







**JOHN CARRUTHERS:**  
**INDIAN POLICEMAN**

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"SAFELY CONTAINED TWO STRUGGLING AND PANTING GIBBON MONKEYS" (p. 99).





# JOHN CARRUTHERS: INDIAN POLICEMAN

BY

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Ancient India"*

MCMV

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### THE FATE OF ABDULLA.

ONE morning, in the month of May, I had ridden ten miles to Tulsipur, where I intended to camp for a couple of days to inspect the Police outpost. My tents were pitched under a beautiful mango-tope, which, although it would not protect me from the fiery wind, would at all events afford great relief from the direct rays of the sun. Everything was, as usual, ready for me. Indian servants often give a great deal of trouble; but for camp life they are marvellously useful. My people had marched all night, and commenced to prepare for my arrival at the first appearance of dawn. But everything was spick and span. The tents might have been there a week, instead of having only arrived that morning. My Hindoo bearer with his snowy *puggree* stood salaaming at the tent door to receive me as I alighted from my horse; an orderly stood at attention and saluted, and inside the tent my breakfast table was spread and tastefully decorated with

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flowers from the jungle. My office table stood in one corner, with pens, paper, and all other requisites carefully arranged. Off the main tent was a smaller one for dressing and sleeping; and I could hear the *bheesti* sluicing water into my tub from the *mussuck* or skin in which he had fetched it from the nearest well. Outside, within view of the tent, there swung from one of the mango trees a basket full of grass, in which reposed soda-water for my consumption at breakfast. The *bheesti* had lately poured on it a libation from his skin; and the wind, notwithstanding its heat, effectually cooled the bottles as it passed through the saturated grass. I had hardly arrived when a smart *sawar*, or mounted orderly, cantered up with my post. So thinking that I would glance at my letters and skim through the *Indian Daily Mail* before I enjoyed a bath and exchanged my riding kit for a cooler costume, I lighted a pipe, and, calling for a cup of tea, threw myself into a long chair. It is one of the drawbacks to life in an ordinary English house that there is no room in it for one of those delightful Indian chairs in which you recline at ease, resting your lower limbs on the rests designed for that purpose.

However, I was not suffered to read my paper in peace. I heard a slight altercation outside the tent between the orderly on duty and a stranger, the former saying that the Sahib had just arrived, and could not be disturbed at present, while the latter insisted that his business was urgent. Ordering the stranger, whoever he was, to be instantly admitted, I saw a wizened-up little Mahomedan

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with a long white beard standing before me. He was evidently in acute distress, and handing me the written petition without which a native as a rule thinks that he cannot make any complaint, he threw off his *puggree* and prostrated himself at my feet in an agony of grief. Giving him a little time to recover himself, I bade him tell me his story.

“Sahib,” he said, “my name is Khoda-bux. I am a *chowkidar* (watchman) on the new railway bridge that is being built over the Sita river. My wife and children died in the great cholera year, before my beard grew grey. My brother, Musa, has many children; and I took his third son, Abdulla, to live with me. Musa’s house is at Narayangunge, a day’s journey by bullock-cart from Parbatipur, where the railway bridge crosses the Sita. Abdulla was as the apple of my eye. He was so skilful that he used to cook my food, and prepare my *hookah*, and keep my little hut as clean as the Sahib’s tent.”

“But tell me what has happened,” I said, as the old man paused for a moment, almost overcome by the recollection of his nephew’s virtues.

“All was well,” he continued, “until a week ago, when about sunset a stranger came with a letter from my brother Musa’s village. In the letter it was written that Musa was at the point of death, and he begged me to send Abdulla to him without a moment’s delay, that he might see him once more before he died. See, Sahib, here is the letter,” said Khoda-bux, handing me a scrap of the commonest paper covered with an almost illegible scrawl. Natives of this class can seldom read and write; and

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the village scribe is the medium for most correspondence. It was idle to ask the old man if he knew the handwriting. "Well," he went on, "what could I do but send the boy? Why should I suspect anything wrong? I did not know the man who brought the letter. He said that his name was Gangadhar, and had only settled in Narayangunge a short time ago. Hearing by chance from the scribe that a letter had to be taken to Parbatipur he had volunteered to carry it as he was going with his cart to a village only two miles short of that place. He had completed his own business, and his cart was waiting at the village that he had spoken of. Well, Sahib, I sent off my nephew, whom I looked upon as my own son, with the stranger, bidding him salute my brother for me, and return as soon as he could."

"About a week ago you said this happened. Can you tell me the exact day?" I asked. "To-day is Thursday, you know."

"It was Friday, Protector of the Poor; there is no mosque at Parbatipur as the people are all idolatrous Hindoos. But I remember that it was our holy day, and I was engaged in my evening devotions when the man who called himself Gangadhar arrived."

"And what has happened since then?" I inquired.

"It was yesterday, just after nightfall, and I was lighting my lamp, when someone approached my door, and there stood Musa. I was stricken with terror, for I thought it was his ghost. 'What ails

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thee, Khoda-bux? ' he asked, as he noticed my astonishment. ' Art thou ill, and where is Abdulla? ' You can imagine, Sahib, what I felt when he talked like this, and I realised that it was no ghost, but Musa himself in true flesh and blood. ' Where is Abdulla, do you ask? ' I said. ' Why, you sent me a letter saying that you were at the point of death, and bidding me send Abdulla to you. The letter was brought by Gangadhar of your village. ' ' Gangadhar ! ' he said. ' There is no Gangadhar at Narayangunge ; and by God's blessing I have known no illness this many a day. But what villainy is this about Abdulla? What have you done with him, you false brother? ' shouted Musa, his suspicions suddenly falling upon me, and he proceeded to abuse me till I thought that in his anger he would smite me. At last I managed to satisfy him of the truth of my tale ; and then we tried to think what horrible plot could have been contrived against Abdulla. There had been a gang of Lamani gypsies in the neighbourhood for some time past, and their camp was latterly near the village at which Gangadhar had said that he had left his cart. Musa went at daybreak to see if he could find any trace of Abdulla with them ; and having heard the name of the Sahib, from whom nothing is hid, this humble one has come before the presence. "

" A strange tale, Khoda-bux, " I said, as I refilled my pipe, which I had smoked out during this long recital, " a very strange tale. Now tell me if the boy had any ornaments or money on him. "

" No ornaments of any value, " was the reply ;



“ but he wore round his neck a curious coral necklace which I got from Madras many years ago. It was not worth eight annas. And as for money, he certainly had not a pice. But the Huzur must come himself, and then how can the truth fail to come to light? ”

I had been long enough at Indian Police work to know that except in special circumstances nothing is gained by hurry. The missing boy was either dead or alive. If the latter, it was not likely that he was in any instant danger. It would be easy enough to come up with the gypsies. So telling the old *chowkidar* that I would ride over in the afternoon, I directed the Head Constable of the outpost to go with him as far as the bridge, get information as to the whereabouts of the Lamanis, and be ready with his report on my arrival.

From breakfast onwards I was busily engaged till four o'clock in the despatch of routine business. Endless reports of investigations into crime from fifteen police stations had to be read out in the vernacular for my orders; patrol reports, morning reports from my headquarters, complaints of inspectors against constables for neglect of duty, applications for leave or promotion, half a dozen anonymous petitions against some officer, all stating that there had never before been such *zoolum* under the British Government, and a multiplicity of other details, which formed my daily routine. Sometimes the routine work could not be completed each day, and a moiety had to remain for the morrow. At four o'clock I dismissed my clerks; and after a hasty cup

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of tea, set off on my bicycle for the bridge at Parbatipur. It was only eight miles, and there happened to be a good road. The hot wind roared round me like a blast from a furnace as I spun along; and I was not sorry when I came in sight of the railway works and the Sita river.

The scene was a remarkable one. The bridge appeared to be near its completion; but an army of some two thousand men was working with that strange mixture of energy and listlessness which is characteristic of the East. Engines of the "Puffing Billy" type were shunting on either side of the great bridge, bringing up rails, sleepers, chairs, ballast, nails, screws, and stores of all descriptions for the workmen. The noise of hammering was ceaseless. The five enormous piers which supported the iron over-structure were of bricks that had been manufactured on the spot; and bricklayers were still engaged in putting the finishing touches to the last pier. I could see that no pains had been spared to insure solidity and symmetry. It being early in May there was little water in the river, which during the monsoon would dash in torrents against the barriers planted in its course; and I walked over the temporary wooden bridge that had been raised on piles of sleepers in the river bed for the crossing of people and stores. Pausing occasionally to admire the design, I slowly approached the opposite side. Here I found the engineer in charge of the works, a keen-eyed man from Coopers Hill, named Robertson, who was known to me by reputation, though I had not met him before. He was actively engaged

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in giving directions to half a dozen people at once; and it was some minutes before I could obtain his attention and introduce myself.

"Delighted to see you," he said, giving me a tremendous shake of the hand. "I haven't seen a white man for weeks. Come and drink at my shanty up there. An evaporating lotion to be taken internally is what I prescribe for this weather. Hold hard half a minute though, while I give an order. We are fearfully pushed for time. Only three weeks to the rains, and we've got to get the rails across first. We had a nice little freshet when it rained the day before yesterday; and it reminded me of what we have to expect. Just like Government to go and change their plans, too, when the work was three parts done, and make me bracket on a foot-path for passengers along the north side. However, we are nearly through with it. My contractor is a marvellous man, as keen on completion in time as I am myself. Here, Rajaram, come and be introduced to this Police Sahib."

Rajaram was of unusual appearance. Clean-shaven but for a large white moustache, he was exceedingly tall for a Hindoo. His face was lined and wrinkled from continual exposure to the sun. His costume, which was specklessly clean, was a compromise between European and native attire. He wore a large white *puggree*, a native *dhoti* or loin cloth, patent-leather boots, and an English white drill coat open at the neck, showing a collar and necktie resting upon a white linen shirt. What chiefly struck me about the contractor was the deter-

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mination expressed in his square chin and the peculiarly hard expression of his eyes. Certainly, I thought, Robertson has got hold of the right man to insist upon his orders being carried out, and overcome any obstacles to the completion of his operations.

Rajaram had no time to do more than make a graceful salaam when Robertson hustled us off.

"Come along, old man," he said to me. Acquaintance ripens readily in the East. "And I say, Rajaram, where are your eyes? Just look at that brickwork in the support to the land abutment where the new footpath is to terminate! Fine the man who joined those bricks two days' pay. I can't have the work scamped even if we are pressed for time."

"I will see to it, sir," said Rajaram as we passed on. "The work of Gopal Mistri is so good that it seldom wants supervision; and I had given my attention to other matters."

Oh that drink, how it hissed down my throat! I remember many a good drink in India; but that one, after the furious heat and dust on the works, is fresh in my recollection now as a foretaste of Paradise; for had it not ice in it, ice brought for sixty miles in a construction train? My little place in Surrey is delightful; but I cannot raise a thirst there.

We had a few minutes' chat, Robertson and I, partly about my errand, but chiefly about the bridge. The man seemed simply to live for his work. It had been carried through in a marvellously short time, almost without a hitch; and, wonderful to say, without the loss of a single life. After giving me a hearty invitation to stay to dinner and spend the

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night, which, needless to say, I readily accepted, Robertson returned to his works, and I went to see if the little *chowkidar* was awaiting me. I came upon him at once standing outside the bungalow, which he had seen me enter. With him was my Head Constable. They were both keenly excited. The latter held in his hand part of a broken coral necklace.

"Look, Sahib," said the Head Constable, a Mahomedan, named Fattah Khan, "here is part of the missing boy's necklace. I found the necklace in two halves on the site of the Lamanis' last camp. One half I brought to show to Khoda-bux, and the other half I left on the spot where it was found, with a man to guard it, that the Huzur might see with his own eyes the evidence of the Lamanis' wickedness. There is no doubt that they have taken the boy, and that the necklace fell off in his struggle for freedom."

Khoda-bux positively identified the necklace as Abdulla's; and it was indeed of an unusual kind for this part of the country. The gypsies were reported to be at a village ten miles off. It would be an easy matter to overtake them; for encumbered as they were with a number of donkeys laden with their portable mat huts, and other paraphernalia, their movements could not be rapid. "Come on," I said, "I should like to see this place." So our little party, consisting of myself, Fattah Khan, Khoda-bux, and his brother Musa, set off on a two-mile tramp across the burnt-up fields.

It was six o'clock when we arrived. I had an

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hour's daylight before me ; and the moon was about to rise, so there was no fear of having to walk back in the dark. The Laminis did not appear to have moved off in any particular hurry, for they had left nothing behind them.

" When did they leave here? " I inquired.

" On Sunday, Sahib," replied the Head Constable. " I have omitted no particulars of investigation."

" *Shabash*, Fattah Khan," I said ; " that's right. Now see if you can get me a light for my pipe, as I have forgotten my matches ; and spread a *kamali* on the ground close to the necklace, that I may sit down and think the matter over."

The matches were soon forthcoming, and after an enjoyable whiff of the friendly weed, I made a careful examination of the ground. It had been too much trodden down for me to make anything of the footprints. But on examining the half of the necklace, which Fattah Khan had had the sense not to touch, something seemed to leap within my brain.

" Go a little way off, all of you," I said. " I will call you back soon."

" What is it, Huzur? " the old *chowkidar* began to ask. " What has the Sahib seen? "

But Fattah Khan, trained to rigid obedience, hurried the group away, and I was left to cogitate alone. The case began now to interest me profoundly. I sat for half an hour immersed in thought, and puffing away at my pipe. Nothing helps me to think out a question so well as my Lady Nicotine. It was now growing dusk. The long evenings of

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an English May have no counterpart in India. But I could still see well enough for my purpose; and I made a further examination of the ground, feeling the soil for several feet round with my hand. Ah! now I was satisfied with my investigations so far. But how to disentangle the thread to the end?

I leapt up, and began to walk back to the bridge, oblivious of my companions, who followed me in discontented silence. At last, as we were close to the river, old Khoda-bux plucked up courage to ask me when I should have the Lamanis arrested. Telling him that I would make arrangements in the morning, I dismissed them with a salaam; bidding Fatteh Khan come to me after dinner, in case I should have any instructions to give him. Turning to Robertson's bungalow, just outside it I met the contractor.

"Well, Rajaram," I said, "have you finished your work for the day? I have just finished mine."

"Has your honour arrested the Lamanis? They must have stolen the *chowkidar's* boy. Very bad people, those Lamanis."

"Not yet. Rajaram. It can be easily done in the morning. I want a few more men. Good-night."

I had the cheeriest of dinners with Robertson. He rattled on from one subject to another, coming back pretty often to his bridge, but always starting again in some other direction. Diverting as he was, with all that was on my mind it was a distinct relief to me when we parted for the night, and I was able to have a quiet think by myself. I had a long chair placed outside the bungalow, and reclining at my

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ease, thought out the case in detail. I had formed my theory. I might be right or I might be wrong. At all events, it was something definite to go on. There remained a further test for me to see to by the earliest daylight. I called to Fattah Khan, who, I knew, would be in close attendance; and giving him certain directions, I turned in for the night.

Always an early riser, I was up before dawn, while my host was still slumbering peacefully beneath his mosquito curtains. With the first streak of day, I had made a minute examination of the bridge work which had called down the maledictions of the Engineer; and I walked back to my host's verandah to await his appearance.

"Holloa, Carruthers," he said, when he turned out in the course of twenty minutes or so, "you are an early bird. I thought that I was fairly up to time, but you can give me points. What's up, old man—indigestion or a bad conscience—that you can't sleep?"

"Neither the one nor the other; it is murder," I said quietly. "Will you give me a few minutes, and I will enlighten you? Kindly walk along with me for a short distance. Good-morning, Rajaram," I said, as the contractor appeared. "I am just going to give Mr. Robertson a little surprise. Perhaps you would like to share it with him?"

"Whatever Mr. Robertson commands me it is my duty to do," said Rajaram. But Robertson was too puzzled to be able to give any commands. By this time most of the workmen were at their daily toil, a few were hurrying up for their tasks. The



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sun was well above the horizon, and already threatening us with the terrors which were in store for us for sixteen hours to come. Others besides the workmen had joined the crowd. Itinerant vendors of sweetmeats and country cigarettes were spreading their stalls; and the ubiquitous mendicants of the East were already on the look-out for doles. A long-bearded Mahomedan *fakir* and a filthy Hindoo *bairaghi* covered with ashes were calling on the followers of their respective creeds to have remembrance of the faithful poor.

I brought Robertson and Rajaram—it was no great distance—to the masonry support where the inferior workmanship had been noticed.

“Now, Robertson,” I said, “will you do something to oblige me, and have this brickwork pulled down?”

Robertson's face expressed the most profound astonishment at my request, but Rajaram's expressed something more. In a second he had hurled himself on to me, and we fell down with a crash together. A moment later and he was seized by the *fakir* and the *bairaghi*, and his hands handcuffed behind his back.

“Rajaram,” I explained to Robertson, “is arrested for the murder of Abdulla, nephew of your *chowkidar*, Khoda-bux. But I want one man more. I do not know him by sight. If any one present knows Gopal Mistri, who is probably here, I order him in the name of the law to point him out.”

Present he was; and in a trice the handcuffs were on his wrists.



'IN A SECOND HE HAD HURLED HIMSELF ON TO ME.'



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Robertson's amazement had by this time turned to indignation.

"What on earth is this?" he cried. "Are you mad, or is Rajaram mad, or am I mad?"

"I am not mad at all events," I said. "If you will have this masonry pulled down, you will learn all. If you decline, I shall have it done by my men on the authority of the law; but they are not skilled hands, and will probably cause unnecessary damage to the brickwork."

"Take it down," said Robertson to his men, without vouchsafing a reply to me.

Tier by tier the bricks were removed until at some three feet below the surface of the ground the workmen stepped back in horror, for they had unearthed the corpse of a human being, and the stench was almost unbearable. There was nothing by which to identify the corpse, and it might or might not have been Abdulla's; and even Khoda-bux and Musa, who had forced themselves to the front of the crowd, could not speak with any certainty.

"It is enough," said Rajaram in a hollow voice; "the corpse is Abdulla's. It is magic, but the Sahib has found out my doings." Not a word more would he say then; and he and Gopal were led away to Robertson's house.

"I beg your pardon," said Robertson, as we followed the prisoners, "for the annoyance that I manifested at these apparently extraordinary proceedings; but I hope you will admit that it was not unnatural under the circumstances. I beg you to enlighten me, for I am still entirely in the dark as

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scraping away some of the earth around the brick-work, I found several matches that had been lit. The night had been windy, and as the persons using the lantern did not want it to show a brighter light than was absolutely necessary for their purpose, it was kept as low as possible, and consequently went out more than once. In this way my theory has been worked out. It was possible after all that it might be wrong; and the only way to verify it was to put it to a practical test, by ordering the brick-work to be opened in Rajaram's presence. The result you saw. There is only one point on which I am still not clear."

Here I was interrupted by the old *chowkidar*.

"Sahib, Sahib!" he shouted excitedly, pointing to Gopal Mistri, "this is the man who called himself Gangadhar. He wore different clothes when he came to me, and looked like a cart-driver instead of a mason; but now it comes back to me clearly that this is the man."

"I do not think that there is anything more to clear up now," I said to Robertson.

"By George, I hope there isn't. It seems to me you have exposed about enough devilry for the present."

That evening I was back in my own camp. After dinner I called for my orderly Krishna. He entered in uniform, and saluted.

"Krishna," I said, "I am displeased with you. When you turned out as the *bairaghi* this morning you had forgotten to thoroughly efface your caste-mark. Do not overlook these details in future."

## THE RAJAPUR CASE.

WHEN I look back on my thirty years of Police work in India, one of the points which impresses itself most forcibly upon my memory is the extraordinary absence of regard for the value of human life displayed by the natives of that country. Murders are of the commonest occurrence; and in the generality of cases the motives are of an utterly trivial nature. A woman complains to her husband that a neighbour has annoyed her when she was drawing water from the village well. The husband promptly shoulders an axe, and puts an end to the offender. A man kills his wife because she does not cook his food to his liking. A woman on bad terms with her husband throws her child into a well, and reports to the police that her man is the murderer. The divorce laws are seldom appealed to—a stab in the back being a simpler remedy for any infringement of the marriage bond than that afforded by the law. I remember scores of cases in which children were murdered for their ornaments—worth, possibly, two or three rupees. A girl jealous of her lover will poison the whole family, either of her lover or of her rival, reckless of the consequent deaths of persons against whom she has no grudge. Most of these cases are uninteresting, and sordid in their details; but there are some I find recorded in my note-book which possess features that make them worthy of narration. Such a case was the murder of Damodhar.

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It was the beginning of the cold weather. The roasting that we had endured in the hot season, and the boiling and the stewing that we had undergone in the monsoon, were forgotten, for were there not before us four months of delightful climate and enjoyable life? The tents are brought out, pitched, and inspected; and the damage caused by the wear and tear of the last camping season investigated. The amount of repairs needed each year is indeed wonderful. Down come the tents again; and an army of *durzics* and *moochies* (leather workers) takes charge of them for a week or more, until the last tent is repaired and the final patch sewn on. Guns and rifles are cleaned, and cartridges loaded for the destruction of game, both big and small. Boxes of stores, books, clothing, glass, crockery, and kit of the most miscellaneous description are packed; and great is the satisfaction of all when the preparations are complete, and boxes and tents are loaded on a train of creaking bullock carts. Off they go at last. It is ten o'clock at night, and they will trundle on at the rate of a little more than two miles an hour until they arrive at the first camp by four in the morning, when, after a short rest, the orderlies, servants, and cartmen will use their best efforts to have the camp ready for the Sahib by the time he comes. The Sahib and the Mem-sahib, if there be one, are up betimes, and in the saddle without delay, for the sun is still hot after nine or ten o'clock, and an early arrival is advisable. Oh the joy of those early morning rides in the fresh, keen November air! Never mind how many years one has served, and

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how disappointing the result, one felt young and light-hearted as ever, cantering along past mango topes and palm trees, now and then starting a jackal or fox from his lair.

It was my first Sunday in camp, and I had promised myself a shoot over a fine *jheel* a few miles off. There was excellent *khubber* of duck, and snipe were said to abound in the neighbouring rice-fields. But before I could start on my excursion I was told that a constable had arrived on urgent business from the Police post at Deoghar. I at once sent for him, and told him to report what had happened. He informed me that a dacoity had been committed in the preceding night at Rajapur, a large village but two miles from the Police post, and five from my camp. One man, he said, had been killed by the dacoits, two of whom had been arrested and had confessed their guilt. The Head Constable of the outpost was at the scene of the crime making further investigations. More than this he did not know.

Here was an end to my intended expedition after the duck. The road to Rajapur led past the *jheel*; and I threw a regretful glance at the birds as I rode by on my way to the village whence the dacoity had been reported. On my arrival the Head Constable, named Imam Shah, who had the reputation of being a smart officer, promptly gave me an account of the incident. Sitaram, a young man of about twenty, lived in a substantial house, with his paternal uncle, named Ganpat, and a servant named Damodhar. These were the only males who resided in the establishment; but there were, however, some



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female members of the family. About midnight, when all were asleep, Sitaram was aroused by the noise of some persons forcing open the door. Hastily awaking his uncle and their servant, they seized some sticks, having no more formidable weapons, and went towards the door, but were too late to prevent five men from rushing in. However, the attack was resisted boldly; and the dacoits, surprised at the unexpected opposition, made off. Sitaram, Ganpat, and Damodhar followed them, calling loudly for assistance. They had only gone a few paces when one of the dacoits turned round, and fired his gun at Damodhar, who happened to be in front of the pursuers, and about four yards behind the dacoits. Damodhar received a bullet in his chest, and died within half an hour, being unconscious from the time that he was wounded. His body had been sent on a litter, hastily constructed of bamboos, to the hospital at Ranigunge, ten miles off, for the usual *post-mortem* examination. Sitaram and his uncle were plunged in profound grief at the loss of Damodhar, who had served the family for twenty years; and they were positive that they had recognised two of the dacoits as men who had formerly been employed on their homestead, but, having been discharged for misconduct, consequently bore them enmity. Their houses had been at once searched by the Head Constable, and in one of them was found a gun of country manufacture which had been recently fired. The owner, named Govind, had at first stated that he had used the gun to shoot wild pig which were rooting up

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crops in his field ; but on being confronted with the body of Damodhar he and his companion, named Bala, confessed that they and three others, whom they named, had committed the crime. Govind and Bala were under arrest ; and men had been sent to the neighbouring villages to search for the remaining three accused.

“ It is a very strong case,” said Imam Shah, “ and is sure to end in conviction. The Huzur will remember my exertions in arresting the prisoners with their gun, and obtaining their confession. The Sahib’s slave has many children ; and if, through the favour of the presence, he is granted the vacant post of jemadar, they will all bless the protector of the poor.”

“ Well, well, Imam Shah,” I said, “ you have wasted no time, and you know that I never overlook good work. But now show me the place.”

The house was evidently that of a well-to-do man. Built of stone, embedded in mud, it was of the usual old-fashioned design. The walls were of considerable thickness. There were no windows ; but there were solid wooden doors with elaborate carving, at the front and back of the house. Each door was secured from within by a ponderous iron bolt. On entering the house, which was of one storey only, a passage on a level with the ground led across to the other door. A native usually shares his house with his domestic animals in the fashion of Ould Ireland. On the left of the passage two buffaloes, a pony with wild eyes and pink points, a cow, and some sheep and goats were tethered

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behind a wooden barrier. On the right the floor was raised to a height of about two feet; and this part of the house, which was about twenty feet long by fifteen broad, was used as the general living room of the family. Furniture, in the European sense of the word, there was none. A few pillows and scraps of carpet lay here and there on the crowded floor. Two tiny bedrooms, or rather sleeping rooms—for the only beds consisted of rugs spread on the ground, and an equally tiny cook-room and dining-room combined, led off the main room. The house was dark, gloomy, and dirty; but as it is the type of residence affected by natives who are rich enough to erect a comfortable bungalow, the only thing to pity them for is their want of taste. Men who wish to make a show will build an upper room, approached by a steep and narrow staircase, adorn it with glass chandeliers and hideous German pictures for occasional ceremonies, or the reception of European guests. But for their own comfort they remain in the vault that they consider a more appropriate dwelling-place.

The first thing to see was the means by which the dacoits had effected their entrance. This was a simple matter. The walls, which were thick enough elsewhere, were less so near the front door. By pulling out, with a chisel or similar implement, some of the stones on the side, one of the intruders had been enabled to thrust his hand sufficiently far to withdraw the iron bolt, and so open the door. I had a good look at the aperture, and found that by putting in my hand I could easily move the bolt.



BUT THE SAHIB WILL SEE THAT JUSTICE SHALL BE DONE



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The two prisoners were inside the house, carefully handcuffed. I directed them to be taken outside, and guarded, while I interviewed Sitaram and Ganpat separately on the events of the night, keeping the Head Constable with me. I began with Sitaram. A chair had been brought for me from the village school. I sat down, lit a pipe, and took out my note-book, while I motioned Sitaram to seat himself on a carpet beside me. He was an intelligent young man, and though naturally much agitated, he told me his story readily enough. His narrative agreed with the Head Constable's report. He added that the two dacoits who were recognised as the men who had formerly worked on his father's land, had several times lately been seen hanging about the house, and had been warned to keep away. They had obviously been planning the best means of carrying out their burglarious intentions.

"Your father's field," I said; "where is your father? I thought the house and property were yours."

"True, Sahib, they are now mine. My dear father passed away three months ago. His name was Luxaman. It was in his time that the men were turned off the farm; but the Sahib knows the people of this country, and how enmity goes down from father to son. Oh, that the villains have killed my faithful Damodhar! But the Sahib will see that justice shall be done!"

"Fear not for that," I replied; "the court cannot doubt your recognition of these two scoundrels, corroborated as it is by the finding of the gun that

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had been lately fired, and the confession of Govind and Bala. But tell me more about yourself and your father. I am interested in your story. You are somewhat young to manage a house and land. Or does your uncle advise you? "

" My uncle knows little of the affairs of this world. He spent many years in religious meditation at Benares; and he only returned a few weeks before my father's death. My father had long been anxious to see him again; my uncle could not resist his earnest request that he would come back, if only for a visit. It was indeed fortunate that he came when he did, or he would have been too late to see my father alive."

The boy, for he was little more, nearly broke down at the remembrance of his loss. After a short interval he resumed. " I know not what further misfortunes are in store for us. My father is dead, and Rama, who was my father's right-hand man, has deserted me. It is a solace to me to pour out my griefs to the Sahib, as the presence condescends to listen to this afflicted one. As I said, my father died a few weeks after my uncle's return. He had gone on a journey to Gopalpur in connection with some business matters, taking with him his two servants, Damodhar and Rama. But when halting in a temple at Koregaum he was seized with cholera, and died in a few hours. After performing his funeral rites the two retainers came back to me; but Rama refused to continue in my service, saying that he was heartbroken at my father's death. So he went away to his native place. I miss him terribly

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in the management of the fields; and what I shall do now, with neither him nor Damodhar to assist me, I cannot tell. I specially need advice with regard to obtaining some more land. My father had long wished to enlarge his farm; and by the death of a neighbour several survey numbers which adjoin mine are to be shortly put up for auction of the right of occupancy. I have money enough—for my good father had insured his life last year in the Occidental Life Assurance Company for five thousand rupees, and the claim has been paid. But the responsibility of such arrangements is great, and my experience is small.”

“ You have indeed a weight of care,” I said condolingly; “ but doubtless you will soon be able to pick up a confidential adviser in place of Rama. Be of good heart, and do not repine against the will of God. But now I should like to have a chat with your worthy uncle.”

The old gentleman was by no means inclined to be as communicative as his nephew. His business was not of this world. His sole duty was to meditate on the incarnations of Vishnu. His brother was happy in that his soul was liberated from its earthly tenement. Yes, his nephew was a good boy, but what could he advise him concerning his money and his land? All such things were illusion. The dacoity showed that the gods viewed the possession of property with displeasure. True, he had himself taken a stick which Damodhar had placed in his hands, and assisted in driving off the dacoits. But he acted on the spur of the moment without



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thinking; and such action was a hindrance to his religious observances and abstraction of the soul.

"Well, Imam Shah," I said to the Head Constable, "doubtless all that we have heard strengthens the case. It was, of course, known that Sitaram had a considerable sum of money in his house, and was about to negotiate for the purchase of land. In the course of the day we may hear of the arrest of the other three scoundrels. Keep the two prisoners here in custody. We need not send them to the magistrate till to-morrow morning. Meanwhile, I shall go back to the *jheel* and pick up a few duck."

Imam Shah saluted, and I rode off in the direction of my camp. But my thoughts were on other game than the ducks. As soon as I was well out of sight I turned off across country, and cantered away to Ranigunge. As I expected, I arrived at the hospital before the medical officer in charge had commenced his *post-mortem* examination. I scrutinised and put aside the clothes which the unfortunate Damodhar had worn, and then waited till the formal examination of the corpse was completed. The bullet was extracted, and handed over to me by the hospital assistant. By this time I was extremely hungry, as I had had nothing since my *chota hazri*, or morning tea. All that I could get was some *chupatties*—flat cakes of unleavened bread—and a bunch of plantains, to be washed down by some very unpalatable water. But a policeman in India cannot always expect delicate fare; and he is sometimes fortunate if he comes off so well as I

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did then. Comfortable as is my home in Surrey, I feel now and then that I should like once more to be munching chupatties and plantains in the shade of a banyan tree. After my *al-fresco* meal, I lit a pipe, and had a quiet think about the circumstances of the case. Wrapped in mystery it clearly was. Could I work out a clue and disentangle the thread; and, if so, by what means? I at length determined upon a plan of action. There was nothing to be gained by my returning to Rajapur that day. It would be sufficient if I were there in the early morning before the two men under arrest were sent off to the magistrate. By that time the other accused might have been found. So I made my way leisurely back to my camp, and then gave certain instructions.

Tired out with my exertions I went to bed early with a view to rising before daybreak. At early dawn I was on my way to Rajapur. The Head Constable met me on my arrival with a curious report.

"Sahib," he said, "there has been another crime committed. After dark yesterday evening there was a great shouting, and four or five men came chasing a Hindu mendicant, swearing that they would have his life. They gave him a number of blows, and at last knocked him down and left him senseless just outside Sitaram's door. A crowd quickly gathered, but no one had the courage to seize the men; and before I came up they had made themselves scarce. Had I been in time, the Sahib can be sure none of them would have escaped me. In the darkness it was hopeless to pursue them."

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“ And the mendicant,” I asked, “ where is he? ”

“ He was so knocked about, Sahib, that I dared not move him any distance, so I had him carried as gently as possible into Sitaram’s house, where he lay senseless all night. I have just heard that he seems coming to himself. Who he is no one knows.”

“ I will see him at once,” I replied, “ and by myself. Let everyone keep away.”

I found the mendicant lying on a blanket in the main room of the house, Sitaram bending over him. After exchanging a few words with Sitaram, I asked him to retire for a short time while I questioned the unfortunate stranger, who, I could see, was now able to give some account of himself. His story was of the utmost interest. “ Sitaram,” I called out, “ come in now, and bring your good uncle. I should like you to hear this poor man’s narrative. His is a pitiable case, and you may be able to help him. Sit by him for a few moments while I go and see if my horse is being properly attended to.”

The patel, or head man of the village, and a number of other persons were standing close by with Imam Shah. I called them up one by one, and asked them a single question. The answer, though not unexpected by me, was sufficiently startling. I went back to the house, and sat down near the wounded man, Sitaram and his uncle Ganpat standing close by. I filled and lit my pipe, and then said to the older man :

“ Now Luxaman, haven’t we had enough of this play-acting? Come, out with the whole story.

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There is not much that I don't know ; but it will be interesting to have it all from your own lips. Oh ! would you, you young viper ! " I shouted, as Sitaram proceeded to level a revolver at me. But before I could get at him the mendicant had seized him round the waist, and the bullet buried itself harmlessly in the roof.

" Arrest these two men," said I to the Head Constable, who had rushed in ; " arrest Sitaram and the gentleman who passed for his uncle, for the murder of Damodhar, and for attempting to murder me. And as for you, Imam Shah," I continued, when the handcuffs were securely on, " you son of a burnt father, you imbecile idiot, you to talk to me of your exertions, and your claims for promotion, and the confession obtained from Govind and Bala. Well, there will be a minute inquiry into that matter of the confession a little later on. Govind and Bala are to be released at once. You see that I have not thought it worth while to ask them even a single question. Now just look at that hole in the wall by which the bolt was unfastened. If you inspect it closely, can't you see that there are marks of a chisel inside as well as out? Why, I noticed that at the first glance, and though I did not at once see through the whole plot, yet it was clear that these good people were wholesale liars, and that they had made the hole themselves. What they said about recognising Govind and Bala was, of course, false. It was rather hard on the two prisoners to keep them under arrest all this time ; but to release them earlier would have thrown

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suspicion on my scheme of investigation. Now take their recognizances in the usual way, and let them go."

Imam Shah retired crestfallen to obey my orders, while I separately interviewed Sitaram and his father. It was now the turn of the older man to be communicative, and Sitaram would say never a word. The only light to be thrown upon the history of the case was the object of the journey when the imaginary death of Luxaman occurred. I was uncertain whether the whole plot was arranged before starting or not. Luxaman stated that the journey was undertaken purely on account of business; but the unexpected death of his servant Rama gave him the opportunity of carrying out the design which he had long meditated of defrauding the Life Assurance Company. He had deliberately insured his life with the intention of obtaining the money by a false certificate of death; but the exact means of doing so he had not decided on.

The whole story was now perfectly clear. The chisel marks inside the wall showed me that the dacoity was a bogus one. Realising this, I at once went off to the hospital to see if the wound by which Damodhar met his death corresponded with the account of the circumstances given by Sitaram. I found that the bullet was a revolver one, and also that the clothes smelt of gunpowder. The bullet was, therefore, not fired from Govind's gun, nor was it fired at a distance of four yards, but at close quarters. Some suspicion then formed itself in my mind that the murder hinged on the life insurance business; but how to prove it? This point was

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elucidated by my orderly Krishna, who successfully carried out my instructions, and gained admittance into the house for the night in the guise of a wounded mendicant. Some scraps of conversation which he overheard were of no great value, but twice he heard Sitaram address his *soi-disant* uncle as father. One difficulty remained. The uncle was said to have arrived some weeks before the reported death of Luxaman. A brief inquiry settled the point. Neither the patel nor any of the neighbours had seen the uncle before the Luxaman's death was announced; and the story of his previous arrival was an absolute fabrication. Thus, then, Rama died of cholera in a strange place, where neither he nor his master were known. The death certificate was made out in due form in the name of Luxaman, who went back to his home by night, and reappeared in the personage of his brother. The claim on the insurance company was duly paid, and everything was working satisfactorily. But the demands of Damodhar for larger and larger shares of the profits became so extortionate that the partners at length refused to give any more, upon which he threatened to expose the whole matter. They therefore, after making the hole in the wall, called him in upon some pretext, and Sitaram shot him with his revolver. The greater part of the spoil was restored to the Insurance Company, who were good enough to give me a handsome acknowledgment of my services in unearthing the fraud, and the miserable father and son paid the penalty of their crime on the gallows.

## THE PRIEST AND THE PARCHMENT.

It was the middle of October, one of the most trying months in India. The rains had ceased ; and the sun was blazing out, unrestrained by any mantle of cloud, to bring to maturity the crops of millet which should soon be ready for the reapers. After the enfeebling influences of the hot weather and the monsoon, it is only the prospect of the coming cold that enables one to endure the burning sun of October. It is a sickly month. The tanks and marshes begin to dry up, and therewith the fever season commences. One's self, one's friends, servants and subordinates, all take it in turns to succumb to this scourge of the East.

The regular camping season had not commenced ; but I was out after a gang of dacoits who had been giving considerable trouble. These Indian dacoities or gang robberies are the most difficult things to detect. The property stolen usually consists of cash which cannot be recognised, or ornaments of gold and silver, which are promptly melted down, and are thus useless as evidence. A police officer may know the names of men who make their livelihood by plundering in every direction. He may even be able to lay hands upon them ; but what then ? When caught, they were engaged in ploughing their fields, or other equally inoffensive occupations. Who is going to give evidence against them ? A search in their houses generally leads to nothing, for the

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stolen property is either at once sent to a distance, or else buried in a field until such time as the hue and cry may be over. Then the villagers who have been disturbed at dead of night by a band of armed men, and made to disgorge their valuables, are, even if they wish to do so, at considerable difficulty in recognising the offenders, who have painted their faces and otherwise disguised themselves. But even if they can identify certain persons as the robbers, what advantage is it to them to say so? If they do, they will in the first place be taken hither and thither by the police to attend searches in which their property may perchance be found. They will then be summoned before the magistrate to give evidence, and subsequently before the sessions judge, at the greatest possible inconvenience and loss of time and money. Then, as often happens, the Sessions Court does not consider their evidence sufficient for the conviction of the accused, and the dacoits are acquitted.

The next proceeding of these gentry is to set fire to the cottages or haystacks of those who have complained. The ordinary native is not imbued with any great amount of public spirit. It is not wonderful, then, that the people of any particular village which has been visited by dacoits should prefer to undergo their loss and be done with it, and either insist that they are unable to identify their assailants, or even combine to say that there has been no dacoity at all. It is not likely, they think, that their village will be entered again for a similar operation. Let other villages take their chance.



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As for any thought of the people turning out as one man, and capturing or driving off the dacoits, such an idea seldom enters their heads. On the few occasions when I have known it attempted, it has answered admirably; for the dacoits have not much pluck to sustain them if they are resisted. But these occasional bursts of courage on the part of the villagers are few and far between; and it is not wonderful that dacoities flourish exceedingly, and the police are driven to despair.

I used to find preventive measures the most efficacious; and by keeping armed police constantly on the patrol; and by sending up persons suspected of dacoity before the magistrates to be bound over for good behaviour, I generally managed to keep my district fairly quiet. It was my business to suppress the methods of my subordinates, founded on centuries of tradition—namely, to get hold of a suspected man and beat him till he confessed—but I must admit that, handicapped as we were by the law on one side, and the passive resistance of all concerned on the other, and censured by Government if our results were not successful, I was not without sympathy for their proceedings. I felt more inclined to go for witnesses who doggedly professed that they knew nothing about what I was certain they had seen, rather than for the accused, for a man is under no obligation to incriminate himself. But I look on a witness who feigns ignorance, in order to save himself trouble, as a cur who deserves the lash. With all these difficulties an Indian policeman's life is not altogether a happy one.

