


# Tact and Some Diplomacy

by Gordon MacCreagh



COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

## CHAPTER I. A MAN OF PARTS.

MR. HAMILTON TREVELLYAN was manager of the Delhi National, and as such, he was known as one of the most successful bankers in the Far East. Now, a successful banker has very little time to acquire information about anything else in the world.

Mr. Trevellyan was very successful. But that didn't matter; for, since he had contrived to learn a great deal about banking, his knowledge was sufficient for his needs. Sufficient, for instance, to make him president of the Terai Timber Company, which was one of the far-flung tendrils of the New Hampshire

Lumber Syndicate, and was engaged in wrecking the health of good Americans in the vast malarious jungle belt of Northern Bengal.

The president was engaged just now in the comfortable and lucrative business of presiding.

"Gentlemen," he puffed with fat, good-natured inanity, "these reports seem to be very favorable; very favorable, indeed; and, er—I understand that this is a very valuable tract of timber land. What I do not understand is, er—why a concession has not already been obtained."

The other directors, keen business men from the land of keen business, who suffered Mr. Trevellyan on account

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of his financial weight, looked at one another wearily and growled:

“Tell him, some one.”

Mr. Jamieson, the least important director, who knew so much about lumber that his associates said he must have been born in a tree, and who knew many things besides, rose to reply.

“The whole trouble, Mr. Trevellyan, has been the backwardness of the raja.”

“H-m! Well, er—if this timber is as valuable as I am given to believe, I don’t understand why we can’t meet his price.” Mr. Trevellyan looked round with the triumph of one who has solved a knotty problem.

“It’s not a matter of price, Mr. Trevellyan. We can’t lure a princeling who could send a man down into one of his sub-cellars with a sack and a shovel and buy out our whole company for cash.”

“Well then, I don’t understand—” Mr. Trevellyan’s misunderstandings were legion. Jamieson hurried into further elucidation.

“The difficulty is psychological rather than financial. A whole lot of these smaller native states, you see, still conduct their own affairs in their own wonderful, slip-shod, mysterious Oriental way, and they know, from past experience of your British genius for poking into their affairs, that the influx of white men will immediately mean interference and publicity and the digging up of their dark family skeletons and a hundred other annoying

reforms; and they don’t like it; they just want to be left alone.”

“Ah, I see, of course. The unchangeable East, what? Oh, yes, we all know that most of them have half a dozen funny practices which they carefully hide from the light; but, er—there must be some person of tact who can persuade this raja person that, er—I don’t understand why—”

“There’s just one man I know who could swing the deal,” Jamieson interrupted hurriedly again. “And that’s ‘Go-To-Hell’ Smith.”

“Go-to— How extraordinary! Who is this, er—Smith person?”

It was Jamieson’s turn to be surprised. Everybody had heard of Go-To-Hell Smith; “Jehannum” Smith, as he was often called, because he usually fired it at his interlocutor in venomous Arabic. He explained again.

“Smith is an army man, invalided out on account of shell shock. I don’t know why, because he’s the biggest, huskiest thing on two feet. Sometimes he’s, well, a trifle eccentric; but he’s dead straight and he knows the natives like a drill-book. If anybody can scrounge that concession out of the raja, he’ll be the man.”

“Well, then, gentlemen, obviously let us hire Mr. Smith. Offer him a bonus on the concession to make it worth his while.”

Mr. Trevellyan surveyed his colleagues with pompous triumph, as though his genius for finance had

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settled the difficulty out of hand. And since his genius for finance was great, everybody agreed with him.

Every man who stands isolated in his ability to do a thing is a valuable man. Smith, then, was obviously valuable. But there were other people besides the Terai Timber Company who were aware of the fact; and who were aware also of the contributory fact, to wit, that there existed a valuable tract of timber land the rights to which could be obtained by a man who had an uncanny knowledge of the native character as well as tact and surpassing diplomatic skill. One of these was the District Commissioner.

The commissioner was one of those fortunate beings who are known as the “heaven-born.” That is to say, he was one of the sacred I.C.S., which by no means must be confused with a certain famous correspondence school of similar initials; for the I.C.S. of the East know everything already.

It is an axiom in government circles that an I.C.S. man can hold *any* job. Therefore all the best jobs, heads of departments and so on, are given to I.C.S. men—and the government then appoints four assistants to do the work. The explanation of this clever benefit system is that the I.C.S. is the government.

The sacred letters stand for Indian Civil Service. And the men of the Indian Civil Service rule India—and get a fabulous amount of pay for doing it.

That is why the slightest mention of that entirely blasphemous thing, home rule, gives them such a violent spasm in the diaphragm.

A district commissioner is very high in the ranks of the heaven-born. About five million people bow before him as their immediate lord. Which is reason enough for any local deity to have a conception of his own dignity equal to that of a Prussian general.

None the less, there are commissioners who are really human. Which, however, has nothing to do with this one. As for him—while the American company was still debating how large a bonus should be offered for Smith’s services, he sent for the man himself. Being a commissioner, however, his methods were different. He scowled with absorbed introspection at Smith from behind a desk in the manner which he had found so efficacious with cringing natives. Having duty subdued him, he growled:

“See here, Smith; there’ve been too many complaints against you during the last few months, and my patience is just about used up.”

Smith took two long, surprisingly silent strides forward, wedged his massive bulk comfortably into the unproffered chair with a pointed “thank you,” and thrust his head forward in alert readiness, as was his habit, so that his hard gray eyes looked out from under a thatch of pale straw eyebrows with disconcerting directness at the

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commissioner.

“So? What’s all the bloomin fuss about, chief?”

The cool impersonality of his attitude irritated the commissioner, who had nourished his ego with the conviction that people should quail before his frown. He snatched angrily at a thick sheaf of papers before him and thumbed them rapidly.

“Fuss, you call it! See here, man; my office has to maintain a personal file devoted to your name. Look at this.”

He skimmed through the sheets, picking out case after case of fantastic flagrancy. Assault and battery! Abuse! Desecration of a temple! Attack upon a crowd! Insult to an influential merchant!

“Damn it all, they run into dozens!”

It was certainly a wild and turbulent recital. The grim lines round Smith’s mouth melted into a sheepish grin, and he said earnestly:

“Chief, if every one o’ them blinkin’ niggers ’adn’t tried to carve me up one way or another I’d never touched a one o’ them.”

“Ah, pshaw! You’ll have all the excuses in the world; and I’m taking off ninety per cent for native exaggeration, and even then it is past bearing. I’ve a dozen petitions here from important men, and the thing has gone as far as I can let it. That last fracas with the big wrestler was the last straw. I’ve decided that you’ll have to leave the district, that’s all.”

Smith’s face, which was of the color and texture of an oaken root, changed slowly to a dull mahogany. But that was the only sign he made. Without moving or altering the alert poise of his massive head he said sourly:

“All right, chief. I’m accustomed to leaving a district—when I want to.”

The commissioner looked up in quick surprise from his petulant perusal of the personal file; but there was no more expression in the sun-tanned face across his desk than could be expected in an oak root. Its very impassivity, however, was overpoweringly suggestive of oaken tenacity. The commissioner decided quickly that he was handling this thing from the wrong angle. His threatening preamble had been a bluff, anyhow. The impression he had wanted to create was that in spite of many enormities he was going to do Smith a favor. He dropped further argument hurriedly and plunged on into the favor.

“Well, I’m going to give you another chance.”

Smith waited like a carved idol. The commissioner waited—like a commissioner—for some sign of gratitude. Then he was forced to shrug carelessly and to set forth his case with an assumption of generous assurance.

“I can put something in your way, Smith, out of which you may make a little money and at the same time do something for me. I have a friend who is anxious to get a concession from the

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raja of Methergunge to work a certain tract of timber in his state. But the raja is difficult—you know how they are. Well, I can't handle the thing myself because, er—of course as a government servant I—may not engage in business. Of course it is quite clear that I have no interest in the matter. I—ah, want to do a favor to my friend.”

Smith smiled. But it was an inward spasm. All that the commissioner saw was a fleeting light in the keen gray eyes which might have meant anything. He went on under cover of an attitude of pompous officialdom.

“Besides, I am on the trail—now I'm being very frank with you, Smith—I'm on the heels of a gang that has been smuggling opium extensively for several months; and I believe that they operate from somewhere in Methergunge state just outside of my jurisdiction. You will see, of course, that interference with subjects of the raja's will strain our relationship—you know how proud all these petty princelings are.

“Now then, Smith. I believe that you are one of the few men who know the native character well enough to get this concession for m—er, for my friend. I must warn you, though, that it will be a very delicate matter, requiring the greatest tact and knowledge of the native line of thought. Now this is very important to—my friend. You know him, by the way; Mr. Sarkies of the Bombay Trading Company”—this last

rather shamefacedly—“therefore, Smith, if you can land this contract I'll put this pile of complaints in the waste basket! But I warn you”—the bellicose demeanor came back through ineradicable habit—“this means a great deal to us—to Mr. Sarkies's company; and if you make a mess of it—” A gesture of irrevocable banishment concluded the sentence.

“Now what do you say?”

For a long time Smith said nothing. What was going on in his mind nobody could guess. The commissioner hoped that his threat was bearing weight. Again the fleeting light crept into Smith's eyes, and there followed a stubborn setting of the mouth. The commissioner began to be convinced that here was a man who could not be bulldozed. Then Smith said abruptly:

“All right, chief, I'll go.”

Then the commissioner was sure that his theory of intimidation was correct, and his inflated ego swelled to the stimulating thought. His demeanor was affably important.

“Ah, I thought you'd see reason. Now, I don't have to tell you that you'll have to be careful up there. No rioting, mind! That will be a dangerous sport even for you. Of course there's no such thing as a man just disappearing nowadays—not white men, that is to say. But in a native state people have been known to die very suddenly from cholera or snake-bite. You understand perfectly, of course. This is a mission

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which will require the greatest diplomacy and tact.”

Smith just grunted.

“Now, I’ll be going out on circuit myself in a few days and I’d like to see you off before I leave. In how many days do you think you can start?”

Smith pondered the weighty matter deeply. He appeared to be planning days ahead. Then he shook his head regretfully and planned all over again. His careful calculations brought a pained frown to his brow. Suddenly his mind was made up.

“In about ’arf an hour,” he said apologetically; and with that he heaved himself out of the chair in a sudden fever of haste and strode through the door, smiling benignly into space and quite overlooking the outstretched hand with which the commissioner sought to close the interview.

### CHAPTER II.

#### SMITH TURNS OUT THE GUARD.

METHERGUNGE was an inaccessible little principality some eighty miles distant through the fever-laden jungle of the Terai foot-hills. Nobody ever went there except natives and a very much harassed British resident and missionaries. Therefore no provision had ever been made for travel.

One arrived there, if a missionary, on foot; if the resident, on horseback; and if a native, in a precarious conveyance

called an *ekka*, which looked exactly like the minaret of a mosque on two bicycle wheels, and had not a nail or a bolt in its entire construction. It was tied together wholly with string, and was drawn by a little rat of a pony called a *tattoo*. Frequently the driver of the *ekka* rode postilion on the *tattoo*, and, if a tall man, his feet swept the ground.

Methergunge itself occupied a place in the scheme of evolution as far back as the means for getting there. Smith’s preparations for his journey to this fascinating place, fraught with such dire consequences for himself, were conducted with the simplicity of genius. He stalked with immense strides, his brow puckered with thought, to his place of lodging, and roared in his drill sergeant’s voice:

“Poonoosawmi!”

His very black Madrassi boy, dressed in very white ducks, appeared on the instant like an imp summoned by a magician’s spell.

“Yes, marshter?”

