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THE GREAT BUDDHA CATSEYE

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THE GREAT BUDDHA CATSEYE.

A strange story of adventure in Ceylon—What took four New York club men into the jungle—
Thrilling experiences of unarmed travelers with the denizens of tropical forests.

CHAPTER I.—THE FIRST LION D'OR BANQUET.

THERE were five of them. They were seated about a table in one of New York's smartest cafés. It was nearly four o'clock of a bleak March day—the hour when these metropolitan banquet halls are silent and deserted. All the world seems actively absent, working up an appetite for dinner ; and every attendant upon the capricious public's wants, from the *chef de cuisine* to the "buttons" at the door, is taking a respite before the expected rush.

The five young men had feasted luxuriously. The fact was evident from the relics of the banquet scattered in confusion over the wine stained cloth. That they were surfeited was patent from the air of weariness and boredom which usually follows a prolonged season of wit, cynicism, and laughter.

The slight framed man, with the pointed beard and the eye of a hawk, was Hamilton, the painter.

The silent, cynical, negative type at his side was Reynolds, man of the world.

At his right sat a composed and portly man of military bearing. This was Dr. Biggs, the scientist.

Opposite Hamilton sat a young athlete, with the air of a city bred son of overkindly fortune. It was Pyke, the millionaire.

The last of this interesting quintet was a tall, wasp waisted man of dreams, with sharp features the color of a gourd. It was Brandt, the writer.

This interesting group of youth, talent, wealth, and promise represented many planes of activity. They were sworn friends. Every month for some years past they had met at some appointed spot to give faithful account of themselves.

Sometimes they dined *al fresco* at some convenient beach resort. Again, they found a Spanish, Italian, Arab, or Chinese host in some quarter of the great metropolis who could regale them with some delicacy adored by the sons of other soils and climes. When nothing superlative offered itself in the matter of a unique repast, they fell back upon one of the Fifth Avenue establishments, as on this occasion, and they generally chose the most luxurious. Such reciprocal friendship is not dear indeed at any cost of mere entertainment.

But now the feast was over, and the insupportable ennui which follows epicurean surfeit weighed heavily upon them. There were long lapses of silence when but an hour before there was such volleying of wit and repartee, wisdom and nonsense, that half of it would have been lost on the keenest

listener. Something of gloom following the sunshine came over them, as if it had partaken of the bitterness of the weather without.

A weariness of one another, of themselves even more, and of life in general, made them grave and cynical. They sickened at the sight of the table débris; and if the rolling eyes chanced to wander toward the wide, satin hung windows, they saw only a forbidding gloom, and muffled forms with bowed heads flitting through it like wraiths in some accursed underworld. If they closed their swollen and throbbing lids, gazing into their own bosoms, they saw there apparitions more appalling still. It was that depressing moment just before the payment of accounts.

But suddenly a new presence stirred them. It was a tall form in long, snow spangled ulster, more like a Bedouin burnoose, slowly advancing into the magnificent room, almost somnambulistic of movement, unearthly of aspect—a presence contrasting weirdly with the magnificence about him.

As the great hall was deserted entirely for the moment, save for these at table, deep interest was naturally stirred by the advent of this strange being. As he sank into a chair by one of the window tables, he turned leisurely and regarded the dumb mouthed quintet for a moment, and they rewarded the interest taken in them with a combined stare that was far from courteous.

The sinister light of early closing day flung a somber radiance over the white coronal of hair that swept to the bent shoulders of the newcomer.

"Great heavens!" murmured the painter. "What a magnificent head for a pastel."

"I could write a volume on that man, just as he sits there," thought the writer. "His suggestion is something amazing."

"Giordano Bruno must have looked like that," sighed the scientist.

"How in the world did that shocking old beggar ever get by the attendants at the door?" is what the millionaire thought, to judge from the sullen query of his look.

Soon there came hurrying in a waiter. When he saw what manner of guest he had, he gave a gasp as if confronted by the ghost of his many crimes. He, too, wondered how this shabby apparition managed to pass the keen Cerberus at the door; but rather than have annoyance, he advanced and with scant courtesy shoved the gilt bordered *menu* under the bowed face.

The stranger put it aside without looking at it. "Bring me bread and bring me water," he said with an uplifted glance and a voice that was weird and plaintive.

The Frenchman smiled cynically. "And vot else, monsieur?"

"Nothing," said the patriarch softly, but with firmness in the tone.

"Nossing?" echoed the waiter mockingly.

"Nothing."

The flunky shifted nervously. "Ve don't serve bread and vater alone to ze guests here, monsieur. You must go elsevere for zat."

There was silence. The fine face clouded, and the lank hand passed over the brown forehead where the wrinkles deepened into dead blue furrows. He seemed to be waiting for an inspiration from some supreme power.

One of the young men seated at the center table, suffering a thorn of pity in his heart, bent forward toward his fellows, whispering loudly enough to be heard by all, "Boys, it's rather hard to see an old man like that turned from his place half starving, as he evidently is, when we have gorged to the utmost. Suppose we invite him over here and regale him, eh?"

"Good," said another.

"It will be a new sensation to see some one do what we no longer are able to achieve," put in Reynolds.

"Call him over, Brandt," added the millionaire, moved more by the stir of a promised novelty than by a moiety of charity toward the aged stranger. "We'll watch the effects of terrapin and champagne on the untutored palate." And forthwith they moved bottles and plates aside, making room for a sixth guest at the table.

The old man had half risen to go.

"Uncle," said the novelist familiarly, "won't you come over here and join us? There's plenty to eat and drink, and drat the expense."

The old man turned, somewhat surprised, but evidently pleased withal.

"Come, uncle," went on the novelist, perceiving his modest hesitancy, "we're all boys together, and we can't see an old man of your years and intelligence shoved out in the snow penniless and hungry a day like this——"

The flippant run of mingled jest and earnest was suddenly stayed; for, as the calm old man moved forward and peered deeply into the speaker's eyes, there was something in his look which silenced and almost sobered them all.

"Thank you," said the stranger, seating himself, and bowing low.

The man of millions passed him the *menu*. "Order whatever you wish, sir," he said with some deference now, "anything and everything——"

"Vot vill ze monsieur haf?" broke in the suddenly obsequious waiter.

The stranger put the card aside as before. "Bring me bread and bring me water," was all he said, but in the same mellow and plaintive tones and with the uplifted glance.

"But what else, uncle?" broke in the chorus. "Order whatever you want—soup, fish, game, fruit—everything."

"Perhaps we had better order for him," suggested Reynolds, half ironically. "He is too modest."

But the lank hand was uplifted with a silencing gesture. "Bread and water," he repeated. "Nothing more, I thank you."

A sigh of disappointment ran round the table. The new sensation was collapsing. Some relaxed into their former mood of snake-like apathy. The waiter brought bread, then filled a rich cut glass goblet with water and set it before the stranger. Then there fell a wearying silence.

After a goodly portion of the loaf was gone and the goblet thrice emptied, the old man lifted his eyes, regarding one after another of his hosts. Then there came a strange smile over the sallow aspect, albeit a smile that neither warmed nor cheered, but it stirred them strangely.

"Young gentlemen," said the guest, throwing back the folds of his great coat, disclosing what was seen to be an orange hued garment beneath, "young gentlemen, I thank you heartily for this hospitality, and you shall

be rewarded. I wish, however, to disabuse you of one illusion. I am not as poor as you believe."

The listeners turned carelessly, Reynolds shrugging his shoulders, as if they had been duped.

"In truth, my young friends," he resumed, "if I am to tell you a profound secret"—they all leaned forward as if expecting wisdom from some rare oracle—"if I am to come out with the bold, startling truth, I am the richest man on this earth today."

Instantly all interest vanished into sighs. Every face was turned idly away, despite the intense solemnity with which these words were uttered.

"Only a harmless lunatic," mused the writer.

"A gruesome bore," muttered the millionaire.

"We had better break up before this old idiot does something to mortify us," meditated the cynic Reynolds.

Only Hamilton, the painter, seemed responsive with something more than apathetic politeness.

"You do not believe," murmured the old man, with a tinge of sorrow in the mellow accents, "oh, I can see that—I can see that. And yet, young gentlemen," he added, with voice so full of earnestness that one was compelled to respect what was spoken as truth, "I shall convince you. Bear with me a moment. I will prove to you that I am truth incarnate. I could not deceive you if I tried."

He had thrust his lank hand deep into the folds of his orange garment beneath, and the rise and fall of the shrunken bosom showed that the stir within was no quiet one. His whole presence seemed spiritually illuminated. Drawing forth something in his clenched palm, and outstretching it at arm's length, the brown arm was laid across the chaste damask like a bronze cast. "It is here, my good friends," he said, in a voice of enchanting softness, "here in my hand—the most priceless jewel on earth: the supreme, beneficent, all powerful catseye of Gautama Buddha!"

If the listeners could have been patronizing in their doubt ere this, their manner toward the speaker as suddenly changed. There was something in that moving sentence which acted upon them like a strange intoxicant.

"What is the gem?" broke in one skeptic, leaning forward and gazing like one hypnotized at the outstretched and firmly clenched hand.

"It is the sacred catseye of Buddha," repeated the solemn gownsman, master of the situation now for the first time. "It is the jewel of the prophet himself—of him who ruled the world five hundred years before Christ, and whose spirit today is sovereign over eight hundred millions of people. It was the only gem which the prophet wore; and passing into the hands of King Tissa of Ceylon in the second century before Christ, was buried by the monarch's hand at the divine command of Buddha himself under the roots of the sacred bo tree of Ceylon, that whosoever in after ages should look therein should become a changed being—another soul, another body, another mind."

The young worldlings were inclined to make light of the venerable speaker's lofty enthusiasm, despite the grave delivery of this profound sentence.

"That suits me," said the millionaire, with a flippant gesture. "For Heaven's sake, uncle, let me look into the mysterious catseye of Gautama, if it will change me, body and soul and mind, as you affirm. For, by all the gods who of our 'pleasant vices make instruments to scourge us,' I'm sick unto death of my own in their present state. In fact, uncle, they bore me immeasurably."

"Hear, hear!" shouted Reynolds. "And mine, too——"

"Let me be the first, uncle," broke in the painter. "I'm the worst off of any of them."

"And I follow," said the scientist. "Make me over into anything, uncle, from a Cæsar to a cockroach, and receive my thanks."

"Gentlemen," commanded the patriarch, half rising, with a gathering fury at this unwarranted levity over something which he deemed sacred beyond words, "you know not what you do when you insult me and this treasure thus. You know not to whom you are speaking—whom you are wounding with this unseemly and cruel scoffing."

"Oh, no harm meant, uncle," came the chorus, wincing under the rebuke. "Don't go away angry. Sit down and show us the jewel."

The painter had seized the old man by the arm. "They are a lot of idiots," he half whispered. "You must not mind them. Be seated and show me the gem, for I am deeply interested, believe me. I would look into the sacred catseye, whatever the outcome of the experiment. Come; show it to me!"

The old man resumed his seat, but with something between sullenness and injured reverence. Then outstretching his hand again, for he had thrust it into his bosom during that moment of flippancy, he bent upon the young painter a searching glance—such a gleaming look from the cavernous sockets that Hamilton shuddered, turning his eyes away.

"Are you sure, quite sure, my son, that you wish to look into the mysterious gem of Buddha," he said gravely, "whatever betides you?"

"Positive," cried the painter, with a sort of desperation, like a man cornered.

"It is well, then, my son," came the solemn words. "You shall see glories which have never yet entered the mind of man—such splendors as no mortal can look upon and remain unchanged. So be it!"

Without further hesitation now the stranger seized the only empty plate within reach, overturning his hand upon it. There was a ringing sound as of something heavy falling upon it.

Still covering the object with his shrunken and hairy hand, over which the blue veins seemed to throb with a strange, heaving pulsation, for the last time he turned that inscrutable look on the young man at his side. "Are you sure—quite sure, my son?" he murmured in the solemn stillness.

"Aye, and now more than ever," breathed the expectant one eagerly.

"Then may the door of the eternal be opened unto you!" said the patriarch, lifting his eyes in a sort of oriental trance of rapture.

With a flourish the trembling palm was lifted from the plate, and the old man leaned back, folding his arms, breathing deeply, great beads of perspiration gathering upon his pallid brow.

There, to the amazement of all, brilliant and bold against the immaculate platter, lay a Ceylon catseye—a wonderful chrysoberyl about an inch in diameter, round shape above and flat beneath, of a rich deep olive brown in tint, like the neck of the royal peacock, with a livid flame of silver light flowing in divergent lines from the apex—altogether such a gem as would grace the royal diadem of the proudest monarch of all the world.

“Magnificent!” cried the millionaire, in ecstasy. He had been in the far east and knew the rarity and value of the smallest of the pure chrysoberyl gems. The size and amazing purity of the stone before him held him spellbound.

“Beautiful!” cried the scientist, who had made a study of precious stones from a geological point of view.

“Astounding!” murmured the cynic Reynolds, who looked first at the gem and then at the shabby and quite repellent figure of the owner, half suspicious of the genuineness of the wonder, or perhaps still more deeply perplexed by the query whether or not the old man had become possessed of the gem by fair means.

Hamilton put forth his hand to touch the flaming gem, as if he needed just this added conviction to convince him of the jewel’s profound reality—as if it might be some mere illusion which by occult means was being imposed upon them.

Instantly a long, thin grip was upon the painter’s wrist, restraining him. “No, my son,” was the soft spoken rebuke, firm, yet full of kindness. “No hand that has not been purified in the Spirit of the Law may touch the sacred gem. Wait!”

“But you have promised me,” came the counter rebuke, coupled with appeal. “You promised that I may look into it, and you must keep your word.”

The elder turned upon him. “Still willing to look and to abide by the consequences, whatever they may be, my son?”

“More than willing,” came the excited cry of the trembling painter, whose face was scarlet now with eager curiosity. “Come; I am ready!”

“So be it, my son!”

Without further ado the aged guest seized the platter in both hands, holding it slowly, almost solemnly, before the face of the artist.

“Look, my son,” he said, in guttural whispers. “Look—look!”

The young man bent slowly over the miracle working gem—so low, indeed, that it seemed as if his long lashes were brushing against that tiny mountain of celestial light, all but blinding him.

For a long time he held his blinking gaze there; then, growing used to the increasing brilliancy of the splendors within, like a man coming from darkness into sudden sunshine, his eyelids parted wider, wider his brows lifted, his breath was suspended, as one who is confronted by something that appals while it enchants him beyond his power of self control.

Then a strange and shocking change came over the face and form of the bowed painter, still bent over the sacred gem. He became motionless as stone. There was no longer a throb, a breath, a stir. His very heart

seemed to have stopped beating, the light of life snuffed out like a candle in a tempest. The drawn profile and the outstretched hands which were clenched before him took on a deathly pallor, appearing to shrivel up and turn green, like one struck dead in the heat and glory of a conflict. It was a mystifying spectacle, and altogether terrible to look upon. The breathless watchers would have turned their faces away, but they dared not—could not.

With a sudden gasping, the scientist was about to seize his comrade, who appeared to be in the very throes of death before their very eyes, when in the painful silence there came a stir, a quiver, a breath, a rallying back to life, as it were, and then two dots of intense scarlet, like the blood of a new born babe infused into the bloodless trunk of a corpse, burst to the temples, spreading thence over the fair and sensitive features, till the whole countenance became a glory—a regenerate, revitalized being.

Slowly the young man raised himself, his eyes still wide and clear and gloriously bright, apparently fixed in a trance upon something beautiful afar. There was an expression upon that countenance that was simply sublime, as if he were truly gazing upon some eternal splendor that had never entered the mind of man—upon which, indeed, no mortal could look and remain unchanged. Quietly, resignedly, he sank back in his chair, panting, yet like one victorious in a battle whose rewards were more glorious than those of all the Cæsars.

CHAPTER II.—THE SERIOUS SEQUEL.

THE small group of spectators of this unexpected and thrilling wonder drama of a moments at perfectly dumb and spellbound. The change that had come over their comrade had stunned them. They leaned forward, peering into the placid, almost beatific face of their friend, then at the mysterious gem, next the pale and inscrutable countenance of the patriarch, and lastly into one another's marveling countenances.

For a moment none seemed to have the courage to break the haunting silence. Then the scientist spoke, addressing his friend, his voice displaying a species of terror despite the forced calmness of his words. "What did you see there, Hamilton?" he inquired eagerly. "What is it? Tell us!"

The painter seemed not to hear. He was rapt in a trance.

The others grew bolder now. "Wake up, old comrade!" they cried. "What did you see in there—in the precious beryl of Gautama? Why don't you tell us?"

The painter gave a sort of convulsive start, as if the soul within him were struggling to speak. Twice he parted his quivering lips and twice failed to find the adequate word, or even words at all.

Then, like one relinquishing all effort, he rose, and in a voice that seemed not his own, answered them, peering deeply one by one into their inmost souls: "Look for yourselves—for yourselves, comrades; for I—I cannot tell you. Look for yourselves. Look!"

With these tragic words the young painter turned, swept his hand over

his forehead, as if obeying the commands of some superior power, then without a further word, without so much as an apology for his strange conduct, he seized his hat and hurried from the place.

The four friends watched the sudden flight of their comrade, then restored their amazed glances to the catseye and the silent, immobile genius presiding over it. Mystified beyond words, they were now thoroughly consumed with a desire to look upon the things which their companion had seen.

"I am next," said the scientist; and all the others drew back with a sort of recoiling horror, as if he had said, "I am the next to die!" But his face was calm as he added, "Quick! Let me look into the gem."

The old man turned to him as he had done to the other. "Are you sure, quite sure, it is your wish, my son?" he asked.

"Doubt not," was the confident response. "Come; I am ready!"

"So be it!" said the patriarch gravely; and grasping the platter again, placed it before the scientist.

There was a moment's silence, then came the transformation—longer, with more difficulty, it seemed, than before; but the end came at last, and there came into his countenance the same beatific look that had made glorious the face of his absent friend.

Then came the same agonized queries. "What did you see there, Doc? Quick, tell us!"

But the scientist only rose, answering as the other had, "Look for yourselves, comrades, look for yourselves!" and seizing his hat, he, too, hurried away.

The third repeated the strange rite, and then the fourth; and at last the old man found himself alone there with the skeptic, Reynolds. The latter's face was a blaze of fury.

"What does this mean, graybeard?" he cried savagely. "What in Heaven's name have you done to my friends? What are you? Who are you? Speak! speak! or by all the demons that work with you in your mysterious craft, I'll strangle you where you sit!"

But the calm old man merely straightened like a saint accused of many crimes. Narrowing his glance of challenge and reproach upon the blazing features of the younger man, he said softly, pointing to the sacred jewel there before him, "Look, my son! Look for yourself."

A wave of incredulity swept over Reynold's vindictive countenance, but reaching forward, he grasped the platter and bent over it.

"What do you see there?" whispered the old man, all atremble.

For a long, long time his accuser peered into the mysterious depths, then with a look of triumph he arose and cried, "Nothing, old man; I see nothing!"

"Nothing?" gasped the other, shrinking as from a monster incarnate.

"Nothing!" repeated the younger savagely, laying aside the platter with its rare gem. "And what is more," he added, with a sinister leer in his deep eyes, "I am convinced now that you are in league with demons of the accursed underrealm of Satan, whose entrance and exit is some reeking temple of the pagan Orient. But why have you chosen my friends upon

whom to practise these accursed black arts? What will you do with them now that you have them in your power?"

The venerable owner of the gem made a quieting gesture. "You do me wrong, my son," he said. "I am no practicer of demonry. They have looked upon glories which have not entered the mind of man, and received the spirit of Gautama the all wise, for which mortal gives up all of the world worldly. Fear nothing. Not a hair of their heads shall be harmed. But what they do hence they shall do under the guidance of the spirit. You nor I nor any mortal shall avail against it. Be at peace, for they shall have reward greater than the gifts of kings."

But the listener only defied him still with a look. "His speech covers only a pitfall, his craft a calamity," he mused. "I shall go for reinforcements and keep an eye upon this impostor."

Without so much as a glance at his companion, lest, betraying his intentions by a look, he should be balked by some mysterious power, he turned and sped away, intent upon returning instantly with help to solve then and there the mystery of the old man's presence.

When the gownsman found himself alone, with the relics of the wassail, he calmly restored the precious jewel to his bosom. "I must make haste," he murmured, "for at daybreak on the morrow we leave on the long, long journey."

He started to go, but the waiter confronted him. He held a fluttering bit of paper in his hand.

"What is it?" asked the old man.

"Ze bill for ze dinnairs, monsieur."

"How much is it?"

"Eet is forty eight dollars."

For an instant the indomitable self command of the master seemed to leave him. Then again passing his hand over his brow in thought, he drove his lank fingers deep into his orange robe, drawing several gold and silver coins. Laying the necessary amount upon the empty plate, he walked silently away.

Instantly the skeptical Reynolds reappeared. He had two men in attendance.

"Where is the old man who was here?" he cried to the waiter, advancing to the center table.

"He is gone, monsieur."

"Gone?" echoed the other. "But I told you to hold him here till I returned—hold him till that bill was paid——"

"He paid it, monsieur."

"What did you say? Paid it? That pauper—that bread and water mountebank——"

"Behold, monsieur," said the waiter calmly, opening his outstretched palm.

With a savage exclamation the skeptic turned, and with a gesture toward the men in waiting shot out into the March sleet, bewildered in defeat, but resolved and desperate.

Three days later the following sensational headlines appeared over an article in one of the metropolitan dailies :

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE!

FOUR WELL KNOWN NEW YORKERS THE VICTIMS OF
SOME WEIRD, ORIENTAL OCCULTISM.

THEY FALL UNDER THE FATAL INFLUENCES OF A WONDERFUL
CEYLON CATSEYE.

WAS HE A BUDDHIST PRIEST IN DISGUISE?

The most remarkable case of sudden and mysterious disappearance has come to light in this city. The whole detective service has been called into action, but without avail ; the scientists are puzzled, the wise ones mystified, and the friends and relatives of the missing ones frantic with alarm.

The four young men concerned are well known, one of them the son of a Wall Street banker, another a writer of great promise, a third an artist who took first medal at the Paris salon last year, the fourth a scientist, late a surgeon in the U. S. army.

It appears that there were five young men dining at the Lion d'Or on Tuesday last, the party including John Reynolds, the only one of the guests left to give a clue to the mysterious proceedings. During the banquet an old man entered, calling for bread and water. Supposing him to be hunger driven into this refuge, and taking pity upon him, the young men invited the venerable beggar to their table, asking him to call for anything he wished. He took bread and water ; nothing more. Then, in the course of the conversation, he displayed a Ceylon catseye of most wonderful beauty.

It appears that each one of the young men, save Reynolds alone, fell under the evil influences of this amazing stone, and departed from the feast one after another in a dazed and hypnotized condition. Reynolds, not succumbing to the fetichism of the gem, upbraided the stranger, taking him to task for his black art, but the latter denied all attempts to get the others in his power, and claimed that the men were under the influence of the mysterious gem of Buddha.

Convinced that the old rascal was getting his friends into his clutches for no good purpose, the survivor hurried to the nearest detective bureau and brought reinforcements.

When they returned, the stranger was gone. He had paid the bill for the dinners—nearly fifty dollars—showing that he was well supplied with money.

Reynolds and his men hurried into the street, one going one way, another another, making a thorough search, but without success.

The old man was not to be found ; and what is more, the four young men have also disappeared as completely as if the earth had rent apart and swallowed them.

"It is the most amazing event I have ever known," said the sole survivor in an interview today. "Ever since that fatal dinner I have been sleepless and unceasing in my efforts to track the old man and his victims. Not one of the men has been seen in his home or by any of his friends since that eventful dinner. Their people are frantic, and have instructed me to leave no stone unturned to discover the old offender and restore the missing ones."

"And have you not had a single clue?" asked the reporter.

"Not one," he answered. "I have had every outgoing steamer leaving for eastern ports carefully watched, and every exit from the metropolis guarded. I have communicated with the best detectives, and even put myself into the hands of the Buddhist mahatmas in Boston. Although they seem to know what has become of the men, they are dumb mouthed as stone. I am convinced that the priest has taken these men to India or some far country, and if nothing rewards me here, I shall put myself into communication with the Indian authorities, or perhaps sail for the east myself. I have unlimited time and means to accomplish the end, and shall never give up till I have solved the mysterious problem."

Meanwhile the search goes on.

CHAPTER III.—THE PILGRIMS OF GAUTAMA.

AGAIN the curtain rises upon five characters in our story, but the scene is in strong contrast to that of the prologue. The background is a jungle, vast and trackless, appalling to the stranger and fascinating to the lover of nature and the dreamer. Here, in far Ceylon, we find the four young men who disappeared so mysteriously from the Lion d'Or Café, but they are the same only in face, and even on this the expression is altogether different. Each is clothed in a flowing orange robe, bound round with a girdle, and carries beside but a cup of cocoanut shell, a pouch, and a staff. Their companion, similarly attired, is the old man of the wonderful catseye, and he now speaks to them as they are about to set out on the last stage of their strange journey.

"My sons, having discarded the garments, habits, and desires of your former life, you are now each one a Brahmana. A Brahmana is one who has cast off all fetters to the things of this world, who does not suffer from desire, who walks in the way. Yea, he is more, my sons. He is one who neither harms nor kills any living thing, who goes weaponless through the jungles in spite of perils and dangers. Thus saith the Gautama."

"Thou shalt find us faithful, master," responded the pilgrims in reverential unison.

"And now, my sons," proceeded the venerable one, "we are about to journey two hundred miles through the pathless jungles to the sacred city of Anarajapoorā. There, under the supreme bo tree of Gautama, you are to receive the rewards for faithfulness which surpass all earthly possessions. Are you still eager to attain them, even though the course lead through many perils and dangers—aye, even though one or all perish by the way?"

"Aye, father, we are!" came the response as with one voice.

"'Tis well," rejoined the master, his face lighted by inspired joy. But let me counsel you to prepare yourselves for great conflicts. The way to the precious goal is long and fraught with untold difficulties."

"We are aware of that, master," was the answer, "and we fear nothing."

"And such encounters and adventures shall befall us as shall make the journey the most thrilling ever attempted by those who are not born children of the jungle, and who know well its creatures of prey."

"The faithful Brahmana has no passion in his heart, O master, not even fear."

"We shall be compelled to live upon the wild fruits of the forest, seeking the mountain honey, the roots and herbs, drinking the waters of the jungle brooks in thirst."

"The good Brahmana needs nothing more, O master."

"The tree tops shall be our couch by night, the blue of heaven our only coverlet, the glow worm our beacon, and we must take shelter in the lairs of wild beasts when the bitter tempests break over us."

"We shall be content, O master, with whatever trial is put upon us to prove our faithfulness."

"Take courage, then, and be of good cheer, O pilgrims of Gautama, for great is the reward. Come; let us be off, for the day advances, and night comes early to the jungle children."

In silence then the four pilgrims arose, each realizing the task before them. Then, giving the western horizon a sweeping glance, with uplifted brows, like martyrs to their doom or weal, they plunged into the dark mazes, to follow their leader whithersoever he might lead them.

CHAPTER IV.—A COUNCIL OF RESCUE AND THE OUTCOME THEREOF.

"READ it," cried Reynolds, pushing a cablegram across the narrow table which stood between himself and three of his club fellows. "Read the cablegram, and then tell me if it has not the ring of sincerity. It was received last night by the chief of police from the Ceylon authorities. You cannot possibly doubt after that."

One of the men addressed picked up the yellow sheet and read aloud as follows :

Pearl divers, north coast, discovered wearing apparel and valuable effects. Supposed Americans. Thoroughly unexplainable. Four either murdered or driven into jungle. Await clue or orders.

"Most amazing!" said one of the listeners.

"Do you really believe that is the mysterious catseye party?" demanded the third, addressing the excited man opposite.

"It certainly is," responded Reynolds decisively. "Nothing has been heard of them since their disappearance. They must have left the city under the influence of this mysterious power and gone to Ceylon, where, renouncing the world and the things of the world, they have penetrated the jungles like blind men led to slaughter."

"But what do you propose to do?" inquired one of the group, with a drawl, as he puffed luxuriously at his perfecto.

"That is just what I brought you here for," responded Reynolds briskly. "Now we will get down to business." He looked every man in the eyes. "Boys," he went on, "after days of agony and suspense, and sleepless nights spent over this problem, I have chosen from among my friends three whom I could best trust to carry out the project of my life—to go to Ceylon, penetrate the jungle, and rescue these poor victims of fanaticism."

There was intense silence—the silence of rebuff.

“And the reward?” said the little man, with a simian irony of tone.

“One hundred thousand dollars which Honorable Joseph Pyke offers to pay to any man who restores his son to him safe and sound; the glory of solving one of the most amazing problems of the generation, and last and greatest of all, to rescue from certain death our former comrades and friends. Are these not enough?”

There was no enthusiasm perceptible. The enormous money reward might have given these scions of ease and luxury a faint twinge of pleasant pain, but the last supreme achievement seemed to them scarcely worth accounting.

“I would go willingly,” said one, with an affected fortitude, “were I not convinced that all effort would be quite fruitless. Even if they still live, which I doubt, the search would be like hunting a mustard seed in a sand-bank.”

“I like adventure,” added another, “but such an undertaking seems somewhat out of my line.”

Reynolds made a gesture of nettled impatience. “Say no more,” he broke in, with much bitterness. “I have tried you all, and I find you wanting. You are the kind that will pat a man on the back, professing eternal friendship, eat at his board, and partake of his luxurious bounty, but when it comes to putting yourselves out a little in order to rescue that man from perishing——”

Instantly the three men rose, answering these imputations with guilty groans and hisses.

“Go on your wild goose chase in a frenzy of emotional insanity if you wish,” said the tallest, his face pale and expressive of contemptuous sarcasm. “Go and be confounded, sir! You will return, if ever you do, to find us all men of sense and dispassionate logic. No mock heroism for us, if you please.”

The strong frame of the athlete trembled in every fiber. “You are a pack of cowards!” he cried, and by Heaven, I shall so proclaim you, every one. I go, and I go alone. I shall prove to you and all the world that in this cheap, mock chivalric generation there is still such a thing as friendship—yes, and such as leads a man to risk his life to save those whom he loves. Sit here and chew your cuds of complaisant scandal, cowards. I am done with you forever!”

So saying, the man of iron determination wrote out his resignation to the club officers, then hurried down the marble steps to the avenue.

“To police headquarters,” he told the cabman.

“Chief,” said Reynolds, upon being ushered into the presence of that functionary, “give me the necessary credentials, please. I leave on the steamer this afternoon to apprehend the Buddha catseye victims in the jungles of Ceylon. I shall return with them, dead or alive.”

The officer drew a deep breath. “Alone?” he asked.

“Alone, sir.”

“Then God have mercy on your soul!” was all the chief said as he wrote out the documents.

With his hands clenched and his face expressive of the stanch resolve of a man who will go through fire and water to accomplish his end, Reynolds left the place, glancing at his watch as he descended the steps. "I have barely an hour," he mused, "before the vessel sails; and yet that is more time than I need——"

"If you please, sir," broke in the cabman, "there is a lady in the carriage yonder looking for a 'Mr. Reynolds,' whom she has followed from the club."

But instantly the coach door swung open, and there Reynolds beheld a dainty, maidenly face, which wore an appealing look.

The young man approached with uncovered head.

"Is this Mr. Reynolds?"

"At your service."

The stranger looked him straight in the eyes, and there was something of solicitude in her tone as she said, "Do you know me, sir?"

"I am sorry to confess I have not the honor—but stay! I must not say that, for you are the living image of the man whom I love and honor beyond words, and whom——"

"Yes," broke in the agitated voice. "It is true. I am the sister of Gordon Pyke, one of the victims of the mysterious catseye. I want to see you on very particular business. May I, Mr. Reynolds?"

The young man bowed assent, but gave another tug at his watch, hesitating, though his admiration of the fair one would have tempted him to neglect any other duty in the world to do her bidding—any other duty save the mission of his life.

"I will not detain you long. Please step into the carriage a few minutes, and I will explain everything to you."

"With pleasure, Miss Pyke, but upon one condition: that your coachman may drive——"

"Oh, anywhere you wish. Pray, tell him. Only don't refuse me—please don't. I don't know what I should do if you did."

Reynolds turned, the soft voice winding something round his heart very strangely. Dismissing his own cabman, he whispered to the Pyke coachman, "To the Cunard docks, please!" and stepped into the carriage.

"You must know, Mr. Reynolds," began the little diplomatist, "that my brother was very fond of you—that he often spoke of your bravery, your sterling qualities, and your worthiness to receive any trust imposed upon you."

"He did me more honor than I deserve," was the modest response.

"I rather think not, sir, considering all my poor father has since had to say on the subject. He seems to cling to you now as if you were the last survivor of poor Gordon's ship——"

"And I was about to prove this very day——"

"Let me speak first, Mr. Reynolds, please," came the pleading demand.

"I must get at my point without delay. Let me see; how shall I begin? I have come to you with a secret. I have come to one whom I believe to be the best, the stanchest, and firmest friend of my poor brother, to ask him to help me in the first great predicament of my life."

"Miss Pyke," said Reynolds, turning abruptly, "I pledge you, upon the honor of a gentleman, that I shall not only keep your secret inviolable, but I shall also assist you to the utmost."

"Good!" cried the young girl, taking courage. "Well, to my task. I have thought matters all over, and am prepared to face the worst. Poor father is distracted. He has aged ten years in as many days. If nothing definite is heard of Gordon I fear he will go mad. Well, sir, I am going to save two lives, if such is possible for human ingenuity, skill, and courage. I am going to Ceylon, penetrate the jungle, and find my brother, dead or alive!"

The listener drew back, drawing a deep breath. He was spellbound. "You?" was all he could cry in his amazement.

