

Levett Yeats Sidney

A Galahad of the Creeks; The Widow Lamport



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Levett Yeats S. Sidney A Galahad of the Creeks; The Widow Lamport

A GALAHAD OF THE CREEKS

CHAPTER I THE COMING OF THE WOON

The good ship steered toward the East,
To the East, o'er the salt sea foam;
And years rolled by, and time grew old,
But she nevermore came home.

Voyage of the Tobias.

When a man has taken a first-class degree, when he has won his blue, and has passed high into the Indian Civil Service without the wet-nursing of a crammer, it might be hazarded that he is worth something. One might go further and picture out his future career-how he would be a prop of Israel; how, step by step, he would rise until the Honourable Council enshrouded him; and

how, after a life of useful work, he would, like Oliver, desire more, and drop into being the bore of "the House," or into the warmest corner of the "Oriental," and dream over the fire of the time when he was his Honour the Lieutenant Governor; but the lion is very old now-let him doze.

Peregrine Jackson had taken the first steps to qualify for this part in the tragedy of life, for this forging of the links of that mysterious chain of which we know not the beginning and may never know the end until, as to Longinus, the gates of immortality are opened unto us. But the tall, straight, broad-shouldered young Englishman was thinking of none of these things at present. He had elected to serve in Burma, and he was now posted as assistant commissioner, practically Governor of Pazobin, which is in lower Burma, and lies near the sea on a slimy creek of the Irawadi. He leaned over the gunwale of the river steamer that was bearing him to his destination, and the skipper, the sleeves of his gray-flannel shirt rolled up to his elbows, stood beside him and pointed out Pazobin, which lay about two miles off, clinging like a limpet to the river bank. Now, a Burman river steamer can walk, and at twelve knots an hour two miles would not take long to cover-in fact, the Woon had already whistled shrilly to announce her coming-a whistle that found a hundred echoes in the forest which fringed the banks, until it died away in fitful cadences in some unknown swamp. And let it be remembered that this is the country of the creeks. Here the Irawadi, whose source no man knoweth, comes down from its cradle of snow,

past the tremendous defiles of Bhamo, through the whole length of that strange land from which the veil has only just been lifted, past cities and temples, until at last the mystery of waters spread out with a hundred thirsty throats toward the sea, and puddles its blue field with a muddy yellow far out, even to where the breakers hiss around Cape Negrais. Between the wide necks that stretch out to the sea the water has made for itself countless cuttings, through which it ebbs and flows sluggishly beneath the shadows of a primeval forest. The whistle of the steamer was answered by the dull boom of a signal gun, and the broad bosom of the creek was almost immediately dotted over with a vast number of small craft making their way toward the incoming mail boat. "There's the pagoda," and the Mudlark, as captains of Burman river steamers are irreverently called, pointed to the gilded cupola which rose high above the feathers of the bamboos that surrounded it. "There's the jetty," he added, "and there's the courthouse. You'll know more about that presently. Wonder how you'll like sitting there ten hours a day? And, by George, there's the *nga-pe!*" "The what?" But as Jackson spoke, a puff of wind brought a decomposed odour to the steamer. It was overpowering, an all-pervading essence, and for a moment Peregrine forgot everything in a vain effort to beat off the evil with his pocket-handkerchief. "It's all right when you're used to it," mocked the captain, "and you mustn't turn up your nose at it, for that delicate condiment is the main source of revenue of your district. Wait till I take you up some day with a shipload on

board! And now, your humble, I must be off."

He vanished to attend to his duties, which to the non-professional onlooker appeared to consist principally of swinging his arms round like the sails of a windmill and using frightful language toward a person whom he called the *serang*. The fitful wind, changing at this time, relieved Jackson from the terrible odour, and allowed him to look with a somewhat despairing curiosity at his new home. Before him lay a fleet of small fishing craft and a single row of bathing machines on stilts. The latter were the houses of the inhabitants, and they were all built on piles. They were of the roughest possible description, but here and there a plutocrat had got some corrugated iron to make a roof with and to excite thereby the envy, malice, and hatred of his fellows. There was but one street, from the end of which the jetty projected into the river. Beyond this rose some larger buildings, the largest of which had been pointed out by the skipper as the courthouse. A little way inland towered the gilded spire of the pagoda, with its umbrella crest that swung slowly round in the breeze. The one street of the township was thoroughly alive. It seemed as if a swarm of butterflies was on the move in the bright sunshine. Everywhere there was the sheen of brilliant colour—red, yellow, electric blue, and that strange tint which is known to milliners as *sang de bœuf*. The small boats surrounded the steamer, and, regardless of the danger of being swamped, recklessly jammed up against her. With few exceptions their occupants were either women or Chinamen.

These latter exchanged joyous greetings with their compatriots on board, and, swarming up the ship's side, set vigorously to work preparing to land their consignments as soon as ever the steamer drifted alongside the jetty. The ladies followed almost as rapidly, and their agility and the skill which they displayed in preventing the too great exposure of shapely limbs was beyond all praise. The women had brought with them their peddling wares, and a brisk market was opened-sharks' teeth, an invaluable love philter, silks and fruits, and the nameless little wants of semicivilized life. One held high above her head a row of mutton chops impaled upon a bamboo skewer. "Excellent they are," she cried; "they have come from the fat sheep the mail brought for me all the way from Calcutta."

Everybody was smoking, except the Chinamen and the man at the wheel, who were too busy. The Burman man was, however, so absorbed in the contemplation of his own dignity that he did nothing but smoke; the Burman woman, on the other hand, simply coaled herself with each whiff of the long green cheroot she sucked, and every puff inspired her with fresh energy for the driving of a bargain. Through all the maze of business, however, madam remained a very woman, and many an astute deal was lost as the joints of her armour were pierced by Ah-Sin's oily tongue or the open admiration in Loo-ga-lay's little eyes. They were now so close to the shore that Jackson could distinctly see the faces of the people and the medals on the breasts of the half company of Sikh police that were formed up on the jetty-

a tribute of honour to him, as he found out subsequently. Two Europeans stood amid the crowd; in one, dressed in a police uniform, Peregrine recognised Hawkshawe, the district police officer, who, while nominally his second in command, was really to be Jackson's dry nurse in controlling his charge until he was fit to fly alone. This period of probation would be, of course, just as long or as short as Peregrine chose to make it, for a member of the Indian Civil Service is ordinarily hatched full-fledged—a diplomat, a magistrate, anything you will. In the other, who stood beside the police officer, Jackson, although new to the country, recognised the missionary. His unkempt beard and hair, his long clerical coat of raw silk, and the dejected appearance of his lean face, hall-marked him as such distinctly.

The steamer had now come almost opposite the jetty. A light line, one end of which was attached to the hawser, was cleverly thrown out and as cleverly caught by a blue-bloused Lascar. The hawser was dragged to the shore to the accompaniment of a "hillee-haulee" chorus, and it surged through the water like an unwilling water boa being pulled to land. At length the end of the huge rope touched the bank, somebody jumped into the ooze and lifted it with both arms, somebody else twisted it deftly round a short stumpy pillar, and then, with a drumming of the donkey engine and an insistent hiss-hiss of the paddles, the steamer sidled slowly alongside the jetty until she almost touched it. In an instant the bridge was placed in position and a crowd that seemed all elbows met an invading army bent upon forcing its way on

board, and there was a little trouble. With the aid of a fierce-looking sergeant, who used his cane freely, Hawkshawe made his way on deck, and after a brief greeting with the skipper came up to Peregrine.

"You're Jackson, I suppose? I'm Hawkshawe."

