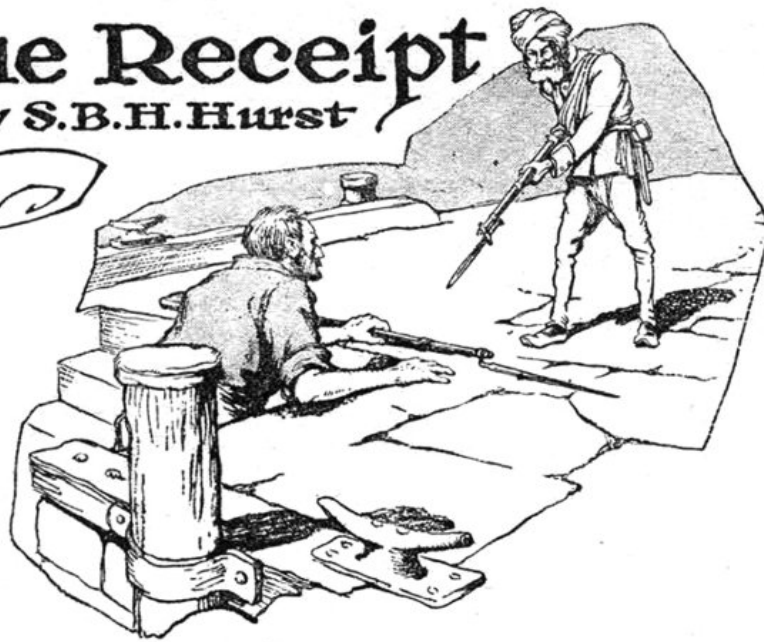


The Receipt

by S. B. H. Hurst



A NUMBER of years ago, a private soldier of a certain British regiment, then stationed at Calcutta, was sent to the Andaman Islands—the Indian penal settlement—to serve a life-sentence for murder. There were extenuating circumstances, and his name was William Driver. He believed in no gods, though he swore by many, but he worshiped most devoutly one girl, and he was a very strong man. He was also a crude person of limited education, and the girl, Annie Hall, was the marrow-bone of his existence.

Therefore, in a most wonderful way, she helped him to escape from the Andamans to the deep forests of Burma, where they had ideas of living in a tree. My old friend, Pickhead Cameron, who was at that time head of the Forest Department, persuaded them to build a hut, to which he added comforts. He also persuaded them to be married—by a Presbyterian missionary—and for many years he aided them, so that they were not discovered by that Government which paid his

somewhat large salary.

In the course of time a baby was born to the Drivers, and the missionary baptized the child, and Cameron was her godfather. And the girl, living alone in those wild forests with her parents, grew to be very lovely.

On her eighteenth birthday Cameron gave her a pearl necklace, and the missionary her first communion. Shortly after, Cameron was called home to London, and the missionary, his work done, was called home also.

And Bill Driver mourned their going, for, as he said to his girl:

“Mr. Cameron, he’s gone to London, and I daren’t go there; and Mr. MacNeil, he’s gone to heaven—so your mother says—and I carn’t go there neither.”

Now, Pickhead Cameron had so arranged matters that the Drivers saw no other humans; and Bill—who, by the way, stood only five-feet-six and weighed nearly two hundred in hard condition—had done his best to show his gratitude. Cameron’s pride was in

the administration of his forests, and Driver fully appreciated this, so that he patrolled the district wherein he abided and looked out for incipient fires and other things. And when he wandered in the deep green of the mighty teak trees, he carried a rifle which had been with him for a long time, and for which Cameron supplied the ammunition. With the carefully kept rifle always went the well-polished bayonet. On the evening that Bill and his woman Annie escaped from the Andamans, she clubbed a Sikh guard into insensibility—the source of the treasured weapons.

So, MacNeil and Cameron went home, but Driver still patrolled the district, as he knew Cameron would have him do. What thinking he did during his lonely walks was of an atavistic character, and he had some curiously anthropomorphic ideas regarding the dead MacNeil.

THERE came an evening. The shadows were beginning to lie softly over the dim forest places, and Bill Driver, hungry, sought his hut, his wife and daughter, and also his supper. He was about a mile from his home when his slowly working intelligence was startled by the cry of a woman. And the voice of that woman was the voice of his daughter—Annie the second.