"Yes." She had faced him again, and there was something thrilling in her soft spoken word as she resumed, "And you, Mr. Reynolds, are to accompany me!"

The gallant sat like stone, gazing into space. After he had vainly sought among all his fellows for a man with courage enough to undertake the task, and failed, here came a little heroine who proposed to lead him instead of follow! He was stunned by the thought.

"Will you go, Mr. Reynolds?" she pleaded. "Why are you so shocked—so amazed at this determination on a woman's part to prove her loyalty to one she loves?"

"Because," broke in the other, "she does not know what a giant undertaking she is contracting for."

"I do not fear it," she added softly. "Why should you?"

Reynolds smiled confidently. "I certainly do not, Miss Pyke. To prove which, let me say now that I am rolling along toward the steamer which sails this very day, and which shall bear me over the sea on the very mission you yourself would undertake——"

"Then I go with you. May I not?" she cried. "Don't refuse me, for I don't know to whom I could turn now, and I can't stay here—I can't, I can't. Say that you will—please, please!"

Reynolds stiffened, like one in a quandary on the brink of some precipice, uncertain which way to leap yet compelled to take the step, knowing that serious consequences follow the first one. "I—I really am beside myself with wonder and amazement, Miss Pyke. I dare not advise you. Do as your heart dictates, and I swear to you I will do my utmost to bring about your desires, to yield to your will. But really, any hasty decision on your part——"

"Don't think for a moment that because my confession seems hasty, sir, that my resolve has been so. I have given it thought from every point of view. I must go—I must. To remain here and see poor father go mad by inches would kill me. I must go."

"And who is to care for him in your absence, for if I remember Gordon rightly, you are motherless."

"Alas, yes!" was the solemn reply. "But my elder sister remains there to comfort father in his distress. Oh, we have talked it all over, sister and I."

We have planned every detail. I have ample means—can penetrate the jungles with a caravan of a hundred men—and only need a general. My maid will go with me—a strong, noble soul, whom I would trust with my life. It has all been arranged, and, as I say, I have needed only a general. Come; may I not count on you to be my commander in this most momentous journey of my life?"

"God bless you!" exclaimed the young man, turning away from that pleading face, choking with emotion that was wrapt round with admiration. "God bless you! I will keep my promise. I will keep your secret. I will do my very best——"

"Thank you, Mr. Reynolds—oh, from the bottom of my heart, I thank you!" and the earnest voice was tremulous with tears. "Ah, we are here already. Leave me now, please, and let me return for my maid and luggage, and to tell my sister the good tidings."

In a flurry Reynolds alighted, closing the coach door, then leaned on the window sill as she beckoned him. "One promise before we part, Mr. Reynolds."

"And that?" said the earnest man, like one in the spell of enchanting witchery.

"That until I give the sign you shall never address me from now henceforth—shall not approach me, bow, nor speak till I myself have broken the spell of silence. Oh, don't look at me so strangely. I mean all I say. I have my reasons, so promise me faithfully!"

"I promise—faithfully!" he echoed; and as he hurried up the gangplank the coach rolled away.

CHAPTER V.—THE PILGRIMS' FIRST ENCOUNTER.

THE march of the pilgrims through the jungle toward the shrine of the bo tree was slow and by easy stages. Fortunately, for the first few days there were no incidents of particularly stirring moment, but as soon as the deeper tracks of country were penetrated—wild wastes untrodden by the foot of civilized man—things took on a different aspect. Vegetation assumed a deeper tropical aspect, the birds were of a different plumage from those nearer the sea, and the wild beasts became more ferocious.

At night the pilgrims either sought a cave—from which it was sometimes imperative first to drive forth the inhabitant, be it a stealthy panther, a jackal, or ground hog, fighting them with fire—or climbed into the broad tree tops and stretch themselves out upon the mammoth leaves, there to swing high and safe from the reptiles and giant insects, but with one of their number always on guard.

About noon of each day a halt was made, if possible near some running water, although sometimes it was only a sluggish pool whose drink refreshed not, but more often by some roaring cascade from the mountain crag, gratefully cool and refreshing to the weary body.

The woods seemed to abound more and more in wild fruit as the pilgrims progressed. A variety of herbs gave forth life sustaining essences and oils,

some fruits a cool milk of honey richness, and there were nuts with strong meats, also mangoes and breadfruit, luscious and ripe.

It was on these occasions of rest by the mountain torrent that the master gathered his followers together and discoursed to them upon the Wheel of the Law, recited the romantic history of Gautama, or dilated upon some variety of jungle species with a nature loving sympathy coupled with scientific acumen.

"Behold, worthy Brahmanas," he would say, stretching abroad his arms toward the sheltering jungle world, "how peaceful and pensive is all the tropic forest in its smiling guise! Yet how this calm exterior belies the appalling truth of its internal struggle! It is fight, fight, fight—the survival of the fittest."

"It doth not so appear, master," interposed one of the pilgrims musingly.

"True, my son; yet the battle begun long before the first Buddha appeared on earth, some milliards of years ago, still goes on, fierce and deadly—plant against plant, beast against beast, and all against man. Do you see that orchid dangling its purple beauty from the top of yonder talipot palm?"

"Aye, master."

"Apparently it was set there by an all merciful hand to keep it out of harm's reach. But go, I pray, two of you, climb the palm and bring it hither. I will prove this great truth to you by apt illustration from nature's own logic."

As the master bade them, two pilgrims laid down their staffs and climbed the talipot till they had reached the marvelous jungle flower, which wound its masses of roots about the trunk and clung there like a superior and patrician member of the floral species.

"Snatch it forth," cried the master, "and throw it into the stream."

The pilgrims did as they were bidden, and root, foliage, bloom, and all fell splashing into the water far below.

"Go, rescue it," said the patriarch to one who sat at his side.

The pilgrim made a dash to recover it, but with a cry of alarm he leaped back just as he laid his hand upon the gorgeous bloom.

From the intricate mazes of roots there crept two hissing and venomous serpents and some giant black spiders, while from the foliage and flower there floated forth over the surface of the pool writhing masses of beetles, black ants, and fluttering things with hooked beaks and needle claws—all making a dash for liberty.

"Behold," said the master, "how perfect are the war tactics of the least to the greatest of nature's warriors! The perfume and the honey of the orchid attract the bee and the ant to its high store, the beetles and winged things follow the ants to prey upon them there, then follows the spider to kill the beetle, the serpent to kill the spider, the vulture to kill the serpent, and even that at last is the prey of some higher order of jungle species. Silently, mightily, the battle wages on from the least to the greatest—each knowing well the weaknesses of the next lower order of being, ever on the defensive still against the next higher—war unending, struggle for

supremacy, death by violence and birth in dread and alarm, with only man supreme, and he of little might."

"Wonderful indeed!" said the Brahmana.

For some time they reclined there in dreamful mood; then the old man arose. "Come," he said, "let us forward a little time still ere the night comes upon us. Are we all here?"

"All save one," said one of the pilgrims who had been sent to gather the orchid from the talipot palm. "Our brother Brahmana has not yet returned from the tree yonder, father."

"Whither has he wandered?"

"Master, I know not," was the answer.

"Go, call him. We must not tarry here."

Two of the brothers started out in search of the missing one, making the forest echo with their cries and beating the bush with their staffs, each moment becoming more alarmed.

For a full hour they circled wider and wider about the talipot, till suddenly there was borne upon the soft breeze a strange perfume. The old man stood still, his frame stiff and throbbing. Then came the wild cry of realization and terror. "The diantha!" he wailed. "Oh, the deadly diantha! Come, quick, quick, my sons, or no man can save him. It may be even now too late. Haste, haste!"

In fear and trembling, not daring to ask what manner of bird or beast had snatched away their comrade, the pilgrims made a wild dash through the thicket, following their leader whose sense of smell now meant the saving of life.

Into the dread masses they plunged, till suddenly bursting upon a sort of clearing, they beheld there a most astounding spectacle. A mammoth lotus shaped flower lay partly open to the half obscured sunlight, giving forth an odor that was sweet beyond comparison, but like a deadly drug, more powerful than the black smoke of opium.

Reaching out in divers directions from the stem below were long and mighty arms, terminating in huge claw like tentacles. The instant one of the pilgrims rushed into the clearing within reach of the monster claw, and stepped inadvertently upon it, the victim was seized as with a giant hand, hurled to the ground and dragged forthwith toward the great diantha, whose fumes became so overpowering that resistance would have been impossible had not all hands rushed forward and seized him, dragging him away bruised and wounded from the powerful grip.

Then, breathless and overwhelmed in this sudden struggle with the strangest of jungle monsters—a plant that lives on flesh alone—the pilgrims retreated, and from a height peered into the heart of the monster lotus.

"He is there!" cried the patriarch. "See! He is lying coiled up as in slumber. We must rouse him, we must save him!"

So saying, without further hesitation, the old man seized his staff and went forth as a warrior to conquest.

Avoiding the tentacles, which have the power to seize only when something comes in contact with them, cautiously as upon a sleeping lion with a

comrade in his claws, they crept to the side of the deadly flower, staggering under the influence of the heavy fumes.

There lay Hamilton as on a bed of roses. With arms thrown back in calm repose, his pale form visible in the embrace of the mighty petals, making him prisoner, he appeared to be in profoundest slumber, with dreams that gave his countenance almost a beatific aspect. It was as if he were in the lethean stupor of the profoundest intoxicant in the world.

Cautiously, with a struggle to keep himself from succumbing to the awful drug and falling into the snare, the leader seized the captured pilgrim's hand, calling aloud to his followers to seize him in turn, so that, with their combined strength, they might drag the prisoner from the arms of death.

Instantly, with the first wrenching stir within the mammoth maw, there was a closing down of all the encircling petals, so that they completely enveloped the sleeper as in a coat of mail, with only his arms and head left visible.

The dreamer seemed to rally somewhat with the grip of his master upon the wrist ; but strange to relate, instead of fighting to free himself from this deadliest embrace, he appeared to think his rescuers were come to do him harm, and struggled against his own salvation.

It was a struggle for life, man against plant in this jungle world, where all things that live seem to be the mortal enemy of one another, with man the deadliest foe of all.

"Once more !" shrieked the master. "Pull for your lives !"

Never once did he lose his grip on the imprisoned Brahmana, knowing well that a slip now would see their loved one dragged down into the depths of the plant, where he would be smothered and crushed.

Now they gained an inch, now they lost it. Now there came a fainting dizziness over the desperate men, now a rallying from the intoxication of the drug. Still they fought like heroes, panting, tugging, moaning, straining, resolved to do or die in the mighty effort to restore their doomed brother to their side again.

"Don't give up !" was the wild cry that echoed through the darkening wilderness. "Keep up the fight to the bitter end !" and then another wrenching struggle would follow.

It was a battle of life and death, with the man eater boasting the advantage of possession.

CHAPTER VI.—THE CAPTIVE OF STRANGE JAILERS.

PRESENTLY the mysterious diantha seemed to be losing its power. There was a trembling through all its fibers. It seemed, with human intelligence, to realize that its vitality had been sapped to the utmost, that resistance against such formidable adversaries was useless. Inch by inch the unconscious victim was dragged away.

"Once more !" cried the patriarch. "Now, all together ! Again—again !"

A fortunate breeze sprang up, blowing the deadly vapor away from the

panting battlers. One more mighty struggle, and the slender form of the pilgrim slipped from the enfolding petals of the demon plant.

Instantly there was a shout of triumph, and the rescued one was borne off to a place of safety, and laid upon a bed of soft mosses. He was bleeding from many wounds, and covered with a sort of sweet, resinous slime, which had exuded from the inner folds of the fair but deadly bloom.

It was many hours before they had finally revived the sufferer; and he awoke to consciousness only to find that a terrible fever, coupled with delirium, had followed the drugging.

Impossible to proceed on the march now, the pilgrims built a circular fire to fight off the animals, and made themselves as comfortable as possible till daybreak.

The following day found the sick pilgrim somewhat recovered, though still weak and wandering. He gave an account of himself—of how, from the top of the talipot, he had seen the wonderful lotus afar through the entanglement of green, and desirous of surprising his comrades with a rare discovery, had gone in quest of it alone, quite ignorant of its formidable nature. Overcome by the delicious perfume, he had advanced with reeling step, till he found himself seized by the feet and hurled along toward the giant flower with no strength to resist, no breath left in his astonished bosom to cry out. Then a feeling of soothing repose came over him, and he realized that he was in the embrace of something more powerful than man, yet as tender and caressing in its demon enchantments as the most adoring mother. Into soothest slumber he was rocked, and his mind filled with rapturous dreams, till half awakened by the coming of his friends, who immediately took the forms of monsters in his eyes—fiendish things that had come to drag him from paradise into the depths of Hades. These he had fought till he had fainted in the struggle, and when next he recovered consciousness, he was lying safe upon the mossy couch, with his anxious comrades bending over him.

“The gods be with us!” he exclaimed. “It was nothing short of a miracle. Another moment and the end would have come, with none to rescue, none to record even the manner of my mysterious passing.”

By the full morning light, the pilgrims made an onslaught upon the mysterious death flower, severing its tentacles, and tearing away its giant petals one by one with extreme caution, delving at last to the very heart of the wonder. There, beneath its massy entanglements, was found a cavern surrounded by masses of roots, wherein lay the bones of thousands of animals that had succumbed to the witchery of the carnivorous lotus—birds of the air, creatures with legs, serpents that crawl—and at last was thrown up from the horrid pit a human skull. It was that of a Veddah, a species of wild man, half human, half chimpanzee, that roams the Tamil districts of the north.

Later in the day the journey was resumed, the sick man being carried part of the time by his comrades.

Hunger now began to press heavily upon the pilgrims. The reserve strength with which they had entered into conflict with hardship was fast

being depleted. The jungle fruits no longer gave them nourishment, the wild plantains grew acrid and bitter to the craving palate, and herbs and roots alike failed to sustain them.

To those who have been accustomed through life to a flesh diet the raw vegetation of the forest is soon found to be impossible. A deadly lassitude comes upon the victim, fever follows, and all wild flavored fare repels him.

"We must find honey," said the master, with great apprehension for his charges. "We must seek some wild bees' store, else our strength will be inadequate to the task still before us, though great is the reward. Come; let us find a flowery clearing. I will show you a secret of the jungle, children."

So saying, the patriarch led them through a shallow ravine and out into a narrow valley. It was a glorious sight—this fair clearing in the arms of the towering crags and the surrounding wilderness—and the sight gave the hunger driven souls a glad courage.

To the right hand and the left, on their way thither, forest marvels of every variety stayed them with their appealing beauties. Rare blooms shone in the lifting sun, clinging to the bark of mammoth trees, or thrusting their ambitious coronets of scarlet and gold from the entanglements beneath their feet, all covered with diamond dewdrops that glistened resplendent in the light of dawn. Birds of gorgeous plumage dashed in wavy lines from the obscure mazes, and every manner of beast and reptile came forth from the vast treasury of nature as if commanded by the flourish of some magic wand.

Here and there, suspended from the limbs of the forest trees, they encountered gigantic spider webs, seeming almost too formidable a barrier to break down. Indeed, the strands had every appearance of steel cables woven by the most expert of fairy engineers with a skill far surpassing man's.

Once the pilgrims paused before the tangled shreds of one of these massive webs which had stretched from the limb of a banyan fully thirty feet to the ground. Lowering his eyes, the old man began a search in the masses underfoot, and soon brought forth a dying paraquet of the most dazzling plumage. It had been caught in its flight by this monster web, and had fluttered in its strands till the encircling coils enveloped the poor bird like a cocoon.

When the stricken thing was lifted, instantly there popped out from underneath its fair wing the parent of its sufferings—a mammoth, hairy, and many legged spider, his eyes blazing with fury at having been disturbed at his delicate feast. For, from a wound in the vulnerable spot in the poor creature's side, the deadly *arachnis* had sucked the life giving blood.

"Behold!" said the master. "The soul of this fair bird wronged the spirit of the spider in some previous existence when both were human beings, even as you and I! What that wrong was no man may know; but the vengeance of the wronged one is here incomplete. Let us take heed, then, that we wrong no living thing, neither man nor beast, nor reptile, nor insect, lest in some of our myriad hereafters the one we harm may be thus revenged upon us."

"So be it," murmured the pilgrims, and passed on.

Into the clearing with its profusion of wild flowers they advanced, the air heavy with the incense of nature.

From the breast of the paraquet the patriarch had plucked a tiny snow white feather, so light and gossamer like, that, as he let it free upon the gentle morning breeze, it seemed to float in mid air. Then bending down, he made a search among the honey laden flowers for a mountain bee.

At last, having found one, and patiently awaiting the moment when the bee had filled his sack to the utmost, the old man dipped the point of the feather into the sticky sap of a gum reed, and delicately laid it between the wings of the insect, to which it adhered. Off sped the little winged creature toward his storehouse, taking a westerly course, the patriarch plunging after him through the thicket, watching that minute trail of white through the jungle gloom—that tiny jot against the deep shadows.

Soon the leader's call was heard afar. The pilgrims speedily joined him exploring with their eyes a dark spot in the cliffs far above them, whither the old man had seen the bee bearing its burden.

"Climb thither, my son," he commanded of the one nearest at hand, "and when thou hast gained the summit I will instruct thee."

"I go, father," said the pilgrim, and sprang up the rugged crag in the direction of the mountain hive.

Up and up the orange robe was seen fluttering in the wind, till the climber appeared like a creeping atom on the broad cliff's side.

The brother pilgrims sat below, watching the old man directing the hunter with a wave of the hand, now this way, now that, till the searcher, having loosened a great stone which thundered down the mountain side, was seen to disappear into the bowels of the cliff.

With a desperation fired by hunger, the Brahmana made his way into the cave, unknowing what manner of reward or rebuff awaited him. The cavern seemed to be entirely deserted. It was only when the hunter brought forth his little cage of luminous beetles, and pushed his way into the black depths, that he discovered the place contained a mass of honey which might have accumulated there for ages—stored up for the winter which never comes to this tropic clime. Even from so much as was visible from the center of the cavern, it was easily seen that there were tons of the delicacy, the lower layers having crystalized to sugar, the upper cleaving the roof of the cave in strange shapes, like stalactites in a subterranean grotto.

Advancing with famished eagerness, the half starved pilgrim began eating his fill, quite undisturbed. Then turning toward the orifice of the cave, he was surprised to confront the very bee, with the white feather clinging still to his back, which had piloted him hither quite unawares. The buzzing wizard appeared to be amazed at this intrusion, hovering before the tiny port with hesitancy. Then he disappeared to summon reinforcements.

Instantly from what might have been another cavern beyond there sounded such a roar as resembled a heavy train rumbling in the distance over an iron railway bridge. Realizing the danger of being discovered there in the thieving act, the pilgrim snatched down a solid ledge of honey and started to retreat. He was astonished, however, to find the door of the cave literally

walled up with a black mass of furious, raging bees. They seemed so stunned by the presence of the yellow gowned marauder that they hesitated to rush in and make the attack. In the mean time, thinking that the bees would be less liable to assail him if he should lie down on the floor of the cavern and remain motionless till their rage should have calmed, the pilgrim stretched himself out at full length, throwing his robe completely over him.

The bees now grew bold, entering after their leader by millions. Their roar was something deafening, their rage uncontrolled. However, as they never attack a motionless body, they gave vent to their anger in consultations over the prostrate form, apparently devising the speediest and surest means whereby they might rid themselves of their foe. Not being able to eject him bodily, with true animal sagacity they prepared to embalm him, after the manner of intruders whom they have killed and have not the power to drag away.

Not daring to stir for fearing of inviting attack from the infuriated insects, and entirely ignorant of what manner of surprise awaited him, the pilgrim for a long time lay perfectly motionless; then, overcome with fatigue and lulled by the dron of the insects in the resounding cavern, he fell into the profoundest slumber.

It was hours before he awoke, and then he found himself in what was perhaps the most curious predicament that man has ever experienced. He was not only in utter darkness, the bees having stung to death the luminous beetles, but the orifice of the cave had been walled up with a solid masonry of wax, and he himself was bound hand and foot—imprisoned in a mask of solid wax, which fitted him like a glove from finger tip to toe, pinning him to the floor of the cavern.

Fortunately the heat of his breath prevented the wax from hardening to the floor of the cave about his mouth, so that suffocation was spared him. But the opening of the cavern now being closed with a wall of wax, the air became vitiated and dangerous.

Weaker and weaker grew the captive. The silence of the tomb reigned, deep and awful. The last one of the countless millions of workers had departed, every pinhole of light and air connecting the prisoner with the outer world was shut off, and a maddening loneliness fell upon him. Even now he could not realize his predicament, somehow feeling assured that rescue would come from some source. Then there came long lapses into complete unconsciousness.

Meanwhile, wondering what had become of their comrade since they saw him disappear in one of the mountain crevices, the party in the vale below started up on a rescuing expedition. Two took one route, and two another, intending to meet upon the wide ledge far above them. But a strange incident was to frustrate this design.

Charles Edward Barns.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THE GREAT BUDDHA CATSEYE.*

BY CHARLES EDWARD BARNES.

A strange story of adventure in Ceylon—What took four New York club men into the jungle—
Thrilling experiences of unarmed travelers with the denizens of the tropical forests.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

JUST as they are finishing a dinner at the Lion d'Or Café, five New York club men form the acquaintance of an odd character from the east, who suddenly walks into the restaurant. In return for their invitation to dine at their expense, he shows them a wonderful gem—a cats-eye from Ceylon—which, he assures them, will give whosoever looks therein "another soul, another body, another mind."

At first the young men scoff at the idea of such a thing, but finally Hamilton, the painter, submits himself to the test. As he gazes into the stone, a strange and shocking change comes over him, and presently he rises, tells them, "Look for yourselves, comrades," and walks out of the place.

All are now eager to see what has caused this mysterious transformation, and three others go through exactly the same experience—Biggs, Pyke, and Brandt—until only Reynolds is left, and when his especially strong temperament proves to be unassailable by the hypnotic influences, he denounces the old man as a charlatan, and hurries out after his friends. But they have mysteriously disappeared. However, Reynolds leaves no stone unturned to learn what has become of them, and finally hears that four men, possibly Americans, are about to undertake a pilgrimage to the sacred bo tree through the jungles of Ceylon. He determines to go to their rescue, and finds that Pyke's sister has made the same resolution. After striving in vain to dissuade her, he promises to give her all the aid possible.

Meantime, the four other New Yorkers, attired in the simple habiliments of Brahmanas, and without any weapons, start under the guardianship of the patriarch on their perilous journey through the wilderness.

After various thrilling adventures, their food supply runs short, and at the suggestion of their leader one of the pilgrims scales a cliff, and attempts to obtain a supply of honey from a hive in a cave the patriarch has located. While he is eating of the golden store, the bees come back in a swarm and wall up the exit of the cavern, making the pilgrim a prisoner. Finally, overcome by fatigue, he falls asleep, and the bees, entering, cover his body with a coating of wax. His companions, wondering what has detained him, start up the cliff by two different routes to investigate. But a strange incident frustrates this design.

CHAPTER VII.—A DESPERATE BATTLE.

THE magpie is a born thief, and, like the professional shoplifter, has a strong liking for glittering fineries. The most knowing bird of its species, it will prowl around the habitations of man until it spies some bright little object, be it a piece of glass, tinsel, or other useless thing, or even something of rare value, snatch it up and hurry away to decorate its nest therewith.

Not only will the magpie rob man's habitations, but it will plunder the nests of its own species if opportunity offer and the chances of escape with

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the booty are favorable. But woe to the magpie that is caught in the act of robbing one of its own kind ! It must fight to the death.

The two pilgrims who had attempted a short cut route to the summit of the cliff in order to see what detained their comrade came suddenly upon a fierce encounter between two screaming magpies, who were fighting a battle of honor on a narrow ledge. A nest in one corner of the field of battle had evidently been plundered by the larger of the birds, the female discovering the theft in time to apprehend the thief.

It was a tussle worthy of the days of cock pits and bear baiting, the feathers flying and the bloody beaks of the fighters burying themselves in the sleek, black bosoms like flashing sabers, till finally, interlocked with clenching claws, they fell over the cliff, fighting still in mid air till they finally disappeared in the jungle below.

Amazed at having come so suddenly upon a struggle between forest kind, and anxious to see what manner of plunder had attracted the thief, the pilgrims climbed forward upon the perilous ledge to take a look at the wreckage. Suddenly, with a cry of wonder, the younger picked up a gold ring of antique design, wherein was set a huge ruby of rare, pigeon blood color and exceeding brilliancy.

Coming upon this token of civilization here in the heart of the jungle held them spellbound. Whence it came and who might have been the owner were questions which puzzled them beyond measure. They fell to dreaming over the curious find, which was first stolen from some palace of civilization, doubtless, and then carried from nest to nest, year after year, with successive plunderings, till finally, after a great lapse of time, it had reached the wilderness.

In the midst of their wonderment the two men heard a wild cry far above them, and instantly recalled their more serious mission, starting up with a guilty murmur. Slipping the precious ring upon his finger, the younger made a leap up the wild incline. The old man and his sole companion had just gained the mouth of the bee cavern, and from their loud cries it was evident that they had made a discovery.

Meanwhile, the other two had become separated, and Brandt, the last man, in traversing a very narrow shelf, suddenly came upon a huge cobra coiled in a crevice of the rocks above him, with eyes blazing bright, head erect and neck hooded, tongue darting lightnings of vicious warning.

Instinctively the pilgrim crouched down, trembling in every fiber, his heart in his throat. Keeping an eye upon the deadly serpent, which seemed preparing for the spring, the unarmed man recoiled, trying to creep backwards along the narrow shelving of the rock. Above him towered the crag, inaccessible and shelterless; at his left hand was the precipice jutting over the jungles far below. There was but one thing for the trapped pilgrim to do : keep a keen eye upon the serpent, and feel his dangerous way backwards along the narrow ledge, ready to seize the serpent the instant he sprang and dash him into the depths below.

But suddenly there was heard behind him a hissing sound, so close, indeed, that the deadly breath of the surprised reptile seemed to graze the pilgrim's

neck. Turning sharply, the traveler was stunned to see another cobra, even larger, coiled as if preparing the fatal blow, his hooded head so close that the opal gleams of his vertically slit eyes made all the blood in the pilgrim's bosom run icy cold.

Everything seemed to turn a blazing scarlet before the gasping man as he confronted death before him, behind him, and at every hand. It looked as if escape were impossible. Clutching his staff with both hands, however, the instant the cobra gave a lunge with open jaws and deadly fangs parted to deal the poison blow, with a terrific stroke he swung it in mid air, caught the serpent, and over the cliff the hissing reptile flew, writhing and whirling in mad contortions, till it disappeared.

With a gasp of relief, the pilgrim turned back to the first foe, which, having seen the vanquishing of its mate, now began to attack upon the orange robed adversary with tenfold fury. To the pilgrim's consternation it was coiling up not three feet before him, its writhing body whipped to maddening fury.

The pilgrim realized that he had here a fighter of a different order, and that the encounter would be more doubtful in its results. Seizing his staff with both hands again, he brought it down with a sudden movement that nearly threw him from the ledge, but all too late.

When the staff had reached the narrow rock and split in twain, the serpent was not there. It had made a terrific lunge and buried its fangs in the leathern pouch at the pilgrim's girdle.

Instantly he dropped the split rod and seized the snake with both hands about the neck, close to the head, whereupon it withdrew its fangs from the pouch and began a struggling effort to seize something else upon which to void its deadly spume. Not succeeding, the snake whipped its writhing body about the neck of its foe, and then the struggle for life began in terrible earnest.

Before the tail of the cobra was lashed around his throat, the pilgrim had little difficulty in holding the reptile within his power. But now, with this creeping, clinging succession of coils about him, a new terror seized the desperate man. Falling to his knees, lest in the tussle he should be wrenched over the precipice, and dashed to pieces, he concentrated all his strength into his double grip, the flaring eyes of the serpent seeming to give forth lurid flames of diabolical light.

But with the increase of the cobra's dangers came its slow but deadlier contraction of coils about the man's neck, not only all but strangling the pilgrim with the grip of a giant, but with this added purchase exerting its strength to gain freedom. Slowly the man realized that the head of the cobra was fast slipping through his hands.

With his own strength failing, purple with strangulation, gasping and quivering there in mortal combat, the frenzied pilgrim bent down and managed to get his knee upon his two clenched hands, straining in every fiber. It was useless, however. As a question of endurance, it was plain that the serpent had the better of the conflict.

The hunger and weakness of the pilgrim now made every effort a racking

torture. He felt himself swaying, giddy with the dizziness which heralds complete collapse. Backward and forward he reeled and fought like a demon, the battle only a question of moments.

Seeing the utter futility of trying longer to control the beast, and knowing well that to let him slip from his trembling grip meant certain and horrible death, the pilgrim worked the serpent's head toward the verge of the cliff, then with both knees upon the straining coils, he managed to hold him there with his right hand, while with his left he snatched the girdle from about his waist.

With a swift movement he bound the cloth bands about the snake's head—round and round again—till it made a bunch the size of a man's two fists. This surprise caused the enraged serpent to relax its crushing coils, and with the first sweet breath of air into his bosom, like a man who comes to the surface out of some pit of inferno into which he has fallen, the pilgrim uttered a wild cry and fell forward on his face in a swoon, the serpent imprisoned beneath him.

CHAPTER VIII.—FROM PERIL TO PERIL.

MEANWHILE, the patriarch and his companion had found the sealed cavern of their imprisoned comrade, and also the tiny exit and entrance of the bees. This, though the men were stung more than once in the scramble to plug up the orifice, they finally sealed, leaving one man on guard while they broke their way into the adjacent cave.

It was no easy matter to force open the mouth of the den, and after they had succeeded they were met by disappointment. Their friend was nowhere to be seen.

It was not until one of the pilgrims stumbled over the strange mass of wax in the center of the cavern that he was struck with the curiously human shape of the silent lump, and wondered what might be beneath it. Reaching down, and by dint of clawing and tearing away the hard wax, he finally managed to uncover a human foot. It was stone cold, as of one dead.

He gave a shout that brought all hands to the spot in an agony of suspense, and without waiting to discover how it were possible for a human being to be buried there under such a waxen sarcophagus, tooth and nail they began undoing the work of the multitudinous bees. They soon dragged forth the limp and unconscious form of their comrade, and bore it to the outer air.

"He is not dead," cried the patriarch, placing his ear to the still bosom and hearing faint murmurings within. "Quick! Bring water! We can save him."

Clustering around the prostrate form, the three men worked with feverish anxiety.

Soon a tiny spot of scarlet was seen at the temple, then there came a gasp, the swollen lids quivered, and presently the eyes opened with a dreamful gaze, as if in wonder what had happened to occasion all this frantic effort.

Soon it was perceived that the bees had broken their jail, and were pouring out in black streams from the crevice in the crag. Realizing that it meant dire mischief to remain there, and, judging from the intestine roar, that the bowels of the earth were alive with bees, the pilgrims snatched up their helpless comrade and started to retreat with all haste.

It was not until then that the absence of the younger brother was remarked. He appeared to be a very long time making his way up the mountain, and when no calls brought an answer, they feared a fresh disaster had befallen him.

"We must find him," cried the old man breathlessly.

But the words were no more than spoken than one of the pilgrims—the former companion of the lost one—stood still, his face pale, his trembling arm outstretched toward a jutting crag below them. There, to their amazement, they saw the prostrate form of the cobra fighter at the extreme verge of the ledge, and over him a ferocious serpent with his head bound in a yellow mass, whipping the air, and dashing blindly hither and thither, struggling to be free so that he might at any moment sink his fangs into the flesh of his unconscious foe.

"Go that way," cried one of the pilgrims to his companion, "and I will go this. Together we shall meet on either side of the ledge and save him."

It was a journey of but a moment, though a dangerous one indeed. Both men reached the narrow shelving, one at one end, the other at the other, at the same moment, making the perilous advance with breathless eagerness.

To avoid the blind, dashing strokes of the cobra, and yet hold the pilgrim ere the writhings of the snake beneath should overtopple him into the jungles below, was a task for a giant. To make matters worse, it was seen that the continued lashings of the snake was freeing him from the swathing rags that bound his head, and the moment he was free it meant death to three instead of one.

Both men made the onslaught with fearless nerve at the same instant, but suddenly both fell back again. The cobra had slipped from his orange hood, and with fangs again distended, fiercer than ever at being confronted by two new foes, he swayed almost on the tip of his blunt tail, whipping to the right and then to the left, not able to reach either adversary, and ignoring the prostrate form beneath him, which, in the monster's writhings, was in danger of toppling over the edge of the precipice.

One leg had already fallen over the verge when the onlookers afar gave a shriek. "He is falling, he is falling! Seize him!"

Both men, despite the fact that death writhed to and fro over the narrow ledge, made a dash for the unconscious man; but they were too late. As if the terrible dilemma had roused him from his trance of terror and exhaustion, there was a stir, a quiver, a wild moan, and over the precipice plunged both man and serpent.

For a few moments the watchers were perfectly motionless with terror at this unexpected tragedy. That the man could still live after this tremendous fall seemed too much of a miracle to be believed for a moment.

The old man hastened down to the narrow ledge which had been the scene the terrible encounter, crept out upon it, and peering down into the jungle, announced :

"There is a great banyan below, with a huge talipot palm towering above it. It appears that the poor fellow struck the palm and carried away one of its giant branches, crashing thence into the banyan and brush below. There is one hope in a thousand, then, that he can be saved if he has not been bitten by the cobra. Come," he added to one of his followers who stood trembling at his side, "we will leave our brothers here and penetrate the jungles to make sure——"

He paused. From far below he thought he heard a sound that was somewhat human.

"Hark!" he cried. "What was that?" Then not hearing the sound again, he called down into the entanglements far beneath him. "Ho, comrade! Are you safe?"