The two men shook hands and looked each other straight in the face. Each saw the other's strength. It was later on they noticed the loose rivets in each other's mail. After a few moments spent in desultory conversation, during which Jackson heard and replied to the usual question of how he liked the country, the two prepared to leave the ship, and Peregrine sought the skipper to say adieu.

"Good-bye, captain."

"Good-bye. The next time you come with me I'll have the *ngape* all ready for you."

They were over the bridge, the guard of honour had presented arms, and the Reverend Doctor Habakkuk Smalley, American missionary, was introduced. Dr. Smalley performed the feat of shaking hands, of mopping his face with a red handkerchief, and of asking Jackson if he had "got it" all at once.

"Got it!" was the reply; "I should think we all did-got it nearly a mile up. It was most horrible!"

Dr. Smalley groaned aloud, and stretched forth both hands in protest. "Sir," he began, but Hawkshawe interposed.

"Excuse me for a moment, doctor, but I must introduce these people to the new king," and he led up the portly native

treasury officer to the bewildered Jackson, who found himself compelled to make and to answer civil speeches, while he was wondering how he could have given offence. The presentations were rapidly brought to an end, and Hawkshawe urged a move toward breakfast, turning to include Dr. Smalley in the invitation, but the reverend gentleman was nowhere to be seen. He had stalked off in high dudgeon.

"I've done something to offend Dr. Smalley; let me go after him and explain, if I can, though what it can be I can't guess," said Jackson.

"I should think you have!" was the answer. "Fancy Smalley asking you his usual question about your certainty of your salvation, and only think of your reply!"

"But I meant that fearful-smelling compound!"

Hawkshawe's laugh pealed out loudly. "Well, if a man will speak of religion like the measles, he must expect to be misunderstood. But there is no use in saying anything now. I will square matters for you. Smalley is a very good fellow really, and you will get to like him and- But you must be very hungry. My men will take your traps over to your own place, and you have to breakfast with me, and can then go on, if you like. Here is the trap. Jump in."

After the cramped life of the river steamer, however, the traveller wished to stretch his limbs a little, and begged to be permitted to walk. To this Hawkshawe agreed with an inward curse, for walking exercise is hateful to the Anglo-Burmese. He

will ride or drive anywhere, but the climate does not contemplate walking. It is not in the programme. An officious peon opened a huge umbrella over Jackson's head notwithstanding his protests, and a small procession was formed. This was increased to a very respectable size by the time they reached their destination, for most of the inhabitants of the place, having nothing better to do, attached themselves in a semiofficial manner to the party, and there was quite a crowd when, after a final leave-taking, Jackson and his host entered the house. It was a great pleasure to find that there were houses far back from the dreary little town on the river bank. It was disheartening to think that one had to live amid the malodorous mud and slime, and it was equally cheering to find instead of this a trim garden and a fantastically pretty little house, with a breakfast table set out in a shady veranda, which overlooked a lawn as green as emerald, upon which two little fox terriers were chasing each other in joyous play, to the detriment of the turf but to their own great good.

"You may consider yourself fairly installed now," said Hawkshawe, "and after breakfast we will take a run down to the courts. Drage, your predecessor, left only three days ago, but his house, which you have taken, will suit you admirably. You will find yourself very comfortable there, for Drage did himself well."

After breakfast Hawkshawe's fast-trotting pony took them the one mile to the courthouse "in less than no time," as the policeman said, and, the trifling business of the first day

concluded, they drove to the house Jackson was to occupy. He had taken it over as it stood from his predecessor, who had gone home on long furlough, and he was much pleased to find it comfortable beyond his expectations. All his heavy baggage had come on before, and Ah-Geelong, the Chinese servant, whom he had engaged as head man, was evidently a treasure. His books were neatly stacked in their shelves, and not with the titles upside down, for Ah-Geelong was skilled in the English tongue after his kind. Everything was spotlessly clean, from the half-dozen servants, who greeted him respectfully as he arrived, to the shining floor of the rooms, on the dark wood of which a mirrorlike polish had been scrubbed. After a few minutes Hawkshawe drove off, having made Jackson promise to dine with him that evening, and Peregrine was left to himself. He spent about an hour in arranging photographs and a few paintings, and then made a tour of the house and grounds. His ponies—two strong cobby little Shans—had come, and were looking sleek and comfortable in their stalls. He came back and made for the room which Ah-Geelong had arranged as his master's study. The Chinaman had selected this with a natural taste that could not be surpassed. The wide windows of the room opened into a veranda, from which there was an outlook over the river. There was a perfect north light, and the soft sea breeze that had travelled so many miles came in cool puffs past the *quis-qualis* blossoms that twined and thrust themselves through the trellis work of the veranda. He wheeled out a small table and sat down

to write home, for the steamer left early the next morning and the mails went with her. The letter was to his father, and, after describing the events of his journey, he went on to explain the feelings which moved him on his entry into the task of governing his fellow-creatures. He was aware that he ought to have first learned to govern himself; but practical work mostly leaves out that little detail upon which the moralist insists. Beyond a certain amount of book knowledge, he knew little or nothing of the people upon whom he was pitchforked by a gazette notification. He had been told that the Burman was incapable of progress, a sluggard, and a fop, and that the Chinaman was the future of Burma. His work was to collect the revenue, to preserve order, and to administer the law. But Jackson was not satisfied with accepting as an axiom the definition of the Burman given to him, nor did he feel that to carry out the mere routine of his work was sufficient. He had read much of the civilization of the East; but, after all, what is the civilization of the East to that of the West! Jackson was bringing all the active, vigorous West with him to this sleepy hollow in the creeks, and his coming would be as a breath of strong air to an invalid. He mapped out his programme. He would be to the benighted creatures-for of course they were benighted-over whom he was placed what his father had been and was to him, and so on for many pages of what a high-souled boy always dreams when he enters upon the battle of the East. With few exceptions, he comes out of the struggle dispirited and broken, feeling that the strong years of his life have been wasted

in trying to affix the impression of a seal upon water. He folded his letter, and, ringing the little bell which stood near him, gave it to the servant who came to carry to the post. He then rose and, leaning over the railings of the veranda, looked out before him. It was almost sunset, and a veil of shimmering gold was over the land. The yellow light fell softly on the sleepy forest and trembled over the dreaming river. Out on the west stretched a long, thin line of purple clouds, and his heart went forth there, for beyond was home-home, which he should see again when his task was done-when he had struck the dead Budh once more into life-when the East had heard the message he bore it from the West.

CHAPTER II

A DINNER À DEUX

Ho! A flowing bowl and a merry lass,
And a fig for monk or friar!
And the clean white light
Of a sword in fight,
And gold to my heart's desire.

The Buccaneer.

Eight o'clock! There was just time to dress and reach Hawkshawe's house, unless Jackson wanted to be late for dinner. He was unromantic enough to have an extremely good appetite, and a man must dine even if he is going to make the old East new. He got through his dressing as quickly as possible, and found his pony waiting for him under the portico that protected the front door of the house. Ah-Geelong followed close at his heels with an enormous hand lantern, which threw a blaze of light many yards around them. Peregrine protested.

"There is a bright moon, Ah-Geelong; you surely do not want a lamp! You might as well bring an umbrella!"

"Plentee snakee, master," and the Chinaman pointed generally all around him with a long knotted bamboo staff. The argument was unanswerable. Out of deference, therefore, to the cobra the

lantern was permitted to assist the moonlight, and the procession moved off. Peregrine determined that, snake or no snake, he would come back without the lantern, and as he rode took little mental bearings, in order to guide himself home again. On arrival, he sent back the pony with his groom, and Ah-Geelong disappeared into the servants' quarters with his cosmos burner. Hawkshawe came forward with cordial greeting, and it might have been fancy, but as they entered the drawing-room Peregrine thought he saw the curtain that guarded the entrance to a side door falling swiftly, and the flicker of a silken *tamein* as it vanished from sight.