“Poonoosawmi, *bhooth ke butchcha*, we’re goin’ a thousand miles into the trackless wilderness to visit the benighted king of a backward state. Methergunge is the blighted ’ole which we’re a goin’ to honor. Now, what sinful knowledge ’ave you about the failings of this ’ere potentate which might be useful?”

*Bhooth ke butchcha*, means pup of a tree demon; but Poonoosawmi grinned with happy appreciation—for such

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endearments meant invariably that his master was pleased—and plunged into an eager recital of such scandal as he knew.

“Yes, marshter. Methergunge raja’s name Ram Chan Chandra Chacrabatti; he is one damn Bengali fellow of inferior caste. His failings is gambling and cock fight and fat women and Kali goddess worship and miserishness. But I am not loving to go to Methergunge.”

“Why not, ye thievin’ parricide? Tell me that.”

“Marshter, this Chacrabatti raja is one low fellow of *chamar* caste. No honor is accruing to us by this visit.”

“Don’t lie, son of Shatian. Tell me your real reason. What crime hare ye perpetrated there?”

Poonoosawmi stood on one leg and squirmed while he scratched his calf with the bare toes of the other foot. But his master bored him through with a gaze like a cold steel drill. No human could stand this for any length of time. Poonoosawmi blurted out the scandalous truth.

“Marshter, in Methergunge is *Padre* Sahib, Rev. Father De-Greis; he got one tin chapel there.”

“Well, what of it? ’E’s a good man. ’E won’t eat you.”

“No, sar. But this *padre* is baptized me into conversion when formerly with Ootacamund mission.”

“An’ a good thing for ye, ye black imp.”

“Yes, marshter, most beneficial. So

one time one nother boy and me is getting drunk like a lord with sacrificial wine out of *padre*’s closet, and *padre* is beating with holy wrath and imposing penance of awful size. So that other boy is taking all *lobhan*, incense, to sell in bazaar, and we are running away. But me, I got nothing.”

Smith’s sudden roar of outraged ferocity made the desecrator jump.

“Ye lie, ye sacrilegious ’eathen; ye must ’a’ stolen everything in sight. But what’s that to me. Get the luggage ready, an’ ’op to it *juldee*.”

“Yes, marshter,” said Poonoosawmi meekly. “How many bottles?”

“Six dozen!” shouted Smith. “An’ five ’undred pounds o’ ginger biscuits!” Smith’s conceptions, like himself, were all on a grandly hyperbolic scale.

“Yes, marshter,” said Poonoosawmi. And he made up a bundle of four bottles of Kellner’s gold label whisky and a single package of crackers. It was his invariable habit to ask his master first, and then to take the invariable quota which he considered was the extreme limit of safety for himself and for his beloved lord. That was all the luggage that Smith ever took, no matter where he might be going. What need had an old campaigner like himself to take thought for the morrow!

Exactly how he lived remained always a mystery; though rumors of ravished jungle villages filtered in the course of time into the commissioner’s office and were duly added to the fat

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personal file. Sometimes there came a story so different from the humdrum of every-day life that it became public property and did much to add mirth to the existence of the exiles who had taken up the white man's burden in the East.

Everybody remembered with joy the classic occasion when a rich *zemindar* had come in and begged to be allotted the contract for supplying grass to the army transport. He was stared at in monocled amazement.

"What army, fool of four generations?" he was asked.

How should he know what army; he was a poor man. But it must be the army which doubtless was on its way to settle one or other of the interminable border risings.

"What rising, direct offspring of a mule?"

How, again, should he know; his affairs, by the grace of God and of the *sirkar*, were with the cultivation of the soil. But the general had said:

"Thunder and blazes! General who?"

Pardon, excellencies. The great commander-in-chief who had come through the country like a storm and had ordered supplies on a vast scale. It was true he had taken but two fowls and a small bag of parched grain as a sample of quality; but the price paid was no more than the current bazaar rate, which was manifestly unfair, since, when an army passed, it was the custom that all prices should be trebled. And

furthermore, on the strength of that contract which he was going to get he had already married his daughter off on a lavish scale to a neighboring *ticcadar*, and he was a poor man, and the government—

Then the *zemindar* was hurled from the Secretariat Building with contumely and abuse; and for months afterward, with naive native persistence, he petitioned every department of the government to refund him his outlay on the marriage festivities and to protect him from the wrath of the *ticcadar*, who spat upon him in the bazaars and called the curses of many devils on him for a man who had got rid of his she-ass offspring under false pretenses.

Something of Smith's commissariat methods could be guessed, then, from these rumors; and the delightful simplicity of his preparations could be understood. Under such circumstances half an hour was ample time to get ready for any sort of a journey. Within the stipulated time he and his faithful boy disappeared from the confines of civilization, and for four days their trail was a dark mystery.

Then they showed up suddenly in Methergunge. Poonosawmi's bundle of luggage was lighter by exactly four bottles—which for a period of four days was a phenomenon startling enough. But Smith's explanation was invariably the same.

"Traded away with the lugubrious 'eathen for grub to bring a little o' the



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joy o' life into their poor, downtrodden souls."

Yet it was a different Smith from the man who had so coolly bearded the commissioner in his den. This was an individual inspired with a lofty sense of duty and responsibility in the matter on hand. He walked with a preternatural solemnity. Stiffly straight, with military precision, he stalked through the streets of Methergunge, streets which swarmed with a populace that seemed hopelessly overcrowded for the tumble-down, battered, gaudily-painted houses which lined the road.

Roads, they were, in fact, rather than streets; for there were no pavements and no sidewalks, and the only limitations as to their width were the open drains which sent a fetid steam curling to high heaven in the sun only a few feet from the doors of the houses. All household refuse was thrown, in the delightful Oriental manner, into these open sewers; or rather, at them; for some fell short, and some splashed over; and all lay where it fell and festered in the heat.

That the whole city was not swept by pestilence was due only to the grace of a merciful God who had created kites and crows and pariah dogs with an insatiable appetite for offal, and who sent in every six months his beneficent monsoon which scoured away what the scavengers could not eat. The people died, of course, in their hundreds, daily, of half a dozen virulent epidemics; but what matter; they bred more rapidly

still. It was all in their *kismet*, and who should be so impious as to interfere with Fate!

Now and then some native more jungly than the rest stared owlishly at the big white man as he breasted a swath through the crowd. But for the most part they looked, ceased their chatter momentarily, as do schoolboys when a master approaches, and passed on.

Their faces showed not the slightest trace of interest, no manner of conjecture as to his business; though in that remote city there were certainly not more than two white men. He has doubtless something to do with the British Resident, or he was perchance some new kind of missionary; what affair was it of theirs?

Natives of India are the most incurious people on earth. For long hours at a time their minds are capable of registering a perfect blank. Their spirits are wandering in dreamy space, from which it takes an appreciable interval of time and a definite interruption to recall them. That is why they are such wonderful mystics.

It is no uncommon phenomenon, for instance, for a cyclist to meet a native—walking, of course, in the middle of the road—who looks straight at him with wide open eyes; yet if the rider be inexperienced enough in the ways of the east to feel that the man will surely step aside in due time, and fails, therefore, to rouse the dreamer with his bell, or

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better, by yelling at him, so surely will he run into him and buckle his front wheel.

Should the cyclist happen to be a white man, and should he in his just exasperation beat the inexplicable somnambulist, the latter will usually die in a few minutes of a ruptured spleen, and a grandmotherly government—in spite of the ravings of sleek Bengali agitators who come to American universities—will then put the white man on trial for manslaughter—as often as not before a native judge!

All this being considered, it is easy to understand how the great white man with the set face passed through the streets without comment. But lumbering bullock cart drivers who plowed through the throng suddenly ceased yelling at their cattle and twisting their tails, and hastily drew aside as he approached; and women lolling in the doorways behind the barricade of garbage quickly covered their breasts and fingered the amulets which averted the evil eye.

Sometimes Smith stepped on the naked foot of some careless dreamer; sometimes his broad front thrust some of the lesser fry into the open drains. But through the whole mess he strode with unswerving, machinelike regularity, as elephants move; and Poonosawmi splattered along in his wake, as an empty canoe is sucked into the wake of a river steamer.

Of all these things Smith was

sublimely oblivious. A single look at his intense face with its wide, unblinking eyes was sufficient to show that his soaring mind was revolving within itself vast designs and Napoleonic plans of attack. What startling form these might take was as impossible to conjecture as the course of an elephant in the time of *must*. Poonosawmi's carefully estimated allowance of four bottles of the mellowest of old Scotch always exalted him to this stage which his friends, who were many, were wont to describe euphemistically as the eccentric aftermath of shell-shock.

In these circumstances Poonosawmi himself did not venture to address his master; but as they proceeded his nervousness began to show itself; for it began to be borne in on him with sickening certainty that they were headed for the mission-house.

It is usual when a white man visits an autonomous native state to call first on the British Resident and to ask his advice and assistance. But Smith was too great a soul to do anything according to custom. He knew, moreover, from long experience, that a British Resident knows exactly as much about the affairs of such a state as the crafty ruler and his wily viziers want him to know.

The man who would have knowledge of the undercurrents of affairs would be the good father of the local mission. This, Smith maintained, was an axiom without flaw; since the

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*padre*, of all white men, was the one who came in touch with the hearts of a portion, at least, of the people. There was method, evidently, in his eccentricity.

The absorbed thinker's devastating course through the multitude came to an end at last. He swung abruptly into a wide compound, which was isolated rather by reason of its surprising neatness than by distance from its surrounding hovels. A trim garden struggled hopefully against the climate, and tall mango-trees gave shade to the half-hidden house.

Poonoosawmi gave vent to a squeal of dismay; but, faithful ever to his care for his master's sustenance, he thrust the last of the luggage, the box of ginger biscuits, into his vast hand, which closed upon it with automatic and crushing force. Smith wheeled on him and fixed him with a cold, codfish stare. The intensity of the unseeing gaze was an urgent question in itself. Poonoosawmi answered as if impelled by some tremendous psychic force.

"Marshter, that *padre's* house." The inference to be drawn was manifest in his tone.

For a full minute more Smith held him with his stare, and Poonoosawmi stood like a hypnotized rabbit. Then his master spoke, without expression, without emotion:

"Little *bhooth ke butchcha*, you go all the way to *jehannum*."

The spell was broken. Poonoosawmi

gasped a grateful: "thank you, marshter," and disappeared with the speed of a conjuring trick. Then Smith stood to stiff attention for a second, executed a smart about face, and went on into the house.

The frail little priest, whose wan face and shrunken body cried aloud the aching truth that he was but another martyr to the foul climate and to an unappreciative people, met him with a glad hand. Smith had a wide and astonishingly cosmopolitan circle of acquaintances. People who loved him for his rugged, great-hearted recklessness kept cropping up in the most unexpected places.

"Aha, Meestaire Smeece, of Je'annum, is it not? Zees is plaisir of no expectation. For w'at beesness you are here, hein?"

The great man towered above him on wide-stretched legs and stared at him with blank intensity for an uncomfortable minute.

"You go plumb to—" He pulled himself with a jerk and pressed a great brown knotted fist to his eyes. He was making a supreme effort of will to oust the subliminal exaltation which possessed him and to regain his normal consciousness. For a period he succeeded. He spoke with slow vigilance.

"Beg y' pardon, *padre*. I'm—I'm in a bloomin' mission—*on* a mission, I mean. An' it requires the greatest diplomacy an' tact."

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The *padre* was a man of vast understanding. "Come on wizin, my friend, and geef me ze plaisir to offer you som' tea."

He laid a delicate hand on Smith's thick elbow and led him to a cool, wide veranda. He clapped his hands, and an alert looking native boy appeared.

"*Char lao*," he ordered. Then he busied himself with hospitable preparations, chatting away in his quaint English the while.

"*Eh bien*, on a mission, hein? Of ze secret, may I inquire?"