Bill Driver hurled himself in the direction of that cry, crashing through the intervening brush like a shell from a big gun. The rifle went with him, but when he reached the small open space where his daughter was struggling with a man, he dropped it.

The red haze in which years before he had shot and killed, again enveloped him; but he could not forget—he had brooded too long over it—that the mere pulling of a trigger had given him no physical satisfaction, and had made him a convict, so that while justified in defending his own, memory bade him use the mighty clutch of his great hands in her defense, and, thus, satisfy the innate craving

of the fighting man.

Annie's assailant saw Bill coming—he also must have heard him—and he released the girl and tried to escape. He might have escaped from an angry gorilla, but not from Bill Driver. The strength of the gorilla and of Driver would be about equal.

In the convict's subconscious mind arose several of his long dead fathers—hairy people who patronized no tailor. Bill was not aware of their presence, but their prompting swayed him. The man who struggled so impotently was a large man. Bill could not see clearly, because of the red haze, but he knew quite well that it was his business to tear the fellow to pieces.

As a preliminary, he broke both his captive's arms. He dropped his almost swooning victim on the ground. It would never do to kill him right away; that would be as unsatisfactory as the shooting referred to had been. He must pull the fellow to pieces slowly, yet he must keep him in such a mental condition that he would be fully and excruciatingly aware of his dismemberment.

Bill Driver, standing over a writhing human, puzzled his slow brain. Then Annie the second reached him, threw her arms around his neck, and brought him out of the year 300,000 B. c. into A. D. 1912.

Bill Driver shook his bull-neck, and the red fell away from his vision. But his strength and vindictiveness remained.

"Go away, lass—he were trying to hurt thee more than thou knows abart."

"But, father?"

"I mun kill him, lass—an' he's going to know I'm doing it."

"But—don't you see he's a white man?"

"Don't make no difference."

"But, father, it does. Mr. Cameron wouldn't have stray white men around here—what's he doing here? You must find out, and let Mr. Cameron know. He asked you to watch

out for things.”

There has been told a tale about a man who aided a wounded lion, and thereby earned the lion’s undying gratitude. We have all heard of “dog-like devotion.” But greater than either of these was Bill Driver’s gratitude to my old friend Pickhead Cameron.

He raised his writhing captive to a sitting position, by gripping an ear between a finger and thumb.

“Wot you doing in these ’ere forests?”

“I vill not tell you,” moaned the other.

“Oh—you won’t, eh? Nobody ain’t got no right here unless Mr. Cameron says so. And you’re some sort of a foreigner, wot makes it worse. Wot are ye doing here?”

The captive’s arms hung helplessly, and Driver’s method of supporting him was agonizing. Nevertheless, he did not answer the question.

“There must be something wrong,” exclaimed Annie the second, clasping her hands nervously, “or he’d tell you, father. You don’t want Mr. Cameron’s forests to come to no harm. You must make him tell.”

Bill Driver’s grin was not pleasing.

“He’ll tell,” he said tersely. “You bring the rifle, lass.”

He threw his groaning captive across his shoulder and walked toward his hut at the regulation quickstep that had never left him, the girl following with the precious rifle. The tortured creature he carried moaned all the way, but Driver paid no attention to his pain, neither did he stop to rest or shift the weight—his slow mind was busy with vague guesses.

Adjoining his hut was a smaller one, used as a storehouse. Into this Driver flung his captive; then he fastened him securely and went to join his wife and daughter, who were eagerly discussing the affair. And the mother was all aflame also—for had not the thing in the outhouse tried to assault her girl, and did it not seem that he meant evil to the beloved forests of Pickhead Camcron? Yet they ate

their supper with thorough British regard for the inner-man, a great creed which the growth of the Empire endorses daily.

Once Driver left the meal, to roughly gag the man in the outhouse; for the English like to eat in comfort, and the crying of the wounded captive was disturbing. Then Driver smoked a pipe and performed certain mental processes almost analogous to thinking.

“He’ll tell,” he remarked as he lit a second pipe before proceeding to the outhouse. “Don’t heed his ’ollering—it’s Mr. Cameron’s business.”

Then he went to interview his captive; and that which he did was not nice. In the abstract it was a boy looking for the inward principle of a watch; in the concrete, a gorilla similarly interested in, say, a pigeon. I knew Bill Driver very well, and I think he liked me; but I am also of a scientific turn of mind, and, therefore, I tell the facts.