"Take that long chair," said Hawkshawe, "and have a sherry and bitters; it will give you a fillip up!"

Jackson did not want the fillip up, but he took the sherry and bitters. He did not do so, however, in his host's scientific way. Hawkshawe first sprinkled the bitters in, and holding the glass before him bent it on one side, slowly turning it until there was a streak of burnt sienna winding round the inside; then he poured in the sherry and drank sip by sip with deep satisfaction. "It's the only way to get the true flavour of the bitters," he remarked. This was, of course, utter nonsense; but Hawkshawe fully believed it, and said the words so positively that his listener bowed to his superior knowledge and also believed. When Hawkshawe had absorbed some of the flavour of the bitters, he asked, "How have you been amusing yourself since I left you-office files?"

"No, a lot came in, but I have reserved them for later on. I've

been writing letters. The mail goes out to-morrow, and I took the opportunity to write home."

"Of course you did. I never write home now. The fact is I haven't seen Old England for many a long year now, and one loses touch. Besides, I never was a good hand at writing letters, and I don't suppose anything I have to say would be particularly interesting."

"I should have thought it was quite the other way, Hawkshawe."

As Jackson spoke dinner was announced, and they moved to the dining-room. It was dinner *à deux*, and for a few moments the conversation was general, Hawkshawe asking about friends at the capital, most of whom Jackson had met, notwithstanding his short stay there; but in this respect the East is a very small place. Finally Hawkshawe got on to the subject of his work, and gave a most interesting account of the robber gangs, or dacoits, that infested the district, concluding by expressing his firm belief that the chief malefactor was a well-known priest, who to all appearance had abandoned the world, but who, Hawkshawe was convinced, although he had apparently nothing to support his statement, acted as a fence, and was at the bottom of all the mischief.

"And you really think," inquired Jackson, "that this man is a sort of head centre? It seems improbable, if what I have read and heard of the Buddhist priesthood is true; but I suppose there are exceptions."

Hawkshawe slowly raised his glass to the light and watched the little beads in the Ayala. "Nothing is improbable in this country, as you will find after a few years' experience," he answered, half in mockery and half in earnest. "For instance, I believe it is really true that the bad characters of the adjoining district of Myobin were all driven here by the mosquitoes. They grow a special kind in Myobin-big gray ones about half an inch long, and striped like a tiger. They were more effective than the police; the dacoit couldn't stand them and came here, worse luck!"

"The obvious course, then, would be to import some of your tiger-striped friends," laughed Jackson.

Hawkshawe sighed. "We have done that, but it was of no use; there is something in the air here which does not agree with that particular brand of insect life. But, joking apart, the dacoits are a very serious evil here, and I have made little or no headway against them. Now and then I score a success, but I put down all my failures to the priest Bah Hmoay-old Father Fragrance."

"I suppose there is no way of clearing the fragrant old gentleman out?"

"None; but if one could be devised, you would end all our troubles and earn Smalley's undying gratitude as well. But Bah Hmoay is a power in the land in more ways than one, as you will find before many weeks, or rather days, have passed."

"Why Smalley's gratitude in particular?"

"Because two of a trade never agree, I fancy. I don't mean by this that Smalley is a dacoit in disguise, but that they are both

bigoted representatives of religion, and each believes the other to be the fiend himself. By the way, the mention of Smalley reminds me that I have explained your little mistake of this morning to the reverend Habakkuk, and he is quite prepared to smoke the pipe of peace with you; and this is well, as he is the only doctor within a hundred miles, and no one knows what may happen. Of course, he will bother you a good deal; but I should think you would know how to meet him when he opens fire on the mission side."

"It was very good of you to explain. I think also that I know what Smalley wants, and I must say I don't see why Government should help the mission on purely religious grounds-and he won't take help on any other. As an educationalist, Smalley should of course be helped, and the same argument would apply to the pagoda schools, over which I suppose Bah Hmoay presides. I don't think we should bring in religion into grants in aid, and it doesn't seem as if Christianity suits the Eastern. What do you think?"

"Don't know; all that's beyond me. I do know, however, that the native Christian is generally a d-d scoundrel. Try these cigars-they are specially made, and you must be patriotic and adopt your new country properly. If you won't face them, there are some Havanas-made of cabbage leaves probably."

"Thanks," said Jackson, "but I am afraid I am not yet blooded sufficiently for a Burman cheroot. I shall move up to the height by easy stages, and, if you will permit me, will stick to the Havanas,

which I am sure you libel."

"They are better for the nerves, at any rate," replied Hawkshawe, and Jackson noted how the flaring, sputtering vesta he lighted trembled in the policeman's hand as he held it to the cheroot. For the true enjoyment of tobacco there must be silence and repose. Although Jackson was utterly unable to attack a yard of poison, such as Hawkshawe was smoking, he knew how to enjoy a cigar, and the Havana was very good. The little incident of the curtain and the silken robe came into his mind again, and he caught himself getting curious about it. Hawkshawe was smoking nervously with quick, short puffs; he continually took the cheroot out of his mouth and rolled it between his fingers, apparently to make the rank leaf draw easier, and assisted his tobacco with short nips of old brandy-a thing which was not good to see. Jackson made no attempt to speak, and they smoked without a word being exchanged until the silence was apparently too much for the policeman, and he suddenly asked, "I suppose you like your new house?"

"Very much indeed. You were right in saying that Drage did himself well. It is very nearly perfect."

"Do you know what became of his impedimenta?"

Jackson understood the question, and flushed with anger. He controlled himself, however, and answered shortly: "No; those are matters about which I am not in the least concerned, nor do I think any one else should be."

"Don't you?" said Hawkshawe-his potations had evidently

loosened his tongue-"don't you? Well, it will force itself on you some day. You shy at it now. We all did-I did-Thomson, Perkins, Drage did-and yet you see we are as we are. We have found that the cycle of Cathay is better than the fifty years of Europe."

"And you call yourselves rulers of men! Why should you go down to the level of the brute if you happen to live near him?"

"Don't know, my dear fellow, except that one gets to like, or like the brute after a time. Why, man," and Hawkshawe rose and began to pace the room, "what have we got to live for in this infernal country? You rot here-*rot*, I say-and your mind and your body both go to ooze and slime. Books! One can't read in this climate. The blue mould covers them up, as it has covered me, and as it will cover you and many a better man yet, and you will be as I am." Hawkshawe filled his glass and drank to the dregs. It seemed as if he were toasting the success of his hideous prophecy. "*And you will be as I am!*" The words hit Jackson like a life sentence. He looked at the man before him, at the promise in the high aquiline features and still, clear eyes, and then he saw the little crowsfeet round the eyelids, the puffy cheeks and trembling hands, and shuddered. No! It would never come to that with him. But a dread rose in his heart. What, after all, if he was wrong in his thoughts of his strength? Hawkshawe looked to him with a strange light in his eyes. "Come," he said, "let me show you what it is like."

It was evident that Hawkshawe was determined, with a half-drunken persistence, to continue a subject that was more than

unpleasant to his guest, and there was only one course open to Jackson, and that was to get away as quietly as possible. "I don't think I will venture," he replied, "and, at the risk of offending you, I must ask you to excuse me for to-night. One always has a lot to do on first coming to a place, and I am no exception to the rule. No, not any more, thank you, to-night; but I will have another of those cheroots, if I may."