"Oh, no, *padre*, I'm 'ere to scrounge a concession out o' this 'ere giddy raja o' yours."

"Ah, so, a concession. So-o-o." The thin, ascetic face perked on one side in shrewd, birdlike inquiry. "*Alors*, you represent ze Société du Terai, or—ze ozzer person—s?" The plural termination came as an afterthought.

The strained expression of iron control on Smith's face gave place to a flicker of interest. He *knew* that the *padre* would know many things. His answer was irrelevant.

"I'd like to know, *padre*, anything that you may know about the blighter. Anything, you know, that might be a useful handle to pry 'im loose with—you know."

Consecutive lucidity came difficult to Smith in his relapses into the condition of shell-shock. The priest shrugged and spread out his hands with deprecating politeness.

"My son, zees which I may know or zat which I may have heard—of which I assert not nor deny—is not wizin my privilege to impart."

His gesture was full of regretful, though at the same time inexorable finality.

Confession! flashed into Smith's mind at once; and he wondered what might be bad enough to require the absolution of a confession on the part of some far removed menial whose only complicity could have been no more than knowledge. But with the strain of thought he felt his control slipping from him with each minute. Though the conventional fitness of things was never of importance to his soaring soul, there were some things which just naturally did not fit in. He pushed his chair back therefore and heaved himself up to his feet to go while he yet might with grace.

"Well, I'm—sorry, *padre*. I'll come back for that tea later—after I've squeezed this 'ere contrac' out o' the dog—very important to me—goin' there straight away. Good-by, *padre*. Thank you."

He saluted with solemn dignity, and stepped with parade-ground precision down the neat gravel walk and swung majestically out to the road. Half a mile further a long, dusty avenue of betel palms marked an irregular course to a great pair of dingy vermilion and indigo gates quite a mile away, behind which, half hidden by mango and guava-trees, appeared garish glimpses of blue-and-

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yellow veranda rails and whitewashed walls and lacquered pillars set with diamond-shaped bits of colored glass. This bright spot of artistic enchantment was the palace.

Being, therefore, holy ground, the avenue was deserted. For it was no farther back in history than the present raja's father that a brass cannon crammed full of pot scraps and bits of hoop iron had been fired from the gates by some zealous captain of the guard, high in temporary favor, just as a hint to the rabble that the approach to kings' palaces was not a public boulevard.

The British—oppressing the poor Aryan again—had immediately stepped upon this inalienable right of royalty—which is perhaps an explanation of why all these dusky “princes” who study sociology and kindred anarchisms at Columbia are so bitter.

However, the precedent having been established, and the east being a land where nothing ever changes, the populace was extremely wary about treading on that sacred avenue. In their place were several thousand crows who raised a deafening clamor against the invading white man which far outrivaled that of the guardian geese of Rome; several black-and-white lop-eared goats who eyed him with belligerent suspicion; and several dozen lean, slaty water buffaloes who heaved themselves out of their mud wallow by the road side with startled snorts like pistol shots, and of the guard, who had

been wavering for at least half that time, swaggered to the bars and demanded in an offensive tone the white men's business.

Smith caught his eye with his hypnotic gaze and looked all the way through his soul, through his lustful, sinful past, and into the souls of his dead forefathers—or at least so the pale glare from under the bleached brows set in that hard, expressionless face seemed to the man. For another minute he stood it. Then:

“*Baba Khoda!* It is a *maha yogi*; or it is *Shatian* himself. Open to him, fellows!”

The great gate swung inward, the guard perplexedly silent. Smith strode through without a word, and without a word he strode on up the long driveway to the palace. Consternation remained in his rear. They would lose half a month's pay for this, those insolent guards who guarded so ill.

It is usual when one calls on an Oriental potentate to send notice some three days ahead in order that the stage may be duly set with all the display of tawdry splendor which is so necessary to eastern dignity. Everybody knows that it is only camouflage; but everybody does it because it is custom and therefore it must be. Only iconoclasts—like viceroys, who know no precedent; and ignorant people—like the Honorable Algernon DeVere Whozus, who was introduced to the kinglet in his London club—commit the

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unpardonable *faux pas* of making a call without due notice.

Smith was neither. But he was Smith. That was enough. Furthermore, he was entranced with the inward contemplation of a lofty purpose. He strode serenely up the driveway, then; and dismay radiated from his path just as though he had blundered through a nest of the big painted ants of the jungle.

Underlings in coats of many colors appeared from unexpected holes and scurried about with a vast diligence which accomplished nothing. Uniformed menials of a dozen different grades with brass badges like plates ran hither and thither and stood in his path and salaamed low and addressed him with deference—for a man who visited kings with so little ceremony was surely a man to whom ceremony was due. And besides, it gained time.

Smith stared each one of them out of countenance; and when they had lowered their eyes in confusion he told each one of them all about hell in language suited to their caste and station. They murmured: "Assuredly, excellency," and accepted his instructions and stared as only buffaloes can stare, with great, pale-blue eyes in which was just enough offense to make one nervously uncertain whether they were going to charge or not.

Smith was oblivious to all these things. The reaction from his recent enforced return to careful conscious

effort was surging over him in waves. He stepped upon unwary goats who were accustomed to Oriental deliberation of movement. He would have stepped upon buffaloes, had they ventured into the road, and would have hurled them from his inspired path. His soaring brain teemed with fantastic plans for wresting that so necessary concession from the obstructive raja.

Every now and then it focused itself with brilliant intensity on the dark mystery which could be wicked enough for a confession; and from that starting point it raced on into splendid theories of hidden villainies which hung in Damoclean menace over the crafty potentate's head, and which needed only the keen blade of his wit to threaten the hair.

So, brilliantly scheming, he came to the gate. Behind it squatted a somnolent guard in a uniform which was his own conception of military splendor—and which needed washing. Ordinarily Smith would have resented this palpably studied discourtesy to a white man by a roar of choicely selected references to the guard's forebears in the vernacular which he could handle with such offensive skill. But a hazy, subconscious memory of the advice which he had received about being careful in this place, where a man might suddenly die of some perfectly natural cause, impelled him to gentleness.

Instead of paralyzing the guard with appalling abuse he slowly drew back a

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heavy, booted foot and drove it against a lower panel with a crash which brought the man to his feet with a shout, and tumbled the rest of the fiercely bewhiskered defenders out of their guard house in exact imitation of film comedy policemen. They all wore swords of various designs, two or three a piece, and they all hastened to adjust their belts and cutlery with a vast dignity. Then they waited to hear the business of this unusual white man.

### CHAPTER III. SMITH BETRAYS DIPLOMACY—

IN a native state one of the chief sports which offers the greatest amusement to the natives is to keep a white man waiting with as great a show of insolence as possible. Smith spoke no word. He only stared at them through the bars with lowered head as the buffaloes stared, and with the same ruminating menace.

After a couple of minutes of affected impertinence the chief with more salaams had passed them on to others who also salaamed.

But time was gained. Not nearly as much as an Oriental would have considered necessary; but sufficient to permit of the raja's struggling into something with lots of gold embroidery on it and hanging a few of his most imposing jewels onto himself.

By the time Smith had won through

the first line of skirmishing outposts a multi-colored personage, more resplendent with brass and braided tape than an Austrian general, stood at the palace door and salaamed to the ground and said that the raja craved the honor of an audience with the protector of the poor.

It was now Smith's cue to say that the condescension of the great king, on whose countenance God looked with special favor, was turning his liver into water with excessive gratitude. What he did say was:

"Ho! All right. Tell 'im I'll grant the bloomin' favor."

Which the gorgeous usher, having understood not at all, was able to translate into whatever flowing compliment he liked. Smith was conducted through a rabbit warren of passages in which funny little steps up and crooked little steps down occurred at intervals for no apparent reason. There seemed to be miles of them, and they were all dim and musty and curtained off in blocks with the regular Oriental disregard for hygiene. An acrid, vaguely familiar medly of goatish odors permeated them all.

Rustlings and scufflings and gigglings came from behind heavily curtained doorways; and he knew that a hundred caged eyes were peeping at him from the dimness with greater eagerness than they would have displayed at the sight of a live ichthyosaurus. And there were other

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heavily curtained holes from behind which came no giggles; but he could positively feel, as he passed, the presence of the dark, grimly watchful shadows behind the shadow.

He was shown at last into a great room overlooking an inner court which he knew at once to be the reception room—for white guests only. For it was equipped with an assortment of cane chairs and folding camp furniture cheek by jowl with extravagant mahogany sets and purple plush couches; and the walls were hung with shiny chromolithographs of sporting events, and gold-framed, sacred pictures of the Holy Family, and esthetic prints of ladies in tights culled from the front pages of the London Police Gazette; and the corners were piled with polo sticks and umbrellas and cricket bats. All white men lived in this manner.

Without a word Smith followed along the maze of passages. Without a word he sat down to wait. He knew that the requested pleasure of an interview was no more than a subtle Oriental euphemism. The jungle princeling, having had his hand forced through ignorance of the real importance of this confident-appearing white man, would now be bound to save his face and uphold his dignity by keeping him waiting for as long as he dared. The Austrian ambassador returned in a few minutes with a sparklet soda syphon and an immense cut-glass decanter which had an ingeniously locked

stopper—an imperative necessity in the Orient; for the native butler will drink and then ruin the rest of the good liquor with water. He salaamed and handed Smith a little silver key. The entertainment of white men always began in this way.

Smith helped himself with abstracted abandon, gulped like taking medicine, and then fixed his hypnotic gaze on nothing at all; for he knew that he was surely being watched through one or another of the heavily embroidered curtains, probably by the raja himself. But presently his eye was drawn and he was hypnotized in turn by the entrancing sight of nineteen painted ostrich eggs pyramided on the center table.

The thing was a fascinating triumph of decorative taste; but it irritated him; for contemplation of the mind which had conceived the ornament was so engrossing that it kept him from thinking about the manifold sins and wickedness which had been honored by a confession.

He endured the offense for half an hour, and his indignation swelled with each tick of the made-in-Japan grandfather's clock in the gilded niche.

He became obsessed with a slow, malignant resolution to obliterate the thing. He rose and approached it with momentous determination. He had just discovered that the painted globules were not ostrich eggs at all, but hard, leathery python's eggs, and he gasped



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afresh.

Then a curtain in an unexpected corner rasped back on its bamboo rod. An immense red-and-gold warrior, garnished all over with weapons, bowed to the ground, and the raja himself entered.

It was fortunate for social etiquette that Smith happened to be standing by the table. Otherwise he would surely have remained sitting; for he had a sturdy pride of race, augmented and stiffened by his patronage of the cut-glass decanter, which did not hold with rising to any “gor-blinkin’ ’eathen blighter.”

The raja was pudgy and overfed, as are all Bengalis when they attain to affluence sufficient to remove the necessity of physical exertion. His eyes were very black, with rather bulgy, yellowish eyeballs, and he had the long-lashed camel eyelid which is considered among his people to make up in beauty what it lacks in breeding.

His nose was surprisingly fine, slightly aquiline, and well-chiseled; but his lips again were thick and very red from chewing betel nut with *pan* leaf, which he did with all the gusto and action of any subway gum expert.

Smith felt antagonistic to him at once. He knew the type. Weak enough to be overbearing, and uncivilized enough to be difficult to deal with. His clothes proclaimed his importance as the ruler of a few million *bunnias* and *ryots*—who incidentally paid for the

clothes by the sweat of their brows. He wore, as was to be expected, a *chupkan* with much gold thread on it, narrow, crinkly trousers with a gold stripe, canoe-shaped shoes with more gold, and a round, brimless hat like a collar box which weighed nearly two pounds, mostly gold.

This was not strictly a Bengali costume; but the raja hid his disgraceful deficiency in caste by claiming descent from Mahratta Thakurs of historic renown. He stretched out a soft hand worth a million dollars in stones.

