major's coat.

At this moment the warder standing behind the condemned man seized both his wrists, drew them behind him and fastened them with a broad, strong strap.

"H'm! That's done it, I suppose," said the murderer. "Can't smoke without my hands. Queer idea too--never thought of it before. Can't smoke without hands.... Rather late in life to realize it, what?"

"Oh, yes, you can," said the Major, drawing his big silver cheroot-case from his pocket and selecting a cheroot. Placing it between the prisoner's lips he struck a match and held it to the end of the cigar. Ross-Ellison drew hard and the cigar was lit. He puffed luxuriously and sighed.

"Gad! That's good," he said, "May some one do as much for you, old chap, when you come to be--er--no, I don't mean that, of course.... Haven't had a smoke for weeks. Yes--you can smoke without hands after all--but not for long without feeling the inconvenience. I used to know an American (wicked old gun-running millionaire he was, Cuba way, and down South too) who could change his cigar from one corner of his mouth right across to the other with his tongue. Fascinatin' sight to watch...."

Captain Malet-Marsac swallowed continuously, lest he lose the faculty of swallowing--and be choked.

Major Ranald looked at his watch.

"Two minutes to seven. Come on," he said, and took the cheroot from the prisoner's mouth.

"Good-bye, Mike," said that person to the swallowing fainting wretch. "Don't try and say anything. I know exactly what you feel. Sorry we can't shake hands," and he stepped off in the wake of Major Ranald, closely guarded by three warders.

The City Magistrate and Captain Malet-Marsac followed. At Major Ranald's knock, the small inner door of the gate-house was opened and the procession filed through it into the strong room where the warders stood to attention. Having re-fastened the door, the jailer opened the outer one and the procession passed out of the jail into the blessed free world, the world that might be such a place of wonder, beauty, delight, health and joy, were man not educated to materialism, false ideals, false standards, and blind strife for nothing worth.

The sepoy-guard stood in a semicircle from the gate-house to the entrance to a door-way in the jail-wall. Ross-Ellison took his last look at the sky, the distant hills, the trees, God's good world, and then turned into the doorless door-way with his jailers, and faced the scaffold in a square, roofless cell. The warder behind him drew the cap down over his face, and he was led up a flight of shallow stairs on to a platform on which was a roughly-chalked square where two hinged flaps met. As he stood on this spot the noose of the greased rope was placed round his neck by a warder who then looked to Major Ranald for a sign, received it, and pulled over a lever which withdrew the bolts supporting the hinged flaps. These fell apart, Ross-Ellison dropped through the platform, and Christian Society was avenged.

Without a word, Captain Malet-Marsac strode, as in a dream, to his horse, rode home, and, as in a dream, entered his sanctum, took his revolver from its holster and loaded it.

Laying it on the table beside him, he sat down to write a few words to the Colonel of his regiment, Colonel Wilberforce Wriothlesley of the 99th

Baluch Light Infantry, and to send his will to a brother-officer whom he wished to be his executor.

This done, he took up the revolver, placed the muzzle in his mouth, the barrel pointing upward, and--pulled the trigger.

Click!

And nothing more.

A tiny, nerve-shattering, world-shaking, little universe-rocking _click_--and nothing more.

A bad cartridge. He remembered complaints about the revolver ammunition from the Duri Small Arms Ammunition Factory. Too long in stock.

Should he try the same one again, or go on to the next? Probably get better results from the first, as the cap would be already dented by the concussion. He took the muzzle of the big revolver from his aching mouth and, releasing the chamber, spun it round.... He would place it to his temple this time. Holding one's mouth open was undignified. He raised the revolver--and John Bruce burst into the room. He had seen Malet-Marsac ride by, and knew where he had been.

"Half a second!" he shouted. "News! Do that afterwards."

"What is it?" asked Malet-Marsac, taken by surprise.

"Put that beastly thing in the drawer while I tell you, then. It might go off. I hate pistols," said Bruce.

Malet-Marsac obeyed. Bruce was a man to be listened to, and what had to be done could be done when he had gone. If it were some last piece of duty or service, it should be seen to.

"It is this," said Bruce. "You are a liar, a forger, a thief, a dirty pickpocket, a coward, a seller of secrets to Foreign Powers," and, ere the astounded soldier could speak, John Bruce sprang at him and tried to knock him out. "Take that you greasy cad--and fight me if you dare," he shouted as the other dodged his punch.

Malet-Marsac sprang to his feet, furious, and returned the blow. In a second the men were fighting fiercely, coolly, murderously.

Bruce was the bigger, stronger, more scientific, and there could be but one result, given ordinary luck. It was a long, severe, and punishing affair.

"Time," gasped Malet-Marsac at length, and dropped his hands. "Get--breath--fight--decently--time--'nother round--after," and as he spoke Bruce knocked him down and out, proceeding instantly to tie his feet with the punkah-cord and his hands with two handkerchiefs and a pair of braces. This done, he carried him into his bedroom, and laid him on the bed, and sprinkled his face with water.

Malet-Marsac blinked and stirred.

"Awful sorry, old chap," said Bruce at length. "I thought it the best plan. Will you give me your word to chuck the suicide idea, or do you want some more?"

"You damned fool! I...." began the trussed one.

"Yes, I know--but I solemnly swear I won't untie you, nor let anybody else, until you've promised."

Malet-Marsac swore violently, struggled valiantly and, anon, slept.

When he awoke, ten hours later, he informed Bruce, sitting by the bed, that he had no intention of committing suicide....

Years later, as a grey-haired Major, he learnt, from the man's own brother, the story of the strange hero who had fascinated him, and of whose past he had known nothing--save that it had been that of a _man_.

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