"Yes," came the faint echo. "But come—quick!"

"Thank all the gods that rule us!" cried the patriarch, lifting his eyes solemnly. "He lives, he lives! Come!" And he started at a leaping pace down the terrible incline.

They found the poor Brahmana lying bruised and bleeding in a mass of brush, but still able feebly to direct his rescuers to the spot where he had fallen.

Side by side the two were breaking their way through the jungle masses with but one thought—to save their comrade from certain death—when suddenly the elder gave a little moan, and stood immovable with horror.

There lay the prostrate form of the bleeding pilgrim, and beyond him, not a dozen feet apparently, crouched a lean and quivering tiger, with flaming eyes and jaws dripping with foam.

Fixing his eyes upon the monster's own, the patriarch was able to hold the beast from making the fatal spring; but what to do to rescue the man who lay moaning there between them was a question which went to his heart like a poisoned arrow.

For some moments the strong gaze of the elder had the effect of quelling the rapacity of the trembling beast, but nothing on earth save a bullet through the heart would have overcome his passion for the feast before him, now that the flaming jaws were parted for the banquet, the half starved stomach prodding him on, and his nostrils dilate with the smell of human blood.

Suddenly, as the sufferer was wondering why his friends delayed so in coming to the rescue, not knowing his own danger, and as the old man was devising any expedient under heavens whereby he might drive off the tiger and save his beloved follower, there came from the gloom beyond, stealthily, greedily to the same feast, a gigantic gorilla, with a face of demon ferocity and massive hair mantled arms and chest.

He was creeping slowly upon the coveted prize, when lo! with his animal instinct, he became aware of the other seeker after the same rich feast. As soon as he discovered this, to the watchers' amazement, the

gorilla turned all his attention to the living, thinking that the dead would be safe till he had settled with the interloper.

It was all done in a flashing instant—the coming of the mammoth ape and his sudden discovery ; and then, without a sound, giving a terrific leap from the branch of a sheltering tree, down came the gorilla upon the unsuspecting tiger on all fours. Then ensued the combat.

CHAPTER IX.—A NIGHT OF TERRORS.

THE fight was fast and furious. The gorilla's methods were those that any brave man with the physical ability to cope with such a rapacious monster might use—the dodging, tripping, wrestling, shifting tactics of the gladiator in the arena—ever on the defensive, till the tiger had exhausted his strength, and thus he overcame him at last by sheer power of endurance.

While the infuriated beasts were in the height of the conflict, the patriarch and his companion made a furtive dash for the object of the warfare, lifted their companion tenderly, and bore him with all haste to a place of safety.

Although racked and bruised by his terrific fall, and nervously unstrung by his encounter with the cobra, the Brahmana was free from poison scars, and otherwise merely bruised and exhausted, the talipot branch having broken his downward flight, and the banyan receiving him in its broad mazes like a net stretched below a burning building.

A sort of encampment was made, for the night was falling fast. Then leaving one to watch beside the two invalid pilgrims, the old man and the scientist started up the cliff again, intending to wait there until the sun had well disappeared, so that they might safely make a raid upon the honey treasure, and bear away enough of the store to sustain them for some distance on the journey.

On gaining the heights, they discovered that there was a storm brewing far to the southeast ; and fearing one of those terrific lashings of the elements which are so frequent in the tropics, they became brave enough to make an immediate forage, which, after many difficulties, was attended with grateful success.

They had no more than emerged from the depths of the crag with their honey loads, however, than the storm was upon them. With all possible haste they returned to their comrades in the gloomy depths below, finding them in a state of alarm.

Instinctively realizing the approach of the tempest, every beast of the jungle seemed to be making preparations for its coming. The whole wilderness became alive with shrieking birds, groaning panthers, howling hyenas, and chattering monkeys, the roar of the storm afar increasing their fury.

At first the pilgrims thought to seek asylum in the tree tops, but soon perceiving that the rising wind drove even the birds and baboons from that refuge, some shelter among the rocks was considered more expedient.

It was no easy thing to find a fitting cavern, and to gather the wounded comrades into it, with only their beetle lanterns to guide them ; but soon a

sort of lair was discovered, small but sufficient for an asylum until morning, and thither with all speed consistent with safety the invalids were borne. And then, with a fury simply appalling, the storm burst upon them.

The forest groaned, the mammoth tree tops lashed one another, raining down their fruit and branches, shaking every manner of beast and bird from their refuge. The jungle was a mad pandemonium of screaming, flying creatures. With each vivid burst of lightning the terrified animals could be seen here and there, wild elephants trumpeting in abject terror, mammoth pythons whipping the air in a frenzy of fear, each one forgetting that it was the enemy of the other but a moment since, and would be so again on the morrow.

Suddenly from the depths of their little retreat came a cry of surprise. Without realizing his danger, one of the pilgrims had sunk through the soft meshes of decayed vegetation under foot and disappeared into the depths of a subterranean chamber below.

With much alarm for his safety, his brothers sprang forward, tearing away the stones and roots, thereby disclosing the entrance to a wide cavern whose portals, sculptured with rare inscriptions and serpentine figures, seen in the glow of the occasional lightning flash, proclaimed it to be one of the famous rock temples of ancient date with which the north jungles of Ceylon abound.

Leaping within, staff in hand, the venerable leader found his follower lying upon the dank floor of the cavern somewhat stunned, but otherwise unharmed. Then the two proceeded to make a hasty exploration.

"A hermit temple of the ancient Buddhists!" cried the master in ecstasy. "Come, my sons, and see how the wise men of the olden time lived in holiness and meditated upon the perfect way."

Glad to find further shelter from the pitiless storm, the pilgrims poured down into their new refuge, bearing their wounded with them.

"The gods be praised!" cried the father, lifting his hands above his head in rapture, as he surveyed the noble sculptures, the cloisters, altars, and grottoes carved with infinite grace and symmetry, and interspersed with inscriptions in the holy Pali language.

"Wonderful!" was the chorus of the pilgrims, spellbound at this first evidence of the handicraft of man in the wilderness.

Suddenly the exclamations of enthusiasm received a sudden check. One of the pilgrims had advanced cautiously into the depths, but quickly dashed back to his comrades, his face ashen pale. "Let us go hence," he cried. "Quick, while there is yet time! They will be upon us!"

"Who? Where? What have you seen, brother?" was the chorused query.

"Men! Demons!" he whispered. "And such terrifying, hideous, nameless creatures as they are! Come, let us go hence! The tempest is a paradise to this haunted spot!"

"Peace, my son!" came the quiet voice of the master. "What thou hast seen is but the figment of the poor brain. We are leagues from any human habitation. It is impossible——"

"But it is true, father. I swear by the sacred tooth it is true. There were two strange, huddling, appalling shapes, with long, lean faces, supernatural eyes in deep sunken sockets, one with a babe upon her breast——"

The old man pressed forward. "He hath seen some stone image of the exalted Gautama," he murmured. "Come, let us explore! We, who fear neither gods nor beasts whom we know not, shall not shrink from men whom we do."

Courageously he led them onward, with staff and glow worm lanterns, far into the very bowels of the mountain.

Suddenly, among the glorious sculptures, in one of those dens of meditation where the holy ones of other ages fashioned the thought which has stood scripture from that far day to this, the father paused. He had confronted two weird, impish inhabitants of the jungles, who, like themselves, had sought shelter here from the fury of the storm.

"Fear nothing," spake the patriarch, while all was breathless wonder; "fear nothing from these poor creatures. I know them."

"What are they, father? What manner of creature, pray? Man, beast or demon?"

"They are Veddahs," said the old man, his eyes resting upon the queer little lumps of terrified humanity clustered in the grotto beyond. "They are of the wild species of the jungle. Fear nothing."

One of the pilgrims advanced, his heart now moved somewhat to pity by the sight of these starved and forest children. "Speak to them, father. Dost know their language?"

"No; for they have none, my son."

"Nor speak they any that thou knowest?"

"No, for they never see the face of human save to flee from it in terror."

"And how do they survive?" persisted another.

"Even as thou and I—upon the bounty of the jungle."

"With no homes?"

"None save the tree tops, except as, on occasion, they are driven into the lairs of beasts by the thunderbolt, which alone they fear. Come," he said, advancing, "let us make friends with our new comrades!"

The master stepped forward, but instantly there was a wild chattering, with moanings of terror and rage, like cornered gorillas—sounds truly unearthly in the gloom of the haunted cavern.

Up rose a tall, attenuated, and threatening shape—that of the man and natural protector of the strange family. He seized something which proved to be a bow much taller than himself and a cumbersome arrow.

He dropped upon his back, grasping the bow with his toes, and adjusted the murderous arrow.

"Beware, father! He is going to shoot. Down—quick!"

Whizz! And as the old man gave a sudden lunge the arrow grazed his robe and buried itself in the fungus covered crevices of the sculptured wall beyond.

Instantly the patriarch was upon the wild man before he could recoil, then they disarmed him, the cavernous depths resounding with lamentations, for

the poor shivering souls regarded their captors as a species of evil genius rained down upon them astride the thunderbolt.

But soon by signs and other intimations the terrified creatures were given to understand that they had nothing to fear from their new companions ; and then, in proof of the kind motives of the pilgrims, the latter fed the starving jungle folk from their own insufficient store of plantains and wild honey.

Grateful for this succor, the storm driven Veddahs grew quite pacified at last, by weird symbols expressing their thankfulness for relief at this hour of their perishing.

The tempest increased, rather than abated, with the coming of the deeper night, every peal of thunder reverberating through the cavern like an exploding mine, driving the Veddahs back into the dim glooms of the grotto again with chatterings of dismay.

But all at once there came upon them a new cause for alarm. Simultaneously with one of these fierce scourgings of the pitiless thunderbolts there burst through the mouth of the cave whence the pilgrims had entered two young panthers. They had fallen headlong into the cavern, and stood stunned and furious as they realized themselves entrapped.

One tried to leap into the upper cave again, but fell short, tumbling back with maddened frenzy. With shrill yelpings the panthers glided into the grottoes like whipped curs, and here they remained, much to the discomfiture of the present tenants of the ancient cave temple of the exalted Gautama.

The pilgrims now had the choice between an encounter with two ferocious young panthers and a battle with the storm, at dead of night while the jungle was alive with every monster of the tropic zone. The pilgrims had a choice, but it did not take them long to decide.

"Lie down and take your rest, my sons," said the old patriarch to his followers. "Let come what will, I will watch over you."

Then setting the little beetle lanterns in a semicircle before the huddled sleepers, with his staff laid across his bosom, the old man began the watch, which was doomed to sudden and thrilling interruption.

CHAPTER X.—A FEARFUL CALAMITY.

THE weary travelers had no more than sunk into profound slumber than the stealthy Veddah crept from his grotto, secured possession of his great bow, and made his way across the cavern. He was in the act of plucking the arrow from the crevice in the rock where it had lodged earlier in the night when his movements stirred the rage of one of the young panthers which lay close to the spot.

Probably the beast was haunted with dread and goaded by hunger, even as was the Veddah himself ; but with a savage lunge the panther was upon the helpless man, clenched with him, and both rolled to the cavern floor, fighting and clawing amid the pandemonium which such a combat naturally precipitated.

Every man was instantly upon his feet, staff upraised, and the little mother in the grotto beyond sent up a direful wail.

Into the denser gloom the Veddah and panther reeled and fought and struggled, till finally the flash of sleek hide and the gleam of teeth were no longer to be seen.

Not daring to go to the rescue, the pilgrims and the master drew themselves together and awaited the worst.

It seemed ages, but the battle could not have been of more than a moment's duration. How it was possible for the wild man to gain possession of his great bow and arrow in that mad struggle, much less to use so cumbersome a thing, will never be known. But through the darkness was heard the deep toned strum of the bowstring, a peculiarly shrill shriek, and out of the depths plunged the Veddah, panting, bleeding from many wounds, to sink helpless and fainting at the feet of the pilgrims.

Instantly his mate was at his side bending above him with impish wails, wiping the blood from his quivering face and bosom with her long, sleek hair.

All was stillness beyond ; and when, a little later, the pilgrims advanced with caution into the gloom, they were astonished to find the panther lying in a contorted heap, dead, with the great arrow clean through him.

Fearing that the smell of blood would enrage the other beast, and tempt him to make an onslaught, the pilgrims stood guard over the wounded man while the Veddah woman went forth, returning instantly with a mass of leaves which she plaited with some dexterity and bound over the sufferer's cuts and bruises. All night long he lay there upon the cave floor, moaning in a sort of delirium, for the slashings of the panther's claws, although shallow, were exceedingly painful.

After this excitement there was little sleep for even tired eyes ; so the comrades huddled together again, nodding and praying for the dawn.

It came, such as it was, but day brought no gladness. The fury of the storm had not abated, the jungle was drenched and still literally alive with furious beast, reptile, and bird.

"We must rest here a little longer," said the patriarch. "It would be impossible to make our way forward in this tempest, and perhaps the night would find us in a less agreeable shelter."

"But food, father?" tremblingly queried one of the hearers.

"We must be content," replied the master.

The pilgrims looked into one another's haggard faces. Content? How was it possible to survive much longer against these odds?

The master caught the silent remonstrance of that look, but it only moved him to reply, "'As the elephant in battle is patient though pierced by many arrows, so likewise be thou patient under many scourgings,' saith Gautama. Come, let us rest awhile, for we know not what the day nor the night may bring forth."

Under the kindly ministrations of the men in orange robes, and restored by the rude nursing of his wife, the Veddah revived sufficiently to drag himself over to the spot of his late battle with the panther, and was found there a moment later with his face laid against the wound in the panther's breast. Having withdrawn the arrow, he was drinking the warm blood in

painful gulplings. The little wife had followed him there and done likewise, both coming forth again like changed beings, erect, revitalized, saved ! With this store of both food and drink, the little jungle people seemed perfectly content ; and when they were moved to pity by the sight of their white comrades in the throes of starvation, they tried to induce them, by signs, to eat of the raw flesh and drink of the blood.

In vain did the master try to inculcate, by symbols and gestures, the lesson taught by his own life. The poor, shallow mind of the Veddah could not comprehend the pilgrims' repugnance to eating of so tempting a feast ; then suddenly disappearing through the dismal maw of the cave, the savage spent an hour abroad, returning at last with such fruit as had been whipped from the jungle trees in the tempest, and with edible reeds and cress from some mountain stream.

The old man blessed him for this succor, dividing the store with his famished followers, then lay down and slept while the others watched. So passed the dismal day, scarcely less bitter than the night, but a fitting herald of the terrors and awakenings of the night to come.

Twice that day the Veddah had gone forth upon a foraging tour, each time returning with something that sustained life a little longer. However, the jungle food soon began to grow intolerable to the pilgrims ; their throats were swollen and tongues parched with fever and the cavern miasma. But had it not been for the efforts of this poor jungle Caliban at this extremity of human endurance, starvation would already have been upon them.

All that day the watchers sat in a sort of listless trance about the mouth of the cave, then at night they retreated to their former stronghold in the grotto, setting the glow worm lanterns in a semicircle about them to keep off the remaining panther, which, since the killing of his mate, was lying in some unknown depth beyond, an ever present menace.

Still, relying upon their combined strength against the beast, should he attempt an assault, and confiding in the skill of the Veddah and his mammoth bow as a last expedient, the pilgrims preferred to let things remain as they were, rather than tempt the panther to attack them by trying to drive it forth.

In huddled heaps the weak and trembling pilgrims lay down with one another's bodies for pillows, sighing into slumber—slumber that seemed to more than one of them the sleep that knows no waking.

The old man crouched down in their midst, watching, watching. Without could be heard the diminishing din of the tempest, and here at hand the monotonous drip, drip, of the trickling water upon the cavern floor. His eyes were wide, his breath short, his body swaying like a pendulum forward, backward, forward ceaselessly, as if the staff upon his bosom were a babe clenched in his sheltering arms.

Suddenly, from the far depths, the master caught the twin gleams of a panther's eyes. Never before had they stirred him so, never before had the trump of doom sounded so appallingly in his ears. With all his frame a-quiver, the old man sat breathlessly awaiting the onslaught of the starving beast, uncertain whether the monster would make an attack upon them over

that bulwark of faintly glowing lights, yet not daring to move lest the first stir would fire him to maddened anger and resolve.

The far gleams grew brighter, though not a step was heard; then at last the creeping shape, sinuous and serpent-like, advanced slowly, like an apparition, without a sound.

For the first time in all his life the heart of the master failed him. The weak frame shook in an ague of doubt and lost confidence. He would even now have cried out, but it was too late. The panther had stopped short, dropping flat, with ponderous paws outstretched, the gleaming claws dug into the slimy rocks. It was the instant before the spring—the one small jot of eternity before the hiss of the executioner's knife.

Suddenly, goaded to madness now, up leaped the solitary watcher with a shriek that brought every sleeper to his feet. He made an insane onslaught over the little breastwork of living lights, bringing down his staff with crashing fury upon, not the panther, but the damp rocks, the beast having sprung aside, and from the right hand made the fatal spring which brought them both down with a sickening crash upon the cavern floor.

Harrowed beyond expression, the pilgrims stood near, beholding their master lying upon his face, still as death, the panther with his giant paws buried in the orange robe, head uplifted in a sort of gladiatorial triumph.

Not a stir to the rescue, not a sound save the low, menacing growl of the panther and the resonant throb, throb, of each heart. Suddenly, overcome with the tragedy, without the strength to battle against such an adversary, one of the pilgrims sank to his knees, then fell forward on his face, unconscious, like one prostrating himself before a Moloch of fate, resigning himself in sacrifice for another's salvation.

The remaining brothers stood swaying for a single instant, and were about to make a simultaneous rush upon the beast, when again was heard the resonant twang of the great bow. As if there had been an explosion under him, straight up went the panther fully six feet in air, turning backward with a strange, gurgling yelp. Then he fell with a heavy spat upon the wet rocks, the arrow driven through his sleek trunk back of the shoulder blade clean to the feathered tip. There he lay, motionless, like a rare beetle transfixed by a bodkin.

The pilgrims sprang forward, groveling weakly to their master's side.

"He lives," murmured one, laying his ear to the patriarch's bosom.
 "The gods be praised, he lives! Loosen his girdle—quick!"

Two began the restoration, a third ran for water, which he scooped up from a pool in the lower part of the cavern with the aid of his shell cup. The fourth had regained consciousness, and lay there panting, with rolling eyes, too weak to raise a hand to succor the wounded master.

The Veddah had dragged the panther into his little grotto. Then he withdrew the arrow, pressed his lips to the wound, and drank long and deep. Then filling a shell cup to the brim with the warm blood, he bore it to the wife who sat crouching beyond, spellbound by these tragic events, yet not so disturbed but that she seized the rude flagon and drank of the warm restorative to the last drop.

Soon there was a noticeable quiver through the shrunken frame of the patriarch, a rallying to life, as it were, and with a gurgling whisper the master half rose.

"I am hurt—mortally," he moaned. "Bear me to the mouth of the cavern—quick," he added, after a moment of struggle. "I cannot breathe here—I am dying! Make haste, my sons; bear me to the free air, or it will be too late!"

Though weak and trembling from hunger, exposure, and exhaustion, his loyal followers lifted the limp form with a mighty effort, half bearing, half dragging it under the opening to the world above.

The dying whirlwind, which had long been such a scourge upon all creatures of the forest, now turned good Samaritan, and fanning the fevered face, bestowed temporary comfort and peace.

Binding up the gashes made by the claws of the panther, the pilgrims clustered about their leader, murmuring in their hearts strange queries, realizing for the first time the presence of the great shadow encompassing them, and shocked at the possible problem that loomed up before them. And morning broke, finding them still there, silent, watching, waiting for—they knew what.

CHAPTER XI.—THE AWAKENING.

DAWN came upon the pilgrims in their cavern, but with its welcome sunburst it brought only increasing dismay. The tropic hurricane was over, it is true; but one glance outside showed that the difficulties of the march were increased fourfold.

"My brothers," reported one of the pilgrims, who had gone forth to reconnoiter, "nor gods, nor men could fight their way through that wilderness after its awful scourging."

And it was quite true. In that mighty convulsion the earth and the tree tops seemed to have met and clenched.

"There is but to remain here and abide by the decree of a fate ruled by a higher hand than man's," said the patriarch, "completing a destiny formulated eons of ages ere we poor earthlings were transient sojourners here in mortal form."

With the first glad shimmer of Heaven's light the old man had seemed to rally. A smile of infinite beneficence spread over his ancient countenance, and gazing upward he murmured: "Gather about me, my sons, for I have great things this hour to unfold to you, that the future generation may know how I lived and died. Come closer, I pray!"

"Father," interrupted one, "why speakest thou of death? Thou shalt not die!"

"No man dies, my son; he but passes into another consciousness—another mortal shape—till he has proven himself, by purification, worthy of Nirvana. Come closer, I pray you, then, for this passing is near at hand. I have had the truth revealed to me this night in a dream. I must leave you."

A strange thrill—an oppression of loneliness, crushing and bitter—swept

over the hearts of his hearers. They pressed nearer, bending above the pallid countenance and that attenuated frame in attitudes of awe and worship.

"Thou shalt not leave us, master, for we know not whither to go to find the sacred tree under which we receive the light. Thou must live till thou hast brought us there in safety."

"My sons, it is otherwise decreed," murmured the patriarch, with a wave of the hand. My pilgrimage is at an end; this small link of my planetary cycle is complete. I pass on to the next, to become the prophet of another world."

The pilgrims looked into one another's eyes, confused and wondering.

"We understand thee not, oh, father. Who art thou, then?"

"Wouldst know the secret—the precious secret which you would have heard from the lips of the sacred bo of Gautama, and which you shall yet hear in the rustling of those sacred leaves as you meditate there beneath them?"

The pilgrims stood in awe, for the face and figure of the old man seemed inspired. "What is the secret? Speak, father!"

"I am the Maitreva Buddha! Behold!"

Nothing could have infused into mortal words the divine glory which seemed to breathe from every syllable of that strange utterance. It came like the spirit voice which the hermit kings of old heard in the passing clouds above the sacred Nile.

"Father," said one, "who is the Maitreva?"

The prophet struggled forward. "He is the messiah of the Buddhists, the fifth of Buddhas, even as Gautama was the fourth. There shall other Buddhas follow, and many more, till all the world shall become purified and made perfect. Go, then, my brave Brahmanas. Bear the sacred jewel of Gautama to the exalted bo tree, laying it there where the next Buddha of the line may become enlightened by its aid, even as I; and for your reward, my sons, receive there under its broad shelter the dispensation, the perfect peace, and spread it then abroad over all the world—the holiest, most profound and blessed gift whose glories have not entered the mind of man. Dost hear me, my beloved?"

"Ay, master," was the choking chorus, "we hear thee."

"And will do my bidding, my sons?"

"Even to the letter, master," was the deep vow from every lip in grave suppliance.

"Then let the joy of perfect enlightenment fill all your souls, for ye are no longer mortal. You are indeed Brahmanas, the anointed of the spirit. Go forth into the world and teach the holy way to refuge, for there is none other. Peace, peace, my worthy Brahmanas. So be it!"

With these solemn utterances the venerable master seemed to relapse into a moment of slumber, the snow white head inclining forward upon the shrunken breast.

The Veddah, seeing the light of day advancing, had crept from his grotto and gone forth into the jungle in search of food.

And now a most remarkable incident occurred. The pilgrims were seated about their prostrate master, silent, restless, panting as in some agony of the soul—as if they were undergoing some ordeal the nature of which they could not comprehend.

Into one another's bloodshot eyes they peered, realizing that a supernatural change was being accomplished, yet none spoke.

Over the still form the younger Brahmana bent low, then whispered, "Master, is it well with thee?"

Breathless he waited, but no answer came. Instead there was a long, deep gasp, a slight quiver, then an apparent relinquishing of all effort; and with the passing of the patriarch into the great unknown, the four watchers fell back in a sort of swoon—prostrate like men struck down by a mighty thunderbolt.

The spell of the enchanter was broken.

Silence reigned deep and awful. Even the stir of jungle beast and bird seemed hushed, nature herself appalled and dumb.

Suddenly there broke forth a strange cry—querulous, and very human.

"*Garçon—garçon!* I say, waiter! Drat the man! *Garçon!* Water, water—quick!"

There was a strange stir in the cavern. One or two of the men had half struggled up, glaring about them as in some hideous dream.

The pilgrim who had cried out this strange command, so insanely out of place with the surroundings, finally wormed his way into a half kneeling posture, then stared aghast at the colorless and shrunken faces of his comrades beyond the prostrate form of the patriarch.

"Hamilton!" he shrieked. "Pyke! My God! What's the matter? What has happened?"

The two dazed men tried to gulp out something audible, but breath failed them. They could but gaze upon the speaker as if he were some accursed shade from the lower regions. They sat reeling from side to side like tortured victims of the opium pipe coming out of the deadly trance.

Again the strongest of the four found voice as he gazed upon a face which lay among the shadows with its perfectly rigid features, eyes set and mouth agape, all but lifeless.

"Brandt!" he cried. "Wake—for God's sake, wake! Where are we? Who has done this? Are we alive, or are we dead? Speak!—Hamilton!—Pyke!—Brandt! Speak, or I shall go mad!"

The raving man had reached across the dead body of the patriarch and clutched the naked shoulder of his friend in a frenzy of wonder and dismay. Then his eyes fell upon the still features of the orange robed master between them; and a shuddering betrayed the revulsion he suffered in his heart—the heart of one who had become human again.

"'Tis he—'tis he!" came the wild moan. "'Tis he to whom, out of pity, we gave the bread and water only a moment ago—the old stranger of the mysterious catseye of Gautama—ah, yes—yes, the mysterious, the deadly, the all powerful catseye of Buddha—into which whosoever gazes becomes a changed being—ha! a changed being—a changed being——"

With his hands pressed to his temples, rocking there in a wild delirium, raving like one insane, repeating words to himself over and over as a man hammers at a block of stone, hoping that each blow will shatter it so that the truth at its heart may be revealed, the poor pilgrim sat there trying to realize who he was, and where, and how it were possible that so strange a miracle could be accomplished.

In the mean time, his comrades had come out of the deadly trance enough to struggle up and gaze about them with swollen and bewildered eyes, stunned by what they saw. Somehow, as they gazed at the silent form beside them, they realized that in him lay the link between the moment of their looking into the brilliant gem and the awful, the incomprehensible present.

"It was only an hour ago—do you not remember?" This from the only one who had found voice. "We were at the Lion d'Or. We offered him food—out of pity offered him food. And this is our reward! This—this! What is it—heaven or hell? Are we living, or are we dead?"

Not one answering sound. The query seemed to involve too great a problem for human solving. Another racking moment of silence, then a shadow came upon them.

It was the Veddah. He was advancing through the mouth of the cave, his arms loaded with jungle fruits, mammoth eggs, and a shell cup of honey.

When the swarthy and impish visage of the naked savage confronted them, the captives shrank back with a moaning cry. Such an appalling demon coming upon them then confirmed their most bitter convictions.

"Yes," said Biggs bitterly, "this is hell!" and turning, he fell upon his face, resigning himself to the inevitable.

But with a countenance expressive of a rude sort of pleasure, the Veddah spread his store before them, bidding them eat, and all with a strange familiarity, as if he had known them for ages.

The scientist rallied, gazing upon the hideous form; then, peering into the small, oblique sockets of the bronze skull through which the eyes glowed like purple pearls, he moaned, "Who are you? Who——"

There was no answer; only a look of cowering fear.

"Who are you—what are you?" persisted Biggs. "Is this your home? Where are we? How came we here?"

But still there was no reply.

Stealthily the wondering Veddah sped away, dumb mouthed as the stone Buddhas that looked down from their age blackened niches in the cavern.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

TWO SONGS.

I SANG a song for all the world to hear;
It rose and fell, and reached no listening ear.
I sang again, for my own heart alone;
The earth resounded with the mighty tone.

Kent Knowlton.

THE GREAT BUDDHA CATSEYE.*

BY CHARLES EDWARD BARNES.

A strange story of adventure in Ceylon—What took four New York club men into the jungle—
Thrilling experiences of unarmed travelers with the denizens of the tropical forests.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

JUST as they are finishing a dinner at the Lion d'Or Café, five New York club men form the acquaintance of an odd character from the east, who suddenly walks into the restaurant. In return for their invitation to dine at their expense, he shows them a wonderful gem—a catseye from Ceylon—which, he assures them, will give whosoever looks therein "another soul, another body, another mind."

At first the young men scoff at the idea of such a thing, but finally Hamilton, the painter, submits himself to the test. As he gazes into the stone, a strange and shocking change comes over him, and presently he rises, tells them, "Look for yourselves, comrades," and walks out of the place.

All are now eager to see what has caused this mysterious transformation, and three others go through exactly the same experience—Biggs, Pyke, and Brandt—until only Reynolds is left, and when his especially strong temperament proves to be unassailable by the hypnotic influences, he denounces the old man as a charlatan, and hurries out after his friends. But they have mysteriously disappeared. However, Reynolds leaves no stone unturned to learn what has become of them, and finally hears that four men, possibly Americans, are about to undertake a pilgrimage to the sacred bo tree through the jungles of Ceylon. He determines to go to their rescue, and finds that Pyke's sister has made the same resolution. After striving in vain to dissuade her, he promises to give her all the aid possible.

Meantime, the four other New Yorkers, attired in the simple habiliments of Brahmanas, and without any weapons, start under the guardianship of the patriarch on their perilous journey through the wilderness.

After various thrilling adventures, they are overtaken by a terrific storm, which makes the forest impassable for a time. They seek refuge in a cave, where they encounter a Veddah man and his mate, through whom they obtain food. The advent of a panther into their retreat results in the death of the patriarch and the release of the four New Yorkers from the spell of hypnotism which has brought them on this strange quest. Their awakening leaves them astounded with horror at the situation in which they find themselves.

CHAPTER XII.—A STRANGE MEETING.

IT was the cool of early morning, on the northward way leading from the beautiful city of Kandy, the capital of Ceylon.

Five elephants, with stately tread, were traversing the forests of the north. The howdahs of the first four were heavily laden; the last alone—the finest beast of all—was without either riders or cargo.

Beside each elephant, guiding him with a hooked implement, walked a mahout, his scarlet turban and white waist cloth contrasting glaringly with the dead bronze of his otherwise naked form.

In the howdah of the leading elephant, reclining in an attitude of medi-

* This story began in the November issue of THE ARGOSY. The two back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 20 cents.

tation, but with a restless eye and nervous air in striking contrast with all this sleepy monotony of the wilderness, was the young New Yorker, John Reynolds. He was commencing the last stage of the most perilous and mysterious journey of his life.

Ever and anon at some turn in the road the watcher leaned forward, peering far along the jungle path with the practised glance of the hunter. Then, with a sigh and clouded brow, he would resume his forced composure, waiting the next turn in the upward highway.

Suddenly, after one of these eager surveys, there came an expression of pleasure over his countenance, and his heart leaped. There, patiently waiting him under the shelter of some trees, he spied two figures.

They were women, both dressed in hunting costume of dark gray, one very tall, angular, and awkward even in repose; the other small, calmly at ease, a little pale with misgivings, but ready for any emergency.

As the elephants approached, the taller of the two left her companion and came swiftly forward. Reynolds descended from his howdah and greeted an Englishwoman of the rugged Yorkshire type, broad of shoulder, and with a face full of quiet and aggressive strength.

There was force and loyalty in every line, self poised and unconquerable will in even the apology for a smile with which she met her leader.

The young man took her measure all in a glance, with the certainty of the character reader.

"Jove!" he murmured. "A cross between a Spanish duenna and a Joan of Arc! But how splendid for our purpose! A woman with a face and figure like that would confront without hesitation all the demons in the devil dancer's catalogue."

A great sense of relief came over him. He had faithful servants in the party; but here he met one who was worthy to become a comrade—a person with force, one able and willing to share the responsibilities of the task in hand. Her very presence inspired courage. All this flashed through his mind.

"Mr. Reynolds, I believe!"

The voice was low and rather husky, and she looked at him coldly.

"At your service!" said the young man warmly.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes; I am armed and well prepared, madam," he replied.

"Bagley, if you please—Miss Bagley, sir."

"Very pleased to meet you, Miss Bagley," he said, for lack of something better to say.

"Your transport train looks promising, Mr. Reynolds. You have taken great pains, I fancy."

"I have given attention to every detail, I assure you," was the confident reply. "The servants are the best, the provisions ample for any emergency, my two native hunters absolutely reliable, and the elephants the pick of the island. Allow me to say that the rear elephant, which is yours for the journey, had the honor some twenty years ago of bearing his highness the Prince of Wales up through the Tamil jungles on a shooting trip, and was chosen among eight hundred beasts for that distinction."

Miss Bagley's face showed her pleasure.

"If the hunt for wild beasts necessitates the utmost care, how much greater the hunt for man, particularly when that one is so dear to us!" Reynolds continued.

The woman drew a long breath.

"Come," he said sharply, "we must be off in order to reach Nallande before making a halt."

On the swaying back of the old burden bearer he passed a silent, trim little figure by the roadside. Back of her was a bullock cart, with a swarthy Cinghalese in charge. In the tall grass beyond lay several boxes and hampers containing the necessities for the journey. Reynolds' heart quickened as he bent his eyes toward the flushed and downcast face; but there was not an upward glance, not one gesture of recognition.

In short skirt and tightly buttoned leggings, trim bodice, and Eton hat of Panama straw, with gleaming rifle slung across her back, her gloved hand resting upon the hilt of a hunting knife in a snake skin case at her belt, she was indeed a modern Diana.

At the turn in the road he glanced about suddenly. For a moment their eyes met, and she gave him one look, one smile of gratitude and faith, then resumed her reserve, awaiting the state elephant.