“Verree much delighted to see you. What can I do for you? You will have some more drinks, yes?”

Smith yearned toward the gigantic decanter, for the heat was appalling; but he had very stanch convictions. He did not drink with “no blinkin’ ’eathen blighter,” either. He was unfavorably impressed with this raja, anyway. But he remembered the importance to himself of securing this so much sought after concession, and he had a very clear recollection of his instructions—diplomacy and tact. His recent medicinal dose had but given impetus to the lofty inspiration which possessed him.

He proceeded therefore to execute delicate diplomacy according to his splendid conception of the art. He sat down with ponderous solemnity so that his head did not come much above the level of the standing princeling’s and toned down with an effort the deep

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rumble of his voice to a rasping whisper. Then he hinted darkly:

“Raja Sahib, are ye sure that no lop-eared gander can spy on you ’ere?”

The raja thrilled. Intrigue is the very life of an Oriental court, and he began to imagine that the secrets of European diplomacy were about to be disclosed. He looked round with innate distrust. Then he laid his fingers over his mouth like a tragedy villain and led the way through one of the curtains to a little inner room which had no other entrance.

“Here we are safe,” he whispered. “Tell me.”

Smith’s conversation was never any more long-winded than that of any other man who accomplished things. During the periods of his exaltation its lucid brevity reached the sublime. He leant forward confidentially; and the raja drew back nervously from his compelling stare.

“Fine,” he rasped. “ ’S about this ’ere timber in your back yard. I’m ’ere to get the concession, an’ you bloomin’ well got to jar loose.”

At this diplomatic overture the raja’s affable demeanor fell from him with indignant amazement. That a mere business man, some obscure person who was not a brother, at least, of kings, should have broken in on his seclusion with such a flurry of excitement was an affront to his dignity which was beyond endurance. His voice took on the meanness of a ferret.

“Oah, you are onlee a trading fellow, yess? You should have written in writing for favor of audience; and that concession I will not give.”

Smith had quite some conception of a white man’s dignity himself. His pale irises in his vast stare suddenly glittered steel hard as his pupils contracted and expanded and contracted again like an angry parrot’s. Otherwise his face remained perfectly expressionless; but the very massiveness and deep-tanned strength of it conveyed an impression of menace. However, the urgent need for finesse was uppermost.

“Ho,” he said, and his whisper was a hoarse rumble. “I ain’t ’ere to declare war on your state, raja; an’ I’ve drunk your whisky; so jes ’and over the loot an’ we’ll call it friends.”

The raja’s command of English was not sufficient to appreciate the full beauty of Smith’s idiom; but he understood its import. He dodged about nervously, like a little fat porker trying to shoot through an unguarded opening in the doorway; but Smith in his eagerness to execute his delicate mission had with lucky inadvertence planted his great bulk just within the curtain.

“I will not,” the raja chattered with querulous irritation. “You go away from my palace, you loafer.”

Loafer is a universal term of reproach among English-speaking natives, being a direct translation of *bhungie*, which means an unemployed

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person of low caste who eats things that have died.

Smith's harsh whisper became a roar.

"Ho? Is that 'ow you feel? All right, you Christmas tree gollywog, you go plumb to—"

He held himself with a heroic effort and exhaled the rest of his explosion noisily through his nose. The lofty sense of duty which held him impelled him to have recourse to the second of the qualifications which had fitted him in the eyes of the commissioner for the delicate negotiation in hand—tact.

"Raja Sahib," he said earnestly. "If you 'ad jes a small idea of 'ow badly I need that concession you wouldn't let me shake it out of you by your pigtail." He knew that men of the *Chamar* caste, while they wore the hair very short, left a small scalp-lock for Kali Mater to draw them out of hell with.

This tactful reference to his heredity drew a snarl of angry malice from the raja.

"I am nott! You are lying fellow! Gett out from my country, why don't you? I will nott give that business. Never!" The voice rose to a scream. "Never, I tell you, nott if I am dying! You are nott even high government official, and you come here like Lat-Sahib Governor. You are just a great big damn! Gett out, or else I will give order for driving out with bamboo beating."

Smith heard him through with the emotionless stare of a fish. Then he

reached out a slow hand like the arm of a mowing machine which scoops up the bundles of hay in its talons.

For a moment the raja was too petrified even to shriek. Then Smith's shoulders heaved up with a great inhalation and his hand fell to his side. He laughed. He felt like a great St. Bernard dog at whom a pup barks in foolish frenzy. That he was a white man alone in a mazy palace where dark figures stood behind curtains with drawn swords never occurred to him. His only impression was that he was the one upon whom it was incumbent to exercise forbearance and control.

Saved from immediate annihilation, the raja recovered sufficient volition to clap his hands as a summons to the sword-encrusted attendant at the further door. But with the first drawing apart of the pudgy palms Smith's vast hand, which seemed so slow, shot out like the stroke of a bear's paw and gripped the raja by one arm close under the shoulder.

Having got the hold and forestalled the summons, the ponderous deliberation of his actions returned. Slowly he drew the paralyzed kinglet to him, and lifting him from his feet as a doll is lifted, he shook him with gentle experiment, his head bent down to listen, as though anxious to know whether the thing rattled. Yearning regret was in his tone.

"If my other 'and wasn't otherwise engaged, little insect, I'd stuff you with

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'ay an' pin you into my 'at."

The important occupation of the other hand referred evidently to the package of crackers which he still clutched in a mangling fist. Then some queer twist of the racing brain switched him suddenly into the vernacular. It was necessary to say things to this unpleasant person who spoke of beatings; and English, after all, is the least satisfactory of the languages in which to conduct an acrimonious argument. Strangely enough, the wide vowels and rolling gutturals fitted Smith's deep voice so that his exhortation sounded almost like a chanted litany.

"Listen, little princeling. One sound, and I tear thee all apart as a goat is rent in thy alligator tank."

He intoned the threat with the passionless solemnity of a paid choir singer, using the familiar "thou," which is only for children and menials.

The princeling immediately disobeyed. But the sound was only the chattering of his teeth. The affront to his dignity was drowned out of recognition by the fear of immediate death. Only the terrifying immensity of this most accursed of all white men held him from giving vent to a storm of hysterical orders for swift vengeance. Smith went on with his passionless lecture:

"Listen to me, little fat pig person. Little fat pigling, who squeals in the sewers when the lice bite. Thou hast made disrespectful ape talk to a white

man. Therefore thy life and thy relatives' lives up to the seventh cousins are forfeit. Yet since I speak as an agent for another, and since I have a great and forgiving heart, they may be purchased—by this concession."

The raja struggled like a spitting kitten. Smith's quietness gave him the power of speech.

"Never!" he chattered. "Never will I have Sahibs prying into—"

"Sh! Peace, ape. Let me think."

Smith lifted him once more and shook the words from him. In this condition of subliminal activity he thought without effort. That was why there was never any expression on his face. His conscious mechanism was dormant, shell-shocked into passivity. It was his alert subconscious intelligence which soared with splendid fantasy and with schemes of surprising cunning.

This same keen, subconscious wakefulness kept reminding him, while he yet shook the raja and seared him with unforgivable insult, of long, twisty passages where fierce-faced men stood behind heavy curtains with drawn swords. There had been an episode in his life, too; before he had grown as wary as a wounded elephant; when he had fallen foolishly into a trap-door cleverly hidden under a carpet in just such a passage.

These disquieting reflections interfered with the delivery of the ultimate in pointed insult. Yet the few little comments which he did make

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sufficed. The raja had never thought that any man might say such things to him and live.

“Never is a long time, dogling. Yet the concession is the price, and it will be paid. Take good note, little drowned pup who floats with no hair on thy belly. It will be paid—later. For the present, son of a goat herd, it is necessary that we pass to thy byre’s gate. Together—so. Thy arm in my hand, conversing as though thou wert almost my equal. Yet very warily, piglet; for the souls of the dead goats who were thy fathers are very near to thee at this passing.”

The subtle innuendo of Smith’s epithets may be understood only by Orientals, and their expounding is beyond the possibilities of print. To a native, *gali* of this sort is a more deadly affront than a blow. For the least little one of the sayings the raja would have ordered an instant killing—if only he might have felt sure of his personal safety; for the Bengali is perhaps the most arrant physical coward on earth.

But personal safety just then seemed to the raja to have ceased to exist. He was reduced to a condition of paralysis by the slow, machinelike irresistibility of this vast white man with the uncannily expressionless stare; and the frightful strength of him filled the little prince with horrid dread of instant dismemberment.

Smith led him, flabby and nerveless with fear, into the larger room. A sudden

thought struck him, and he paused.

“Fat slug of the manure pile, order now that guard behind the *purdah* to go before us.”

The rajah’s teeth merely chattered, and he looked piteously up at Smith. The latter quickly increased his grip of the rajah’s arm till the pain of it diverted his terror to a more pressing emotion. Then, without a moment’s hesitation he called in a genial roar:

“Ho, there, guard!”

Immediately the curtain rasped aside, and the man salaamed low.

“The Rajah Sahib goes walking with me. Hasten, lout, and notify the umbrella bearers.”

The man salaamed again and vanished. Smith bent low to his host.

“Wormlet, that was bad. Observe now with diligence. Come, grasp me now one of these cricket bats in the corner here.”

The rajah hesitated; but the instant excruciating pressure on his arm restored his faculties. He picked up a bat, and Smith led him, wondering, to the center table of mahogany. A noble purpose fired him.

“Great warrior, lift now that bat and smite with ferocity upon that mound of shells. Swift now!”

This time the rajah hesitated only a short second. He lifted the weapon with a new fear in his face—the man was surely mad—and smote with the broad blade of it full on the pyramided triumph of artistry. It was the one thing

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which he had accomplished with thoroughness in all his life.

“Good!” said Smith. “That was to exercise thy scattered wits in the use of swift obedience. Furthermore, it was a holy work. Come now with speed—and care.”

Together they traversed the maze of the excoriating odors. When they came to certain curtained off niches it needed only the slightest pressure of Smith’s hand to make the rajah hurry anxiously past. In the rooms through which they passed, servants salaamed, and Smith talked in a genial stream which obviated the need of reply. Outside, a pair of silver-plated guards fell in in front; menials held umbrellas over their heads on long bamboo shafts; more guards jangled along behind. Nobody ventured near enough to the royal presence to necessitate his conversation amounting to more than the squeaks and grunts which Smith squeezed out of his arm in answer to his own flow of inspired rhetoric.

Thus the great king of Methergunge and his favored guest were escorted to the gate. There the rajah hesitated hopefully again. But Smith’s iron fingers ground the lacerated muscles of his upper arm and he told him pleasantly:

“Nay, Rajah Sahib. We go to the house of the British Resident. There, at his gate with many expressions of mutual regard, we part.” And, he added softly: “Toad’s belly, give me thanks;

for so shall thy own face be saved before thy people.”

As a special mark, then, of the royal favor the ruler of Methergunge accompanied his guest down the Avenue of the Buffaloes—and presently a dark, skulking figure detached itself from a dry wallow and crept warily after them. But of that they knew nothing, for their conversation was of crops and taxes and rainfall and other absorbing matters of state. A little one-sided, it is true; but none the less a conversation, for the rajah answered: “Ouch, yes,” and “Oof, no,” whenever Smith thought fit.

At the Resident’s gate the royal cortège came to a halt. The rajah stood in sulky uncertainty; but Smith’s inspiration never faltered. He made a ceremonial speech.

“*Maharaj*, great king, the presence has shown a godlike condescension in coming this far with his servant. My heart becomes too small to contain my happiness. Sahibs from far countries shall hear the tale of this thing and much joy shall accrue to them. As for the concession which the mightiness has promised, I will surely come again to conclude final arrangements, even as I have promised. Favored of the gods, go in peace.”