When the other showed a willingness to speak, Bill removed the gag.

“My countrymen will come to find me,” said the captive.

“Oh,” responded Driver, “how many are there—fifty?”

“Two.”

Bill laughed.

“Don’t—oh, don’t!” shrieked the captive.

“Tell, then.”

“Will you let me go if I do?” Bill Driver significantly lifted the rough gag from the mud floor of the outhouse, and the captive, snatching at the one chance of freedom from further agony, spoke.

“You’ve heard of the Andaman Islands—prison?”

Over Driver’s face flashed the expression of the hunted animal. The gag dropped from his hand; he bared his teeth, and his forehead wrinkled as he snarled—“So—you found out—summat—and you—come here—to, to——”

“Wait, wait!” shrieked the other. “You don’t understand.”

“Yus, I do. And, you swine, you tried to—to—to—my girl.”

“Listen. Oh, listen, please. Let me tell.”

“You tell me—tell me quick—where is the other two that’s after me?”

Bill Driver pressed his heavy chin on the other’s nose, moving it just enough.

“We’re not after you; never—heard—of you,” moaned the captive.

Bill Driver lifted his face and stared.

“You never heard I was at the Andamans—and got away?” he asked.

“You escaped?” gasped the captive, forgetting his misery in astonishment.

Bill Driver was himself again.

“How do you want to die?” he asked.

“But all we want to do is to rescue a man from the Andamans—help him get away, like you did.”

The affair was too complicated for Bill’s mind. He had no objection to another poor devil escaping, but he had many objections to his place of hiding becoming known. Besides, the fellow had attempted to assault his daughter; and what was he doing in the forest, anyhow?

“How do you want to die?”

Inside the outhouse it was quite dark, but neither man felt the need of any more light. Outside, the bats flew low and the teak trees woke to their evening whisperings.

“Let me tell you—we will give you money—we don’t care about you. Don’t you see that if we help another man to escape we daren’t tell about you?”

“Well?”

The prisoner gasped out his tale, which was to the effect that a Burman—the leader of a gang of highway robbers (dacoits)—had been caught in the periodical dragnet of the Department of Justice. As usual, he produced a host of friends who swore that he was an

innocent man. They went on the stand and testified that he not only abhorred dacoity, but that he was of so spiritual a nature that he could not even wring the neck of a chicken. Unfortunately for the dacoit there was other evidence, and the other evidence convinced the judge that the Andaman Islands would make an excellent abiding place for the remainder of that dacoit’s life. And so he sent him there. It was the philanthropic desire of Driver’s captive and his two countrymen to rescue said highway robber.

“Well?” said Bill Driver when the tale was told.

“His poor wife cries for him,” explained the other.

But Bill came of a nation of shopkeepers.

“Ow much are you getting for doing it?” he asked.

The other hesitated.

“How do you want to die?” said Driver.

“There are mines.”

“Yus?”

“Ruby mines that we made quite sure the man at the Andamans knows about—oh, we are very sure. Ve vill get him away, and for doing so get the place of the mines.”

“Well?”

“If you will let me go, I will—give you half my share.”

“How did you get into these ’ere forests?”

“I was lost,” replied the other with apparent truthfulness. “My friends are at—a fishing village.”

Bill saw his daughter struggling in his captive’s arms. The captive could not see Bill’s face.

“I ain’t got nothing against you ’elping a poor devil escape, but—how are you going to do it?”

“It’s all arranged,” said the other eagerly. “In native sailboats we go—with

machine guns that came as sewing-machines. We will have thirty Burmans with us, just for the hard work, because with our machine guns we could do it alone. The convict station has no cable or anything, and the guard-ship—pooh! Just a few *colashe* sailors with old rifles and ten rounds of ammunition, and English officers with swords. We take our sail-ships, and nobody suspects. The soldiers—about hundred and fifty—have also just a few rounds of cartridges. It is easy.”

“Well?”

“We go close to guard-ship—little steamer, you know. We go close like poor sail-ship in distress, asking for water. Guard-ship we easy find, but if in harbor just the same. Then we kill all on guard-ship, easy, and——”

“Well?”