## THE PRIEST AND THE PARCHMENT.

Wearied out with a long tramp and listening to countless falsehoods, I was lying in a long chair in the verandah of a small district bungalow which I had made my temporary headquarters. It was late when I had got in, and it must have been past ten o'clock before I lit my after-dinner cigar. Pondering again and again on the dacoits and how to put a stop to their little games, I gradually dozed off in my chair, to awake with a start at hearing someone say, "Sahib, Sahib," beside me.

"Who is it?" I asked, not best pleased after my day's labours to be disturbed at such an hour.

"Sahib," was the reply. "I cannot tell you here. My business is most urgent. I must speak with the Sahib in absolute privacy. See," the stranger said, pointing to an orderly at the end of the verandah, "this is no place to tell my story. Will the Sahib come with me on to the road and hear his slave's petition?"

"Well," I said to myself, "I suppose this is part of the white man's burden. Talk of the 'sullen folk and wild'! Kipling might have put it a bit stronger. All right," I replied to the stranger: "Nothing will give me greater pleasure after tramping about all day than to get up now from a comfortable chair, and stand in the road and listen to your discourse. Come along."

The stranger was a tall, thin man, much of my own build. His caste-mark as well as his clean-cut features showed that he was a Brahmin, and of good position; though his clothes, which might have been those of the commonest mendicant, presented

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a striking contrast to his face and general appearance. Lighting a fresh cigar, I asked him to say what his errand might be.

"Sahib," he commenced, "forgive this humble one for disturbing the presence at this hour; but it is a matter of life and death, and I dared not come at an earlier time. Sahib, my name is Mahadew, and I am chief of the priests of the Temple of the Sacred Goddess Kali, at Halgiri, ten miles from here."

"I know the temple by repute," I replied, "but have never yet had an opportunity of seeing it. Well, proceed. What has brought you here? And if you are the priest of the Halgiri Temple, why do you not wear clothes less inappropriate to your position?"

In reply, he placed in my hand a *chapatti*, or cake of unleavened bread, and a piece of paper.

"The *chapatti*," said my visitor, "is an ordinary one in appearance, so it matters not that the Sahib cannot see it plainly in the darkness of the night. And as for the paper, it bears this mandate:— 'Bring the parchment to the Suttee-Stone by the grove below the temple at midnight on the seventh day of the dark half of Kartik. Let no one attend thee. Fail not.' "

"This is very mysterious," I said. "Does the paper bear any signature? Let me hear all that you can tell me. What is the parchment? But, firstly, why should the priest of the temple of Kali wear these clothes?"

"It were best not known, Sahib, that the priest

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of the sacred goddess was wandering about at night ; and by wearing this garb I was less likely to attract attention. But I must tell my story from the beginning."

"Proceed," I rejoined, my curiosity getting the better of my temporary annoyance at this nocturnal summons.

"Know that," continued the priest, whose manner betokened strong agitation, "the temple was erected by pious souls many hundreds of years ago. It was richly endowed by the Hindu rulers of the land, and it was famous far and wide for the wealth of its ornaments and jewels. When the Mussulmans brought most of the country under their rule, a portion of these hilly tracts still remained to Hindu Government. But a little under a century ago, Tippoo Sahib, the Governor of Mysore, who for years successfully defied you English, learnt of this temple. Wherever he went he carried fire and sword, and he specially loved to plunder our holy shrines, and destroy the graven images of our ancient gods and goddesses. He even forcibly converted the children of Bhawani and Indra to the faith of his false Prophet. So his ruffians entered the holy temple of Kali here at Halgiri, and robbed it of its treasures, which are said to have been worth fifteen lakhs of rupees. My ancestor, Wassudeo, was then chief priest of the temple. By the law of the goddess each chief priest chooses his successor ; and lest he should die suddenly without having time to nominate any of the brethren to his sacred office, he makes the appointment as

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soon as possible after his own installation. This selection is known to none other than the actual chief priest, and the brother whom he selects for the succession. On the death of a holy father, the priest elect notifies his right to the sacred office before a solemn conclave of the brethren assembled in the shrine of the deity. No one has ever dared, or would dare, to put forward a false claim, for fear of the anger of the dread goddess whom we worship.

“To his successor my ancestor Wassudeo imparted under the most solemn vow of silence this secret, that in a certain vault below the temple there was a parchment which was not to be read by anyone until the Hindu faith was securely re-established. Two men only at a time were to know of the existence of this parchment, the chief priest himself and his successor that should be. No one has ever seen this parchment.

“Now, since Wassudeo died there have been in succession seven chief priests, including myself who am here before the Sahib. Of these, three received a written message, such as I have shown the Sahib, directing them to give up the parchment. Each message was accompanied by a *chapatti*. None of the three dared to give up the parchment, and they took no notice of the message. The strange thing, Sahib, is that each of them died mysteriously within a short time of the receipt of the mandate. One was killed as he was walking along the hillside by a rock that rolled down on him. No one was seen setting the rock in motion; and it was supposed that it was loosened by the rains, and slid from its site

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by natural causes. Another was found stung to death by a cobra, with the cobra dead beside him; and it was thought that on finding himself bitten he had had time to trample on the snake before he died. The third was found dead in a quarry whence they dig stones for the repair of the temple. Now I have related all my story to the Sahib. What is this humble one to do? If I do not give up the parchment as ordered, I am in peril of my life. But how can I break my vow and give up the parchment? All men speak of the Sahib's wisdom. What does the protector of the poor advise?"

"This is indeed a strange tale," I said, after a short pause for reflection. "Of course I cannot get to the bottom of it all at once. But a few things are quite clear. There is no doubt that the existence of this parchment has been known from the first to others besides the priesthood; it may be to some secret society, or to a particular family, the members of which have handed down the tradition from one to another. I might also hazard a guess that these outsiders know more about the contents of the parchment than you do. I take it as pretty certain that if you disregard the summons you will be in the greatest danger of your life. But I very much doubt whether, if you took the parchment to the Suttee-Stone as directed, you would be at all certain even then to escape with your life. Now the mysterious mandate bids you be at the Stone on the seventh of the dark half of Kartik at midnight. If I am not mistaken, this is the third of Kartik; we have therefore four days before us. Now you

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have come to consult me, and I will do my best to help you. But you must put yourself absolutely under my orders, and obey unhesitatingly whatever I tell you. In the first place we must see this parchment, and learn what it contains. Bring it to me without fail to-morrow night."

The old priest nearly sank to the ground with terror at this command.

"How can I do this thing?" he stammered. "How can I break my vow? How can I risk the wrath of the goddess?"

"In the first place, O priest, you appear to have already infringed your vow by telling me of the existence of this parchment at all."

"It is true, Sahib; it is true. But how can I ask the Sahib for help without revealing the secret of the parchment? Surely, the goddess will forgive me for this action."

"Your sentiments do you credit," I replied. "If everyone who consulted me would tell me the whole truth it would save me a great deal of trouble. I think you may count upon the absolution of the deity. Kali cannot be pleased with the murder of her priests. And now look here. Let us understand each other plainly. You have already disobeyed your promise of secrecy to some extent, so you can, with an easy conscience, go a little further and produce the parchment. You will be justified by the reasons that you have already advanced. But there is a further consideration. What was your vow? Not to divulge the secret until the Hindu faith was firmly re-established. The disruption of that faith was due

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to the savagery of Tippoo Sahib. But under the blessings of British Government the faith has been securely re-established. Your vow says nothing about Hindu Government ; it only refers to the faith. So it seems to me that you are entirely at liberty to show me the parchment."

The priest appeared convinced by my arguments, though, perhaps, he had a lingering doubt that while the benign British Government placed restrictions on *Suttee* and a few other things, the Hindu faith was not quite so satisfactorily re-established as it might be. However, as what I said eminently coincided with his own convenience, he did not seem anxious to subject my logic to any severe critical test.

"The Sahib shall see the parchment at this time to-morrow night," he said at last. "May all be for the best under the Sahib's kindness!" With these words he made a profound salaam, and disappeared into the darkness; while I returned to my well-earned rest, wondering much what the *dénouement* of the old priest's strange story would be.

The next night I did not wait in my verandah, but strolled up and down the road until my friend appeared.

"Sahib," he said, without waiting for me to address him, "here is the parchment; but I understand not its hidden meaning. It is written in Sanskrit, and the characters are as clear as though they were traced yesterday. But what the signification may be I know not. The parchment contains five lines only in the form of a *Shloka* or sacred text. I have committed them to memory, and they run as follows," and he proceeded to repeat them.



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"I do not know Sanskrit," I rejoined when he had finished. "So please explain the lines to me in the vernacular of the district."

He proceeded to do so, and what he said may be expressed as follows:—

"To half of ten add double of two,  
From six above take twelve below;  
From north to east and south go true,  
Then onwards to the south go through,  
The falling stars spring into view."

"What an extraordinary rigmarole," I remarked, as I took out my note-book, and jotted down the lines as well as I could in the dark. "There must be some meaning, and it would seem a most important one, judging from the vow of secrecy enjoined, and by the attempts to obtain possession of the parchment. And you can throw no light on it at all? You can hazard no conjecture?"

"None," he replied in a tone which compelled belief.

"Well, stand still here," I said, "while I walk up and down for a short time and consider what is to be done. But give me this mystic parchment. You will be safer without it; and I guarantee that I shall not lose it."

Leaving the priest in the road, I thought the matter over from every possible point of view as I paced backwards and forwards. It was soon clear to me that without a local knowledge of the temple, and, perhaps, an interview with the sender of the letter and *chapatti*, I could not hope to discover what the mysterious puzzle might mean. I must therefore see the temple; and the meeting asked for by

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the stranger must be granted. Now, though I did not doubt the old priest's honesty, I very much doubted his courage. Would he venture out unattended to the Suttee-Stone at night? But both for the elucidation of the mystery, and for the apprehension of the man who would appear to belong to a society which had no scruples about taking life, that man must be met at the place and time chosen by himself. At last a delightful plan suggested itself to me.

"Look here," said I to the priest, as I went back to where I had left him, "these are my orders. I will go to Halgiri to-morrow and shoot some of the snipe that I have heard of there. I shall then take an opportunity of seeing your temple and the Suttee-Stone. If I meet you about the temple you will show no sign of having seen me before. Then on the third night I will be at the Suttee-Stone with the parchment. I know not how far your movements have been unobserved; and in case there should be spies upon us, I will not do what I had first thought of, and take the real parchment, but I will take a sham one, leaving the original under lock and key. Now you must leave out for me at a place near the temple, which I will notify to you to-morrow by dropping my gun there, the *puggree*, robe, and sandals that you would be wearing were it you who were to meet the person who is so anxious for the parchment. My personation of you, as we are much of the same build, will be sufficiently good to pass muster at night. Carry out my instructions to the letter, and the rest leave to me."

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"The resources of the Sahib are boundless," he replied. "May the kindness to this poor one be rewarded. Be it as the presence has determined."

He salaamed and departed, leaving me in a state of joyful excitement at the prospect of an adventure.

"Krishna," I said to my orderly, "wake up that lazy butler of mine and tell him to get me a peg. And to-morrow I am going to have a day with the snipe at Halgiri. You and three other sepoy's go on at five in the morning with my gun, and some cold breakfast for me in the tiffin basket; and arrange for beaters by the time that I arrive. After to-morrow we return to headquarters, as there seems no chance of arresting any more dacoits at present."

The next morning I made an excellent bag of snipe, and picked up a few quail; and then sat down with a good appetite to my breakfast under a tamarind tree, from which I had an uninterrupted view of the temple. Situated on a slight eminence, the building was a large and imposing one. Like most Hindu temples of Southern India, it consisted of a large hall or nave, of which the roof, by a succession of delicately chiselled terraces, cornices, and panels, with curiously carved figures in recessed niches, gradually rose to a pinnacle in the centre. At the distance of some ten paces from the main building was the shrine of the goddess, which none but the priesthood might enter. In appearance the shrine was a replica of the nave; but the dimensions were far smaller. It was united to the nave by what may be described as a cloister consisting of a roof

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carried by exquisitely sculptured columns. The whole building was of dark grey granite.

Breakfast completed and a pipe enjoyed, I walked up to the temple. Of course, the shrine was forbidden ground to me; but I knew that, as a rule, there was no objection to a European visiting the rest of the building. However, I took the precaution of sending a civil message by an orderly to ask any priest or official whom he might find for permission to view the temple. This was at once accorded. Impressive as was the exterior, I was almost overwhelmed by the beauty of the interior. It was entered by a porch of noble proportions. The roof consisted of a solid octagonal stone, nearly thirty feet in diameter, carved in the form of a beautiful lotus pendant, supported by eight sculptured pillars. The roof of the nave itself rested upon no fewer than sixty columns, carefully wrought in close-grained dark slate. The shafts were finely polished. The capitals were most delicately carved and wrought with bands each of a different design, including bead festoons, lozenges, flowers, scroll-work faces, prancing dragons, and dancing figures. The taste, care, and elaboration with which the design had been conceived and carried out were visible everywhere. The dimensions of the nave were about ninety feet in length by fifty in breadth. After enjoying at leisure the splendour of the architecture I passed on to the cloisters which led from the nave to the shrine. Through the carved iron gate which barred the way to this holy of holies I could dimly see the image of the terrible goddess by



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shudder run through me as I looked up at their contorted features, and the cavities which represented their eyes. I had quite forgotten the events which had led to my visiting the Halgiri temple, when they suddenly recalled themselves to my recollection by my wondering how the building faced. Glancing at the pocket compass which I always carried, I saw that the shrine pointed to the north-west, the corner of the nave to the right of the shrine being exactly north. Instantly my thoughts flew back to the mysterious parchment. "From north to east and south go true." What did it mean? Could there be any connection between the verses and the pillars of the temple? However, I could not prolong my visit any further without exciting remark. The plan of the nave with its sixty pillars was easy to remember, and I would puzzle it out when I had gone. It was now my business to determine the exact position of the Suttee-Stone, so that I might be able to find it in the dark. The temple was about three hundred yards from the road; and I could see what was obviously the Suttee-Stone close to a small grove of trees at two-thirds of the distance from the temple to the road. It lay in an exact line from that side of the nave which extended from the south in one corner to the west in the other. Thus, by commencing at the southern corner and passing on to the western, I had only to continue in the same direction for two hundred paces, and however dark it might be, I could count on arriving at the stone. There was a gentle declivity all the way with no bushes or other objects to interfere with

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one's progress. The only place for the old priest to leave his clothes for me to put on was at the corner between the shrine and the temple. On leaving the edifice, I took my gun from an orderly, and walking to the place which I had fixed upon, I made a feint of stumbling, and dropped the weapon. As I recovered myself I observed the priest steadily gazing at me. He drooped his eyelids for a moment as a sign that he understood.

There were now only two days before the expected adventure. I despatched my kit that night to a stage ten miles farther from Halgiri on the way to my headquarters. I proceeded there myself in the morning. This was the sixth day of the month Kartik; and the meeting was for the next day at midnight. I was now twenty miles away from Halgiri, and I had much to think out by way of arrangement. Meanwhile, I occupied myself in making a plan of the temple, of the sixty pillars, and trying to apply the lines on the parchment to the design.

"To half of ten add double of two"—that, of course, was a common native way of saying to five add four. The result was obviously nine. But how did that help me? And how, again, could I take twelve from six? And what did above and below refer to? For hours I scrutinised the plan in every way that I could think of. I felt sure that the enigma pointed to a particular pillar to which some mystery must be attached. But where to make a beginning? "Why, how simple, after all," I said to myself at last. "I must commence at the north.

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and go towards east and south, which I take it means south-east. This coincides with what I may call the right side of the temple. Then how many pillars in this direction? Is nine the right solution? No. I have it. Let me split up the initial instructions, and read them as referring severally to the two later injunctions. That may be it. Firstly, half of ten. I make a pencil mark at pillar number five on the right side of the chart. And then, if so far I am correct, I turn due south. From the pillar that I have tentatively selected as the first stage in the solution of the acrostic, the diagonal line of pillars runs exactly to the southernmost corner of the temple. Double of two. Just so; pillar number four in this line must be the repository of a secret that has cost some lives, and may cost more. Then from six above take twelve below. If I have discovered the correct place, it cannot mean that I have to move elsewhere. Above and below what? Why, of course, the ground. From a point six feet above the ground take another twelve feet below the first point. In other words, the place to be sought is six feet below the ground. But stay; what did the architect of the temple know of feet? The measurement is more probably calculated in cubits. This could only be verified by experiment. And if my guesswork turns out to be correct, what, in the name of all that is marvellous, are the falling stars? Seeing that no more light on the matter could be expected at present, I devoted the remainder of the day to office work.

At length the date fixed by the unknown stranger



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arrived ; and as I got up soon after daybreak, I felt myself quivering with excitement. I hardly know how I passed the morning and afternoon. About five o'clock carts were collected, ostensibly for the removal of my kit to headquarters. I then called my favourite orderly Krishna. " Krishna," I said, " I am not going to send off my kit to-night. Everything remains here. Say nothing to the cartmen at present. I am going back to Halgiri. Absolute secrecy is required. You and the three other orderlies who went with me there the other day will accompany me. You must start in an hour's time. The distance is twenty miles ; and it will take you about six hours to walk there. Do not wear white clothes ; but put on something dark that will not show at night. I shall have some dinner at six o'clock, and afterwards follow you on my bicycle, picking you up about half way to Halgiri. You will see my lamp. Give a whistle as I come up, and I shall know who you are. The rest of the way I shall walk with you. Carry, for me to put on, a *puggree* and some native clothes, so that I shall not attract any attention. Each man will take a bull's-eye lantern, but will not light it until I join you ; also a stout stick and a pair of handcuffs. Further orders I will give you later on."

It was about half-past eight when I heard a low whistle. I dismounted from my bicycle, put out the lamp, and placed the machine behind some bushes where it was not likely to be interfered with. I then called my men into the middle of a field and gave them my last instructions.

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“Look here,” I said, “you have to thoroughly understand now what I want done when we reach Halgiri—for not a word is to be spoken on the road, or after arrival, until I give you leave. We shall get to Halgiri soon after eleven. You know the Suttee-Stone about a hundred yards from the road. On arrival at Halgiri two of you will take up a position about fifty paces from the stone on one side, and two of you at the same distance on the other. You will lie down, and keep absolutely still; and let your eyes and ears be open as wide as you know how. At midnight two persons will meet at that stone. Directly you hear a whistle, rush up as fast as you can. One of the persons will be the priest of the temple. The other, whom I cannot describe, is to be secured at once. Now light your lanterns, close them carefully, and conceal them under your clothes; you will want them when you hear the whistle.”

On we trudged through the darkness in absolute silence. At the first milestone that we came to, after seeing that no one but ourselves was near, I struck a match, and read seventy-three. I knew that milestone number eighty-three was close to the temple, so by counting the stones I could exactly fix our position. We passed a few bullock carts crawling along, with their drivers either half or altogether asleep; but there was no one who accosted us. On our arrival the orderlies crept off on their hands and knees in the directions assigned to them, while I adopted the same means of progression to the temple. I found the priest's clothes in the corner that I had arranged. I put them on

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as best I could, and then crouched down to await the hour of midnight. I had taken the precaution of rubbing some phosphorus on the hands of my watch, so I had no difficulty in knowing the time. It was a peculiarly dark night. Hardly a star was able to pierce the clouds. A chill wind blew off the marshes and rice-swamps. The situation was so weird and uncanny that I felt a sickening sensation at the heart; and an almost uncontrollable inclination to shout out. At last the period of my vigil, which seemed as if it would last for ever, came to an end. I rose up, and walking at my full height, with the sham parchment in my hand, proceeded slowly to the Suttee-Stone. On arriving there, I stood still for a few minutes, knowing that with my white robes I could easily be seen by anyone a few paces off. That the sender of the *chapatti* would come I did not doubt; but whence and in what form was a matter of utter uncertainty. Suddenly, guided by a flash of instinct rather than any definite train of thought, I turned round, with an idea that I might be attacked in the back. The motion was my salvation; I was just in time to see a dark figure within a pace of me, his hand raised to strike.

"Halt," I shouted, covering him with my revolver, "drop that weapon, and hold your hands above your head!" while I lost no time in blowing my whistle. The stranger, amazed at hearing my voice, which he could easily tell was not that of the priest, did as he was commanded, while my orderlies rushed up with their lanterns thrown open. It was all over in an instant. The stranger was handcuffed

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and secured, and a knife that he had dropped was seized. "Have you any confederate?" I asked.

"I am alone, curse you, whoever you are," was his reply. And it appeared to be true, for the most diligent search with the bulls'-eyes revealed the presence of no accomplice.

My next proceeding was to take one of the lanterns, and carefully examine our prisoner.

"What is the scale of wages in these parts for a skilled mason?" I asked.

"Eight annas a day," was the curt reply.

"There you are wrong," I said. "I have been making inquiries, and find that for the last year it has been ten annas. And what is the rate at Mangalore?"

"Six annas only. But how do you know that I am a mason, and from Mangalore?" he asked in astonishment.

"Well, my friend, I rather suspected that it would be a mason who was concerned in this little business, more especially one accustomed to fine and delicate work. Look at your hands, thin and long, the skin on the finger-tips slightly worn by contact with stones, and the fingers somewhat turned back at the upper joints. The palm of the right hand is polished by the constant pressure of the handle of the chisel. You are a stranger to Halgiri or you would have known the rates of wages. Your pronunciation of Kanarese is that of the coast, not of the hills; and as Mangalore is the nearest town on the coast, it was a probable deduction that you came from there. Having arrived at this conclusion, I can

go a little further. When Tippoo plundered this temple an ancestor of yours was called in secretly to do some mason's work. He was placed under vows of implicit silence. During his lifetime he respected those vows; but on his death-bed he imparted something of the secret. Not all of it, for in that case you would not have needed the parchment to guide you in your search; but enough to place sufficient temptation in your way to make you risk your life at the hands of men and your eternal salvation through the wrath of the goddess Kali. There is also a matter of the strange deaths of certain priests."

"Are you a man or a devil?" he ejaculated after a short pause.

"A mere man, and, as you can see, an Englishman," said I, taking off my *puggree*. "And now perhaps, as I have told you so much about yourself, you will tell me a little more. In the first place, what is your name, and in the next, what information do you expect from the parchment?"

"My name is Ramana, the son of Basapa. When my ancestor, as the Sahib divined, revealed the secret, he had received the dread summons of Yama, the god of the unseen world. The message that was handed down to my father and to me was that whichever of his descendants had the courage to brave the priesthood and the wrath of the goddess, would discover something hidden in the temple which would make the finder richer than an emperor, and that the key to the position was written down in a parchment which lay in the possession of the chief priest for the time being. That priest was

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under the most sacred vow never to deliver up the parchment; and whoever ventured to attempt to obtain it must not hesitate to take the priest's life. He would have said more, and possibly explained what it was that was concealed, and in what part of the temple, but he breathed his last without another word. The Sahib has referred to the end of certain priests. What should I say? That is a thing of past days. If a man sent a message, and it were not heeded, shall not his anger arise? Yea, his purpose may thus be accomplished. We of this country can bide our time. If what we desire come not to the father, it can come to the son; and the thing is one and the same. See, this priest Mahadew had learnt somewhat, and now we have the parchment."

So this precious scoundrel had the presumption to think that he had a claim to the parchment, and the secret that lay behind it! However, as a mason he would be useful to me at present. So taking my friend's knife, I made my men lead him into the temple. A number of priests roused by the noise, but who had been too frightened to leave the sacred precincts, stood in the cloisters between the nave and the shrine.

"Now," I said to Mahadew, "there is no chance of a bed to-night, so we will see this business through at once. Get all the lights that you can, and follow me."

Torches and lamps were soon produced by the astonished throng. Taking up a position at the northernmost corner, I bade Mahadew read out the parchment.

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"Who can explain this?" I asked when he had finished. "No one?" I continued, as each looked helplessly at the other. "Then you must trust to my interpretation. We start from the north, and count half of ten or five pillars to the south-east. Next," I continued, as we reached the pillar, "we turn south, and count double of two. Here we are at number four."

Before I could say another word, Ramana, pinioned as he was, sprang forward, his eyes gleaming with excitement.

"Look, look!" he cried. "The joints of the stones in this pillar are quite different from all the others. Quick, loose me, and give me my knife."

I gave a sign, and this was done. As he said, there was a marked difference between this and the other pillars. The jointing between the stones was considerably broader. Ramana tapped the joint with his knife, then inserted the blade, and the cement readily came away. He removed the jointing from both above and below the third stone from the base, and then pushed it. The stone yielded slightly to his pressure.

"Look, look!" he said; "it moves. Let someone help me!"

I and a stalwart young priest applied our full strength to the stone. It had not been cemented to its fellows, and between it and the stones above and below there was a loose rubble of dry earth. Without any great difficulty we slid the stone from its position, and laid it on the ground. Testing the stone above the aperture thus made, I found that



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it was securely attached to the upper portion of the pillar, which was now suspended from the roof, without any support from below. There were now two stones above the level of the ground, each about a foot in height. These we removed; and level with the ground we came upon a circular slab, with an iron ring embedded in the centre. The excitement was now intense. I first seized the ring and tried to raise the slab, but it would not stir. Nor could anyone else move it; and we had to wait in suspense until a priest fetched an iron bar, which was passed through the ring, and used as a lever. At last the slab showed signs of yielding to the force that was thus applied to it; and suddenly it came out with a jerk, and was placed on one side. Seizing a lamp, I held it over the aperture, and looked below. I could see that there was a well-like cavity, just broad enough to admit of a man going down; and on one side were rings let into the wall by which to ascend or descend. The vault seemed about nine or ten feet deep. But what was this mysterious radiancy, flashing and gleaming from below? Cerrucations of light darted hither and thither with dazzling effulgence. Gazing at the marvellous sight, I at last realised that the lustre scintillated from four starlike clusters of the finest brilliants. "Starlike!" I repeated to myself. Why, this is the verse of the Shloka: "The falling stars come into view."

Telling an orderly to hold a light over me, I descended into the well. The magnificent jewels reposed in a metal saucer beside which stood an earthen vase. Taking up the jewels, I saw that each

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was fashioned in the shape of an eye; and when I remembered the hideous statues of the gods by the shrine of the temple, I at once grasped that these were the eyes that had once rested in the cavities which now formed the orbs. The earthen vase contained necklaces of priceless value. Altogether it seems that the priest of Tippoo's time had been fairly astute when that grasping Sultan had visited the famous shrine.

Here my story ends.

The finding of the jewels was reported to Government in accordance with the Treasure-trove Act; but the guardians of the temple were allowed to retain the whole of the property. On a certain day a ceremony was held before a vast throng, for the chief priest to restore to their place the glorious eyes of the hideous idols.

As for Ramana, the part that he had played or intended to play sank into insignificance as compared with the final act in the drama. There was no one except myself to give evidence that he had attempted any murderous attack upon me; and, after all, it concerned myself as a private individual only. He was unaware that I was a police officer. I therefore felt myself at liberty to let him go with a warning, and I have since heard that he was doing an excellent business as a builder and contractor.

## THE SIN OF WITCHCRAFT.

THE average native of India is one of the most superstitious of mortals. Magic and the evil eye are to him vivid and all-pervading actualities. Sickness and misfortune are commonly believed to be due to the supernatural agency of demons and evil spirits. Cholera and smallpox have been personified, and elevated to the rank of goddesses. Some extraordinary rumour or other is generally flying about the country; and the more monstrous it is the more implicitly is it believed. In the time of Lord Auckland the hill tribes at Simla were terror-stricken on being told that the blood of their people was needed to restore the Governor-General to health; and most of them ran away and hid in the jungles to avoid the fate which they anticipated. Shortly after a police corps was first organised out of the wild tribe of Bhils, a rumour spread amongst them that the object of Government was to form them all into a line, and with one blow exterminate their race. The newly raised corps promptly scattered to the four winds. These people also, like the hill tribes of Simla, believed that their blood was highly esteemed as medicine by their English conquerors. Before the Mutiny it was currently reported that Government had mixed bone-dust with all the flour for sale in the grain markets in order to destroy the caste of the Hindoos. In the "Fate of Abdulla" I have referred to the popular notion

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that no great engineering work can be completed without a human sacrifice to the gods. I find in my notebook an account of another case of human sacrifice, this time in connection with witchcraft. This is the only instance in which I had any personal experience of that extraordinary delusion, although it is by no means uncommon; and cases are every now and then reported.

One year, at the beginning of the cold weather, I suddenly received orders of transfer to the wild and isolated district of Shrigonda, which borders on the highlands of Central India. It was not at all pleasant to have to leave the charming station at which I had lived for several years, with its club, officers' mess, racecourse, and polo ground; to say nothing of breaking up my nicely furnished bungalow, and disposing of my beautiful garden. I did not at all relish the idea of saying good-bye to all my cheery friends and neighbours, to go to a ghastly place where I should generally have to be contented with my own society. However, needs must when one gets his marching orders in India; and in a very few days the things that I was taking with me were despatched, and the rest sold. There was one consolation which went a long way to counterbalance the drawbacks of the transfer; and that was that Shrigonda was a magnificent part of the country for big game. Various good sportsmen of my old station promised to make the long journey to my new sphere of action in the next hot weather, and try their luck at tiger shooting.

Beyond the shikar, I cannot say that Shrigonda

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had anything to recommend it. My residence was a hateful little house, without a vestige of a garden, stuck away all by itself at a distance of forty miles from the station where the other district officers resided. A considerable portion of the population at large, as also of my police force, was composed of Bhils. These curious people had one good trait in their character, and that was their devotion to sport. They were indefatigable at tracking, stalking, and marking down tigers and other denizens of the jungle. They were good shots with a rifle, and they would even bring down a tiger with their bows and arrows. The Bhils are an aboriginal tribe which has, to some extent, been absorbed in the outskirts of Hindooism. They had never taken at all kindly to civilisation. They were by hereditary instinct thieves and robbers; and though by allotting them lands rent free, and advancing money for seed and cattle, the Government had induced many of them to settle down as small farmers, yet their heart was not in their new life; and again and again large bodies would desert their holdings and retire to their ancestral haunts in the depths of the jungle. There they would spend their time in slaying wild beasts, and making raids upon the farmsteads of their more civilised neighbours. The malaria of the forests, coupled with their universal addiction to strong drink, from generation to generation had stunted both their forms and their intellects. Their superstition beat anything that I had come across before. On the whole, they made better policemen than might have been expected. They were very

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fair detectives, for the excitement of tracking a man was to some extent identical with that of tracking a beast; while in such ways as guarding a treasury, or escorting Government treasure along the country tracks, they were perfectly trustworthy. But, as a rule, they were incorrigibly lazy and careless; and to make them the least smart or proud of their appearance was quite impossible.

It happened that on the second day after I had taken charge of my new appointment, I was sitting in my office engrossed in the usual reports, diaries, and returns relating to burglaries, robberies, and the discipline of my police force. The latter category might rather be called the indiscipline of the force, as cases of refusal to do duty and absence without leave were incessant. What a change, I was reflecting, from my last district, where I had left everything in perfect order! There are times when, in the humdrum existence of English country life, or in the commonplace atmosphere of my club in Pall Mall, I sigh for the old Indian days so full of life and incident; but, in spite of its big game, I never feel a shade of regret for the weary time that I passed in Shrigonda. Fortunately, perhaps, the work was so heavy that I had little time for worrying over the loneliness and the absence of all civilised comforts. It was nearly time for closing office on the day of which I am speaking, when the orderly on duty informed me that an elderly Brahman desired an interview with me. Not sorry for any interruption to the wearisome reiteration of reports about neglect of duty, I ordered him to be brought

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in at once. In accordance with my usual custom I dismissed my clerks, and saw the visitor himself.

Brahmans are generally of clean-cut features, intellectual expression, and some air of dignity. This old man was quite an exception. His appearance was singularly unpleasant, not to say repulsive. He struck me as cruel, unscrupulous, and cunning. He was probably sixty years of age, but he looked older; and his wrinkled and bloated countenance was suggestive of a familiarity with something stronger than milk and water.

“Sahib,” he said, without either salaaming or waiting for me to address him, “it is a matter of eight hundred rupees. I want justice from the *Sirkar*.”

“Well,” I replied, “explain what it is all about. What is your name, and from whom do you want eight hundred rupees?”

“My name is Vishvanath,” the old man answered. “I live at Parbuttapore, where I have some land; and I also do business as a money-lender. My wife and child are dead. I intended to marry again. Some time passed away without any arrangements for this being completed. At last—it may be some two years ago—an agreement was made with one Vinayak, whose house is at Jadeshpore, that his daughter, Gunga, should be given to me to marry. This man Vinayak is a man without honour. He has cheated me; and the *Sirkar* must do me justice. Time after time he deferred the marriage ceremony on account of deaths in his family and other excuses; as if the deaths of his relations



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mattered to me, when the only thing that I wanted was his daughter? Then he represented that he was a poor man, and had many losses; and insisted that I must pay him well for his daughter's hand. Now, Sahib, I am a just man, and wish to pay no one less or more than is his due. Knowing that the girl was fair to look upon, I made no objection when he named the sum of five hundred rupees. Then he demanded that three hundred rupees should be paid to him in advance. To this also I consented; and after some days this large amount was paid to him. The Sahib knows that with us all these things are done by an agent, and not personally or by letter. Therefore in the process of negotiations much time elapsed. Again this Vinayak increased his demands; and not to make too long a story of it, the date for the ceremony was finally fixed for this very month, and I agreed to increase the sum which he was to receive for his daughter to eight hundred rupees. The whole amount was actually paid over to him; and I have incurred many other expenses in connection with the proposed marriage. This snake had sworn to break off the whole arrangement if I did not accede to his terms. I was afraid of the scandal that there would be—for all knew of my intended marriage—if after all it was not solemnised, so I agreed. And now his daughter has been killed, and he refuses to return the money. Sahib, I *must* have that money. The Huzur *must* recover it for me. There can never be such tyranny permitted under the British *raj*."

The chief things that impressed me while listen-

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ing to the narration were the horror of the idea of this dreadful-looking old man marrying a little girl, as, of course, she must have been, with the prospect of his dying and leaving her at an early age condemned to perpetual widowhood, and then his total want of concern for her death, which appeared to have been a violent one. All that he wanted was his wretched money. Of course, the recovery of his money had nothing to do with the Police. But before telling him so, I was anxious to learn more about the death of Gunga; and if, as it seemed, she had been murdered, whether the crime had been detected.

"How was the girl killed?" I asked. "Was it on account of the ornaments? And has anyone been arrested? When did her death occur?"

"The Bhil people killed her, I am told; and I hear that some are under trial. It was during the feast of *Diwali*, not a moon ago. But the Sahib will at once send for this Vinayak and make him return my money under pain of imprisonment."

"But why was she killed?" I repeated, disgusted with the old wretch's insistence upon his rupees.

"Who shall say what the Bhils will do, and for what reason? But there was some talk of magic and a wizard. The Sahib's police will know about the matter."

"Magic and a wizard!" I said to myself. "Here promises an experience. I must learn all about this."

Bidding Vishvanath sit down outside while I

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considered his complaint, I rang the bell on my table, and directed the orderly who responded to call my head clerk.

“What is this case about a Brahman girl, called Gunga, being killed by Bhils in connection with something about magic?”

“I will lay before your honour the papers in the case,” replied the clerk, an educated Brahman from Poona, who had a supreme contempt for Shrigonda and everything connected with it. “This is an excessively uncivilised country. The springs of learning have not yet overflowed it. These aborigines do not resist the temptation of temporising with unclean spirits. This case is of horrible and nauseous nature. The trial comes on before the Sessions Court on 23rd instant. Much interest is excited in a civil station. I will produce the papers relating to the deplorable circumstances.”

The papers when produced were, I saw at a glance, very lengthy. On the chance of my finding it expedient to ask Vishvanath any questions on the matter, I asked him to come again in the morning, when he should have an answer to his application. I then threw myself into a long verandah chair, and with the accompaniment of a cigar I proceeded to peruse the case-papers.

The story that they contained was indeed a gruesome one. The village of Jadeshpore was some miles from any road, and only approached by a *nullah* which served as a track in the dry weather, and was a watercourse in the rains. On one side were fertile fields of cotton, and on the other a

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dense forest. The population consisted mainly of low-caste Hindoo cultivators, a few Mohammedans, and some Bhils who lived on the produce of the forest and a few scanty scraps of cultivation. There was one family only of Brahmans, which consisted of Vinayak, from whom Vishvanath sought to recover the sum of eight hundred rupees, his wife Radha, and their two children, Gunga, aged twelve, who had been murdered, and a son, Babaji, aged ten. In one of the Bhil cabins there lived a man, named Timma, his wife Moni, and Timma's brother, Rupa, who had a wife, named Kalsi. The latter couple had several children, but Timma and Moni were without issue. Besides these inmates of the household, there was a very old woman, named Kirpi, the mother of Timma and Rupa.

On the third evening of the *Diwali* Vinayak had gone off to some relations at Ramnugger, twenty miles away, travelling in his cart, drawn by one bullock, which he drove himself. In a small village like Jadeshpore there was, of course, not much display for the *Diwali*; but a few lamps were lit, and after Vinayak's departure his two children strolled about to see the illuminations, such as they were. They were met by Kalsi, the wife of Rupa, who greeted them and asked them to come and see a stag which her husband had killed in the jungle with his bow and arrow. When they arrived at the Bhil's cottage there was no stag to be seen. Kalsi said it was a little farther on, and persuaded Gunga to come with her, telling Babaji that he might wait at the hut till they returned. Babaji waited for a long

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time ; but as his sister did not come back he became frightened and went home. When asked by his mother, Radha, where Gunga was, he was afraid to say that they had been to the Bhil's, and said that she was just coming in. However, after some time Radha became anxious, and forced the boy to say where he had left his sister. The only other person in the house was an old servant named Suddoo, and Radha at once sent him off to Timma's house. Suddoo did not reappear until after midnight, Radha being by then in a state of uncontrollable excitement. On his return Suddoo was for some time speechless with terror. He at last managed to gasp out the following story :—

He had found the Bhil's hut deserted. He had made inquiries at one or two other houses at some little distance off, but nothing was known. He was wondering what to do when he noticed the flicker of a flame in the forest, and thought it advisable to see what this might be. He was of a very timid disposition, and he approached the flame slowly and cautiously. After proceeding about two furlongs, he came in view of the fire, and concealing himself in some bushes he witnessed a most appalling sight. The unfortunate Gunga was lying bound on the ground, while Timma and Rupa with their wives and the old crone Kirpi were dancing round, gesticulating wildly, and a low-caste chamar, or leather worker, named Durga, was sitting down blowing a flute. A small cauldron of water was seething on the fire. Suddoo was too terrified and horror-stricken to move. After some time Durga looked at the



"HE WITNESSED A MOST APPALLING SIGHT"



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cauldron, and made a signal, upon which Timma cut the throat of Gunga and let the blood flow into the cauldron. Durga then repeated what appeared to be some mystical incantations, in which Suddoo caught the words, "Great goddess, accept this sacrifice, and let thy slave bear a child."

Unable to endure more, Suddoo fainted away. On recovering his senses the Bhils were gone. The fire was still smouldering. He managed, he scarcely knew how, to retrace his steps to his master's house and relate his frightful experience. Horror-stricken as the unfortunate Radha was at the awful story, she did not lose her self-control or presence of mind. She instantly sent for the patel or village headman, and arranged with him for despatching a man on a pony, first to her husband at Ramnugger, and then to the nearest police station. This done, the patel and some villagers went to search the house of Timma, and Radha insisted on accompanying them, though nothing would induce the cowardly Suddoo to leave Vinayak's house. Timma and his brother were both absent from their hut, but their wives and their aged mother were found fast asleep. On being aroused—an operation which took a suspiciously long time—they were at once charged with the offence and threatened with all the penalties of the law. The two younger women absolutely refused to admit the truth of the charge. Kalsi denied that she had spoken to Gunga at all. Both wives said that their husbands had gone away for hunting in the afternoon, and that they had not seen them since. Old Kirpi, however, appeared to be of a



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more yielding temperament; and when advised by the patel that the only chance of escaping the utmost punishment of the law for them all was to make a full confession, she consented to speak out, but said that she was weary and confused, and begged to be allowed to wait till the officer came from the police station. Nothing incriminating was at first found, but suddenly Radha stooped down and picked up two copper coins that had evidently been subjected to the action of fire.