The rajah’s little black soul screamed and stamped within him to break loose in a fury of filthy revilings; but, discretion forbade. His retinue consisted of only six men; and what chance would

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they have of defending him from this cold-eyed berserk? Moreover, while the thought that sahibs would chuckle over the tale was a consuming frenzy to writhe over in private and to wreak off on his wives, betrayal of the disgraceful secret by his own temper to his people was unthinkable horror.

He breathed noisily several times, and his black eyes glittered like a cobra's. Then he answered in English, which none of his men understood.

"You are verree funnee, hunh, yess. And concession you talk? You loafer, if I catch you in my countree again I keep your skin for drum-head."

Smith began imperceptibly to edge towards him. But the rajah was giving free rein to his pent-up spite.

"In my stable is a *hubshi*, a woolly black man, big like you, and ugly. I will beat him for your sake. If your—"

Suddenly he realized that the terrifying white man was almost within reach of a quick grab. He jumped with the surprising agility that a fat toad might exhibit under the stimulus of extreme fright, and with the jump turned and hurried up the road. His retinue, rather surprised but silent, fell in behind him.

Smith stood watching him with blank intensity as his figure diminished into the distance. A fleeting trace of expression began to creep into his face. It was one of majestic satisfaction at a difficult task well accomplished. Then a tinge of soulful yearning swept across

his contentment.

"Gorblimey," he muttered. "Another second an' I'd ha' split 'im in 'alves!"

### CHAPTER IV. AND MANHANDLES A GREAT MAN.

HE became aware of something far removed from his lofty introspection which interfered with his feet down on earth. It was the skulking black figure. It embraced his knees and wept.

"Marshter, oah, marshter, you are coming like holy advent. When I am seeing you going into that rajah fellow's house I am thinking *murgia* dead for sure."

Smith shuffled his great feet uncomfortably. "Get up from there!" he roared.

"Yes, marshter," said Poonoosawmi, with an extraordinarily swift relapse into decorum. He stood on one foot and dusted off the other knee with cheerful unconcern while he looked up into his master's face.

"Marshter, I got news—" Having captured this concession, it never occurred to him that his master might have failed. "It is easy for remunerative deliverance to Commissioner Sahib. He is now doing circuit in Mailakhana just outside this boundary."

Reminder of the commissioner's existence suddenly filled Smith with indignation.

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“Ho, is that so? ’E’s the gobbler who threatened to abolish me out o’ his district; an’—an’, s’welp me, I forgot to tell ’im *barra jehannum*. Gor strike me ’f I don’t go now!”

“Yes, marshter, now is favorable time for rejoicing with concession, for he is eating up pen-holders with gnashings of teeth. Seven *hafim wallah* he is catching smuggling opium; but chief leader is without the trap. Dhunsura Bux plentee clever fellow.”

“Ho! An’ where’d you get all this, Sherlock?”

“This bazaar talk, marshter. All fellows is laughing because Dhunsura commit sacrifice in Kali temple over knife for cutting Commissioner Sahib’s throat; and Commissioner is offering one thousand rupees reward.”

Poonosawmi’s matter-of-fact recitals of the undercurrents of bazaar gossip always threw a staggering side-light on the native trend of thought, which white men so seldom understand; and it was always accurate for he had learned long ago that exact knowledge of events turned themselves with miraculous frequency to his master’s benefit.

But Smith’s mind was in no condition to take thought for sordid personal gain. Intrusion of the commissioner’s name stirred him only with a stately ambition to obliterate the slur which had been put upon him by the other’s pompous threat. It was a case of deferred stimulus; the

resentment had not affected him before his coming into the trance condition. Lofty ambition fired him. His eyes fixed themselves once more in the wide, vacant stare of those who receive inspiration.

“ ’Bout face! Forced march to border! Hup!”

Smith’s relapse to terse brevity with his return to his own language was an interesting phenomenon. It was just as though the flowing eloquence of the vernacular were controlled by quite another entity.

With brevity came swift action. Quite oblivious of the patent truth that by all the laws of common sense he ought to be seeking shelter under the aegis of the British Resident as long as he remained within the confines of the state of Methergunge, he executed a smart turn on his heel and strode off down the long, fetid street which sweltered two to the square yard with subjects of the outraged monarch.

It was hotter now than when he had come earlier in the day, and the crowd was more lethargic; but it remembered his devastating passage of a few hours ago and it scattered from before his path, marveling at the exalted purpose in his face.

Smith covered distances like a wild elephant which has been disturbed in its feeding-grounds. Moving with ponderous, machine-like regularity, he departed from one place, and no man knew the manner of his going; and



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presently, without fuss or flurry or conscious effort, he was somewhere else. Then, like an elephant, he slept. Poonoosawmi would struggle in during the course of the next day—or of the day after that, according as to how long the migratory impulse had lasted.

Evening saw Smith at Mailakhana, gaunt and begrimed, with shreds of trailing jungle vines enmeshed in his leggings; but swelling with enthusiasm. He strode with mighty intentness direct to the *dak-bungalow*.

A *dak-bungalow* is a rest house. It is erected by the government in places which, while not populous enough to call for a hotel, are yet on some general route of travel. In districts where there is a circuit court they are quite elaborate, containing several rooms with their more necessary furniture. Even meals may be served by the *khansama* in charge, who invariably asks what the guest desires, and, having regretfully excused everything on the list, invariably informs him that there is only chicken. The system affords the basis of four out of the five jokes which are the stock-in-trade of that very mournful country.

A district commissioner may, by reason of his dignity, put up at no place other than the government *dak-bungalow*.

Smith strode mountainously into the veranda, where a delicious *punkah* fan swung, actuated by a cord which passed through a hole in the wall and was

pulled by a coolie who squatted outside in the sun or the rain as the case might be—the *punkah-coolie* affords the groundwork of the fifth joke.

A wide table was littered with important looking papers bearing the crimson imperial crest of officialdom; but for the moment the commissioner was not in sight. A tall tumbler with a lump of ice in it—worth its weight in platinum, for its rapidly dwindling parent piece had come many miles packed with sawdust—and a cut-glass decanter half full of molten amber, were very tempting. Smith had come many miles himself, and he felt as though he, too, were packed with saw-dust. Moreover, he felt very disdainful of commissioners just then.

Finally, he felt distinctly aggrieved to find that the tumbler did not hold all that was in the decanter.

Then the commissioner came out!

Smith eyed him solemnly over the rim of the glass. For a moment the commissioner was too astonished at the apparition to appreciate the full import of the tableau. But he recovered himself quickly, as all great administrators must.

“Why, hello, Smith!” he said, with the condescending geniality of a thoroughly democratic president of a corporation who addresses his bill clerk. But that was all. Commissioners on circuit, being very near to God, do not shake hands with trampish-looking giants who stride in and out of the jungles and lay impious hands on the

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sacrosanct ice.

Smith took no offense. A vague throwback of recollection to his recent interview with another royal personage, lord of many millions, put it into his mind that one came before Oriental potentates bearing gifts. Automatically he opened a gnarled fist and deposited on the table his much-traveled, mangled, and quite unrecognizable package of ginger biscuits.

“I got a present for you,” he announced with the impressive gravity of a trusted messenger between kings; and, having delivered himself, he dismissed mundane things from his mind and devoted himself with the intensity of genius to the more important matter of his tumbler.

The commissioner fingered the battered package wonderingly. He was quite accustomed to the idea of a great rajah, on the consummation of some agreement, sending a valuable jewel as a trifling mark of his regard. Yet this Methergunge man—with a neutral mind and with finicky finger tips he opened the grimy package!

Neutrality immediately gave place to anxious hostility, wanting only confirmation to become vindictively active.

“Here, I say you! What sort of a bally joke is this? What about that concession? How did you leave the rajah?”

Smith made a gesture of vast condescension, as though the existing

conditions were due only to his favor.

“The blighter’s alive. But jes’ two more inches, an’ I’d a bust ’im all apart.”

The commissioner began to see. And with vision came misgiving. His mind flew to the long list of fantastic exploits he recorded in that fat personal file; and for nervous seconds, while he sucked on his mustache, his imagination ran riot with lurid pictures of prodigal revelry and brawling. Smith filled in the interval by emptying the residue of the decanter into his glass and absorbedly watching it melt the residue of the ice.

This was conduct which exhibited no sort of awe in the almighty presence. The commissioner banged his fist on the table.

“Stop that! You can’t fool with *me*, you know! What did the rajah say?”

Smith looked at him reproachfully.

“Commissioner Sahib, I wouldn’t sully me mouth with wot ’e said.”

Outraged dignity overcame discretion.

“Look here, you! If you’ve gone and made a mess of that concession I’ll jolly well chase—”

“Sh!” Smith stopped him with a huge upraised hand, like an imperturbable traffic policeman stopping the headlong course of a resplendent car. “You said it once; an’ for that I’ve come ’arf a ’undred miles jes’ to dot you one on the boko.”

Now blasphemy is very properly punishable by the law. The

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commissioner choked. In all his homage-filled life he had never heard anything like this.

“Why, you insolent bounder!” He banged a call bell. “You talk to *me* like that! I’ll jolly well have you locked up!”

From where he stood on the other side of the table Smith made one of his utterly unexpected grabs, swift as the out-lash of an elephant’s trunk, and equally irresistible. A “bounder” in India is a low person who works in a shop, or who holds non-gazetted rank in government employ; one, in short, who is not a “gentleman.” Smith’s tone was that of a supreme court judge delivering a regretted, but none the less necessary death sentence.

“You done it, Chief!” he murmured, in a pained voice.

His great fist had closed over an indiscriminate square foot of coat and vest and collar. With a slow heave he tore the commissioner up by the roots, as it were—for the latter, in a most ungodlike way, clung desperately to his chair and twined his legs ’round the table supports. But he might as well have tried to resist a derrick. Smith’s great shoulders bunched; and slowly, roots and all, the lord of five million souls was hauled across his own table over papers and pens and ink bottles.

Then the horrified myrmidons of the law fell upon him!

### IN DURANCE VILE.

A COMMISSIONER goes on circuit with a retinue greater than that of some kings; and it happens sometimes that sacrilegious ex-offenders who bring a vindictive spirit with them have to be dealt with summarily. The call bell, therefore, was the S.O.S. signal.

As Sampson must have stood between the pillars and shed Philistines from him, so Smith scattered *chaprassis* in red uniforms and para-wallahs in khaki uniforms, and *khansamas* and cooks and table boys and file clerks and all the host of underlings who pertain to a commissioner’s camp.

The veranda was full of them; for they kept coming in relays. And the tables and chairs presently became tooth picks; and the sacred, official papers of the commissioner were stamped in the dirt; and his August pens were broken; and ink flowed in miraculous volumes—it is astonishing how far one small bottle of ink can go.

It was all most unseemly and very riotous and hideously undignified—which is gall and wormwood to a commissioner. And the uproar of it reached to the furthest limits of the settlement of Mailakhana, so that all the town knew about it—which was the abomination of desolation.

The battle would have lasted under ordinary circumstances until all of his enemies were destroyed; for Smith’s great muscles worked like machinery

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with tireless steam to drive them. But Smith had journeyed far; he had been empty of food for nobody knew how long;—*and* he had very recently committed copious sacrilege on the commissioner's whisky!

A great weariness began to come upon him, therefore; and when a zealous *chowkidar*, guardian of the chair, contrived finally to tap him on the head with a shattered leg of his badge of office he subsided suddenly onto the floor in a dizzy stupor, from which he passed shortly into a beatific sleep.

When it was all over; and when all the wreckage had been removed, and the combatants had slunk away in awe, frightened because they had witnessed the commissioner's discomfiture; and when new furniture had been brought from other parts of the *dak-bungalow*, a *subadar* of police salaamed low before the great one and inquired in confusion:

"Heaven-Born, what shall be done with this sahib who fights with the ferocity of a bull elephant and sleeps then with the security of a child?"