During his short acquaintance with William Driver the captive had found little cause for amusement. Now he laughed unpleasantly:

“Then we free all the convicts—fifteen thousand black men. The convicts very glad to kill guards and soldiers. We help with our machine guns. Then, while the convicts are having little fun, we take our man away, and nobody ever know about us. Afterward, convicts blamed—mutiny. Who will believe tale about white men coming and freeing them? We only take our man—no more. Lots will be killed. So, we free all convicts to get them blamed, and to keep soldiers busy while we take our man away. But we leave convicts having their little fun, so we get away without being bothered by many wanting to go with us.”

“Fun?” asked William Driver.

“Yes—we tell convicts about English women, you know.”

Bill Driver’s powerful body twitched strangely. About his lips was a slight froth.

“Yes,” added the prisoner. “English women—wives—girls—fifteen thousand

black murderers—very few soldiers—very little ammunition.”

A wounded gorilla will first scream, then mutter automatically and continue to mutter. Bill did not scream, but he had no control of his words.

“Near twenty years ago I told Annie I loved her. Then I read a book about what the blacks did to the English women in the Mutiny, Cawnpore and the like. And I were scared that some black might do it to my Annie, and so I shot the first black I saw. It were foolish of me, because the blacks in India are now all decent folks, except those they send to the Andaman Islands. They sent me to the Andamans for shooting the black, and I deserved it. Annie helped me escape. I read it in a book. Read just what them blacks will do when your friends lets them loose. You won’t be there. And—my daughter.”

I do not know what Bill Driver did with his captive.

I know that he went to his hut obsessed with the importance of a mission; that in spite of the pleadings of the women who loved him, he gave certain orders and made known his intention.

The wife and daughter were to do their best to get to Moulmein, where there was a telegraph. If they got there, they were to see to it that the authorities sent a man-of-war to the Andamans. As Bill put it:

“It will take maybe a week to get there. If I went, they’d want to know all about me, and they’d put me in jail. Then they’d take a month to investigate—and think wot them black convicts could do in a month. Now, you go to Moulmein, and use Mr. Cameron’s name, and get a telegram to him. But be careful not to say a word abart what he done for us. Do all you can to make ’em send a man-of-war. I’m going to the Andamans to warn ’em—if I get there in time.”

“But——” from Annie the first.

“No buts, lass. There ain’t no need to

tell who I am, though I'd go anyhow. You start for Moulmein."

So they parted at the little hut, in the midst of a circle of great teak trees, where years before they had had notions of making their home in one of them, where Pickhead Cameron had found them, and where MacNeil had married them.

BILL DRIVER, taking with him some few stores and the precious rifle and bayonet, made a forced march of twenty-six hours to the coast and when he left the jungle at a tiny fishing village, the haunting smell of the clear sea brought memories of the fog-bound spirit of England, and of the warmer wraith forbidding escape from the Andaman Islands. The tremulous stimulant of sentiment shivered his spine with recollection, and he clutched his rifle the more tightly as he circled the huts of the fishermen.

Quietly he laid his small stock of food and water in the stern of a boat, cut the grass-rope hawser and got aboard. There was a slight creaking when he hoisted the single sail, but the fishermen were asleep and the light breeze was off the land. And Bill Driver steered in the general direction of east and south, down a wavering lane of moonlight that seemed to beckon him along his not-too-accurate course.

It is necessary to guess at the details of that voyage. Nearly twenty years before he had crossed that same part of the Indian Ocean, in the scow known at the Andamans as the "milk-boat," with the woman who had shown him the way of escape—and a terrible voyage it had been. For it had only been by favor of the god of the chances that they had made the coast of Burma, despite their own heroic efforts. And what I once told about it came from Annie, in the main, for, as has also been told, Bill was no teller of tales.

So, regarding the voyage when he went back, only guesses can be made, since he went alone. Besides, there is another reason.

But I am inclined to think, because I have been a sailor all my life and know how limited was Bill's knowledge of the craft—I, indeed, state without fear of contradiction, that the imperious, though ever-bibulous, god of the chances again aided the man; and that, furthermore, that same decadent deity prevailed upon his brother tippler who rules so laxly over the minor winds. For Bill Driver, by simply keeping his frail boat before it, made the harbor of Port Blair on the morning of the seventh day. And during the passage he saw no other ship.

The early morning mists were wreathing into fantasies as Bill rounded the point. These lifted suddenly, and the penal settlement thrust itself into his vision, but there was nothing unpleasing about its appearance. The man stared at the place, and the place seemed to stare back at the man, and the man felt a sense of friendliness. It was as if he had met an old enemy, with whom he had once fought a hard battle, but with whom he now clasped hands.