Reynolds sank back upon the comfortable cushions, a smile of content taking the place of the frown of misgiving worn all the way from far Kandy—ay, from farther New York; for that one look from the girl was like the first drop of wild honey to the jungle starved wanderer.

The halting place for the night was the ancient city of Nallande, once great, now an insignificant hamlet with a few huts. Two separate camps were pitched side by side, but entirely independent of each other. They were duplicates in every respect, except that two of the attendants in the encampment of the "memsahibs," as the natives called them, were Cinghalese women, well trained in service, and one an excellent cook.

But early on the second morning Miss Bagley invaded the camp of Mr. Reynolds and poured forth her grievances.

"I was given to understand that you had employed trustworthy servants," she began.

"So I believed them," said Reynolds, rising from his hammock and dropping a little ammonia upon a troublesome tick—a tiny insect with a corkscrew beak, the size of a flea, but with a poisonous sting, with millions of which the jungle abounds—and then lighting another pipeful of Cavendish. "In fact, Miss Bagley, those coolies were recommended by the British consul of Colombo. I told him that there was to be an English lady of quality in the party, so that he took extra pains, for which I paid a most exorbitant demand in the matter of hire. I am disappointed if they do not come up to your expectations."

"Disappointed?" she gasped. "Why, they are simply atrocious. Do you know what that miserable cook served us for supper last night? I did not discover it until this morning, when I went to the kitchen between the rocks and saw the skin hanging by the tail from the limb of a banyan."

"Can't imagine," said Reynolds, who, nevertheless, guessed the truth.

"A *tic polonga*, sir—snake steaks, if you please, sir!" she cried. "A great, ugly twelve foot reptile——"

"Great delicacy," broke in Reynolds. "I had some of the same. A cross between frogs' legs and fricasseed pullet. After all, it served you right," he went on, lighting another match and puffing vigorously at his bulldog briarwood.

"Served me what, sir?" she cried. "What do you mean?"

"I mean simply, Miss Bagley, that travelers through the jungle must abide by the menu, and not go prowling around the kitchen to find out what they have been eating."

"I beg your pardon, sir," was her answer. "I wish not only to know what I eat, but I must see it cooked."

"Then you must be prepared to starve in the jungle, unless you can live on hardtack and Apollinaris. By the way, what did you say to the cook?"

"I didn't say anything. I just banged her over the head with this stick."

"What?" cried the listener, paling. "You struck her?"

"And a good one. What was I to do? I might storm and rail a month of Sundays. I don't speak her language, nor does she understand mine. But here's one language that every one understands."

"You did very wrong," said Reynolds. "You must remember you are not in a civilized land. We are at the mercy of these people, in a measure. Winah!" he called out to his man servant hastily, "go down and call the cook of the memsahib's camp. I want to see her." Then, when the man had disappeared, he added to Miss Bagley, "You cannot rule by force when you are in the minority twenty to one!"

"And such people as they are—oh, such heathens!" cried Miss Bagley, not hearing a word of counter counsel. "Why, last night I could not sleep for a great tom tom pounding and discordant singing over on the hillside yonder. Well, I got up, dressed, and went over there. Now what do you think I saw the miserable heathens doing?"

"Can't imagine," said Reynolds, who nevertheless surmised.

"There were thirty or forty people gathered in a circle, with torches and tom toms, in the center a young girl stretched out on a rush couch. She was sick—looked as if she were dead, in fact. Around her were dancing three awful creatures with long hair away down their backs, greasy naked bodies, and the most appalling masks on that I ever beheld—red, yellow, and black, with flaring eyes and distended jaws. Well, of course I thought they were trying to kill the poor thing, so I rushed in and stopped them."

"A very impolitic, and I must say dangerous, thing to do."

"Perhaps, sir. But do you know what those idiots were trying to do? They were actually trying to scare the devil out of the girl. Just think! Such heathen rites, and by people several of whom confessed to me that they were members of our mission churches! Oh, it was awful. I tried my best to stop them—pleaded and threatened, and even offered to pay for an English doctor to be brought up from Kandy. Well, what happened? The girl gave a gasp and died, and then they said that I did it. Imagine!"

"Well, I guess, between you all——"

"Sahib," interrupted Winah breathlessly. "Danga-Dyk and his wife, the cook of the memsahib's camp, have fled back to Kandy in a rage."

"What!" cried the leader, leaping up.

The woman was startled but defiant.

"It is true, sahib. They say that lady struck the cook over the head with a club. Nearly killed her. No reason what for, sahib. They are gone, sahib."

"But they will starve in the jungle——"

"Oh, never fear, sahib," said the coolie, with a smile that was half a sneer; "they filled a hamper from the memsahib's stores——"

"What!"

"And Danga-Dyk took the memsahib's rifle and a belt of cartridges. Oh, no; they won't starve."

Reynolds was silent, for fear that he might say something to the author of the troubles that would not only make matters worse, but would also display disaffection among the whites before the servants, who would be bound to spread the news.

"Oh, the brutes!" shrieked Miss Bagley, clenching her great fists, so that the coolie fled in alarm. "My rifle stolen by those wretches——"

"See here," said Reynolds sharply, seeing the servant had disappeared. "You are getting us into a mess out of which it will soon be impossible to crawl. Now, let me tell you one thing, and this goes for the present and for the future." He came toward her and she knew he was in dead earnest. "I am the leader of this party, and not you. You shall obey my orders, or I'll pack you on an elephant and ship you through to Colombo in disgrace."

"Oh, will you!" Her tone was half fear, half fight.

"Yes—I—will!" was the savage rejoinder, and the three little words went home. "Now you just go back to your tent and cool down. I'll go to work to pacify these creatures, if it is possible, and undo your blundering. Not a word—I won't listen! Go back to your tent, I tell you; for if the coolies hear us quarreling, they will mutiny and it will all be up with us."

Sullenly and defiantly she faced him for a moment and then moved off slowly. Reynolds shouted to the man.

"Bring every coolie, hunter, and mahout here to my tent at once!" he commanded. "Make haste!"

The attendants to a man were drawn up before Reynolds, who took a camp stool and lighted a cheroot.

"The memsahib's cook and her husband have gone," he began. "As soon as they get back to Kandy, they will be arrested and thrown into a dungeon. I left orders to that effect."

There was a murmur, half of amazement, half of pity, and several looked as if they would like to run after the deserters and warn them of their fate.

"I want to know if there is any one else here who is not content to go on with me. If there is, let him come forward and declare himself. I will not only pay what is due him, but give him a letter to the consul which will save him from arrest. Do you understand?"

Some of the silent hearers nodded, digging holes thoughtfully in the sand with their flat toes and muttering. Those who did not understand listened to the head hunter, who was an able interpreter.

There was hesitation, then the coolies drew aside in a council of war.

"I will give you all the time you wish to decide," said Reynolds, "only your decision must be final. There must be no backsliding or it will go hard with the traitor. Remember this, and decide once and for all. Winah, call me when they have settled the matter."

With these words, and oppressed with many misgivings, the young commander of the party passed moodily into his tent.

CHAPTER XIII.—THE TRAGIC EPISODE OF THE RODIYAHs.

THE much concerned Reynolds sat down at once to write to Miss Pyke and inform her of the trouble threatening them.

MY DEAR MISS PYKE:

With sad lack of forethought, your maid and companion has committed some indiscretions which are liable to lead to complications. She gave grievous offense by interfering with some semi religious worship of the natives last night, bringing down upon us the wrath of the semi savages, and this morning she took such umbrage at something the cook had done that she split open the head of the coolie woman with a stick. The result you may know—the cook and her angry husband have fled from camp, carrying with them stores and valuables which we very much needed. This event has brought rebellion among our people, and the outcome of the miserable affair is doubtful.

The hunters and coolies are in conference now; and if they decide adversely to our plans, it means an instant abandonment of the whole trip—a prospect so lamentable that I cannot face it.

The natives are very sensitive and revengeful; and to be abandoned by them here in the jungle would be serious—so serious, indeed, as to cause one to shudder to think of it. The blow being struck by a woman (and one who herself occupies the position of a superior servant), the natives simply could not condone the indignity. I myself should never have dared such a thing, however angry, knowing full well the spirit of revenge, which is the savage's chief moral law.

You must instruct Miss Bagley to lay aside every weapon, to treat the coolies with some decency, or—

I have just been called to the door of my tent where the chief hunter, representing the native attendants, brings me the ultimatum. It is to the effect that they will all remain loyal provided 'that the she wolf's claws are clipped.' In other words, if Miss Bagley is shorn of her authority to bully and beat them at will. I have given the promise, and from hence she is not to give an order. You must keep her near you so that she will not be likely to thrust upon us any such complications again; because the farther we go, the more difficult become the embarrassments and formidable the retreat. The natives fear the Bagley—which perhaps may give you a sense of security—but to keep the attendants by us to the end of this perilous journey we must use the utmost tact. We are dependent on these people for safety and comfort, whatever may be our assumptions of authority.

This letter having been despatched to the camp of the memsahibs, the order was given to prepare for the march.

For the remainder of that day the party traveled in silence through the wilderness, every now and then passing ruins which testified to an ancient civilization of a high order.

What was now a trackless forest was once a veritable garden, with cities of vast wealth, having marble streets extending for miles with massive stone lamps at the crossings, gilded domes, and noble pagodas ; the whole capital surrounded by a wall upon which four double chariots could have raced abreast.

On taking up the journey after the second halt for rest, the party had not proceeded far when, in the highway ahead, was heard a strange call, something human, yet like the scream of the jackal.

"Rodiyahs!" exclaimed Winah with a start, and every native bowed his head, repeating, "Rodiyahs! Rodiyahs!"

Somewhat mystified by the effect on the coolies of this strange word, Reynolds was about to address his head hunter on the subject, when he saw a little further on a swarthy man lying by the roadside apparently writhing in agony.

The coolies to a man dropped their eyes and turned their heads away, as if they expected to be struck down for giving the suffering one a pitying glance. Reynolds came to the conclusion that the man was shamming in order to extort money or food. He therefore paid no attention to the man, but passed on, but when the memsahib's elephant came up it stopped.

The encampment was made early owing to the discovery of a favorable spot in a high and dry clearing which commanded a view of the Malwatta river. A light supper was served, and as Reynolds sat before his tent watching the antics of a score of monkeys playing a game of flying leap frog through the jungle's edge, he saw a wild group of coolies racing down from the camp of the memsahibs, headed by the chief hunter.

"Well, what now?"

"Pardon, sahib," said the chief hunter gravely, bowing low, "but you have done a dangerous thing to allow the Rodiyah to become the servant of the memsahib."

"What's that?" said the listener.

"Ah, then you do not know. Thank God, sahib, it was not on your orders." He turned to the coolies, telling them that the sahib was not even aware of what had happened, and that now he would settle the matter.

"What does this mean?" asked Reynolds anxiously.

"This, worthy sahib," was the chief hunter's reply, as he drew a deep breath like one preparing to tell a long story. "The Rodiyahs are an outcast jungle tribe with which the very lowest caste of native Cingalese or even Tamils will not condescend to mingle. Away back in early ages, sahib, according to the sacred chronicles of the Mahawanso, these people were the deer hunters who supplied the early kings with venison for the royal tables. Once, not finding deer, they had the audacity to substitute human flesh for venison, the king liking it so much that he offered a large bounty to his hunters to find more of it. They continued to supply the sovereign with human flesh till they were discovered in the act of killing human game, after which, proof being brought to the king, he consigned the hunters to the jungle, making them an outcast race, with the name 'Rodiyahs,' which means 'Unclean.'"

Reynolds lighted his cheroot and made himself at ease. "That is interesting," he said. "Go on. What has that to do with us?"

"Hear me out, sahib, if you please," said the hunter, drawing closer. "From that early day these people have been outcasts and jungle wanderers. They are not allowed to speak our language. They are beneath our lowest caste. By order of the early kings they are not allowed to enter our villages, to draw water from a well, to enter a vihara to pray, nor a hall of justice to present a petition. It was also decreed that the Rodiyah must call out when meeting a native on the highway, so that the latter may bow his head and pass on without so much as looking on so contemptible a man beast, as happened this day when the caravan met this Rodiyah wounded on the road."

"Wounded?" echoed Reynolds, his conscience somewhat pricked that he should have passed the suffering man without offering him succor.

"Yes, worthy sahib, the man was wounded—bitten by a cobra. The 'memsahib she wolf' ordered the mahout to stop there as they were passing, then she got down and discovered the trouble. The Rodiyah had killed the cobra after being bitten, and it lay there beneath him; but the bite was a bad one, just above the knee.

"The Rodiyah asked her for a knife, and getting it, slit open the head of the cobra, taking out the small white porous bone, which, you know, is an antidote to its own poison. Binding this over the wound, by the help of the memsahib's brandy flask, the man recovered. Now, all of this was bad enough; but when the memsahib actually dared to make the Rodiyah a body servant she committed a sin which no native can forgive. In fact, sahib, these people had already packed up their belongings and a good many of the stores, just as the cook and Danga-Dyk did at Nallande, and were going to desert."

"What!" cried the young man in a sudden rage. "Going to desert without even consulting me?"

"Yes, sahib; and it was all I could do to get them to come here with me and make the matter plain. What is to be done, sahib?"

Reynolds was pacing forward and backward deep in thought.

"Go, bring the Rodiyah here," he commanded, at last.

The chief hunter recoiled before him. "What! I bring the Rodiyah here? Why, sahib, I should lose caste instantly if I even so much as looked at the loathsome beast, to say nothing of touching him. If you should even so much as speak to the outcast, sahib, these people would flee from you as if you yourself were an unclean demon like the Rodiyahs themselves. Impossible, sahib."

Reynolds drew a deep breath. "Leave these people here with me, then," he said, "and tell the 'memsahib she wolf' that I wish to see her."

The hunter spoke to the coolies and then left, while the puzzled leader paced up and down the clearing, thinking.

Soon he saw a scattering of the natives as if a mad bull had been let loose in their midst, and on looking up confronted Miss Bagley.

"Well, sir," she murmured, "I have come."

"Thank you," said Reynolds. He dashed the ashes from his cheroot, then faced her.

"You have made more trouble," he said very quietly.

"Indeed!" was the ironical sneer.

"Oh, I realize that what you did was done out of the goodness of your heart."

"A virtue which you evidently have not, seeing that you passed a dying wretch in the highway and never offered him a glass of water, to say nothing of saving his life."

"Listen!" broke in the other, suppressing his anger. "We must not appear to quarrel or there will be more trouble. We must talk this matter over calmly. You do not understand. This man was a Rodiyah—an out-cast, a jungle pariah——"

"Well, what of that? So much greater the credit for having saved him."

"Hear me out!" he interrupted. "I am not criticising your deed, but your taking the man into your service afterward. Let me tell you just what this means—just what has happened, and what is bound to happen if you persist."

Slowly and with great care Reynolds put before the "she wolf" the situation as presented by the chief hunter, forgetting no detail.

"Now, Miss Bagley," he ended, "you must discharge him—send him back to the jungles with some little present of food and clothing——"

"What!" was the exclamation. "Send that sick man into the wilderness again to perish? Never, sir! Why it would be nothing less than murder on my part."

"But it is compulsory. We shall be instantly deserted if you don't, and that is the least calamity that can befall us. To keep him here means to declare the Rodiyah our equal; in other words, that we are unclean in their eyes, and thus liable to be preyed upon and despoiled of everything we have of value."

"Well," said the woman, "I would like to see one of the beasts come near my tent. I should fill him so full of daylight——"

"Tut tut! Have a care. You must not talk like that. Go back to your tent and consult Miss Pyke."

"I have done so. We are of one and the same mind. We wish to keep the Rodiyah. He adores us for having saved his life. He is a magnificent savage, and has a fine, honest face, unlike these effeminate and sneaky scoundrels you have provided us with. He has, moreover, some rude sense of gratitude, and would fight for us to the death if need be. Then, too, he is an excellent shot——"

"But there is to be no fighting, there is to be no trouble! Go back to your tent, I beg of you, and I will quiet the natives. I will tell them that you will send the Rodiyah back to the jungles as soon as he recovers from the cobra wound—probably tomorrow morning——"

"But I won't. He's worth ten coolies, and I simply won't send a sick

man into the forest to perish, and that's the end of it;" and she walked away.

"No," said Reynolds, trembling, beads of sweat rolling down his temples, "that's not the end of it; that's just the beginning."

Reynolds called the hunter and the memsahib's coolies, and made them promises, foremost of which was that the offensive outcast was to be sent into the jungle at daybreak.

"No, it must be done tonight, sahib," said the hunter gloomily, "or the native attendants will not sleep, and trouble is sure to follow."

"But the man is sick—tell them that he is very sick, and would die in the forest."

"They say that it is better so, sahib."

"They must wait till morning—tell them that they must—do you understand?" cried the now angry young man, losing all patience. "It is too late to do anything tonight. Go back to your camp, I tell you. In the morning it will all be arranged. You need not see the man—need not go near him. Enough of this! I am willing to do anything that is within reason, but I will do nothing till daylight. That ends it."

The interpreter turned to the sullen coolies, who had watched this outbreak with a species of wonder mingled with rage. He told them everything the sahib had said, and they dispersed with angry mutterings.

Reynolds went into his tent, and there by the light of a bullseye lantern poured forth his fears and forebodings in a note to Miss Pyke.

All was quiet—ominously so, the calm before the storm. Reynolds kept alert for some hours, wandering about watching the natives; but finally returned to his tent and threw himself into his hammock.

"Bah!" he murmured. "There is no trouble, and there will be none."

Soon—at least so it seemed, though in truth many hours had passed—the light sleeper heard a whispered voice at his tent door.

"Mr. Reynolds!" the voice repeated. "Oh, come quick—quick!"

He sprang to the tent door and saw there a figure in the dense shadows. He could only hear her frightened sobs.

"What's the matter?" he called out. "What has happened?"

"I don't know—I don't know. Miss Bagley is asleep——"

"Well, what of that?"

"You do not understand! She is so soundly asleep that—that I can't wake her. I have been trying for an hour. I don't know, but I—I fear——"

Instinctively he realized the meaning of the news. "Wait!" he whispered. Then he snatched up his ready rifle lit his bullseye lantern, and stole back to the spot where Alice stood.

CHAPTER XIV.—IN THE CAVE TEMPLE DUNGEON.

WERE four men to be taken from a great city and to be transported suddenly to a crater of the moon, even the problems that would confront them there could scarcely be more perplexing than those which hour by hour our four pilgrims of Buddha were forced to face!

The old man was dead--dead with the great catseye upon his heart, with the wonderful hypnotic power which he possessed now impotent and vain. He had left four men in such a predicament as never human beings had known before.

Naked, starved, without a weapon, without a compass, they seemed to have awakened from a long and terrible sleep. The spell of the trance worker was over, for he was dead!

For some hours the comrades gathered their orange robes about them and sat there in the semi twilight, staring into one another's faces! Finally the scientist grouped his way to the mouth of the cave.

Vaguely the doctor stared about him. Here and there bright pencillings of light seemed to stab through the interlacing roof of green. Bewildered before this wonder world of tropical nature, he sat for some time beside the cave door, when suddenly, in a little pool of water no larger than his two hands, a remnant of the storm held in the hollow of a fallen ficus trunk, he caught a glimpse of his own face. And such a face! It looked like that of a fiend!

"My God!" he murmured. "And that is me--poor Tom Biggs!"

His eyes were suddenly arrested by the sight of fresh blood trickling down his thin, naked limbs, and then he saw that he was literally covered with the tiny leeches with which the jungle abounds. These little pests hang by their tails from twigs and branches, and, endowed with five pair of eyes, watch for their passing prey. Fastening themselves upon the flesh, though no larger than a pin at first, they soon fill themselves so full of blood that they actually burst of their own gluttony, and the first that the sufferer knows is the sight of little rivulets of blood and a sense of faintness.

Picking the pests one by one from his body, he crept back into the cave, where, after a little time, he became well enough used to the gloom to see the forms and faces of his comrades, and beyond them the two Veddahs crouching in terror, as if watching their chance to escape. The savages had gathered up their poor belongings, including half a carcass of a panther, and were about to desert the cave.

Biggs became possessed of the idea that these people could tell him how he and his comrades could escape. Slowly and in most friendly fashion the doctor advanced toward the frightened pair, who saw now in the white men no longer docile, half slumbering hypnotic subjects, but men of action and intelligence.

With conciliatory gestures, the doctor stroked the head of the little Veddah babe and took its tiny hand in his own, caressing it. The mother grew calmer, and after a time seemed even to take some pleasure in seeing her child petted by the sahib.

The doctor then turned his attention to the Veddah, taking up his bow and examining it with looks of wonder. The arrow, too, he placed in the giant weapon, but his weak arm was unable to draw it. The Veddah laughed, seated himself, and seizing the bow with his toes, drew the arrow to the full length with ease. The doctor applauded warmly.

Suddenly in the dimness he saw for the first time the half carcass of the

young panther which the Veddah had bound up so as to bear it away with him. The blood upon it was still fresh. Crazy with hunger, poor Biggs bent down and touched his lips to the flesh, finding the first taste of that which he had so craved inexpressibly delicious.

The Veddah looked at him first with wonder, then with a species of pity. For a long time he crouched there, watching the doctor gnawing like a wild beast at the raw flesh. Then, without a word, the savage leaped up, seized his arrows and bow, and was gone.

In what seemed an incredibly short time the Veddah darkened the door of the cave with his presence again. He was groaning under a heavy burden. The doctor was delighted beyond expression to find that the hunter had brought them a deer—a fine young stag with the arrow clean through his heart.

With many gestures of gratitude the doctor thanked the savage as best he could.

"Boys," said the doctor, almost genially, to the others who had been revived by some of the good meat, fresh from the fire, "we are in a predicament, and I see no immediate way out of it. We are somewhere in a tropic jungle, heavens knows where, but presumably still on earth. We might as well get to work to put ourselves into condition. We have been hypnotized and dragged here without our knowledge, and death has come and taken the author of our woes."

A shuddering glance at the prostrate form was the only answer to this sentence.

"The problem, how we can get out of this, is the most important; but before we can possibly settle on a plan, we must provide for the present."

"Well, how is that to be done?" asked one of the others gravely.

"By keeping up our nerve and standing together. This wild creature and his wife will prove a godsend, I am sure. We must make sure of their remaining with us."

"How, pray?"

"Well, we must bribe them if possible——"

"With what?" came the ironical interruption, as the speaker thrust his hands into his imaginary pockets. "I don't believe I could bribe a yellow street cur with a dry bone——"

"I might bribe him with this—whatever it is and wherever I got it," said Brandt, holding up a shrunken hand whereon blazed the wonderful ruby which he had found in the magpie's nest.

The men bent forward, gazing at the precious bauble, turning away with shaking heads.

"If we can't bribe them, we must at least hold the woman here by force. The man will get enough food with his great bow to suffice for all. One of us must stand guard at the door. Now see here. We might just as well face this thing with courage and determination. I will go out and gather some rushes for a couch. The most able of you can come with me and get together some dry wood with which to keep up the fire."

"Rather a come down from a metropolitan club rounder."

"Sudden! My dear fellow, we must have been months getting here. If you could only see yourself you would not doubt me."

"Then certainly our friends have discovered our departure——"

"But not our whereabouts, that's quite evident. Come, none of this depending upon others. We have more than enough to do to keep from starvation and disease till something turns up to save us. Let's quit talking and go to doing. Pyke, if you will give me a hand, we shall give the old man as decent a burial as he deserves."

The doctor approached his comrade and shrank back on looking at him closely. The man's face was the color of raw beef.

"Here's trouble, boys. I believe that Pyke has jungle fever of the worst type. Hurry and get leaves and branches. We will make him a bed, at least! Come; no time to lose!"

The Veddah had crept forward, and was peering into the sick man's face. Then he left the cave, but returned with an armful of green leaves of immense size, and some moss of extraordinary coldness, which he laid upon the sufferer's head. Swathing the fever stricken pilgrim in the leaves, he went out again and returned with some red bark which he proceeded to pound up on the rocks to a powder, mixing it with honey and giving the rude specific to his patient.

The doctor tasted of the bark, but shook his head. "Either my taste has all gone wrong, or else this savage has a new drug for jungle fever. However, it is probably harmless, and I am all at sea——"

"But certainly the jungle was man's first drug store, and ought to be his principal pharmacy still."

"Oh, that's all right," said the scientist. "It's very easy to learn how to write out a prescription; but to go into the forest and fill it out yourself from the millions of varieties of medicinal herbs, roots, barks, and flowers, requires greater skill than mine. Doesn't it only prove how superficial our knowledge is when a successful practitioner of a civilized city must put his patient in the hands of a savage who doesn't look or act or talk with any more intelligence than a chimpanzee, and yet beats your medico at his own game?"

Chatting like liberated prisoners now, they were constructing couches, and finally managed to get the sick man in a position of more comfort than he had yet known.

The wild Veddah was proving a friend indeed. His first care, after getting the medicine for the invalid, was to care for the dead. When the pilgrims proposed carrying the body into the forest, the Veddah made signs indicating that he had a better plan. Finding the hollow trunk of a tree near by, he helped them to slip the bound body into it, in a standing position, and then he sealed all the apertures below. Bringing down from the mountain crag a great mass of honey, the Veddah poured it into the wooden tomb till it was completely full, sealing it again with clay, and thus embalming the dead after the savage manner.

He brought honey, too, for the prisoners to eat, taking the precaution to

bear with him a branch of the gooreonda tree—a wonderful plant that has a smell from which the bees fly as from a sulphur smudge.

The Veddah brought them wild limes, with which he rubbed their limbs, and this made them proof against the leeches. He also wove them clothes of strips of palm, and sandals of the same. Cocoanuts, mangoes and bread fruit he brought them in abundance ; and whenever he went out on a chase, rarely returned without a panther, deer, or some other game.

For several days this raven of the wilderness fed the four representatives of civilization. He clothed them, he brought them flesh of beast and fowl, eggs from high nests, honey from the caves, herbs and barks for medicine, and, in short, was their sole support.

One morning, however, this was all doomed to a change. The trumpeting of a herd of wild elephants through the forest proved too much for the Veddah's discretion. He grew restive. Here was meat enough in one prize to suffice for months. He could strip the flesh from an elephant's flanks and store it away in the great beehives, where the honey would preserve and add to it even greater sweetness. With several arrows and his trusty eight foot bow, the Veddah ventured forth to conquest.

The pilgrims watched him from afar, not without misgiving. The manner of the savage in taking an elephant is to climb a tree and drive arrow after arrow, dipped in smartweed sap, into the beast's trunk and hind feet. As these parts are very tender, and the pain is excruciating, the huge beast soon tires himself out, and finally succumbs to exhaustion.

The roaring elephants sounded nearer and nearer. It seemed that there must be a hundred of them, and their trumpeting made the jungle tremble and the very earth quake with the terrific echoes.

From the door of their cavern two of the pilgrims watched the sport, ready to drop into their shelter at any moment.

The Veddah had climbed into the crown of a tailpot palm fifty feet high and fully two feet through the trunk. He awaited the elephants with the bow clenched between his toes, the long arrow drawn full length. The elephant in front was enormous.

On they came, trumpeting loudly. Then was heard the keen twang of the bow and the phut of the arrow as it buried itself half way in the elephant's shoulder.

He stopped short, his trunk in the air. He did not seem to know what had happened to him. Then the stinging sap with which the arrow was wiped began to burn him like caustic, and he set up a furious bellowing, dropping back clean upon his haunches.

Twang ! went the bow and phut ! drove the arrow into his trunk, pinioning it to his back for the instant ; and then the flashing eyes caught a glimpse of the author of all his troubles swaying there high above him.

There was something awfully human about that furious anger—that determination to get at his tormentor, come what would ! The herd now swerved to the left when they heard the shrill trumpeting of their leader, and were soon lost to sight and sound in the wilderness. But the leader stayed. He had revenge on hand.

His trunk lashed about that mammoth palm. Bracing himself, he tugged, wrestled, and tore away at the tree till its branches, sweeping around, marked a twenty foot circle. The Veddah was clinging with all his might and shooting down arrow after arrow into the enraged elephant's shoulder and vitals.

Never was there such a fierce struggle. The great tree was fast loosening from the earth. Ever and anon the roots could be heard snapping underground. The pilgrims watched the mighty duel with bated breath.

The Veddah had exhausted his ammunition, had thrown down his bow, and now simply coiled himself about that tree like a serpent, clinging for dear life.

The end soon came—sooner than the watchers really expected. With one mighty pull the great tree went down before the mighty beast! There was a tremendous crash, and the Veddah lay perfectly still.

For a moment, covered as he was with flying *débris*, blinded and stung to madness with the pain of the blistering arrows, the elephant seemed perfectly dazed. Then, as if recovering, with a final cry of triumph, he dashed along the whole length of the seventy foot palm, charging the prostrate and unconscious offender, driving his foam flecked tusks clean through him, keeling over as he did so, and falling dead upon the author of his sufferings.

"Boys," said the doctor, "that is the last straw. What are we to do now to avert certain starvation—certain death. Our good Samaritan—our one prop, our one salvation in the jungle—is gone. God help us!"

CHAPTER XV.—THE GREAT SPIDER.

JOHN REYNOLDS had more than a vague notion of what waited for him at the camp of the memsahibs. He knew the native mind with its subtle spirit of revenge. At last they reached the tent. All was quiet there—the solemn silence of the churchyard. Before the door of the memsahib's tent there stood a tall, dark figure, finely proportioned, straight and even military of carriage. When Reynolds saw that strong face and manly bearing, he could scarcely withhold an expression of delighted surprise. Surely in the gleams of the lantern this jungle warder looked every inch the king and superior of the native coolies and hunters who abhorred him so.

They entered the tent. The poor woman lay upon an improvised rush couch. The broad, masculine bosom rose and fell with faint flutterings, but the face spoke all. She was doomed.

"Leave me alone with her—just a moment, please," Reynolds said.

Without a word, Alice left the couch, gliding into the clearer air and pacing restless up and down.

The rays of the lantern fell upon the face. Suddenly Reynolds noticed some tiny vivid green spots, like pin pricks, over the thin, set lips.

"The scolopendra!" he exclaimed. "The deadly scolopendra!"

He had heard that the natives who wished to become avenged on their enemies sometimes contrived to scatter the aromatic seeds of the goraka apple in the doomed one's bed. That pungent odor soon attracts the mam-

moth jungle spider which creeps upon the sleeping victim, infusing into the tiny wound a strange and deadly opiate which puts the victim to sleep. Never was human being stung by the scolopendra ever known to survive it.

The watcher drew down the coverlet from the still faintly fluttering bosom. Yes, there were the telltale seeds—tiny discs of dusty yellow.

He paused. What was that quivering stir near the foot of the couch—that stealthy movement beneath the coverlet? Turning the rays from the lantern upon the spot, he distinctly saw a moving shape. Now the hideous thing had reached the very edge of the couch, and in another instant it would fall upon the ground, even where he was kneeling.

With a shudder at this prospect, Reynolds snatched his hunting knife from his belt, poising it above the gliding shape, his hand no longer quivering. With the first gleam of the yellow and hairy antennæ peeping from under the cover, down came the long blade. Clean to the hilt was the dagger driven into the rush couch, transfixing the terrible spider.

Reynolds drew back. There was a struggle under the coverlet, then all was still. Cautiously he lifted the edge. It was a mammoth jungle spider, no less than a foot long, with a glistening armor of purple, furious eyes, and claw legs working like demons struggling to be free. The sight was hideous, and the watcher let fall the coverlet, turning away.

"Alice must not see this," he murmured.

A sudden commotion at the door of the tent made him look up.

"Mr. Reynolds!" came the excited call from beyond. "Come quick!"

Instantly he passed through the door of the tent, and stood gazing upon a curious and threatening scene. The tall and powerful Rodiyah stood defying a semicircle of the natives who bore torches and arms, flourishing a gnarled and murderous cudgel.

There was a silence the instant that Reynolds was seen to burst from the tent so unexpectedly, and the natives fell back. It was plain that they had come there bent on mischief, believing him elsewhere.

"What are you here for?" he cried. "What do you want?"

The coolies drew together and then made way for the chief hunter, who had suddenly come among them. "Sahib," he said, with a glance at the Rodiyah, "the unclean beast has scattered the seeds of the goraka apple in the memsahib's tent. They will draw the great jungle spider from the forest, and the memsahib will be stung. It is sure death, sahib."

"Is that what they came to tell me?" said Reynolds.

"So they say, sahib; they came to warn the memsahib——"

"With torches and arms?"

"They feared trouble with the Rodiyah, sahib, so they came prepared."

Reynolds took a step forward. He could see the whites of the hunter's eyes. "How did they know that the seeds of the goraka apple are there?" he asked. "Have they been in the memsahib's tent?"

"No, sahib. They found the apples from which the seeds were taken——"

An angry voice silenced him. "You tell them that they are lying—all of them. Tell them that if the memsahib dies, and I find out which one did

this thing, I shall put a bullet through him without ceremony. Tell them that—every word ! ”

The hunter turned to his fellows, speaking in a low, ominous tone.

Meanwhile Alice was edging closer till she brushed against her protector and friend. Reynolds turned and saw her.

“ What does all this mean ? ” she asked. “ What has happened ? ”

Suddenly the crowd of natives melted away. The chief hunter stood alone, and with a look of extreme hesitation. Reynolds leaped forward to him.

“ You stand faithful to me,” he said, “ and I will double your pay. The pay of every man that deserts me shall be given to those who remain loyal. Do you understand ? Let them do as they please. Go to my tent yonder, and protect Winah and my possessions there. Shoot the first man that lays hands upon any of my belongings. Stand by me and I will stand by you. Do you understand ? ”

The hunter nodded significantly, clutched his rifle, and started down the declivity. He arrived at the tent just in time. Two of the mutineers were holding down the servant, while others were trying to break into the heavy chests containing the ammunition and supplies, and ripping open the hampers. A few shots scattered them easily.