"I suppose if wilful will, then wilful must, but you are losing a new experience," said Hawkshawe, as he accompanied his guest to the door. He there found that Peregrine was going to walk home. "Let me order my trap for you, or a pony, if you prefer to ride?" he asked.

"No, thanks, Hawkshawe; there is a bright moon, and I know my way perfectly. I go to plan the suppression of Bah Hmoay. Goodnight!"

The hard gravel crunched under his firm footsteps as he walked down the drive. Hawkshawe stood looking after him. "He knows his way, he says. I wish I knew mine. Mr. Peregrine Jackson strikes me as rather a cold-blooded prig. I never could stand that sort of fellow-no," and, as if to keep his heart up, he sang:

"Pass the bowl, the merry, merry bowl,
Let it brim with good red wine.
I have pledged my soul
To the merry, merry bowl,
And the ruby light of wine."

He trolled out the verse in a rich baritone as he walked upstairs and entered his drawing-room. Taking up a book, he flung himself into the same long chair he had so hospitably pressed on Jackson earlier in the evening. He glanced over the leaves for a few moments; but the effort to read was beyond him, and putting down the volume he stared moodily into space. He had done this for years. Every evening, except when he was on active service--and he was keen enough then--he had drunk more than was good for him, and sat drearily through an hour or so before going to sleep. Ordinarily he did not think at all on such occasions; but somehow Jackson's attitude had impressed itself on him, and he was feeling nervous and depressed. There was that also which brought a hot flush of shame to his forehead, for he had lied to his guest when he had expressed his inability to bring Bah Hmoay, the dacoit priest, to justice. It would all come out some day, and then he, Hawkshawe, would be cast adrift on the river of shame. "D-n!" he hissed between his teeth, and buried his hot face between his hands.

The curtain before a door that led to an inner room was lifted, and a figure entered the room. It was that of a woman dressed in the national costume of Burma, which is so adapted to conceal as well as reveal the figure. Taller than ordinary, she had a face and form of imperial beauty, and as she stood there, looking at the bowed head before her, it was possible to understand Hawkshawe when he said that for himself he had chosen the cycle of Cathay.

She crossed the room with light steps, and, laying her hand on his shoulder, asked in Burmese, "What is the matter? Are you ill?"

Jackson had touched a lost chord in Hawkshawe's memory, and the murmurs of the white past were sighing in his ears. He raised his head wearily, and drooped it again. "No, Ma Mie, not ill in body but sick at heart."

She looked at him, and, untutored savage as she was, she understood, and, stooping suddenly, kissed him with a fierce little pressure. "Hawkshawe," she said, "I have news for you-good news. Look up, my husband!"

CHAPTER III

FATHER FRAGRANCE

LIMES A TWIG

Ruys. – I care for naught but gold. Gold holds the keys of this strong earth, and I Am earthy, of its mould. That unseen thing, The crown of glory, lies beyond the stars; I know it not... Give me my gold.

Maraffa, a Tragedy.

A broad streak of yellow water is drowsing toward the sea, and lies hedged in to the right and to the left by the most luxuriant vegetation. Here teak and mango, palm and bamboo grow side by side, and are laced together by the octopus arms of the cobweb of creepers that spreads over the forest and tries in vain to bind down its splendid growth. There is hardly any sign of animal life, although the forests teem with it. Occasionally the great woodpecker or a flight of green paroquets flash like emeralds through the patches of sunshine between the leaves, or the melancholy cry of a mule pheasant echoes dismally through the woods. Yet although no beast and hardly a bird may be seen, this void is filled by the ever-present abundance of insects, for here is their paradise. It is true that those grotesque specimens of creation which, like the sons of Belial, wander forth at night, are reserving themselves in a million cracks and crannies for

the pleasures of the evening; but the gnat and mosquito are on the alert, and the fly is here on his path of annoyance. Through the dense masses of foliage glide, like the snakes which infest them, the creeks that cut the delta of the Irawadi into numberless channels, and while thus dividing it serve as a means of communication from one part of the country to the other; for who, unless an Englishman, would scramble through the bramble and thorn of the jungle? Who would do so, when it is so easy to sit in a canoe and ship silently along the ooze of the creeks?

Some little way back from the main stream a canoe lies hidden in a small backwater. There are two occupants, and, being Burmans, they are of course both smoking, for smoke to the Burman is what beer is to the Saxon, a Derringer to the gentlemen of Arkansas, or opium to the Celestial. One of the two, in whose powerful hand is grasped a long-bladed paddle, is apparently a man of the people. He wears his hair long, and the golden brown of his limbs is covered with tattoo marks in strange devices. The other is a man of God; his yellow robe, his shaven crown, mark the priest of Budh. There is no asceticism, however, in the fat cheeks, or in the beadlike eyes which glint out from above the high cheek bones. The mouth is like a sword cut, long and cruel-looking, and the sensual aspect of the face is only matched by its cunning and treacherous look.

"Payah," said the man with the paddle, using a Burmese title of the highest respect, "we have now waited for two hours; the steamer will not come to-day."

The priest went on smoking as if he had not heard the remark, and his companion relapsed into silence. After a few minutes, however, the clerical gentleman found voice.

"Moung Sen," said he, "your name means red diamond, but it ought to have meant a clod. Did I not tell you that the steamer will come to-day? and I tell you again she will come. The wire has brought me the news. Two hours! What are two hours to me? I gain two hundred years of eternal bliss by meditating during two hours on holy matters of which you laymen know nothing—Hark! there is the whistle that was to be our signal."

And even as he spoke the shrill whistle of the Woon announced her coming, and the dull boom of the answering gun from Pazobin rang out in response.

Moung Sen bent his back to the paddle, and the boat shot out of the backwater to the very edge of the creek. There, concealed by the drooping foliage, they could see without being seen, and watch without any risk of discovery.

"Payah Bah Hmoay, the steamer approaches near," and, parting the screen of leaves with his hands, Moung Sen peered out.

"Yes, and with it Jackson, the new ruler of the land. I heard him say in Rangoon that he would stamp out all evildoers, so you, Moung Sen, had better be careful."

The boatman showed a row of teeth that would have driven a tiger mad with envy, and chuckled to himself. As the steamer came near they could hear the hissing of the paddles, and the

wash rocked the canoe up and down to the no small danger of its upsetting.

Moung Sen was longing for a race. He would have dearly liked to have pulled against the steamer for the jetty. His slanting eyes twinkled with excitement, and he turned an imploring look on Bah Hmoay.

"Ho!" grunted Father Fragrance, "be still. What with racing and gambling and women, you will come to a bad end some day—hang to a string and dance upon nothing. Is this a time to think of racing, when that young fool on the steamer yonder is come here with his new-fangled notions? Back, I say! Our friends have heard the steamer's whistle and will have assembled. Here! give me a paddle too." He seized the spare paddle that was handed to him, and, loosening his robe to give his arm free play, rowed with a most unclerical skill. Guided by their powerful strokes the canoe sped back, and, taking a narrow cutting at the head of the backwater, they rowed steadily on for ten minutes and then stopped.