“Look!” she ejaculated. “See these burnt pice! What more proof is wanted? Do not these evil ones always use heated pice to burn magic marks on the bodies of their victims? That is how they propitiate their evil deities.”

Early in the morning the place where the incantation and murder had taken place was visited, but beyond the remains of the fire nothing was found. In the course of the day Vinayak and the Police Chief Constable arrived, and investigations proceeded. The body of the wretched Gunga was never discovered, though the jungle was searched for miles, and it was supposed that the Bhils, who can walk twenty miles in a night, had concealed it at a long distance.

Durga, the chamar, was arrested the same day. He was quietly working in his house. He maintained a dogged silence. Evidence was obtained that Timma and his wife Moni had bitterly felt the want of offspring, that Moni had twice made pilgrimage to a distant shrine of the goddess Lakshmi in order to be granted a child, but with no result;

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that Timma and Rupa were desperate characters, and had each been sentenced, time after time, for thefts and violent crimes; that on more than one of these occasions Vinayak had been the complainant, and that, consequently, they bore him bitter enmity; that it was a common superstition among the Bhils that a childless woman would become a mother if she were bathed with water in which was infused the blood of a Brahman child; that Durga lived alone, and was currently reported to be a wizard, and that once, when a certain man offended him, that man's cow died.

On the arrival of the Chief Constable that officer at once charged Kirpi and the two younger women with the crime, and advised them in their own interest to make a clean breast of the matter. Moni and Kalsi professed their absolute innocence; but Kirpi made a full confession, saying that it was she who had suggested the sacrifice of Gunga on the third night of *Diwali*, which was the most propitious time for performing the ceremony. She insisted that she alone was responsible for what had been done, for her sons were bound to carry out the wishes of their aged mother. Kirpi was made Queen's evidence; and Kalsi and Moni were arrested. A few days later Timma and Rupa returned to their house, and were at once taken into custody by some police who were in readiness. They, like their wives and Durga, asserted their innocence. The case was fixed for hearing in the Sessions Court in a week's time.

I was fascinated with the horror of this amazing

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tragedy, and determined to attend the trial at the Sessions Court. Meanwhile, I was curious to learn a little more about the details of Vinayak's money transactions with Vishvanath, and the hindrances put forward to the projected marriage. I wished also to visit the scene of the crime. The next morning, therefore, when Vishvanath turned up, I told him to return to Parbuttipore, and I would inquire into his complaint. At Jadeshpore I found that Vinayak and his wife were just starting on their journey to the Sessions Court. They were overwhelmed with their misfortune, and were reluctant to speak about their unhappy daughter's marriage, or, indeed, any other subject. Before returning to my bungalow at Shrigonda, I paid a flying visit to the house of Vishvanath at Parbuttipore. I explained to him that the recovery of his money did not concern the police, and suggested that he should file a suit for the amount in the Civil Court. I stayed a couple of days in my bungalow, and then rode to the Civil Headquarter Station of the district, halting half-way at a rest-house for the night.

The witchcraft case, by which name the murder of Gunga was commonly spoken of, had created intense excitement. The Sessions Court was crowded with natives; and a fair sprinkling of Europeans, including some ladies, attended. The circumstances were first related by the Public Prosecutor in an admirably clear and concise narrative. The witnesses gave their evidence in precisely the identical terms in which they had made their original statements to the police, though both

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the father and the mother of the murdered Gunga were so overwhelmed with emotion that it was with some difficulty that their words could be heard. The little boy Babaji, however, was quite free from agitation as he stated how, on their father's departure, his sister and himself had slipped off to see the *Diwali* illuminations, and had been enticed away by Kalsi. The horror culminated when Kirpi was conducted into the witness box, and apparently without the slightest compunction reeled off her terrible confession. She explained how the heated coins had been used to brand the victim before she was dead, this being an all-important part of the ceremony. Only when she was told that her examination was over, and that she might step down, did she show any signs of emotion. She then made a piteous appeal to the Court for mercy for her sons and their wives and Durga, insisting that she alone was responsible, and that her death should be expiation for all. The prisoners seemed all the time lost in hopeless despair, and displayed no interest in the proceedings. Beyond protesting their innocence, they made no defence. What defence had they to make?

The second day of the trial was drawing to a close, and the court was packed with people waiting to hear the sentence. There was no jury, the case being tried by the Judge with the assistance of two native assessors. The Judge in a few words addressed these gentlemen, and asked their opinion.

"Guilty," was the immediate reply of both.

At this moment a note was put into my hand.

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I rose and addressed the Court, and begged permission to call one more witness. The Judge was exceedingly surprised, and replied that my request was so unusual at this stage of the proceedings that he must ask me to explain my reason. I tore a page out of my pocket-book, scribbled a few words, and handed the paper to him. He bowed his head in token of assent. I stepped to the door of the court, the assembled throng watching me with astonishment, and walking to the witness box I placed therein a young girl.

"This, sir," I said, "is Gunga, daughter of Vinayak, who is falsely alleged to have been murdered. I beg the Court's sanction to arrest and prosecute all the witnesses on a charge of the most abominable conspiracy."

The audience first looked on in amazed silence, and then, headed by the Europeans, burst into a roar of applause, which the Judge had considerable difficulty in silencing. Meanwhile Gunga had caught sight of her parents and her brother, and joyfully ran to join them.

"Put Vinayak into the witness-box," said the Judge in a stern voice. "Is this your daughter Gunga?" he continued, when Vinayak had taken his place.

"It is," was the hoarse reply.

Radha, Suddoo, and Babaji gave the same evidence as to the identity of Gunga.

"Release the accused at once," ordered the Judge. "The witnesses Vinayak, Radha, and Suddoo to be taken to the jail, and Babaji, though

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he may be too young to be prosecuted, to go with them for the present."

As for myself, before I knew where I was I found myself outside the court in the midst of an excited knot of Europeans, all asking me different questions at once. As soon as I could get a hearing I represented that I could satisfy their curiosity much better in a more secluded place. So we adjourned to the Club, where they formed an audience round me and vociferously bade me "tell them all about it."

"Well," I said, "in the first place I am a confirmed sceptic, and never believe any story until I have thoroughly tested it. In this instance there was one most suspicious point that attracted my attention from the first. Though I have never personally come across a case of human sacrifice of this nature, yet I have made notes from the records of some half a dozen. In each of them the child murdered was a boy. Why, in this case, should it be a girl, especially when a boy was available? Had she really been killed? Aversion to the contemplated marriage with Vishvanath might have furnished a strong motive for causing the disappearance of the girl. The crafty Vinayak had played with Vishvanath as long as he could, actually getting the large sum of eight hundred rupees out of him before the nuptials; and he probably intended to clear out with his family to some distant part of the country. He was in poor circumstances, and may have thought that with the capital he had thus obtained he could make an advantageous start else-

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where. I presume that he had himself desired the match, in spite of the age and personal disadvantages of the suitor ; but it is a reasonable guess that his wife and daughter had heard of these drawbacks, and that their opposition to the marriage was too strong for him to resist. So, as he could not obtain the money by the actual celebration of the marriage, he had to devise some plan to get hold of it without carrying out his part of the contract. He would, therefore, pretend that his daughter was dead, secrete her for a while, and then quietly remove her. Then there was his long-standing feud with Timma and Rupa. Excellent idea ! He would, in deceiving Vishvanath, work out his revenge on them ! If he concocted an ordinary story of his daughter being killed for the sake of her ornaments, he might run the risk of some flaw being detected in his narrative ; but he would not unnaturally think that if he conceived a really artistic tragedy, such as he finally elaborated, the attention of all concerned would be so concentrated on the horrors of the incident that no suspicion of its truth would occur to anyone.

“ This was the hypothesis that gradually evolved itself in my mind. I might be wrong, but it was very necessary to carefully test it. Vinayak had gone off just before the alleged murder of Gunga. For what purpose ? That point had been entirely neglected. If my suspicion was correct, where would he dispose of his daughter ? Presumably with the only relations he possessed in that part of the country ; and it was to their village that he had gone.

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Well, ostensibly with the purpose of visiting Vishvanath at Parbuttipore I rode round by Ramnugger, went to his relations' house, and ordered them instantly to produce Gunga. It was, after all, only a shot, but it was a correct one. The people were too astonished to refuse; and they led me into a poky back room; where the girl was sitting on the ground. The only other point that needs referring to is the confession of Kirpi. There is nothing very unusual in this. The poor old soul thought that the case against her sons, innocent as they were, was so strong as to be practically hopeless, and the one chance of saving their lives was by sacrificing hers on their behalf by taking all the blame on herself. She was not to know that the law would not hold that her sons were blameless because it was her behests that they were carrying out. I feel the greatest admiration for this noble-minded woman. That is all the story," I said in conclusion.



## THE STOLEN DESPATCH.

ONE cold season found me wearied out with excess of work, and much reduced by persistent attacks of fever. So I applied for and was granted two months' leave; and, putting aside all care and worry, I set off on a trip that I had long promised myself to the famous cities of Northern India. I first took steamer to Karachi, and then went right through by train to Lahore, where I revelled in the picturesque sights of the city, the magnificent mosques and thronged streets, and the grand old fort of Ranji Singh.

It was all new and fascinating to me; and I felt as if I had never known the East before. The Golden Temple at Amritsar, floating as it seemed in a lake within the town, was, notwithstanding the beauty of its site, somewhat disappointing. The brass or gilt, which represented the original gold nailed upon the roof, looked tawdry and meretricious. The effect would have been infinitely more pleasing had the dome been allowed to remain in the simplicity of its pristine whiteness. But it was the street architecture of Amritsar that impressed me more than that of any other Eastern city. The narrow thoroughfares, opening out here and there into squares, with houses many storeys high, all a mass of colour, the highways and byways alike seething with life, struck me as a very type of that Bagdad through which Haroun Alraschid

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loved to wander in disguise. The Taj and Fort at Agra, and the neighbouring tomb of the great Emperor Akbar at Sikandra, were all new sources of delight.

At Delhi two objects, the Ridge where our army waged their immortal combat in the Mutiny year, and the Cashmere Gate, through which we at last burst our way into the mighty city, put into the shade all other objects of interest. Day after day, history in hand, I stood on the Ridge and worked out the various actions, until I almost fancied that I could actually see the avenging British hosts. Never did traveller more appreciate the sights and reminiscences of Allahabad, Cawnpore, Lucknow, and Benares. Thence I went to Calcutta for Christmas; and had a genial time with some old friends whom I had not met for years. From Calcutta I paid a flying visit to Darjeeling; and in bright though bitterly cold weather I gazed upon the glories of the eternal snows. My trip had by this time made a new man of me. I was wrapped in the present, and quite forgot the existence of such things as police inquiries and reports. But it was time gradually to retrace my steps; and, after staying here and there as the fancy seized me, I found myself, with ten days only of my leave remaining, at the capital of one of the great Princes of Central India, where I took up my quarters at the dāk bungalow.

This was another entirely new experience. In the station where the European officers resided I took no particular interest; but I roamed about,

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sometimes on foot, sometimes in a hired carriage, through the native town. The appearance of a European in the street was evidently unusual, and not altogether appreciated by the population. Without ever being actually molested, I encountered anything but civil glances; while rude remarks about Feringhis in general, and myself in particular, were far from uncommon. Gestures denoting bitter hatred of the Feringhis were occasionally to be seen. But I looked on this display of race hatred as an additional tone of local colour, brightening the artistic panorama.

The contrast between this capital of a Native Prince—who ruled over territories as extensive as Belgium and Holland together—and that of any town in British India was indeed remarkable. Cavaliers decked in fantastic uniforms careered about, their belts bristling with knives and pistols, and their horses adorned with gorgeous trappings. Magnificently caparisoned elephants, bearing gaily-clad men seated in howdahs, shambled along. Some of the riders affected camels, with curious tasselled hangings and many-coloured saddle-cloths. The distinguishing feature of the spectacle was the profusion of arms that was to be seen. There were old-fashioned matchlocks mingled with pistols of the latest design, crooked scimitars, curiously wrought daggers, and carven shields of endless variety. Near the royal palace there was a considerable assemblage of troops, some dressed in a fashion closely resembling that of our own Native regiments, others in a variety of Oriental styles,

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presenting little or no uniformity. It seemed rather as though it were a point of honour for each man to devise something original and unique in the design of his massive turban or his pointed helmet, and the cut and colours of his tunic. The air of the military and other notables was supercilious, and their demeanour arrogant; and the police, such as they were, treated the crowd with a roughness that would have called forth bursts of indignation in a British district. The impression left upon my mind by all that I saw was that the English Resident must have no easy time. I did not know how soon I was to realise the truth of my surmise.

As my thoughts turned for a moment on the Resident I remembered that it was the duty of every official halting in the capital to proceed to the Residency and there pay his respects by writing his name in the visitors' book. So the next day, shortly after noon, the recognised hour for calling in India, I ordered a carriage, and set off to discharge this official obligation. The Residency was a palatial building, standing in a wooded park, at a distance of about a mile from the town and royal palace. I duly wrote my name, envying the Resident his noble mansion, and returned to the dāk bungalow to write some letters before I went for further explorations in the evening.

Just as I was preparing to go out a mounted orderly clattered up and handed me a letter from the Resident, Sir John Mordaunt. It contained but a few lines, asking me to come to him at once on urgent business. Wondering what possible

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concern Sir John could have with me, I lost no time in driving to the Residency. I handed my card to the orderly, and was surprised to notice that, instead of at once taking it to the Sahib, he rang an electric bell. Three strokes on another bell sounded in the hall, upon which the orderly walked upstairs to deliver my card. Indian exigencies demand that a visitor's card be sent in, as Native servants find it hopelessly beyond them to grasp the name of any strange Sahib. The man soon reappeared, and said that the Resident would see me. I walked upstairs, and was introduced to the room where that officer transacted his official business. A dignified-looking, elderly man of a stern and commanding expression, but whose chin suggested an element of weakness in his character, motioned me to a chair.

"I have just seen your name, Mr. Carruthers," he commenced, "in my visitors' book, and having heard of your success in unravelling certain difficult cases, I sent for you to ask your help in a most grave and perplexing incident."

"You may depend upon me, Sir John," I replied, "for doing my utmost. Will you kindly let me know all the circumstances that have occurred?"

"You must know," said the Resident, "that this State, which is always turbulent and a continual source of anxiety to the Government, is just now in the very pangs of a most acute crisis. Before I proceed further, I would remind you that whatever I tell you must be regarded as absolutely confidential and secret. Amongst the stormy ques-

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tions now before Government are the conflicting claims of two rivals to the heirship of the throne. One youth is the son of the Prince's lawful wife. The other claimant, who is older than he is, is the son of a dancing girl. His mother has since been married to the Prince, and the question is whether this subsequent union makes the birth of the son legitimate. A thousand authorities have been produced on either side, and the rivalry has caused an endless crop of intrigues, and has even led to serious breaches of the peace in the public streets. Then the Prince himself is unscrupulous, vicious, and cunning; and under an outward guise of civility conceals feelings of implacable hatred to British rule. He is in constant communication with the hill tribes, against whom our troops are now fighting. He has assisted them with advice and money, while he affords similar encouragement to seditious newspaper writers and agitators in British territory. He is by treaty allowed to keep up a certain number of troops. He has hit upon the astute plan of a short-service system, by which he has practically multiplied the forces at his disposal by ten. I am surrounded by spies, and bribes are lavishly distributed in return for any information regarding my correspondence with Government. Why, the telegraph master openly drives about in a carriage which it would take him more than a year's salary to purchase. Spies and agents are employed in the Government offices at Calcutta and Simla. The Prince has even gone so far as to request that another officer, who is, as he puts it, more in

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sympathy with the humble servants of the Empress than myself may be appointed in my place; and two attempts to poison me have been made. So, Mr. Carruthers, you see that my position is not without difficulties."

I assented, wondering whatever Sir John wanted me to do in this glorious entanglement of intrigue.

"Now," continued the Resident, "I am coming to the immensely serious matter upon which I wish to consult you. I have reported confidentially to Government the exact state of the existing phase of local politics in the State. I received this morning a cypher despatch from Calcutta directing me, on the one hand to obtain further particulars regarding certain points; and, on the other, to take some exceedingly strong, not to say drastic, measures which can only be successful if carried out without the least previous intimation or warning. For the orders to leak out before action is taken would place the Government in a most difficult, and even dangerous, position. I will tell you at once that this is exactly what has happened. I will now give you the details. The cypher despatch was enclosed in two envelopes, one within the other, each bearing a large Government seal. I opened the despatch, took out the key to the cypher from my office box, and translated the letter into ordinary English. The contents being so important, besides somewhat unexpected, I required some little time to consider the best way of carrying out my instructions. I put aside the original despatch, together with the cypher key, beneath a letter weight, while



HEARD SHOUTS OF "MURDER!" I RUSHED OUT,  
FOLLOWED BY FRASER"





## THE STOLEN DESPATCH.

I enclosed my translation of the despatch in the two envelopes with the Government seals, and tying some red tape round the cover, placed it on one side of my despatch box. I then sent for my shorthand writer—a young lad just out from home, named Fraser—to dictate some orders to him. He was sitting at the other end of my table. After about half an hour, I thought that I would partake of my usual lunch, which consists of a biscuit, a little fruit, and a glass of wine. This refreshment was placed on my office table. I poured out a glass of claret, and separated one plantain from a bunch of three that was on the plate, when I suddenly heard an extraordinary noise in the compound, followed by the report of a gun and shouts of ‘Murder!’ I rushed out, followed by Fraser. It will give you some idea of the lawlessness of this place when I tell you that two rival parties from the palace had brought their quarrel into the precincts of the Residency, each one clamouring for my support, and that one turbulent scoundrel had actually shot one of his opponents in my very hearing. After some little time—to be exact, it was ten minutes—which was occupied in securing the murderer and sending off the remainder of the intruders, Fraser and I returned to my room. Judge of my horror when I saw that the cover containing the translation of the cypher despatch was not to be seen! The original, with the key to the cypher, was under the letter weight where I had left them.

“ You can imagine the state of anxiety in which I am plunged. The mischief done is incalculable.

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I know not whom to suspect or whom to trust. My life here has made me suspicious of everybody. You will remember that Fraser followed me out of the room. He would have had time to snatch up the paper and put it in his pocket. Doubtless, he would get twenty thousand rupees for it, or more. When I told him of the loss he coloured up in the most extraordinary way. Of course, I did not even hint that I had any suspicion of him. And yet what to believe? This room is approached by one way only, the staircase which you ascended. The orderlies below insist that no one came up in my absence; but, of course, I cannot trust them. You see that no one can get in at the window without a ladder. The pipal tree would afford no assistance, for though higher up its branches touch the roof, yet on the level of the window the nearest does not come within ten feet. You noticed when you arrived that the orderly did not bring up your card until he had rung the bell, and received my answer. I never allow any chuprassi or peon to stand nearer my room than the entrance verandah on the ground floor, or to come up without my permission, signalled by the bell; and I summon people by the bell only.

“Now my idea is that there was a preconcerted plan to get me out of the room by the scuffle and noise outside. Of course, the spies in Calcutta would have communicated the information that an important despatch was on its way. But how to get any further, or detect the thief, and, if possible, even at the eleventh hour defeat his purpose, is beyond me. I have now put the whole matter before you.”

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"I am much obliged to you, Sir John," I replied, "for giving me so admirably clear a narrative of the case. But in my work the smallest details must be considered. Can you tell me how your claret came to be upset to-day? You see that the stain on the green baize is not yet quite dry."

"The claret!" he replied, in a surprised way, as if wondering why I troubled about such a trifling matter when issues so grave were at stake. "Yes; when I came in and noticed that the despatch was gone I saw that the claret was upset. I suppose that the thief was in a hurry, and knocked over the wineglass in his haste. By the by," he continued, a trifle sarcastically, "since these details interest you, I remember that the plantain which I had broken off was eaten, and the other two were gone. Heaven bless me," he ejaculated. "My niece's photograph that was on my table is gone too! Can it be——" He paused without completing his sentence.

This discovery certainly added to the difficulties of the problem which it was required to solve. What thief would wish to make off with a despatch from the Government of India, a couple of plantains, and the photograph of a young lady, and while staying to eat a plantain be in such a hurry as to upset some wine which he might have drunk?

"The obvious conclusion," resumed the now much irritated Resident, unconsciously replying to my soliloquy, "is that the scoundrel has taken the photograph and the plantains just to puzzle me, and put me off the scent. These are clearly side issues of no importance, and they must be put away from

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our calculations. The inquiry before us lies in the direction of the palace, though there is the possibility that the thief, be it some native emissary or my own servant, or even Fraser, may still have the document in his possession here. Now I understand that you are versed in the ramifications of Oriental chicanery; and I am not without hopes that by penetrating into the palace in disguise, or employing such other methods as you have found successful in former cases, you may be able to recover the translation of the despatch, and bring the perpetrator of the outrage to me before he has had time to dispose of his haul. The thief may be holding back the document until he can find which party will pay him the highest amount for it."

"Depend upon me, Sir John, to leave nothing undone. But first permit me to ask you one question, in spite of its apparent triviality. How do you know that one plantain was eaten?"

"What has that to do with the case?" asked the Resident. "But, since you wish to know, the skin was lying on the floor."

"Has the skin been kept? For, if so, I should like to see it."

"The skin kept? Really, Mr. Carruthers," said Sir John, "this seems indeed trivial."

"I feared that you would think so, sir, but I have known a half-eaten mango at one end of a clue and the gallows at the other. I should esteem it a favour if you would inquire about the skin. Meanwhile, with your permission, I will make an examination of the room."

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Sir John made no reply, and taking his silence for consent I took out my lens and proceeded to examine with the utmost care the table, the chairs, and the floor. Sir John's patience was visibly exhausted by this performance on my part. He rang his bell, told his servant to see if the plantain skin could be found, "as the Sahib wanted it," and saying that he would leave me to continue my investigations alone, he stalked out of the room. This was exactly what I wanted. I required time to reflect upon the story, as well as to make a most searching examination of the premises. I was exceedingly interested in the affair, and most anxious to elucidate the mystery. But the field of inquiry embraced so large an area that the difficulties might prove insuperable.

I had been engaged in my investigation for some seven or eight minutes when I heard a light step running up the stairs, and almost before I had time to look round a charmingly pretty English girl rushed into the room. Both her dress, which was evidently fresh from Bond Street, and her red and white complexion showed that she had just come from home. She was evidently full of life and vivacity, and her eyes were twinkling with merriment and mischief.

"Oh, Mr. Carruthers," she said, "it is such fun! My uncle, Sir John—I am his niece, you know—is in a towering rage with you. He says that, instead of disguising yourself as a black man and going into the Native town to look for his letter, as he thought you would, you are messing about with plaintain skins and looking for stains on the floor

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with a microscope. Oh, he is in a rage! He says, 'Fancy a man who calls himself a detective fooling like this when every minute is so precious!' It was simply ripping to see him. Do you know what I told him? I said I had stolen the letter myself because he would not buy me an Arab pony that I had set my heart on; and not for worlds would I let him have it until the pony was mine. I said I would put it up for auction first. Oh, you should have seen him! He didn't in the least know whether to believe me or not. So I ran away, leaving him to make up his mind, while I came here to see what a real detective was like! But you look more like a soldier than a detective! Do you really disguise yourself, and find out all sorts of wonderful things? Do tell me all about it. Oh, and do you believe that I stole the letter? Honour bright, you know."

This was all so extraordinarily original that I felt rather puzzled how to deal with such an extremely volatile and withal fascinating young lady. Anyhow, I saw no reason to break through my usual principle of making friends with anyone who is likely to be of use to me in an inquiry, and Miss Mordaunt might supply me with much useful information which the dignified Sir John would think unworthy of attention. So I did my best to adopt her light style of conversation.

"I shall be delighted to spin you some first-rate detective yarns, Miss Mordaunt, and show you all my false beards and disguises; and I don't mind betting that I would appear before you at any time you like to mention without your having the

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faintest idea who I was. What sport telling the Resident that you had stolen his letter! But tell me, Miss Mordaunt, why you would not give one of your photos to Mr. Fraser."

"Why didn't I give my photo to the poor little Fraser boy? I'd have given him a dozen, but he never asked me for one. He is the most awfully shy boy I have ever known. He can't make out what to think of me; and he would die before he could pluck up courage to ask me for a photo."

"Oh," I said; "now we are talking. It shows what a dangerous quality shyness is, Miss Mordaunt. I have known many people ruined by it. I suppose you have never suffered from any affliction of that nature?"

"I am most desperately shy," she laughed. "You have no idea how I have to struggle to conceal my diffidence. You don't know what it took me to make up my mind to face you. It was only my curiosity that prevailed."

"That is exactly what I thought," I replied. "But, seriously, you know, his bashfulness has brought Mr. Fraser into the danger of losing his appointment. He was too shy to ask you for a photo, but not too shy to steal the one that stood on this table. Don't you see, the Resident half suspected him of walking off with the despatch as well. He is the one person who certainly had the opportunity of doing so. Even before he noticed the absence of the photo, Sir John had considered this possibility. You see, I am taking you into my confidence. And when he missed the portrait he com-



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menced a sentence which was never finished, though I could form a very fair guess as to what was in his mind. Now, Miss Mordaunt, it is quite clear that this very shy Mr. Fraser admires you so much that the Resident has observed it."

"It wouldn't require any vast amount of intelligence to see that," answered the young lady, quite unconcernedly. "The boy is a regular owl! He is always staring at me, and blushing like a school-girl when I catch him in the act. He is a good little fellow, all the same."

"Well, Miss Mordaunt, all the more reason to clear him of suspicion, apart from other reasons for finding out the real culprit. Meanwhile, you can assist me by letting Sir John still wonder if you really took the despatch."

We were at this moment interrupted by the entrance of a servant with a basket of plantain skins, which he presented to me "with the Sahib's compliments."

"The servants consume many plantains," he added, "and I have brought all the skins of those that have been eaten to-day."

"Shahbash," I said, "excellent. You can leave them here and go. Now, Miss Mordaunt, you can see a little of my methods which so annoyed Sir John."

So saying, I took out my lens, and examined each of the skins with the utmost minuteness. After completing this operation, I took up the skin which had been the third in number to be brought under the lens, and handed it to Miss Mordaunt.

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"This," I said, "is the skin of the plantain which was taken from your uncle's plate. Whether or not it will help me to the solution of the conundrum is more than I can say; but that this is the skin of the plantain which he had removed from the bunch there is no doubt."

"Oh, how delightful!" she said. "But do show me how it is done. I haven't the faintest idea what the good of it is, but it is quite fascinating."

"I will tell you all about it to-morrow morning," I replied; "and, what's more, I will promise you that if you can be up by seven o'clock you shall see me and not know who I am. But now, if you will excuse me, I must be off, for I have various things to arrange. Good-bye, Miss Mordaunt. I shall look forward to puzzling you to-morrow."

"Good-bye, Mr. Carruthers," she replied, giving me her hand to be shaken. "This is most frightfully mysterious and exciting. We shall have a small bet on it. Shall we say a pair of gloves?"

"Done with you," I rejoined, as she took her departure.

She danced rather than walked out of the room, as if the mode of locomotion employed by ordinary mortals was much too slow and cumbersome for her to be tied down to; leaving me, I must admit, in a state of admiring surprise at this very original type of beauty.

On descending to the verandah I dismissed my carriage, saying that I would walk home. I had hardly started when I was joined by a gentlemanly-

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looking but exceedingly shy young man, whom I had no difficulty in identifying as young Fraser. He had been intended for the Indian Civil Service, but owing to his father's death he had to discontinue his studies. He had already some knowledge of shorthand, and perfecting himself in this branch he came out to India to seek employment. He had good letters of introduction, and speedily obtained his present appointment under Sir John Mordaunt. I at once put him at his ease, and asked him to accompany me. He was terribly concerned about the loss of the despatch, and made no secret that he felt that suspicion might rest upon himself; but neither of us referred to the incident of the photograph.

"Now, Mr. Fraser," I said as we walked out of the park gates, "will you show me the shop of any leading merchant or contractor who looks after the general requirements of the station? There is sure to be someone—probably a Parsee."

Fraser conducted me accordingly to the emporium of Mr. Jamsetjee Dadabhai, who was purveyor of everything which the *Sahib logue* might want. Here I bade adieu to my companion, and asked for a few minutes' conversation with the proprietor of the establishment.

It was in no enviable frame of mind that early next day the Resident descended the staircase which led into his verandah, prepared for a morning ride with his niece; and his irritation, when he perceived a number of coolies running about, and shouting at each other in the raucous tones commonly adopted

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by our Aryan brothers for the interchange of pleasantries and platitudes, was unrestrained.

"What on earth is all this about now, you insolent ones?" he shouted in the vernacular. "By whose orders are you here? Leave off all these words, and let one speak for all! Why, what is this?" he continued as he walked out into the compound followed by Miss Mordaunt, who looked charming in the neatest of neat riding habits. "What is this ladder against the house for?"

The noise, however, continued for some time without any abatement, and no one volunteered to answer the Resident's question. At last one of the men, after apparently consulting the rest, walked boldly up to the Resident, and with an exaggerated salaam said:

"Sahib, we people have suffered great outrages, and we call on you for redress. Here is our written petition. The Sirkar should do us justice."

"You should come at the proper time," said Sir John, waving aside the petition with his riding whip, "and not disturb me now when I am going out to eat the air. Be off, you scoundrels, or I will have you all locked up."

The man threw off his puggree in an insolent way at Sir John's feet, turned to Miss Mordaunt, and said that as the Sahib would not listen to justice the Missy Sahib must interpose.

"Uncle," said the startled but not discomposed girl, "what is this peculiar old landscape going on about? Don't you think we might dispense with his interesting society, and go for our ride?"

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"Now, Miss Mordaunt," I said in English, "what about that pair of gloves?"

Miss Mordaunt stared in silence for a few seconds, and then burst into a delicious peal of laughter.

"Uncle," she said, "isn't this lovely? Why, here is Mr. Carruthers in this singularly unbecoming get-up! You see, after all, he can run to disguises. I had a little bet on with him that I would recognise him in any character, and I have lost it. I consider this is really quite too hard on me, Mr. Carruthers. If you had come as an old man with a long white beard, or any other character out of a fancy ball, you bet I should have spotted you; but a common coolie splashed with whitewash, and one of a lot all alike too, how could I think it was you? It is really horrid of you, and I simply hate you!"

"I am most sorry to have incurred your displeasure, Miss Mordaunt," said I, "but I hope to be able to get into your good books again before long. Meanwhile, Sir John, since neither you nor your niece will take the stolen despatch from me, will you kindly tell me how to dispose of it?"

"Good heavens! Have you found it, and do you mean to say it is in that wretched petition that you wanted us to take?"

"It is indeed, Sir John; but I am afraid that the thief did not set a very high value on it, for it is in a very fragmentary and dilapidated condition."

It was indeed a very tattered and besmeared document that I withdrew from the red-sealed cover, but the Resident soon satisfied himself that it was

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the *bond-fide* missing paper, and that, though in several pieces, it was complete.

"Heaven bless my soul!" he ejaculated. "How did you get it, and who is the thief? This passes my comprehension."

"With your permission, Sir John, I will wash off this paint, and get into some respectable garments which I have with me in a portmanteau, and then let you into my secret. Meanwhile I will introduce the thief here. There are two personages concerned, and I am not quite certain which of them is the guilty party. Ho, brothers!" I shouted to my fellow coolies, "bring hither the prisoners!"

Grinning from ear to ear, two men advanced, carrying a net, in which were safely contained two struggling and panting gibbon monkeys from Sumatra.

"Oh, how perfectly sweet!" said Miss Mor-daunt. "I simply must keep them."

"You must settle that with your uncle," I replied, "but there may be some little difficulty, for they belong to the Prince, who sets great store on them. They escaped from the royal menagerie two days ago."

An hour later we met at breakfast, and I was compelled to satisfy the curiosity of my host and hostess without further delay.

"It is a very simple story," I said. "You were perfectly certain, Sir John, that the document had been stolen in the furtherance of Court intrigue. The conclusion was a very natural one, and it might very probably have been correct. In my work I can

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assume no hypothesis of this kind. I must have facts, and I at once sought to discover some facts. Now, with the aid of my microscope I soon found some very interesting facts. My lens first guided me to a few small hairs upon your table of a slightly green tint. Now, hairs of this particular tint are very unusual in natural history; but they are found on the breast of the Sumatra gibbon, or *Hylobates agilis*, a remarkable animal that is said to be able to leap as far as forty feet. From the presence of these hairs it was a fair deduction that a monkey of this description had been in the room. If so, how would he have come? I looked out of the window, and saw that though, as you yourself noted, no man could enter the room from the tree, yet it was quite possible for a gibbon to leap in from the nearest branch that would bear his weight, as the distance was not more than ten feet. On looking closely at the tree I saw something yellow attached to a fork of this branch. So far as I could see from the window it was a plantain skin. This fact, by the by, has been verified this morning by the aid of a ladder. I thus formed a very pretty theory, grounded solely upon facts. I should add that your green baize table cover has a number of tiny holes pricked in it, which are clearly the impressions left by our friend's sharp claws. Thus the search for the missing plantain skin was not absolutely necessary, but it was an interesting corroboration of my theory to find similar small markings on the outside of the skin. The conclusion which I drew was as follows. A gibbon had leapt into the room during your absence, had

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devoured one plantain, but, hearing footsteps, became frightened, and stowed away the other two in his capacious cheek pouch for further use. Then, being attracted by the red seals on the official envelope and the red tape wound round it, he seized the packet by the tape and leapt back into the tree. Here he ate one of the plantains, leaving the skin hanging. The top of the tree overhangs the roof of the house. As the missing document had not fallen to the ground, the monkey had probably taken it on to the roof. By the time I had formed this solution to the mystery it was too late in the evening to take any further action, so I made my preparations to explore the roof in the morning. I arranged for ladders and a net and a supply of coolies from Mr. Jamsetjee. I determined to get myself up as a coolie, partly because you had considered that disguise was a necessary property in my rôle, and I wished to show that I was not wanting in that respect; also I had that little bet on with your niece. I moreover thought that a monkey would be less frightened of a native than of a Sahib, and I should consequently be able to approach it more easily. So I climbed up the ladder in the early morning, and was rewarded by seeing these two graceful creatures having a lovely game with the Government despatch. That is all there is to say. The noise made by the coolies was made by my orders, to distract the attention of yourself and your niece, especially of Miss Mordaunt, and so make any attempt to frustrate my disguise less probable."

"Mr. Carruthers," said Sir John, "I am eter-



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nally indebted to you. I beg that you will accept my full apologies for any disparaging remarks I may have made on your methods."

"I should just think it was time for you to apologise, Uncle," said Miss Mordaunt. "You deserve what for, with the chill off. Why, I enjoyed the fooling about with the plantain skins from the first, but I didn't expect such a ripping show as this!"

"There is one point, however," added the Resident, "which has not been cleared up, and that is what the monkey did with my niece's photograph."

"I must admit, Sir John," I replied, "that that question entirely baffles me."

## TANTIA MAHARAJAH.

I HAD been stationed for several years in Somapur, one of the pleasantest districts in the Deccan. There was good small-game shooting and excellent pig-sticking. Somapur itself was the headquarters of a considerable number of troops. There was a capital gymkhana club, and we had a constant round of cricket and polo matches, races, tennis, picnics, and dances. The hot weather was certainly very hot, but it did not last more than about three months. As soon as the rains set in the climate became delightful. Occasionally it rained three or four days without ceasing, but usually we had about an hour's rain a day, and the rest of the time was bright and sparkling, the heat of the sun being tempered by a delicious breeze. Certainly, if it was necessary to live in exile, Somapur was one of the most enviable places that could be selected for one's habitation.

For several years we had enjoyed plentiful harvests, and there was no pinch of hunger to incite the more improvident classes to serious crime. There was the usual run of murders prompted by revenge or jealousy; but for a long time there had been nothing to test my mettle. While I appreciated the comparatively easy time, and gave my attention to my horses and garden, and looking after the station club, I occasionally sighed for something to turn up which would prevent my wits from getting entirely rusty. At last strange rumours

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began to reach me of daring dacoities in the dominions of a native ruler in alliance with the British Government whose territories for many miles marched with mine. Sometimes there would be three dacoities on three successive nights, at places vast distances apart; and there were the most conflicting rumours as to whether they were the work of one gang or of several. On the one hand, it seemed almost impossible that any gang could cover such distances in so short a time. On the other, the proceedings of the robbers were so similar on each occasion, and also so unique in the history of the crime, that it seemed as though the band in each instance must be one and the same. As a rule, dacoits are cowards at heart, and seek to stimulate each other's courage by carrying out their operations in large numbers. A village is often looted by a gang of forty or fifty of these robbers, most of whom do nothing but explode bombshells and utter wild cries to intimidate the wretched inhabitants, who are only too glad to deliver up their little all in order to escape personal injury. But this newly organised society consisted of six men only. Their faces were always disguised, and there was not the slightest clue to their identity. They were mounted on sturdy Deccani ponies. One of the six used to look after these animals outside the village, while the remainder went for the house of the richest sowkar or money-lender, and at the threat of the instant death of all his household forced him to disgorge his cash and ornaments of gold and silver. The faintest resistance led in the first place to the slicing off the

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money-lender's nose; and if this did not prove sufficient, and the usurer struggled or called for assistance, he was mercilessly killed. The next proceeding of the dacoits was to call up all the poorer villagers and to distribute fifty per cent. of the sowkar's coin. The ornaments, often worth several thousand rupees, were always taken away, for to hand them over to anyone would render it fairly certain that the police sooner or later discovered them, and prosecuted the possessor for receiving property stolen in a dacoity. Cash could, of course, not be recognised. The sowkar's account books were invariably burnt. All these proceedings were conducted with extraordinary rapidity, and within half an hour of their arrival the robbers were off and away with their illgotten spoil. It was remarkable that the gang always knew exactly which house to go to, and no one would ever say that he had seen them on their way to or from the scenes of their outrages. There was no doubt that the people at large warmly applauded the methods of these modern Robin Hoods, and were not in the least inclined to give the police any information which would lead to their capture. All that could be learnt was that the gang consisted of six men, who were armed and well mounted and disguised their faces, and that one was the leader whom the others addressed respectfully as Maharaj, or Great King.

So long as all this went on in foreign territory it did not personally concern me. But after some interval the band selected for their prey certain thriving villages in the British districts that

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bordered on mine. It was always the same story—six men with arms and ponies, the plundering of the money-lender, and the distribution of largesse to the poor. The most inconsistent and marvellous stories were bruited abroad as to who the leader was ; but no real light was thrown upon the subject. He gradually became known as Tatia or Tantia Maharajah, and the name of Tantia naturally reminded one of the Mutiny rebel of that designation, who, after leading our army under Sir Hugh Rose a pretty dance through Central India, was finally hanged for the murder of English men and women at Cawnpore. The police of the neighbouring districts were in despair, and I in part congratulated myself that the force under me was so well trained that the gang would take care not to trouble me, while I half wished that Tantia Maharajah would give me the chance at trying my hand against him. I little anticipated how the conceit was to be knocked out of me ! Latterly another peculiarity was adopted by Tantia. The Chief of the Police would receive notice by post or otherwise that a dacoity would be committed at a certain place and at a certain date, always just in time to enable him by desperate efforts to arrive at the scene shortly after the birds had flown.

I thought it as well, though it was not the touring season, to ride round some of my districts, and personally warn my men to be on the alert, and keep a sharp look-out on suspected characters. They all expressed the keenest confidence in their powers against any dacoits, and scoffed at the idea of Tantia

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trying on his game in the Sahib's jurisdiction. One evening, after a very long day in the saddle, I was sitting down in a rough chair obtained from the village school outside a small rest-house, where I intended to pass the night. My horse, whose comfort I always looked after before my own, had been rubbed down and watered, and was quietly consuming his grain by my side. I was enjoying a cigar, and considering how far it was worth while to continue my journeyings, with the alternative of going back to civilisation and iced drinks at Somapur. I was coming to the conclusion that I would visit the outposts of Morvar, where the Head Constable named Syad Mohidin wanted a little waking up, and thence return by train from the roadside station of Tulsipur, when I heard the footsteps of someone approaching me. Looking up, I saw a Maratha Brahman, above the middle height, clad in speckless white garments and wearing the enormous *puggari* generally affected by men of his caste.