The commissioner, being a super-man, had long since recovered his dignity—the outward semblance of it, that is to say, the inward and spiritual grace of it would require years of stern living to regain. That he was peevish is easy to understand.

"Oh, lock him up in the circuit house, of course, fool," he snapped.

The circuit house, a wooden structure used only when the

commissioner made his periodical visits, contained, in addition to the little court-room, a reinforced lock-up in which prisoners were kept pending trial.

"Excellency," the *subadar* demurred, "it is not seemly that a sahib be locked up with those evil men of the opium gang."

Smith's healthy snore grated with exasperating untimeliness on the commissioner's outraged nerves. It was intolerable that this ruffian should sleep there like an ox after committing unthinkable havoc. His decision was vicious.

"Damn him! Lock him up! Where else would you put him?"

The *subadar* salaamed without further braving the wrath of the almightiest, and beckoned four of his men. Together, with groans, they lifted up the sleeping giant, who smiled happily up at them, and staggered with him from the presence, condemned to durance vile.

Not quite so vile, however, as the commissioner had ordered. The *subadar* had the innate respect of his people for a sahib. He conveyed Smith, therefore, to an outer guard room, next door to the lock-up. It was a room with a barred window and a strong door, used as a waiting room for guards and the next prisoner on the list, quite strong enough to hold a sleeping white man.

He admonished the pair of sentries who dozed in the passage that if the wild one were to wake up during the

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night and should commence to rend the door posts from their sockets they were on no account to attempt to restrain him; but were to run immediately and rout out the whole available police force.

The sentries muttered, "*bohut, atchcha Subadar Jee,*" and as soon as their superior had gone they returned to the further end of the corridor to huddle close over the circle of light thrown by their lantern so that *lodhurs* might not creep upon them in the dark and leap upon their shoulders.

For in India there is a peculiarly malignant species of ghost which haunts jails and places of confinement. These goblins are the spirits of prisoners who have died who return for the special purpose of tormenting guards and policemen and judges and everybody else who might have been instrumental in their incarceration.

They have small, peaked heads, like turnips, with smudgy features, like a leper's—that is so that they may not be recognized—and no neck. Their bodies are flabby and round, of a clammy gray color with large, yellowish blotches of a fungoid phosphorescence. Their legs are very short and sturdy, and their arms are very long and have no bones in them.

They belong to the genus *bhooth*—which includes devils of all sorts—and species *lodhur*. Contrary to most *bhooths*, they have little, round mouths; therefore they cannot bite; but they whistle with shrill eeriness in the night;

and they may be heard by anybody on hot, windless nights near the jungle edges.

Ignorant white men say that these weird shrieks are the calls of tree hyraxes; but every Indian knows better. The habit of *lodhurs* is to creep silently upon a dozing guard and to leap upon his shoulders where they take a firm grip round the back of the neck with their powerful legs and wrap their long, india-rubbery arms round and round his head, three or four times, blinding and suffocating him. He can then do nothing but run wildly through the night and keep on running until he drops with exhaustion.

Then the *lodhur* leaves him and creeps away; for they do not eat their victims, as some *bhooths* do. But very often the guard dies of fright and exposure. This *bhooth* zoology of the Orient is a fascinating and instructive study.

It is easy to understand, then, why the guards withdrew to a far corner of the corridor, where no terrifying spaces yawned at their backs, and tried to keep awake by playing *bag-chal*, which is accomplished with grains of corn, representing sheep, and little pebbles, representing lions, who maneuver over a diagram of squares marked out on the floor with a piece of charcoal.

The prisoners, they knew, hardly needed attention; for the lock-up was an inner room, re-enforced all round with sheet iron, ventilated by little holes high

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up, and lit by an inaccessible, heavily grated skylight. Even the door was solid, the authorities having learnt long ago that Oriental flesh is frail and that bribery is a hereditary custom; also—from experience—that a small cannon may be passed through open bars. The lock-up, then, was safe—and what were prisoners anyhow, when offset by the ever-present knowledge of lurking *bhooths*?

*Lodhurs* never torment prisoners; for they are, of course, blood kin to them. Smith slept, therefore, in blissful peace, until he had a dream. He dreamt that he was engaged in a riot of imposing grandeur. Men stamped and yelled; clubs whirled and broke with crashing noises full over his ears, and with that men howled again. He did not seem to be having his customary good time in this riot; for the walls kept closing in on him and banging him surreptitiously on the side of the head; and with each bang his enemies howled aloud once more and sang noisily obscene songs of triumph.

These continual clumps on the head were very annoying. He decided to wake out of that dream. Consciousness came to him slowly; and as material things began to impinge upon his brain he growled and cursed all the “ ’owlin’ black ’eathen” in the world; for he began to realize that the yelling came from next door. Then he thought he must be asleep again; for, bump came another clout which was material

enough to jar his head.

He groaned and turned—and rasped his nose against a rough board. Tropic star glow through the barred window gave light enough to show that he had been sleeping on a bench with his ear pressed against the wall. Thud, came another muffled bump and jarred his nose. Smith sprang from the bench in sudden wakefulness and landed far out in the room like some huge cat.

“Wot the ’ell!” he muttered. Then: “Gorblimey! Cells an’ confined to barracks! Wonder ’ow much I got?”

In another instant full consciousness returned, and ousted the vague mental throwback to former military delinquencies. With normal thought came memory.

“Crikey!” he murmured, a trifle awed. “Pinched!” Instinctively he looked round at his prison, and he smiled in a scornful sort of way; he regarded all civil places of confinement with a very proper military derision. The smile slowly expanded into a grin of the deepest appreciation.

“Gor-strewh, but I must a socked it to that Gawd-a-mighty C’missioner bloke!”

Contemplation of assault on the mighty one’s sacred dignity brought an unregenerate satisfaction which was worth many arrests; for there was a long string of accounts between them, petty matters mostly, but galling to extinction by reason of their insufferable “swank.”

A shade of annoyance crept in.

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“Wot in thunder’s this ’ere blasted concert nex’ door?”

The prisoners were stamping their feet and beating upon an improvised drum of some sort while they shouted in discordant chorus.

“An’ wot for did they ’it me on the conk?—There it goes again!”

He felt the faintest suggestion of a tremor; and in a little while the uproar stopped. Smith’s eyes began to narrow; slowly, thoughtfully the lids puckered till they were shrewd, half-smiling slits. He tip-toed to the bench and softly knelt with his ear to the wall.

He was immediately astonished at the microphone effect. He could distinguish faint scratchings and shufflings and low conversation which the sheet metal on the other side magnified like the diaphragm of a telephone receiver. A chuckle was clearly audible. More cautious scratching. Then a voice.

“Brothers—and thou, Nathu Ram, son of a fool, who hast murmured against the chief—take note. Truly is Allah great who created Dhunsura Bux small of stature, yet gave him for good measure a wit greater than a hundred men.”

“Yet his spirit is very fierce.” It was almost a defense.

“Fierce, indeed. With his own hand will he do the killing; he has made oath. But his wit—consider now. It was the very spirit of Allah which impelled him to send me to work as a carpenter on

this very building as long as three years back against just such an evil happening as this.”

An angry snarl came.

“Why prate of Allah, Feroz Khan, Mussulman swine, when our chief is a good Shivaista Brahmin!”

A deep growl.

“Peace, fools! Hindu or Mussulman, what matter? The truth remains that we escape from this dogs’ den.”

More scratching. Then the sulky insistence of the first speaker.

“Yet, it was Allah who alone is great, who put it into my mind to leave a loose plate and to conceal thereunder this file and chisel.”

A triumphal pause. Then again, “Come, Dhunnu, put thy bull’s strength here—Sing, brothers!”

Once more the lewd chorus broke out, and presently under its cover a sharp twang impinged on Smith’s ear.

He rose to his feet very softly.

“Blimey! Drawin’ the bolts! After that, just the wooden partition, an’ then—! Seven o’ them, Poonoosawmi said!”

He knew at once that this must be the opium gang which the commissioner had trapped. Criminals of the most desperate type, of course; because the British government in India is very jealous of its monopoly on *papaver somniferum*. Penalties are extraordinarily severe; and only the most daring of ruffians can be lured by the hardly won profits.

Seven of them! And he, a lone, white

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man, stood in the way of their freedom! He cat-footed to the window to examine the bars. They were of heavy, unpromising-looking wrought iron set in a sill of metal overlying the wooden window frame. He applied his great hands to the bars with tentative force. Immediately a cautious whisper came from below.

“Marshter, oh, marshter.”

Smith’s heart went out to his faithful imp.

“Huh! ’S that you, Poonosawmi? Good boy!”

“Yes, Marshter. Long time I am waiting here. Marshter, I got news.”

“Again? Let ’er go ’s fast as you like.”

“Methergunge rajah is arrived at *dak-bungalow* late night time with much followers.”

“Golly! ’As the crooked pig come to lay a complaint?”

“No, marshter. His people say coming for sociable visitings only. I am seeing him make vomitsomely polite ceremony with Commissioner Sahib.”

“The ’ell ’e did! Wot’s the bleeder up to now?”

“That thing, marshter, is without my knowledge. Marshter, how is marshter?”

“Me? Looks like I’m up a bloomin’ pole. But, are we down-’earted? NO! Now listen ’ere, Poonosawmi. You’re a good little *bhooth ke butchcha*. So you jes’ go on a foraging party an’ loot me some ropes. Miles’ o’ ropes.”

“Yes, marshter, can do. But I am thinking, if marshter breaking bars, one rope is plentiful. Almost marshter can jump.”

“MILES O’—” Smith clapped his hand over his mouth to still his thoughtless roar. “Tons o’ rope, I said, ye black imp. An’ ’op to it, *juldee*.”

“Yes, marshter.”

The lithe, black shadow vanished, and Smith tip-toed once again to listen to the progress of the opium gang. Another burst of singing was in progress. Under its cover he heard the creak of a straining heave, and then a metallic twang, higher up the wall this time. In a little while the cock-sure voice of the ex-carpenter came jubilantly.

“But a dozen more, brothers; and then, with three blows of the foot those planks on the other side fall, for they are loose. Then will I show you the cunning trick of the iron bars at the window.”

“M-m, wish I knew wot the bloomin’ trick was,” Smith mused. And, “Cripes, I wish Poonosawmi would ’urry.”

Mingled with industrious scratching came the malcontent.

“What if the chief be not there?”

“*Awah, thuck-ka*, goat’s child! Surely he will be there! Did the chief ever yet fail? With swords will he come—that was the message—and then we slay, besides the commissioner sahib, who is for him alone, every dog’s dog of a sahib in the town. Thus shall our



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honor be made clean.”

A very proper scheme of vengeance, and a perfectly natural one from the point of view of criminals as desperate as an opium gang. Smith, as he listened, felt the unpleasant conviction of its perfect feasibility; and a growing respect for the chief's cunning began to come over him.

That he was about to be in a very short time the first sahib whom they were to meet was a sickening certainty. Yet in spite of his predicament he felt the hot anger rise in his throat. He had a very proper conception of the deference due to a white man, as many riots detailed in that personal file testified. Instinctively his great shoulders stiffened, and regardless of odds or opponents he growled within himself:

“The 'ell ye will! Dirty nigger! Jes' you come on an' try.”

The fault-finder was muttering again.

“Killing talk is well enough. But, having killed, what then? Bethink you, brothers; the slaying of sahibs is no light matter under this British *Sirkar*. Where shall it be possible to—”

A chorus of snarls drowned him out.