Reynolds rejoined Alice at the tent door. “ There is trouble afoot,” he said. “ Whatever happens, we must hold out together. I can trust the hunters and Winah, and even the mahouts, for they are too much attached to their elephants to leave them. As for the Rodiyah——”

“ He saved my life,” was the quick interruption. “ Why, they had surrounded me here—not twenty feet away. If the Rodiyah had not come to my rescue, I don’t know what would have happened. Oh, this is awful. What is to be done ? ”

“ Nothing for the present but keep cool and not show the least concern, say nothing of fear. These miserable cowards will soon come to their senses. If they don’t——”

He paused, for he saw the breathless figure of his man servant approaching.

“ What now, Winah ? ”

“ Sahib, the hunter just came in time. They had me bound, and would have taken everything. As it is, they have fled to the jungle, and without food, arms, anything, sahib. They have made direct to the hill country——”

“ Guilty ! ” muttered Reynolds bitterly. “ They are murderers—every one of them.”

The speaker felt a sudden clutch upon his arm. “ Murderers ? ” echoed his trembling companion. “ Do you refer to Bagley ? Oh, you cannot. What has happened to her ? Could you not wake her ? ”

“ No,” said Reynolds, with a gasp.

“ But we must try.”

“ My dear friend,” he said solemnly, “ there is no use in keeping the truth from you. Neither you, nor I, nor any other human power can wake her. She is——”

"Not dead, Mr. Reynolds? Don't say that—don't——"

"You must be brave!" Then, as the stricken girl turned to slip into the tent again, as if she must see to be convinced, Reynolds seized her.

"Stay!" he said appealingly, but with command in his voice. "You can do nothing—nothing under heaven. It will only unnerve you—make you incapable of doing your duty to yourself, to him you have come to rescue, and to me. Besides, the natives must not know their dastardly work has been a success. You see they hated her, and in order to tempt the deadly spider into the tent, that it might sting her to death, they sprinkled the seed of a pungent jungle apple on her couch. It is the only thing that will tempt the scolopendra from his lair in the low forest undergrowth——"

"Her couch?" Alice exclaimed. "Why, that was not hers; it was mine!"

Reynolds started violently. "I don't understand," he said.

"Listen! It happened this way. Her own bed broke under her as she fell suddenly upon it, and as I had slept well while she watched over me during the afternoon siesta, I proposed that she take my bed while I keep watch for a few hours at least. I knew that an hour in my couch would give her more rest than a night in her own. After some persuasion she yielded, then thanking me, crept in and was soon fast asleep.

"About an hour later I noticed a peculiar sound in her breathing. It was no longer deep and rest giving, but quick and fainter. Alarmed, I went to her. The change that had come over her countenance gave me such a shock that I wonder I had the courage to try to rouse her. It was all without avail, however. Then, thoroughly frightened, I crept out into the darkness and groped my way to your tent. And now," she sobbed, "now you will not even let me go back to see her——"

"I repeat, Miss Alice, the sight would only unfit you for your duty to the living. Hard as the truth may be, we must nevertheless accept what we cannot help. Stay here and watch. I will stay with you now, come what will!"

Back into the tent the man crept. On reaching the couch he found matters precisely as he had expected. The poor, querulous, arrogant but ever faithful woman was gone, and the poison had made all that remained of her quite unrecognizable.

With a sudden resolve, Reynolds raised the bottom of the tent and dragged the rush couch and its silent occupant stealthily into the jungle. There he constructed a pyre of such dried wood as he could find, returning to camp for oil and such inflammable matter at hand as would make speedy work. Softly he drew the couch upon the pyre and applied the torch. Then he sped back, rejoined the watcher with her Rodiyah guard, and sat down close to her side in silence.

Alice had been weeping, with her head bent low. Suddenly she raised her eyes, for among the trees she saw a red, flickering glow.

"What is that?" she asked. "It looks like fire."

"It is fire," was the answer. "It is a funeral pyre," he added, after a short interval.

"Ah," she said, "some midnight rite of the natives in the jungle probably. How weird it looks, and quite near, too!"

Reynolds was silent.

"I almost feel as if I did not care what happened," she said, after a pause. "It would find me ready—even the worst."

"You must not say that," Reynolds said solemnly. "We have had disasters, we shall have more; but in the end we shall be victorious. Can you trust me?"

"I can and I will!" was the answer, full of hope and renewed strength. "And I shall work with you to the end, whithersoever you lead. I give you my promise. Do you believe me?"

"Ah, how could I doubt?" was the grave reply. "Enough! Go into your tent now and take your rest till daybreak. We have problems enough with the coming of the dawn. Go, please. I shall watch here where I can hear your every whisper. Fear nothing, for no harm shall come to you."

Reynolds had risen, but she did not stir. "I can't," she whispered, at last. "I could never close my eyes there—there in the presence of the dead—of her who gave up her life and so spared my own——"

But he interrupted her. "See," he said, "how the flickering lights of the fire are dying along the palm tops yonder!"

"What of them?" she asked.

"Now look!" he added, turning quickly and swinging wide the door of the tent, turning the lantern's rays upon the spot where the couch stood.

A swift glance and then a soft exclamation. "Gone!" she murmured. "But where?"

He pointed to the faint gleams along the tree tops, and Alice understood instantly. She bowed her head, and passing into the tent and sinking upon the couch at hand, rested her head upon her arms, shaken with sobs.

Reynolds stood still. He would have given his life at that moment to help her, but the tragedy of the hour was too near.

"Sleep!" he whispered, as he closed and laced the tent door. Then he sank among the moss grown rocks a few feet away, the rifle across his knees, patient and wide eyed in faithful watch till the break of dawn of a new day, wondering what it might bring forth.

CHAPTER XVI.—SAVAGES BY COMPULSION.

"THERE is no use wailing over the matter," said Dr. Biggs, as he held a council of emergency after the proper rites over the unfortunate Veddah who had lost his life in a brave effort to secure food enough for the party.

"We are prisoners here by reason of our weaknesses."

"Well, what's to be done?" said Hamilton. "Is there any use striking out north, east, south, or west, and taking our chances of finding something?"

"I fear that something would find us first," said Biggs dryly. "Besides, there's our comrade Pyke on his back with fever. I don't know much about doctoring in the crude but effective style of our late comrade; but I

do know that to move a patient in the height of his delirium means certain death."

"Death, death, death!" repeated Brandt. "Say, I wish you chaps would stop ending every sentence with death. It gets oppressively monotonous."

"Well," said the doctor dryly, "it looks as if that were the end of our sentence, whoever the judge that passed it on us. We might just as well get used to the thought; and if we have to face the reality, it won't seem so hard."

"If we do!" cried Hamilton. "Just as if you could open your eyes and look anywhere without facing it now. But here; these miserable leeches are drawing to fill in a manner not the least entertaining. I meant to have sent our departed friend out to hunt more wild limes this morning. We haven't one, and without them the leeches mean torture."

"And how is the stock of honey?"

"And meat——"

"And water—and plantains, and—and—say, boys, I am just beginning to realize what a godsend that poor forlorn savage was, now that we have lost him. We made the mistake of our lives when we didn't take some lessons in gathering food instead of depending on him."

"Yes! Now a savage in that predicament would have put himself right in schooling, wouldn't he?" groaned the doctor. "Here we are high and dry like so many Crusoes. Hamilton, here, can paint like Michelangelo, and yet he doesn't know where the next meal is coming from."

"Oh, that's nothing new. I have had that experience many a time right in the heart of dear old New York."

"But you could always work a free lunch there."

"So we can here. It seems to me that our late friend, the savage, might have given a Park Row bum points on going out and storing away something for nothing. As for yourself, Doc, you are about the most helpless of the lot."

"But say, what's to be done with that elephant, eh?" asked Hamilton.

"That's so; we've got an elephant on our hands, haven't we?" murmured the doctor, recalling the incident of the hour.

"Several of them," said Brandt. "I think I'll go out and see if I can't cut him up."

"Hello! what's that?" exclaimed the doctor. "Why, the poor little wild woman and her baby are yonder still. By Jove! I have clean forgotten her. She must be expecting her husband back——"

He paused, for there was something tragic in that thought.

"Better go over and tell her," said Brandt sympathetically.

The doctor started back into the depths of the cavern, but soon came back. "That's just a little too difficult for my dialect of gesture, I fear. I wonder what we can do with her now? There is no use holding her prisoner any longer."

"Perhaps she knows as much and more than her husband, if we but give her the chance."

"Yes, and she certainly knows more than four New Yorkers about this life, if she knows anything."

"I have it," broke in the doctor. "One of you chaps go out to the place of the tragedy and get the poor fellow's bow and arrows. His wife will recognize them, and it will be easy after that to explain things."

"Good idea," said Hamilton. "I'll go."

"Let me," said Brandt. "I know the exact spot where they were laid. In the mean time, just fix poor Pyke a little more comfortably. He acts as if he were uneasy. You will find water in that gourd."

With a wave of the hand the young writer sped from the cave, and started bravely out toward the clearing where the mammoth elephant lay.

The delirious invalid was made as comfortable as possible. Fresh mango leaves were laid over his burning bosom, and the jungle ice plant matted about his head.

"Pyke is nearing the crisis," said the doctor, "if I am any judge. If he succeeds in fighting along for two or three days, I am sure that there will be a turn in his favor. It's a bitter struggle, though."

"I am convinced that we are right slap up against a stone wall," continued Biggs. "I know what I am going to do right now. I am going to provide myself with some weapon, if nothing more than a stick with a stone bound to the end of it. Then I am going out and kill something, or get killed and have done with it."

"Why so rash, dear boy?" drawled the painter. "You say that we've got to take the bitter pill sooner or later, any way——"

"But there are ways and ways of taking pills. I saw a man die of starvation once, and if ever I prayed for the God sent privilege of putting a dying man, for whom there was no earthly hope, out of his misery, I did then. I watched through a whole night with him. It was tetanus of the worst type. Well, he died at daybreak, and I went away just ten pounds lighter for my watch. As for starvation here, it would be long and lingering torture, without even the comforting offices of a bulldog revolver at hand to call a halt on nature's ordeal of the rack——"

"What's that?" cried Hamilton, starting. "I thought I heard a cry——"

"Where? What was it?" The doctor had started up alarmed.

"I don't know," was the breathless answer, as Hamilton sprang toward the cavern mouth, "but it sounded something like Brandt's voice. Do you know, he has been gone a very long time for such an errand. I think I'll just climb out and call out to him—hark! Didn't you hear that? It was Brandt's voice, just as sure as I live——"

The sentence was cut short, for the excited man had leaped up into the cavern's entrance, peering into the jungle, and waiting for a repetition of the sound. Then he made a hollow of his hands, crying shrill and quick, "Brandt! Brandt! Where are you?"

For the instant there was no reply. Then high up—up so far above them that it seemed as if the voice fell from the clouds themselves, there came a screaming wail: "Help, help! Oh! Oh!"

As the terrible echoes reverberated through the jungle depths, Hamilton's heart stood still. He had leaped into the clearing, and stood there trying to penetrate the dome of verdure above with his rolling eyes, his hands clutching the broad limbs at his side. Then he turned about, shrieking pitifully, "Doc, Doc! For God's sake, come—quick!"

An instant's pause, and then the strong form of the scientist was seen bursting from the cavern's mouth, his face very pale. "What is it?" he called out, glaring about, not yet seeing the comrade who had summoned him. "What has happened?"

"I don't know—I can't tell," was the agonized reply of the man who was peering still into the heavens. "I fear something has happened to poor Brandt—something awful——"

He paused, for again high above him, now still farther away, as if the sound had burst through miles of the clear tropic ether over the jungle, far to the northward, he caught the wild cry, "Ho, boys! Help, help! Oh—oh—oh!"

Nothing in all their experience terrified them as did that far wail of their comrade whom they could not even see.

Suddenly there was an exclamation of surprise—of enlightenment. The scientist had picked up a huge purple feather. It was at least three feet long. Lying there across the flanks of the dead elephant, it told the tale plainer than words.

"A diornis!" he cried. "Upon my soul, this is a feather of the great carrion bird of prey, the diornis, or Ceylon moa." Then after a pause, he added with a sob, "God help poor Brandt! We shall never see him again—never, never!"

CHAPTER XVII.—A MIDAIR ENCOUNTER.

AND this is what happened.

From the mouth of the cavern Brandt had made his way along with some caution, vaguely fearing that the dead elephant might attract the jungle beasts, who can scent blood for miles. Besides, elephants have the serpents' trick of returning to avenge the slaughter of their mates now and then, and it was expedient for an unarmed man to keep a close lookout.

Making his way toward the carcass of the elephant, suddenly a shadow came over him.

At first he thought it was one of those dense black clouds which seem to burst up from nowhere in the jungle and disappear as they come. But no water fell, and the shadow was no more than upon him when it was gone again. Much mystified, he stood there in the clearing with his eyes lifted, when again the swift shadow fell upon him, this time darker, deeper, and he thought he heard a sort of whirring sound, as of a whole flock of wild geese through the sky above.

The third time that the darkness came, he saw and knew the truth. It was some enormous bird of the jungle, attracted there by the sight of the carcass.

The bird was sinking gradually, with head bent down so far beneath the gray mottled breast that the head and neck resembled the half length of a serpent, with distended jaws, watching for an opportunity to attack. Its body, which was enormous for so small a head and neck, was rather ungainly of shape, and the yellowish legs and great talons were folded up closely. The wings were not less than fifty feet from tip to tip.

Perfectly motionless, Brandt lay there half concealed. But when the great bird descended, instinctively he moved to hide.

The bird must have heard the quick stir, for she flew straight upward twenty feet, dropping her head and peering down at the object of her sudden alarm. For the instant she seemed to be studying what manner of bird or beast she had encountered there; then she drove her massive wing into the underbrush where the man lay.

Brandt caught only the edge of the blow, but it stunned him. He uttered a cry, crept aside half unconscious, and then suddenly felt talons seize him, one closing about the right leg, the other upon the shoulder. With a shriek of agony he turned and tried to fight himself loose; but the grip only tightened as up, up, through the clearing, the monster wings fanning the air into a tempest, he felt himself carried off without the slightest power to help himself.

When the bird reached a thousand feet in midair, she prepared to drop Brandt. Seeing that to fall meant certain death, he turned and seized one of the bird's mammoth legs with the grip of death. The bird fluttered about in strange alarm for a time, even dropping its head so that it could get a better view of its strange adversary beneath, when with the other hand the man seized her about the neck with such a choking wrench that the bird lost her balance, her wings sagged, and down both captor and prisoner fell fully five hundred feet ere the head was released and the equilibrium regained.

Seizing the other leg now, for the bird was so thoroughly frightened that the talons hung limp, Brandt set up a wild cry to his comrades, and clinging for life, felt himself borne along on a slight incline toward the north. It was these two shrieks which the men far below had heard.

The bird was becoming weak. She had taken up a weight of one hundred and forty pounds, borne it aloft a thousand feet, fought with it there in midair, taken a tumble of half the distance back to earth during the conflict, and was now the unwilling bearer of this strange burden over the jungle. She was evidently making for shelter, probably her nest.

Never was Brandt's mind so clear, never his arm so strong. He dared not look down. He simply clung there till, thank heaven, he saw looming up before them a great crag. It seemed to burst out of the sky, and the great bird lessened its speed.

Sinking now with a fluttering motion, the great burden bearer drew so close at last that Brandt could see his destination. It was a wedge shaped, shallow cavern, in front of which, in the center of a great ledge, was the nest, some twenty feet in diameter, in which there lay half a dozen greenish gray eggs, each at least three feet from end to end.

When Brandt saw safety some feet below him, he let go, landing beside

the nest. Then he crawled back on all fours into the cavern, and panting sank into a half swoon.

The bird set up a wild screaming, and perching on the extreme edge of the ledge, peered below in the direction in which she thought her passenger had fallen.

With his nerves all upset, after an ordeal such as never man experienced before, Brandt lay as if dead, through his half closed lids watching the movements of the bird on her nest, which she had evidently left but a few moments before in search of food. The mouth of the cavern thus darkened by the great body, he finally sank into a dull slumber.

When the sleeper awoke it was already night. The bird was still upon her nest, and the man crept closer under the warm wings, for he was shaking with the cold. The breaking of day was magnificent. The bird left early, and Brandt crept about the place to get his bearings.

For a thousand feet there was not a foothold below him. The ledge was perhaps fifty feet long, with twenty feet width in the clearing, and twelve in the shadow of the cavern. Far to the west, along the horizon could be seen the sea—a silver line. Far to the east, with the lifting of the clouds and the coming of clearer light, there was a cluster of minarets and domes with white arches.

Twice during the day the great bird left her nest, and then the captive crept from his hiding out upon the ledge and studied the world and his chances of escape. With the coming of the feathered jailer Brandt would creep back into his cavern again. During the day there were two slight showers and he licked up the fresh drops from the tiny pools in the hollows of the rock ere the sun could dry them away.

Toward the close of day, during the absence of the great bird, the fighting of a couple of magpies below the main ledge at some distance to the westward, interested the captive enough to induce him to kneel down and crane his neck over the edge of the rock. He caught a glimpse of the magpie's nest below him. It was lined with glittering things. The fact did not make much impression upon the prisoner for some time.

It was while lying crouched up by the nest of the great bird, and completely sheltered by her wings through the long night, trying to argue down the pangs of hunger that oppressed him, that the possibility occurred to him of making use of the many brilliant trinkets with which the magpie's nest was filled. He conceived the idea of constructing a mirror of sufficient brilliancy to attract the first human being who might pass within range.

With the first coming of day there was a strange stir in the great nest. Then in the interior of one of the great eggs there was heard a dull pecking sound, at first faint and irregular. The mother bird began to show great impatience and trepidation till suddenly one of the shells burst open with the report of a pistol, and a head protruded.

The sun was up by the time that the hatching was over, and the mother had pushed the shells from her nest, many of them falling over the ledge into the jungles below, but still more remaining about in confusion. Once more she sat contented upon her brooding place, and there gathered the fuzzy

feathered offspring beneath her. Then when the sun was high, she arose with many clucking admonishments to her children, and made off with a great whir of triumph in search of food.

Brandt crawled from his hiding and lost no time in storing away three or four of the egg shells. They were amazingly heavy, and appeared strong enough to resist the blow of a hammer. He saw in them a convenience in catching water with the oft recurrent rains. Then having inspected the brood to his satisfaction, he turned his attention to gaining possession of the magpie's nest. By plastering the concave interior of one of those shell hemispheres with the glittering bits, he would have a powerful heliograph that could signal for miles.

It would have been a perilous journey for a strong man in health, but for one weakened by hunger and appalling privations, it was miraculous that he ever reached the lower ledge at all. But soon making himself possessor of the brilliant baubles, which looked as if they had been accumulated there for a hundred years, he made the more difficult climb back to the upper ledge again.

It was in the midst of this that he was suddenly attacked from behind by the magpie whose nest he had robbed. There on the brink of the rock, with his toes dug into the insecure crevices and only one hand free to fight the bird, he made the struggle of his life under most tremendous odds.

Again and again the infuriate magpie flew full at her adversary's eyes, each time baffled and repulsed, but ever eluding the man's quick grasp. Again and again came the onslaught, till finally with one unguarded move, the bird felt the clutch of the man about its neck, and back upon the lower ledge, scarcely two feet wide, the panting victor struggled, still clutching the fluttering magpie till the last faint quiver. Then as if in justification of his struggle, with a piece of pointed glass from the magpie's own nest, Brandt cut an artery under the fighting bird's wing, and pressing his dry lips to the quivering flesh, sucked the carcass of every drop of blood.

Brandt had not time to regain the upper ledge before the great mother bird was seen afar over the distant valley. It was circling up and up, a serpent in her bill and a baby mountain goat dead in the grip of her talons.

Down the pilgrim dropped and clung to the ledge perfectly motionless as the feathered monster, having reached the plane of its nest, swooped toward him. He knew that the slightest sound or move would be the signal for an attack, and one stroke of the giant wing would dash him a full thousand feet into the jungles below.

On and on the great wings with stately motion carried the mighty body, nearer, ever nearer, till the writhings of a ten foot snake in her bill were visible. Then lower and lower the mother sank upon her nest. She began the preparation of her children's first meal.

For a long time Brandt listened. Then when all was still, he began to pick out the brightest bits of glass from the magpie's heap, laying them along the rock, planing his life saving heliograph.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THE GREAT BUDDHA CATSEYE.*

BY CHARLES EDWARD BARNES.

A strange story of adventure in Ceylon—What took four New York club men into the jungle—
Thrilling experiences of unarmed travelers with the denizens of the tropical forests.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

JUST as they are finishing a dinner at the Lion d'Or Café, five New York club men form the acquaintance of an odd character from the east, who suddenly walks into the restaurant. In return for their invitation to dine at their expense, he shows them a wonderful gem—a cats-eye from Ceylon—which, he assures them, will give whosoever looks therein "another soul, another body, another mind."

At first the young men scoff at the idea of such a thing, but finally Hamilton, the painter, submits himself to the test. As he gazes into the stone, a strange and shocking change comes over him, and presently he rises, tells them, "Look for yourselves, comrades," and walks out of the place.

All are now eager to see what has caused this mysterious transformation, and three others go through exactly the same experience—Biggs, Pyke, and Brandt—until only Reynolds is left, and when his especially strong temperament proves to be unassailable by the hypnotic influences, he denounces the old man as a charlatan, and hurries out after his friends. But they have mysteriously disappeared. However, Reynolds leaves no stone unturned to learn what has become of them, and finally hears that four men, possibly Americans, are about to undertake a pilgrimage to the sacred bo tree through the jungles of Ceylon. He determines to go to their rescue, and finds that Pyke's sister has made the same resolution. After striving in vain to dissuade her, he promises to give her all the aid possible, and they form a joint expedition.

Meantime, the four other New Yorkers, attired in the simple habiliments of Brahmanas, and without any weapons, start under the guardianship of the patriarch on their perilous journey through the wilderness.

After various thrilling adventures, they are overtaken by a terrific storm, which makes the forest impassable for a time. They seek refuge in a cave, where they encounter a Veddah man and his mate, through whom they obtain food. The advent of a panther into their retreat results in the death of the patriarch and the release of the four New Yorkers from the spell of hypnotism which has brought them on this strange quest. Their awakening leaves them astounded with horror at the situation in which they find themselves.

They are soon worse off than before, for an elephant kills the Veddah man, thus cutting off their supplies. While trying to forage for themselves, Brandt is seized by an enormous bird and carried off to a lofty crag, whence it is impossible to escape. He possesses himself of some bright baubles from a magpie's nest, and tries to make out of them a heliograph by means of which to attract his friends' attention.

CHAPTER XVIII.—"CASTING A SPELL."

THE day following, the mysterious assassination of Miss Bagley was a busy one indeed for the jungle searchers.

Death by violence had followed mutiny, and the flight of the guilty ones had followed murder. The camp was not half manned, and Reynolds knew the end was not yet.

*This story began in the November issue of THE ARGOSY. The three back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 30 cents.

As soon as the gray of dawn gave way to the faint light which announces the dawn, John Reynolds rose from his place outside the memsahib's tent and ordered a little breakfast. Hastily swallowing this, and feeling revived in spirits and health, he made a tour of the encampment.

Within an hour he returned to the memsahib's tent ; and with the first stir within approached the door and called : " Miss Pyke, are you up ? "

" Oh, long ago," was the answer. And then the wing of the tent was thrown wide, and Alice came forth, her face almost radiant after the refreshing sleep and the invigorating bath.

Reynolds was so amazed at the change from the forlorn and haggard eyed girl of the night before that he flushed with admiration which he dared not show.

Alice saw that look, and it troubled her for the instant. It was no time, no place for love ; and while she would not have feared nor shrank from his anger, she felt uneasy.

" Come—breakfast ! " he said.

Alice could have thanked him, but she only hurried on to the little summer house which the natives had constructed of branches. In it there was an improvised punka swinging. This was to be used for a dining place. Reynolds had seen to the breakfast himself, even turning with his own hands an omelet of pheasant eggs, a rare luxury requiring the nicest care in preparation. He made the coffee, and cut the bacon into little dominos. Altogether it was a breakfast fit for a queen.

Alice had quite finished when he approached the little house, covered still with diamond dew that glistened gloriously in the early light. No fairer picture could have greeted his eye than that lovely girl, there in the midst of the jungle.

" Won't you come in and have some breakfast ? " said Alice to the man who was approaching with uncovered head, for the first time realizing the curious situation in which they found themselves, but knowing herself its full mistress.

" It is simply delicious—everything ! Your cook certainly excels mine, and I am almost glad that she has run away. My cook, I mean. This omelet is a poem ; and these dainty bits, with such coffee as I never drank before——"

A wave of the hand interrupted her.

" We have matters of importance," broke in Reynolds. " I am glad to see that you have regained your courage, and I hope you will not lose it again. It is not every one who can throw off grief and loneliness by sheer force of will," he ended, and his tone meant much.

Alice was contemplating the depths of her coffee cup.

" I am an optimist by nature, that's all," she replied carelessly.

" Optimism is heroism in such crises as these," he answered. " We have a hard march before us, and under difficult conditions. But we shall succeed—oh, never fear as to that ! " he added earnestly.

" I feel it, I know it," she answered seriously, looking at him.

" We have barely enough men for one camp. But so much the better.

We can leave two of the elephants behind, and get rid of a good deal of the luggage."

"I am willing to do with less," said Alice instantly.

"We shall be compelled to depend more on jungle food; but as I am a good shot myself, and have two hunters whom I believe I can trust, I feel that everything will go on as smoothly as could be expected after such troubles as ours."

"How do the natives feel this morning?" she asked suddenly.

"Much relieved. They certainly expected an attack on the part of the mutineers last night, for they know that the rebels are without food or arms in the wilderness. But the expected charge on the camp did not come, so the faithful are in singing mood, you see; or rather, as you can hear."

"If that is singing!" she replied, smiling. "I can't tell when a native is singing, wailing, swearing, or saying his prayers. They all sound alike. But do you think the rebels will dare make an attack?"

"Well, no!" he said, with some hesitation. "And yet they dare not return to the south for fear of being put into jail by the consul for mutiny. They have all signed the sacred bond and taken the temple oath to stand by me to the end. They dare not show themselves to their friends after that until we are safely back in civilization. What I do fear from them, however——"

"Well, what?" she asked impatiently, as he paused.

"That the rascals will come by night to the edge of the encampment and try exhorting the faithful to mutiny; perhaps bringing a devil priest to put a spell upon them."

The eyes of the listener opened wide. "What on earth does that mean?" she asked.

"It means something which you, an intelligent woman, having reason and sense, will think the most arrant folly, will probably laugh at! But it is a something which to the savage Cinghalese and Tamils means more than life and death. Oh, there is no use 'kicking against the pricks.' The jungle child is a curious person, nine parts superstition and one part passion, with reason thrown in somewhere the size of a mustard seed.

"Their devil priests are all in all to them, greater than even Buddha. Witness the other night when Miss Bagley got into a mess by trying to stop the devil dancers who were chanting, wearing frightful masks, and waving flaming torches about the deathbed of a young girl. There were several of the family present who were professing Christians, who had been educated at Jaffna or some other mission. They find Christianity good enough in prosperity; but the moment a person is sick they send for the priest or clergyman. Of course he can do nothing.

"Then they summon the native and foreign doctors, and they can do nothing. As a last expedient, what do they do? They revert to superstition, the savage rites which their ancestors have practised here in the jungle for five thousand years; and this because, away down in the souls of those who have received a surface gloss of civilization, the savage lies dormant, to come forth at last.

"Suppose that child had revived the other night, had been restored to health! Do you suppose that any amount of talk would have convinced those people of the superiority of the Christian religion over the demon dancer?"

"But what has that to do with 'putting a spell' on the servants who have remained with us?"

"It means this. If a native has an enemy, he does not go to him and have it 'out with him' in Western style, either with the jaw, with pistols, or a club. He has an expedient which is handier and more effective. He goes to a devil priest, makes him an offering, names his man, and with some hokus pokus the priest pretends to send an invisible devil to haunt and harass and even to bring about the death of that enemy."

"What!" she exclaimed in wonder. "And these poor things actually believe that arrant nonsense?"

"Believe it!" Reynolds exclaimed. "Why, bless your soul, the written and unwritten annals and legends of the Cinghalese are filled to overflowing with instances where 'putting a spell on an enemy' has resulted in the latter's death!"

"For instance, let a tiger kill a man, and instantly a devil priest comes forward to confess that he was hired to send a demon in the shape of a tiger after that man. This makes advertising for the priest and insures good business. As the Cinghalese do not believe in killing, but are willing enough to profit by murder by others, the priest—who ought to be strung up to a tree for such lying—simply goes free and picks up a fat living for 'putting a spell!' Do you understand it now?"

"I can't say I do," confessed the girl, after some thought. "I am beginning to think that these people are not so simple minded as their faces and chattering apishness would lead one to believe."

"I am glad you are, for it will put you on your guard. Remember, that although you are apparently in the midst of peace and plenty, you are nevertheless virtually in an enemy's country. Man, beast, reptile, plant, insect; all are leagued against you, and for no reason whatever save that you are of another race. Here we are still living B. C., despite the assurances of the almanac."

"It is all very wonderful," she said, with a sort of vague shrinking. "It does not inspire one with confidence."

"I did not mean to put the matter in such a light, Miss Pyke," said Reynolds apologetically. "I only wish you would not put any trust in the native word or pledge, and be always on your guard. For, whatever the pledge, whatever the token of confidence, there is, away down beneath it all—even against his better will and wish—something savage and barbaric which, in a crisis, will come out and be dangerous. Now, for fear that the rebels may return unexpectedly, let us get ready and start."

Alice rose with her face a little paler and more serious, but as she looked at the strong face at her side, she felt equal to any task.

"Where are we?" she said at last. "Have you a map and our bearings?"

"We are a full day's journey from the great bo tree of Anarajapoorā, and if we do not there find those whom we are seeking we have—well, I do not know, how much of a journey down through the jungle in search of them."

He paused, his voice falling in almost hopeless tones. Then, seeing that it was wrong to allow a shadow of despondency or doubt to rest upon her, he went in more cheerfully.

"But this will not do. We must go out and encourage the servants, and by so doing encourage ourselves. Is not courage the greater half of any victory?"

"I am with you heartily," she said brightly, and her voice and look gave him strength.

All that day they were occupied with the task of rearranging the expedition. It was like starting on a new journey, for every piece of luggage had to be considered with a view to its absolute necessity on the march. The three largest elephants were retained, the two smaller sent back to the nearest village, there to wait for orders. This work occupied a good deal of time, and as the night began to close in on the tired travelers, it was thought best to start at daybreak rather than so late. Anarajapoorā could then be reached at nightfall on the morrow.

Reynolds' tent was now pitched close to the memsahib's, with the Rodiyah guard, well armed and surrounded by torches, stationed between them, ready to give the alarm at the first sign of trouble. A light supper in the little house of boughs, a few words of warning and encouragement to the natives, and an interchange of confidence and hope between Reynolds and the girl, and the camp went to rest.

It was fully midnight when the trouble began. At first the signs of the rebels were scarcely perceptible; but the Rodiyah, with the practised ear of the child of the jungle, who knew the voice of man and the footstep of the native from every other sound, discovered their approach. Knowing that if the mutineers returned it meant evil to him first of all, with some trepidation the guard approached Reynolds' tent and apprised him of the expected attack.

Reynolds leaped from his hammock, seized his rifle, and went forth, straining his eyes and ears into the gloom of the jungle; but nothing save the myriad croakings and shrillings of the insects or the spitting cough of the wildcat greeted him. For all that, the Rodiyah kept pointing in the direction of the approaching mutineers; and a few minutes later there was such a howl that it woke every human being in the camp.

Fearing trouble, Alice had grasped her rifle and come forth, with trembling step, to where Reynolds stood, under a pitch torch, weapon in hand, motionless as a statue.

"What has happened?" she queried, in a soft whisper. "Who are they, and why do they shriek like that?"

"The rebels," he replied. "The expected has happened. They have returned to bring mutiny to the camp. We shall see. If I could only catch a glimpse of one of them, I would nail him; but the cowards keep well in

the shadow of the brushwood and call out their curses to their comrades. Just listen to that din, will you !”

“ I’m glad I don’t understand it ; ” and she shuddered, as if the sounds alone were sufficiently appalling.

Soon the chief hunter came forward from where the servants stood, listening.

“ Sahib,” he said gravely, “ the rebels have returned, and have brought with them half a dozen devil priests. Do you hear them, sahib ? ”

“ Devil priests ? ” answered Reynolds. “ I thought they were wildcats. I was watching a chance for a shot.”

Suddenly there was seen, for an instant only, the head of a lion—a mere mask, hideously painted, and as much like a lion as an ape, but it served the purpose of frightening the natives. Reynolds raised his rifle.

“ Let that beast show his face again, and——”

But the hunter’s hand grasped the barrel. “ Don’t, sahib ! ” he cried. “ That’s not a lion, sahib ; that’s a devil priest. His death would be instantly avenged with the massacre of the whole party. You don’t know, sahib ; you don’t realize.”

“ I realize one thing,” said the leader, turning upon him—“ that if this shrieking and yelling don’t stop, I shall go out there and empty my cartridge belt among them.”

But the hunter protested earnestly. “ You don’t know what you say, sahib,” he said. “ They are cursing us, sahib.”

“ What for ? ”

“ That we have a Rodiyah in camp, sahib. They say that they will ‘ put a spell ’ on us all. That ten thousand devils in the shape of serpents, spiders, tigers——”

“ Yes, yes ; the whole menagerie. Well, what of it ? You believe any such trash ? ”

“ I—I don’t like to fight them, sahib,” the man replied hesitatingly. “ One never knows what goes on in the spirit world, sahib.”