"Sir," he said in English, "I beg that your honour will listen to my request. My name is Ramchandra Parashram. I served for years as a Head Constable in the district of Tarabad. I was forced through circumstances to resign. Now, having heard your honour's name, I have come all this way to seek for employment."

"It is quite impossible," I replied, "for two reasons. I have no vacancy in my police, and I never take on a man who has once resigned either from my own force or from any other. You people

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seem to think that for the slightest reason you can throw up your employment one day and expect to get it back the next."

"Permit me to explain," he resumed. "I will satisfy your honour as to the cause of my resignation, and I will be content to work under your honour without pay as an *umedwar* (candidate) until a vacancy occurs. In my former district I had a succession of family misfortunes. My father and mother were seized with cholera. I was granted leave to be with them in their last moments. My wife and four children lived with them. No sooner had I performed the funeral rites for my parents than my wife became dangerously ill, and I had to extend my leave. Within a few weeks she died, and two of the children followed her. Sahib, I was in despair; and from misery and anxiety I became ill myself. I applied for more leave, but was told that on account of dacoities I could not be spared, and must either return to duty or resign. I was helpless, and my resignation was accepted."

"That is rather a hard case," I observed, "but I do not think I can do anything for you."

"I would beg your honour to look at my certificates. They are enclosed in this packet. But I can see that the Sahib is tired. I will leave the certificates, and come for an answer in the morning."

"Very well," I said, "I will look at them in the course of the evening. Now you can take your leave."

The certificates given by the various officers

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spoke in the highest terms of Ramchandra's character and abilities. I was looking through them at leisure after my dinner, and casually wondering how I had never heard of the man before, when I came to the last paper in the packet.

"Dear Mr. Carruthers," it ran, "I am much obliged to you for the interview that you have accorded me, and for the opportunity of renewing my acquaintance with you. If you are at the house of Balwantrao, sowkar of Nawalpur, by midnight, you will there find Tantia Maharaj."

"Good heavens!" I shouted in amazement. Was this Tantia himself who had visited me in this audacious way, or was it merely an envoy charged with his message? What on earth did he mean by renewing my acquaintance? *Qui hai?* "Come here, you people," I cried to my men. "Who was this Brahman who came to me just now for employment? Here, Sitaram, you served for years in the Tarabad district, from which this Ramchandra, as he calls himself, had such excellent testimonials as jemadar. Did you know him there?"

"No, Sahib; I never saw the man before, nor was there any jemadar of that name in the district."

Oh, if I had only looked at the certificates earlier! I had lost an hour and a half by the delay, and doubtless Tantia or his lieutenant, whichever it might be, had all the arrangements for his ride complete. The only horse that I had with me had done more than twenty miles already to-day; my other, which I had ridden in the morning, I had left at the village to be led after me. As it happened, I



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had no mounted Police with me. It was thirty miles to Nawalpur. When Ramchandra, or whoever he was, had left me it was seven o'clock, and he had six hours in which to do the journey at leisure. It was now half-past eight, and I had only four hours and a half to cover the thirty miles. I must travel nearly seven miles an hour to arrive in time—a thing easy enough to do with a change of horses ready saddled at a couple of stages on the way, but I had only one tired nag. I had no time to waste in thinking. There was need for immediate action. A happy thought struck me.

"Sitaram," I cried, "whose is that bay pony that I saw tethered under the banyan tree as I rode in to-day—the one that I admired so much and thought of inquiring about for a polo pony? Whosoever it is, get it saddled for me at once."

"Sahib, the Brahman who conversed with the presence went away on it. He saddled it himself, and went down the road just as the Sahib rides after the wild boar."

The impudence of the whole thing was amazing. I knew there was nothing else to be had where I was, so the only resource was to order my own horse at once. He was good for ten miles, at any rate; and after that I must take my chance. Luckily I knew every inch of the road, and was familiar with the villages and their patels or headmen, some of whom possessed tolerable, not to say fair, ponies. Putting my revolver in one of the holsters, a loaf of bread in the other, and a flask of whisky in my pocket, I was soon mounted and

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away. Maddening as the impertinence of Tantia was, I felt electrified with excitement at the idea of an adventure, and determined to do my utmost to be up to time with the famous dacoit. There was no moon, but the night was clear, and I could find my way well enough by the light of the stars. On and on I clattered along the road; village after village flew by, each making its presence known by the all-pervading smoke of the cow-dung cakes used for fuel, and by the discordant howling of clamorous pariah dogs. Once from a whitewashed temple I heard the tinkling of a bell, and knew that some holy man was still engaged in his devotions. From time to time I drew rein to give my wearied horse a rest, and once I dismounted for a few minutes and lit a pipe. At the end of an hour I had covered ten miles. That left me twenty miles to do in three hours and a half. If I could only obtain mounts, I ought to be in time. I could ride my own horse no further. Here was the village of Yamnur, where the patel used to have two ponies, one good and one by no means bad.

"Oh, Patelji!" I shouted, battering at his door. "Why sleepest thou so early? Awake, awake, and get ready your best pony. My need is urgent—I ride for life and death."

The time it took to get the old man out, and explain who I was, and what I wanted, seemed interminable. At last he managed to comprehend me.

"Sahib," he said with exasperating slowness, "it may be an hour ago, it may be two hours or more—how can I say exactly?—a stranger rode up,

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and on pain of instant death bade me bring out my best pony. In a moment he took the saddle off his own animal, which he handed over to a man who was ready waiting, and who led it away by a jungle path; saddled my pony and galloped off. I was going to complain to the Sahib in the morning, but the Sahib has come and shall do me justice."

Good heavens! This is the way that Tantia covers the country.

"By Mahedev," I cried, "what matter is this now? Get me your other pony then, the piebald mare that I remember. This is no time for words."

"The piebald mare is not fit for the *huzur* to ride. She has travelled far to-day, and is lame. This is my misfortune that I cannot make arrangements for the Sahib. But there is a bullock cart of Dhondeo, the accountant. He has good bullocks, and they might be found. They would cover seven *koss* (fourteen miles) by the morning."

This was too maddening. I seized the patel by the shoulders, and bade him bring me to the piebald, as, lame or not, I must ride her at all events to the next village. I got my saddle on her, tightened the girths, and, leading her into the road, sprang upon her back, hoping against hope that she would carry me on. My own horse I handed over to the patel, bidding him, if he valued his life, to take the utmost care of him. To my surprise, the little mare was not in the least lame; but nearly twenty minutes of my precious time had been wasted by the miserable old patel. On we went, and on and on; the game little piebald settling down into an easy trot which



"SUDDENLY WE CRASHED VIOLENTLY INTO SOME DARK  
OBJECT."



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she occasionally varied by a short canter to ease her limbs. We had covered about five miles in excellent style. I had ceased to give attention to the mare, and my thoughts were on the devilries of Tantia and the villainy of the patel, who, I felt sure, had been bribed to delay me as much as possible. The road now passed through dense forests, and on either side the country was covered with water. The trees met overhead, and it seemed almost impossible to see further than one's horse's head. Suddenly we crashed violently into some dark object, and I found myself on the ground, considerably shaken and bruised, with the mare lying beside me.

A bullock cart, laden with long bamboos, was standing across the road, and formed an effective barrier against further progress. The bullocks had been taken away. For me to move the cart with its heavy load was impossible. The bamboos projected over the water on both sides of the road. I could, of course, climb over the barrier; but the only way to get the little piebald across was to take her into the water, the depth of which I did not know. It was three miles to the next village. Should I leave the mare and walk, or endeavour to get her round? I decided on the latter course as likely to be the speedier. Taking a bamboo and sounding the water, I found that it was about up to my shoulders. I pulled up the pony, led her into the stream, and after a short struggle we were again on the road beyond the obstacle. I wrung the water from my clothes as best I could, and once more

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mounted. But the mare, with the shock of the collision and the chill of the immersion, was quite done up. I could only persuade her to trot for a quarter of a mile or so in each half-mile. At last we reached the village of Sayadabad. I had accomplished eighteen miles, but it had taken me two hours and three quarters; and I was bruised and shaken, and drenched to the skin. I had before me twelve miles, and one hour and three quarters in which to do the distance.

At this stage luck was in my favour. I found an altercation going on in the village, and to my joy learned that the dispute concerned a strange pony. A horseman had ridden up some two hours before, forced a well-to-do peasant to hand over his pony, and had left his own in exchange. The peasant not unnaturally insisted upon retaining the stranger's mount, at all events until his own was returned to him; while the patel ordered that it should be put into the cattle-pound, and the matter reported to the magistrate. The village, as was not uncommon, was divided into two bitterly opposed factions. The peasant belonged to one faction, and the patel to the other, and there was every prospect of a pretty row over the pony.

"Show me the pony," I cried. "Why, this is the property of the patel of Yamnur, stolen from him this night. He is fit for another journey after the rest he has had. Put my saddle on him at once."

No time was lost in executing my order. On and on we hurried down the road, covering a good

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eight miles an hour. No obstacle opposed me this time. I was in no mood to spare the animal, and I exacted his utmost capabilities from him. But he was unused to my weight, and his journey with Tantia on his back had taxed his strength. At the end of eight miles he collapsed altogether, it was hopeless to urge him further. I was now within four miles of my destination, and I had three-quarters of an hour in which to reach Nawalpur before the time fixed by Tantia should expire. No village was near, and the only way was to proceed on foot. I ran and walked, and ran and walked, occasionally looking at my watch, panting, perspiring, and sometimes almost fainting with my exertions. One milestone in ten minutes, another at the same rate, and the next after twelve minutes more. I had one more mile to traverse, and thirteen minutes left to me for the purpose.

Clatter, clatter! Clash, clash! Rattle, rattle! and six riders emerged from the darkness in front of me. I was too late; the devilish Tantia had cheated me, and accomplished his purpose before the time he had mentioned. The scoundrel, to play me false like this!

"Halt, you shaitans! Halt!" I shouted at the top of my voice.

The first five dashed by without taking the faintest notice. The last slackened pace for a moment, and with a chuckling laugh called out:

"What! Carruthers Sahib! Be a little more punctual next time. Ta-ta!" and disappeared into the darkness.



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I suppose that the hopelessness of doing anything more caused me to collapse. I remember nothing further until some villagers found me senseless by the roadside in the morning, and carried me to Nawalpur. When I came to myself I found that Bulwantrao, the sowkar, was lamenting the loss of his nose and five thousand rupees' worth of ornaments and cash, and that not the slightest information as to the whereabouts of the gang was forthcoming.

That was the beginning of the dance that was led me for weeks by the Maharajah. I did everything that I could possibly think of, but to no purpose. I had patrols of mounted and armed men in every direction. Time after time, by some mysterious agency, I received notes from Tantia telling me the scene of his next operation; and time after time I rushed off on endless journeys, always to be just too late. I tried a bicycle once on a moonlight night, but suddenly on turning a corner I was in the thick of a carpet of babul branches, and my tyres were hopelessly punctured.

At the end of a month there had been ten dacoities with two murders, and half a dozen slit noses, and an aggregate of plunder of some forty thousand rupees. I and my men felt driven to despair. To add to my vexation I received an urgent telegram from Government directing me to report on the outbreak. I wired back asking them to send me an assistant to do my office work, and saying that I should be in a better position to report on the matter when I arrested the ringleader. A smart young

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assistant arrived within a few days, and I fear that the mass of undisposed-of work which he had to grapple with was by no means light.

One evening, after a short respite from midnight raids, I was at a town called Byramgunge, and had, for a change, time to partake of a civilised dinner. I sat down to table, and opened my napkin, when with the usual roll of bread there fell out a piece of paper. I was too accustomed to finding missives in unexpected places to wonder what it was.

"Dear Carruthers," it ran—the rascal was becoming familiar now—"Meet me at Shiggaum at four o'clock."

I nearly choked with rage and indignation, but determined to make the most strenuous effort to catch my friend this time. As to how the note found its way inside the napkin it was useless to inquire. Of course, no one knew. Luckily, a primitive kind of mail tonga traversed the road on which Byramgunge was situated. The tonga started at half past nine in the evening, and reached a place called Sirur, thirty-five miles off, at three o'clock in the morning. Thence there was, I knew, a track to Shiggaum four miles long, running in a direction oblique to the road, from which, as the crow flies, the place was only two miles and a half off. It was now eight o'clock. The tonga would leave in an hour and a half. It was useless, with my experience of the difficulty of picking up mounts on the way, to think of arriving any sooner by setting off at once on horseback. At Sirur, if there was nothing else available, I would take one of the tonga ponies that would

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be relieved there, and get to Shiggaum in half an hour if it cost the animal its life.

By nine o'clock I had finished my dinner, buckled on gaiters and spurs, and seen to my revolver and whisky flask. I then remembered what Tantia's message had temporarily put out of my head—that I had promised after dinner to attend a lecture, given by a wandering preacher named Swami Mahdu Anand, who had been lately holding forth at various places in the district. This man had acquired an extraordinary notoriety both for his eloquence and for his charities; and it was commonly reported that he possessed miraculous powers. The place of meeting was at only a few minutes' walk from where I was putting up, so there was no reason why I should not look in for a short time. I found the room filled to overflowing with a spell-bound audience, but room was somehow made for the Police Sahib. The Swami was an elderly man of spare figure, with a flowing white beard and wrinkled brow; but, like the prophet of old, age had not dimmed the sight of his eyes nor abated his natural forces. He was addressing the audience in Marathi; and when I observed his dignified air, his impressive gestures, the eloquence of his speech, and the fervour of his language, I did not wonder at the reputation which he had acquired. He did not so much exhort as command his hearers.

The delivery of that part of the oration which I heard had occupied about ten minutes, and I had a quarter of an hour in which to await the departure of the tonga. When it arrived I found that it

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contained no passengers. The ponies were soon changed, the mail-bag from the post office was handed over to the driver, and I had taken my seat behind him, when a Hindoo bunya or merchant, evidently a well-to-do man of the better class, appeared, and showing his ticket seated himself beside me. I had hoped to have the back of the tonga to myself, and by stretching myself across get some sleep; and I was by no means best pleased at having to sit upright in a corner. However, my fellow passenger apologised profusely for encroaching on the limited space that was provided, and did his best to make himself agreeable. He had received a business letter which rendered his presence at Belwandi, a town of some importance fifty miles away, indispensable.

"This humble one hopes that the Sahib will forgive this intrusion," said the merchant, "but in truth my journey is most urgent. My father died last year; I have become head of the firm. Our agencies are widely extended, and constant supervision is necessary. What did the presence think of the Swami's address?"

"It had an extraordinary effect upon me," I replied, "but I did not notice you there, though I have a good eye for faces."

"I was there, however, and I saw that the presence was interested in the discourse. How should the Sahib observe such a humble one in the crowd? But the address? Did the Sahib approve of it?"

"I must confess that I was wonderfully impressed by it. How did such advanced ideas strike you?"

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“ Words, Sahib—mere words. People will listen to any new story out of curiosity, but no one will take these vapourings seriously. What attracts people to his lectures is his charity. He doles out money to the poor with extraordinary lavishness. No wonder that people crowd about him and say that he works miracles. As for what he says, most of them don’t trouble to understand it. His theory is all very well for ascetics, sunyasis, bhairagis, and so on; but for practical people, if he takes away the Holi from the Hindoos, and the Mohurram tigers and mummers from the Mussulman, there will be no interest left in religion.”

We talked on for some time on various subjects. I remember that he expressed great indignation on the doings of Tantia Maharajah, and hoped that I should soon have him locked up. At last I fell into a sort of troubled sleep, which lasted till the tonga pulled up with a jerk at Sirur. Here I alighted, and looked at my watch. We were punctual to the minute. It was just three o’clock, and I had an hour in which to cover the four miles to Shiggaum, if my friend intended to keep faith with me as to the time. I saw fresh ponies put in, and the tonga whirled away, my Hindoo fellow traveller waving a salaam as he went on to his destination.

“ Now, then,” I cried, to the sleepy syces, “ a pony quick for me to ride to Shiggaum. What animals have you? ”

“ None, Sahib. Not a four-legged animal of any description but these two ponies that have just brought the tonga. The Sahib was asleep, and may

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not have noticed that at the last stage the ponies were not changed, as there were none to take their place. Look at these poor wretches! They have been driven sixteen miles, and can hardly stand."

It was no use disputing this statement, which I could see was correct. The only way again was to foot it. I could easily be at Shiggaum by four o'clock. A waning moon threw enough light to enable me to make sure of my way. On and on and on; breathless and half in a dream I struggled on. There was Shiggaum before me, and there were lights, and there were shoutings and screamings, and oh! I shall be in time. Oh, was I too late? Into the village square I dashed, in time to see horsemen galloping away.

"Ta-ta, Carruthers!" said the last rider, turning round and waving his hand as he made off.

"Curse you!" said I, as I discharged my revolver at him. He winced and reeled in the saddle, but stuck gallantly to his pony, and disappeared into the night.

No mount was to be had, so I followed on foot. On and on and on. I could see the marks of the ponies' feet on the sandy track. On and on and on. Surely a wounded man could not ride much further! On and on and on till the day broke, and a man stood outside a small hamlet telling me that Tantia Maharajah was lying wounded to death in a hut and wished to see me, the Sahib, before he expired.

I found him extended on a *charpoy*. The bullet appeared to have struck him in his thigh, which was bandaged up, and bandages and bed were drenched

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with blood. His face was of an ashen colour, and I could not doubt that he was dying.

"Carruthers, old man," he gasped, "I am lagged at last, but you cannot keep me. I shall be off the hooks in an hour or two. I thought I would like to see you, for the sake of old times."

"For the sake of old times?" I inquired in amazement. "Who and what are you?"

"Don't you remember me at Trinity? My full name was Rajaram Swami Mahant, and you fellows used to call me Ram Sammy."

Good heavens! What memories of old Cambridge days were recalled with a rush! The gateway, the old court, the hall, the chapel, and lime avenue of Trinity; the advent of a shy Indian youth who astonished the Dons and undergraduates alike by beating the best scholars at mathematics, and by winning laurels with the cricket bat and the oar! He had become a Christian, and was intended for the Church, with a view to taking up missionary work in India; and with his abilities he had a brilliant future before him. But there was a curious moral kink in his character. He was a wonderful adept at acting and disguising his appearance, and this proclivity brought him into trouble on several occasions. He was recklessly extravagant, and funds with which he had any connection had a way of mysteriously growing less; and on more than one occasion he was the hero of some wilder piece of devilry than the most barefaced English undergraduate would have thought of, so at last Ram Sammy disappeared under a cloud. This, then, was

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the famous Tantia Maharajah! What an extraordinary destiny!

"Of course I remember you well. But this is most amazing. I had not the faintest suspicion that you were identical with poor old Ram Sammy. I am bitterly sorry that you have come to such an ending. Tell me, if you can, how it came about."

His voice was almost a whisper. I held my flask to his lips, and this seemed to partially revive him.

"You know," he managed to say, "my prospects for Church work were knocked on the head. I came out here. I was as wild and as extravagant as could be. The money-lenders got me in their clutches; and when a distant kinsman claimed my ancestral estate the Government decided the case in his favour. I therefore hate the sowkar and the Sirkar alike. I was ruined, and, in your parlance, I took to the road. What more can I say? I am sorry for the trouble I have caused you. Now I am dying, and you will get promotion for shooting me. Leave me to die with my own people round me."

I wrung his hand and left him; and, flinging myself on some straw, slept till noon. I was awakened by a man shaking me roughly. It was a mounted policeman.

"Sahib, Sahib, he is gone! Awake—awake!"

"Gone! Who is gone? What mean you?"

"Tantia, the dacoit, Sahib. Listen to my report."

"What mean you?" I asked impatiently. "He is dead, you mean? I know that; he was dying when I saw him after dawn. It was I who shot him."

"Sahib, he is neither dead nor dying; he is gone."



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I was ten miles off at Mithiani. I heard of this dacoity, and that the Sahib had shot the Maharajah. I galloped here. This shaitan bade the people place his bed under a pipal tree, and leave him to meditate on the Deity, and die in peace. They obeyed him, and went far away. A stranger rode up on a pony. Tantia sprang from his cot, threw off his bandages, sprang on to the pony behind his rider, and flew away. This paper was found on the charpoy."

Was I mad or dreaming? I mechanically took the paper.

"Dear Carruthers," it ran. "I remember you at Trinity as a bit of a stiff 'un, but really I am surprised that you are still so gullible; your wits should have been sharpened by now. I played a game that was a bit risky, but I could not resist the temptation of taking a rise out of you. Your shot never touched me. The bandages and some goat's blood did the thing in style. Ta-ta! Here's to our next merry meeting."

I collapsed. My men somehow took me to Sirur, and put me into the mail tonga. I was again at Byramgunge, the site of my temporary headquarters. For several days I was incapable of thought, but gradually my old energy and activity of mind and body reasserted themselves. My servants fished out a bottle of champagne, whose existence I had forgotten, from some hidden recess in my camp equipage; and I believe that the wine was a potent factor in my recovery. I recommenced issuing orders, listening to reports, and generally reorganis-

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ing operations. I sent for and interviewed every native who would be in the least likely to give me information ; I promised rewards and promotion profusely for information leading to Tantia's arrest.

One evening Swami Mahdu Anand was again lecturing, and with a view to distracting my attention, I went to listen to him. The views which he was now expounding were by no means so broad and cosmopolitan as on the former occasion. His eloquence was, if possible, more marvellous than before, his tone was as impassioned ; but he spoke with a bitterness and acrimony that surprised me. He was making a fiery attack both on the Christian religion and the inconsistencies of the lives of Europeans, especially in India, with the teachings of their sacred books.

“ What find we in Europe ? ” he asked. “ What find we in England ? Bishops and archbishops with an income of lakhs of rupees a year, living in regal palaces, flaunting their coaches and their horses, entertaining crowds of the well-dressed and worldly, who care naught for any faith but that of pleasure and gold, with the choicest viands and wines that can be produced. These the representatives of their Teacher and His apostles ! Let them put down the hypocrisy, cast away this cant at home before they send out their missionaries to us to convert the priest of the holy Vedas and Shastras to their so-called religion. And in India, look around you. Why, even their own barrack-room poet sings of the land eastward of Egypt where the ten commandments need be no restraint.”

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Great heavens, what was surging and seething in my brain? What subtle intonation of voice, what choice of words, what intangible reminiscence, brought back to me the candidate for employment, the bunya who travelled with me in the tonga, and the devil who had feigned that he was dying. I could delay for no plans. In a second I was upon him, his false beard dashed aside, and we fell in a mad struggle.

"Help!" I shouted. "Help! This is Tantia the dacoit! In the name of the law, help!" It was soon over. I had him by the throat as with a vice, till he was all but suffocated. He writhed and panted and struggled to reach his revolver; but my men were upon him. He was handcuffed and bound, and surrounded by police with fixed bayonets. The consternation of the audience was immense at this amazing termination of the lecture; men pushed and interrogated, and sobbed and cursed.

Tantia was the first to compose himself.

"Really, Carruthers," he said, "that was unexpectedly smart of you. I compliment you on your astuteness. Can you give me a whisky and soda, as I am a little done up with your vigorous onslaught?"

I ordered drinks for my friend and myself, but he was perhaps a little disappointed in finding that he had to partake of his refreshment at the hands of a constable who put it to his lips, his own hands being strongly pinioned behind him. I could run no more risks with this gentleman.

"Thanks, old man," he said. "You always had

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an excellent choice of whisky. Now the sooner you take me to Somapur the better. What an ovation you will have ! See that I am made reasonably comfortable while I stay in jail. It will not be for long, for the jail is not yet built that can hold me when I mean to leave it."

I got him to Somapur, handed him over to the jailer with a word of caution, had the pleasure of being thanked for my services in durbar by the head of the province, and went off on a sea-voyage on medical certificate to recover from the wear and tear of the last six weeks. The other members of the gang were never heard of again.

## ROMEO AND JULIET.

THE manners and customs of Europeans and Orientals are so diverse that it has been found almost impossible to bridge the gulf that exists between their respective societies. Time after time have efforts been made to overcome the difficulty; but the success achieved can only euphemistically be described as questionable. Intercourse between the two races is almost invariably stilted and conventional. What common ground is there to go upon when a native gentleman, be he Brahman or Mahomedan, thinks that to eat with you involves defilement from which he can only be purified by stringent religious ceremonies? How can you meet on really intimate terms a man who will, on no account, allow you to see the face of his wife, and who, you are aware, in his heart of hearts, regards you with contempt because the Mem-Sahib is suffered to go about unveiled? However, if in a general way it is difficult or impracticable to find a *modus vivendi*, yet personally I have been on intimate terms with a considerable number, both of Hindus and Mahomedans. There is no real necessity to bring to the front the inherent differences of East and West. Much can, after all, be found in the way of mutual interest. If when going round the district on successive tours a zemindar finds that you remember all about your last visit, the stages of his son's education, his

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horses, his crops, the new mango grove that he has planted, the embankment that he has built, and the adventures that he encountered when he went on a pilgrimage to Mecca half a dozen years ago, he naturally feels warmly complimented; and friendly relations are soon established.

It is commonly said that natives have no sense of gratitude; but I have often found that a little kindness or attention is most gratefully remembered. A good deal of my time in India used to be taken up in replying to letters received from native friends who lived in the districts where I had served before; and if it be urged that these communications may have been written from that gratitude which has been defined as an expectation of favours to come, this argument cannot apply when officers after their retirement constantly hear from old acquaintances in the East. Often, when in the course of my duties I have had to make sudden journeys, I have partaken of the hospitality of the Mahomedân landholders of Northern India, and very excellent were the curries and pillaos that they provided for me. The only desideratum required was that I should take my own knife, fork, and spoon; these appendages of civilisation not yet having replaced Nature's appliances in Indian homes. Hindu gentlemen, too, have often furnished me a meal of lighter material; explaining with pardonable pride how the delicious pastry and sweetmeats were prepared by the ladies of their household. As I came to know the people more intimately I grew to like them more in proportion; and the insight that I obtained into

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their characters and idiosyncrasies gave me very valuable assistance in numberless cases which I had to investigate.

I had been stationed for some years in the important district of Somapur in the Deccan, and there I had come to know several Hindu families very intimately. Amongst these were the Joshis, the Govekars, and the Balkrishnas. The two former reminded me of the Montagus and the Capulets, for from time immemorial they had been on terms of bitter enmity. To keep on friendly relations with both required no little tact; but in spite of the difficulties involved I succeeded fairly well. The primary cause of dispute between the Joshis and the Govekars was the right claimed by each to possess a certain piece of very valuable land at Lakshmeshwar, a few miles out of Somapur. The estate was not a large one; but as the soil was extremely rich, and was abundantly watered by wells whose springs never failed, the possession of the land was a prize well worth striving for. Often in the course of a morning ride had I visited the gardens and orchards which thrived exceedingly on the debatable land. There were groves of coconut, date, and betel palms, guavas, pomegranates and plantains, and long rows of upright saplings round which the delicate "pan" clambered luxuriantly. Limes and pumalos grew to perfection; and there was a small plantation of oranges, which, if the fruit was not of the finest flavour, added much to the beauty of the scene. All this prosperity was due to the irrigation from the wells. While an

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English well is generally not more than four or five feet in diameter, Indian wells are often excavated to great depths from the solid rock, in the form of a square, of which each side may measure thirty feet or more. A splendid supply of water is thus obtained unless the springs suffer from an abnormally dry season. Various appliances are used for raising the water. In Western India the plan usually adopted is to build from a point above the well, a sloping way which terminates at a lower level some thirty or forty paces off. A large leather bag, capable of containing as much as fifty gallons of water, is affixed to a rope which passes over a wheel suspended above the well. This rope is fastened to the yoke of a pair of bullocks which are led to the top of the slope. The bag is lowered into the well, and when it is filled with water the bullocks are started down the decline, and, assisted by much twisting of their tails and insinuations regarding their female relations, on the part of the driver, they raise the leather bag to the top of the well. It is there seized and opened, and a torrent of cold, clear water dashes into a reservoir, whence it can be diverted to any part of the land which may require moisture. Between each grove in the Lakshmeshwar estate there was a water channel; and it was a refreshing sight in the hot weather to see a sparkling stream rushing along to vivify each plot of the plantation in its turn.

For centuries had the dispute about this land raged between the Joshis and the Govekars; and it had caused as many deaths as a Corsican vendetta.



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Under the various successive Hindu and Mahomedan dynasties sometimes one family and sometimes another had been placed in possession. When British rule was established, the Joshis happened to be the actual occupants; and the administrators decided to allow them to continue in that position until the opposite party could prove their superior claim in the Civil Courts. Thenceforth the war was transferred with unabated vigour to the duly constituted tribunals; and piles of documents, of which the genuine ones were few and the spurious many, were piled up by either side. Lawyers made their fortunes out of the case, and the courts overflowed with the records; but finality seemed as distant as ever. Whenever the Govekars produced a piece of evidence that they considered absolutely incontrovertible, the Joshis immediately came forward with another which seemed no less convincing.

The head of the house of Joshi was named Chintaman. Successful and flourishing in the possession of the estate and other worldly affairs, Chintaman had one great grief. His sons had one after another died; and to him and his spouse Lakshmi was left only one daughter, Sita, who had nearly completed her fourteenth year. The worthy couple were no longer young; and in despair at having no male heir to whom to leave the land, Chintaman had determined to adopt the son of a distant kinsman, who should continue his line, and hold the land in the name of Joshi, in spite of the pretensions of the detested Govekars. Meanwhile, he had other arrangements on hand; for Sita, whose

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marriage had, through various circumstances, been deferred to an unusually late age, was to be wedded to Lakshman, the eldest son of Hari Balkrishna; and the festivities and ceremonies were to be celebrated with the utmost magnificence. The Balkrishnas were of an old and respected family, who had their full share of this world's goods; and Lakshman was a quiet and studious youth of unexceptionable character who would make an excellent husband. So when the Joshis sent the offer of marriage, with Sita's horoscope, to the parents of Lakshman, and the astrologer certified that the horoscopes of Lakshman and Sita were in agreement, Chintaman felt a glow of satisfaction. All details regarding the dowry and the presents to Lakshman by the bride's father, and the value of the gold and silver ornaments to be given by Hari Balkrishna to Sita had been settled. The written agreements had been drawn up and signed by the heads of the houses. The astrologers had named a propitious day for the wedding, and a prodigious bustle of preparation was going on. Hari Balkrishna was in great delight at the prospect of his son's alliance to the opulent Joshi family; and perhaps in his heart of hearts he thought that the adoption of a son by Chintaman might fall through, and the Lakshmeshwar estate come into the possession of Lakshman by his union with Sita. Sita, moreover, was said to be a very beautiful girl. The only person who manifested no interest in the matter at all was the bridegroom that was to be. Lakshman made no objection to carrying out his parent's wishes with regard

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to his marriage; for he had a great idea of duty. But he was always glad to get away to his books from the endless talks about dowry and ceremonies. I suppose that it was upon the principle of the attraction of opposites that the intellectual Lakshman had a strange liking for Rama Govekar. The association of the names Rama and Lakshman is with the Hindus the equivalent of David and Absalom, or Æneas and Achates; but never was there so strangely assorted a pair of intimates as these two. Rama was a dashing young man of eighteen. His parents were dead, and he was head of his family. He was still unmarried, for he said that he had had quite enough to do with looking after a number of younger brothers and sisters without saddling himself with the responsibilities of married life. He was devoted to his dogs and horses, a capital shot, and a good sportsman all round. He was ambitious of obtaining in a few years' time a commission in a native cavalry regiment. He had a certain touch of the devil in his composition, and was frequently up to some mad escapade. Besides his house in Somapur he possessed a more or less ruined fort at Imamghar, about nine miles off; and he used to spend weeks at a time there. But his movements were always erratic, and he was often absent from both of his residences. What possible link there could be between the madcap Rama and the book-loving Lakshman it was difficult to imagine. But not even the projected marriage of Lakshman with the daughter of the hated Chintaman Joshi had any disturbing effect upon their intimacy. All

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these people, and others of their families I knew well, and had even been allowed the privilege of conversing with some of the ladies, their persons being, of course, concealed behind a purdah.

"Lakshman," said I one day, "I wish you would tell me what tastes you have in common with Rama. He wouldn't give a pice for all your books."

"That is true, Sir," replied Lakshman, in English. "But he is so brave and daring, and so charming when he tells me of his doings, that how can I fail to be attracted by him?"

"Rama," I asked, on another occasion, "what is it that you see in Lakshman to make you care for his friendship? I should have thought that your tastes and his were altogether repugnant."

"Sahib," replied Rama, "you know me very well. What can I do? Nothing but ride and shoot and so on, and talk a lot of nonsense. But Lakshman knows all sorts of things, and does not boast about it a bit. And he doesn't mind listening, however long I talk."

It happened that about the middle of February duty had called me in from camp to the headquarter station for a few days. One evening I was riding through one of the principal streets of Somapur, in which was situated the residence of Chintaman Joshi. It was a charming house of the old-fashioned type. Entering by a massive portal, one came upon a courtyard in the midst of which grew plantains and lime trees. Around the open court were cool verandahs from which opened the doors of the

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various dwelling-rooms. As I approached the house I saw a large crowd of people all arrayed in the gayest of costumes. It was easy to see that the initial stages of Sita's wedding were in progress. A large pendal, or booth, had been erected in the street in front of the house. The framework consisted of bamboos. The sides were lined with parti-coloured hangings; and the roofs and posts were decorated masses of mango leaves. Garlands of leaves and flowers were suspended across the street from the windows of the upper rooms. Music of sorts was a prominent part of the proceedings. There were the orthodox native minstrels with guitars and zithers; while in the intervals between these performances a Goanese band, armed with old brass instruments of European make, gave forth discordant strains which occasionally bore a partial resemblance to "Home, Sweet Home" and the National Anthem. I reined in my horse, and watched the doings of the assembled throng, wondering what sort of time the beautiful Sita would have with the retiring Lakshman in days to come. Almost all the people were Hindus; but my attention was attracted by a Mahomedan of middle age whose appearance was somewhat unusual. He was dressed in plain white, with a peculiarly large puggree. His beard was dyed a reddish hue with henna juice; and he wore a pair of dark spectacles. He was talking and laughing with anyone whom he could persuade to give him their attention. He held in his hand a small manuscript book which he persistently displayed.



‘WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?’



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“ Who are you, my friend? ” I asked, when he came within range of my voice. “ What are you doing here, and what is the matter with your eyes? ”

“ My name is Ibrahim Khan,” he replied in a cheery tone. “ I have travelled in Persia and Arabia and many countries, and the scorching wind of the desert has weakened my sight. I live on the charity of the faithful, and I make a small profit by telling fortunes. By the will of Allah I have some skill in reading the future. The Sahib should see the certificates in this book. This rich Hindu in whose house the marriage ceremonies are being performed favoured me with an audience to-day. He wished to know about his daughter’s future prosperity. I crossed her palm and traced the lines in her hand through the purdah, and consulted the order of the stars on the date of her birth. ‘ Never ! ’ I told him, ‘ were all the signs more favourable for a marriage. Health and wealth and many children are prognosticated both by the stars and the lines. This shall be a marriage that people will talk about for generations.’ He was so pleased that he gave me five rupees. Let me tell the Sahib’s fortune ! Shall I tell him when he will catch the dacoits who looted Chinchli two months ago, and who are still at large? ”

“ By all possible means, Ibrahim Khan,” I said ; “ but not now. Come to my bungalow the first thing in the morning. As you know who I am, you can easily find my house.”

“ Who should not know the Sahib’s house—the receptacle of the wisdom of Nashirvan? It is well



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said. To-morrow morning this slave will be present. Your highness shall hear him and reward him."

A cool customer, I thought, as he turned away salaaming. Meanwhile, there was a stir in the crowd, and to the united accompaniment of Goanese and Hindu musicians a procession of mounted men advanced, headed by Lakshman, who was riding a richly caparisoned chestnut mare. From his gold-laced puggree to his patent-leather boots he was clad in the most gorgeous apparel, and I seldom saw a man look so supremely miserable. I caught his eye, and did my best with an encouraging smile to stimulate him to a sense of the occasion; but I must admit that the effort which he made in response was not exactly a success. In front of the booth he and his escort alighted; and while the bands played louder than ever, Chintaman and Lakshmi advanced to welcome him. Then the ceremonies of the marriage commenced. Lakshmi poured water on his feet, Chintaman washed them, and then they both dried them. Next he was anointed with sandal paste and other perfumes; his neck was encircled with garlands of flowers, his puggree was removed and replaced by another of still richer texture. Two matrons then emerged from the booth with a plate of red water and two lamps which they waved round his face. A cocoanut was placed in his hand, and this portion of the interminable ceremony was complete. The bride had taken no part in it. Sita was so far kept in rigid seclusion. Her part of the performance would commence later on. Evening was already closing in; and a lavish display of fireworks was the

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next feature of the entertainment. Lakshman had now to return to his own quarters, there to eat a repast prepared at the Joshi establishment. I was about to turn my horse's head homewards when a message was brought to me that the bridegroom and his prospective parents-in-law desired the honour of my presence. I dismounted, and stepping forward was conducted into the booth, and asked to be seated on a couch. I had never entered a marriage pendal before, and was much interested in the present opportunity. The interior was far more spacious than I had expected from an outside view. The walls were beautifully decorated with richly embroidered cloths, and lamps hung from the ceiling in profusion. There were a number of couches and chairs for the principal persons concerned, while for the less honoured guests carpets were spread on the floor. On one side was an altar about six feet square. On its western edge there was raised a whitewashed wall about two feet in height. Diagonal lines in red powder crossed the wall; and on the top was a circle representing the sun, and a crescent representing the moon. In the centre the inscription, "Oh ! goddess Lakshmi, be pleased !" was written in red lead. I delighted the old gentleman by my congratulations on the magnificence of his ceremonial, and told the bridegroom not to pretend to veil his feelings, as I well knew that he must consider himself to be the most fortunate man in the world with the prospect of so lovely a bride as Sita was said to be. I paid my adieux to my host, who was careful to impress upon me that what I had seen was nothing, the most

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important part of the ceremonial being reserved for a later hour on that and the following nights.

I had a cheery dinner at the club that evening with various old friends, including one or two whom I had not seen for years. Champagne and talk alike flowed merrily; and we came to the unanimous conclusion that we were all rather younger than when we had met last. Devoted as I always was to camp life and the jungle, it was nevertheless delightful to be able every now and then to put in a few days at Somapur, with its civilisation, good fellowships, and ice in one's drinks. We had finished our coffee and smokes, and were arranging a four at whist. Bridge was not then invented. Just before we rose from the table a note written in the vernacular was put into my hand, with a message that it was very urgent. With the usual excuses I read it, and found that it was from old Chintaman Joshi. The communication was sufficiently concise: "Come for life or death," it ran, "I await you in a carriage outside."

"I am very sorry," I said, "but I am afraid you must get someone else to make a fourth; there appears to be some peculiar devilry on, and I must go. My correspondent was celebrating his daughter's marriage this evening, and now he writes about a matter of life or death."

"Hard lines, Carruthers," said Tom le Patourel, the genial secretary of the club. "Of course you must go. We all know that a policeman's life is not a happy one."

"A policeman's life is a very happy one," I

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replied, as I bade good-bye to my whist, and filled my pocket from the box of cigars which a waiter was handing me. Another moment and I was in the carriage which contained Chintaman.

"Drive on," I said, "and tell what has happened as we go along."

"Sahib, Sahib," he stuttered out amidst a burst of wails and sobs, "I am ruined, I am ruined, I am plundered, dacoited, robbed. Oh, that the day ever came!"

"Yes, yes, of course," I observed, "I can quite understand that. But what has happened? Of what are you robbed and dacoited?"

"She is gone, she is gone! What do I know more? Is it jadu, or is it those devils of Govekars? Let the Sahib come and see."