Moung Sen put his hands to his mouth and hooted twice like an owl. A cock crowed twice in reply. "They are there," he said, and, running the canoe on to the bank, the two men secured it firmly with a creeper, then, taking an almost invisible path, they trotted along it like sleuthhounds. After a short distance was travelled in this manner Moung Sen hooted again, and again the cock answered as it were out of the hollow of a huge silk-cotton tree a few yards away. Then the tree began to give up its fruit. One

by one four men came out of the hollow, and half a dozen others dropped lightly from the branches where they had lain concealed. Each as he approached the priest bowed lowly before him. They took their places in a semicircle whose ends were to the right and left of Bah Hmoay. He gazed on them for a moment; they were a strong and likely looking set of men, fit for any devil's work. The chequered light fell on the bronze of their bodies, for they were naked to the waist, lit up the hideous blue and red of the tattoo marks with which they were covered, and ran in a line of fire on the long straight blades of the *dahs* they held in their hands. Then Bah Hmoay spoke, taking the men before him into his confidence, choosing his language simply, and appealing to all their weaknesses.

"And now, my companions," he concluded, "I have told you all that I learned during my visit to Rangoon, and how the plans are progressing. At Wuntho the chief is ready to take up arms; the Shan States are on fire-on fire, I say-and every creek and jungle holds gallant men only waiting for the signal to rise. Our whole difficulty is money-for when was a Burman rich? I propose, however, to meet this, and to find funds by a bold stroke. You all know the treasury at Yeo. It is thirty miles from here, and there are a hundred rupees there, all with the White Queen's head on them. Half shall be yours; the other half goes to the cause. Are you ready?"

There was a murmur of assent.

"Thank you. There is but one word more: in a week from to-

day-the day of the guinea pig-you must be at Yeo. And now for the water of the oath." He loosened a small pocketbook from his waist cloth as he said these words, and, writing a few lines on a page, tore it out. One held an earthen vessel full of water before him, and another lit a sulphur match. The Boh put the match to the paper and held it over the water, into which as it burned away the cinders fell; but when the flame got too close to his fingers to be pleasant the chief dropped the little unburned tag of paper into the water, and it went out with a splutter. Then taking the vessel in his hands, he swore to be faithful to the men before him, and, drinking a little, handed it to MOUNG SEN. That worthy pledged his soul on his good faith to the assembly, and, taking his sip, passed on the bowl. It went the round of every man there until it reached the last, who, when he too had sworn and drunken, dropped the vessel to the ground, where it broke into pieces.

This closed the chapter of the order, and the knights proceeded to disperse, each man with his long green cheroot burning in his mouth and his *dah* tucked away over his shoulder, a grotesque amalgam of devil and the child, the like of which is not equalled anywhere in the world.

Bah Hmoay and his Little John were once more alone, and the Boh or chief turned to his subaltern with a somewhat anxious look in his eyes, and asked:

"Do you think they will be true?"

"My name means red diamond, but it ought to mean a clod," laughed MOUNG SEN. "Yes, I think they will be true, and will all

be hanged for their faith, while you will end as a great man. But there is something else to do to-day."

"Hawkshawe-true-I have not forgotten; however, we ought to be getting back," and making for the canoe they rowed out into the open stream and then drifted down toward the town. As the priest stepped from the canoe his face assumed the severe expression of sanctity suitable to his calling; an obsequious disciple met him and opened an umbrella over his head, and he walked toward the pagoda or temple meeting with respectful greetings from all. He entered the gates of the pagoda, on either side of which grinned two colossal griffins, and, making his way through a courtyard thronged with worshippers, passed into the great hall, where a huge image of Gautama looked down upon him with calm, inquiring eyes. A tall, graceful woman stood at the foot of the idol, and as the priest approached she looked at him with something of impatience in her glance, and said, "I have been waiting here for nearly an hour."

"My daughter, it is patience and resignation which, united with thought, leads us to holy Nirvana."

"Pish! I haven't come here to bandy words about Nirvana. Was it for this you sent Loo-ga-lay for me?"

Bah Hmoay dropped his voice to a whisper as he said, "You are too hasty; women are always so. Follow me," and, passing behind the idol, he touched a door which seemed to open of its own accord, disclosing a small passage dimly lighted by a single lamp. At the end of the passage was a small archway, so low that

it was necessary for both to stoop as they entered it, and beyond was a large hall, along whose sides a row of Gautamas or images of the Budh was arranged with military precision. The images were alternately of white and black marble, and at the extreme end lay a huge recumbent casting of the Messiah of the East. Small lozenge-shaped cuttings in the wall above let in bars of light, which fell on the dim statues and made the polished brass of the recumbent image glow as if it were red-hot. The girl leaned lightly against the arm of the huge figure, and something flashed in her hand as she did so. Bah Hmoay observed it as he pointed to the dagger, and said with a smile, "You are very careful, Ma Mie; too careful for one so beautiful."

There was enough in the speaker's voice to make his listener turn on him like a panther, and Father Fragrance stepped back with a hasty apology. Then he spoke in a low tone for some time, the woman all the while keeping her guarded attitude. "There," he said at last, "this is a good offer. Will it do?"

"I am selling my husband's honour," she replied. "No, it is worth a larger price."

The priest uttered an exclamation of impatience, and moving off a few feet stooped near the foot of an idol, and picking up something from a recess there returned bearing it in his hands. He held it to the light as he approached, and Ma Mie saw that it was a bracelet of rubies, which flashed and glowed with a hundred colours. She almost gasped as she looked at it.

"Oh, how lovely!"

"Let me put it on your arm." Bah Hmoay, suiting his action to his words, stepped back with an admiring look. "There is nothing like this in all Pazobin," he said. "I will add it to my offer."

The woman hesitated and was lost. "It is a bargain," she said, and the face of Father Fragrance glowed with joy. "The new Englishman comes to dine with him to-night," she added. "When he is gone, I will settle all. And now I must go; I have been away too long."

"You can go this way," said the priest as he turned the key in a carved door toward the right, and opening it showed Ma Mie a back path that led out of the pagoda gardens. "And remember, the police guard must be very weak at Yeo next Friday."

She nodded and passed out, and Bah Hmoay watched her down the pathway and saw her raise her arm and look at the bracelet upon it. "Selling her husband's honour!" he laughed to himself. "When had Hawkshawe any to sell? Those ideas of hers are, however, very expensive, and I had to take away my peace offering from this old gentleman here." He patted the face of the idol from under whose foot he had removed the jewels. "However, he won't miss it, and Friday evening will see me repaid and ready to buy another rag of Mr. Hawkshawe's honour."

CHAPTER IV

RUYS SMALLEY

He rode toward the Dragon Gate, And blew a ringing call,
A virgin knight, in armour bright, 'Twere sad to see him fall.
Ah, saints of heaven, steel his heart, And nerve his arm withal!

Sir Amory.

Jackson walked out into the moonlight with a feeling of relief at having escaped from Hawkshawe. His disgust at his host's code of morality was only equalled by his pity for him. Perhaps, after all, the man did not mean what he said; and it was possible that an appeal to Philip sober would result in the expression of sentiments widely different from those which bubbled forth from Philip charged with a quart of Ayala, sundry short brandies, and a multitude of "baby pegs," as three fingers of mountain dew tempered with a split soda are called in the country of the creeks. Peregrine hesitated a moment whether he should go straight home or walk on a little. A great mass of official papers had come to the house as he left it that evening, and his work was cut out for him; but after what had happened he was in no mood to begin at once. He pulled out his watch, and seeing by the bright moon that it was barely half-past ten, decided to adopt the latter course. He walked slowly toward the river face, and then