“ No, and I don’t want to,” said Reynolds impatiently. “ But I do know that I am tired of this everlasting din. We have a hard march before us, and we need sleep. Call out to those cursers and tell them that the sahib is very angry, and he is going to shoot. Tell them that—quick ! ”

The hunter stepped forward and raised his hands, giving a call for silence. Then he delivered the message. It was greeted with a chorus of yells.

“ What do they say ? ” demanded the leader.

“ They say, ‘ The fat pig of a Christian, may his grandmother boil nine years in hell ; ’ but they will never stop till the curse is passed upon us, sahib.”

“ My grandmother ! ” said Reynolds, chuckling in spite of himself. “ I wonder what the old lady has done to bring such misery upon her.”

But it was no joke to the hunter.

“ Sahib ! ” he cried. “ You don’t know what an awful curse that is—you can’t understand.”

"No, I'm afraid I don't," said Reynolds.

"And they say that they will send ten thousand devils to step on our heels all through life, sahib, torturing us till our dying day——"

"Thank them!" said Reynolds ironically.

"And that they have the ghost of the memsahib she wolf there with them, and that she promises to turn against the memsahib and kill her."

Reynolds smiled significantly. Then turning to Alice, he asked:

"What do you think of that?"

"I certainly don't think it's anything to laugh at," Alice answered.

"But they say they have the ghost of Miss Bagley, and she promises all sorts of vengeance on you."

"On me?" the girl said quickly. "For what?"

Reynolds gazed into her eyes.

"Good heavens!" he said. "You don't believe these idiots?"

"No, no, no!" she cried. "I don't believe in their hideous nonsense, but I'm frightened. I never in my life saw such horrible things, never heard such sounds, and at this time, this place, in the night." She covered her face with her hands, sinking upon a log, sobbing with nervous terror.

"Tell those miserable rebels that I am coming," he said. "Tell them quick! Do you understand?"

"Don't, sahib," implored the chief hunter. Reynolds had started forward, and he was running after him. "Don't, I beg of you, sahib! You don't know what you are doing. If I could only tell you, sahib——"

"I know well enough. Let me alone. Go back to your tent or I'll brain you." Then, rushing toward the edge of the jungle, he raised his rifle and shouted: "Run, you curs, run, or you'll take the dose. Run!"

Bang! bang! bang! the rifle cracked, like a machine gun. Then came the shrieks of rebels, the curses of the devil priests, the roar of the jungle beasts, and pandemonium.

CHAPTER XIX.—A CHASE AND A DISCOVERY.

AFTER the mysterious disappearance of their comrade Riggs and Hamilton returned to their cavern perfectly dazed. Had there been the slightest chance of finding Brandt by making a search through the jungle, these brave men would have dared anything to attain the end; but the direction whence the cry came made it perfectly plain that he was not on the ground.

How he had been taken, and by what, they could not imagine. They could not penetrate the roof of green overhead to follow his cries.

It seemed plain that there were other monsters in the great tropic world than those which they heard by night, other than those which walk abroad on four legs, or on two, or on no legs at all.

The sense of insecurity oppressed them deeper than ever.

The doctor dropped beside the rude couch of his sick comrade, taking his hand half as a physician and half as a friend. He wondered what answer he could make to Pyke when the delirium had passed, and the latter asked where Brandt had gone.

"What are you muttering over there, all to yourself?" asked Hamilton, who had thrown himself upon a heap of branches and leaves in the corner.

"I was just—er—thinking things," was the reply. "I was also pledging myself to stand by my two comrades to the end, for somehow I don't think it will be very far off."

"That's better left unspoken, even if you do think it, doctor. It somehow knocks all the courage out of me—that sort of pessimism."

"It ought not to do that," rejoined the doctor. "It should simply weld us firmer together. If we had been in the jungle with Brandt at the time we might not have averted the calamity, but we would have at least been certain of the manner of his disappearance——"

"Which would have been so consoling, wouldn't it?" was the half sarcastic interruption.

"Well, there is one chance in a thousand that he is alive; and had we seen him, we might have——"

"Doctor," broke in the young painter desperately, "we're brooding too much on 'has been' and 'might haves.' Brandt is gone. God knows I would give my right arm to know were the poor chap is, but since I probably never shall, I turn to the living—to Pyke, there—unconscious in a jungle fever, and who may leave us any minute; to you, who are the best equipped of all of us to hang on to the slender thread, and to myself, who may outlive you all, to chronicle the tale.

"Do you remember that reckless army song which the barrack boys sang before the battle of Cawnpore—

'Then stand by your glasses steady!
It is all that we have to prize;
Then here's to the dead already,
And hurrah for the next that dies!'

"Say, doctor, that's a great song to sing on the brink of death, ain't it?"

"Hamilton, you're going mad," was the rejoinder. "Men don't sing songs like that on the brink of death."

"What? Am I going to cave in?"

"You are dying of hunger. This unnatural boisterousness is the first stage. Next comes fever, gnawings, and then the break up. All like clock work, isn't it?"

"Bah! You're a sorry pill juggler away out here in no one knows where. I like you, doctor, but please don't diagnose me. I want to live to bury you all and sing with Ariel—

'Full fathom five my comrades lie,
Of their bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were their eyes:
Nothing of them that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea change
Into something rich and strange.
Ding, dong!
Hark! Now I hear them—ding, dong, bell!——'

"Ho, doctor, I'll bet you a new hat against your spitz poodle that you don't know who paid for that Lion d'Or dinner!"

"Calm yourself, Hamilton. You're getting delirious. I think I'd better go out and forage for something to eat before you get so bad that I have two men on my hands to nurse back to life."

"I'll lay you even money that I can bag more game in a minute than you do in an hour. Come ; put up stakes. Is it a go?"

The doctor glanced at the restless man. "That's a bad symptom," he murmured. "I see trouble approaching."

"Is it a go?" cried the painter, his face ablaze with excitement.

"Yes, yes," responded the doctor, as he passed out, answering as a man talks to a child ; "but keep calm, Hamilton, for heaven's sake—and ours!"

As a matter of fact, in less than a minute a very curious incident did happen—one like that on the night when the panthers fell into the cave and were despatched by the Veddah. There came a great rush at the mouth of the cavern, and Hamilton leaped up, expecting to see poor Biggs mangled and bleeding after some encounter.

But what actually did fall through the opening just in time to escape the hungry jaws of a leopard was a young gazelle. The deer scampered back into the cavern, while the leopard gave a backward leap and made off into the forest.

Picking up a club, Hamilton groped his way back, resolved to win his bet first of all, then secure food to save his life, though the last object seemed just then rather unimportant.

He hunted through passage after passage, ready to spring upon the beast with the first stir ; but to his amazement he found no deer, and only succeeded in penetrating the bowels of the cave.

Giving the game up as lost he started to retreat, when suddenly the deer passed in the passage, bounding into the upper caverns. Hamilton followed as fast as he dared, and reached a point where he caught the glimpse of daylight beyond just in time to see the gazelle attempt to make the leap back into open air again. She stumbled, fell, and rolled back, stunned.

Hamilton ran forward, and with a single blow between the eyes ended the struggle.

When the doctor came back he was empty handed and forlorn. When he saw the dead deer, however, he gave a shout of delight.

Hamilton called out weakly, "Do I win my bet, or do I not?"

"You win," said the doctor, laughing, "though goodness knows how."

"Never mind how," said Hamilton. "I win fairly. Come, cook ! Give me venison steaks *à la bordelaise*, and a choice Perfecto to cap the feast."

"I'll do my best," said the doctor. Then he made a fire after the savage manner by twirling a pointed stick between his hands, the end inserted in a slot of dry wood, and chunks of venison were roasting in a few minutes.

After eating heartily, and tempting the sick man with a little juice squeezed out of the meat, they sought out the Veddah woman and laid before her such of their food as they could spare, together with a small gourd of water.

Since the disappearance of her husband, the little mother had retreated deeper into the cave, without a murmur. It was evident that the Veddah was in the habit of leaving her for long periods, perhaps for days at a time, while he hunted for food.

"Doctor," said Hamilton, much brighter of spirit and stronger in tone after the feast had been cleared away, "have you the slightest idea what sort of a place this cavern is?"

"I don't know for certain," was the reply; "but I think that it is some kind of a heathen temple. These carvings show that it was constructed by the hand of man."

"And I have made a further discovery," said Hamilton.

"What is it?"

"While you were foraging through the jungle, I was exploring the bowels of the earth."

"Really!" said the doctor, who was not sure but that the man was still delirious.

"Oh, I'm in my right mind, again, doctor; don't forget that. I tell you, I have been on an exploring expedition. I started to find a deer that had been chased in by a leopard; but——"

"Oh, that is sufficient to explain matters. You bagged her back in the cave, eh?"

"Guess again," said Hamilton. Then, after a pause, he added: "While hunting that gazelle, of which we have just so thankfully eaten, I ran into what appears to be an endless artificial passage leading backward into the heart of the mountain. It seems to lead to the west, and then to the north, if my directions are correct. It is sufficiently large to admit of one man walking erect, with plenty of elbow room, too. Strange, isn't it?"

"Very," mused the doctor.

"Now, do you know, doctor," Hamilton continued, "I may be an idiot for thinking so, but that passage was built for a purpose. It leads somewhere. Now, what do we know but that that somewhere might prove our salvation?"

"Nonsense, man! The idea of penetrating the earth in order to reach the heavens!"

"But the tunnel may pass clean through this mountain and come out upon civilization beyond," exclaimed the excited man. "Why, the Roman aqueducts were often fifty miles long, and big enough to allow two men to walk through abreast. And their engineering feats were small compared with those of the ancients away out in the far east—Egypt, India, and elsewhere. We don't know where we are, but I'll tell you what we'll do. As soon as night comes, we'll crawl out and get a dozen of those luminous moths that we see crawling up the palms, and then I'll make the venture."

"Don't be a fool," answered the doctor. "Let good enough alone——"

"Good enough?" cried the painter, rising. "You really don't call this good enough, do you?"

"Well, we have at least light and air and water, the three elements."

"Drat your three elements!" cried the younger man. "Man can't live

on three elements alone; and it looks as if the three elements as a steady diet is what we are getting down to. I'm no chameleon to live on light and air, and I'm no fish to live in water, nor a mythological maiden to live on the scent of roses, nor a South Sea Islander to live on smoke.

"I want civilized grub and lots of it, and I'm going to work all my points to get it. Now, I take all the risk, remember, not you. You go back with me as far as you like, then I will go on as much farther as I dare. We can keep calling to each other, and if there is any trouble, or I make any great discovery, you can come at my summons. How's that?"

The doctor was hesitating.

"I don't like the thought of losing you in such a foolhardy move, Hamilton," he said, "and yet I must confess to a strange feeling that this is our best course; if you promise to mind my orders, and come back before you get too far beyond me, I'm with you. But mind, the promise!"

"It's yours, old boy!" came the hearty pledge, as the painter grasped the hand of his comrade. "Now go up to the mouth of the cave and watch for phosphor moths, will you?"

"It is not quite dark enough yet, I fear."

"It soon will be. Go on; let's get some sport out of this. And who knows, doctor, it may be our salvation."

The doctor sighed. His mind was too practical to see much benefit in such a scheme. Still, he went to the mouth of the cave and sat there watching for fire moths, which were to be their living candles.

In the mean time, Hamilton seized a haunch of venison, a gourd of water, and half a cocoanut of honey, and crept with them down into the passage.

"If this means a five days' journey, there's food enough, at any rate," he muttered. Then he returned to the cavern to find his friend, calling him to come and gather in his natural torches.

It was a journey for life and liberty, or death and eternal silence.

CHAPTER XX.—A THOUSAND FEET ABOVE THE JUNGLE.

MEANWHILE, the brave man whom we left clinging to a two foot ledge of rock over a great, wide valley, constructing a heliograph of the glistening bits which he had found in the magpie's nest, was having a hard time of it. More than once he lost heart and cast himself down from the crag.

As the mother bird left her brood with the first burst of morning, her prisoner, who had regained the upper ledge again, crept forth to the brink of the ledge and watched the coming of day.

With the first peep of the sun over the ragged cliffs to the east, it cast shadows wonderful to behold. On one occasion there was that of a serpent writhing and coiling around the limb of a mighty tree, which appeared as large as that mythological tree of the Sagas, the wide waving Ygdrasil, with its roots on earth and its fruit laden branches among the stars of heaven.

Extraordinary as was this sight, it was easily explained, since between that far phantasm on the western cloud and the sun there rose a peak whereon a living tree with the reptile stood.

On the morning of the second day after the feast of the magpie hunger got the best of Brandt. The rain, which was frequent, allowed him to fill two of the great hemispheres of the eggs with water. At least thrice a day the ledge was swept with a torrent ; but the instant the cloud passed and the sun appeared the sunbeams lapped up the moisture, and the crag was dry. But a water diet was not food. Feverish illusions began to fill his brain.

Though the thought of attacking and devouring one of the new born jungle birds made the starving captive shudder, after that long and terrible night, with the going of the mother in search of food for her young the famished man crept from his hiding place, advanced to the nest, and reached over and seized one of the birds, dragging it forth upon the ledge, and breaking its neck over his knee. Brandt began the meal without ceremony.

The meat of the young bird was deliciously tender and the hungry man gorged himself. Then hiding as much as he dared to keep in one of the shells and shoving this into a crack in the ledge, he threw the rest over the cliff.

With the feelings of a man renewed in body, soul, and mind, Brandt crept back into his cave, confronting the problem which the mother bird's discovery of the robbery of the nest might bring on him. They were six, and now they were five.

Could she count? Of course, there was food enough for the prisoner for some time, unless the fledglings grew large enough to defend themselves. But if the mother discovered the robber of her nest, what would be the result? Brandt had but to watch and wait, in the mean time going on with his signaling with the rude heliograph which he had constructed.

Soothed by the food and brought back to life, as it were, Brandt fell into a sound slumber in the midst of his speculations. It was a long time before he woke, and then it was to see the mother bird had returned, with a young mountain goat in her talons. This she had torn to pieces on the ledge, and was about to feed her young. Brandt watched her with interest.

Now she drew forth a lump of flesh and dropped it down the throat of number one. Next came a clod of liver, heartily relished by number two, who gobbled it down with an audible choking. Number three got the goat's heart, but seemed dissatisfied, for she leaped up and protested until a hard tap over the head with the maternal beak made her subside in her place.

Number five was content with a strip torn from the goat's flanks, and seemed even to chuckle over it. Then the mother made another fierce tear with her claws, and picked up a bit for number six.

Around the edge of the nest, one, two, three times the mother carried that dripping lump of flesh ; then she stopped short. She seemed suddenly confused. Around and around the edge of the great nest, with its clamorous brood, she bore that luscious morsel, then stood up as high as she could, dropping the flesh from her bill, and uttering a shrill, most unearthly cry.

The little ones made a dash for the flesh, but the mother bird seemed not to care. She could not count her brood, yet a strange instinct told her, when she came to feed her young, that one of them was gone. Brandt

kept still. He knew that with his first unguarded stir it would be war, and war to the death. And no man would want to fight that great bird.

Suddenly, as if she had determined on her course, the great bird tore the remainder of the goat to bits and cast it helter skelter into the nest, allowing her fledglings to gorge themselves at will. Then she gave one leap to the edge of the cliff, another into the air, spread her great wings, and was away to the southwest. Whether she had gone to get reinforcements, or more food, or what her errand was, was not easily guessed. Brandt kept still till she returned, which was not more than twenty minutes.

She was now in a great state of agitation, and ran around and around the great nest, with strange cries.

With a quick movement of her long neck and head, she dragged one of her young upon her back, placing it at a point just between the wings.

Then the great bird flew away, carrying her tiny passenger.

Soon she returned, and this time there was a scramble among the nestlings to be the first to gain the soft berth between the maternal wings.

Brandt lay there with an anxious mind. He watched the depletion of his larder till he decided to make sure of at least a few days' food at all risks. During one of the mother bird's flights, when there were but two of the nestlings left, he came out, determined to strangle them, that he might exist, perchance, until help came. He leaped into the nest. It was dark.

Then came the great shadow. The mother bird had returned. Thank heaven she did not see him, so dense were the shadows, or she would have settled with the murderer of her young before he could have leaped from the nest and regained his hiding place!

Another crouching by the side of the nest, and the great mother took another babe upon her back and flew away.

Poor Brandt's soul sickened within him. What was he to do? There was but one thing now, to leap upon and strangle the last survivor. This he proceeded to do, but it was a hard fight.

What was that! A swoop, a great gust of wind, and the mother bird returned!

Brandt dropped into the bottom of the nest as if he had been shot. He dared not retreat without the dead bird; he dared not stir. Waiting the attack with his head bent low, he suddenly looked up and saw the mother restlessly moving at the edge of the nest as before. Twice the great head turned about, but the darkness prevented her realizing the calamity that had befallen her.

Then a wild idea seized Brandt. Mad as the impulse was, he acted upon it. With marvelous agility he sprang upon the bird's back, nestling between the wings, and folding his arms about the long, slender neck.

The bearer of the burden staggered, amazed to find her fledgling grown so great in her absence; but nothing daunted and eager to regain her new nest, she leaped into the air and flew away. Brandt held on "for dear life," as he took this strange ride.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THE GREAT BUDDHA CATSEYE.*

BY CHARLES EDWARD BARNES.

A strange story of adventure in Ceylon—What took four New York club men into the jungle—
Thrilling experiences of unarmed travelers with the denizens of the tropical forests.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

JUST as they are finishing a dinner at the Lion d'Or Café, five New York club men form the acquaintance of an odd character from the east. He shows them a wonderful gem—a catseye from Ceylon—which, he assures them, will give whosoever looks therein "another soul, another body, another mind." Hamilton, the painter, submits himself to the test. As he gazes into the stone, a shocking change comes over him. He tells them, "Look for yourselves, comrades," and walks out.

Three others go through exactly the same experience—Biggs, Pyke, and Brandt—until only Reynolds is left, and when his especially strong temperament proves to be unassailable by the hypnotic influences, he denounces the old man as a charlatan, and hurries out after his friends. But they have mysteriously disappeared. However, Reynolds finally hears that four Americans are about to undertake a pilgrimage to the sacred bo tree of Ceylon. He determines to go to their rescue, finds that Pyke's sister has made the same resolution, and they form a joint expedition.

Meantime, the four other New Yorkers, attired in the simple habiliments of Brahmanas, and without any weapons, start under the guardianship of the patriarch on their perilous journey through the jungle. After various thrilling adventures, they are overtaken by a terrific storm, which makes the forest impassable for a time. They seek refuge in a cave. The advent of a panther into their retreat results in the death of the patriarch and the release of the four New Yorkers from the spell of hypnotism which has brought them on this strange quest. Their awakening leaves them astounded with horror at the situation in which they find themselves.

While trying to forage for food, Brandt is seized by an enormous bird and carried off to a lofty crag, where he is kept prisoner until he finally summons courage to grasp his captor about the neck as she is about to start off on another flight. His three companions give him up for lost, and Hamilton determines to follow a passage leading into the heart of the mountain.

Reynold's expedition has to contend with discontent on the part of the natives composing it, because Miss Pyke has taken pity on a Rodiyah, a man of a despised race. A number of them rebel, going off into the jungle, to return and endeavor to cast a spell over their loyal brethren. In spite of the admonitions of his chief hunter, Reynolds fires his rifle among them.

CHAPTER XXI.—INTO THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH.

"ARE you ready, Doc?" cried Hamilton.

"'Ready, so please your grace,'" was the jocular response.

"Then let the band play and the procession start!" said the explorer, starting back from the mouth of the cavern toward the unknown regions below their jungle prison.

Hamilton was in a chattering mood.

"Mighty curious place this," he said.

A score of huge moths of the phosphorescent variety were fixed to his

*This story began in the November issue of THE ARGOSY. The four back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 40 cents.

robe. They shone brightly—so brightly, in fact, that for a distance of ten feet ahead the passages were dimly lighted up. The doctor had half a dozen fastened to his own breast, and followed his younger leader with conflicting emotions.

"I wonder how old this cave is?" went on Hamilton. "Now look at that sculptured elephant head and the niche beneath it? Doesn't that prove that this passage was lighted at one time with lamps for the benefit of the people who passed from somewhere to this cave temple?"

"It would certainly seem so," responded the doctor reflectively. "And yet——"

"The air is no worse as we advance, you notice——"

"Nor better," interposed the doctor.

"You're a skeptic," said Hamilton testily, making a rather sudden turn to the right.

"No," rejoined the doctor; "merely an agnostic. I simply don't know——"

"Then I will show you."

Hamilton had reached the point where, an hour or two before, he had deposited the supplies which he intended taking on his possibly long journey. As he did not wish his comrade to become aware of his intention to pursue the passage, he turned and said:

"I guess you had better stay here a little while and wait for me to get ahead. I will keep within calling distance for a time, and then you can follow if you wish. Oh, there is no danger of our getting lost. You see, the passage is narrow and apparently endless——"

"But you don't know what may be a few feet ahead of you," interposed the doctor, with a look of deep concern. "But go on, old comrade, and shout whenever you come to anything worth shouting about, and every fifty steps give a call, any way. Will you promise?"

"I promise," said Hamilton dutifully.

The two parted. The doctor stood still, a feeling of insupportable loneliness coming over him. "What a fool's chase this was, after all," he mused. He would gladly return to the open and take his chances against the beasts of the wilderness.

Suddenly a moving shape, creeping along toward him on the wall, caused the solitary watcher to feel cold shivers run up and down his spine as he nailed the offending thing with a blow.

It was a monster centipede. There was no struggle, but the disgusting insect gave the doctor a feeling of repulsion. Then he felt something clinging to his leg, and striking it off with his stick, he saw it fly away into the depths. He found that his leg was covered with blood. It was a vampire, and it had flown on him so silently that he was scarcely aware of its presence.

"Hamilton," he shouted, "I don't like this a little bit. Let's get out."

"Oh, nonsense! This is just getting interesting," came the voice from afar, uncanny in the stillness.

The explorer had reached his outfit and taken up the burden like a

soldier, plodding on. The excitement of the journey into unknown regions, the uncertainty of his every step, and the hope of ultimate reward, though the nature of it he could not divine, kept Hamilton nerved up so that he forgot his gloomy forebodings—the sort that oppressed the solitary watcher away back of him.

On and on he went, often calling, as often answered. Then of a sudden he saw that the passage skirted the edge of a vast subterranean cavern. From below, it seemed, there came the roar of a torrent, plunging from nowhere to nowhere, through the bowels of the earth. Hamilton gave a shudder, but hurried on over the well worn stones until again arrested by the cry of his comrade.

"Hamilton, come back!" screamed the doctor. "I am getting enough of this."

He had stood still so long that it seemed as if every reptile, vampire, centipede, and bat which infested the place had sought him out.

"Come back!" he shouted again and again, hammering right and left with his cudgel at the black things that were closing upon him.

Hamilton heard that scream far away—so far that it seemed miles—and it stayed him. He started to retreat, but he had not gone far when he realized that his passing had awakened every sleeping denizen of the horrible place. They came now from every crevice and crack. He hurried, but to his consternation he found that the great grotto he had passed was now a mass of hissing, writhing serpents.

With the white light of his lantern moths faintly illumining the place, he saw the hideous shapes, those writhing forms and burning eyes! Then he turned and ran like mad on, and on, and on, whither he knew not, appalled by that presence of certain and horrible death that cut off his retreat.

"Hamilton! Hamilton!"

The shrill voice was now agonized and distracted, eloquent of the terrors that the doctor far, far back in the rock bound tunnel, felt within him. "Come back, come back—quick!"

"I can't come back," said the explorer, scarcely above a whisper. "I can't—I daren't! Oh, if you only knew—if you had seen them!"

With a shudder, he went along with bowed head and teeth hard set, not daring to look back for fear of seeing a thousand infuriated reptiles at his heels. He plunged forward, resolved to go on to the bitter end, come what might.

The poor doctor called again and again. Then, as no answer came, he made his way back to the upper caverns with a sick heart.

It was as he feared. Hamilton was lost—plunged into some bottomless pit.

"God help us!" groaned the doctor, as he came into the larger cave again. "Brandt disappears through the air, Hamilton through the bowels of the earth. Ah, what will become of the rest?"

Gloomily he plodded toward the front, stumbling over the skeleton of a Veddah in the smaller chamber. He shuddered and hurried on.

"Such will be our own fate," he thought. "Well, what is the use of

keeping up hope? We might as well prepare. What can I say to Pyke when he comes out of that delirium—if he ever does—ah, yes, if he ever does?"

He heard a weak voice call, and he sprang forward. Gordon Pyke was seated upright on his rush couch.

"Brandt!" he was calling faintly. "Brandt, where are you?"

The doctor sat down beside the sick man.

"Yes," he said. "I'm here with you. What do you want?"

"I want—I want Brandt," was the reply. "I want Brandt; I have something to tell him." Then, after a pause: "Where's Hamilton? Why don't you say something? What has happened? It is night, and yet they aren't here! Where are they?"

The doctor took the white hand and said: "Calm yourself, dear friend. I am here with you——"

"But they, doctor! Tell me the truth. Where are they?"

For a moment the listener seemed to hear nothing but the beatings of his own heart. Then he bowed his head, and said: "I don't know, old man."

Pyke fell back like a stone.

CHAPTER XXII.—A VOICE FROM THE DEPTHS.

QUIETING down the natives after the row made by the rebels and their devil priests was no easy task for Reynolds, but he finally succeeded in doing so.

"I don't think I hit any one," he said to Alice, "unless the idiots climbed the trees, an old habit with them, for I shot high."

The march was resumed, and at length, after recruiting their forces by the addition of a Tamil, whom Reynolds rescued from an alligator, they suddenly left the jungle on the crest of a hill, and there lay Anarajapoor, the capital of the Kingdom of Lions, before them.

They entered the ruined city by moonlight, following their silent footed elephant through the jungle grown streets. Everywhere were ruins, and in the center of them all the sacred bo tree of Gautama.

Before it the two travelers stopped and gazed in silence. Reynolds uncovered his head, as before a shrine.

As if bound to keep its promise to flourish forever, there stood, and still stands, the noble fig tree, grown from the branch of the one under which Gautama received his Buddhahood, and which was brought from Northern India nearly three hundred years before Christ, taking root in this soil, and flourishing after all the vestiges of the surrounding glory had passed away.

Making a sort of encampment in one of the courts of what was once a great king's palace, the travelers took a light supper. Then, stationing their guards in camp, they went forth to make their anxious inquiries.

They had not wandered far when they fell in with an orange robed and shaven headed priest, who forthwith presented them to the high priest, who has charge of the sacred bo tree, volunteering to act as interpreter.

This venerable man, occupying a position corresponding to that of an archbishop, received his guests in the open, his eyes rarely taken from the wide spreading tree, his ear gently inclined toward it, as if ever and anon he heard voices in its sacred rustlings.

The orange robed dignitary answered the questions put to him with condescending ease. No, he had not heard of pilgrims from America—an old man and four younger devotees, who were on the way hither to do homage to the “lord bo tree”—and he moved his talipot fan with majestic ease, and took the gold pieces in his cocoanut cup—this leader of a hundred million Buddhist souls, this commander of untold wealth—as if the offering were much too small.

But as the travelers were turning away crestfallen and hopeless, Reynolds addressed the interpreter again :

“Ask the father if he has ever heard of the great catseye of Gautama, which, in a golden casket, King Tissa buried with his own hand in yonder sacred inclosure?”

Somewhat mystified, and with a voice that trembled slightly, the interpreter put the question as the stranger had given it.

For a moment there was a deep silence. A short interchange of ideas between the venerable priest and his junior followed, and then the old man arose, all animation.

The interpreter turned to the visitors. There was a strange look upon his dark countenance.

“Yes, sair,” he said. “The master has heard of the sacred catseye ; and he now begs to know why you have asked him this question, which no foreigner before ever put to him?”

Reynolds drew a deep breath.

“Tell the most reverend master,” he said, “that I ask the question for the reason that I myself have lately seen that wonderful jewel. That’s all. Good night !” And the travelers moved away.

If Reynolds had given a backward look, he would have seen a startling change.

The assembled priests noted the expression that had come on the face of their master.

The old man was like death. Surely these travelers from a far land had brought to him tidings far greater than he expected.

Reynolds and Alice returned to their camp in the ruins of the king’s palace with sad hearts. Thus far their perilous journey had been a failure.

A deep and bitter sigh came from the girl. Her disappointment seemed too great to bear.

“Keep up good heart !” her companion said earnestly.

But she interrupted him.

“I would bear it willingly did I have the first clue to the poor boy’s whereabouts—if he had been here and gone away. We might track him to the ends of the earth ; but to fail——”

“Oh, don’t say that,” broke in Reynolds ; “for, if you stop and think a moment, you will see that it is not quite true. That they are somewhere

hidden away in this green island I have not the slightest doubt. We have simply anticipated them, that is all."

"But is it not possible that they might have come and gone again?"

"They could not have come to this shrine without being seen by the devotees. Oh, no; we have simply anticipated them."

"Then they are lost; they will never reach Anarajapoor!"

"Oh, you must not take such a gloomy view," said Reynolds, fighting down the despondency which rose in his own heart in spite of himself. "I admit that we set our hopes too high, and have been defeated; but we must fight all the harder for this first set back. They have survived, of that I am confident. But what is this?"

The traveler saw before the arch a score of the orange robed priests trying to break through the guard which the faithful Rodiyah had set there. Reynolds came forward. Instantly the devotee who had served as an interpreter advanced with deference.

"The supreme Tathagata, sair, presents his compliments, and begs that he may have a further interview with you early in the morning."

"Very well," said Reynolds, who was now beginning to think that he had been indiscreet in his mention of the great catseye.

"And he sends you, sair, as a token of his respect, some little refreshment after your journey."

Two coolies advanced and laid at the traveler's feet a wicker basket filled with the most luscious tropical fruits, honey, spices, and gourds full of a sweet liqueur distilled from the petals of rare jungle flowers.

Reynolds bowed.

"Convey my gratitude to the supreme master," he said, "and tell him that I shall wait on him early in the morning under the sacred tree, as he instructs me."

The priest saluted and made way for at least a hundred of his fellows, who crowded forward in the great archway to gaze at the man who had said that he had looked upon the most sacred jewel on earth.

It was nearly midnight now, and as Reynolds threw himself into his hammock sleep came almost instantly—sound, refreshing, and dreamless.

But the hum of the voices had not long given way to the night songs of the jungle when the sleeper was disturbed by a call.

"Mr. Reynolds! Come—quick! I can't stand it. I shall go mad——"

Reynolds started to his feet.

"What's the matter?" he called.

A sudden dash of something heavy against his tent startled him.

"Who's there?" he whispered, seizing his rifle.

"It is I—it is Alice!" came a weak, plaintive response.

"What?"

Plunging from the tent, Reynolds stood under the stars gazing at the small figure. Her pale face was lifted to heaven, her eyes supernaturally wide, motionless.

"Alice! Don't look like that! What has happened? Who hurt you? Did you say you were hurt?"

An uplifted hand silenced him.

"Hark!"

The man listened, breathless.

"Don't you hear it? Can't you hear it?" she whispered.

"Hear it?" he echoed. "Hear what? I hear nothing."

"Nothing," she persisted, taking a step toward him, her ear inclined toward the earth; "you hear nothing?"

There was a long pause.

"Nothing!" he murmured.

"No, no, no!" she cried. "A voice—a human voice—calling, calling, calling. Oh, I thought it would drive me insane!"

Reynolds drew a deep breath.

"There—again!" she burst forth. "Is it possible that you did not hear it?" Then, as the man did not stir, she reached forward, drawing him in the direction whence the sounds came.

"Miss Pyke," he said kindly, "what you hear is nothing but a fiction of your own tired brain. Go back to your tent and sleep."

"But I can't—I daren't," she interrupted. "I have lain there for hours—hours. At first I thought as you do—that I imagined it; but soon I was convinced. It is some one in distress—in deep distress——"

"Where?"

"There—yonder!" replied the girl, pointing to one of the arches. "Did you not hear it, then? Surely you did—you must have heard that——"

"I heard—I heard something," said Reynolds slowly. Then he added: "Yes, something—but I am convinced that it was only an owl, or bat; certainly it was not human."

"Not human?" she interrupted excitedly. "Why, do you know, that sound is not only human in my ears, but—" she raised herself almost on tiptoe as she spoke—"the voice was not that of a native. It was one of our own flesh and blood!"

Reynolds was amazed. What could she mean? There was conviction in her every gesture and tone.

Suddenly he turned about, and shrieked out:

"Hello! Hello! Hello!"

A silence.

"Hark!" said Alice, still clutching him.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"There—there!" cried the girl at his side. "Did you not hear that? Do you doubt me now?"

"Silence! Hark!" he cried. Then he advanced a step, making a hollow of his hands as he called out, "Who's there? Who's there?"

"Help! help! Quick! Oh, oh!"

Reynolds leaped up as if he had been stabbed.

"My God! You are right! It is the voice of one of our own flesh and blood! Ho! Tibby Jak! Rodiyah! Tamil man! Quick—quick! Torches, torches! Help! Help!"

The three servants came tumbling down the small declivity, the chief hunter with his rifle cocked. There they stood, their faces expressive of questioning.

"Run for torches! Go! You, Tamil man, go bring torches—lights! Hurry!"

"What's the matter?" the native gasped. "Tiger?"

"The rebels?" inquired the faithful hunter, quaking at the thought of a more formidable adversary than any four footed beast.

"No, neither. Don't ask; just go and bring torches, as many as you can find, quick! Not a moment to lose."