And it was all the same—Hope Island, where he had lived in his lonely hut; the settlement of Port Blair, with the men's barrack-like jail on that island, divided by a strip of water from the women's jail; the hilly island where the paroled convicts started independent life again, and, up the estuary, Viper, where the worst characters were confined.

The harbor was empty, neither the guard-boat nor the convict-carrying ship being there.

The breeze died, and Bill lowered the sail, and, with great effort got out the clumsy oars. Dizzily he looked toward the bungalows of the officers, then he began to row toward the chief commissioner's private wharf. When a convict it had been his business to row the milk boat from island to island, and the chief commissioner's wharf had been his first place of call.

The heavy oars seemed to have wills of their own, and Bill could hardly control them. On the wharf a tall Sikh guard roused from his dozing and watched him come.

Bill Driver made the boat fast to the worn cleet on the steps of the landing. He clawed out of her like a man trying to scale a cliff, and made his way feebly up the steps on hands and knees. Half-way up he paused and laughed vacantly, for he had discovered that he had reached the right place and that his fearful voyage was over. It also occurred to him that he had eaten and drunk but little, and that he had not slept at all.

"Abbe kitha jartha?"

Bill, at the head of the steps, looked up to the voice. It was a long time since he had heard Hindustanee spoken. Some one wanted to know where he was going. Bill's soul tried to tell the voice that it was none of that voice's — business, but his lips were working like an infant's at breast-time, and the words he tried to get between them trailed off into curious little noises which mocked him.

Then he forgot where he was going, and, struggling to remember, memory asserted itself over the vague impressions of the present. And memory told Bill that he was again a convict confined, and that he had grown tired of the loneliness, and that he was going to kill the Sikh guard on the chief commissioner's wharf, so that he would be hanged and suffer no more.

He lay down on the rough planking and wandered in the past.

His mind swirled to the boat he had just left. There were two boats. No—one boat. He had taken that boat from a Burman fishing village, and he had grinned at the moon when he took it. From just behind that moon the voice again spoke to him.

"Who are you?" it said in English.

And Bill Driver opened his eyes and looked up at the tall Sikh guard. Then he clutched feebly at his precious rifle. The Sikh

had grown gray in service, and Bill had changed also, but the men knew one another at once.

"Toom kady."

"Yus," muttered Bill, "it's me. This 'ere was once your rifle—my girl hit yer, and took it. I ain't come to kill yer this time. Did yer know that one morning I were going to throttle you? I went behind that there hedge, and I trod on some English flowers wot were growing there, and the smell of them made me weepy. My girl—wot had come here as a maid to the chief commissioner's sister—found me there blubbing. So, I didn't throttle yer."

The Sikh's rifle had followed every movement of William Driver. Indeed, I think that it was only the uncanniness of his arrival that saved him. The Sikh was superstitious, and Bill had not only reappeared to him out of the morning mists, but it was as if the rugged personality of the famous convict had suddenly and fearsomely thrust itself forth from the gathered years. Besides, he was supposed to be dead. Any other man would have been dead.

But when the guard felt quite sure that his old enemy was not dead, he grinned relievedly behind his great beard. Then he stepped forward and removed the precious rifle from the unresisting fingers. Then he fired his own rifle into the air and alarmed the colony.

And Bill Driver, unable to stand, but again conscious, glared up at the Sikh, looking for trouble and cursing his inability to cause it. The chief commissioner's bungalow was only about a hundred feet from the wharf, a carefully cultivated flower garden separating. Consequently Sir George Furlong was the first man to reach the place of alarm.

"Bot budmash waller hi, Burra Sahib," explained the Sikh.

But the guard's explanation was not sufficiently particular. The chief commissioner only saw an exhausted white

man stretched out on his private wharf—a white man who was apparently a stranger to the islands.

“Who is he—what do you mean?”

Bill was so weak that when he looked at things they appeared to be separated from him by a glass globe full of water. The man talking to the Sikh was not the old chief commissioner of his time of captivity, and he loomed above him like an attenuated ghost. Perhaps Bill guessed at his identity. By forcing all his will into his mighty muscles he managed to raise his hand and salute.