across the soft sand to the deserted jetty, where he paced up and down its full length. In front of the dark outline of the forest a few twinkling lights marked the sleeping town, for Pazobin went to roost early. The fishing craft were all huddled together like sheep in a pen, and the outgoing tide lapped angrily at the wooden piles below. The wind bore to him the soft tinkle of the bells that swung from the golden umbrella on the spire of the pagoda. Their dreamy monotone fitted exactly with the scene, and seemed to call all good Buddhists to that Nirvana which to them is the end of all things. Everything was calm except the mind of the man who paced the teak planking of the jetty. Jackson was in that temper which would have been horrible doubt to an older man, but which to him in his youthful confidence in his own power was absolute certainty. He had shaken off the momentary terror of Hawkshawe's prophecy, "And you will be as I am!" That would never be; his young heart swelled with pride as he drew himself up in the consciousness of his strength. He did not seek aid in prayer. He had never sought it, except in dim infancy. Since his mother's death, in his childhood, he had known no care but that of his father, and the older man had brought up his son in his own creed, which was, to summarize it, man. And Peregrine drunk it all in eagerly and was an apt pupil. He held himself apart from all beliefs-Calvary, Mecca, the groves of Gya, were all one to him in that they all aimed at the good of mankind, in that they had all accomplished untold good. He was aware of the rewards offered to the faithful-the harp and crown of the Christian, the

sensual paradise of the Moslem, the merging into the deity of the Buddhist-and none of these tempted. He had looked with scorn on the professor of a faith who calculated on the advantages that would accrue to him from his fidelity; he despised the human being who sold good works for a price and speculated in futurity like a stock broker making a time bargain. He was young and very cocksure. The solitary up-and-down tramp, combined with the cheroot and his naturally calm temper, began to quiet Peregrine's excitement, and he finally put aside all thoughts of Hawkshawe and stopped for a moment near the huge crane which stretched out its long arm over the river as if begging for something. The Havana had burned low by this time, and he flung it from him, watching the little arc of fire die away with an angry hiss into the water below. Then he turned to go. He recrossed the sand, once more passed Hawkshawe's house, from an upper window of which the light was burning brightly, and, turning to the right, took, as he imagined, the road home. He had said that he thought he knew his way perfectly, but now it seemed as if the bearings he had taken were all wrong. One tree was like another, one bend of the road was like every other he had passed. The few houses were all built on the same plan, and he could scarcely discern them in the mass of foliage with which they were surrounded. It flashed upon him that he had lost his way, when he was so sure of it. What if he had miscalculated his strength as he had done the road? He stopped for a moment near a wooden gate to try and see if he could find a landmark, and as he did so a sudden blaze

of light streamed out of one of the windows of a long building that lay within the gateway. A moment after the droning tones of an American organ stole into the night, and above them rang out a woman's voice clear and distinct:

My God, I love thee; not because
I hope for heaven thereby,
Nor yet because who love thee not
Are lost eternally.

He listened in a manner spellbound not only by the voice, which was of the rarest order, but also by the words, which poured forth from the heart, the genuine unselfishness of the Christian's belief. That pure flood of melody floating into the night seemed to give all his convictions the lie as it passed out on its way beyond the stars to God's throne. Cheap and jingling as the verses were, the simple words sung by such a voice carried with them a revelation he had never imagined. He wondered to himself what manner of woman this was whose voice affected him so powerfully. He determined to see this beautiful saint-for of course she was beautiful-and stepping cautiously down the road approached the open window through which the song poured. Standing back amid the yellow and purple leaves of a croton, he peered in, and saw a long narrow hall filled with rows of empty benches. At the head of the room, and close to the window, was a low dais, and upon this the organ was placed. The singer was seated with her back turned toward him; but the

light from a shaded lamp lit up the sunny gold of her hair and fell on the outlines of an exquisite figure. She was alone, singing to the night. Overcome with curiosity, Peregrine stole softly to the window and raised himself slightly with his hands to look in. As he did so the sudden snapping bark of a dog, hitherto lying concealed near its mistress's dress, rang out, and the singer turned round so sharply that it was impossible for Peregrine to withdraw unobserved; but as she turned he saw that the perfect beauty of her face more than realized the picture he had drawn in his imagination.

"Who are you? What do you want?" she gasped, with an alarmed light in her eyes.

"I am very sorry," explained Peregrine humbly. "I have lost my way, and seeing a light and hearing music thought I-I-" and he stammered and broke down for a moment; but picking himself up, went on, "I have only arrived here to-day. My name is Jackson, and the house I want to find is the one that was occupied by Mr. Drage; perhaps you know it, and if you can give me a rough idea how to find it I shall be very grateful, and I hope you will accept my sincere apologies for having frightened you."

As he spoke, the look of fear on his listener's face passed away. "Be quiet, Flirt!" she said to the little dog, who kept alternately growling and yapping to herself, and then, turning to Jackson: "Yes, you did startle me at first. So you are Mr. Jackson. My husband-that is, Dr. Smalley-said he met you to-day," and she smiled as if she was thinking of something that amused her.

"This," she continued with a little wave of the hand, "is the school, and we live next door. If you will kindly come in by that door to your left you can help me to shut the musical box, and then I will take you right away to my husband, and he will see you through the wilderness to your home." The slight American accent in her voice lent her words a piquant charm, and it was with a true American's ready resourcefulness that she carried on the conversation with Jackson and attempted to take stock of him at the same time as he stood outside, half in shadow and half in light.

"It is very kind of you," said Peregrine gratefully, and he made toward the door, delighted with the lucky accident that had brought him this adventure. Nevertheless, the words "my husband" did not please him. So this beautiful creature was Smalley's wife! "I wonder," he muttered to himself, "if marriages are really made in heaven, why they don't assort people better." There was, however, no more time for regretful reflection, for the door was opened by his involuntary hostess, and they walked up to the dais together. As Jackson closed the organ Mrs. Smalley looked at him from under her long lashes, and a faint colour stole into her cheeks. She stood by placidly, however, holding a large hymn book in her hand and saying nothing. When he had finished, she spoke: "Now you can carry the light and come along-tchick, Flirtie!"

And they went into the garden, Peregrine full of pleasure at being ordered about in this unceremonious manner, and his

companion walking demurely beside him.

A few steps brought them to the parsonage; the Reverend Habakkuk was summoned from the interior and matters explained to him. He hospitably pressed Jackson to stay and have some refreshment, but Peregrine noticed an impatient look in his hostess's face and declined. Smalley determined to lead Peregrine back himself, notwithstanding his protestations that all he wanted was a few simple directions, and, putting on a wide felt hat, turned to his wife, "I shall be back soon, Ruys; do not wait for me."

"Good-night, Mrs. Smalley." For the life of him Peregrine could not help throwing a shade of regret into the last words, and an odd light came into his listener's eyes.

"Good-night, Mr. Jackson. I am-we both are-*so* glad you *lost* your way here. I trust you will in future be able to find it often." She made a demure little courtesy as she said this in an even voice, and Jackson and his host passed out of the house.

She listened till the sound of their footsteps died away, and then turning round to her dog picked it up and sat in a chair with the little animal in her lap. "Flirt," she said, "I guess he's perfectly luv-ly. There, you can go down now. I want to think." And she sat leaning back in her easy-chair with a pleased expression on her face until Habakkuk returned, and said, as he put down his hat:

"A most excellent young man that, Ruys; I am afraid I misjudged him sadly to-day," and the missionary, pulling a chair near his wife, rubbed the palms of his hands together softly.

"Remarkably good-looking, too, don't you think?"

She turned and looked him full in the face. "I don't think I've given Mr. Jackson's looks a thought."

"Of course not, of course not," said Habakkuk timidly, and began to repeat the nervous rubbing of his hands together.

"Why of course not?"