They were not gone more than twenty seconds, but it seemed an age. Back they came on the dead run, their naked forms gleaming in the flare of the red lights.

"Stand here! Form line! Silence—silence, I say. Hark, and tell me if you hear anything in answer to my call."

The men ranged themselves side by side, each armed, each with a torch held high above his head.

"I will call," said Reynolds, "just once. If you hear the answer tell me."

Again he advanced to the black hole. He made a hollow of his hands, drew a deep breath, and cried down into the dismal depths: "Ho-o-o-o! We're coming! We're coming!"

He threw up his hands commanding silence.

Then it came, like a voice out of eternity: "Thank God! Come quick—quick! I cannot last much longer!"

Snatching a torch from the mahout, and despatching him for another, Reynolds seized the girl by the hand and plunged down the steep declivity into the bowels of the earth.

"Hold your rifle close," he cried, nerving himself. "There is no telling what we may encounter down here."

Alice tightened her grip on the weapon and followed, the nails of her fingers pressing deep into the palm of Reynolds' hand.

CHAPTER XXIII. —AGAINST GREAT ODDS.

It was an evil place, filled with vampires, lizards, and serpents—all gliding hither and thither, amazed and dumfounded by the presence of the midnight intruders, with their flaming torches and their reckless haste.

Now and then a jackal crept snarling across their path; but a torch thrown at the beast sent him shrieking into the awful voids beyond.

Once or twice they paused, gathered in a little breathless knot, keeping silent while Reynolds gave another call through the Stygian glooms. Yes, they were plunging on, nearer and nearer the chosen goal. Another climb through a rotten doorway, another dash through a foul chamber, all alive with hideous things, and suddenly they brought up short before a black wall.

Again they drew together, gathering like a brood of bats while the leader gave the call.

That salute was answered from the other side of the great stone barrier—a clear voice, though weak and tremulous.

“We must burst through that stone fortress some way!” cried Reynolds, striking his fist against the offending thing. “Go and bring picks, hammers—anything!”

The chief hunter started to go back through the black void, when suddenly Alice, who had moved to one side, called him with a quick cry.

“Stay!” she commanded. “Here, look at this. It might have been a door at one time or other.”

Reynolds leaped down the wall to the spot, and found himself before a vast heap of loose *débris*, which had the appearance of having been piled up against the great barrier as if in an effort to conceal the small opening into the chambers beyond.

“By heavens!” he exclaimed. “I believe you have hit the bullseye again, comrade. You’re the mascot! You’re a prophetess! It is a miracle—truly one of the wonders of the age. Here, you Tamil! Work for your life. And you, mahout! Tibby Jak, give your torch to the memsahib. All together!”

With three flaring rushlights in each hand, Alice mounted the pile of *débris* and laid her back against the wall. Fear seemed to have gone from her heart. She no longer shuddered at any earthly thing of whatsoever shape or condition.

When a monster milleped crept along the wall, with a calm nerve worthy of a heroine of many wars, she thrust out her torches and roasted him where he clung with such evil tenacity, not even moving aside from the spot where he dropped, a black, contorting heap.

“Work!” she cried encouragingly to the men, whose backs were bent over the task, making the heavy stones fly into the void back of them, groaning, straining, grunting.

“Look out!” cried the Tamil, suddenly leaping back.

In dragging away a large stone, Reynolds had uncovered a yard length of black python, which looked as if it had held forth from this ancient fortress for years.

But this obstacle was of but a moment’s setback. With a single blow of Reynolds’ rifle stock the back of the monster was broken, and his whole writhing fifteen feet of anger and vengeance was flung forth into the gloom.

Once or twice during that hasty breaking away of the barrier, put there by hands long since passed into the Nirvana of the faithful, they paused, half from sheer exhaustion, half from a desire to be encouraged by that sound afar.

It came always in reply to the shrill scream through the dismal place, but weaker and weaker each time, bidding the rescuers apply themselves more boldly to their task.

Alice heard that ever weakening reply, and shuddered. What would be revealed to her beyond that black and slimy wall? Were they about to burst into some underground cavern where they would find her brother lying white and cold—dead?

With a loud shout of cheer, hysterical and shrill though it was, she drove the fearful image from her brain. Then as the great pile gave way beneath her, she was obliged to move aside, standing free where she could light the undaunted workers, and yet not be compelled to dodge the flying missiles.

Suddenly she caught sight of the upper ledge of the low archway, and the roar of falling boulders gave her a keen thrill.

"See!" she cried. "We have reached the door. It is a question of moments now. Fight hard! Don't give up!"

"Never, never!" groaned the panting Reynolds, a sentiment echoed from the depths of every soul.

Suddenly the mahout staggered back and fell fainting. Alice dropped the torches from one hand and lifted him up, half supporting him on her knee till he came to.

The workers had been so absorbed in their task that they had scarcely missed him.

"Poor fellow!" she murmured. "I thought he would not last. He was working too hard."

"Let him go back to camp and get some brandy and a gourd of water," said the leader, "as soon as he is able."

"Oh, he would never find the way—never, never!"

An exclamation on the part of the Tamil turned attention from the panting mahout to the work in hand.

"See!" he cried. "A hole—there!"

Alice gently put by her charge, seized the torches, and leaped up, thrusting her flaming lights through the aperture into what appeared to be a small chamber beyond. "Stop!" she called. "Give another shout! Call once more!"

"Ho—o—o!" screamed Reynolds, low and shrilly.

There was a long and bitter silence, but no welcome answer came.

The leader gave the haggard face above him one despairing look, then renewed the fight.

Soon there came another great tumbling down of the rocks, and a hole large enough to admit a man was thus opened.

"A torch! A torch!" cried Reynolds, seizing one and rushing pell mell up the débris toward the black portal into regions unknown beyond.

There he turned about. "Go on with the work!" he shouted to the men. "Work! Work!"

Thrusting the torch into the opening, he peered through, long and breathlessly, then withdrew.

"What do you see?" demanded Alice, all fear and wonder.

"Nothing—as yet," he responded. "But here, this will never do. I must not stay here. Every moment is precious."

He started to force his heavy frame through the black orifice.

"Wait! Wait!" cried Alice, all aquiver. "Take a man with you; please do. You don't know what you may have to meet there."

"Give me my rifle—that's enough," said Reynolds, who was now more than half through the eye, and stood with one foot in the depths beyond.

Alice seized the weapon where it lay and ran up the hard incline.

Reynolds clutched the stock, made a sudden dash, and was gone.

For a long time there was not a sound. The awful mystery of that mission so thrilled the workers that they had no will to proceed.

Their hearts stopped beating. Alice was half fainting against the wall, her face pressed to the stone coping of the mysterious doorway.

Suddenly she heard a voice. It was afar off.

"Ho! Send a man here—quick!"

Alice turned her white face toward her companions, but not one stirred.

"Go!" commanded the woman. "The sahib wants you."

Either the order was not intelligible, or the men were so benumbed with fear that they did not know what to do, and merely stood there.

"Cowards! Cowards!" cried the savage voice. Then tossing them a single torch, Alice nerved up all her strength, and dashed into the black void, where she was swallowed up like an atom.

With an awful sense of loneliness weighing upon her bosom, the valiant girl plodded on through the thick gloom in the direction whence she had heard the cry for help.

A sudden turn brought her face to face with her comrade. He was bearing in his arms a slender figure—a weird and unearthly clod, scarcely human, and certainly bearing no semblance to a civilized species.

Limp and inert it lay in his embrace, while with the torch and the half freed hand the panting rescuer was fighting off the vampires which flew hither and thither about him—as if reluctant to leave with their feast half done.

Alice tried to cry out, but her blood froze, and all the voice left her bosom. Reynolds had let fall the limp form gently, and Alice dropped beside it, peering into the blackened and shrunken face, which looked like a wraith of hell rather than a creature of the earthly realms.

The matted black hair was streaked with silver, though the aspect was that of a youth. The long, fine nose was thin like a piece of wax; the cheek bones seemed bursting through the drawn, sallow skin; the sunken eyes were closed; the mouth agape; the beard, fine and curling, gave the ascetic aspect a gaunt and haunted look.

"Water! Quick! Tibby Jak! Ho! Where are those scoundrels?"

"They dared not come. They were afraid."

"Oh, the cowards!" shrieked Reynolds.

But instantly one white face, then another, then a third burst out of the appalling shadows.

"Here, you Tamil man! Go for water! Take torches! Tibby Jak, bring my hunting coat. You know it—hanging on the tent pole. Go!"

Each snatched up a torch and dashed away.

"Who is he?" asked Alice, all of a tremble.

"Who is he?" echoed the astonished comrade, rubbing the man back to life. "Why, don't you know? It is Hamilton——"

"What! Hamilton, the painter! That?"

"I swear before heaven!" replied Reynolds, as if his oath were challenged. "It is poor Hamilton, one of the four——"

But the frenzied woman had leaped up, snatched a torch or two from the ground, and started off into the further gloom.

"Then he is here—he must be here!" she moaned frantically.

"Who?"

"My brother—Gordon. Oh, he must be—he must be!"

Then, with a cry that was full of the agony of her heart, she ran on wailing aloud: "Brother! Brother! Where are you? Where—where?" And so sank upon the rocks, sobbing.

"Come back!" commanded Reynolds. "Come back—quick! He is waking. He is coming to. We can ask him. Oh, what a miracle! Why, there were a million vampires on him."

"See! He is opening his eyes," said Reynolds. "He is breathing. Hammy! Hammy! Do you know me? You are all right, old boy. You are saved. Do you know me?"

The head nodded preceptibly. A gurgling sound was the answer.

"Yes, you are Ren——" The weak murmur died away.

Alice crept closer.

"Where is he? Can't you tell me? I will go to him. Tell me. Oh, try, try! Just a word. Is he alive or dead?"

The attenuated frame seemed to suffer a convulsion. "Who?" he gasped faintly.

"My brother—my brother, Gordon Pyke!" was the agonized moan.

"Pyke—Pyke," came the scarcely audible sound. "In the jungle—in the jungle——"

The quivering form sank back in despair.

"But where—where? When did you leave them?"

There was a weak quaver of the lip. It was plain that the poor boy was making a giant effort to solve the great riddle for her.

"No—no!" he sighed. "I am here alone—alone. I left them in the jungle—more than thirty miles away. Night before last I left them. I have walked through this narrow cave all the way."

He seemed prostrated by this slight effort, and closed his eyes.

"He is raving," said Reynolds. "Thirty miles through this cave—impossible!"

But the sick man seemed to hear his statement challenged. He struggled up again. "It's true, John—by heaven, it's true. I wish it weren't!"

"And you left them there in the jungle—all of them?" persisted Reynolds.

"No; only two—only two left."

The trembling woman crept closer. "Which two—which?" she gasped.

For a moment there was no reply. He seemed to be trying to remember.

"The doc," he said at last. "The doc——"

"And—and——"

"And Pyke. Only they were alive."

"Thank God!" came the sobbing wail. "Then there is some hope!" Alice had bent down, covering her face with her hands.

"Calm yourself, comrade," said Reynolds. "You have been so brave up till now. I beg of you, bear up. We shall find them yet."

"Do you think so?" she pleaded, with a face expressive of one poor hope struggling through a mountain of despair. "Can you think so?"

"He has brought us good news. Those men of ours are a long time."

"Here they are. I hear them!"

Reynolds turned and caught the faraway echoes of voices. Then came the sound of hurrying feet, then the distant gleams of light, and at last the men, each bearing something—Tibby Jak, the hunting coat; the Tamil, food and water.

A draft of brandy and a deep gulp of water revived the poor fellow, who had gazed upon eternity at his very next footstep. On that momentous journey he had lost his paraphernalia piece by piece; the monsters of the under world dogging his steps, attracted by the smell of blood, he was forced to throw away his meat.

The bats had plucked the lantern moths one by one from his tattered robe. He had not risked one moment's halt, knowing well that they would be upon him—those fiends of the darkness; and so he plunged on till he fell against this stone wall which barred his way, uttering loud cries, and fighting off the vampires to the last moment.

Suddenly the revitalized frame stiffened, and those awful eyes were suffused with intelligence.

"Where are we?" he gasped.

"Don't you know?" said Reynolds. "Why, you are in Ceylon—in the very heart of Ceylon. Where did you think you were?"

"I did not know," was the hollow answer. "I knew it was the tropics somewhere, but between the Lion d'Or dinner——"

"Ah, fatal banquet!" interposed Reynolds.

"And the time of the death of the old man whom we befriended——"

"Ha! He is dead, then? The old graybeard with the mysterious catseye of Buddha—he is dead?"

"Dead," said Hamilton. "We buried him in a tree—buried him standing up, embalmed in honey."

Reynolds turned aside and drew a deep breath.

"Raving," he muttered. "He doesn't know what he is saying. Come; we must get him right out of this. Tibby Jak, lead the way. You, Tamil man, take hold of his feet. No, never mind. Why, he is light as a feather, poor chap. I'll carry him alone, but you stay by me to help me over the hard places."

Half an hour later they burst into the outer world and took a deep and thankful breath.

The report had gone abroad that a foreigner had been discovered in one of the subterranean passages of King Tissa's palace, and about the mouth of the cavern there stood at that gray hour of dawn at least a hundred eager priests and others, gazing upon the party as if the rescued man were a mummy brought back to life.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THE GREAT BUDDHA CATSEYE.*

BY CHARLES EDWARD BARNES.

A strange story of adventure in Ceylon—What took four New York club men into the jungle—
Thrilling experiences of unarmed travelers with the denizens of the tropical forests.

CHAPTER XXIV.—A STRANGE SPECTACLE.

LATE in the morning Hamilton sat up after a refreshing sleep. He looked infinitely better—in fact, a changed man.

Alice was preparing breakfast with the help of the Tamil.

“Hammy,” said Reynolds, seating himself beside the convalescent, “tell us where you buried that old chap who hypnotized you and brought you to the jungles without your knowledge?”

“What do you want to know that for?” was the weak response. “Good heavens! Haven’t you seen enough of him?”

Reynolds sighed. “To tell the truth, old chap, I want to find that mysterious catseye——”

With the mention of that word, a sudden convulsion seemed to seize the patient. “Don’t, for God’s sake, don’t go near it!” he cried. “Look at the misery it has brought upon us—misery and death!”

“No; it wasn’t the stone; it was the old man himself. Oh, I can understand your repulsion. But see here. I saved your life by hard work, and you might at least reward me by showing me the spot where you buried the old man. You don’t understand. That gem is a relic of Gautama. The old patriarch has told me so. I have promised to restore it to him, and he has promised to reward me handsomely. Come now.”

The sick man turned and gazed into the pleading face.

“Jack,” he said weakly, “I would give my right arm to do you a service; but, for heaven’s sake, never mention——”

There was a sudden commotion outside the tent. Reynolds rose and dashed outside.

He found the area between the ruined walls already filled with natives and priests. They were laden with torches, gourds of water, and bundles of food, making a dash for the black chambers of the palace beneath.

“We could not hold them back, sahib,” ejaculated the chief hunter guiltily.

“Who are they?” said Reynolds. “What are they going to do?”

“They are going to explore the great passage to the far jungle temple, sahib. They believe that they shall find a great jewel there.”

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Reynolds smiled, then a sudden fear seized him. He rushed back into the tent.

"Hammy," said he with faltering voice, "do you think that Doc and Pyke would tell where the old man is buried—that they would tell strangers?"

"They would tell anybody. They would be so glad to see the face of a human being that they would tell all they know and more, too. Besides, why shouldn't they?"

"That settles it, then!" cried Reynolds.

"What?" was the surprised query.

"We leave for the jungles immediately—this very hour."

"But I can't—see! I can't stir."

"Never fear, old comrade. We will pack you on elephant back, and have you down those thirty miles in a wink."

Then Reynolds fell into a brown study.

"But say, Hammy," he added solemnly, "do you think that you could find the cave temple where our comrades are?"

Hamilton mused. "We can try, that's all. I have the general direction, but I may be miles and miles out of the way——"

"We must try without delay. I thought to leave you here, but it is impossible. We could never find the boys without you."

So Hamilton was forced to assent to the plan.

After breakfast a fine large elephant, in charge of a swarthy and handsome mahout, was brought up, and the priestly interpreter of the grand patriarch approached Reynolds, saluting him with deference.

"Sair," he said, "the supreme Tathagata sends this elephant to you for the use of the sick man who was so miraculously rescued last night from the bowels of the earth. Use the beast and man to your interests, sair, and let them return when you are done."

"Just the thing!" said Reynolds. "We were trying to make room for the sahib on our elephant, while we proposed to walk behind. Present our compliments and thanks to the master; tell him that I shall keep my pledge with him, and he is to be prepared to fulfil his pledge to me."

"Never fear, sair," was the reply. "Whatever the great master tells you, that you shall believe above everything on earth."

With this, the interpreter took his departure.

The howdah of the new elephant was spacious and cushioned in such a way that Hamilton was enabled to recline at full length, his comrades beside him.

Southward they took their course from the wonderful city, Hamilton gazing about him like one trying to realize his good fortune.

With the first halt Reynolds made a discovery. "Do you know," he said, "I verily believe that mahout of the patriarch's is much too intelligent a man for this business."

"Well, what do you suspect him of being?" was his friend's query.

"I think that he is nothing less than a Buddhist priest in disguise."

"And what could be his purpose?" Alice wanted to know.

"I'll tell you afterward. Now come with me and watch him carefully while I ask him a few questions."

They advanced to the spot where the mahout stood beside his charge, giving his elephant a drink of water from an ancient stone tank by the jungle path.

"English?" began Reynolds suddenly, addressing him; "you speak English?"

The mahout shook his head. A vapid expression came over his simian face.

"Well," said Reynolds, with measured slowness, and not at all in tones calculated to excite alarm, "I am very sorry I don't speak Cinghalese; but, in point of fact, there is a deadly scorpion crawling up your back!"

The mahout changed color, made a slap at his back, and finding nothing, threw off his thin garment, looking it all over with much alarm. Then, as the pair walked away, the fellow glanced up with a very foolish look on his thin face.

"You see, comrade, it worked beautifully. That fellow is a Buddhist priest, commissioned by the supreme patriarch to accompany us and hear any conversation we may drop unwittingly. Why, I'll wager that he speaks better English than we do. Even if he does feign the stupidity of a hog, he has ears as keen as a lynx'."

"But why this disguise?" persisted his companion. "What could we possibly say in his presence that could be of use to him?"

"Ah," rejoined Reynolds, with a knowing look, "that's a secret! Oh, yes; I shall let you into it, but only after my theory has proven a success. In the meantime let us be guarded in our talk, with this crafty chap near by. For, depend upon it, we shall see stirring times with him yet."

It was a very hot day—the thermometer reaching a hundred and ten. The southward jungle path was a very poor thing in comparison with the traveled road by which they had entered the sacred capital.

Rivers were forded, ravines skirted by a hair's breadth, and when, early in the afternoon, a halt was made, it found all hands in a state bordering on collapse.

With the cool of the evening they took up the march again, but only for a couple of hours, finding a safe and sheltered spot fit for the bivouac till the morrow.

Though Hamilton was improving hourly, it was plain that as a compass he was growing more and more unavailable. He had some general direction in his mind at the start, but with the first deviation from the straight course, all sense of location left him.

Hourly the task before them grew more momentous. To penetrate these dense mazes was one thing, to hunt for a lost jewel there was quite another.

As they gathered about the campfire that evening, cheering one another as best they could, gloom fell upon them in spite of themselves.

About nine o'clock that night there seemed to be a great awakening on a hillside about a mile distant. It was a clustering camp of Rodiyahs, the outcast jungle folk. Between them there ran a small, swift stream.

From a little rise of ground the travelers viewed the scene. It was a very curious aggregation of savages, swarming together on a slight acclivity half sheltered beneath a jutting crag.

Soon it was seen that there were Rodiyahs coming from every quarter, joining the festival of the revelers, who were enthused over some sort of triumphal rite. From up the stream and down the swarthy skinned pilgrims came. Each bore some sort of offering upon his head, as if approaching a temple of worship.

One of these parties of recruits burst upon the campers in their little jungle clearing ere they were aware; and with a great shout swerved to the east, and made a detour in the direction of the place of revelry.

The Rodiyah who was in the service of the travelers suddenly became very much excited. With that queer falsetto which is so like the cry of a cheetah in distress, he mounted a little eminence and called out in an inquiring voice to his flesh and blood brethren.

There was but one answer—the shrill scream of triumph, which was echoed and reëchoed through the wilderness till it became unbearable: “*Alyi tumk yaha! Alyi tumk yaha!*”

For a little time the Rodiyah seemed skeptical, and making his doubts known, suddenly heard afar some confirmation which he dared not gainsay. With that the savage became transformed. Instantly he threw himself upon his face, casting the dry leaves and branches over his head after the manner of the jungle people, his face toward the strange encampment beyond, now ablaze with the gathering torches.

“There is surely something of great importance going on over there,” said Reynolds. “TibbyJak, get me my glass!”

“Well, what do you see?” queried Alice, after he had gazed a while.

“There is some one seated upon a high eminence,” he reported, “surrounded by worshipers, and about him lie offerings of every conceivable description. It certainly can do no harm, so suppose we divert ourselves with a little excursion to take in the spectacle?”

Reynolds was coming down from his height when he was confronted by the Rodiyah guard and the Tamil man. The former was a sight after his ceremony of prostration, and so excited that his appeals through his interpreter were like chatterings of a drowning man.

“Well,” said Reynolds calmly, “what has happened?”

“*Alyi tumk yaha!*” cried the Rodiyah in wild ecstasy. “*Alyi tumk yaha!*”

His face was a blaze of glory. He seemed drugged with some magic potion.

“Well, so I’ve heard before,” said Reynolds calmly. “But what under heaven does that mean?” and he turned to the Tamil.

“It means everything to him, sahib. Alyi is the god of the Rodiyah, sahib.”

“What’s that?” said Reynolds stepping closer, where he could see the man’s strange face in the firelight.

“He is the—what you say, sahib? The——”

"Messiah—can you mean the messiah of the Rodiyahs?"

"The god whom they have been looking for all these ages," interposed the hunter, seeing the Tamil perplexed with the elucidation of so abstruse a question. "You know, sahib," he added, "the Rodiyahs are an outcast race——"

"Oh, yes; I know all about that."

"And they have been watching for the coming of the god who should become their leader and save them—make them such as they were in ages past, sahib."

"I see. He is to redeem them in the eyes of the world, eh?"

"Yes, sahib. He came the other night—this wonderful god—came as they predicted years ago. He is there now, sahib."

"Ah, I see," said Reynolds, smiling indulgently.

"And the Rodiyah, sahib, wants to go over and pay his homage to the great god. May he go? He will come back before morning."

"Well, if he will wait a few moments, he will have company. Tell the mahout to bring out one of the elephants, and we'll all go across the stream. It will be quite a lark," he added, turning to his friends gathered about the campfire.

Although they were not particularly enthused, the experience promised some diversion, particularly as sleep amid this constant pandemonium was out of the question.

The elephant was brought; and with Hamilton, Miss Pyke, and Reynolds in the howdah, the march began.

The Rodiyah, with his hands above his head in an attitude of praise and worship, led the way, and it was fortunate that he was with them, otherwise the strangers would never have been allowed to approach the place of worship.

Several times they were halted, but when they were found to be in charge of a Rodiyah, they were suffered to pass.

CHAPTER XXV.—THE GOD OF THE RODIYAH.

"LOOK!" cried Alice, as they emerged from the stream on the other side.

Like a vast amphitheater the circular acclivity opened out before them, and every foot was a flaming mass of light and color.

In attitudes of worship and awe thousands were kneeling before the rude throne, while others further back were chanting and shouting, either in choruses or singly, going into all sorts of frenzied contortions, wild with triumph and adoration.

The elephant was obliged to pause, for the press of people became too great. Suddenly, with a great show of authority, one of the Rodiyahs ran down from the altar and with much excited gesticulation, ordered the elephant turned about.

Of course there was a severe protest, the Rodiyah guard arguing with his brother outcast with more force than elegance.

"It's of no use," said the chief hunter at last, with a despairing tone

that showed his abandonment of the project; "they will not allow us to approach the throne. We might as well turn back."

"But I will make an offering to the new god," rejoined the persistent Reynolds. "Here!—You Rodiyah chap there! Here's gold for the new messiah. Go give it to him, and tell him we want to render homage."

The Tamil and the chief hunter wrestled with the Rodiyah dialect for a time, then with the two gold pieces the savage returned to the dais.

He was not gone long. Soon he managed to press his way back through the throng, tossing the gold into the howdah again with infinite disdain.

"Well?" inquired Reynolds haughtily. "He doesn't like gold, eh? He must be a new kind of a Ceylonese saint. Hey! Tibby Jak, ask that idiot why the god would not take the gold?"

"He spurns to take bribes from the oppressors of the Rodiyahs, sahib."

"Oh, does he, though!" smiled the leader.

"We must get back," said the Tamil apprehensively. "They mean to kill us if we don't, sahib. They are fanatics, you know."

"Oh, really!" retorted Reynolds, with a sneer. "Give me the glass, Miss Pyke. We'll see what sort of a looking duffer this heavenly visitant is. Strange that he should be afraid of meeting a white man——"

He raised the glass after wiping it carefully.

"Hold the elephant still, you fellow! Confound it! I can't see. Everything blurs——"

"The people are pressing closer, sahib," wailed the hunter. "They mean to do us harm if we do not go away instantly. The god up yonder has ordered it."

But the leader, who was straining his eyes through the binocular, was deaf. Now he raised himself upon his tiptoes, drawing in a deep breath, his whole attitude strained to the utmost. Then came an exclamation of intense amazement.

"Well, this bangs Banagher!"

"What's the matter?" cried Alice with sudden alarm. "What is it? Who——"

"Why," said Reynolds, turning about, his eyes glittering in the torch-light, "do you know who their messiah is—their god—their new angel visitant who has come to redeem them from the curse of the world?"

"Well—well?" was the breathless query.

"It's Brandt!"

"What!" exploded Hamilton, writhing up from his reclining posture.

"As sure as I live, Hammy, it's Brandt. He's sitting on the throne with a scepter in his hand, dressed in royal robes, crowned with a chaplet of lotus flowers, and what is more, from the looks of him, I—I must confess that he is drunk—maudlin drunk, by Jupiter."

Hamilton had snatched the glass, but his hand trembled so that he could not see. Alice steadied it for him.

"Hold that elephant still, you idiot!" shrieked Reynolds.

"But the people say that if we don't leave before the next tom tom sounds, sahib——"

"Tell them to hold on a minute. Here, who's got a piece of paper?"

"Great heavens!" moaned Hamilton, dropping back with a gasp. "True—true—true! It's Brandt—it's Brandt! What a miracle!"

"Here you!" shouted Reynolds. "Give me that dry talipot leaf down there. I want to write a message to the angel. Quick!"

"Sahib, the people won't wait!" The chief hunter's face was the color of clay.

"Here—where is that man who came down with the message from the—what d' you call him god up there?"

"He is here, sahib. He is wild with rage. He threatens trouble, sahib."

"Give him this and tell him to take it to the Alyi instantly. It's important."

"But he won't, sahib. He is afraid. He has orders to drive you away."

"Then here is a gold piece for himself, and promise him another if he returns with the answer."

There was a very animated pantomimic show; but the sight of the gold won the hour.

"He says he will go, sahib, even if he is killed for it."

"Kind of him," said Reynolds, settling back. "Now we'll see what sort of an answer we'll get to that."

Reynolds tried to sit down in quiet, but he couldn't.

"What message did you send?" asked Alice.

"Nothing but just 'Jack Reynolds.' If he's too drunk to read——"

"Do you really," said Alice sorrowfully, "really think that he is——"

"Drunk? Good heavens! Look at him." But as no one offered a second look, the speaker took the glass, stood up and made another inspection.

"Ha!" he said, leaning forward breathlessly. "The messenger is approaching on his hands and knees. Now—now he is offering the leaf to the angel—and now—now the maudlin idiot is trying to wipe the cobwebs out of his eyes and—ha! he starts—he leaps as if a bomb had exploded before his nose! Again he is studying it—turning it upside down—around and around. He seems dazed, swaying backward and forward like a man bereft of his senses. Now—now he is looking straight at us. He sees nothing, though his eyes are wide and have an awful, haunted look.

"Drunk? Why, he's drunk as a lord—no, it must be a drug. He has been sampling some of these offerings and got the worst of it. Ho! now he is pulling himself together. He is raising one finger to the kneeling man, nodding. One—that means me. By Jove! if this isn't the richest panorama I ever saw in all my life."

The message bearer made his way back through the screaming, lauding ranks, his face expressive of victory. He held a short, excited confab with the interpreter, then the hunter turned to Reynolds, lifting his eyes apprehensively as he spoke.

"Sahib, the great god of the Rodiyahs will receive your worshipful homage——"

"By Jove!" interposed Reynolds, with a feigned ecstasy, "isn't that mighty good of him now?"

"But, Sahib, if you take my advice, you will not go."

"Why not?" asked Reynolds, dismounting from the howdah.

"I—I think," said the hunter, "I fear that he intends to make a sacrifice of you—to kill you, sahib."

"Oh, don't be alarmed," said Reynolds smiling. Then he followed the messenger, who made his way on upward through the worshipful ranks, waving his broad, brown arms before him and parting the crowded ranks as a swimmer through the waves.

As Reynolds drew near the altar, he found more and more cause to marvel. Surely the Rodiyahs had expressed their adorations substantially, and in myriad offerings of fruit, flesh of beast and fowl of the air, and flowers in almost sickening profusion.

Behind the enthroned monarch there stood two enormous wings, purple black, glossy, and magnificent. They were a fitting background to such a stately and imposing pageant as the new angel and his terrestrial chiefs.

With his vague eyes the enshrined potentate caught a glimpse of the newcomer in the flare of the torches; but he controlled himself admirably, though his heart was beating very fast.

"Hello, Brandt!" cried Reynolds. "What in the name——"

"Shut up!" came the low, coarse growl. "Don't you see that I'm an archangel?"

The speaker motioned to the messenger to lead his man closer to the daïs, where, without changing the expression of his face, he said, "Reynolds, as you value your life and mine, do just as I tell you. Will you?"

Reynolds looked mystified. A smile of rebellion came over his strong features.

"This is all confounded poppycock, Brandt——"

"Shut up, I tell you, or I'll have to order you thrown into the river to save myself, and you, too. You don't realize where you are nor what you are——"

"But I see what you are—you're drunker than a she bear——"

"Will you hold your tongue? Don't you see they are all of them eying us? Why, they would tear us to pieces in a minute if they knew. Now, do as I tell you, or else go away and let me escape as best I can."

"Well, what?" mumbled Reynolds testily.

"Get down on your hands and knees and crawl here to me," said Brandt.

Reynolds began to rebel; but when he saw the long and awful faces of the Rodiyahs about him, he lost his indomitable swagger.

"If it weren't for Alice down there, I'd have some fun with this whole lot of blooming fools," he muttered.

"Stop your mumbling and do as I tell you," insisted Brandt, in a low, long drawl, without moving a muscle of his face nor deigning to give the newcomer even a look.

"Well, here goes!" said Reynolds, with a sigh. Down on all fours he floundered, and began puffing his way up to the supreme personage.

"Well, here I am," he said savagely. "What next?"

"Kiss the hem of my garment," ordered Brandt, with a grave groan, like one condescending to a slave.

Reynolds shut his teeth together with a snap.

"Kiss nothing!" he said. But after one more look into the silent, ashen faces about him, he hesitated no longer.

He took up the hem of the flowing robe of exquisite oriental silk, and kissed it with a smack that sounded like a Tamil washerwoman slapping clothes on the rocks by the riverside.

"Well, what sort of a blooming idiot are you going to make of me next?" he growled.

"Empty your pockets!" commanded the god.

Reynolds began shelling out without a murmur now, several gold pieces rolling down the incline. They were restored to the heap.

"Are you through with me now?" he inquired meekly.

"Pretty near. Say, where in the name of jumping Jupiter did you come from?"

"And you—how on earth did you ever get here?"

"I didn't," said Brandt. "I came by the air line—flew down on the back of a big bird. It seems that they have been expecting me for over a thousand years, poor devils! Sorry I was so long about it. But say; this won't do. One little suspicion that I am not the thing they think I am, and it's all up with both of us. Say, where can I meet you and the boys, by the way; I suppose you must have found and rescued Doc and Pyke, eh?"

"No," moaned Reynolds, still on his knees; "we're trying to find them. For heaven's sake, do you know where they are?"

"No. I don't know where I am myself. All I know is that I flew down here on the back of a whooping big bird——"

"From where?"

"Oh, lord! don't ask me to tell you that story. That was some nights ago. I've been living like a god ever since. But I'm getting sick of it. Too much of a good thing, and dangerous. The first white man that sees me, it will all be up. Say, help me out, will you?"

"That's what I'm here for. Just vamoose and meet us ten miles down the river at dusk tomorrow."

"Good. I'll be there. Wait for me."

"And do you think that we can find Pyke and the Doc?"

"God knows. I have lost all bearings. But say, who's down there on the elephant?"

"Hammy and poor Pyke's sister."

"Hammy? Lord! I left him with the boys——"

"And we found him at Anarajapoorra, thirty miles away. Crawled through an underground passage leading from that cavern where you were all imprisoned."

"Bless me! what wonders are coming to pass. But here; this won't do. Go now—don't get up, but crawl backwards like a crab, you clumsy baboon! Glad you had the pluck to come, any way. The shock has almost

sobered me up. These poor idiots gave me some sweetened water that I thought was so harmless, but I soon found to my sorrow——”

“Your halo of glory is slipping over your left ear, old chap,” said Reynolds, glancing up as he crept backwards down the slight incline. “Tomorrow at sundown, remember!”