“I’m Bill Driver, sir,” he said, “wot—got away—from here.”

Then he fainted again, as the wharf became crowded with half-dressed officers and men. The doctor knelt by Driver’s side.

“Get some brandy. No, he’s pretty well worn out—a hypo’s better.”

The sun flooded the harbor, and Port Blair glittered like a diamond. Two soldiers supported Bill whilst the contents of the hypodermic syringe warmed life into him, and the men and women on the chief commissioner’s wharf watched in a tense silence, plaided with the colors of speculation and memory.

And this was Bill Driver, the famous convict. The only man who had ever escaped from the Andamans, and—a man whom a woman had really loved. Wonderful William Driver! What was it you had that made your Annie love you? It wasn’t only your strength. Other men might equal that. I almost can myself. You who so seldom spoke, and never heard of verses—what was there in you, William Driver? Why should the tender Fate who tries to arrange the love-affairs of men have made a special effort on your behalf? For—a woman loved you for yourself alone! Then how had he come back to the penal settlement—where had he been all the years—and for what reason had he returned?

“I read it in a book,” muttered Bill.

“Yes, yes, we know,” said the doctor soothingly. “But that was very long ago.”

“Abart a week—a long week,” muttered Bill.

The doctor studied him.

“No fever. Why is he delirious?”

The chief commissioner interrupted—

“Driver, why have you come back?”

The sunlight hurt Bill’s sleep-craving eyes and made him angry.

“Some grub and a sleep, and I’ll help ye.”

“Yes, yes—you came to help us?”

“Swine,” muttered Bill. “There was two swine—no, three at the start—there’s only two now. I came to tell you—and I’ll help you.”

“Yes, Driver—go on.”

“Swine,” replied Bill.

“Can’t you help him, doctor—give him something?”

“He’ll be all right, sir, after we get food into him and let him sleep.”

“But, you don’t think he came back here for the fun of it, do you. Give him something.”

The doctor obeyed reluctantly.

“Read it in a book, about swine,” whispered Bill. “And the swine is coming here.”

“Yes, Driver—go on.”

“Wot’s—the—name of—guard-boat?”

“The Mayo.”

“Swine—got her—killed all—crew.”

“What?”

“Don’t bother—abart convicts. Look out—for women. Worse than Cawnpore—coming.”

Along the morning breeze came the unmistakable rattle of a machine gun, punctuated by some rifle-shots.

“Wot did—I tell yer,” muttered Bill. “Now—look out. They got the guard-ship.”

“I don’t quite understand,” said the chief commissioner. “Tell me, Driver.”

“Forrin swine—going to loose convicts—tell ’em abart white women, he said—just like in book I read—abart mutiny—machine guns.”

“God! Why doesn’t the Government give us a cable?”

Bill blinked up at the chief commissioner and spoke confidentially, also confidently.

“Just hold on, sir. It’s all right—just hold on, and my Annie will bring a man-o’-war.”

Shortly afterward, Bill Driver came as near blushing as he ever did in all his turbulent life, for two very aristocratic ladies were feeding him beef tea with silver spoons.

They fed him, and two Tommies put him to bed. He insisted that the precious, if somewhat archaic, rifle should be laid by his side.

“When the trouble starts,” he explained, “I want the old girl handy.”

He slept for several hours, and woke to all his strength again, licking his lips at the appetizing fight before him—a fight that had commenced shortly after he had warned the garrison, which had, however, been able to build a fairly strong protection of sandbags, wherein the women were now doing their best to soothe the pain of many wounded men, for the small stock of anesthetics and anodynes had been exhausted.

It was nearing sunset, and all the wonder-colors of the Indian Ocean appeared to be playing with the fish jumping in the harbor. There was a lull in the fighting, for the convicts were busy with their evening curry and rice. Also, the more subtle were holding conferences. The first abandon of freedom had worn itself out, and some were beginning to see a rift in the altruism of the two foreigners who had freed them. The fingers of many dead pointed to an unpleasing end.

An ancient murderer nibbled at a piece of dried fish, and spoke between nibbles.

“They came,” he said, “and they captured the Ag boat, on which they put their many-mouthed guns. They sailed close to where the British have made them a fort, and, the water being shallow, they grounded. With much effort they got off. Meanwhile, their men let us go free—telling us to seek revenge and the white women. Now, my brothers, what is the reason of this doing? In what way are these two white men, who are not English, interested in our enjoyments. Many of us are dead, and the English still hold the fort.”