The calm tone in which this question was asked entirely upset Smalley; he stopped his hand exercise, and, crossing one leg over his knee, began to nurse it and sway slightly backward and forward. He did not answer his wife's question, and she watched him for a moment, and in her heart began to wonder how it was she had ever consented to marry this lanky, shuffling creature before her. She knew his moral character was irreproachable; if only his personal appearance were more prepossessing. She had truly and honestly tried to do her duty as his wife, but the chains of her bondage were beginning to gall. Mentally she was far Smalley's inferior. She could not live in the clear ether, in the pure air of his thoughts, and she was always unconsciously dragging him down while making many an honest effort to rise to his level. She had lived so quietly for so long a time that the sudden and unconventional manner of her meeting with Jackson had affected her powerfully. There was no denying that he was good-looking, and she had drifted into a flirtation with him at sight as naturally as a duck takes to the water. Oh, if life were only different for her! she thought as she watched Smalley swinging himself in his chair. The slow motion exasperated her; her nerves

were at a tension, and she said sharply:

"Habakkuk, I wish you wouldn't fidget so! Can't you sit still anyhow, like any other mortal? Do read, or do something. I want to think, and my head is aching."

"Of course, of course," assented the missionary, and a furious light gleamed in his wife's eyes, which, fortunately for him, Habakkuk did not observe. He was a man slow of thought, and it was only after a little time that he began to realize that his wife had said she was in pain. He looked at her softly from his calm blue eyes, and then, putting forth his hand, laid it gently on hers. Ruys received the caress passively. Then Habakkuk was emboldened, and he tried to draw her toward him. She evaded him, however, by a deft turn of the shoulder, and, rising, walked to a table in the room, and picking up a heavy Bible placed it before her husband, as she said primly:

"It is getting very late. I think you had better read a chapter before going to bed."

CHAPTER V

"FURIIS AGITATUS AMOR."

Belike for her, a royal crown
I'd wager to a penny piece.

Old Play.

As Jackson and his guide left the gates of the parsonage Peregrine struggled with a temptation to look back over his shoulder. Finally he gave in with a sense of shame at his weakness, and then was unreasonably irritated to find that no shadowy figure behind the tinkling bead screen before the open window watched their passage down the moonlit road. The result was that for the first few hundred yards of their walk there was very little talk, for Peregrine's silence discouraged all the missionary's attempts at conversation. Suddenly the whole countryside seemed to be filled with the flashing light of gems. A blaze of jewelled glory came and vanished in a moment, and then appeared again in all its fairy beauty to slip away as swiftly as before.

"What on earth is that?" asked Peregrine, moved out of his reserve at the sight.

"Bugs," replied Habakkuk, "fire-bugs. They're pretty lively to-night, anyhow. Each one with the little lantern God has given

him. They don't make a real show, however, because of the moon."

"Of course," said Peregrine, "I might have known they were fireflies, but it all came so suddenly, and I had no idea the sight was so perfectly beautiful," and he pointed to the millions of little lights twinkling through the night.

"I guess so, Mr. Jackson; just as if all the little stars had come down to earth and hung themselves out on the trees to dry." The constraint with which the walk began now vanished, and Smalley took the opportunity to read Jackson a lecture on the subject of health, summing up with these words, "I am speaking as a medical man now, Mr. Jackson; you must remember to take care of No. 1-that is, of yourself. This is a most treacherous climate, and I have known many men stronger even than you look fall before it like withered leaves. Take a quinine pill daily, and always wear flannel next to your skin. I don't do it myself, but then I'm a seasoned vessel. Ah! here we are at your gate."

"Do come in, Dr. Smalley?" and Jackson held the wicket invitingly open.

"No, no, thanks," replied Habakkuk. "Pooh, man! Don't thank me for showing you the way a few yards. Good-night! I must get back, for my wife is sure to be waiting for me."

The last words jarred on Jackson, and he felt all his old feelings returning as he shook hands with his guide, who turned and shuffled off into the moonlight. When Jackson had got about a third of the way down to his own door, however, he heard his

name shouted out by Habakkuk.

"What is it?" he called out as he hastened back.

"Only this-don't forget about the flannel and the quinine. Good-night!"

"Confound him!" and the angry young man turned on his heel and entered the house. It was very fairly late now, and Jackson had worked himself again into a thoroughly excited frame of mind. Ah-Geelong devoted himself to making his master comfortable for the night, and as the slippered Galahad sat in an easy-chair trying to collect himself and gather together the fragments of resolve to attack the pile of papers he saw on the table in his study, he heard the angry fizz of a soda-water bottle and the hissing of its contents as it was poured into a long tumbler and placed beside him.

"What *are* you doing, Ah-Geelong?"

"Allee masters dlinkee peg-peg him keep off fever. Dlinkee peg and go sleep," and Ah-Geelong almost lit up the room with the shining row of teeth he displayed. It was impossible to be angry, but Jackson told the man to go, and he went, wondering, perhaps, wherein he had done wrong.

Peregrine rose from his seat and went to his study. But over the file before him flitted the outlines of the face he had seen. "Ruys," he murmured to himself, repeating the name by which he had heard her called, and it almost seemed to him that she replied, and that he heard the melody of her voice again. The far-off shadows of the room gathered to themselves form and

substance, and as he leaned back idly there rose before him the vision of the dimly lighted school hall and that golden head bending slightly over the music. He had never been in love, and he gave himself up for the moment to the fascination of dreaming over the face he had seen. This was what inspired the knights of old. He stretched out his strong right arm and almost felt that he held a lance in rest. What would he not give to know that this peerless woman was his own? How he would work and labour! But a few short hours ago he was bowing at the shrine of a lofty ideal that was to carry him through life, at that invisible glory which strengthened his shrinking heart and nerved him to the highest for duty's sake. And all this was gone. The old god was dethroned in a moment, and the soft notes of a woman's voice, the touch of her hand, a glance from her eyes, and the past was rolled up like a scroll.

"My God," he said, "can this be love?" It never struck him that he had unconsciously appealed to that Godhead in whom he thought he had no belief. He was not able to think of that then—of how in a moment of trial the doubting soul turns instinctively to cling for support to that ethereal essence we call the Creator, and endows it with a living faculty to hear and to answer. Surely this spontaneous appealing to a higher power is something more than the mere force of habit. It springs from the heart pure as the snows of Everest, genuine and true. And this is the instinct which is not taken into account in the mathematical reasoning of the atheist; the touch of fire that would enlighten him out of

his darkness is wanting. He will allow the instinct which tells an animal of his danger, which signals to him a friend; but to man, the highest of all animals, will he deny the instinct of the soul which shouts aloud to him the existence of God.

And the answer to Peregrine's question came unspoken, but he felt it ringing within him. Yes, and a hot flush of shame went over him as he thought of another man's wife. "It will not be! it shall not be!" he said, and he fought with himself as a strong man can fight. He fought with the devil that tempted until he saw the light of the morning star pale in the east and a pink flush steal into the sky; and then, being utterly wearied, he lay down and slept a dreamful sleep. It seemed to him that he was standing beside his own body and watching a dark stream trickle slowly, slowly from his heart. Around him were misty figures whom he could not recognise, and he lay there very still and silent. Suddenly there was a flash of golden hair, and a woman robed in white stooped and kissed him on the forehead, and as she rose he knew the glorious beauty of her face, and then he awoke.

CHAPTER VI

ANTHONY POZENDINE SPEAKS UP

Hark unto me! Myself will weave the plot
Close as the spider's web, with threads as fine.

Old Play.

Anthony Pozendine, the half-caste head clerk of the district office of Pazobin, had evidently something on his mind. He sat at his desk amid a heap of files, over which his head just appeared, and every now and again his squeaky voice rose in petulant complaint or censure of one of his subordinates.