“Verily thou art the son of a mule, Nathu Ram! The rajah gives us hiding—he dares not otherwise. He will give notice to this grandmotherly *Sirkar* that all the jungles are being scoured for us, and he will invite their pig police to render assistance, while we walk the bazaars unmolested. Was it not ever

so?”

Smith's eyes narrowed again; but the shrewd expression was not humorous this time. Instead there was a strange groping into the unknown. Here again was something which could be held over the rajah's head. He shook his massive head testily. If only he had known up there! But this was no time for regretful guessing. The quiet, clever work on the other side was progressing with unpleasant smoothness. Smith strode anxiously to the window again. He grunted his relief at the quick whisper from below.

“Marshter, I got. I am throwing.”

A huge, tangled mass of cordage flopped up against the bars. Smith snatched at it and drew in yard after yard of a heavy braided matter, quite two inches wide and immensely strong, as the resistance to his great hands testified.

“Where in thunder—?”

Poonosawmi giggled in the darkness below.

“I stealing all ropings from one bed in *dak-bungalow*.”

Smith exclaimed in admiration. Beds in these government *dak-bungalows* consist always of a strong wooden frame interlaced with a heavy tape which forms a very comfortable, cool mattress. Poonosawmi's audacious recourse was worthy of Smith himself. It was encouraging proof that genius may be achieved by earnest emulation. His short ventral laugh coming at

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intervals as he struggled with the tangle in the darkness was evidence of how much he appreciated the joke.

“Marshter can rend all bars in sunders and commit liberty now?”

Smith’s growl was scornful.

“Poonosawmi, me son, you’re a bloomin’ black diamond; an’ I’ll give you arf’ o’ what I make for *backsheesh*. But you’re a fool. These ’ere bars are two inches thick.”

Poonosawmi’s heart ceased to beat. That mere bars should hold his master after all the risk of his bold raid on the bed chamber was a tragedy. Then, with a gleam of hope.

“Oh, marshter, if these damn iron too thick how is marshter running away now? If I bring thick stick, then mabeso can do?”

“Poonosawmi,” grunted Smith, through his teeth, as he sawed at the rough tape with his pocket knife, “You shut up, an’ ’ook it. There’s a hard, bad boogey man due to arrive exactly where you’re standin’ in jes’ about two minutes with seven swords, an’ ’e’l carve you all up into dog meat. So you’d better *jao juldee* quick. Me, I’m ’ere to combine business with pleasure. An’ jes’ in time, too. ’Ark to the bleedin’ thugs!”

The sing-song was in full blast again. Smith felt the jar of metal snapping. Very shortly another. And then suddenly the noise doubled in volume, as if a door had been opened. It required no guessing to know that a

considerable sheet of metal had been removed. The voices on the other side were easily distinguishable, exultant and excited.

“*Shabash!* It was well done! *Inshallah!* Dhunnu, and thou, Gokale, strike now with thy great feet, here, low down; and Allah strike with you.”

The muffled kicks of bare toes followed; and Smith could see the dim lower ends of two wide planks swing out and strike against the bench on which he had lain. A grunting heave, and the bench clattered over. Then suddenly a dark, burly figure stood in the room! Dhunnu, the strong man, evidently. For the moment he saw nothing, for he turned to wrench the planks from their upper fastenings. As he leaned them carefully against the wall, three more eager figures pushed through.

Then there was a shout, a gasping squawk rather; for they had become aware of the apparition in the room. Huge and dark and menacing it appeared to them, framed motionless in half-crouching silhouette against the window. A *bhooth*, of course, of some particularly malignant variety, was their first thought; probably a *rakshasta*, who snatched people up in dark places and put them into the great hole in its back and went leaping and howling through the jungles to its lair.

For an appalled second they stood in paralyzed impotence. Then they turned in a frenzy of terror to dive again

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through the opening they had just made. But the others from the inside fought just as frantically as they to win to freedom.

Weight of numbers was with them. Someone, more cunning than the rest, crouched low to heave through below the heaviest resistance. He cut the legs from under the frenzied leaders; and in another second the last of them had piled out over the struggling heap. Then they, too, realized the terrifying presence, and the whole gang huddled against the wall, shocked for the moment into silence.

### CHAPTER VI. SINGLE-HANDED.

IT was the precise psychological apex. Smith knew from his army tactics the value of surprise. What was better, he knew it by instinct as a rough and tumble fighter of long experience. He roared, then, like a bear charging from its cave, and charged at the shadowy group.

Dhunnu, he knew, was the one who would be most likely to give him trouble; and Dhunnu's prowess, therefore, was his own undoing. He was easy to distinguish from the other dark shapes on account of his size.

Smith singled him out and drove an annihilating fist at the general blur of the upper part of his anatomy. Dhunnu coughed, just once, a short, choking

spasm, and slumped to the floor. Smith shouted again and raged among the rest.

They yelled now with pain and rage; but two were gasping heaps on the floor before the others gathered wits enough to fight back. Since the unexpected apparition turned out to be a man of some sort, something human, though hugely terrifying in the dark, they were plucky enough, these smuggler folk. Fighting was a necessary part of their profession; and they fought with vicious fury.

But natives are not good fighters with their hands. The crushing efficiency of a heavy fist is beyond their knowledge, for they have not been civilized away from the weapon instinct. Smith knew that somewhere was a chisel which might make a deadly tool, and possibly a file. His fierce wish to find them was almost a prayer to some grim god of battles.

While his shoulder blades crawled with the thought, he drove again at the dim shapes which clawed and bit at him, and swung a heavy-booted foot like a devastating flail below. Something that groaned clung to his knees. He stamped viciously and the thing ceased to groan; but it tangled itself with his feet and he fell.

Three at least fell with him—he could not see sufficiently to drag down more—and together they rolled over the floor, a clawing, grunting tangle of venom and fight.

The natives, of course, yelled as

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natives always do. Smith wondered vaguely as he squirmed and kicked and hit into the heaving dimness whether any sentries or officials of any sort would hear and come to the rescue. He knew nothing, of course, of the two guards who huddled over their lantern with cloths drawn over their heads at the further end of the corridor. And they, of course, knew nothing of the struggle that strained and threshed round in the dark room. The yelling was no louder, and very little different from the recent singing. Assistance, though so near, was the last possible factor in the battle.

It was the special reward of a turbulent life that floor fighting was another branch of the art in which Smith's experience was great. It was easy for him, whenever his great hands came in contact with a head, to bang it viciously on the boards. The pile on top of him began to diminish.

Then he found the chisel! Something seared him in the shoulder and ripped down his upper arm. A voice yelped in exultation. Smith heaved himself loose from clinging hands and feet and rolled all his weight in its direction. A wiry figure squirmed beneath him. He smashed a fist onto it, anyhow, anywhere. It shivered once and ceased to squirm. He felt himself wonderfully free from naked, well-oiled limbs.

But two erect shadows hovered over him waiting to pounce as soon as they could distinguish which of the confused blurs they should pounce upon. In a

flash an old trick which a French sergeant of artillery had shown him came to his mind. It was one of the unexpected offenses of the *savate*.

From where he lay on the floor he pivoted on his two hands and swung both his legs in a sweeping arc. They struck the standing figures just below the knees and brought them down like cut corn. The crushing fist finished the coup. He whirled again to meet the next attack.

But this time he was really free. A dark shape moved slowly on the floor. From his prone position he kicked in the general direction of its middle. A groan behind him caused him to spin round just in time to see a head and shoulders heave themselves unsteadily up. Immediately he smashed a fist onto it, and its head met the boards with a hard thud. Then he lifted himself to a crouching position, straining his eyes for the least sign of movement among the prone shapes. But he was alone on the floor. He rose cautiously to his feet, panting, but alert and fresh enough to begin all over again. He felt his shoulder with a wry face and swore.

"Ruddy 'eathen! Goin' to kill sahibs, was they!—Lor lumme, 'ow they stunk!"

He twisted his clothes back into approximate position and fished for a match. He had the long-burning strike-anywhere wax vestas which are found in British countries. Holding one high, he counted the carnage. He might have

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posed for another Statue of Liberty—won at a price.

“Hm! Seven o’ them; an’—Hey, lie still, you!” His quick boot gave point to the admonition. Before the match burned his fingers, he gathered up his sections of the bed taping. A hard, truculent grin began to seam his face as he fell to muttering again.

“Blinkin’ thugs! Kill white men, yes! I’ll show ’em!”

With a certain grim amusement he garnered his fallen desperadoes into a pile, pushing them with his feet; and then he sat down so that he faced them all, and set to work. First he tied their hands and feet, roughly and quickly, keeping an alert watch on his pile. Whenever anything moved in the dimness he immediately hit it. Then he went over his collection again, with elaboration this time.

He was tying, in the dark, and he could make no intricately secure knots. He swathed them, therefore, like so many mummies; there was going to be no untoward accident through some lithe, loose-jointed figure wriggling out of its bonds. Those who gasped and began to come to as he wrapped them he jeered at unpleasantly, harping always on their effrontery in harboring the vain idea that sahibs could be overcome by folk who were closely related to goats and jungle pigs.

They were too overawed at the frightful force of him—and half convinced that he must be some sort of

dominating devil, after all—even to feel the horrid Oriental insult of his methodical jests.

When they were all properly wrapped, Smith singled out a certain one from the dark pile. He lifted it with an easy heave to the best light by the window and there he stood it on its feet like a doll. Satisfying himself that it was conscious and very frightened, he growled:

“Thee, I remember having stabbed at me with the chisel”—He shook the man in remembrance—“Thou must be the ape who played once as a carpenter. Good. Tell me now the secret of the window.”

Terror was in the man’s eyes; but his face began to set in a dogged sullenness. The lower types of humanity are very prone to take refuge in an animal silence of this sort from which it is almost impossible to move them. Smith knew the symptoms. He shook the man again; but the sulkiness only stiffened. Smith shrugged without anxiety; he knew many ways of stirring the native imagination.

“So? It is to remain a secret? That, we shall presently decide. Consider now, Mussulman swine. Here is a bench. I sit—so. Thee, I hold between my knees as a manure sack is held; thy monkey-shaped head between my hands. I twist, just a little—so. Speech comes not? Observe, then—a little more, slowly. And three—after a little more—it is so easy.

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“At about the third time round thy head comes off like a plucked crow’s and I drop it out upon the head of thy chief who must be waiting even now—with seven swords. Ho, ho, it is a jest! Thy chief, who is small of stature, yet has the wit of a hundred and a spirit that is strong enough to bear the burden of seven great swords; six for swine who are trussed ready for the knife, and one for an ape who will presently have no head.”

It was more than even an animal mind could stand. The man’s head was twisted round so that the glow from the window was in his eyes. They boggled with terror. He was quite convinced that those inhumanly powerful hands could carry out the threat. Frenziedly he tried to speak with the eyes alone.

Smith paused as though considering. Then he released his hold. The head rolled drunkenly and the man gasped for breath. Smith’s look was an urgent inquiry. He laid a suggestive hand on the lean neck. It was enough:

“The iron sill,” the man gasped. “The screw heads are false. Only at either end are they true—yet the—holes are bored wide and they may be lifted—out with a knife. The whole, then, may be swung aside.”

Smith whistled his admiration.

“Oho! Clever! And was that thy chief’s wit, or Allah’s inspiration to thee? No matter. If the tale be true, then thy head may await the hanging. Let us now put thy fate to the test.”

He dropped the man softly back onto his pile of trophies and went with deliberation to try the trick window-grating. With a little maneuvering his knife slipped under the round head screw at one end. With a little more, the screw, which was held only by rust, came away in his hand. He chuckled with the anticipation of some vast joke or other which began to frame itself in his mind. The other screw proved to be capable of the same manipulation. Then Smith heaved tentatively on one end of the grating. The whole heavy mass swung out like a door.

“Thy neck awaits the rope,” he spoke into the room; and then he leaned out.