“It is said that they hate the English because they are white, yet are not English—being of a lower caste,” suggested another.

“And that there is a great war coming, after which there will be no more English; at which time all men will be free,” said a third.

“Free,” sneered the ancient. “Who is free? What is free? Even a rajah is not free. By his women is he enslaved as are others by opium. When this matter of killing the English in this place is concluded, what then? Suppose it is but the revenge of the two white men who are not English. Well, we will have helped at that revenge, and had our fill of women’s screams. Then will the two white men want to take the *Mayo* Ag boat and go back to their place—which will show us their wisdom. My brothers—” he leaned forward in the little circle—“we, who are wise men, and friends, must see to it that we, also, go from here in that *Mayo* Ag boat. I have a memory that the British Government has a long arm.”

“It might have been wise,” said another thoughtfully, “had we gone to the side of the British. They have a lion for their castemark, and ever do many seek to kill that lion. He is a sleepy lion and wakes but slowly. But when he does wake he makes the jungle tremble with his rage, and all the lesser beasts hide from him. Did not my father tell me—”

And so on. There was infinite chattering. Relatives and old cronies in crime

jubilated over the cooking-pots. The women prisoners had their peculiar place in the orgy. The dark closed over a chorus of nasty noises. The few little circles of old men gabbled wisely, but the mass was a thoughtless horde craving many things.

BILL DRIVER, rubbing his eyes with one great hand and trailing the precious rifle with the other, had reported himself to the captain in command of the white soldiers. And that officer had said things to William which made him feel lumpy inside, made him feel that he could just about lick a hundred of the enemy. Very much embarrassed, he tried to explain this feeling.

"I'm only a third-class shot," he stammered, "but I'm useful with the butt and baynit."

And over it all hung the peculiarly peaceful smell of the wood fires. The bats flew low. In the creeks and estuaries the mist-wraiths began to form.

But there was a hideous unanimity about the killing of the garrison, which was fostered exceedingly when some genius of a convict found the commissariat sergeant's store of wines and spirits. There are certain castes in India that profess to abhor drink, but religion is at times elastic.

The machine guns spluttered. The defenders fired at the advancing menace, but the terrain favored the convicts with every sort of cover, and they were able to creep almost up to the defenses before attacking with their axes, adzes and weapons looted from the *Mayo*. It must be remembered that there were about fourteen thousand convicts, and that the two machine guns effectually prevented any sortie of the garrison which was so very short of ammunition.

And the whole affair had been so unexpected, so unprepared for. Many of the defenders felt that they were in a hideous nightmare, out of which they would wake in

due time; and in that belief many died. Description of it all is as impossible as would be the description of a burning building. It was fight, fight, fight.

The drink worked in the convicts and the moon set. Then they began firing the houses, making a glimpse of an indecent hell as they ran about with torches. And ever the ammunition in the little fort dwindled. Thus, with all Port Blair ablaze, the last round was served out, and the men were told of this fact. Some grinned, some swore, some said nothing, each after his fashion; but all grimly held on.

Shortly before daylight an order was whispered to certain men. It had to do with the use of the shells in some revolvers. These were on no account to be fired at the enemy.

The dark lifted to the kiss of the dawn. The breath of morning moved over the harbor. The ammunition of the defenders was exhausted. The convicts came on, careless of creed distinction, howling in a reeling frenzy—Hindoos, Mohammedans, every caste known to India and Burma. The settlement echoed to their yells as they swirled forward.

Then humanity clashed at the breastworks, and voices melted into a sort of hum, splashed with curses and weapons meeting.

Oaths from every one of that little group of islands in the grim North Sea mingled with the fighting gutturals of the valiant Sikh guards, dying for the honor of the salt they had eaten. And Bill Driver and his old-time enemy of the chief commissioner's wharf found themselves side by side. They grinned at each other through sweat-cluttered faces and parried and thrust in a glorious spirit of comradeship. Yet the drunken degenerates prevailed. The defenders did not give way—they fought till they fell and died.

Over the souls of certain men who had been told off to do a certain clean deed with the few remaining shells in the revolvers

spread a horror of that duty. These looked furtively at the women.