“Careful, now!” was the parting word. “Not a sound—not a suspicion or we will all be done for—it means massacre, old chap, dead sure!”

The low, dismal murmurs of the god, aping solemnity during all this animated conversation, and giving vent to fierce gutturals in drawling out the most commonplace sentences, now ceased; and with a wave of his scepter the tom toms began their beating, the shrill pipes sounded up in a chorus, the chanting tunes of the swaying hordes were renewed, and the rite of adoration went on.

Brandt sank back, all this homage boring him immeasurably. He was thinking how he might escape from it all at dead of night and meet his comrades in the jungle below at dusk. The problem before him would be a severe test of his powers of diplomacy.

CHAPTER XXVI.—WONDROUS TIDINGS.

THE moment that Reynolds regained the howdah, he gave orders to turn about.

“We must get right out of this,” he said.

“What does he know?” inquired Alice, her anxious face expressive of deep emotion. “Has he not given you a single clue?”

Reynolds drew a deep breath, leaned back, and folded his arms.

There fell a deep silence, ominous and forbidding.

“No hope?” said Alice again, almost piteously. “Did he not say a word about his comrades?”

“He thought we had found them,” replied Reynolds. “As for himself, he had completely lost his bearings. How he ever got there seems to be a greater mystery to him than to us. He will escape during the night and join us ten miles down the river at dusk.”

“Did he say that?” said Hammy eagerly. “Good. That is the question I was burning to ask you.”

“You did not for a moment think that we were to leave him there entirely to his fate, did you?”

“But he seemed not to be minding it in the least—in fact, heartily enjoying the novel sensation of apotheosis. I think I should like a bit of it myself for a change.”

“But even that palls, Hammy. Besides, Brandt knew that the first European that set eyes upon him would let out the secret, and woe to the tin god then!”

Alice was about to put another question when a sudden agitation about the camp which they were nearing caused the occupants of the howdah to center their interest there. It was evident that there was trouble ahead.

“What is it?” she asked, with some alarm.

"I can't see," said Reynolds, whose solemn face was craned over the flapping ears of the elephant. "I'm afraid some panther or other has made an attack on our watch. I see some one lying flat by the campfire. Tibby Jak and the Tamil man are bending over him in a state of excitement. Here, this is too slow," he added, leaping from the howdah to the ground, rifle in hand. Then he ran with all haste to the place of momentous interest.

He found a stranger—a Singhalese, with the shreds of a garment clinging about him, his bronze flesh gashed and seared as if he had crashed into a cactus hedge, or tried to plunge through a line of prodding bayonets.

For a little time he lay there panting, unconscious of the presence of the leader. Then suddenly he turned and faced him, uttering a strange, wailing cry.

Reynolds was dumfounded. Who could the strange man be?

Alice came rushing up, quite breathless.

"What's the matter? Who is that man?" Then she drew back. "Why, I know. It's——"

"For heaven's sake, who?" burst in Reynolds. "I'm sure I don't know him."

"Why, it's one of the rebels—one of the murderers of poor Miss Bagley!"

Reynolds whistled savagely. Advancing, he stood before the horribly emaciated and lacerated creature who was still muttering his prayers, his eyes rolling in a frenzy.

The chief hunter was plying him with questions, none of which he seemed to hear.

"How came he here?" cried Reynolds. "What does he want?"

"He is one of the mutineers who escaped to the jungle, sahib. There were nine of them at first. There are but four left."

—"Where are the rest?"

"Dead, sahib. A boa crushed one to death, and a tiger closed upon the others the night after. Three men were killed right before his eyes, sahib, he says."

"Swift retribution," murmured Reynolds, resting his chin upon his rifle muzzle.

Alice was speechless, compassion mingling with resentment in her heart.

"Well, what else has he got to say?" was the nervous command. "Is that all?"

"Oh, no, sahib. He says that seven miles south of here they met a Veddah woman. She was hunting for food. You know, sahib, they are people of the wilderness——"

"Oh, never mind that. We know all about Veddahs. What else?"

"Well, sahib, she took compassion on them, for they were all torn and bleeding, starved and fainting. She took them to a cave, sahib—a cavern in the mountains, where they found two white men——"

"What's that?" fairly shrieked the listener, making his way forward, dropping on his knees before the panting wretch. "White men—are you sure that he said white men?"

The interpreter put the question. "Positive, sahib. One of the rebels, Dyn Amakh, who was so badly bitten by the tiger that he had to be carried to the cave, spoke English with the white sahibs. They told him that they did not know how they got there, nor where they were, in fact. They said that they were once five, but that three had died, one of them an old man with long white hair, sahib. He died first——"

Reynolds sprang to his feet, his powerful frame all a tremble.

"I can't believe it," he muttered, turning to the stiff, immovable figure at his side.

"Ask him how they were dressed—how they lived?" broke in the dazed woman.

"They wore orange robes like the priests of Gautama. They lived on the food which the Veddah woman brought them. Her husband was killed by an elephant, but they dared not tell her for fear that she would leave them."

"And both were alive—both?" came the eager, feminine query.

"Yes; but one was ill with fever—going mad——"

He paused, for the look upon the woman's face frightened him.

Alice turned, facing her friend with contorted countenance.

"We must go and find them—instantly. It may not be too late. We may save them. Will you go? Say that you will?"

"You need not ask me to do my duty," said Reynolds quietly. "I only want to make sure that the man is not lying. Oh, these scoundrels are great romancers."

"But there can be no possible doubt. I will go with you."

"But I really prefer to go alone. The journey will be perfectly appalling at night. You need the rest. Stay here with poor Hamilton——"

"I can't! I should go mad here after all that has happened. No, no; don't deny me. I must go. We must leave now—this very hour—this moment. Every second may be precious. Don't deny me—don't!"

Reynolds gave her a glance which reassured her.

"It will be a terrible journey," he said, "but all things are possible after what we have been through. Seven miles, did he say? We shall be compelled to walk it, driving the two elephants ahead to make a tunnel through the jungle. There is no use trying to stick to a path in this darkness. Go and prepare then. Tell Hamilton. We shall take turns carrying him."

The little woman gave him a look of unutterable gratitude, then turned and hurried back to the tent, pausing long enough to apprise Hamilton of the glad tidings.

Reynolds knelt over the prostrate rebel, drawing his flask of brandy. "Drink," said he.

The wounded coolie swallowed with effort.

"Tamil, go and get some food for this poor chap. He will collapse if you don't, and then where will we be?"

The servant did as he was bidden, returning instantly with rice, water, and native bread, all of which the famished creature devoured wolfishly.

Reynolds turned to his chief hunter. "Ask him if he will pilot us back to the cave tonight."

"He says, 'Not tonight, sahib.' He is too near death himself, sahib."

"But he must go tonight. Every moment is precious. We go to save lives. He must go tonight."

"No, sahib. He says he must rest."

"Then take him up and throw him back in the jungle and let him rest there!" cried the infuriated leader. "Am I going to save his life when he has it in his power to save the lives of my friends, and won't? Throw him back in the jungle, I say, the rebel—the murderer! We'll go it alone."

But when this decree was passed on to the prostrate native he uttered a piteous cry, chattering his appeals like a cornered demon.

"Oh, he will go, sahib; he says he will go if the men will help him, for he cannot walk——"

"Bah! We've got a man in worse condition than he is, and he must go." He came closer. "What's the scoundrel working for—a bribe?"

"No, sahib. He said he would go, but on one condition."

"I thought so. Well?"

"That you promise him that he and his fellow rebels there in the jungle cave shall not be arrested for the murder of the she wolf memsahib."

"Ha! So he confesses, does he? That's interesting."

"He says that Dyn Amakh thought of the goraka seeds, and Chang Hah, the man with the Malay mother, sahib, did the business. To make sure, these two together caught the great spider and put it in the memsahib's tent. Chang Hah, sahib, was killed by the tiger, and Dyn Amakh died in the cave of the white sahibs the day after they got there."

"Indeed!" was the quiet exclamation. "I begin to believe in the Buddhist doctrine of compensation. But enough talk. Tell the man that we forgive him, and shall protect him from justice in this miserable matter if he brings about the salvation of our friends whom we came here to save. Do you understand?"

A grateful groveling in the dust on the part of the coolie upon whom rested the shadow of murder showed that he not only understood, but was alive to the full meaning of the suspension of sentence.

"Bring him some honey, venison, bread and drink," commanded Reynolds, as he turned away. "Then prepare to break camp immediately. Tell the new mahout everything, though, from the way he has been hanging about here, I guess there is little he doesn't know."

"On your order, sahib."

It was a march never to be forgotten. The sick coolie clung to the back of the second elephant, while Hamilton was carried in a sort of sling palanquin swung from a pole borne upon two shoulders, the Tamil, the chief hunter, and Reynolds taking turns as bearers. Alice walked along ahead of this crude ambulance, her rifle ever poised, undaunted through all.

Once in a while a native would slip into one of the crevasses overlaid with verdure, and the march would be interrupted till he could be rescued. The rebel coolie had sunk into a sort of feverish lethargy after his frightful experiences, and it was with the utmost effort that he could be roused to guide the leaders with intelligence.

Then, for fear that they might pass the spot which they had so earnestly hoped to reach, it was thought best to make a halt till the first flush of day, when a detour could be made and their exact bearings discovered.

Swinging a hammock in a favorable position, with the hunter to watch over her, Reynolds made Alice comfortable; and there exhaustion and anxiety overcame her. She slept soundly.

Reynolds lay-down for a little time; but he was soon up, venturing this way and that from the camp, moving cautiously along to some point where he might gain an eminence for the purpose of taking a survey of the impregnable jungle.

A sudden stir in a tall treetop caused him to halt and grip his rifle with quickening firmness. Straining his eyes upward, high above him he descried a strange shape, half human, half ape, clinging with her toes as deftly as with her hands to the great branches, surveying the encampment from this safe vantage.

Reynolds watched the curious creature in the ruby light of dawn. It was surely the most perplexing Caliban he had ever encountered in all his experiences.

Feminine in build and contour, mummy black and sinewy, with long hair sweeping over the knotty shoulders, she was moving restlessly about the tree, using her hands, feet, and toes with like dexterity, uttering weird cries like an ape.

Silently Reynolds crept off and returned to camp. There he stored away in his hunting jacket a quantity of rock salt. Hurrying back to the spot with all stealth and swiftness, he was just in time to see the strange being descending from her perch, and start to the westward at a rate of speed with which poor Reynolds found it hard to keep up.

Finally, the pace being altogether too hot for him, he gave one or two agonizing cries to attract her attention, and fell upon his face.

Curiosity in the jungle species, from the insect to the lions, elephants and the missing link Veddahs, is the strongest passion. Monkeys will pick up a bit of mirror thrown aside by a traveler, and contemplate it for days at a time, even going insane over it, not so moved by admiration of their own features nor appalled by the mystery of the phenomenon, but merely from simple curiosity.

To follow that Veddah woman would have required the wings of a pheasant and the agility of a chimpanzee. Seeing defeat before him, there was but one thing to do—arouse the strange creature's curiosity, not by terrifying her, but rather by appealing to her rude sympathies, which, strange to say, are remarkably easy to awaken.

It was as the clever hunter thought. Not more than half a minute elapsed when through the green mazes he caught sight of a feminine face, the color of rusty stove iron.

Rising slowly, the hunter thrust his hand into his pocket, and drawing forth the rock salt, held it toward the weird woman who, when she saw the sudden stir, was up and ready to start off again. The sight of the salt, however, stayed her.

Craving for salt is the one thing that all denizens of the jungle share in common, and when money bribes fail, the Veddah still succumbs to the one supreme temptation.

Tossing a little crumb to the stranger, greedily she snatched it up and laid her tongue against it, her eyes sparkling with delight. Then Reynolds outstretched his two filled hands to her—an offering which she could not resist.

Rousing her curiosity with one thing after another, never letting her interest in him flag for a moment for fear that she would be up and off like a wood sprite, Reynolds showed her his watch, even the tiny wheels, and finally placed it at her ear that she might catch its perplexing tickings.

As she expressed some interest in the tortoise shell buttons on his thick silk hunting jacket, the delighted man drew his knife and cut them off, presenting them to her with every show of gracious condescension. In fact, there was only one other instance in all his life when this born fighter and sterling republican from a land of equality ever groveled before a human shrine, and that was the night before at the feet of Brandt, the pseudo god of the Rodiyahs.

But it all had its reward. By pantomimic gestures and facial contortions that would have done credit to the most consummate *Pierrot* on the French stage, Reynolds made his wants known.

It was a long time before the anxious query could break through the formidable brain barriers that hemmed in the savage intellect, but finally the idea awoke within her. She nodded.

Pointing to the westward, she made a weird sound in the hollow of her hands. This, in the savage vernacular, meant that the cave was as far as the "Whoo!" of the owl might be heard, which represents half that of the "Ar-r-rou!" the roar of a tiger, and twice that of a "Whirr!"—the noise of the jungle pheasant in flight. Such is the savage measurement of distance.

With the promise of emptying his pockets completely of magic things as a reward upon reaching their destination, and with the Veddah woman as leader, the jungle searcher rose and plodded on to the westward.

CHAPTER XXVII.—THE GREAT CATSEYE OF BUDDHA.

THE day was already quite advanced when Alice awoke.

Marveling that Reynolds should have let her sleep so long when matters of such vital importance weighed upon them, she uttered an impatient exclamation and started to investigate.

A strange sense of loneliness oppressed her. An appalling helplessness began to afflict her beyond endurance. She started toward the clustering coolies, when a voice near at hand brought her to herself.

"You have slept well, Miss Pyke. I am so glad."

It was Hamilton. He was still in his hammock ambulance suspended from the long pole laid in the crotches of two trees. There was a refreshed look in his pale but beaming face.

"Yes, thank you," was the reply. "But what does this mean—this delay? Surely we should have been up and stirring hours ago."

"Well, evidently Jack is up and about. He disappeared before daybreak—he and the new mahout—and they haven't been seen since."

"What!" exclaimed the troubled woman, "the new mahout?"

"The chap the old Buddhist patriarch of Anarajapoorā so kindly lent us."

Alice came forward with a look of grave alarm on her face.

"If that is the case, I fear there has been trouble. That old scoundrel is here for no good purpose. Come, I can't stay here. Do you think that you could walk a little this morning?"

"I tried it but soon gave it up," lamented Hamilton. "It makes me wild to think that I should be so helpless and dependent here when every man has burdens enough of his own."

"But I can't remain quiet," exclaimed Alice, as if a premonition of evil were crushing her. "I can't. Something will happen—something *has* happened. I feel it. I know it!"

"But—but what in the name of heaven could have happened? Isn't Jack Reynolds able to take care of himself? Surely you cannot think that after all that he has been through so bravely——"

"Oh, no man would be able to take care of himself alone in the jungles with that rascally mahout—that Buddhist priest in the guise of a hireling. I knew there would be trouble. I wish he had never come. Ho! where's my Rodiyah?"

At sound of that call, right at her side, but so hidden that she did not see him, the faithful man sprang up like magic to her bidding.

Alice turned to her bodyguard with an air of command. "Will you go with me—yonder—there—into the jungle and find the sahib?"

Although she spoke these words, knowing that they were perfectly unintelligible to him, they gave her gesticulations and facial expression a lucidity which even the savage comprehended. He nodded gravely.

Alice advanced, examined his belt with the cartridges, then took up her own rifle and moved away, the Rodiyah following—a towering shape with the humble air of a giant mastiff at the heels of his little mistress, whose very footstep he worshiped.

"Which way did the sahib go?" the searcher inquired of the Tamil.

"Yonder—toward the west," was the reply.

"And the mahout?" she added almost fiercely.

"I don't know, memsahib. He is gone, that's all."

Alice stood still a moment, and then said, "You have arms—a rifle?"

"Yes; here." He drew it forth from the thicket.

The commander took it, saw that the chambers of the repeater were filled, then laid it across his knees.

"When you hear me shoot once, answer with a shot. When you hear me shoot three times, you come—you and the chief hunter, both, and quick. Will you do as I say?"

The faithful ally nodded gravely. He saw that there was something

agitating the brave girl's mind. He seized the rifle. "I will listen—I will come," he said, and with a voice which plainly showed that he meant it.

With a wave to her servant, Alice started forward, taking a westward course.

She had not penetrated the forest far when she discovered footprints in the soft moss—those of her leader—and near them the impress of some sort of a bird or beast which she could not make out. It certainly had very little appearance of a human shape.

She took their direction and plunged forward till the jungle grew so impenetrable and dark that she was obliged to force her Rodiyah ahead of her to break a path.

After some time, fearing that she was wandering beyond gunshot, she raised her rifle and saluted. To her amazement there were two salutes in answer, one far behind her, doubtless that of the Tamil; and one farther on, without doubt that of her commander.

With a look of excited triumph, feeling that matters were not half as bad as she had imagined, on she plunged through ravines and over clearings, now and then wedging her servant ahead of her, till at last she stood still on the summit of a rock and gave a shrill cry.

For a moment there was no answer, and her heart beat wildly. Then she thought she heard a cry, faint and despairing—a low, long wail through the far depths.

No longer herself, with savage desperation the brave girl leaped down into the thicket and dashed on and on.

"I'm coming! I'm coming!" she screamed. "What's the matter? Where are you?"

"Here! here!" was the hollow response, which sounded from a void almost at her feet, it seemed.

Turning abruptly, down the steep declivity she plunged, and there, in a sort of clearing, lying on his side, his face china white and pitiable in its expression of agony, lay Reynolds.

Beyond him was the mahout, flat on his face, dead, with his hands outstretched upon the sods, as if in some rite of eternal prostration.

Alice dashed forward and fell by the side of the wounded man.

"What does this mean?" she moaned. "What has happened? Are you hurt?"

"Hurt?" was the bitter echo; "I am all but killed. Oh, it was a terrific fight——"

"With what—whom? With that?" cried Alice, pointing to the shapeless clod beyond.

"With that!" he answered, gasping. "Can you reach that flask in the pocket under me? I have tried to for almost an hour, it seems; but I am so weak from the loss of blood——"

Alice seized it, unscrewed the stopple, and emptied half the contents down the gulping throat.

"But I don't understand," she murmured. "What was it all about? Tell me!"

Reynolds rolled his eyes about him till they rested upon the tall Rodiyah, who stood beside them aghast at the tragedy.

"Send him away and I'll tell you," said the sufferer. "No one on earth but you must know it now, Alice; no one."

The huntress rose, seized her rifle, and shot three times in the air. "Nonsense!" she cried then. "They will never hear that away down here in this ravine."

"I have been blazing away for an hour," said Reynolds, "and you never heard. I had given up, reserving my ammunition for emergency, as the smell of fresh blood will soon be bringing the tigers and leopards from their lairs, and there is sure to be trouble."

Alice was making excited gesticulations to the Rodiyah, who, understanding the command, was off like a shot. Then she dropped back in the blood spattered grass.

"Now, tell me!" she cried. "What was the fight over? What could have been the reason——"

Reynolds thrust his hand into his bosom, and drew it forth again with something inclosed in the palm.

"What is it?" she asked breathlessly.

"The grandest jewel on the face of the globe. He tried to rob me—the dog! Do you know what it is? It is the illustrious, supreme catseye of Buddah, for the restoration of which to the Buddhist shrine I am to be rewarded with a million pounds sterling."

The listener drew a deep breath. Then a sound startled her.

"What's that?" she commanded. "It was a human cry——"

"Yes; yonder. Do you see that tiny black opening?"

"Well?"

"It is the cave temple. They are there!"

A convulsion came over the slender frame. "Who? Gordon—my brother—there?"

Reynolds nodded.

For a moment all was still. She was trying to read some awful oracle in his pallid face. He was clinging to her as one drowning.

"If that is true—if that is true," she faltered, "I must go to him——"

"No, no. Wait!"

"I can't. I must go. I will return instantly. This suspense—it is killing me. Whatever the worst is, I must know it." She had broken from his clutches.

"Come back!" he cried. "Wait—don't leave me! It is not a fit place for you to go, Alice, believe me."

But a sudden scream interrupted him, and back she flew with shrinking terror.

"Yonder! It is a panther—see?"

"Ha! the smell of blood—I thought it would make them bold." Reynolds had seized his rifle, tried to struggle up, but fell back with a moan.

Along the edge of the little clearing the beautiful beast crept almost on

her belly, her sinuous flesh all a quiver, jaws dripping and eyes expressive of terror suffused with savage fury.

Bang ! bang !

Almost crouched to the ground Alice had fired twice, pausing with her heart in her throat to watch the effect of her bullets.

The panther did not seem to know what was the matter with her. Her hindquarters gave way, dropping limp, but her front was bolder than ever.

It was plain that her back was broken, the hindmost half numb and paralyzed, but with her terrible forepaws she was dragging herself toward her adversaries with a shrieking fury, writhing along like a serpent.

Crack !

The cool huntress seemed satisfied with her shot, for she lowered her rifle.

"Splendid !" cried Reynolds as he saw a wavering look come over the panther's whole aspect, the eyes grow glassy ; and then with a gasping cry, down went the beast like a game fighter.

"Magnificent !" cried Reynolds again. "What nerve—what courage——"

"Hark ! what's that ?"

"Ho ! it's our men." Reynolds was fighting his way into a sitting posture. "Tamil man, go yonder—do you see that cave ? Take the Rodiyah up there and bring hither the white sahibs—two of them. Do you understand ?"

"I will go and show them," cried Alice.

"You will stay here !" screamed Reynolds, half commanding, half appealing. "You can do no good. They are safe—both of them——"

"Safe ?" she echoed, falling back at his side. "Alive—you are sure ?"

"They will live," said Reynolds. "Please don't leave me. You must not go there. It is a horrible place. God only knows how they have survived till now. Here, you Tamil man ! run back to camp and bring food and water—plenty—do you understand ?"

The colorless face gave an expression of intelligence at last, and he was gone.

Alice was now lying in a complete collapse.

"Thank heaven—thank heaven !" she was murmuring. "If Gordon is only alive—only breathes, it is all I hope for. We can save him. After this miracle, are not all things possible ?"

A fearful sigh awoke her. She looked up and saw the two men coming down the incline bearing a shapeless clod.

Alice tried to spring up, but Reynolds seized her. "You must stay here with me. They will bring them here."

"But—but who——" The stuttering interrogation ended in a horrible gulping.

"It is the Doc," said Reynolds.

He motioned to the men to deposit the unconscious man near by, then they ran back for the other.

Alice looked at that appalling shape, and all the blood in her heart seemed to go out through some open wound. She sat riveted to the spot—chained there by weakness and consuming terror.

Then in awful silence she watched the men bearing down from the black cavern another hideous lump, black, misshaped, distorted, and as they drew near, Reynolds seized her still firmer.

"Keep up heart, Alice, for God's sake ; don't break down now !"

But as the shocking thing was laid before her, with all the woman's tenderness pouring out her very life, she crept forward with a faint gurgling cry, "Gordon ! Gordon !" and so fell across his body in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—HAMILTON'S QUESTION.

IT took many hours of labor and the most careful nursing to restore Pyke and the doctor to consciousness and a sense of their rescue after their frightful incarceration. The miracle of their salvation seemed too great to be believed.

But with the sight of the dear face of his sister bent over him in tearful gratitude, poor Pyke was suddenly seized with the illusion that it had all been a horrible dream, and that he was in reality in the luxurious seclusion of his own Fifth Avenue mansion on the other side of the earth.

"Alice, dear," he would murmur, "I am dying of thirst. Tell William to bring me up an eye opener. Then let him get a hot shower ready for me right away. I mustn't lie here like this. What time is it? Lord, Alice, did I really make such an ass of myself yesterday at that Lion d'Or dinner?"

"What's that man mumbling about over there?" groaned the doctor. "Nurse, tell the house surgeon that I'm no charity patient, and I want a better room and bed——"

Hamilton heard this, and began drooning like a maudlin fish woman :

"The ship came out o' the sea,
Yo ho !
And a pirate ship was she.
And the cap and the crew
For the death lot drew,
To see which should serve
In a pirate stew ;
For the larder was empty,
And the grog tank, too.
Sing ho !"

"There, there, Hammy !" begged Reynolds, who had just awakened from a refreshing nap. Then, turning to the little woman, who was flitting from one to another, he added : "What have you got here? A hospital or a lunatic asylum?"

"Both," was the quiet answer. "But either is better than a morgue, isn't it?"

"You've got that, too," said Reynolds, pointing in the direction of the spot where the encounter with the patriarch's mahout occurred over the body of the old man who bore the rare catseye to his rude sarcophagus with him.

"No," answered Alice. "I feared more trouble from the wild beasts, so I ordered the men to throw the mahout into the jungle and cover him over."

Indeed," she persisted confidently, "there is no morgue about this place, and there shall be none."

"For which we shall be grateful to you alone," interposed Reynolds proudly. "Jove! But if I could only move this arm so that I could shoot, I don't think I would feel so dependent and helpless."

"You were hurt more than you think," said Alice, advancing toward him with another bundle of green leaves, which she laid with soothing gentleness upon the fevered slashes of the barbarian's knife. "Get a little sleep now. It is already past noon, and remember we have an engagement at nightfall ever so far from here."

"Not so far as you think," returned the wounded man. "I have been keeping pretty good tab on my bearings. - We have been going down stream obliquely. I think that two miles below we will strike the river, and then following down another two, we will about reach the spot. We will camp there till Brandt comes."

"Don't worry about it," murmured Alice calmly. "He has been able to take care of himself so far. I rather trust him to find us."

She was tying the bandages about the wounded man, making his pillow of leaves softer, and otherwise ministering to his comfort with that ineffable tenderness which has always made woman glorious in time of peril and distress. Then she took up her rifle, glanced about to see that all was safe and quiet, then moved away to a point where she could overlook the whole field and stand guard.

Hamilton had watched this picture from his hammock ambulance.

"Jack," said he softly, bending over and looking full into the face of his best friend, "I'm going to ask you an impertinent question. Don't answer it unless you want to. Understand?" -

"Well?" was the guarded query, with some misgiving.

"If you ever get out of this alive, are you going to marry Alice Pyke?"

Reynolds flushed, but remained silent, closing his eyes. He seemed half-stunned with the audacity of the question.

Had any one discovered all that was in his heart which he shuddered to reveal even to the object of his adoration? How then, if it were patent to another, could he hope to keep it longer from Alice?

"You don't answer, Jack, and you needn't," resumed Hamilton. "But you may wonder what leads me to tread on sacred ground. I'll tell you."

His calm brown eyes looked full into those of his friend, who lay stretched upon the jungle thicket beneath him. "It is because I, too, love Alice, Jack; and if you don't, I will. Fair warning, old comrade!"

Then he turned away, for there was something in that sudden gasp and the complete transformation that startled him.

"You will never have the chance to marry Alice, Hammy," said Reynolds with much solemnity, and so closed his eyes in delicious slumber.

Toward dusk the last elephant load of convalescents and camping trumperies had reached the banks of the river at the appointed spot. The sufferers were doing very well, with every promise of speedy recovery.

True to his appointment, the god of the Rodiyahs came floating down

the stream on an improvised raft till he spied the campfires of his friends and rescuers, then he haled them. One of the servants was despatched amidstream to intercept him, and bring him to his friends by a circuitous route so that he should avoid the Rodiyah, who might give the alarm if he saw his pseudo deity transformed into a common earthling.

Brandt was in great spirits, but shocked to discover Reynolds on his back.

"Never mind asking me so many questions, Brandt, and God knows I've more than a million right on the tip of my tongue to ask you; but hop into some of my duds and get thee gone before the Rodiyah guard gives the alarm, or it will be all up with us. We would be a very helpless crew indeed in case of trouble now, with food, ammunition, everything of comfort and safety running desperately low. You are the best equipped yet, so you and the Tamil man take the southeastward trail and intercept the highway between Kandy and Anarajapoor. Get what supplies you can, and start back with any sort of conveyance you can find. We will meet you as far on as we can go in our present pitiable state."

Brandt wanted to fire a volley of questions at the leader, but a flourish of the hand silenced him. He did the commander's bidding, discarding the robes of state for more modern tailoring, and strapping a belt of cartridges about his person, took a rifle and slipped away into the jungle.

CHAPTER XXIX.—THE LAST LION D'OR BANQUET.

THREE months elapsed.

Seated about the same table in the Lion d'Or restaurant where four young men once signed themselves into months of the most thrilling and crucial bondage to a mysterious and supernatural power, a jolly company exchanged congratulations and happy pleasantries.

There were seven now. At the head of the table, like a presiding goddess, sat a young woman with a face brown and rosy and eloquent of the triumph of life which comes all the sweeter after many hardships, many perils, and the consciousness in the heart of a duty well done.

At the foot of the table was an old man with white hair and the look of princely good cheer upon his benignant face, as if all that he had wished for in life had at last been granted and the way down the decline of years was strewn with roses. It was the father of the fair presiding genius.

"My good friends," the old man was saying, "this is the gladdest, proudest moment of my life. After months of crucial suspense I look upon the faces of the two whom God has spared to me as by miracle, and who are all the world to me now. It is they who shall perpetuate my name and fortune when I have passed away, whose lives were so interwelded with my own that their taking away would have been my death. I wish only to say, without circumlocution, without an effort to impress unduly, that I have asked you here to break bread with me—here on the very spot, on the very anniversary, of a momentous event—that you may witness a deed of simple justice to one to whom we all—yes, every one of us—owe our lives."

The old man drew forth an envelope from his inner pocket and continued, with solemnity : " John Reynolds, when you came to me while I was nigh to death with sorrow, carrying your strong good cheer into my darkened life, I told you that if you succeeded in bringing my boy back to me—yes, alive or dead—a hundred thousand dollars should be your reward, to say naught of the profound and eternal gratitude of a father's heart. You have brought him back to me, Reynolds, by the strength of your courage, by the manliness of your character, by the indomitable daring of your hero's nature. You have saved his life, and so saved mine.

" Accept this token, then, knowing well the spirit of the giver ; and may the good Father who has endowed you so ably, and permitted you to exercise your talents so abundantly for others' good, keep you in the shadow of His beneficent hand."

For a full moment there was no sound.

At last the tall young man near the head of the table rose, his face extremely pale.

" My good friend," he began, " I thank you with all my heart for this expression of your esteem, which I only wish I could feel was altogether justified. I shall cherish your noble words to my dying day—and, as you say, if it is permitted us hereafter to cast a backward look upon the moments of this life—through all eternity. But as for this reward"—he took up the envelope, broke the seal with quivering fingers, and drew forth the check within—" let me say here before all, it is not enough !"

And to the consternation of the assembled company, he tore the precious bit of paper to bits, letting them fall in a shower before him.

To say that the guests sat aghast, little expresses it. They were like stone.

The old man was struggling up. He tried to speak, but his voice died away, and he sank back with a sigh of wonder.

A smile, supernaturally bright and assuring, came over the face of the young man, who stood with his finger tips upon the damask.

" My good friend," he continued, " you may wonder what has caused me to do an act which seems to ill express the gratitude of a just man. But let me repeat again, sir, this reward of a hundred thousand dollars is not a pebble to the mountain of reward that I shall ask at your hand."

The company sat motionless, the old man's face the picture of perplexity mingled with hope.

" Let me tell you a story," added Reynolds, with deep feeling, " a story that is not all a story. In the heart of the jungle world, after the great fight was over and the rescue was consummated, while nursing back to life the brave boys who came from the valley of the Shadow as by miracle, I had the perhaps forgivable daring to lay my heart at the feet of my fair commander—the one to whom you owe, and to whom must be rightly attributed, all that you have thrust unworthily upon me.

" Sir, no longer able to bear the weight of love in my heart for her, that was growing and growing with each hour of peril and struggle in the wilderness, I took her hand and asked her to accept this love and all that it

meant through life and all eternity. She received it, sir—received it on condition; and that condition is what I now seek from your hand as the supremest reward for my poor effort to do you honor and service. I wish your consent that Alice may be my wife.”

For a moment the old man swayed forward and backward, his face and figure a perfect transfiguration of ecstasy and love. Then, with a mighty struggle, he rose, seized a glass, and held it above his head as he cried aloud:

“To the bride! to the bride, God bless her!”

Instantly every man was upon his feet in a perfect furore of exultation.

“To the bride!” shouted Brandt.

“To the bride!” cried Hamilton.

“To the bride!” added Biggs; and a pandemonium of congratulations and well wishes ran round the table.

Alice looked up; her face was ablaze with triumph and love.

A messenger rushed in; and singling Reynolds out of the group, placed an envelope in his hand. “A cablegram, sir,” he said.

The happy man broke the seal, and then “Bravo!” he cried, “bravo! Listen to this—this fitting climax to the banquet.” Then in slow, firm tones he read:

The great catseye of Buddha this day delivered to the emissary of the supreme Tathagata of Ceylon. One million pounds sterling deposited to your credit with the Bank of England.

Reynolds seized his glass once more. “Here’s to the ‘supreme, illustrious jewel of the Gautama, fourth of Buddhas, into which whoever looks becomes a changed being, body, mind, and soul!’”

“Three cheers for the supreme Tathagata of Ceylon!” added the doctor.

“And three more for the million pounds sterling!” cried Hamilton.

“And three more to the god of the Rodiyahs!” broke in Pyke.

“And three more for everybody and everything!” shrieked Brandt.

The din now became perfectly frenzied and uncontrolled.

“The Star Spangled Banner! All together!” cried the old man, who was become young again.

And as Hamlet saith, “So runs the world away!”

THE END.

WHICH?

IN a letter he wrote from the city

He called her a “pretty young girl.”

He’s a fellow that’s awfully witty,

And he keeps all the girls in a whirl.

Now a compliment meant he, or pity?

Should she kiss him or wish he were hung?

Was the accent he meant on the “pretty”?

Or was it to be on the “young”?

Tom Hall.