"Here, Mr. Pillay, can't you add, eh? You make out four hundred cases tried last quarter, and seven hundred convictions! Sshoo!" And he flung a file across the room at the unfortunate Mr. Pillay, who stooped and, picking it up humbly, went on with his work.

Through the half-open door of the office the buzz of voices from the court room came in, and occasionally a peon would enter with a request for Pozendine to see either Hawkshawe or Jackson. When it was to see Jackson, Anthony obeyed with a resigned air and a certain amount of pleasure, because he knew he was being sent for to remove some difficulty of routine which the new chief felt, and this would raise him in the eyes

of his subordinate clerks, and make them think the power of Pozendine was great in the land. When it was to see Hawkshawe, Anthony's thin legs trembled under him, and he went with an outside assumption of dignity but a great fear in his heart, and when he returned there was generally an explosion of some kind. Hawkshawe had already sent for him four times to-day, and Anthony's temper was in shreds. He had just taken a fair sheet of foolscap, folded it lengthwise, and written in a clerkly hand across the half margin near the top "Memo. for orders," when again the messenger entered with a request from Hawkshawe, that was practically an order, to see him at once. "Damn!" said Anthony so loudly that the ten busy heads in the room bobbed up from among the heaps of papers in which they were buried, and ten scared faces looked at Anthony in alarm. Ten pairs of eyes were fixed upon him with anxious inquiry in their gaze, and the magnetic effect of this made the head clerk cough nervously and very nearly upset the inkstand.

"Are you coming?" said the messenger in an insolent tone, as he stood in an easy attitude before Anthony and inserted a piece of betel between his teeth.

Anthony glared at him. "I'm coming," he said. "Go 'way," and then he turned on his assistants.

"Wot are you all looking at, eh? Wasting time this way and that way. Think gov'ment pays you to sit in your chairs and look about! Here you, Mr. Rozario, you joined office a last-grade clerk two years ago, you're a last-grade clerk now, you'll leave it

a last grade, I think. G'long and work-plentee of work-if not, I will reduce establishment."

Ten heads sank back into their papers, and the little man, seizing a file in his hand, walked slowly out with becoming dignity, his heart, however, full of combined fear and anger.

He was absent for fully half an hour, and the clerks once or twice distinctly heard the strident tones of Hawkshawe's voice echoing along the long passage, through the court where Jackson sat, and into the room where they worked.

"Big row on," remarked Mr. Rozario to no one in particular. "Pozendine ketching it warm, warm."

Finally the head clerk reappeared, but he came back with hasty steps and a face in which green predominated over its habitually yellow tinge. There were two blue lines to mark his lips, and his hands shivered over his papers as he stood at his desk in an irresolute sort of way. Finally he could contain himself no longer, and turned to his chief assistant.

"Mr. Iyer," said he, "am I head clerk of the district office or head clerk of the police office, eh? Answer me, eh?"

The stout Madrassee clerk looked at a fellow, who looked at another, and then, as if by one impulse, the whole room arose and crowded around Pozendine.

"Am I," repeated Anthony, "head clerk of the district office or of the police office?"

"You're chief clerk," hazarded Mr. Rozario.

"Yes," assented Anthony, "I am the chief clerk. I have served

gov'ment twentee-four years, and now Mr. Hawkshawe he sends for me and tells me before a menial servant that I know nothing. Why, I taught four deputy commissioners their work! Who writes revenue report? Who writes notes on crops? Who makes tabular statements? Who drafts to commissioner and revises administration report? Who attends to district roads? Who sees to cess collections, budget work, record and despatch, stamps and stationery, office routine and discipline, eh? Who? Who? Who? And now Mr. Hawkshawe he sends for me to look over Mr. Drage's report on police. 'Pozendine,' he says, 'you're a damfool'-call me, Anthony Pozendine, head clerk of the district, *damfool!* 'Sir,' I said, 'that's Mr. Drage's order,' and he say, 'You ought to have been able to tell Mr. Drage what to write.' 'See,' he say, 'now that Mr. Drage has gone on leave nothing can be done about this, and it will give beastly trouble-and now be off with you, infernal idiot!' *Damfool and infernal idiot!* I will report to commissioner at once by wire through assistant commissioner and resign. Now you go on with your work." He flung himself down into his seat and began to scribble a long complaint to Jackson about the treatment he had received from Hawkshawe. There was much irrelevant matter in it, and his pen fairly hissed along the paper. While he was thus engaged the Madrassee clerk Iyer rose softly and, stealing toward Pozendine, whispered in his ear. It was like one devil tempting another, and Anthony's face was perfectly satanic in its expression of glee as he listened.

"Plenty witness-Ma Mie's sister my wife," murmured Iyer,

and his yellow eyes twinkled like two evil stars. Pozendine nodded his head. "Ah, ha! Mr. Hawkshawe, you call me damfool-I will brand you dam' blaggard!" he hissed out aloud as his busy fingers travelled over the paper and Iyer went back to his seat.

The Madrassee watched his superior keenly from his chair, and a wicked smile stole over his features as he half expressed his thoughts. "Pozendine will get sack, and I will become chief clerk." He then placidly put up a memo. for orders on the subject of the wasteful extravagance in blue pencil indulged in by the district engineer.

* * * * *

"I can not stand that beast of a head clerk, Jackson," and Hawkshawe, flinging himself into a chair, pulled out a long brown-leather cheroot case and extracted a gigantic cheroot therefrom.

Peregrine looked up as he said slowly: "Why not? He seems a decent sort of fellow-all nerves, though, I expect, but most men of his class are. But what has he been doing to upset you?"

"Oh, nothing in particular, only I don't like him; can't help it, perhaps, but I hate him like poison. Why don't you get rid of the brute? He's been too long here. Is a sort of power in the place, and owns property. That's the sort of man who gets his palm greased, you know."

"It's a very serious matter to punish a man for a fault you think he's going to commit. Still, as you say, he has too much power; but that can be remedied without resorting to anything like the

measures you suggest."

Hawkshawe shrugged his broad shoulders. "As you please; but if the crash comes, don't say I didn't warn you. However, I didn't come to talk to you about this, but to ask you if you think it wise to have so much money at Yeo. There's close on a hundred thousand there, and the engineer on the famine works a native, too."

"What can be done? There is a strong guard, I believe?"

"Yes, twenty men, and old Serferez Ali, my inspector, commands them. He's the best man in the service. Still, I think you had better bring in the money."

"You think there is any danger?"

"Absolutely none that I know of at present; but old Bah Hmoay has been so quiet of late that I'm afraid mischief is brewing, and one never knows what may happen."

"We have, then, two alternatives before us-either to bring in the money or the greater part of it here, and send it out as it is wanted, exposing it to the danger of being stuck up, to use a slang phrase, on its passage, or to increase the police guard. Have we the men?"

"Yes," he said, "I can spare thirty men on Saturday, and will send them up then. With fifty men Serferez Ali could hold out against ten thousand dacoits."

"Very well, so be it."

"That's settled, then. Hola! what have we here, a *billet-doux*?" and Hawkshawe held between his finger and thumb the gray

envelope he had taken from the messenger who brought it into the room and handed it to Peregrine. "Is the fair Ruys asking you to dinner?"

For the life of him Jackson could not help the hot blood rushing to his face, and there was something inexpressibly galling in Hawkshawe's tone. "Excuse me," and he tore open the envelope. It was an invitation to dine, and as he put it down Hawkshawe made a further remark that stung him to the quick. He turned round upon his visitor and said shortly, "Supposing we drop the subject or drop each other."

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