The sun rose over burning, blackened Port Blair and flushed at the screaming filth it lighted. Certain men agreed that the garrison could not last five minutes longer. These looked at each other; then they did not look at each other. They staggered toward the group of women and girls. Then——

She came round the point—a gray, lithe shape, cleared for action, her ensign snapping angrily. And as she came her guns smashed at the scum that had almost surged to its desire. Her boats dropped from the davits, and, loaded with armed marines, drove at the beach. The women had not been cheaply protected.

IN WAYS beyond my understanding the pleading of Annie the first had prevailed against the precedent of regulation, and the captain of the cruiser had brought her, and Annie the second with her. That she was liable to imprisonment for conniving at her man's escape was a detail she ignored entirely.

She was the marrow-bone of Bill Driver's life, and, therefore, she knew that her place was by his side. And, searching frantically among the wounded and dead, she found him lying unconscious, across the body of the Sikh guard, among the carefully cultivated English flowers in the chief commissioner's garden. And while Annie the second ran for the doctor—over-busy with other wounded men—the marrow-bone took Bill's head on her lap and petted him back to consciousness.

Amid her kisses, he indicated the dead Sikh.

"He were a man, lass," he muttered. "I'm most sorry you hit him when we got away from 'ere—though we did need the rifle mortal bad."

Then the doctor came; and after a little while that doctor nodded slowly. And Annie

the first, dry-eyed and beyond sobs, knew the meaning of it. The chaplain began the prayer he had so often used, but Bill interrupted. He could not see very clearly, but the haze clouding him was very different from the red haze of his passions.

"Scuse me, sir," he said weakly. "The doc says I'm dying?"

"Yes, my man," said the doctor.

The chaplain began to pray again.

"I want to speak to the chief commissioner," said Bill Driver.

The chief commissioner, his left arm in a sling and his head bandaged, leaned over Annie's shoulder.

"Yes, Driver—what is it?"

With a vast effort Bill saluted.

"You know abart me, sir—escaped convict?"

"Yes, my man, but that's all right. You have wiped the slate clean."

Bill smiled weirdly.

"Thank you, sir. There's a gent in London—Annie can tell him. But there's a Mister MacNeil—he's dead—he were a good man, and a minister." Bill gulped for breath. "I—I—I want him to know that I've paid the Government back."

"He knows now," said the chaplain.

"Yes, sir—I don't think you'd tell a lie. And Mr. MacNeil, he said the same thing. But—I don't know for myself. There may be a heaven, and all that. I'm going to find out in a few minutes."

"It's true," said the chaplain.

"Yes, sir—but I want Mr. MacNeil to know that I've paid the Government."

"He knows now," reiterated the chaplain.

Bill was silent. His brain had become strangely clear, and he was thinking as he had never thought before. Then——

"If I see Mr. MacNeil I can tell him," he said. "But that's only telling. S'pose he says 'Yes, Driver.' I won't know but what

he's saying it to make me feel good. I won't be able to prove it."

He became silent again. The noise of the convicts being subdued came faintly to his ears. He saw his wife, his daughter, the doctor, the chaplain, and the chief commissioner, vaguely.

"What is it they give a feller when he pays a debt?" he asked suddenly.

His audience failed to understand him.

"You know, sir," he said directly to the chief commissioner. "Suppose you pays a bill; what is it the man gives you—the man you pays it to?"

"Oh—a receipt," said the chief commissioner.

Bill smiled happily.

"That's it. Please give me a receipt, sir, so I can show it to Mr. MacNeil, and he'll know I've paid the Government."

The chief commissioner answered huskily:

"Very well, Driver."

He wrote on a page torn from his notebook; signed the writing and gave it to

Annie the first.

"Read it, lass," whispered Bill.

And Annie read:

This is to certify that William Driver, who escaped from the Andaman Islands after being sentenced for life thereto, returned of his own volition to those islands to warn the officials of an impending massacre; that, due to the effort of his warning, not a woman or child was killed or injured; that he fought most nobly in defense of the right; that he gave his life in that defense.

And, by virtue of the authority invested in me as Governor of the Andaman Islands, I, George Furlong, do hereby release the said William Driver from the custody of the British Government—which Government has received full satisfaction for the debt William Driver once incurred.

GEORGE FURLONG.

Bill's vast chest heaved with the pride of a work well done.

"Put it in my hand, lass," he whispered, "so I can take it with me, and show it to Mr. MacNeil."