"Who is gone, man? Can't you say plainly what has happened?"

"Who is gone, Sahib? Why, who should be gone? Sita is gone, Sita; can't you understand?"

"Great Scott!" said I. "Sita gone! What on earth do you mean? If you want me to help you, in the name of Mahadeo cease this foolishness and speak some words of sense!"

"Sahib, it was like this. You know our marriage customs. An hour before the time fixed for the solemnisation of the marriage vows the bridegroom is conducted to the bride's house on his horse with great ceremony. He is received by the bride's family. The music ceases for a time, but nautch girls dance on a platform for the entertainment of the guests. Then the priests are to call

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aloud the genealogy of the bride and bridegroom, and when the lucky moment approaches, the bride is led out, and the marriage bonds are tied. Well, Sahib, Lakshman had arrived, and all was in progress, when Lakshmi called me into the house and whispered that Sita had suddenly disappeared. The back door of the house was found open; and just outside were Sita's wedding garments and ornaments. Not the faintest sign of my beloved Sita was to be found. The women folk were in consternation. I ordered them to remain absolutely quiet, and say not a word, but to keep the nautch girls dancing while I went to fetch the Sahib; and if anyone wondered at the delay, they were to explain that the Sahib had promised to honour us, and was momentarily expected."

"You could not have done anything wiser," I replied; "you have taken the most sensible course possible. But what on earth can be the meaning of all this? I expect that Sita is really somewhere about, and has hidden herself out of shyness."

"No, Sahib, she is gone, we are robbed. My daughter, my only daughter! And the honour of my house! Whoever heard of a marriage interrupted like this? What will Hari Balkrishna say? And Lakshman, the bridegroom? And the Govekars? My face is blackened for ever in their eyes."

Lakshman is not unlikely to get over it, I thought to myself as I remembered his woebegone countenance when I had seen him in the evening; but poor old Chintaman was certainly in a serious predicament.

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"Look here," said I, after a short pause for thought, while the unfortunate Chintaman continued weeping, "the marriage ceremony must go on somehow. You must have one more thorough search for Sita. She may be found. If not, I suppose you have a swarm of relations from all parts to witness the marriage? What girl is there of about Sita's age? Did you not once tell me of a cousin, Ganga, wasn't it, who was marvellously like Sita? Is she here?"

"Sahib, she is here. Ganga, daughter of Shamrao Joshi from Bhuleshwar. Yes, she is here, but what would the Sahib propose? To wed Ganga to Lakshman instead of Sita? The horoscopes have not been compared with one another."

"No, no, we will marry Sita to Lakshman; but just until we can find Sita let Ganga take her place. If you can keep your women's tongues from wagging, not a soul will be the wiser. You have got Sita's garments and ornaments for Ganga to wear. Doubtless I shall soon be able to get Sita back, whatever has happened; and then you can square it all up. The actual details must be left to the future. One thing at a time. Trust to me. Now, here we are, close to your house. You escort me to a chair by the booth, and then go into your house and bring out Sita or Ganga, whichever it is to be, and go on with the programme. As you say, the honour of your house is at stake. I can see that the delay has caused some annoyance already. Give money to the nautch girls and the priests in front of the crowd, and announce that you will feed two hundred poor to-morrow. That will turn everyone's feelings

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to your side. One word more. If it is Ganga who is to appear, just contrive to let me know, and when everything is in full swing smuggle me somehow to the room from which Sita disappeared. I must examine it carefully."

"May all the blessings of the gods be upon you, Sahib! You have saved my life. How can I express my gratitude?"

"Wait till I get back, Sita," I replied, a detail which seemed temporarily to have escaped his memory in his delight at finding a way out of the immediate difficulty.

He carried out my instructions to the letter. A whole bag of rupees was distributed to the priests and the nautch girls; the crowd cheered, and the Goanese band murdered "Home, Sweet Home" without waiting for orders. I sat in a gorgeous but exceedingly uncomfortable armchair, while someone garlanded me with flowers, and improved my dress clothes by a plentiful application of rose water and attar of roses.

In a creditably short time the bridal party emerged from the house. The bride, whether Sita or Ganga I could not tell, looked a really beautiful girl. She was rather young in appearance for a bride according to our ideas, but not, of course, in native opinion. Her complexion was not darker than that of an Italian or Spanish girl often is. Her head was bare, but for a wreath of gold ornaments. Her hair was carefully plaited up. She wore a *sari* woven of the most delicate shot silk, green and gold, through the folds of which peeped a *chuli* or bodice

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of an exquisite saffron tint. A hum of applause rose from the spectators in general; but a screen was held to withhold her from the bridegroom's gaze until the lucky moment was announced by the priests. Meanwhile, two of these gentry, one for the Joshis and one for the Balkrishnas, read out the genealogy of the bride and bridegroom for four generations. Chintaman promised to give his daughter to Lakshman, and tied a turmeric root, with some betel and rice, in a corner of Lakshman's shoulder cloth. Hari Balkrishna promised to take Sita for his daughter, and tied turmeric, betel, and rice in Chintaman's shoulder cloth. Meanwhile, the astrologer was watching a complicated arrangement which I learnt was a water-clock, to ascertain the approach of the lucky moment. At last the astrologer spoke to the priests, who said that only five minutes remained. The clock was worshipped with red powder, rice, and flowers, and a present of fifty rupees was made to the astrologer. A movement was then made to the pendal, and the bride and bridegroom were led to the marriage altar, the screen still between them. A brief pause, and the priest said, "Behold, the moment has come. Shri Lakshmi, be propitious!" and the screen was drawn aside. The bride and bridegroom for the first time saw each other's faces. Grains of red rice were thrown about by the whole company, including the happy pair, who were now in a fair way to becoming man and wife, though many more ceremonies that would last several days were needed to tie the irrevocable knot. But I was not destined to see



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more at present. Chintaman took the opportunity of the rice throwing to whisper in my ear that it was Ganga, not Sita, and bade me follow a man who stood beside him. I soon slipped quietly out of the booth, but not before I had time to notice an amazing transformation in the face of Lakshman. His gloom was all gone. A glimpse of his bride's face had absolutely changed him. His countenance simply beamed ; and if there was ever a case of love at first sight this was one.

Meanwhile, I followed my guide, who puzzled me by leading me to the carriage in which I had come. Did old Joshi not wish me to investigate Sita's disappearance, after all? However, I got in ; my guide climbed on the box, and we drove off. We soon turned down one side street, and then another ; and I realised that I was being brought to the back of Chintaman's house. Of course, I ought to have known that I could not have entered the women's apartments by the front way. On finding myself inside the house I made a careful examination of the room from which Sita had disappeared, but there was nothing to be found which threw any light on the matter. One point, however, was perfectly clear, and that was that the door had been unbolted from within. Someone thus was a party to Sita's abduction. Who was it? Leaving this conundrum for the moment, I took one of the carriage lamps and, kneeling down, minutely scrutinised the ground outside. My carriage had pulled up at a short distance off ; so the horses had not disturbed the surface of the road.

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There was no sign of any scuffle ; nor, after finding that the door was opened from inside did I expect to find any. But the marks in the dust told a very plain story. A man had ridden up gently on an animal that had been trained to stand perfectly quiet without being held. The rider had dismounted. A girl had slipped out to meet him. There were two tiny footprints in the dust. He had placed her in the saddle, leapt up behind her, and put spurs to the horse. I could see by the distance between the departing footprints of the horse that it was going at speed ; and the deeper impressions told of the added weight. The man's footprints, too, as he moved to the horse with the girl in his arms were more distinct than those which he left when standing alone. This was an elopement, not an abduction. Miss Sita must be a very unprincipled young person ! She had clearly managed to find an opportunity of opening the door and slipping out unobserved, to fly with her lover. Her lover ! Who the deuce was he ? This was beyond all my experience that a Brahman girl in the very midst of her marriage ceremony should bolt with another man. It was useless to ask Chintaman or his family if they suspected anything of the kind. They had apparently no such suspicion ; and if they had they would never breathe a word. But what was this that suddenly caught my eye as I chanced to move the carriage lamp to one side ? Down on my knees again I went, and speedily put my hand on a fragment of smoked glass. Smoked glass ! Good heavens, what did that remind me of ? Yes, there was no doubt that it had formed

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part of a pair of dark spectacles ! Now it came back to me. Ibrahim Khan, the traveller, who had told the girl's fortune the very day before. Was he the favoured lover, he a Mahomedan ? I paused in my reflections. My brain was whirling in search of some baffling memory. What was there about the man that had seemed unusual, and yet suggestive of something familiar ? Nothing that I could definitely focus as yet. The scoundrel, he had promised to come and tell my fortune next morning ! How did he know who I was ? I had not paid sufficient attention to him at the time. By-the-by, what was he going to tell me about ? Why, the undetected dacoity at Chinchli ! The very case that Rama Govekar had promised to help me in. Rama Govekar ! Great Methuselah ! now I have got him ! This is that young devil Rama's villainy. Now I see why my friend, the fortune-teller, wore dark glasses.

This was a problem indeed that confronted me. My faculties seemed momentarily at fault, till I recollected that in my excitement I had not had a smoke since I left the club. A few puffs of a cigar seemed to pull me together again. If my surmise was correct, what on earth was I to do ? How would Rama have disposed of the girl ? Judging by the haste with which he went off he had some distance to go. He would never take Sita to his house in the town. Why, his ruined fort, at Imamghar, nine miles off, was the probable place. I must hurry there at once, and decide on what to do there as I went along.

"Look here, my friend," I said to my guide,

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who had seemed to think that I was bereft of my senses during my examination of the ground, "I am going on a journey, and you have to come with me. These horses are pretty fresh. I must have someone with me; but to avoid scandal it must not be the coachman or the syce who came with a hired carriage. They remain here. I shall drive myself, and you can sit on the box beside me."

The horses went splendidly in the cool night air, and we covered the nine miles in an hour and a quarter. Leaving the carriage and horses in charge of my attendant, I proceeded to the door of the fort. It was locked, but after some time I managed to arouse a sleepy custodian.

"Open the door at once," I cried. "It is I, Carruthers Sahib. If you do not open it at once my men will blow it down and you will be shot."

Upon this persuasion the door was soon thrown open by the porter, whom I ordered, on peril of instant death, to conduct me at once to Rama's quarters.

"Come out, Rama, without a moment's delay, as you value all that is dear to you," I shouted, at the same time battering on the door. "Come out. You know very well who it is—Carruthers Sahib. Come out. Otherwise I shall have to use force."

"I come," said a voice from within. "The Sahib will wait a few moments!"

I had not long to wait when Rama appeared, looking half ashamed, half defiant.

"Well, young man," I said, "you have spoilt my night's rest, robbed me of a game of whist, and you are certainly responsible for a new dress suit

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for me. You have also committed at least three cognisable offences. Altogether you are in a nice mess. Now, bring out Sita, for I am going to take her back to her father. A nice sort of Rama you are to your Lakshman ! ”

Rama threw himself at my feet, and then rose and addressed me with a dignity and determination which I could not but admire.

“ Sahib,” he said, “ I may have committed a lakh of offences. For any trouble that I have caused you I am more sorry than I can say. But there is one word, and that is this, that Sita I will not give up. To Sita my soul has gone out like water. For Sita my whole heart is inflamed. The world contains nothing for me but Sita. To Sita I had spoken no word of mouth till yesterday, when she promised to fly with me. But, Sahib, when there is love, what need for the mouth to speak? Our eyes had spoken many a time. I saw her only by chance at the well where the Brahman women draw water, and our eyes met. The glance of the eyes was more eloquent than any language. Again and again I rode by the well, and our hearts passed one to the other. What could I do? I dared not address the Joshis, our ancient enemies. The time had come to give her up for ever, or take her for ever. You know me, Sahib. Was I a man to do the former? You may shoot me where I stand; but this word I say, that Sita is mine, and while I live I keep her. And Sita loves me, not Lakshman. They tell me that the Sahib logue arrange their own marriages. In this much I intend to copy the



"YOU MAY SHOOT ME WHERE I STAND"



## ROMEO AND JULIET.

Sahibs. As for Lakshman, he is still my friend. He did not want Sita, and he will be satisfied with any other arrangement."

When I thought of Lakshman's countenance as he looked upon Ganga it occurred to me that he probably would not be satisfied with *any* other arrangement. But this affair could wait.

"This is all very well, Rama," I said; "but how do you propose to marry Sita? You do not answer. You know that you cannot surmount this difficulty by yourself. You have not the brains. Look here, Sita goes back now with me to her father's house; but this much I will concede, that you may come too. A carriage is here. And further I tell you this, and you know that what I promise I fulfil: you shall marry Sita from her father's house, with his full consent."

"But the priests?" he commenced.

"Bother the priests!" I interrupted. "Have you never tried to square a priest? I have, and have succeeded, and can do it again. Now bring Sita, and let us be off. I presume that no one here knows who she is!"

He reassured me on this point, and soon emerged with a bundle in his arms which there was no need for him to explain was Sita. He carried her tenderly down to the carriage, put her in, and sat beside her. I mounted the box and drove off. The horses were not so fresh as when I had driven them to the fort; but they did their duty nobly. Once only on the way was the silence broken. I felt a touch on my back, and Rama asked, "How did you know, Sahib?"



## JOHN CARRUTHERS: INDIAN POLICEMAN.

“Don't you know that it is no use trying to deceive me? Did I not recognise you in the Mahomedan fortune-teller?”

This was not quite accurate, but I had to keep up my reputation. It was close on three o'clock when I pulled up the tired horses near the back door of Chintaman's house, and I sent his servant, who had accompanied me, to bring his master at once.

“Now, Chintaman,” I said, “listen to me without a word. You are in a considerable fix, all of you; and there is only one way out of it, and that is to obey me. I have brought back Sita. She has been taken by Rama Govekar, who is here. He loves her, and she loves him; and you have got to marry her to him with every ceremonial. As for Lakshman, he is enamoured of Ganga; and Hari Balkrishna will marry him to her. Altogether this is a most excellent arrangement. The long-standing feud between the Joshis and the Govekars is by my orders now at an end, and the two families will be one. The Lakshmeshwar garden will belong to Rama and Sita. The details of the arrangement are only a matter of money. Send off this faithful servant of yours to at once bring hither the priests of the Joshis and Balkrishnas. You will arrange with them, upon my authority, that there be a special manifestation and miracle by the goddess Lakshmi, who will appear in person, and order that Sita be wedded to Rama, and Ganga to Lakshman. Why, don't you see the very names suggest this? Was not Rama, the incarnation of Vishnu, married to Sita? To go on with the marriage of Sita to

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Lakshman is impossible, as you can see for yourself. Are you prepared to obey my instructions? "

"The Sahib is an incarnation of Vishnu. Who has such wisdom? Let it be as the Sahib has said."

A joyful little laugh came from the bundle of wraps that covered Sita in the carriage. The old man walked to the carriage, embraced his daughter, and carried her into the house.

I waited till the priests came up, and heard the arrangement explained to them. I mean no disrespect to these reverend ecclesiastics when I state that after hearing about the miracle that was to be wrought both eyes of the one twinkled, and the right orbit of the other was singularly suggestive of a wink.

"I wonder what job I shall have to tackle next?" I thought as I at last turned in at daylight. "I have become a match-maker, I have healed a family feud of centuries standing, and I have perpetrated a miracle. I have done a bad turn to the lawyers and a good turn to the priests. Not a bad record for one night."

I need only to say in conclusion that the town was convulsed at the favour shown to it by the goddess Lakshmi, that the treasure chest of the priests was filled to overflowing by the offerings of the votaries, that the marriages of both the happy pairs were celebrated with the most utmost magnificence, that Lakshman came to see me shortly afterwards beaming with joy to express his undying gratitude, and that a long train of olive branches has been vouchsafed to both families; and I, from time to time, meet them playing in the Lakshmeshwar garden.

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SOUTH of Bombay, and separated from that vast city by its splendid harbour, is the district of Alibag. It is not a favourite place of residence, inasmuch as the European population generally numbers about six souls ; and amusements and social recreations are non-existent. But when, after two years' service there, I was transferred to a more central and civilised station, it was with very great regret that I said good-bye to Alibag. My bungalow was right on the seashore. There was a fine sandy beach that reminded me of Dawlish, and sea-shells of innumerable descriptions were scattered about in abundance. In the fair weather there was excellent swimming, and I enjoyed it to my heart's content. In the monsoon the great waves used to burst with a boom on the stone wall just below my verandah. On a rocky promontory, which at high tide was an island, stood a fine old stone fort built by the pirate Angria, whose depredations in the days of Shivaji were so daring that the East India Company had to keep up an armed fleet at a cost of forty thousand pounds a year to protect their convoys from his ravages. The district ran down the coast for miles, and, inland, its boundaries extended to the mountains known as the Sayhadris or Western Ghauts. It was a rugged country, crossed by numberless ranges of hills interspersed by fertile valleys and beautiful rivers. Some thirty miles south of Bom-

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bay, hidden by a luxuriant growth of palm trees, lay the ancient Portuguese city of Rewadanda, a mass of ruined churches and monasteries, more charming, perhaps, in their decadence than in their original perfection. A great sea-wall, dating from the days of Albuquerque, old rusted cannon from Lisbon still lying on its crumbling bastions, protected the remains of the once flourishing settlement from the inroads of the Arabian Sea. Across the Roha River stood out the rocky fortress of Korlai, surmounted by the Chapel of the Holy Virgin, long since roofless and deserted. The village below contained a population of a few hundred fishermen, who, though all Roman Catholics by creed, were very difficult to distinguish in any way from ordinary Hindus. But in the village streets, instead of pictures of Krishna, the walls bore crude representations of the ascent of Elijah in the fiery chariot, and other Old Testament scenes. In the south of the district was the citadel of Raigahr, the capital of the great Shivaji, known from its massive proportions as the Gibraltar of the East. Other old fortresses were scattered here and there from north to south; and one named Sagargahr, on an eminence some 1,100 feet in height, and distant only six miles from the civil station, made a delightful sanitarium for an officer who required a short change in the trying months of April and May. Then there were some charming camps under mango and palm trees on the southern shores of Bombay harbour, where one could sit and watch the great steamboats taking lucky mortals to

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their dear old English homes. Lucky, I perhaps thought them; but although I am happy enough in a way in my little place in Surrey, oh! how I look back on those days in India! Of course, it was hot and dusty, and there were mosquitoes and such like; but it was life, and this is existence. Sailing in the harbour, too, was part of my business in the Alibag district, for I had an outpost on the Island of Elephanta, and many a pleasant trip I had to the famous caves with their ancient Buddhist temples and images.

On one occasion I was in camp near the thriving town of Uran, opposite Bombay, the seat of an extensive Government liquor distillery. My tents were on the lower slopes of the hill of Karanja, facing the old Bombay fort, and within hearing of the splash of the waves caused by the expiring monsoon. It was the beginning of November, rather early for tents, but I had to visit that part of my district, and thought that I would take the chance of there being any late showers, tents being always preferable, in my mind, to a dingy district bungalow.

It was a Sunday morning, and I was enjoying my first pipe and considering whether I should order a boat and go over to Bombay for the day, when I saw a couple of native fishermen running up to my tent. I beckoned to them to approach, and asked if they had any business with me. For some moments they were too breathless to reply, but at last one of them gasped out, "Sahib, there is a white man down by the shore who is dead or



" I SAW A COUPLE OF NATIVE FISHERMEN RUNNING UP TO MY TENT"



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dying. He is covered with blood. We chanced to find him, and knowing that the Sahib was here, came at once to call him."

"Shahbash," I said, "well done. I come at once. Boy, give me my brandy flask, and get a couple of men to carry my camp-bed and an umbrella to the water's edge. Hurry up."

I was soon at the place, where I saw a European, quite a young man, lying senseless under the shade of a mango. A brief examination served to show that he was certainly not dead, and apparently not dying. His pulse, though weak, was not irregular, and his breathing was free. His clothes, though drenched with water and stained with blood, were decently made, and his general appearance was that of a gentleman. He looked very delicate, and his pallid features gave me the impression that he had met with some great shock. But the first thing was to get him round. I moistened his lips with some brandy, and, without loss of time, I had him placed on my bed, and carried to the tent. Then, with my servant's assistance, I got off his stained garments, sponged him, and rigged him out in a sleeping suit, which seemed the most suitable costume for the occasion. He gradually recovered consciousness, and, after looking up and down in a most puzzled way, asked faintly where he was.

"That's better," I said; "we are coming round fast. Now you swallow this cup of tea and a couple of eggs, and go to sleep for the next two hours. I expect you may have a long story to tell me. But you are not up to it just yet. We will hear all



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about it later on. Not a word now. Yes, yes, you can reserve your thanks till you have had some proper rest."

The tea and eggs disposed of, he sank back on the pillow, and was soon in a healthy sleep. Not till then had I sufficient time for wondering what the mysterious occurrence was all about, and there was not much chance of any light being thrown upon it until the young fellow was in a position to explain his arrival under such strange circumstances. I went down to the beach, but the hard sand registered no foot-prints, and I could find nothing which served to elucidate the mystery. So, restraining my curiosity as best I could, I ordered a tub, and, my toilet completed, I sat down to breakfast, the stranger still sleeping soundly. It was past mid-day when he awoke. As soon as I saw him stir I called for some soup and eggs. I did not consider that anything more substantial would be advisable just yet.

"Where am I?" was his first question. "How did I come here? What part of Bombay is this?"

"What part of Bombay?" I rejoined. "It isn't any part of Bombay. Bombay is the other side of the harbour. You are in my camp near Uran. My name is Carruthers, and I run the police in this district. Some fishermen found you on the shore early this morning, a little the worse for wear. Now put yourself outside this soup and eggs, while I have a pipe, and then tell me all about it. Boy, give the Sahib a whisky and soda; we will try the effects of that prescription."

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The food revived him, and a slight tinge of colour crept into his pale face. I did not allow him to say a word till he had finished. I then put him into an easy chair, pulled up another alongside it for myself, and asked him to begin his tale, looking forward much to learning why he imagined himself in Bombay.

"I really don't know where to begin," he said, after he had settled himself comfortably in his chair. "You say I am not in Bombay, but across the harbour. Why, I crossed the harbour twice last night, so how I am not in Bombay I can't make out."

"The best thing you can do," I replied, "is to tell me your story from the beginning, and then I shall be able to understand it properly. I have a passion for solving conundrums, but I must know all the circumstances connected with them. I can see that you have not been long in the country. Tell me first what brought you out here."

"I am an engineer by profession," he rejoined. "My name is Van Gelder. My father was a Dutchman. He settled in England, was naturalised there, and married an English wife. I had always a taste for engineering, and I was brought up to the mechanical branch of that profession. I wished for employment in India, and passed into Cooper's Hill, but my health was delicate, and I could not get the necessary medical certificate. However, I still hankered after India, and learning that there were many openings in the country for electrical engineers, I went through a special course in that line both in England and Holland. I can speak

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Dutch as well as English. You might think that these details are not much to the point, but they bear some relation to what occurred to me last night, though I don't exactly see how the connection comes in."

"I dare say we shall find a key to that before long," I responded, wondering greatly what was coming.

"Well," continued Van Gelder, "I completed my course, and came to this country, arriving in Bombay a month ago. I had no friends, and little money, but hoped to find work very soon. I put up at a cheap hotel, and advertised for employment in a number of papers, native as well as English. I referred in the advertisements to my certificates from Holland. Day after day went by, but no offer of employment came. Bombay did not seem doing much in the way of electricity. My funds were getting low, and I began to feel in despair. At last something turned up, and that in a very unusual way. Yesterday evening after dinner I was sitting wearily in a long chair in the verandah of my hotel, when a card was put into my hands by a servant. It bore the inscription :

NARAYAN RAGHONATH,

*Manufacturer of Chemical Manure.*

"Was the card printed or written?" I asked; "and did it bear any address?"

"It was written, and there was no address. I told the servant," he continued, "to call up my visitor. Shortly afterwards a native appeared. I

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noticed that he was a tall man. He must have been close upon six feet. He asked in excellent English if he could have a private interview with me ; so I conducted him to my room.

“ ‘ I must apologise, Mr. Van Gelder,’ he commenced, ‘ for this unreasonable intrusion upon you ; but you will, I hope, pardon me in consideration of the urgency of my circumstances. I have a considerable factory for crushing bones, and the preparation of chemical manure. It is situated across the harbour near the town of Uran, as the municipal regulations forbid the carrying on of such manufactures in Bombay. A sudden hitch has occurred in the machinery, and the cessation of work is causing me great pecuniary loss. My engineer, a gentleman, like yourself, trained in Holland, is unfortunately suffering from a severe attack of fever. The motive-power that I employ is electricity. The batteries were purchased from an Amsterdam firm ; and the system of transmission of power is on a different principle from that in force in England. No one but an engineer, who has studied in Holland, can repair the injury. I was in great straits as to where to turn for help ; but providentially I saw your advertisement, and hastened across the harbour in my steam-launch to apply to you. Now, Mr. Van Gelder, will you do me the favour of returning with me at once to put the machinery in order, so that work may be resumed first thing in the morning ? Your fee will be one hundred rupees.’

“ Needless to say, I was delighted at the offer,

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and lost no time in setting off with my visitor. We drove and drove for what seemed to me an interminable distance; and at last pulled up somewhere on the shore of the harbour. The carriage was dismissed, and we walked down to the water, but no sign of a steam-launch was to be seen. My companion flew into a rage, and vented imprecations on the missing crew. 'The scoundrels!' he said, turning to me, 'what a cursed trick to play us! I am afraid we shall have to cross in an ordinary boat. Do you very much mind? I am most distressed at this accident.'

"Luckily there was a boat there, the only one, as I happened to remember. After some conversation with the boatmen we got in and pushed off. It was a pitch dark, cloudy night; not a star to be seen. There was a pretty strong wind and a choppy sea. I am not a good sailor, and I felt very uncomfortable, and at last lay down on some rough mats. The men put up a sail, and also used their oars; and the boat seemed to travel pretty fast. My friend was most apologetic for the discomfort, but said that we should arrive nearly as soon as if we had found the launch. I was so miserable that I took no account of time; and when we arrived at the landing place I felt more delighted than I can tell you. There was a light bullock cart waiting for us right at the water's edge. My conductor hurried me into it without waiting a moment, jumped in after me, and closed the door. Curtains were drawn down over the windows, and when I thought that I would raise one of them to get a little fresh air I

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found it immovable. The bullocks trotted off as fast as horses, and we drove for a considerable time, taking a great many turnings. Finally, after apparently passing through a gateway, we stopped outside a building and then alighted. Everything was in total darkness. The manufacturer again flew into a violent rage at the carelessness of his servants in having no lights for us. The door of the house was closed and locked. My friend shouted and knocked several times, and then blew a whistle, upon which the door was opened from within. We entered a large and dimly-lighted room lined with shelves covered with bones, and jars labelled 'Chemical manure.' This, then, was part of the factory premises.

" 'Allow me to offer you a little refreshment, Mr. Van Gelder,' said my host. I find these native names stick in my throat, and the exertion of getting out a designation like Narayan Raghonath is a severe strain. 'You must take a few minutes' rest before commencing work.' I gratefully swallowed the whisky and soda which a servant brought me, and soon felt ready for my task. I was conducted through several passages to the factory, and on entering it I was surprised at the scale of the machinery and the perfection of the mechanical appliances connected with the generation and application of the motive power. The room was well lighted, and I at once got to work. I am an enthusiast in my profession, and the one thing that I thought of was to find the defect in the machinery and rectify it with the least possible delay. The

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manufacturer looked on with the closest interest and attention while I made my examination. I carefully unscrewed and removed cranks, levers, joints, and valves, and laid them on the floor. In an hour I had found a valve whose action was interfered with by the presence of a foreign body consisting of a small piece of tin which might have fallen into it from the roof while some careless artisan had left it open. It was merely a most simple operation, for which any special scientific acquirement was unnecessary. In another half an hour everything was replaced, the electric current applied to the engine, and the great cylinder which passed through the wall, to supply, as my friend informed me, the motive power for the bone and nitrate crushing presses, was once more set in motion. The proprietor was delighted at my success. 'You must come again later on,' he said, 'and see the stuff turned out. Now have another drink, and I will take you as far as the boat. You will get back to your hotel in a couple of hours, and can sleep off your fatigue at leisure. You must allow me to add fifty rupees to the amount stipulated. It little represents the obligations that you have conferred upon me.' He pressed some notes into my hand, handed me a whisky and soda, which was welcome enough after my exertions, and accompanied me in the bullock-cart to the boat. After this my recollections are rather vague. I cannot help thinking that my last drink was drugged, though why it should have been I have no idea. I was only vaguely conscious of what was going on. I know



"THE MANUFACTURER LOOKED ON WITH THE  
CLOSEST INTEREST"





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that the sea was much rougher than before, and after a time I was horribly sea-sick. My nose then began to bleed, and it was impossible to stop it. I am subject to this distressing malady after any unusual exertion. I noticed the boatmen watching me as in a confused kind of way I tried to check the bleeding. They spoke to me and to each other; but what they said I haven't an idea, as I do not know a word of the language. I have a general feeling that they were rather anxious. After what seemed an eternity of misery I believe that I must have swooned; and the next thing that I remember is finding myself in your tent. And you say that I am not in Bombay? Why on earth should they keep me hours in their abominable boat only to bring me back to this side of the harbour which I had just left? "

"What an extraordinary story," I said after a pause for reflection. "We must try to get to the bottom of this mystery. As you say, it is hard to understand why they should put you in a boat at Uran to go back to Bombay, row you about in the harbour, and end up by leaving you on this side. It wants a lot of thinking out. Now, can you answer a few questions? You told me that you do not quite see where the connection comes in between your having been trained in Holland and your last night's adventures. Well, if the machinery was turned out at Amsterdam, and you had been trained there, is it not very natural that the owner should consider you to be the very man to repair the damage to the mechanism? "

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"Yes," he replied, "that would be so; but at the time my sole idea was to put the machinery right as soon as possible, and I did not pay any attention to the fact that has struck me forcibly since, that the machinery was not Dutch, but English."

"Exactly what I expected," I remarked. "There is something very deep in this. Now, I will not bother you any more just at present. Keep yourself going with some of these books and papers till the heat cools down a bit, and then we will have a little turn and talk it over at leisure. I dare say I can rig you out in some of my clothes."

He took my advice, and I buried myself in the adventures of Mr. Midshipman Easy until it was time for tea; and then I ordered a reckla, as the light carts drawn by two trotting bullocks are called. They are the only form of conveyance to be obtained at Uran; but I have often had to travel by worse means. Van Gelder had by this time pulled himself together, and he seemed quite to enjoy the outing. I took him through the town, and then below the hill of Mora, past the distilleries to the landing place. As we went along his expression appeared more and more puzzled; but I wished to let his thoughts take their own way, and so refrained from asking him any questions. We watched the sun set over the harbour, and then drove back to the town and my camp. At last my guest broke silence.

"I can't make it out, you know, at all," he commenced. "Of course, I could not see how I

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was taken to the factory last night, but at all events the road was a good one, while this is execrable; also from the landing place to the town the road is perfectly straight with no branches, while last night there was one turn after another. And where is the church?"

"The church!" I said in surprise. "What church?"

"Did I not tell you?" he said. "Just as I was reaching the factory, I heard the sound of Gregorian chants at no great distance off; and then a clock, with heavy solemn tones that seemed to belong to a church, struck twelve."

"Struck twelve!" I repeated. "And what time was it when your manufacturer called on you after dinner? I suppose not before half-past nine."

"It must have been nearly that. It was nine when I left the dining-room, and I had been sitting in the verandah for some time."

"Great Scott," I said, "now you are talking! Now a light dawns upon me. Here are depths upon depths. By Jove! there is something before us. I am afraid you must put up with another boat journey to-night, Van Gelder—in my company this time. We must get back to the tents for a hasty dinner, and then off we go. Here, Krishna," I shouted as we arrived, "come out with this Sahib and myself to the seashore, where no one will hear us." Krishna followed us in silence, walking erect and well drilled, every button on his uniform polished to the utmost; and as we halted at the beach he stood at attention and saluted.

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“What kit have you here?” I asked. “Can you get yourself up as a Bunya in ten minutes?”

“In less, Sahib.”

“Very well, do so, and go off at once to the bundar, and engage the best boat you can find to take you to Bombay; go by the footpath that passes the bungalow. When you are well out of sight of the landing stage make the boatman bring you round here, and when you are close to the shore whistle. The tide is running out, and you ought to manage it in three-quarters of an hour. The Sahib and I go to Bombay. About this matter let there be silence.” Krishna saluted and went off without a word, while Van Gelder and I returned to my camp, and dined. Indian servants are wonderful about getting one's food. If you suddenly call for dinner an hour before the usual time, or come in a couple of hours late, it makes no difference. The servants come up smiling, and the dinner is just as though you had sat down at the very minute for which it had been ordered.

It was half-past seven when we heard the expected whistle. I took my revolver, and asked Van Gelder if he could shoot. He replied in the affirmative.

“Very well, I will get you a weapon later on,” I said. “We shall probably require six-shooters. Try not to be sea-sick this voyage. We shall want all the wits that we have.”

“All right,” he rejoined. “I will do my best. But what are we going to do in Bombay? I am completely mystified.”

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"Never mind that just at present," I rejoined. "I may be wrong, and do not wish to disappoint you. But I fancy that you will be a little surprised. By the way, is all this business absolutely incomprehensible to you? Have you no surmise at all?"

"None whatever. It looks as if someone had been playing a practical joke on me."

"Well, you must see on which side the joke lies to-night," I replied; "but meanwhile you might give me some description of your friend of the chemical manure. Was he a Hindu or a Mussulman?"

"I am afraid that I hardly know the difference," said my companion. "You see, I have only been out in India a few weeks. How should I distinguish them apart?"

"Was it possible that a man could be such a griff?" I thought. "What sort of head-dress had he on?" I asked. "Had he a beard or not, and did he wear trousers or this description of attire?" pointing to the bunya's dhoti worn by Krishna, who was sitting in the bows of the boat without the faintest indication that he had ever been put through a course of drill.

"Let me see," said Van Gelder thoughtfully. "He certainly had no beard. He was clean shaved but for a moustache that had been black but was turning grey. I think he had a loosely-tied white cloth round his head; and, yes, he wore a garment of this fashion, round his legs."

"A Hindu then, certainly," I rejoined, "and probably a Brahman. Brahmans, of course, occa-

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sionally wear loose rumals instead of their heavy go-to-meeting puggries. Hindus are not often very tall, but when they are, they are nearly always Brahmans."

It took us three hours to cross the harbour. We landed at the Apollo Bandar, and I took my friend straight to the police post between the landing place and the Yacht Club, where I knew that I should find a European constable.

"Good-evening, Dickinson," I said. "I am glad to find that you are on duty. Where is the Chief? I want to see him at once. Can you telephone to his house?"

"Certainly, sir," said the constable, to whom I was well known, "but begging your pardon I think he is still at the Yacht Club. I know he had a party of friends dining there. He often stays a bit late, and then drives round to see if all the men are at their posts. If you will take a seat, sir, I will send round and find out in a minute."

"Hold hard a moment," I interrupted; "I will write a chit on the chance of his being there. Just keep a look-out at the gate in case he should drive off while I am scribbling, and if you see him stop him."

The Chief was a splendid officer. I had known him on and off for years. I hastily wrote a short note saying that I wanted to see him at once on urgent business, adding that I was not in suitable attire to join him in the Club. The messenger came back with a salaam, and a few moments afterwards the Chief appeared.

"Hullo, Carruthers!" he said. "What's up

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over the water? You want my assistance? What's the shikar? "

" So far as I can make out, there is some first-rate shikar on hand. But it's not over the water, though my friend here thinks that it is. It's in your beat, if I'm not mistaken. By the by, let me introduce Mr. Van Gelder."

" The engineer! " said the Chief, jumping up. " Why, I have had my men looking for him all over the place to-day. His hotel manager reported that he had gone off with a Brahman last night, and had not been heard of since. He is in no end of a funk about him. Where has your friend been? Have you been hiding him? "

" Tell Dickinson to see that no one is within hearing, and you shall hear the whole yarn. We can then see about the interpretation thereof."

Precaution being duly taken to ensure that there were no listeners, I said to the Chief:

" I think you had better hear Mr. Van Gelder's story from his own mouth if he will not mind giving it to us. If I repeated it to you I might unconsciously give it a colouring in conformity with my theory regarding it."

The Chief agreed, and Van Gelder related his narrative in exactly the same terms as before, adding, however, the recollections which had occurred to him on the evening drive to Uran. The Chief looked graver and graver as the engineer proceeded.

" You really think——? " said the Chief, looking at me when the story was completed.



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"I really do," I replied.

"Then these devils have actually been at work here, under my very nose. I thought that the scene of their operations was probably at Allahabad. But here, and I not to know it? Good heavens! I shall have no reputation left."

"Don't jump at conclusions," I said. "They may have only started business here quite lately. Anyhow, think of the kudos that you will get for the magnificent capture!"

"Do you gentlemen mind kindly telling me what this is all about?" interposed Van Gelder. "I am completely in the dark."

"Yes, that's only fair," said the Chief. "Will you enlighten him, Carruthers?"

"We'll do it between us," I said. "I'll begin. You see, it was like this, Van Gelder. Your friend of the nitrates was in a boggle about machinery. For reasons best known to himself he wished to keep the locality of his industrial concern an absolute secret."

"Therefore," said the Chief, "he looked about for a qualified engineer who knew nothing about the country and still less about the language. He came across your advertisement, and thought you would exactly suit him. In order to interest you in the matter, and render it unlikely that you would say no to his somewhat peculiar request, he told you that the machinery was of a Dutch pattern, and so led you to think that you were the one man in Bombay who was indispensable to him."

"If your advertisement had stated that you had

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Norwegian qualifications," I continued, "he would have told you that the machinery was from Norway."

The Chief grunted assent, and resumed. "Every precaution was taken to deceive you as to the whereabouts of the manufactory. In the first place, you were told that it was at Uran, across the water. Then you were taken a long drive up and down, the Lord knows where, from your hotel to the harbour, while you could have driven to various landing places in ten minutes. You were to have crossed in the gentleman's steam launch."

"But you didn't," I struck in, "because the steam launch never existed. The boat which, as you thought, chanced to be there, was in waiting for you. The mythical steam launch was held out as an inducement to you, lest you should have hesitated to accept the offer if you had known that you would have to travel in a native boat at night."

"When your voyage was over you were placed in a reckla, the kind of conveyance universally used at Uran, though still to be found in Bombay. This was to support the Uran theory. Then the shutters were firmly closed to prevent you making out where you were. At last you reached the business premises. You hear a church clock striking midnight. I don't think anyone could have crossed the harbour in so short a time, eh, Carruthers?"

"Quite impossible. The tide and wind were both unfavourable last night. You see you were not taken across the harbour at all, but to another part of Bombay. The voyage was only a little *jeu d'esprit* to deceive you. Well, Van Gelder, you

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examined the engines, and found what was wrong. The injury was very simple. Almost anyone could have put it right. There are swarms of engineers in Bombay who would have been glad to do the job for twenty rupees, while you were offered a hundred. Now note this. Although you saw the mechanism that supplied the motive power, you did not see what the motive power had to effect. The proprietor, with a great air of candour, asked you to come on another occasion and see his works."

"Next," resumed the Chief, "you were given a drugged peg. As you were afterwards seasick that did you no particular harm. You were escorted to the boat, and the boatmen were probably instructed to land you at the place where you had embarked. But your nose began to bleed violently, and your clothes were saturated with blood, and then you swooned away. The boatmen were in a tight place. They dared not land a man in such a condition as yours at any place where they were likely to be seen by the police or others, for fear of coming under suspicion themselves. They therefore hit upon the plan of taking you across the harbour in earnest, and leaving you where you were found this morning."

"Where I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance," I interposed.

"Now," said the Chief, "we must go to the root of the matter. Had you seen the workshops you would have been surprised at the kind of machinery used for crushing bones and preparing chemical manure. The place that you visited (the

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Chief's voice sank into a whisper) was an illicit manufactory of false coin and false currency notes ! The country has been flooded with these articles for a long time, and we couldn't get on the track. And it was going on under my very nose ! What a haul we shall have ! Now, Mr. Van Gelder, there is one thing that I did not ask you before, as I wanted our story to work itself out in a straightforward way, and doubtless Carruthers had the same reason." I nodded to explain that I understood what was coming. "Do you mind showing me the notes with which you were paid? "

Van Gelder took them out. There was one of a hundred rupees, and five of ten each.

"Of course," said the Chief, after he had scrutinised the notes. "Calcutta circle ! Notes perfectly genuine. But look through this lens at the hundred rupee note. What do you observe ? There are traces of the best printer's ink having been dropped on it in two places. The note has been used as a copy. Let me consult my note-book. Yes ! I thought so. The forgeries are all of the Calcutta circle. Here are the numbers of various forged notes which have found their way to the Paper Currency Office through the banks, where they excited no suspicion. Here we are, the very number of this note ! "

"By George," I said, "the plot thickens. But where is the church where they sing Gregorian chants up to midnight? "

"I think I can put my hand upon that," said the Chief. "Yesterday, or rather the day before

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yesterday, for we are well into Monday now, was All Souls' Day. There is a new church of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart beyond Mazagon, close to the water. A hundred to one that is the place. The Brothers are just the sort to have midnight services on such an occasion. I congratulate you on noticing this point, Mr. Van Gelder. We should have been in a fix if you had not."

There was silence for a short interval. The Chief was lost in thought, and I would not interrupt him.

"It is one o'clock now," he resumed. "We have four hours before dawn, when we shall go for the chemical manure factory. I must have two hundred men to draw a cordon round the Church of the Sacred Heart, and some more to act with us. The police launch will prevent egress by the harbour. I must denude all my stations to get enough men. Now I will set the telephone to work. We may as well stay here for the present. I will send for some long chairs from the Club, and we can have a couple of hours' snooze. Are you both armed? Just so, I will have a revolver for Van Gelder. Dickinson, send round to the Club stable and order my carriage for three o'clock."

Telephonic orders despatched, the Chief threw himself into an easy chair, and slept the sleep of the just for two hours, when he seemed to awake automatically; but Van Gelder and I were too excited to woo the sweet goddess. For myself, I was lost in a train of thoughts that would not work out to any definite conclusion.

Shortly after three we entered the Chief's

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carriage. We did not make straight for our destination, but drove round to various police stations to see if orders had been carried out. It was close on half-past four when at a word from the Chief we pulled up.

"We will walk now," he said. "We are a quarter of a mile from the church, and where the bone factory is we don't exactly know. See, here are my men!"

We alighted, and at the turning into a small by-way we saw six armed constables under a petty officer. They saluted silently. The Chief asked a question in a whisper. The officer pointed in reply. On we walked, and at every turning we found a similar guard; while between each post at every ten paces stood a sentry. At last we reached the church as the great clock struck five. Dawn was now breaking, but not a breath of freshness came with it. The heat was sickening, and we gasped for air. Close to the church we found drawn up a large force of some fifty police, including a number of Europeans. Two men carried crow-bars and axes. Thirty constables were promptly sent off, two and two, in different directions, to see if they could find any building which corresponded with the bone factory. We three stood still with the remainder, waiting eagerly for news. In less than five minutes, which seemed an eternity, a smart havaldar or sergeant came running up to report that a house, surrounded by high walls, had been found down a small lane, from which could be faintly heard the sound of machinery working inside.

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"Come on," said the Chief. "We must chance it's being the right place, shahbash, Havaladar. Send three men from each post to the house, and tell the rest to keep their eyes open."

We were soon at the entrance of the house. A heavy gate closed with a solid lock confronted us. But the alarm had by this time evidently been raised inside. We could hear movements and voices. There was no need for further silence.

"Open in the name of the law," shouted the Chief; while at a sign from him the application of axes and crowbars speedily effected an entrance. We rushed in, revolvers ready. Three natives, who attempted no resistance, were seized and handcuffed in the room, round which stood the shelves bearing jars labelled, "Chemical Manure." On through the engine-room we ran, Van Gelder showing us the way. The engines had ceased working, and the room was empty. We saw where the cylinder passed through the wall to the room which must contain the working machinery; but we could find no entrance to lead us into it. The Chief snatched up a crowbar and signed to me to take another. We commenced probing the wall, he on one side, I on the other, to find any hidden communication. At last I struck on a deal board. It slightly yielded, and I found that I had hit upon a door so skilfully painted the colour of the wall that it had escaped our observation.

"Here we are," I shouted. "Come on." The Chief was with me in a moment. We dashed in the door, and tumbled through, to be saluted by a

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bullet which lodged in the Chief's forearm. Before there was time for our opponent to fire another shot I had put a bullet through his right shoulder. He dropped his revolver, and I closed with him. He struggled fiercely, but had no chance with his wounded shoulder.

My prisoner was in no communicative mood, and contented himself with cursing "that little fool of a Dutchman." After doing what we could for the Chief, pending the arrival of a medical man, we turned our attention to our spoil. The coining factory was a perfect mint, and replete with the most modern appliances in the way of dies, moulds, files, tools, and batteries. Thousands of coins, both rupees and dollars, were found: some ready for circulation, and others in various stages of manufacture. The coins were most finely finished, and only an expert could distinguish them from those issued by Government. The contrivances for the preparation of currency notes, of which we seized a very large number, were on the same standard.

The Chief had the bullet extracted, and soon recovered. As I had anticipated, he was given great credit for the detection and seizure of the illicit manufactory. The wounded prisoner, who was proved to have escaped from the Andamans, was convicted of attempt at murder while under sentence of transportation for life, and this time he paid the penalty for his crime upon the gallows.



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OF course, as a policeman, it was in my day's work to see much of the seamy side of life. But even after making due allowance for this, it frequently used to seem to me that natives of India found no occupation so fascinating as that of living on their own wits and their neighbours' credulity. The confidence trick, in all manner of forms, was a source of income to innumerable individuals. I have often met men carrying about vessels of sacred water from the Ganges, a thousand miles from that venerable stream, who retailed precious draughts to the faithful at the most fanciful prices. So efficacious, they assured their purchasers, were the virtues of the holy fluid, that however much was expended in the course of the day was miraculously renewed by Mother Gunga during the night. Certainly the jars of the vendors were always full in the morning. A golden road to the attainment of affluence was to be found in the trade of doubling rupees. A professor of this Rosicrucian mystery repairs to an out-of-the-way village, and offers to double as much money as anyone will lend him for a night. The *chevalier d'industrie* has, of course, engaging manners, and a flow of cheery conversation, which soon ingratiates him with the credulous bucolics. At first there would be a little hesitation in coming forward. Then perhaps a woman in her husband's absence consents to risk a rupee out of the scanty household stock. The next

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morning it is returned to her with an additional coin of the same value. This creates some sensation ; and a number of people come forward with one or two or more rupees, all of which bear fruit in the same way. After a few days our friend is out of pocket by perhaps fifty rupees ; but his reputation is now immense. People crowd to him ; and even the careful village money-lender thinks that this is an opportunity not to be lost. Nearly two hundred rupees are handed over to this universal benefactor, in confident hopes of their duplication ; but the next morning there is lamentation, for the wonderful stranger is gone, and the rupees with him. Another ingenious method for the appropriation of one's neighbour's money is for a *soi-disant* merchant to go round with genuine pearls and jewels which are for sale at marvellously cheap rates. A would-be purchaser is much struck with their appearance, but, in spite of the favourable terms offered, his love of haggling causes a little difficulty in coming to terms. The salesman in the most confiding way offers to leave his wares till the next morning, telling his friend good-humouredly that when his wife has seen the pearls she will never let him part with them. In the morning there is another interview, and bargaining recommences. The ornaments are brought out. The dealer takes them up, and begins to dilate upon their splendid qualities, when he raises a cry and says that false jewels have been substituted in the night for his real ones, and loudly demands justice. In the confusion that ensues he contrives to conceal in his girdle the original articles, and produces imitations

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which he has handy for the purpose. He yells and screams in the manner of the East, and shows the bystanders the sham pearls or stones, which are universally admitted to be made of glass. The intending purchaser, overwhelmed at the charges brought against him, and terrified by threats of the law, is only too glad to come to terms, and lay down a lump sum in compensation for the alleged disappearance of the original jewellery.

There was at one time a thriving trade in the sale of women from the Punjab to the landholders of Sind, who apparently had some difficulty in obtaining wives in their own country. Professional matrimonial agents brought down from the upper provinces a bevy of ladies, who were represented as being of high caste Hindu or respectable Mahomedan family. As a matter of fact they were generally of low extraction; but no suspicion seemed to arise in the minds of the aspirants to connubial bliss. As much as four hundred rupees was often paid to the agent, and formal marriage ceremonies were completed. The wife thus obtained would live with her husband for some months until she was thoroughly conversant with the ways of the household, and her husband implicitly entrusted her with his lares and penates. One day, however, she would take an opportunity of disappearing with the valuables of the establishment. After a good old time in her home in the Punjab she would return with the agent to Sind, and be sold to another victim. Though I had no pity for the weak-minded Sindees who allowed themselves to be fleeced in this way, I

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managed to secure convictions against several of the agents for obtaining money under false pretences ; but in spite of this deterrent the trade flourished merrily.

Natives, as a rule, have only to be told that such and such an order has been passed by the Sirkar, or Government, to implicitly believe it, and many a swindle has been perpetrated upon the strength of this confiding innocence. I find in my note-book particulars regarding a gang of Hindus who got hold of a low European as their figure-head, and went about in remote villages with large quantities of cloth. They represented themselves as the Star of India Government Cloth Agency, and stated that by order of Government so much cloth had to be purchased at fixed rates by every householder. With a white man to preside over the sales their statements were unhesitatingly accepted ; and as the price charged for the cloth was out of all proportion to its value, a very handsome harvest was reaped for some time, until I heard of their doings and had the pleasure of running them in. A Manchester firm at one time exported to India large consignments of bandanna handkerchiefs stamped with the likeness of ten-rupee notes. This, of course, presented too great a temptation to be resisted. Each portion of the handkerchief that bore the facsimile of a note was cut out, pasted on paper, and disposed of to the ignorant as genuine currency. The fraud assumed such proportions that the importation of the handkerchiefs had to be prohibited. The calamities of plague and famine afforded endless opportunities

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for fraud. False certificates of inoculation, and passes for travelling, testifying that the bearer had not come from a plague infected area, were drugs in the market; certificates that deaths from plague were deaths from any other cause could easily be obtained from subordinate native medical officers for a sufficient *quid pro quo*; and any amount of blackmail was extorted from people who were suffering from a touch of ordinary fever, on the threat that if they did not pay up they would be taken to a plague hospital. In the famine the commonest form of fraud was to draw the Government wage on relief works for hundreds of persons existent only in the fertile imagination of some understrapper, who thought that famine was a special dispensation of the gods for the benefit of his own pocket.

For more than a year I was in charge of the Railway Police. It was not a sphere of duty that I should have liked as a permanency, for it deprived me of camp life; and the everlasting living in trains palled, notwithstanding that I had a comfortable saloon carriage for my own use, which could be attached to any train that I liked. But I gained some interesting experiences, and my eyes were opened to an astonishing number of frauds that were constantly being perpetrated. Consignments of silver bullion entrusted to the Railway would turn out on arrival to be lead. Sometimes the transformation was actually effected during transit; in other instances it was discovered that lead had been handed over to the company under the designation of silver in order to bring a false claim for damages.

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The majority of native travellers are uneducated, and cannot read the tickets issued to them at the stations. A swindler would hang about at a station, and seeing a party of agriculturists arrive in a bullock-cart, inquire of them their destination, and then offer to purchase their tickets for them, saying that the ticket clerk habitually charged too much. Perhaps the party consisted of five passengers, who were going sixty miles. Our friend takes their money, purchases and hands over to them tickets for the next station, and disappears. Great is the tribulation of the passengers when, at the end of their journey, they have to pay over again! On the occurrence of a native fair or other large gathering there are frequently more people wishing to travel than can be accommodated in the trains. The station staff reap a golden harvest on each occasion by giving preference to those who are willing to pay double the fare rather than be left behind. In the same way, when there is a rush of cotton or grain traffic and the supply of rolling stock is insufficient—a not unfrequent predicament—and it is of urgent importance for the sellers to get their stuff to Bombay at the earliest possible date, the native station masters make enormous profits by taking a premium on the priority of despatch of consignments. The goods trains on Indian railways are very heavily laden, and travel at slow rates where there are stiff gradients. Consequently the idea of mounting the trains when in motion and throwing off bags of grain from the open trucks, especially in times of scarcity, readily presented itself to the native mind. Grain to the

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value of many thousands of rupees was robbed from passing trains in this way in famine times ; and the thieves grew so daring that they would grease the lines when a train was expected, and so bring it to a standstill by preventing the engine from gripping the rails on the incline. Telegraph clerks at various stations would agree with each other to transmit messages without keeping any record of them, the receipts being divided amongst themselves instead of being credited to the company. There were similar artifices in every department of railway business. It was a regular thing at one time for cases of wine or spirits ordered from Bombay to arrive at their destination with several bottles short. A certain number of the railway employés had become most expert at opening cases, however carefully sealed, and reclosing them so cleverly that no change in their appearance was noticeable. These worthy gentlemen gradually became known as the Golden Gang ; and great was the dismay in many unexpected quarters when their delinquences were at last unearthed.

One morning in the month of March, to be exact it was the 9th of the month, I was sitting in my saloon carriage, which was standing in a siding at a station above the ghauts on the Jubbalpore line. I had been there several days for the investigation of one or two cases of fraud ; and my work being completed, I had ordered my carriage to be attached to a train which would land me at Bombay in time for a set of tennis at the Gymkhana in the evening. I was enjoying a pipe, and watching a passenger train from Bombay draw up at the platform. What a row

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there always used to be at those Indian stations when a train arrived ! Passengers, whether getting in or alighting, always thought it their duty to shout at the top of their voices to each other, or to the guard, or to coolies, or to no one in particular. To send policemen or anyone else to order them to moderate their transports had only the effect of increasing the babel, for the crowd, if anything, shouted the more, and there were the raucous orders of the police to " choop raho " in addition. An orderly brought me from the train an evening Bombay paper, and I was proceeding to read the foreign telegrams, when my eye was caught by the heading of one of the local paragraphs, " Serious fraud on the G.I.P. Railway." " Hullo," I thought, " what is all this about? I have had no telegram of anything serious ! Twelve thousand rupees too ! " as I glanced further on. " A nice little haul for somebody ! " Before I had time to finish reading the paragraph, the train which had brought the paper moved on ; and I saw a man running excitedly across the lines towards my carriage. He was a typical Hindu merchant of Bombay, of middle height ; his figure was inclined to corpulence. He wore a squat red puggree, a specklessly clean dhotee or loin cloth surmounted by a black alpaca coat, and patent leather shoes. He had a gold watch chain and gold-rimmed spectacles ; and generally presented the appearance of a man who took good care of himself. I noticed behind him on the platform a pile of luggage, which included a large steel trunk and wicker basket, and the enormous roll of bedding which



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appears to be generally carried when travelling by well-to-do natives as a voucher of their respectability, for such an array of rezais and blankets is certainly not a necessity in the Indian climate. In his hand he had a neat brown leather bag.

"Are you Mr. Carruthers?" he asked in English, without waiting to be announced. I reassured him as to my identity and requested him to take a seat in my saloon, and inform me of his business.

"I have been swindled," he resumed, after sitting down on the extreme edge of a chair; "I am the victim of a most base and atrocious conspiracy. I have been robbed of twelve thousand rupees by some unscrupulous scoundrels."

"Twelve thousand rupees!" I interrupted. "That is curious. I was just beginning to read in the paper an account of a fraud of that very sum. Does this happen to relate to you?" I continued, handing him the paper.

"This is the very thing," he replied, after wiping his spectacles and perusing the paragraph. "My name is Maganlal. I am the junior partner in the firm of Ranchordass and Maganlal, upon whom the embezzlement has been perpetrated. But the description in the paper is not entirely accurate. If you will do me the favour of listening to me I will give your honour a detailed and circumstantial statement of the unprincipled machinations which have been levelled against my firm."

"Proceed," I said, "Mr. Maganlal. I shall be most interested to listen to all that you have to say. Let me hear about it from the beginning."

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“ My narrative,” rejoined my visitor, “ shall be at the same time lucid and concise. I was for many years managing clerk in the old established firm of Ranchordass and Narayandass Brothers. Unfortunately a little more than a year ago Narayandass passed away, leaving no heirs ; and the senior partner, Ranchordass, who also was not blessed with any offspring, carried on the business for some months under the original name of the firm. But he was very much affected by his brother’s death ; and I could not help noticing that from time to time his instincts of commercial acumen appeared somewhat at a discount. Business was not attended to as it should be ; and the ups and downs of the produce market did not receive due attention. I should mention that the transactions of the house, though not restricted to cotton, were chiefly concerned with that commodity. At last one day I, with due repugnance on account of my natural modesty, ventured to bring to the notice of my esteemed proprietor the unsatisfactory condition of affairs. He reciprocated most kindly. He said that he was aware of his growing incapacity, and had in vain tried to devote greater clearness of judgment to his concerns, and that he intended to take me into partnership with a view to the rehabilitation of prosperity by my energy. I was overjoyed at his benevolence ; and under the new title of Ranchordass and Maganlal the firm began to recover its old prosperity, and the respect of the mercantile community. I did not confine my operations to Bombay, but I travelled to the various cotton centres in Khandesh, Berar, and

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the Carnatic; and by personal inspection, coupled with a system of cash payments, producing short profits and quick returns, I steadily continued to improve the business relations of the house.

“ And now, sir, to descend from the general to the particular, on the first of the current month I visited Hubli with the intention of making some purchases there; but the crop, though abundant, was of inferior staple, and the prices disproportionately high. The merchants offered me long credit if I would accept their terms; but as I was prepared to pay cash down for stuff that suited me I did not come to an agreement. I was about to return to Bombay in disappointment, when I fell into conversation with a Parsee merchant, who like myself could not satisfy his requirements. His name was Rustamjee Bomanjee. Though strangers, we soon struck up acquaintance, and we became quite familiar. I told him about my circumstances and details of the firm. In fact, I let my tongue run away with me, and left natural prudence behind. I am the sufferer, as it appears for my rash confidence. This Rustamjee strongly advised me to go to Sholapore, where there was large supply of fine quality in the market; and he recommended me to one Vishandass Nekrai, who resided at No. 237, Mungalwar Peth, in that city. I accordingly went there, but found that there was no such number in Mungalwar Peth; nor could I hear of any merchant of the above name. However, finding that there was some excellent cotton in the market, though not on the large scale suggested, I stayed a couple of days, and completed some satis-

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factory negotiations. It was on March 4th that I left Hubli by night train. I reached Sholapore on the fifth, and left on the seventh, reaching Bombay on the eighth, yesterday. What unhappy incident had occurred in that interim !

“ When I joined my partner Ranchordass at the office I found him evidently oppressed with melancholy ; and I asked what had happened to disturb him. He was in deep agitation ; but he contrived to inform me that there was great misapprehension about the cotton that I had purchased at Hubli. I was in amazement. ‘ Cotton at Hubli, and purchased by me,’ I replied ; ‘ why, my dear partner, I did not purchase one pice worth of cotton at Hubli. The stuff was rubbish ; and for the reputation of our house I could not deal in it. Pray enlighten me on what has thus troubled you.’ To cut matters short, the substance of the events was in this fashion. On the 6th instant, by midday post, a letter had been received from the Hubli firm of Laljee Shivlal, with whom we used to have dealings, advising that, in compliance with order of Mr. Maganlal, of Messrs. Ranchordass and Maganlal, they had despatched that day 175 bales of best cotton, the total value being Rs. 12,000. The railway receipt for the consignment was enclosed. The letter of advice requested that Ranchordass and Maganlal would pay the amount to the banking firm of Hirachand and Mathradass upon the presentation of a hoondi, or bill of exchange, in favour of that firm. The railway receipt for the cotton, which was actually in transit, would be security for the amount. This

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was, I need not explain, in conformance with ordinary usage of business, as the cotton would only be delivered by the railway company upon presentation of the receipt obtained by the consigner and forwarded by him to the consignee. Money due to the Hubli firm had on former occasions been paid in this way to the above bankers in the ordinary course of business, a receipt being issued in the name of Hirachand and Mathradass on account of Laljee Shivlal."

"This is very interesting," I said, as my visitor paused for want of breath. "Some one must have been taking great liberties with your name. But after all, if cotton of this value was despatched, where does your loss come in, even if the hoondi was honoured by your partner? Besides Hirachand and Mathradass are a most respectable firm, and they would not be mixed up with any discreditable transaction."

"I will now come to the long and the short of this shocking conspiracy," resumed Maganlal; "and your honour will form joint opinion with myself on the authorship of the plot. About two o'clock on the afternoon of 6th instant my partner received a visit from the managing clerk of Hirachand and Mathradass. His name is Bhaishunkar; and he has been long known to us. He produced a hoondi for Rs. 12,000 from Laljee Shivlal & Co. of Hubli, and my respected partner, Ranchordass, paid it in due course of business. He held twelve currency notes of a thousand rupees each; and these he handed over to Bhaishunkar after taking a

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receipt. After some desultory conversation on the state of the market, Bhaishunkar asked my partner if he had any dealings with one Hurri Ramchandra of Miraj, as the letter from the Hubli firm instructed the bankers to forward the amount to a person of that name in currency notes in a registered cover, the amount being due by them to him. Ranchordass, after short reflection, said that he had heard of the same individual as a sound business man. Bhaishunkar then took leave; and my partner deposited the railway receipt in his strong box.

“ On the next morning, March 7th, my partner came to the office as usual and took out the railway receipt. On scrutiny he observed that the cotton was booked to Wari Bunder, the goods terminus of the G. I. P. Railway. Now the offices and warehouses of our firm are situated close to the terminus of the B. B. & C. I. Railway at Colaba, a distance by road of some four miles from Wari Bunder. If delivery is taken at Wari Bunder the cartage across comes to four annas a bale; but, if booked to Colaba, goods are shunted on to the Baroda line at Dadur, and delivered at Colaba for extra charge of only three pies per bale. This was the course usually adopted. My partner therefore addressed a letter to Goods Superintendent at Wari Bunder, quoting number and date of despatching office at Hubli, and explaining that the cotton was booked by mistake to Wari Bunder instead of Colaba, and requesting him on its arrival to send it round by rail to Colaba at expense of firm. The Goods Superintendent replied that, as the cotton would not arrive for some

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days, he would arrange to have the wagons containing it shunted at Dadur; and he wired to Hubli for exact date of despatch of consignment. Judge of my partner's consternation when later on in the day he received further communication that no such consignment had been booked at Hubli. Still he, being of an unsuspicious nature, anticipated only some carelessness; and he repaired to Wari Bunder with the railway receipt to further investigate details. But when he produced said receipt for examination by Goods Superintendent that officer certified that the document was a forgery."

"By Jove!" I interposed, "this is a most ingenious swindle. How on earth did the perpetrator get hold of the railway receipt form? The Companies issue the most stringent rules for the keeping of these forms in proper custody. Or was the form itself a forgery?"

"No, sir," replied Maganlal; "inquiries show that the receipt is made out on a genuine form; and it must have been purloined by an unscrupulous individual."

"And what steps," I asked, "did your partner take upon realising that he had been imposed upon?"

"He acted with the prudence of business habits," replied Maganlal. "He telegraphed to me at Hubli; but of course the telegram did not reach me, as I had gone to Sholapore. He then went to office of Hirachand and Mathradass, to see what information they could supply; and, if possible, recover the notes from them. But, alas, he had not learned

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the worst. The notes had been posted as directed on afternoon of 6th in registered cover to Hurri Ramchandra at Miraj. Wire was put in motion to that centre, and reply received from postmaster that registered letter had been delivered personally to individual dubbing himself Hurri Ramchandra at 7 a.m., who had called at office and asked if there were any letters for his address. Postmaster was newly transferred to Miraj and did not know local residents by sight. This was sum and substance of information supplied to me by my partner yesterday. I said to him, 'This matter must be radically investigated. This is not work for amateurs. I will not write or telegraph anywhere on my own account. I will go straight to Mr. Carruthers, and doubtless he will exercise his fatal ingenuity in probing depths of villainy!' So I ascertained that you were at this station, and took night mail from Bombay to solicit advice in personal interview. And now what will your honour arrange? I need not conceal from your honour that the Parsee Rustamjee must be the author of this vile conspiracy. Why else should he induce me to place myself out of the way at Sholapore by cock-and-bull story of his acquaintance, Vishandass Nekrai, of No. 237, Mungalwar Peth, and so get opportunity for devilish machinations?"

"Well," I said, after a pause for reflection, and a few whiffs from my favourite meerschaum, "this is an exceedingly complicated problem. I never like to express an opinion with too great confidence at first; but the circumstances would certainly point



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to your hypothesis being correct. Now as to what we must do. You see, a little serious consideration is needed as to where to begin. There are inquiries to be made, and clues to be worked out in various directions—Hubli, Miraj, and Bombay. We have to find Mr. Rustamjee Bomanjee. Meanwhile I should like to see the railway receipt, and the envelopes from Hubli if they have been kept, and learn the numbers of the notes. Then we have to think whether Bhaishunkar has any connection with the matter. His promptness in despatching the notes appears a little peculiar. The firm itself is, of course, above suspicion.”

“I am much complimented,” replied Maganlal, “at your concurrence in correctness of my surmise; and instant appreciation of facts. The envelopes were in usual course consigned to waste paper basket, and contents removed. The matter did not escape my attention. Regarding number of notes there is great fiasco. I asked my partner for numbers. He replied that he had recorded numbers on slip of paper and deposited in strong box. He informed me that he had written down the numbers in presence of Bhaishunkar, who said that there was, therefore, no need for him to exercise same precaution, as two birds were killed by one stone. I asked my partner for key of chest, and I opened receptacle to copy numbers from the paper into my notebook; but behold they were *non est*! I called Ranchordass to search himself; but our joint efforts were unsuccessful.”

“That is very unfortunate,” I said. “The

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numbers would have been of considerable assistance. But now, Mr. Maganlal, you must require refreshment; and I should like some little time to think this matter out by myself. I have also some other business to be attended to. I will wish you good-bye now, and will see you again in a couple of hours. Meanwhile I shall be obliged by your writing out a description of the personal appearance of your Parsee friend."

I had a long think after Maganlal had departed; and surveyed his story from every possible point of view in my mental vision. At the end of an hour I wrote out several telegrams, one in cypher, and sent for my former orderly, Krishna, who was now promoted to jemadar, or senior head constable, in the railway police, and gave him certain instructions. I then had a hasty breakfast, and on its completion sent for Maganlal.

"Well, Mr. Maganlal," I said, "I hope you feel better after your rest. Now where is the description of Rustamjee? That's right. Wears the usual Parsee tall hat, a black coat, red trousers, age about forty-five, whiskers and moustache, no beard, above middle height, figure thin, complexion wheat coloured. Very well; I will just add this description to some telegrams that I have commenced, despatch them, and then we will go to Bombay. Any person wishing to lie low is safer in a great city like Bombay than anywhere else. Besides, there are various members of the Parsee community in that city who will give me every possible information. Failing success there, we will turn our atten-

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tion elsewhere. It will, I presume, suit you to accompany me."

"You feel really convinced, sir, that this Rustamjee is at the bottom of this nefarious transaction?"

"Well, Mr. Maganlal, I never prophesy until I am sure; but, as I said before, appearances clearly point in that direction. I, however, wish to make inquiries about Bhaishunkar. He may have been in the conspiracy with Rustamjee. Meanwhile I must ask you to exercise patience and confide in me. I cannot guarantee success, and though we may hope to obtain it we must not be in a hurry. You see that the ramifications of the affair extended to so many places, such great distances apart, that the case presents special difficulties. Now it would not be expedient for me to be seen with you in Bombay. We may be watched. You can call at my office to-morrow afternoon. Bring the railway receipt with you."

Maganlal did not appear particularly pleased at having to wait so long before he could again see me; but he realised from the tone of my voice that remonstrances would be useless, and took his departure. The up train soon arrived. My saloon was attached to it, and I saw Maganlal take his place in a third-class compartment. I had been up and down the ghauts too many times for me to take much interest in the romantic scenery or the splendid engineering which carried the line from the summit of the mountains to the plains below; and I must admit that a prolonged siesta occupied a

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considerable portion of the journey. I remember that I was in time for my tennis, and an excellent game I had.

On the afternoon of the next day Maganlal was announced at my office. I directed the orderly on duty to admit him, and motioned him to a chair.

“I am glad to be able to tell you,” I said, “Mr. Maganlal, that certain progress has been arrived at in my inquiries. I have just received this telegram from Dhond, which is, as you know, between Poona and Sholapore. ‘A Parsee answering to the description has been noticed here. He is evidently trying to avoid notice, as he only goes out after dark. It is believed that he came here lately from Hubli. Awaiting instructions.’ Now I may mention to you in strict confidence, for to divulge any information at present would affect my inquiries, that from information received to-day I have reason to believe that Bhaishunkar is a confederate, and that he has received a share of the proceeds. Not a word to a soul about this. I only tell you to satisfy you that every endeavour is being made to recover the money for your firm. As regards this telegram I shall send no reply. You will, I am sure, agree with me that the best course is for you to go with me to Dhond by the mail train to-night, that you may see if the Parsee is the man whom you suspected. If, as I think most likely, he is, we shall have advanced a considerable way. It would probably, however, not be advisable to arrest him at once. We must approach the matter cautiously, get him to give us a specimen of his handwriting, and

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gradually entrap him into an admission of his guilt. I do not always take gentlemen who consult me into my confidence so fully as this, but I am impressed by your sagacity, and have confidence in your secrecy. By working together we are the more likely to secure success. Thanks, I will take charge of the railway receipt and examine it at leisure. Good-bye, Mr. Maganlal, we meet at 10 p.m."

Maganlal expressed his deep obligations for the interest that I was bestowing upon his case, and bowing and smiling, left my office. He turned up in due course at the station with his tin box and bedding and leather bag. I entered my reserved carriage, and he his third-class compartment. Punctually to the moment the train steamed out of the station, I lit a cigar, and threw myself into an easy chair. I took up some papers and tried to feel an interest in them; but my thoughts ever recurred to the case which I was investigating. Was I right in my general idea regarding the circumstances? Was the course that I proposed to adopt likely to prove successful? I might be on an absolutely wrong scent for anything that I could demonstrate with any certainty. The only way was to risk it as I had risked bold shots before, and often with success. On rattled the train through the stifling air. We traversed the islands of Bombay and Salsette with a couple of minutes' halt at Tanna; and after crossing the creek that divided Salsette from the land, we pulled up at Kallyan junction. Here there was a halt of six or seven minutes, and I got out of my carriage to take a stroll up the platform.

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As I walked along I heard a tremendous altercation going on in a third-class carriage. Passing quietly to the scene of the dispute, I looked in at the window, and saw that my friend Maganalal was engaged in a vigorous discussion with two brawny-looking up-countrymen, who were laying hands upon his leather bag.

"What on earth is the row about?" I asked. "Cease this uproar till I know what the trouble is. These people seem to be annoying you. Mr. Maganalal, kindly explain what has happened."

"These *people*, sir," repeated Maganalal, quivering with excitement, "these are Shaitans! They accuse me, Mr. Carruthers, of stealing their purses and putting them into my bag. I give them in charge for maliciously false complaint."

I turned to his companions, and asked what they meant by their extraordinary action.

"Sahib," said one of them at the top of his voice, "my friend was asleep, and I was dozing, when I saw this man deliberately put his hand in my companion's pocket, pull out his purse, and put it in the bag. And he dares to deny it! I insist upon his bag being searched."

"So do I," said his companion in a surly voice. "I did not see what happened, but my purse is gone."

By this time the inevitable crowd had gathered round the door of the carriage.

"Look here, Mr. Maganalal," I said, "this is a very unpleasant incident, and there must be a serious mistake. However, as this charge is made,

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I must examine your bag. But not here. Come along to my saloon where we shall be free from interruption. I will take the bag."

Maganlal and the two up-countrymen followed me into my carriage.

"Now, then," I said, "we shall soon put this matter to rights. What is the matter, Mr. Maganlal? You cannot object to a mere formal examination of your bag."

"I object to any tampering with my bag, Mr. Carruthers. I appeal to Habeas Corpus! I shall institute case for defamation with damages before High Court. Never have I seen such zoolum under British Raj!"

"Sit you down," I said, "while I look at your bag," which I proceeded to open, an orderly at a sign from me standing between Maganlal and my operations. I had no time to spare, and I hastily threw all the contents on the floor, and ran my fingers through about as miscellaneous a collection of odds and ends as I ever came across.

"Well," I continued, "I don't see your fellow-travellers' purses, but I congratulate you on the recovery of the twelve thousand rupees in your own bag! This will save us a long journey. No, you don't!" as my friend made a rush to the door, but was promptly collared by the two north-countrymen. "You sit quietly here till we get back to Bombay, unless you want the bracelets on you. You have done very well, Atmaram and Gungadeen; send a couple of constables from the platform to relieve you while you get into your uniforms. Station-

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master," I continued to that official, who was standing by to start the train, "have my carriage detached at once, and put me on to the next train for Bombay. I am sorry if I have had to keep the train waiting for a few minutes. They can easily make up time before Kurjut."

"All right, sir," said the station-master, as he proceeded to make the necessary arrangements.

"This is a very skilful trick on your part, Mr. Carruthers," said Maganlal after an interval. "I have heard great accounts of your ingenious finesse; but I did not think that it would proceed to disastrous lengths of this nature. Your honour will kindly explain particulars."

"Silence, you cur!" I replied. "Your curiosity shall be gratified before your partner to-morrow."

Very early the next morning Ranchordass, the senior partner of the firm of Ranchordass and Maganlal, was announced to me in my office at the railway terminus. He was a wizened-up, shrunken little man, who gave me the impression that he had formerly possessed intelligence and ability, while his mental faculties seemed now more or less clouded over.

"I have sent for you at this early hour, Mr. Ranchordass," I said, "as I desire a few minutes' serious conversation with you. In the first place, let me present you with this roll of currency notes for Rs. 12,000 which you paid over a few days ago to the firm of Hirachand and Mathradass."

The old man took the notes with a dazed expression; and was evidently too astonished to find words.



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“ I will now explain matters to you, Mr. Ranchordass. Since your brother's death your firm has been in difficulties. You took into partnership your managing clerk, Maganlal, who, I can assure you, is a man altogether unworthy of your confidence. Your partner, with or without your concurrence, embarked in a series of rash speculations, nearly all of which have ended disastrously. He therefore determined to throw you over, and decamp with such spoil as he could obtain. He knew that there were twelve currency notes of Rs. 1,000 each in your safe. He might perhaps have stolen them in a more simple way, but his crafty mind preferred a deeper plan. Moreover, he wanted time to rake in a few more rupees that were due to the firm. He proceeded to Hubli, there stole a railway receipt form which he filled up, and despatched to you in the handwriting of Laljee Shivilal & Co., with a hoondi to be paid through Hirachand and Mathradass to one Hurri Balkrishna, at Miraj. The notes were in the ordinary course of business remitted to Miraj, where your partner, in the guise of a Brahman, received them, representing himself to be Hurri Balkrishna, a gentleman who merely existed in his prolific invention. I have recovered the notes from Maganlal. On finding that the fraud had come to notice, your partner thought that he would prevent any suspicion falling upon himself by being the first to inform the police. That is the long and the short of the story. It rests with you to take such action as you like in the matter. There is one point only on which I am in the dark; and I should be glad if you would en-

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lighten me. How did you come to tell Bhaishunkar that you knew of Hurri Balkrishna as a good man of business? "

" Yes, I did tell him so, I remember," said Ranchordass hesitatingly. " How did I come to do so? I am sure that I had that impression on my mind at the time. Some one must have spoken of him to me. But my memory sometimes fails me; I forget things unless I am reminded of them. Why now it comes back to me. It was Maganlal who praised him; and told me if anyone asked about him to give him my recommendation. Yes, it *was* Maganlal," continued the old man, suddenly straightening himself, and blazing with indignation; " it was Maganlal who did this and did that, and ruined the firm and disgraced me, and has now robbed me! The viper whom I cherished! You said, Sahib, that it rests with me to take what action I like. Very well, then; I wish to mete out to this shameless one the utmost penalty of the law; and I will sign any formal complaint that may be necessary."

" I entirely agree with you," I said. " He shall be placed before the magistrate without loss of time. Bring out the prisoner, Gungadeen," I continued to the orderly.

There was no need to bring him, for the terrified Maganlal tumbled out from behind a screen where I had placed him, threw himself at his partner's feet, and howled for mercy. Ranchordass said not a word. His glance of rage and contempt was sufficient.

Maganlal apparently realised the hopelessness of

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the situation; and ceasing his wailings turned to me.

"Will you kindly explain, Mr. Carruthers," he said, "by what subtle devices you arrived at final inferences?"

"I don't know that you deserve any explanation," I replied, "but I will let you into a few of my proceedings. In the first place, I regard every complaint made to me in this country with some degree of suspicion. I did not at first see what object you could have had in robbing your own firm, which you represented as being in so flourishing a condition. Still, from your own account you had been at Hubli on the day on which the railway receipt and hoondi were despatched to Bombay; and you were familiar with the handwriting of Laljee and Shivalal. It was, therefore, not impossible that you were concerned in the swindle. I consequently verified all your information. I sent a cypher telegram to Bombay directing that a statement of the circumstances of your firm should be given to me on arrival here. You know that, far from having rehabilitated the firm, you have well nigh ruined it by your speculations; and insolvency is within a measurable distance. I deputed a head constable to Sholapore, who wired to me that there was such a number as 237, Mungalwar Peth. Further, you had reached Sholapore on the 4th, and done a pretence of business; just enough to make evidence that you have been there. But you were noticed leaving the same evening, while you said that you had been there two days. You thus had time to go to Miraj, and

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take delivery of the registered letter in the guise of a Brahman. That it was actually you who did so I have no positive proof; but it is curious that in your tin box we have since found a Brahman costume. Then no Parsee of the name of Rustamjee Bomanjee had been seen at the Hubli cotton market, nor any Parsee who was not known there. It was curious that you directed the cotton to Bori Bunder and not to Colaba, but that matter was explained when I heard by telegraph that a form which the clerk at the Hubli goods station had begun to fill in to Bori Bunder and had carelessly left on his tablet was abstracted when he had been absent from the office for a moment. I need not pursue the matter further. My only thought was to secure the money. Where was it? I noticed your special devotion to your brown leather bag, and I arranged a little comedy by which to obtain access to its contents. Now, Gungadeen, on with the handcuffs, and send for the chief constable to make out this gentleman's charge-sheet."

Maganlal paid a prolonged visit to salubrious quarters provided at Government expense; while Ranchordass seemed to wake to new life, and with the Rs. 12,000 which I had secured for him managed to restore his business to a sound financial position.

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through. In the camping season I used to have a roaring fire in my tent in the mornings and evenings; and a pail of water left outside at night would be thickly coated with ice in the morning. It seldom rained in Sind, the country being irrigated by thousands of canals from the mighty Indus; but when it did rain it came down in torrents, and towns and villages used to be flooded out.

In spite of all its drawbacks, there was a certain fascination about Sind. It was different from any other part of the country in which I have served. Instead of the comparatively dead level which existed elsewhere, there were great extremes of wealth and poverty. The society may be described as patriarchal. There were few small landholders, most of the country being composed of enormous estates in the hands of Mahomedan zemindars or landlords. Many or most of these gentlemen were of dignified appearance and courtly manners. Descended from Pathan or Belooch ancestors, they were imbued with an inordinate pride of race; and they looked to speak with the Englishman as man to man. Their faults I found out in due time; but I prefer to remember their good qualities. Their hospitality was endless. They were only too delighted to put everything at one's disposal—their houses, their horses, their camels, their carriages, oranges and peaches from their gardens, poultry from their farmyards, and fish from their tanks. They would ride with me all day in pursuit of a criminal; come out miles to meet me when they knew that I was approaching their estates, or

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summon a hundred labourers from their lands to beat for their partridges and snipe when I wished for shikar. And all this for really nothing in return. Only this, as I have said: that they should be given an honest shake of the hand, and receive a hearty welcome when they came to one's bungalow or camp. Not much, it would seem, to ask, yet perhaps they did not get it from everyone. But both from inclination and from policy I was on intimate terms with them; and whenever difficulties arose in my administrative work I found the greatest assistance from a stately Mahomed Murid or a dignified Musuffer Khan.

Crimes of violence were exceedingly common in Ghaibo Dehro. There were far more murders than I was able personally to investigate; but, as a general rule, they were brought to light. They were frequently due to a tribal feud which had been handed down from generation to generation, in the manner of a Corsican vendetta. As likely as not the offender would at once give himself up and proclaim that he had been doing God service by ridding the land of his pestilent adversary. Sometimes the criminal, though known, would make himself scarce, and his place knew him no more. In some instances, though I had a very good idea who had committed the crime, yet I could not bring it home to him; but it was only occasionally that heinous crime remained obscured in mystery.

Once, early in the cold weather, I was in camp at a place called Tando Ghulam Mahomed. The weather was crisp and clear; and after the awful

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months of heat and dust and insect annoyances that I had endured, life seemed absolutely delightful. Snipe and duck were in profusion; partridges were showing signs of their advent; and teloor or bustard were soon to be expected. I had been up since daylight, and had spent the morning in a combination of business and pleasure, having inspected a small outpost half a dozen miles away, and also made a very fair bag of snipe, with a hare thrown in. On return to my camp I found a sowar, or mounted constable, who reported that a Mahomedan fakir had been found murdered that morning at a village by the name of Adamkot, about two koss, or four miles, from my camp. He knew nothing about the details, but was sure there was no clue. He had heard about the matter from a villager, and had gone to see the body, which still lay where it had been found. No one had as yet gone to investigate the case. Of this I was glad, as I should at all events have no wrong clues to unravel, which would probably have been the case if some head-constable, possessed of more zeal than discretion, had got on the case first.

There was nothing to be gained by going hungry; so telling my Inspector Abdul Khadar to get his food promptly and be ready to accompany me, I called for my tub and breakfast. My ablutions completed, and the requirements of the inner man being satisfied by an excellent breakfast of fish, venison, and snipe—the hare being reserved for dinner—I mounted a camel, and with a fragrant cheroot in my mouth, set off for the village of

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Adamkot. It was not much of a place. It belonged to a zemindar named Ghulam Rasul, who was apparently not in very well-to-do circumstances. His was the only house of any pretension in the village. The whole settlement had an untidy and neglected appearance, and the cottages of the haris or cultivators looked altogether uncared-for. The grain and sweetmeat shops in the little bazaar were of a very inferior description; and altogether I was unfavourably impressed with the local surroundings.

“What is this?” I asked of Abdul Khadar. “The neighbouring country is rich and flourishing, and there is plenty of water from the Naolakha canal. Why is Adamkot in such a poor way? Have you been here before?”

“Inshallah Tollah,” said the inspector, wagging his long beard, “by the Sahib’s favour there is not a village, a house, a tree, or a farmyard in the whole district that this slave has not seen. The Sahib knows that this humble one is not given to vain boasting; but as the famous Rustam said that not a blade of grass moved in his dominions without his knowing it, even so the Sahib’s slave knows the doings of every soul in this division. Does not the Sahib remember how, when everyone else failed, this slave——”

“Dry up, Khan Sahib,” I interrupted. “When you get on to your remembrances there is no time left to say one’s prayers. Is there anything special in connection with this village that would explain its present condition? Cut it short, if you can.”



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"By the Sahib's condescension, I will tell the Sahib in two words what is known of this place. Why should this slave trouble the Sahib, who has the wisdom of Naoshirvan, and who completes more business than any ten other Sahibs ever attempted, by wasting his time in listening to unnecessary words? As the proverb says——"

But I was not to know what the proverb said, or what the loquacious inspector had to tell me about Adamkot; for we had arrived at the zemindar's otak, or vestibule, where he saw his male visitors, and Ghulam Rasul stood in the doorway to receive me. Abdul Khadar and I dismounted from our camels, and I shook hands with Ghulam Rasul, who bade me welcome to his home. The zemindar was an ordinary specimen of his type. About middle age, he had already taken to dyeing his beard red with "henna" to conceal the grey hairs which had prematurely mingled with the black. He was simply but carefully dressed, a huge red and gold turban being the only article of his attire which was not of plain white. He gave me the impression of one who had by no means enjoyed a life free from care and trouble. After we had exchanged the usual compliments, I asked him to tell me about the tragic occurrence that had taken place on his estate. His followers were all sent out of hearing, but the inspector remained.

"Know, Sahib," he commenced when we were seated, "that two months ago there came to my house a fakir, a holy man, who wandered hither and thither, supported by the charity of the faith-



THERE WAS A NOISE OF MEN SHOUTING'



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ful, and employing his time in prayer and meditation. His name was Imamdeen. He was learned in the wisdom of our Prophet, and he would recite by heart long passages from the Koran. I pressed him to tarry at my poor residence; and though he urged that his life must continue to be one of wandering, yet he acceded to my earnest request. For so it was that my soul seemed to go out to him. I consulted him on my affairs, and besought his blessing on my house, which for many years had suffered misfortune. By that faithful one's intercession heaven became merciful, and my crops began to grow and my cattle to be fruitful. So comforting was his discourse, that I attained a happiness which I had not known for years—those years of disappointment which have made me old before my time. And now my fate is again turned back! Some devil—for it could not be man—has killed this saint of God! Last night, when we parted, he was sound and well. It was here in this otak that I last saw him. I retired to my chamber, and he went to the little thatched hut outside the wall that surrounds my homestead, where he always insisted upon sleeping. When I awoke this morning my servants told me that Imamdeen was nowhere to be found. I arose hastily, fearing some evil; but before I could reach the place there was a noise of men shouting, and one said to me, 'He is dead! He is dead!' I felt as if my heart had turned to stone. But the worst was to come; for it was not only that he was dead, but that he was killed! The back of his head was broken in, and by his side lay

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the stick which he always carried with him. It is a strong stick, which he used to lean upon when he was discoursing to the faithful; and some evil one has turned his own weapon against him."

"And whom do you suspect, Ghulam Rasul?" I asked. "What possible object was there in killing this inoffensive fakir? Had he any money, or other valuables? What inquiries have you made? As the outrage has taken place on your estate, you are responsible for making every effort to bring the culprit to justice."

"Balachasam," he replied, "upon my eyelids be it. The Sahib shall see my exertions. There shall be nothing left undone. But what can I say? There was no robbery. The man had not a pice nor an ornament. There may be some other motive. Did I not tell the Sahib that this fakir was my adviser in all things? Did I not consult him and call his blessing on my affairs? Who shall say what is in men's hearts? It may be that this was not pleasing to my kamdar, Allahdino Khan, who has managed my lands for years. But when his methods failed, should he resent it if I sought advice from another? And yet it is not only for just reasons that a man is inflamed with wrath. The Sahib shall examine this Allahdino, and wring the truth out of him. And then there is another word which the Huzur should hear. But it is a long history, and it is known to the Inspector Sahib."

"Saving the Sahib's presence," interrupted the inspector, "this slave, who has kept his eyes and ears open for fifty years, was about to lay this history

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before the Sahib as we came hither, but there was not time. If this slave may speak two words."

"I know your two words, Khan Sahib," I said. "Ghulam Rasul says that it is a long story. I will listen to it later. I only meant to stay here long enough to get some information as to the circumstances, and to learn if anyone was suspected. Time is slipping by. I must see the body at once, and hear what is to be said later on. Show me the way. I understand that the scene of offence is close here."

The zemindar led the way, and we passed out through a gateway into the sandy track which did duty for a road. Close to the gateway was the small hut where the fakir used to sleep. I entered it, and closely examined the floor. We then walked about thirty paces down the road. On the right hand there were some large stacks of grass, surrounded by a thick hedge of dry babul thorns. Within the hedge was the body of the dead fakir. It was lying on one side, and in close proximity to it was the heavy stick of which the zemindar had spoken. The fakir had been a man of more than middle age. His forehead was deeply wrinkled. Over the right eyebrow was a repulsive looking cicatrix, and a scar from the left corner of the mouth stretched across the chin. He was dressed in a long coat of green muslin, with a girdle of twisted green and white cord round his waist. His neck was garlanded with several necklaces, composed of curious round and oval stones, some of them as large as pigeons' eggs. Altogether his appearance was

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striking and unusual. The back of his head was crushed in.

The space between the hedge and the nearest stack measured about six feet. The enclosure was entered by a rickety wicket-gate. The ground was very hard, and it was almost impossible to make out any sign of footprints. The track from the fakir's hut to the gateway in the hedge had been trodden by hundreds of people in the course of the day, and no individual impression could be detected. I first made the most minute examination of the body, taking care not to disturb the adjacent ground in order to give every facility to the puggee, or tracker, whom I meant to call in to examine it. The pugges of Sind are marvellously clever; and where a European can see nothing at all, a tracker will say without hesitation what manner of man has passed through the jungle, whether he was running or walking, and if he was carrying a burden or not. The art is a hereditary one; and though with the advance of education it is said to be falling off, there is almost always a more or less skilful puggee in every village in Sind.

"Now, Khan Sahib," I said to the inspector after I had completed my examination of the body, "call in a tracker and let him examine the ground. It seems a hopeless business, but he may discover something which is hidden from me. Is there a good man available?"

"By the condescension of the Sahib," replied Abdul Khadar, whose impatience at my prolonged examination of the corpse was barely concealed,

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"there is one Fakeera present who has some reputation. Why should this slave deceive the Sahib? The Huzur knows that a lie has never passed the gate of my lips. Bismallah! who is this dog that he should mingle the wine of falsehood with the water of truth before the presence? This Fakeera is not such a one as the famous Musa of Shahdadpur, or Azimuddeen of Naoshehro, of whom it was said that they could track blindfolded; but, by the beard of the Prophet, he shall show what he can do."

"Up with him sharp," I said; and without any delay a wizened, grey-headed old man, with a tangle of matted hair protruding from a ragged puggree, drew up before me, and with a stately obeisance that would have done credit to a court, asked for my instructions. I bade him examine the ground, and see what information he could derive from it. His inspection took as long as mine had, and I began to sympathise with the inspector's impatience at the length of my operations. For what seemed an interminable time the old puggee studied the ground from various points of view, occasionally looking at the soles of the fakir's feet. At last he ceased, and stood before me with an expression of extreme perplexity.

"Well, Fakeera," I said, "what are you looking so puzzled about? Can't you make anything of it?"

"Sahib," replied the puggee, "the man has killed himself! The prints are plain to my eyes, and they all exactly correspond with those of his own feet. There are none of any other man's within the



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enclosure. And yet, see, there are the returning footprints, the same as the approaching ones. Of the thousands of footprints that I have tracked never have I seen any two alike before. There was one Nur Ahmed, whose prints might have been taken by the puggees of to-day for those of Fakeeruddeen of Gurhee Tegho; but the ball of the great toe on the right foot of Nur Ahmed was slightly greater than that of the other. Who shall say what this word is?"

"Son of an owl!" roared the inspector. "What foolishness is that you speak? Maybe these are your own footprints here that you dare not utter the truth, and try to put us off with these tales of the holy man taking his own life! Away with you, before you get your deserts!"

"Gently, Khan Sahib," I interrupted. "The man is probably too old for his work; I can't imagine how the most accomplished tracker could decipher anything out of this hard ground. Now it is getting late. Have the corpse sent for the usual *post-mortem* examination to the dispensary at Tando Ghulam Mahomed. Luckily, it is only four miles off, and the bearers can easily arrive there before dark. There is not much doubt as to the cause of death, but we must comply with the formalities. I shall stay here for the night, and think the case over. Let my servants be directed to send my bed and a change of clothes. Doubtless Ghulam Rasul will do me the kindness of giving me some food. You can order my post to be brought here in the morning."

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"Bismallah!" said Abdul Khadar. "To hear is to obey. But if the Sahib——"

"Oh, but me no buts, Khan Sahib; and do what I tell you."

The inspector actually condescended to carry out my instructions without further demur; and I then proceeded to make the most careful scrutiny of the place where the body had lain. I searched every possible nook and cranny in the neighbouring hedge and grass stack which might conceivably contain evidence of the crime. I had almost despaired of finding anything, when I at last lit upon a brass lota and a small earthen jar, concealed in a hole in the stack. What conclusions were to be drawn from this find I could not exactly make out; but there was that about the jar which set my brain whirling in search of a multiplicity of developments. I could not think it all out without more local knowledge. Ah! the inspector and the zemindar had both been about to relate to me some history. I would have them up, and listen to them while I smoked my after-dinner cigar.

It was a long story that they told me, and its length was at least doubled by the innumerable flourishes of rhetoric indulged in by the two worthies. The sum and substance of it was as follows: Twenty years ago Jan Mahomed, the father of Ghulam Rasul, was alive. He had two sons, who were twins: the present Ghulam Rasul and his brother Mustapha. The twins were then twenty-one years of age. There were bitter disputes between these brothers, and between them and their father about

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his land. The estate was even then deteriorating, and the old man would not allow his sons any share in its management. He insisted upon keeping it entirely in his own hands as long as he lived, while his sons saw everything going from bad to worse, and raged at their inability to remedy matters. They in vain besought him to hand over the management to them, and they also urged him to make a will for the disposition of the land upon his death. Ghulam Rasul insisted that, as he was the elder by half an hour or so, he was entitled to the more valuable portion; while Mustapha was equally positive that the division should be absolutely equal. The father refused to say a word about his intentions, and the strife was incessant between the three. It was evidently not a happy family. Just twenty years ago, Ghulam Rasul happened to be absent for a few days at Khairpur, twelve miles away, on the occasion of a marriage ceremony. Mustapha took this opportunity to urge his claims upon his father with more vehemence than ever; and several violent scenes occurred. On the second night of Ghulam Rasul's absence, Mustapha and his father were heard noisily disputing till close upon midnight, when the young man departed to his own room. The next morning Jan Mahomed was found dying with a deep wound across his forehead. All that he could say before he expired was, "Mustapha—Mustapha." Mustapha's stick, with marks of blood, was lying near the old man's body; and hidden in some rafters above Mustapha's room were found some of his clothes, stained with blood. Mustapha, who ad-

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mitted having quarrelled with his father, but protested that he had laid no hand upon him, was tried and convicted of culpable homicide not amounting to murder, as it was held that the deed was probably not premeditated, but done in the heat of passion. He was sentenced to transportation for life, and shipped off to the Andamans. Ghulam Rasul succeeded to the estate, but misfortune after misfortune attended him. The crops failed, the cattle died of murrain, and it might be said that there was a curse upon the place. The zemindar gradually ceased to make any efforts, and became listless and indifferent.

"This is indeed a tragic narrative," I said to Ghulam Rasul, when he and the inspector had come to an end of their joint recital. "But what possible connection has it with the death of the fakir Inam-deen?"

"Sahib," said Ghulam Rasul, "who should affirm with certainty those things which may only be guessed at? But my brother Mustapha was a son of shaitan. Twenty years have passed away since he was sent across the Black Water, and the Sahib knows that prisoners sentenced to transportation for life are often released after twenty years. Now of late I have felt oppression upon my mind, and I fear that my brother may have been set free. If it be so, who knows what wickedness he may not commit? He killed his father and mine. Will he stay his hand from me and my children? God knows if he hath not come unawares and slain the holy man who had become my adviser and consoler in things of this world and the next! It was even

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in my heart to ask the Sahib to let two of his armed Sepoys live in my house and protect this slave from his brother, should he come here to commit more crimes. And now I can no longer refrain from making this request at the Sahib's feet."

"Your request seems reasonable," I replied. "I will consider it, and let you know in the morning. Now, by your leave, I will retire for the night."

Always an early riser, I was up betimes in the morning, and I took a stroll round the estate. I came upon the kamdar, Allahdino Khan, and had a long talk with him about the land and the crops. By nine o'clock I returned to the zemindar's otak, and desired the attendance of Ghulam Rasul and the inspector.

"Well, Khan Sahib," I said, addressing the inspector, "have you come to any conclusion regarding this matter? Ghulam Rasul has already suggested two alternatives—one that Allahdino Khan is the criminal, his jealousy at the fakir's influence with his master having prompted him to the deed; and the other, that his brother Mustapha has returned from the Andamans, and killed Imamdeen as a first instalment of many bloodthirsty crimes. Which of these views strikes you as most probable?"

"What shall this slave say in the presence of the Huzur?" replied Abdul Khadar. "Of a truth the Sahib's wisdom is as plentiful as the waters of the Indus when they swell with the melted snows of Kashmir. How should this humble one display

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his folly by hazarding an opinion before the representative of Naushirvan? But this slave has not served thirty years under the shadow of the Sirkar for nothing, keeping his eyes and his ears open and his mouth shut. If the Sahib would take a few days' rest and enjoy some shikar across the river leaving this slave here, Allah knows what evidence may come to light."

"I can quite imagine," I replied, "what evidence might come to light. A lovely cock-and-bull story fortified by the most circumstantial confession and a mass of corroborative evidence, which would all tumble to pieces in the Sessions Court. No, I am not going across the river for shikar. I have some nearer at hand. By-the-by, Ghulam Rasul," I continued, turning to the zemindar, "when was the last crop of juwari grown in the field within the curve of the Naolakha canal, just opposite where the breach occurred two years ago?"

"I know the field well," he replied. "The soil is poor, and nothing but winter crops of wheat have been grown there for many years."

"Thank you," I said; "your information is most interesting. Now, Khan Sahib, you have more experience than I have of Sind by a generation or so, and I should like your opinion on the following tentative solution of the mystery which we have to elucidate. Look at this stick, which the late Imamdeen used to carry about with him. Try your knife on it. It makes not the least impression, though the blade is a good one. Have you seen wood of this kind before? No, I thought not.

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This is a piece of the iron-wood tree from the Andaman Islands. What do you deduce from this? Get your brain to work on it. Let us suppose as a hypothesis that our host's brother Mustapha has returned from the Andamans. Has he been seen about? Has any stranger been here of late? Ah! You begin to grasp my meaning? If Mustapha came disguised as a fakir, who would recognise him, with his green costume, his beads, the cicatrix over his eye, and the scar on his chin? Ah! Ghulam Rasul, you start at this. But if it be so, think of your good fortune. This snake comes home and worins himself into your confidence in the garb of a holy man, and someone rids you of your enemy. Who is this good friend of yours? Has Allahdino lighted on the secret, and put him out of harm's way before he could do you the injury that he doubtless intended? What does Abdul Khadar think of this little guess of mine?"

The two were standing up facing me, Ghulam Rasul's face an ashen white, and the inspector staring at me in amazement.

Ghulam Rasul was the first to break silence.

"How can this be, Sahib?" he asked. "Mustapha was my twin brother, and exactly resembled me. He had no such ill-looking growth over his eye. The scar might have been caused later, but such a cicatrix must have been there from birth."

"So one would think," I replied; "but this worthy gentleman was full of devices. See what I found in the grass stack—a broken earthen pot, which contained some mucous substance, and some



'SEIZED HIM FIRMLY BY THE WRISTS.





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daubs of nasty-looking paint. The holy man had created these elegant adornments which so well disguised his appearance. Yes, I think you were right about your brother's return to the land of his birth. Now, Abdul Khadar, if my theory is correct, who is the man who would have been chiefly interested in ridding himself of the ex-convict? "

"Allah Akbar! God is great!" said Abdul Khadar. "The Sahib shall leave this miscreant until the day be ended with this humble one, and he shall confess all. Of a truth this slave saw all this from the first; but how should he obtrude his thoughts upon the presence before whose knowledge nothing can be concealed? Verily, as the Persian proverb——"

"Wait a minute, Khan Sahib," I said. "You are in too much of a hurry. Ghulam Rasul is, to my knowledge, absolutely innocent of the death of Mustapha. You must look for a totally different offender."

"The Sahib is the fountain of wisdom and justice," said the zemindar, with a tone expressive of the greatest relief. "The Sahib knows that if I had recognised my brother Mustapha in the fakir I could not have injured a hair of his head."

"Well, Abdul Khadar," I said to the inspector, who looked at me as if he wondered whether it was he or I who was bereft of our senses, "we have had enough talking, and I want my breakfast. Arrest Mustapha for the murder of Ghulam Rasul!"

Without waiting a moment for the inspector to recover from this fresh shock to his intellect, I

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rushed at the zemindar before he could attack me, and seized him firmly by the wrist. In a moment two of my own orderlies, whom I had directed to be in readiness, dashed forward, and the handcuffs were once more on the wrists of the ex-convict.

"Really, it was a very brilliant idea of yours, Mustapha," I said, after I had recovered breath, "to come back in disguise and plan this means of getting possession of your estate. I think I may hazard a guess that you were wrongly convicted of the death of your father, that the real criminal was Ghulam Rasul, and that you have all these years cherished revenge, at the same time planning how to get the land. Well, your scheme very nearly succeeded. You, as the fakir, enticed Ghulam Rasul to the grass stack at night, killed him, changed your costume with his, ornamented his face with the cicatrix and scar which you had worn, washed the marks off your own face with water which you had carried in the lota, and stepped into your brother's shoes. You had made yourself in the guise of the fakir very fairly familiar with the present circumstances of the estate; but it was a pity that you did not ascertain that there was a very fine crop of juwari three years ago in the field opposite the breach of the Naolakha. No wonder that the tracker was puzzled at the similarity of the footprints of the twin brothers."

Mustapha did not return to the Andamans, for within two months he was swinging at the gallows in the Headquarters' Jail.

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A DISTRICT of wonderful beauty, of mountains, lakes, rivers, forests, and noble estuaries of the sea, a district that abounded in objects of antiquarian and historical interest, in ancient Buddhist cave-dwellings, Mahratta strongholds perched on the crest of precipitous heights, and in ruined Portuguese fortresses and cathedrals. A district bordering on the great city of Bombay, but whose population was, for the most part, more backward and uncivilised than that of localities far more distant from any centre of civilisation, while the aboriginal tribes that dwelt in the forest and mountain tracts were entirely submerged in barbarism. A district with an enervating and treacherous climate, where the rainfall was excessive and fever ubiquitous, where it was never cold and almost always oppressively hot, although on the actual coastline there was generally a breeze that we tried to persuade ourselves was cool and refreshing.

Such was the district to which I once found myself posted on a return from a glorious six months at home. What a contrast, I thought, to all the joys of England, the delights of town and country, the clubs, the theatres, and the roaring streets, the loveliness of the woods and lanes with their succession of primroses, violets, bluebells, daffodils, and May! However, I soon fell into my old routine. My enthusiasm for my work returned; and a

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succession of intricate cases that turned up for investigation helped me to get over my lingering regrets for home and its various attractions.

I was anxious to go out into camp as soon as possible, but I had to stay for a few weeks at the Civil Station first. There were my horses, tents, and camp-kit to be sent for from my old district, nearly four hundred miles away, and it was necessary to make myself acquainted with the native officers and men at my headquarters, and see that their duties were being carried out systematically. There is always an infinity of work to be done at headquarters. There are generally about three hundred men, whose drill, discipline, clothing, marksmanship, knowledge of law and departmental regulations, require the closest supervision; there are guns, ammunition, reserve of clothing, saddlery, and miscellaneous stores to be accounted for, orderly room, and stables to be held, and the sanitation of the lines, or barracks, to be carefully attended to. In fact, if an Indian policeman's life is not a happy one, it is certainly not for want of having enough to do.

One morning, a fortnight or so after I had taken charge, I had just returned to my bungalow from the rifle range, where I had been endeavouring to instil into my men some degree of keenness for scoring bulls'-eyes in preference to misses. I was about to devote a short interval to the comfort and well-being of my horses and dogs, when the orderly on duty informed me that a Mahomedan gentleman, named Hajji Suliman, particularly wished to see me.



“WHAT IS YOUR OPINION OF THIS KIND OF THING, HAJJI SULIMAN?”



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"Let him come in," I said. "Tell him to follow me to the stables. We can have a chat there while I have a look at the horses."

It would have been amusing, had it not long since ceased to be a novelty, to see the tremendous vigour which the syces put into their work as they saw me approach. The bidies, or native cigarettes, which they had been smoking disappeared as if by magic, and an uninitiated stranger would have thought that the syces' one object of existence was to live for the sake of the horses.

"You scoundrels!" I said. "Why is not your work completed long ago? It does not take much detective skill to see that you have been doing nothing but smoke and gossip for the last two hours. Look at the dirt under Sultan's mane! Look at the state of Magnet's feet! What do you think you get your pay for? What is your opinion of this kind of thing, Hajji Suliman?" I asked of my visitor, who had now been brought up to me. "What do you do when your servants neglect your horses?" I continued, as I motioned to him to sit down beside me on a garden bench, whence we could view the operations of the grooms.

"They are all a sad lot of scoundrels nowadays," replied my visitor, who, after a respectful salaam accepted my invitation. "They give as much trouble to us people as they do to the sahibs. Why, it was only last month that I applied my cane to a man who had been absent without permission for the whole afternoon, and he put me into Court, Sahib. I was fined five rupees! There is no



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justice nowadays, as I shall explain to the Sahib. But the Sahib's name is great, and at last I shall see Daud and Yussuf get their deserts."

My visitor spoke in fluent English. He was a typical Mussulman of the better sort, a type that, alas! with our University education, our railways, our local self-government, and the native press, is likely before long to be as extinct as the dodo. His manners were perfect. While in every way preserving his own dignity and self-respect, he was careful to treat me with the utmost civility and courtesy, details in which young India of the present day is singularly deficient. Say what you will, while we English rule India the fact that we are rulers must be recognised. This, as experience shows, constitutes no bar to real friendship between the two races. The average modern young Hindu, Parsee, or Mahomedan is, however, not content with claiming equality with Englishmen. He puts on airs and graces which unmistakably show his views as to his own infinite superiority. "What are the English doing here," is the monotonous cry of the native newspaper editor, "when we of this country have studied Bacon and Shakespeare, and are in every way qualified for governing ourselves?" Yes, my M.A. and B.A. friends; but whenever there is any trouble you go to the Sahib.

Of middle age, and stature above the ordinary, Hajji Suliman possessed clean-cut features, fair complexion, and a particularly intelligent expression. His beard was closely trimmed, and his dress, though plain, was of spotless white, with the

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exception of a green cummerbund, or girdle. His appearance was altogether in his favour.

"Well, my friend," I said, "I am very glad to make your acquaintance. Is your matter very confidential, or can you tell me about Daud and Yussuf while we sit here and see these lazy syces do their work?"

"If your honour will pardon me," he replied, "I could speak with greater freedom were there no listeners. But let me not interfere with the Sahib's convenience. My story may take some time in the telling. I can come again at any time that may be more suitable."

"There is no time like the present," I rejoined. "Come along into my private office, and I will listen till sundown if necessary. Do not spoil your tale by any hurry."

So we adjourned to my sanctum, where I got into a long chair, and Hajji took a seat on a divan in front of me.

"Sahib," he commenced, "the events with which I must make you acquainted occurred nearly two years ago. I must say at once that many police officers, including some of high position, have investigated my case, but I have had no satisfaction. Sahib, it was my son, it was my only son, and he was murdered."

My visitor paused, under stress of emotion, while I felt my senses quicken as I foresaw the joy of dealing with a case that had baffled everyone.

"Proceed," I said; "I am all attention."

"This is January," continued Hajji, "and it

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was on March 10th, the year before last, that my son Ibrahim was done away with. He was a boy after my own heart. His age was between fourteen and fifteen, but he looked older. He had not studied much English, but he was fairly well educated in the vernacular. He was keen on athletic exercises, and was a good horseman and cricketer, and a universal favourite. Now my wife Amina, his mother, died long ago, but her mother, Fatima, the lad's grandmother, survived her for some years. Fatima was a wealthy old lady, and liked the lad well, and she made a will leaving him no less than ten thousand rupees. She died just three years ago. Now, Sahib, in this world there are likings and dislikings, for whatsoever cause there may be. What reason may have been hidden in her mind I know not; but Fatima was ill-disposed towards me. There are some proverbs about mothers-in-law which may have reached the Sahib's ears. Well, the boy was young, and there was a clause in the will which enjoined that, instead of my being trustee, the property was to be held in trust by two brothers of my late wife, Amina. These were Daud and Yussuf, who were Ibrahim's uncles. There could have been no worse selection. They are of loose character and reckless spendthrifts. They had been well-to-do, but had run through their own patrimony, and they now proceeded to lavish the boy's legacy in all kinds of pleasure and dissipation. They ingratiated themselves with Ibrahim by letting him share their pleasures so far as a boy of his age could. They took him on outings to Bombay, where they drove

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about in expensive carriages and dined at fashionable refreshment rooms. They dissuaded Ibrahim from his studies, and gave him a pony and bicycle to ride.

“ I must admit that it was a pleasure to me to see his skill with both. He could perform wonderful feats, but the admiration that he received did him no good. Needless to say, I argued with Daud and Yussuf, but it was all to no purpose. For a time I separated my son from their company, but his head was turned, and he insisted on rejoining them. I explained to him that it was his money and not theirs that they were spending, and that his future prospects were being ruined. But one cannot put old heads upon young shoulders, and all he thought was that he was thoroughly enjoying himself at present, and that the future might take care of itself. He said that his uncles had lots of money, and had no need to meddle with his, and they were far too kind to do so.

“ But, Sahib, retribution must come to the wicked. Did I tell the Sahib that by the terms of the will Ibrahim was to come of age and manage his own affairs at the age of fifteen? A foolish clause, you may say, but one that with us is not impossible. In a year the scoundrels Daud and Yussuf had run through the greater part of the money, and it seemed to dawn upon them at last that the day of reckoning was approaching. If when Ibrahim came of age he called upon them for his legacy, what would they have to say? They did not relish the thought of going to jail on a charge

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of criminal breach of trust. I saw anxiety on their faces, and there was some cessation in their extravagances. What could they do to forestall the future, and prevent Ibrahim from ever claiming his own? Sahib, there was one way. The dead cannot claim their own in the Courts of this world. On March 10th, the year before last, Ibrahim took his evening meal with me, but he insisted on fulfilling a promise which he said that he made to his uncles that he would go to their house afterwards. Sahib, I have never seen my son again. I waited and waited for several hours, when, becoming anxious, I walked to the house where Daud and Yussuf lived. When I explained why I had come they expressed great surprise, and said that Ibrahim had neither been to them nor had promised to come.

“ I felt great alarm, and at once went to the Chief Constable Govindrao, who made inquiries with me in every direction. We found two young friends of Ibrahim, who said that they had been wandering about in the bazaar with my son for some time, and that they had finally left him at the door of his uncles' house. However, I could not then make any definite charge against Daud and Yussuf, who expressed their assurance that all must be right, and that the lad was sure to turn up. Oh ! if only I had had their house thoroughly searched there and then ! Some devilry occurred that night. There were mysterious goings and comings, and rumours began to spread abroad about a cart that went to the creek, and a boat that was in readiness. Of course, no one had seen anything with his own eyes.

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One had heard that his neighbour had seen things happening about which he did not like to speak ; but the neighbour, on interrogation, fathered the rumour upon someone else. And so nothing has been done—or, rather, nothing was done in time. Later on, as doubt became certainty, various officers took up the case, but with no result. My son is murdered, and the murderers are at large ! ”

“ You have my utmost sympathy, Hajji,” I said. “ But tell me, what do you think I can possibly do after the lapse of so much time? What proof can be obtained now? ”

“ How should I presume to say what the Sahib can do, or how he can obtain proof? But everyone knows that Carruthers Sahib can succeed where others have failed, and men say that there is jadoo (magic) in what the Sahib does.”

“ I don’t know about jadoo,” I replied, “ but I will go through the papers of the case, and see what I can make of them. Doubtless everything that has been elicited is duly recorded. Meanwhile, is there anything else that you can tell me about the matter? ”

I could not help noticing that Hajji Suliman looked a trifle disconcerted when I talked of seeing the papers. Did he wish me to at once arrest Daud and Yussuf, and by the means of jadoo induce them to make a full confession? That was probably his idea.

“ Your honour may see the papers,” he replied, “ but there is not very much to be learnt from them. On the contrary, there will be much useless trouble,

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for a great deal of irrelevant matter has been taken down. But I have a few things to add which are of vast importance. They are in the papers; but a few grains are hidden in mounds of chaff. The chief thing is this—that while, since my son's disappearance, Yussuf (who had less to do with the whole matter than his brother, for Daud was always the leading spirit) has continued his ordinary life as usual, Daud has entirely changed. On the third day he shaved off his beard, and dressed like a fakir. He will not answer to the name of Daud, but calls himself Gulam Mahomed, and he lives in a back room in the house like a recluse. For some time after shaving off his beard he went on in the most extraordinary way. He paid a visit to a friend at Poona, and stole some articles of trifling value from his house. One morning he took the train to Bombay. There he walked into a large shop in the bazaar in the middle of the day, and openly stole a valuable ornament. He was, of course, followed, arrested, and sent to jail for a term of imprisonment. In the jail he said that he had murdered a boy, but could not remember his name. On his release a postcard reached me in his handwriting, but not signed, saying that he had quite forgotten the last time he saw me to say that he had killed my son. What can be thought, Sahib, but that he has murdered Ibrahim, and that he is conscience stricken, and haunted by his crime? "

"This is indeed extraordinary," I said, on the conclusion of this strange description. "I can come to no opinion just at present, but I will give the most anxious thought to the matter."

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“There is one word more,” said Hajji Suliman, as he rose to take his leave. “This is a copy of the local paper called *The Dawn of Light*, in which I put an advertisement offering a reward of five hundred rupees for the finding of Ibrahim. It gives a full description of his personal appearance and the dress that he was wearing. It may not be of much use, as the boy is surely dead; but the Sahib will see that I have left no stone unturned to recover him were he living.”

With a profound salaam my visitor left me to reflect on his remarkable story. I had a very busy day, and it was late in the evening before I had time to peruse the papers of the case. These were indeed voluminous, and, as my friend had justly observed, for the most part irrelevant. There were depositions by the dozen of people who knew nothing about the matter; there were reports by subordinate police officers, forwarded by superior officers, and sarcastic remarks on all concerned by the highest officer, who, however, could not do any better than his subordinates when he took the case up himself. An officer from the Presidency Scotland Yard had come down, but had given up the case as hopeless. He considered that his services had been called for far too late in the day, when hopes could no longer be entertained of obtaining any evidence. Strange to say, this was the only officer who credited the story of Hajji Suliman, and believed in the guilt of Daud and Yussuf.

The preponderance of opinion was dead against Hajji, who, whatever the truth might be regarding the disappearance of his son, was certainly far from



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being an exemplary character, in spite of his gentlemanly bearing. He possessed a small landed estate, but supplemented his income by mercantile pursuits. His reputation for integrity in business matters was by no means above suspicion. He had actually been in jail for embezzlement, and had been guilty of various bits of smart practice which did not actually infringe the law. Several of the statements which he made to me were either incorrect or misleading, if only by reason of their omissions. It was true that Ibrahim was the heir to the old lady Fatima, who, disliking Hajji, had preferred to make Daud and Yussuf trustees. But Hajji had omitted to tell me that by the terms of the will he himself was to be the heir to the ten thousand rupees in the event of his son dying before him. It seemed strangely inconsistent on the part of Fatima to make Hajji her actual heir upon a certain contingency, although she would not appoint him trustee for his son. She may have thought that the eventuality was most unlikely to occur, and that anyhow Daud and Yussuf had already sufficient means of their own. However this may be, the fact remained that Hajji was, in succession to Ibrahim, the heir to the money, of which it appeared that a not inconsiderable moiety was still in existence at the time of the boy's disappearance; and Hajji had lost no time in filing a suit for possession. Again, the motive for the alleged murder was very inadequate. Admitting that Daud and Yussuf were liable to be called to account for the money and that disagreeable consequences might ensue, how would they benefit by rendering themselves liable

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to a charge of murder in addition? They had certainly not benefited, and the charge of murder was still hanging over them; and though not actually apprehended on the more serious accusation, they had been put to the greatest possible annoyance and trouble by protracted police inquiries, and were regarded with suspicion by their neighbours.

The general opinion of the local police was that Hajji himself had either secreted or even murdered his son, in order to bring Daud and Yussuf into trouble by charging them with his death, and to get the remnant of the money into his own hands. It was on record that Ibrahim had never shown any affection for his father; nay, had cordially disliked him, while he was devoted to his two uncles. This, of course, was very mortifying to Hajji, whose feelings towards Ibrahim gradually became embittered. Ibrahim had insisted on practically living with his uncles, though his relations with Hajji were not entirely broken off. He took some of his meals in his house, and generally, though not always, slept there. On one occasion Hajji sent the boy to the house of a relative who resided at a distance of thirty miles, and arranged that he should be kept there, so far as might be, as a prisoner. But Ibrahim was of a daring and impetuous disposition, and soon managed to return to his usual haunts; nor did Hajji make any further serious attempt to interfere with him. It was clear that the boy had been a regular young scapegrace, a truant from school, and with no good qualities except engaging manners and remarkable courage and skill in athletics. Between him and his uncles there had been the most

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constant affection; and, taking into consideration the absence of motive for murdering Ibrahim, the police did not believe in the possibility of so odious a crime on their part. In Hajji, on the contrary, they had no confidence; and, having once formed their opinion that he was in some way or other responsible for Ibrahim's disappearance, they went out of their way to pile up arguments in support of their theory. As I have said, the officer from the Presidency Scotland Yard took the opposite view, and he greatly censured the local police for the attitude which they had adopted. In his opinion it was not to have been supposed, considering the intimate relations between the boy and his uncles, that any suspicion of causing his death would fall upon them. The responsibility could easily be foisted upon Hajji. As regards probability there were hundreds of cases to show that in this country people would for a trifling gain murder their own familiar friend. Although Daud and Yussuf, as circumstances turned out, had gained nothing by Ibrahim's death, yet, burdened as they were by the expected legal claim for the money, they might well have anticipated that their desperate straits would be relieved if he were put out of the way. Further, he laid stress upon the point that the boy was last seen alive at their house, and that the subsequent conduct of Daud could only be accounted for on the supposition that he had been guilty of murder, and that, stricken by conscience, he was so appalled at the thought of his wickedness that his brain had given way. There was also the postcard in his handwriting.

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The local police were, of course, very indignant at this attack upon them, and reiterated their opinion that the uncles were perfectly innocent of the whole matter. Daud's behaviour was easily explained by his agony of grief at the loss of Ibrahim, coupled with the cruel suspicions thrown upon him by Hajji. As for the postcard, even if Daud had written it, in his state of mental derangement it went for nothing, while it was far more probable that Hajji, who was capable of any villainy, had composed it himself in imitation of Daud's handwriting.

On one point all were agreed. After this long interval of time the boy must be dead. It would have been impossible to secrete for close on two years a youngster of so adventurous a character. Whoever had kept him in captivity he would have contrived means to escape, or at all events somehow or other to communicate with the police, or with his friends. He must be dead. Who, then, was responsible—Hajji Suliman or the two uncles? Here was a very nice dilemma. Could I unravel the mystery, and, whichever the guilty party might be, bring the murderer to justice?

Two months passed away. For most part of that time I had been in camp, very busy with inspections and investigation, occasionally getting a morning with snipe and duck, in which the district abounded. I had perused the papers in Ibrahim's case again and again, until I almost had them by heart. The affair was much on my mind, but there seemed no golden road to its elucidation. It cost me much thought and more than one sleepless

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night, as I pondered over the details from every possible point of view. The story fascinated me, and I felt that I must persevere, in spite of all the difficulties involved by the long lapse of time that had taken place. Hajji Suliman came to see me at various camps to inquire what I was doing. But whether he was concerned in his son's disappearance or not, he had at all events deceived me in several particulars. I was therefore displeased with him, and refused to give him an interview. Nor did I send for Daud or Yussuf, or any of the people whose depositions had been taken. Were they to come forward now with fresh statements contradictory of their original ones, it was obvious that no weight could be attached to them. At last, all of a sudden, a flash of inspiration seized me. I had always been in the habit of keeping a note-book of matters connected with criminal cases, whether they belonged to my own personal experience or not; and again and again I had found the information thus recorded to be of the greatest value. "Eureka! Eureka!" I said to myself one day as I was casually glancing at my book. "Have I really found thee, oh mine enemy?" Here was indeed something tangible to work up, a possibility that amounted to a probability, a probability that might be rendered a certainty. Oh, the time that must elapse before that certainty could be arrived at! How elated I was at the prospect of success! How depressed at the inevitable delay in reaching it!

But luck was in my favour. Less than a month elapsed before my way was clear before me. I wired to the head of the police of my last district to

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let me have the temporary use of the services of my old orderly, Krishna, who had now, at a comparatively early age, attained the rank of Chief Constable. I had not hit upon any officer in my present district whom I could depend upon for the delicate mission on which I proposed to employ Krishna; besides, the police now under my command were too prejudiced in the view which they had already taken of the case to enable them to be of real use in working out new developments.

Krishna arrived in due course, and received detailed instructions from me. After making inquiries on one point at the Civil Station, he departed on his errand. I had every confidence in his intelligence and integrity, and I counted the days until I could expect information from him. A week passed by, and then an urgent telegram in a yellow cover was brought to my camp by a mounted orderly, who had ridden twenty miles from the nearest telegraph office. "Your honour should come," was the brief message. I felt myself quivering with excitement. I at once arranged to move camp to the Civil Station, where I arrived the next afternoon. I promptly sent for Hajji Suliman, the brothers Daud and Yussuf, the Chief Constable Govindrao, who had been the first to undertake the investigation, and an inspector named Dinanath, who had followed up the inquiry later. This was the first time that I had seen Daud and Yussuf, and I must say that I was not favourably impressed with their appearance. Daud seemed a victim to continued melancholia, while Yussuf appeared to be a dissipated ruffian. Both were dressed in clothes

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that had once been handsome, but were now stained and torn. Hajji, with his speckless white costume and his courteous demeanour, seemed altogether their superior.

"We have a long journey before us," I said, when they were all assembled. "We leave by to-night's mail for Travancore. We shall there learn the truth about Ibrahim. More than this I cannot tell you at present. Be ready at the station at ten o'clock without fail. Bring a couple of constables, inspector. I hardly think that they will be wanted, but we may as well have them with us."

"The Sahib has discovered the truth!" said Hajji. "Justice will at last be done, and the death of my cherished Ibrahim be brought home to these dogs."

Daud stood silent without apparently taking the faintest interest in the matter; but Yussuf scowled as he chimed in with a muttered oath, "This lying devil Hajji will now be put to shame."

It was a weary journey. Three nights and two days we passed in the train, and it seemed as if the time would never come to an end. I took no interest in the scenery through which we were borne along; my whole mind was concentrated on the case of the missing Ibrahim. On and on we were carried towards the southernmost part of India, and at the close of the third day we arrived at the capital of his Highness the Maharaja of Travancore. I bade my companions find accommodation in the town, and, after refreshing themselves, meet me at the circus at nine o'clock.

"The circus?" said Yussuf. "What have we

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to do with a circus? Have we come all this way just to see a tamasha?"

"Chuprao, be silent," said Govindrao. "Do not you people know Carruthers Sahib? What this Sahib says must be done. Verily the Sahib does not give this order without a reason. They shall be present, Sahib," he continued, turning to me.

I was met at my hotel by Krishna, who was got up as a Hindoo merchant with a stock of Cashmiri shawls for sale. He briefly assured me that I should find what I expected, and then whispered a few surprising words in my ear. Bidding him attend later on, I proceeded to enjoy the luxury of a bath, and to exchange my travel-stained clothes for fresh ones. I then partook of an excellent dinner, after which I felt prepared for any *dénouement*.

Punctually at nine I was at the circus, which was really an excellent show. It was styled the "Imperial Circus of Siam"; and flaming posters and bills described it as possessing a world-wide notoriety, and as having been patronised by many royalties. Fresh as I was from the Hippodrome and theatres of variety in London, I was unexpectedly pleased with the various turns. The performers were mostly Siamese, supplemented by some natives of India. I and my party occupied seats in the front row facing the performers' entrance. Certainly, when I come to think of it, we were a curious collection. On my right was Daud, and beyond him Hajji Suliman; on my left was Yussuf, and beyond him Govindrao. Dinanath, the inspector, was next to Hajji. Immediately behind me were to be noticed two Parsees, with the



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singular hats worn by that go-ahead race of people. None of my companions manifested the slightest interest in the performance. Obviously their minds were occupied in wondering why the Sahib had brought them there. The rest of the house was enthusiastic, as well they might be. The feats of skill were remarkably clever and up to date, combining European and Eastern ideas of dexterity and versatility. But the artist who seemed to me to be the popular favourite was the clown. The persevering way in which at the termination of each number he attempted to imitate the achievements that had just been exhibited, his efforts, of course, always ending in egregious failure, fairly brought down the house. His failure made the audience roar with laughter, and the air of resigned melancholy with which he endeavoured to cover his want of success brought tears to their eyes. Even my companions began to smile at the ludicrous grotesqueness of his antics; and at last Yussuf, carried away by the humour of the exhibition, burst into a hearty peal of laughter. At that moment the clown was in close proximity to us. The sound of Yussuf's explosion seemed to suddenly petrify him. He stopped his pantomime, stood still, staggered towards us, and fell down before Yussuf in a dead faint. The excitement among the audience was intense. The comedy had turned into a tragedy, though none knew the cause.

I jumped over the balustrade, took off the clown's head-gear, loosened his coat and shirt, and called for water, which was speedily brought. He was soon able to breathe and sit up.

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"Now, Ibrahim," I said, "come along with me. Here are your father and your uncles, though they do not seem to know you in this rig-out."

I hurried him away to the vestibule through which we had entered the great circus tent, my companions following in astonishment that was as yet too deep for words. On my way to the vestibule the manager came up to ascertain the cause of the disturbance.

"Never mind the cause of the disturbance just now," I replied. "Get some other item of the programme started instantly to keep the audience quiet. Then rejoin me. You are under arrest, but I do not want to create any scene. If you attempt to escape you will be handcuffed."

The manager took the hint and went off, followed by my inspector and the two Parsees who had been seated behind me. I could see their hands delicately fingering the handcuffs that were secreted in their capacious coat-tails. The band gave a flourish, and in less than no time half a dozen Siamese equestriennes entered the amphitheatre, standing upon six cream-coloured Pegu ponies, and began galloping round the arena to the tune of "Bonnie Dundee," produced by a really first-class orchestra. The audience speedily forgot the interlude that had occurred. The astonished manager was soon beside me. I dealt with him first.

"I arrest you," I said, "on a charge of administering a stupefying drug to one Ibrahim, son of Hajji Suliman, and for kidnapping him out of British India. Travancore being a native State,

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you will be handed over to the State police until I can obtain a warrant of extradition."

He was promptly marched off to the proper authorities by Dinanath and my myrmidons of the law in their Parsee get-up. I could then turn my attention to the rest of my party. The scene was almost indescribable. Hajji Suliman was looking on in stony silence. If he felt any joy at the recovery of his long-lost son, I am bound to admit that he had an admirable way of disguising his feelings. I fear that he suffered more severely from the realisation that his hopes of seeing Daud and Yussuf and a gallows tree in close connection were once and for all frustrated. Yussuf, on realising that his nephew was really found, was in an exuberance of delight, in spite of the fact that Ibrahim seemed too stunned to comprehend what was happening. Daud's mental condition was not sufficiently clear to admit of his thoroughly understanding the situation; but his melancholy features seemed to relax their strained expression as the reality gradually unfolded itself to him.

We travelled back together to my district, a strange little collection of people. The journey was to me an infinitely weary one, in spite of my satisfaction at having unravelled this strange mystery; but to the two uncles and to their nephew it seemed a source of joy. Hour by hour Daud and Ibrahim seemed to be steadily recovering the sense of individuality and self-recognition of which they had been so long deprived; while now that Ibrahim was rid of his clown's dress and paint, and arrayed in

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suitable costume, his father began to manifest satisfaction in his society. The curiosity of my two subordinates as to how I had found the missing Ibrahim was intense; but I declined to gratify it until we all arrived in the fulness of time at the headquarters of my own district. I was too dead beat on the completion of that awful journey to be able to do more than take a hasty meal and retire to rest. I fixed the next afternoon for all concerned to be present, and hear my narrative.

"There is only one thing that I wish to know for certain," I said, when we had come together, "though I think that I can guess the answer. Tell me, Yussuf, why you denied that you had seen Ibrahim at your house the night before he disappeared. That he was there is a matter of absolute certainty."

"Of course, he came to us," replied Yussuf, "but we had no reason to suppose that anything had happened to him, and we simply wanted to annoy that hypocritical old curmudgeon Suliman, so we denied that we had seen the boy. Having made this statement, we had to keep to it, and, in truth, there seemed no advantage in going back on it."

"Exactly what I thought," I replied. "But you made a very grave mistake in not going back on it when you found that there was real anxiety about the boy. You might even then have put the police on the right track, and saved all the consequent trouble that arose."

"How should we possess the Sahib's wisdom?"

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responded Yussuf. "But the Sahib will tell us how he discovered the boy?"

"Yes," I said; "I will now tell you, and I hope it will be a lesson to all concerned. That your police officers failed to detect the case is not wonderful, but it is discreditable that you could think of nothing but the two horns of the dilemma which were presented to you. Argument after argument has been piled up as to whether Ibrahim was secreted or killed by his father or by his uncles, while there were dozens of other possibilities which might have been considered. The boy might have gone off to Bombay on his own account and been suddenly stricken by plague there; he might have been decoyed away by strangers and murdered for the sake of his ornaments; or he might even, being of an adventurous spirit, have run away to sea. Do not in future limit your efforts to investigating just what has been told you.

"When I studied the papers of the case I was struck by the utter want of motive for doing away with or concealing the lad by either the one side or the other, and I soon dismissed both these alternatives. What had actually occurred it took me some time to make out—much more, I see, than it ought to have, now that I have all the facts before me. I recommend for your advantage, Dinanath and Govindrao, the practice of keeping a note-book for the record of any facts that may come to your notice regarding crime and criminals. It was my note-book that detected this case. As things have turned out, Ibrahim was alive. Had he been dead I might

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perhaps have failed to solve the mystery. Assuming that he was alive, the problem that confronted me was the absence of all communication from him for close on two years. What hypothesis would fit in with this strange circumstance? Ibrahim was no fool. Surely he could have managed to escape from any confinement or communicate with his friends. It is not so easy to lock up anyone and arrange for his food for any length of time without exciting some suspicion which would lead to inquiries. But here was a stone wall of silence.

“ Now, opening my note-book one day, I came upon the following entry :—

“ ‘ Saikong, a mysterious drug used in Siam. Its origin and nature unknown. Its properties are to deprive any person to whom it is administered of all remembrance of his identity. Its action is uncertain. It may leave the physical and mental qualities, beyond the loss of identity, unimpaired. At other times it induces melancholia, eccentricity, and general breakdown. Its possession is a penal offence in Siam.’

“ ‘ Siam?’ I thought. ‘ What have I read or heard of Siam lately? I have it! Why, it was that local newspaper that Hajji gave me with the announcement of a reward for the discovery of his son.’ I turned it up and read the following paragraph :—‘ We regret the departure on the 11th inst. of the Imperial Circus of Siam. Its performances are of the highest quality, and the management under Mr. Chowravadh in every way admirable.’ The truth instantly jumped to my eyes. There was

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no long business in putting two and two together. A young boy who possesses remarkable skill in riding a horse or bicycle and in athletics generally was in attendance at the circus while it was here; and on such friendly terms with the management that he was allowed to ride the circus ponies, between the performances—a trifling fact which Krishna has since ascertained for me from the two boys who last saw Ibrahim at his uncle's house, but to which, if you were aware of it, you gave no heed. The manager, we may conjecture, was anxious to obtain the lad for his troupe, but could not prevail on him to enlist in it. He is a Siamese, and possesses the baneful drug Saikong. He gives the boy some sweetmeats containing the drug. Ibrahim partakes of some himself, and also on his last visit to his uncles gives some to Daud. Ibrahim bids good-night to his uncles, and starts back for his father's house, but is met by the manager, who is on the look-out for him. The drug is beginning to work. He suffers himself to be taken to the circus. He is given a disguise, and the next day, his identity forgotten, he departs with the company. On Daud the drug also acted, though, being an older man, it was not for two or three days that it took effect. The result on his mental condition you know. You attributed it to remorse for his crime—a most unwarrantable assumption.

“In this way I worked out my theory, which in every way fitted in with the facts of the case. The next thing was to verify it. It took me a month to learn where the Imperial Circus of Siam

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now was. I then learnt that it had just arrived at Tuticorin, after a successful tour in Java and Sumatra, and was proceeding to Travancore in a week's time. I obtained the valuable services of my old and tried subordinate Krishna" (here Krishna drew himself up and saluted), "whom I had despatched to Travancore with instructions to find out quietly if anyone corresponding to Ibrahim was a member of the company, also if Mr. Chowravadh was still the manager. I had no intention of letting this gentleman off lightly. Krishna, as a shawl merchant who sold his wares at marvellously cheap prices, soon ingratiated himself with the management and performers, and learnt that Ibrahim was there. He merely telegraphed to me to come without giving me any details. It was greatly to my surprise to find Ibrahim in the clown instead of careering around on a fiery, untamed steed; but this has since been explained. For more than a year he had proved a great success, but he gradually became a victim to melancholia. He lost his skill and daring, and he could no longer be employed in the rôle which he had for a time successfully filled. Somehow it occurred to the manager to try him as a clown. The experiment was a brilliant success. His real and intense melancholy struck the audience as an exceedingly funny bit of acting, and crowded houses were the result. I don't think I have any more to say, but it seems to me that both Ibrahim and Daud are distinctly regaining their right minds, and they will soon be on a fair way to recovery."



## THE LAST STORY.

GOOD-BYE to India. Was I glad or sorry? It was hard to say. Thirty years are a big slice out of the life of a man, and one cannot sever one's connection with all that this means without some tinge of regret. I had had my full share of troubles, cares, cruel hard work, spells of fever and other tropical delights, and, perhaps worst of all, grievous homesickness and resentment at having to pass so many years in exile. On the other hand, I was leaving India with my constitution unimpaired; I could look back upon many joys, and a life, in spite of all its drawbacks, of activity, adventure, and good fellowship. In my official career I had, like most men, experienced disappointments and heart-burnings; but, on the whole, I had met with even more success than I could have ventured to anticipate. At the age of fifty I was retiring on a pension of five hundred pounds a year—little enough to live upon as I wished to live, but enough to substantially supplement the private income that I was fortunate enough to possess. I had also earned one of the highest prizes that India can confer, and I left its shores as Sir John Carruthers, K.C.I.E. The suppression of serious riots had already given me a C.I.E., and the unearthing at an early stage of its existence of a grave conspiracy, to which I cannot specifically refer, obtained for me the higher distinction. On the whole, in spite of regrets that

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youth was passed and gone, I felt a sense of joy at being at last free from harness, and at liberty to follow my own pursuits in my own country. I could reasonably look forward to many years of health and strength and interest in life. Moreover, India was not what it was when I first joined the Service. Then the Sahib's hukum (order) was sufficient; but now, through many insidious changes, a total bouleversement of antecedent conditions had gradually taken place. Latterly the immediate consequence of the issue of any order by the Sahib was an exhibition of profound ingenuity on the part of his native fellow-subjects to devise means for having the order set aside. Perhaps it was all right to do away with racial distinctions; but those who had undergone their training in older and more patriarchal times found the new *régime* exceedingly irksome. Personally, I may say that if I had to wear a velvet glove over my iron hand the hand was no less iron, and if I had been compelled at times to be stern, not to say despotic, this did not prevent the attendance on my departure from the Apollo Bunder of an enormous crowd of natives with tears in their eyes to wish me God-speed across the Black Water.

So I settled down in my little place in Surrey. I had my horses and dogs. I enjoyed shooting and golf, and manifested all possible interest in the local flower show and parish pump. I had taken furlough several times from India, and had always kept myself *au fait* with what was going on at home, in politics, sport, and the stage. So I do not think

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that I showed myself out of it, as many old Indians undoubtedly do on their return home. I soon found myself on satisfactory terms with my neighbours, and I certainly cannot complain of their want of hospitality; but in truth the life was tame and insipid after the rattling good times that I enjoyed in the East. It was more a dead level of nothing in particular. We were spared the drawbacks of India, but we never really rose to its joys.

One fine afternoon in September I was smoking a cigar amongst my dahlias, of which I was distinctly proud. I had just said good-bye to some guests who had honoured me with their presence at a most sedate luncheon party, and was thinking how exceedingly proper, correct, and uninteresting it all was in comparison with some merry meetings that I could call to mind on the other side of the Suez Canal. However, the element of excitement was closer upon me than I had any reason to imagine. I was dreamily watching a beautiful ring from my Manilla gradually soar into the air and fade away, as my thoughts dwelt on a certain grand pig-sticking meet at Somapur followed by a magnificent ball at the club, when the tinkle of a bicycle bell recalled my attention to existing circumstances. Glancing down the drive, I saw a young man and a girl riding towards me. The man, who might have been two or three and twenty, was a typical Englishman, evidently a thorough gentleman, with fair complexion, good features, and an expression that denoted absolute straightforwardness; while a somewhat low forehead suggested that if he had to

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depend upon his brain-power he would hardly achieve any marked worldly success. The girl was of a far more striking individuality. A brunette, with piercing black eyes that seemed to look into one's soul, a mass of dark brown hair, a slightly up-tilted nose that invited one to make love to her, a thin straight mouth that should have warned one to think twice before doing so, a determined little chin set upon a long and beautifully shaped neck, she at once struck me as altogether out of the common, and probably endowed with an adventurous temperament. She appeared to have set off in a hurry, for instead of an appropriate bicycling costume she was wearing an elaborate confection of muslin and lace, which was hooked up with safety pins to keep it from being entangled in the machine.

"Forgive our unconventional intrusion, Sir John Carruthers," commenced the man as they approached and dismounted; but before he could finish his sentence his companion dashed into the incipient conversation.

"Oh, Sir John," she said, "I am so frightened! I am in such terror that I don't know what I am doing! You must save me! Oh, do say that you will save me! I am in fear of my life, and they tell me that you have wonderful powers!"

"I am sure I shall only be too delighted to be of any use," I replied, as the young lady ceased for a moment for want of breath. "But now, take my advice, and come and sit down quietly on this bench. We will dispose of the bikes against the conservatory. That's right. Now we can start fair. But,

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got the brooch and the picture, and why you are in terror of your life? I can assure you that I will spare no efforts to assist you."

"I am afraid I always begin in the middle," replied the girl; "but I will try to give you a connected narrative of what has happened. The worst is that I know so little about it myself, and what I do know I have only learnt to-day. I have never known my parents. Ever since I can remember I have lived in America, where I was brought up by some people with whom I had been placed by my father. All that they ever told me about him was that he had lived in India, and that this gold brooch had been given to me by him. A few months ago I met Mr. Pixley, who was travelling in the States, and we became engaged. It was then arranged that I should come to England and live with an old maiden aunt, Miss Letitia Hill, who had a house near Godalming. I had, of course, never seen her; but she used occasionally to write to me. Oh, that awful voyage across the Atlantic, Sir John! I thought that nothing in the world could exceed the horrors of sea-sickness, but now I have experienced worse! I should tell you that Herbert's place is not far from Godalming, being just the other side of Guildford.

"Well, to-day, my aunt and I were having lunch. She always likes lunch very early. In the middle of the meal the servant brought in the post, and on opening an envelope directed to myself in a handwriting that was quite strange to me, I found the pig and the hieroglyphics that I have shown you.

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It struck me only as something very funny, and I passed it to my aunt for her to see. But no sooner had the old lady set eyes on it than she turned deadly white, and I thought she would have fainted. I instantly gave her a glass of neat brandy, and did all that I could think of to bring her round, and as soon as she had recovered begged her to tell me what was the matter. It was a strange and awful story that she had to tell me, and I have been in the most terrible state of mind ever since. She said that my father had been a planter in India, in a place called Tarapore. He had been very fairly successful, but he finally returned home very suddenly with three young children—myself and two brothers. He was already a widower. He had been of a cheery disposition, but all this was now entirely changed. He was so irritable and nervous that it was clear that some fearful weight lay upon him. He proceeded at once to dispose of his three children at separate places with distant relatives and acquaintances—myself, as I have said, being shipped to America. Well, this is the awful thing. Within a year my father and my two brothers absolutely disappeared in the most mysterious way. Not a sign of them was ever seen again. It can only be supposed that I escaped because I was far away in a foreign country. Oh, I can hardly go on; it is so frightful. In each case before their disappearances my father and my brothers received in succession three pictures of a pig, just like this one, sometimes by post, and sometimes in inexplicable ways. It can only be presumed that my father and brothers

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have been murdered, though why or by whom it is impossible to say. And now my turn is to come! It is too appalling! What am I to do, Sir John? There is clearly some connection between this awful business and India. It would seem that my father must have incurred the enmity of some mysterious agency who, not content with killing him, is visiting the sins of the father upon the children, if indeed he was guilty of any sin. But what it is all about, why there should be pictures of pigs, what the letters underneath mean, and what the brooch given to me by my father has to do with it, and what I am to do—oh, Sir John, tell me all this. You see how I have hurried to you just as I was. Herbert was coming after lunch to take me for a bicycle ride, and off I came without waiting to change. I must add that my aunt is so upset that she has retired to bed.”

“I feel stupefied, Sir John,” said Pixley, “and utterly at a loss as to what to do. We put ourselves in your hands.”

“Be assured of my utmost efforts,” I responded. “Of all the mysterious cases that I have known this is the most extraordinary. I can say nothing at present to throw light upon it. I must think it out, but I sadly want more data. Meanwhile, it would not appear that you are in any immediate danger, as if the original programme is adhered to you are to receive two more drawings of a pig before any attempt is made upon you. However, you would certainly be well advised not to go out without an escort. Doubtless Mr. Pixley will not find it disagreeable to accompany you. Now come and have



"OH, HOW FRIGHTFUL! WHAT AM I TO DO?"





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a look at my dahlias, and see if you can give me any tips for improving my selection."

We wandered about the garden, and had a charming talk about my favourite flowers, and all kinds of subjects. Pixley turned out to be quite an authority on dahlias, and his *fiancée* rattled on about one thing after another, quite forgetting for the moment her critical situation.

She was soon to be reminded of it. When a move was made for the bicycles the back wheel of her machine was found to be quite flat. I instinctively opened the bag to get at the repairing outfit, when I found therein a piece of paper which unfolded bore the representation of a pig. It had the same mysterious cypher below; but, apart from this, there were certain variations in the document. In the upper right-hand corner were the letters M A, and in the left corner N E, while in the right-hand lower corner was a diminutive but vigorous sketch of a Buddhist shrine. Now I had some more data. Now I might get on the track.

"Good heavens, Sir John!" said Miss Le Marchant, as she stared at the paper in my hand. "Another of these hateful pigs, and so soon! Oh, how frightful! What am I to do?" And the poor girl, plucky as she was, burst into tears. I walked away for a moment, thinking that perhaps Pixley might be of more use than myself for the time being. After giving her time to recover herself I returned to my two visitors.

Pixley was the first to speak.

"What an extraordinary thing," he said, "that

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the beastly picture should have been found in the bag? How on earth did it get there? It is just a chance that you happened to open the bag, for the tyre was not punctured after all. The screw of the valve had slipped loose. I have pumped it up, and it is all right now."

"It is just as well that we did find it," I rejoined. "There is nothing like knowing exactly how we stand. I think that from this second picture I can perhaps elucidate something about the machinations of this diabolical agency. I must have time to think it out. Take Miss Le Marchant home now, leave her safely in her aunt's house, and make her promise not to leave it till after breakfast to-morrow, when you will call for her and escort her to me again."

"By the bye," said the young lady as she was taking leave, "Herbert and I are going out golfing to-morrow afternoon, and we are booked for a dance to-morrow night at the Thornhills. They live at Weston Hall, you know. You don't suppose that the pig people will go for me at the links or the ball? I should be quite safe, shouldn't I, if Herbert escorts me each way?"

"I shall be at the dance myself, Miss Le Marchant," I replied, "and I think that Mr. Pixley and I ought to be sufficient protection. Do not do anything imprudent, that's all—I mean, avoid moonlight rambles between the dances."

With many promises to be most discreet and heedful she departed, taking Pixley in her charge, it struck me, rather than placing herself under his

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protection. I had a prolonged meditation on the singularly strange circumstances that had been unfolded to me, and I looked forward with special interest to the *dénouement*. My utmost ability must be brought to bear to circumvent the plot.

The next morning my visitors turned up in due course. Miss Le Marchant had this time found leisure to don a suitable bicycling costume, and very charming she looked in her neat coat and skirt.

"No more pigs, Miss Le Marchant?" I asked as she sprang lightly from her bicycle.

"Not a single one," she rejoined. "After a good night's rest I feel as if it were all a hideous dream. Tell me, it is not true that there is a sentence of death hanging over me!"

"I can tell you that I have every reasonable anticipation of preventing the accomplishment of any so untoward a design. But the matter is a deep one, and you must place yourselves unreservedly under my orders. This is the only stipulation that I make before I proceed further in the matter. You must see, Mr. Pixley, the absolute necessity of this condition. Without it I can undertake no responsibility."

They both agreed at once to my terms, so I continued my little address.

"That's all right," I said. "As you have, Miss Le Marchant, with Mr. Pixley's concurrence, put yourself in my hands, I will now, for my part, fill up some of the gaps in your narrative. The whole I cannot unfold to you now, if only, to be perfectly frank with you, because I have yet something to

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learn myself. Now let us glance at these two pictures of the unclean animal. The first one has on the upper corners the letters O and M. They certainly are not there for nothing; but, taken alone, their meaning was beyond me to evolve. But look at the second picture. On the corresponding corners are the letters M A and N E. What do they stand for? 'Master of Arts' and 'North East'? No; something more abstruse than this. The true interpretation flashed upon me in a moment. Placed in proper juxtaposition, we can frame two words from these letters—not in English, it is true, but in terms familiar to anyone acquainted with the literature of the East. Look at this, 'Om Mane.' You do not appreciate the force of my discovery? This is the first part of the cardinal sign of the Buddhist religion, which in full runs, 'Om Mane Padmi Om.' Now look at the lower right-hand corner of the second picture. I, who know the East, recognise in this finger-nail illustration a Buddhist monastery. This strengthens my deciphering of the letters in the upper corners. Now how to go a step further. Here is an extract from my old Indian note-book referring to a time about twenty years ago: 'Attention has been called in several quarters to a revival of Buddhism in Indian districts. Buddhist priests have come from Ceylon and Burmah, and their doctrine appears to be spreading amongst a certain section of the population. These missionaries have especially turned their attention to the restoration of old Buddhist shrines, caves, and monasteries. Some of these, which dated from many centuries

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back, but which still remained substantially intact, were found to be used as storehouses for agricultural stock, for cowsheds, and even for the breeding of swine. By various means a number of these have been cleared of their unsuitable tenantry, and in more than one instance extraordinary misfortunes have fallen upon the recent occupants, some being so plagued that they have been driven to leave their districts.' Now we arrive at a further step. Your father, Miss Le Marchant, you say, had to suddenly leave India. You wear as a brooch a very remarkable moulding of a pig, given by him to you as a young child. We have unmistakable signs of the most bitter enmity against him and his on the part of a society which sends premonitory missives of death, or, at all events, of disappearance, which betokens death, embellished with drawings of pigs. Further, these productions bear portions of the most mystical of Buddhist religious teachings; and the last picture has the delineation of a Buddhist monastery. Now we evolve with absolute logic the following history. Your father, a planter, finds that certain Buddhist remains situated on his estate are suitable for the rearing of pigs. He imports some of the long Berkshire variety. He is so interested in his hobby that he has a gold brooch made for his only daughter in the similitude of one of these animals. He must have been unusually keen upon his speculation to have been led to think of this little design. The Buddhist reformers come round, and urge him to relinquish his claim to their sacred spot. He flatly refuses, upon which they swear to

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him with all the terrors of their creed that neither he nor his children shall escape their revenge. He knows the East, and flies the country. But this is the enemies' opportunity. Forbidden by their religion to take life, they can easily limit the application of the rule to their own country and to their own handiwork. In England death, especially if caused through an agent, would cease to be a sin. Buddhist priests have vast sums of money, and a marvellously powerful organisation at their disposal. They soon compassed the death of your father and of your brothers. America was beyond their reach, and you have fortunately escaped for years. But they have never ceased to be on the look-out for you, and now they have found you. In the former cases they were good enough to give three warnings in the shape of pig-pictures. As yet you have had only two, and presumably there is still one to come before any action is taken. Any such action we have now to circumvent, and I venture to think that it is in my power to bring the whole conspiracy to light and the agents to justice. I can tell you no more at present. You must trust in me."

"Oh, how interesting!" said Miss Le Marchant. "Fancy being able to work out such a complete story from separate little fragments! What a fascinating life you must have had in India! Really, I wish these hateful pig-people would leave me alone, if only to let me learn how these methods can be mastered."

"I can't say how I admire your spirit, Miss Le Marchant. I am sure you will keep your presence

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of mind in any emergency. Will you reward me for anything that I can do for you by giving me a dance this evening? Until the ball I shall be immensely busy with your case. Telegrams will be flying about, and I must run up to town to work out some points myself. Meanwhile, be most discreet. I hope you will enjoy your golf."

Miss Le Marchant promised me No. 8 Valse, and then skimmed away with her *fiancé* as if she were as free from care as a sunbeam. What versatility of spirits, I thought, as they disappeared down the drive.

I spent a very busy and interesting day, and my dinner had to be a very hasty repast to enable me to be in time for the ball. I must say it was a magnificent show. My host and hostess were most charming, and new acquaintances greeted me as if I were an old friend. The floor, the music, and all arrangements were simply perfect. I soon had my programme as full as I wished. I had passed the stage when I wanted to dance every dance. Miss Le Marchant had not yet appeared when I arrived, and I stood about waiting for a word with her when she came. She was amongst the latest of the guests; but when at last a brougham drove up, and she and Pixley alighted, I thought that she was certainly the most striking. Her costume was of a delicate cream colour, set off only by scarlet roses in her hair and her corsage. I noticed, as I approached her, that she looked pale and agitated, and yet a trifle defiant.

"Oh, Sir John," she said, as I was about to



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remind her of our dance, "isn't it crushing? Look here, the third pig! It was in the little bag that is on the carriage door. I had put my handkerchief in it, and on taking it out this hateful thing came with it. But I don't care. Let them do what they like!" she continued with increasing animation. "I have come here to enjoy myself, and I am just going to. All right, Sir John, you needn't fear that I shall forget No. 8."

I looked at the paper that she left in my hands as she hastened to the cloak-room. It differed from the others only in having, as I expected, the letters P A D in the left upper corner, and M I in the right, while the lower corners had respectively O and M. The final warning had been received. But the fortitude of the girl was sublime; whatever mental effort it cost her to do so she maintained an appearance of unimpaired gaiety. There was no doubt that she was the *belle* of the ball-room. I stood in the intervals between my own dances watching her with intense fascination.

"Well, you are a plucky one, Miss Le Marchant," I said, as the time came for me to claim my dance with her. "How do you manage it?"

"Oh, I don't exactly know," she replied; "but this may be my last dance or my last anything else, and I am determined that they shall not spoil the evening. I feel madly defiant of them, and only wish that I could meet them!"

She could just dance. In fact, it was more than dancing; it was floating rather on wings than on feet. It was with a feeling of intoxication that I



"...GOOD HEAVENS!" I EJACULATED. "THE THIRD PIG!"



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was whirled round with her to the strains of "Sou-rire d'Avril."

"How divine," I said, as we had reluctantly to pause for a moment near the entrance to the ball-room.

"Very sorry to interrupt you," said a voice which I perceived was that of my host, "but I am a bearer of bad news. Miss Hill has been suddenly taken ill, and the doctor thinks that she is dying. Miss Le Marchant has been sent for to return home instantly. A man has come for her in a hansom."

I am afraid I thought more of my luck in being brought down to terrestrial existence after that delicious dream, than of poor Miss Hill; but there was no time for words. Action was imperative. Miss Le Marchant dashed into the cloak-room for her wrap, while I looked around for Pixley. He was nowhere to be seen, and it was impossible for my late partner to go alone. There was only one thing to do.

"I accompany you," I said. Miss Le Marchant got into the hansom. I was pushing in her flowing mantle after her, preparatory to getting in myself, when in a moment the driver brought down his whip upon the horse, which I could see was a particularly spirited one, and off the vehicle dashed!

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated. "The third pig!"

"The third what?" exclaimed my host, in amazement at the dramatic incident.

"What has happened, Sir John?" said Pixley, who rushed towards us at that moment. "Has Miss Le Marchant gone?"

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"She is gone," I replied. "The third pig has done its work. I cannot explain now, Thornhill; Pixley understands. The only thing is to follow instantly."

But we could not follow instantly. The horses had been unharnessed from the carriages that had brought the guests; and ten minutes elapsed, which to us seemed hours, before a mail phaeton, with a fine pair of horses, turned up. I leaped on the box, seized the reins, and with Pixley at my side, started in pursuit of the hansom. It was a bright moonlight night, and we could see as well as if it were day.

"How do you know which way she has been taken?" asked Pixley.

"I have very good reason to guess where she has been taken and why," I responded. "I have not spent my time in idleness since this morning. 'Wheels within wheels!' is a mild expression for the devilish machinery that is in motion. I was on the look-out for a stroke, but the rapidity of the action is disconcerting. Fear not, I am on the track. See," I said, as I drew up for a moment at four cross roads, "Miss Le Marchant has kept her head. Look at that glove on the road in front of us. On we go."

At another turning her second glove showed us the way to take; and, at two more, fragments of her fan were unerring guides.

"I thought so. I felt sure of it," I said, as the last fragment of her exquisite lace fan met our eyes when we turned from a cross-country lane on to the main road to Red Hill. "We have a long journey

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before us. England was not safe enough. I hope you are a good sailor, Pixley, for we have to cross the channel. I fear Miss Le Marchant will suffer. Do not ask me to explain now. Trust in me. We may yet catch the last night train for Newhaven."

Pixley groaned, but had the sense to refrain from questions. On and on we went; but the horses, unaccustomed to the pace at which I had driven them, showed unmistakable signs of flagging. Our speed, in spite of my efforts, grew less and less. It was half-past two when we reached Red Hill, and the Newhaven train had left. Yes, a sleepy porter told us in answer to our inquiries, a lady in a long cloak had arrived in a hansom just before the departure of the train; she was met by an old lady and a middle-aged man, whose appearance he was unable to describe, and had been hustled, apparently in a half-dazed condition, into a first-class compartment that was labelled reserved.

It was in vain that Pixley asked for a special engine, and explained that money was no object to him. The stationmaster was obdurate. Then Pixley suggested going to London, by goods train if necessary, and travelling by rail from Calais to Dieppe. But I knew something of cross-country trains in France; and it did not take a prolonged consultation of a Continental Bradshaw to find that by that route we should arrive no sooner than by waiting for the next steamer from Newhaven. Pixley came out well from the trying ordeal of enforced delay. He displayed marvellous patience and self-restraint. He only asked me one question.

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"What about Miss Hill? Is the report about her illness a make-up?"

"I fancy that it is nothing but a ruse," I replied.

At last the morning dawned. The moon had long since sunk. The station awoke. A train crawled in. We reached Newhaven at last, after stopping at every station, and went on board the steamer. The passage was indeed a stormy one, and I reflected on the sufferings that the unfortunate Miss Le Marchant must have endured. But there is an end to all things, and we finally disembarked at the picturesque town of Dieppe.

Pixley could restrain himself no more.

"For heaven's sake," he said, do let me know what all this means! I entirely confide in your skill, but this suspense is more than I can bear. Where is Edith? What do you mean to do?"

"Five minutes more," I said in response, "and I hope to be able to let you know everything. I feel that we are in time."

"Hotel d'Angleterre," I said to the *cocher* of the *fiacre* which I selected; "a *pourboire* if you get us there sharp."

The Jehu flogged his wretched horse, and we were soon at the old-fashioned hostelry which I had named. To Pixley's unspeakable amazement we perceived at the entrance Miss Letitia Hill in close proximity to an elderly man.

"Oh, Miss Hill!" he shouted, "what does all this mean? Are we in time? Is Edith safe? Where is she? For the sake of Heaven, tell me!"

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"Edith safe!" said Miss Hill. "I should think she was safe! A good deal safer than she deserves to be—she and her pig-pictures, and taking my name in vain! You are lucky to have been able to know the minx in time, when you can still break off the engagement. She is a pretty good wreck from sea-sickness; otherwise she is as safe as Warner's cure!"

It was cruel to torture Pixley longer.

"Go and get Miss Le Marchant if she can possibly come," I said to Miss Hill, and she departed to do my bidding.

"Meanwhile, Pixley," I said, "let me introduce you to Mr. Le Marchant, the young lady's father, who you see is still in existence!"

"Am I in a lunatic asylum?" asked Pixley as he mechanically shook hands with his prospective father-in-law, "or is there any sense in this business?"

"You shall learn all about it at once?" I replied, as a very pallid young lady, who wore a strangely conscious and guilty expression, entered the room. I put Miss Le Marchant into a comfortable chair, and sympathised with her for her sufferings from *mal-de-mer*.

"That's all right, Sir John," she said. "I shall get over my misery in time, though I do feel very bad. But how did you find me out? I am most awfully puzzled. Why was I brought over here? You didn't get left behind by the cab on purpose, surely? I couldn't imagine what had happened when I was rushed off like that. I thought



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there was a real plot against me after all, so I dropped my gloves and fan as a guide to you and Herbert, for I was sure that you would come after me. But how did you see through my pig story? I thought that it was above suspicion. Do tell me everything!"

"All right, Miss Le Marchant, you shall hear all about it. In the first place, long experience has taught me to suspect every narrative. I am a hopeless sceptic. Now, you gave the whole show away in two ways, though I did not exactly jump at the truth just at first. In the first place, there was the bicycle incident. I observed you fumbling with the machine, which you insisted upon putting down yourself, declining my offer of assistance. I realised afterwards that you had deliberately let the air out, with the intention that the bag should be opened. Then there was the cypher. Why should the missive contain a cypher of which the recipient had not the key? There was no sense in it at all. Then there has never been a cypher invented which cannot be solved by a proficient in the art. But your cypher would yield to no system of treatment. In other words, it was no cypher at all, but a mere meaningless juxtaposition of letters. This was sufficient to justify me in the conclusion that it was not exactly you who were the victim of a conspiracy, but that something else was on. What I knew not. So I proceeded to test your statements, of which about one only I have found to be unreservedly correct. That was the effect of a sea voyage upon you. When you were at the golf-links

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I paid a little visit to Miss Letitia Hill. I learnt from this good lady, who is a real brick, and has played the game splendidly, that you were a regular madcap, and were also engrossed in detective stories. You had even done me the honour of perusing the earlier 'Leaves from my Note-book' which had already been published, and you thought it would be a fine joke to test your wits against mine. It is true that your worthy father had kept pigs in India, and you had certainly studied Buddhism to some purpose. Your father and you had lived apart; but his sudden disappearance, as that of your brothers, was a product of your fertile imagination. The practical joke that you evolved was exceedingly ingenious, and I hope you will do me the credit of admitting that I elaborated your rough sketch with some degree of skill. You thought that I was beautifully taken in all the time, didn't you? And now, Miss Le Marchant, comes the moral. You are engaged to this young man, and will doubtless make him an excellent wife; but your aunt and I considered that you would be benefited by a very drastic lesson. So I had you whipped away in a hansom and carried across the channel. I hope that it has not been too brutal on my part. Of one thing I can assure you, Miss Le Marchant, and that is that it was a cruel deprivation to me to have to lose half of that delightful dance."

"Herbert," said Miss Le Marchant, "I give you full permission to break off your engagement to me."

Pixley, whose countenance had expressed every

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possible shade of amazement, burst into a hearty peal of laughter.

"Great Scott!" he gasped, "this is the rummiest show! So all the pig business was a made-up yarn? Splendid! splendid! I have never had such an excitement in my life. Break off, our engagement? Not quite, though I admit that Sir John and your aunt had a right to take a rise out of you after the little game you had played on everyone."

All's well that ends well. Pixley and his wife were a devoted couple; they became my most intimate friends, and were frequent visitors at my house.

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