A dark figure, smaller even than Poonoosawmi’s, crouched in the shadow of the wall. With the alert nervousness of a Rhesus monkey it jumped two full yards away, and crouching, ready to dart aside again, it glanced up at the window. The great head and shoulders framed in the dark opening seemed to reassure it. It came close once more.

“Is that thou, Dhunnu? Offal, I have waited this half hour. Swift now, and reach me thy great ape’s hand.”

Smith leaned far out and reached down as far as he could without losing his balance. His hand fell short by four feet of the little chief’s head. But the latter was evidently quite satisfied.

“Good! Hold so! Cup thy great fist.”

The squat figure gathered its legs

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under it and like a monkey it leaped, straight up, for a hold. The thin, wiry hands clamped together over Smith's great palm, and the man hung. Smith steadied himself against the sill and with a clean heave he hoisted the little figure safely onto the window ledge. It scrambled softly, clutched firmly on the sill.

"*Wallah!* That was well done. Shiva, who favors our cause, has trebled thy strength. Let us now make speed for the merry killing. But the commissioner sahib, remember, fellows, is mine. My liver aches to meet the dog."

Smith's indignation rose immediately. He clapped a vast hand onto the lean neck and, twisting the other into the loin cloth, he swung the bloodthirsty little chief off the sill and into the room. Holding him well clear of the floor he shook him exactly as a great black leopard might worry a captured ape before eating it.

The man yelped once; and then speech was jolted from him into hiccoughing gurglings and chokings. His swathed *chudder* worked loose, and long, crooked swords dropped from him in clattering profusion. When he seemed to be empty, Smith held him up before his own fierce face as a small, vicious puppy may be held.

"Killing again! Little monkey man, enough chatter has been of killing in connection with my good friend the commissioner sahib. Presently will I make a light and show thee thy seven

greater apes who mouthed also about killing."

The little wizened face chattered afresh at the obscure sight of this fearful creature which held him in its huge paws like a squirming infant. Smith growled again and shook him vigorously once more, this time for good measure.

"The commissioner sahib is thine indeed? Thy liver aches to meet him? Half-born bat, even now will I take thee to see him; and the ache in his stomach will be such that he will pay me one thousand rupees at the sight. Ho, ho, a thousand hard-won rupees! Truly, will there be a pain in his vitals!"

Smith saw such a fund of joy in the contemplated scene that his indignation passed from him and he forbore to shake the life out of the wretched captive. Instead he set him on the floor and, squeezing him breathless between his knees, he stripped his loin cloth from him. Then he groped for the fallen turban; and with the two he made the man into a compact bundle.

As he worked he chuckled with the graceless shadow of an overgrown boy absorbed in mischief. To profane the pompous rest of the commissioner was a joy in itself. But that he, whom the great one thought safely locked up awaiting his vindictive morning's judgment, should come clamoring at his gate in the night for money was an exquisite thought.

He lit a succession of matches to see

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that the rest of the gang was secure against all chance of escape. Looking at the mummy shapes, he paused and frowned. Bound men, however fast, if they were left in a position in which they could roll to one another, might help each other to an unbelievable extent. Extraordinary things had been accomplished by desperate men who had no apparent hope except seclusion and their own teeth. Kneeling among his mummies he looked round in scowling perplexity. Then his face lit with inspiration. A fantastic conceit had come to him.

All round the room at intervals stout iron pegs were fixed for the hanging of coats and rifles and accouterments. Smith grinned with joyous deliberation. One by one he turned his trussed-up desperados onto their faces and made a small readjustment of their wrappings. Then he heaved them up in turn and hung them over the iron pegs in a row like Indian papooses, to be found by the first official who should open the door in the morning. He stepped back and struck all the rest of his matches to survey his handiwork with grim gloating.

“Safe as so many bloomin’ ’ams in the pantry,” he muttered. “Won’t ’e be ’oppin’ mad!”

He chuckled again with wicked mirth and tucked two strong fingers into the windings of the ferocious little chief, who had recovered wit and breath enough to spit venom and hatred at him.

Even that, Smith forgave in the sublimity of his happiness. He laid his bundle over the window ledge and threw one great leg across the sill, looking back almost with regret at leaving so perfect a jest behind him.

Suddenly as an inspired afterthought he swung his leg in again and went back and stuck a long sword upright in the floor in front of each as a finishing touch to the artistic effect. Then he strode with business-like deliberation to the window.

It was his turn now to play the ape. Holding his snarling package tight under one arm, he swung himself over and let himself down. For a moment he hung from one hand just as a great gorilla might hang holding its young. Then he loosened his hold and dropped.

The *dak-bungalow* was only a stone’s throw from the circuit house. Itself it was dark and silent; but at one end of its compound, where the kitchen and servants’ quarters were, several fires burned. It was easy to see that the rajah had brought down quite a retinue with him. Smith strode on to the dark building.

Immediately silent, watchful figures surrounded him and gaped in wonder at the strange apparition. Smith paid not the least attention to them, but stalked straight ahead filled with a lofty purpose. A brass-bradded *chaprassi* of the rajah’s swung a lantern onto the portent. Its rays fell on Smith’s grimly,



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cheerfully determined face and, with startling contrast, onto the puckered, snarling, half-choked visage of the bundle under his arm.

The man with the lantern grunted like a startled bullock. He thrust his face closer to look again; and then with an exclamation of dismay he turned and bolted into the house. Without betraying by his manner even a fraction of astonishment, Smith followed.

About the doors and in the veranda more brass-bound men slept. On these Smith coolly stepped whenever they were in his way. While everybody stared and murmured in frightened whispers, nobody dared to try and stop the great, fierce-looking, truculently grinning white man. He kicked open an inner door and stood in the hallway. There he planted himself with legs wide apart, laughed once—it was almost a giggle of childish delight—filled his great chest, and blasted the sacred silence with a roar.

“Hey, there, Commissioner Sahib! ’Ull-lo-o-o-o!”

After a minute filled with sudden tramlings and startled questionings, he shouted again.

“ ’Ullo-o-o, above! Business, Chief! Important business!”

A frightened and shocked orderly came down the steps holding his fingers over his mouth as a priest might in a desecrated temple.

“Sahib! *Are hap-re-bap*, have a care! The Heaven Born—”

“ ’Ere,” Smith shouted at him. “Tell ’im I got a package for ’im an’ I’ll sell it for one thousand rupees.”

But the man was too flabbergasted at the blasphemy to do more than stare. A scuffle came from a side door. The man who had held the lantern threw it open, and a fat, little figure, looking most unkindly in a dingy silk sleeping *chudder*, crowded into the light.

It was the rajah of Methergunge himself. He gave one searching look into the distorted face of Smith’s captive, and then a moan like a stricken animal’s came from him. For a moment his knees sagged under him; and then he was clawing beseechingly at Smith’s arm while he struggled for words. Smith looked down at him from his massive height.

“Why, ’ullo, it’s Yellow-Belly,” he said genially. “ ’Ow’s things Raj.?”

The rajah clung to him.

“Oah, please Mister—please, I—one verree great favor I ask. One thousand rupees I am paying gladly. Mister, please—just a few speeches I beg with—with this man.”

Smith looked at him sourly. Then he disengaged his bundle from under his arm and lifted it out of reach, balancing it on one of his massive hands at the level of his shoulder.

“Ho, wot’s the excitement? Why’re you so bloomin’ polite all of a sudden, little Toad-Face?”

“Oah, Mister, please—this—annee favor you ask I give. This—this

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unfortunate fellow is one relative of my house—one distant relative; and—please, Mister; it is a most important family matter and of great concern to us.”

Smith looked at him with a shrewd suspicion awakening in his quick brain. Again came the thought of that something that the rajah was so deadly anxious to conceal. He held his suddenly valuable prisoner aloft with cool deliberation as a huntsman holds a carcass out of reach of the yapping hounds and his eyes narrowed in characteristic contemplation. Suddenly:

“Ah-h!”

The exclamation burst from him. The long sought inspiration had flashed to his mind, and he knew immediately that it was correct.

“Pshaw! Might a guessed it long ago!” he exploded.

He remembered the implied threat of the opium gang’s conversation. And that familiar acrid smell in the palace.

The illicit drug, of course! Behind those heavy curtains was a cunning little factory! And quite obviously, too, the rajah had made his friendly visit to the commissioner with the hope of doing something for the protection of his gang. And, excruciatingly obviously again, he was now deadly anxious to get at the smuggler chief and promise him anything on earth if only he would keep his mouth shut and not implicate the man higher up.

All these things flashed to Smith’s

brain as he held the prisoner high and looked down on the rajah, who yammered at his waist line. Again his eyes narrowed with a shrewd humor. He lowered the key to the situation just a little with tentative diplomacy.

“So, Rajah Sahib? Any favor you said?”

“Yes, Mister, anneething! Only please, without delay. In minutes the commissioner sahib is coming.”

Encouraged, Smith resorted to tact.

“Ho, all right then, fat sewer pig. What I wants is that bloomin’ concession. An’ I wants it, *juldee*, without any fuss.”

“Oah, Mister, at once. I promise. In writing will I give you my seal.”

Smith dropped the squirming chief into the arms of the rajah, who staggered under the sudden weight.

“Take ’im. I ain’t no bloomin’ revenue policeman—an’ ’e crawls, any’ow. You can ’ave ’im till my friend the commissioner comes down in ’is sacred pajamas, an’ then I sells him for one thousand rupees, an’ I watches the commissioner’s belly ache—An’ I don’t want your blinkin’ writin’. I got what’s a heap better. I got the bulge I was lookin’ for.—An’, Rajah Sahib, I’m comin’ up into your stinkin’ state to get the concession, like I said.”

He watched the rajah pounce on the precious bundle of fury and drag it to a corner, chattering like a cheap gramophone; and he stretched his great shoulders and grinned with

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complacence and much satisfaction at the scene.

The slop of soft slippers sounded on the stairs. Smith looked up quickly and found himself grinning right into the face of a very surprised, very red, and very irate commissioner. By all the laws of official etiquette he should have immediately prostrated himself before the presence.

Instead, the grin grew wider. He had reached the stage of the small boy who has so steeped himself in crime that he knows that the extreme limit of punishment has already been passed. What was more, he knew, very shrewdly he knew, that he held the whip-hand. His grin, then, was one of angelic enjoyment. He waved a hand airily toward the fiercely whispering and self-absorbed pair.

“There you are, C’missioner Sahib. There’s a picture o’ lovin’ solicitude; title: ‘ ’Is countryman’; an’ a thousand bloomin’ dibs the sight’ll cost you.”

The commissioner swelled to the verge of apoplexy. That this hatefully, cheerfully insolent bounder should have escaped from a flimsy confinement was after all, in view of his amazing record, rather to be expected. But that he should have contrived in some miraculous manner to capture the one man in all India whom the commissioner was most anxious to see was direct proof of his partnership with the devil. The commissioner just stood and puffed hugely, and no word came from him.

Smith took up his wicked monologue.

“Well, Commish, old top, ain’t you pleased to see ’im? Why you’d ought to be glad to give me a pikin’ thousand. My good friend the rajah ’ere is so pleased that ’e up an’ give me the bloomin’ concession.”

Eager interest came into the commissioner’s face. It drowned out his indignation. With it came his voice. He was all most friendly.

“Oh—er—really, old—Mr. Smith. Oh, I’m glad about that, really, you know. I’m awfully pleased that we’ve got the concession at last. Er, that you’ve got it for my friend, Mr. Sarkies, I mean to say.” The commissioner had been surprised into unwariness.

Smith looked at him through characteristically closed eyes, in which was a gleam of malicious humor. His voice was dry and cheerfully incisive.

“Commissioner Sahib, listen. That concession now. I ain’t got it for your black-and-tan friend, Mr. Sarkies; nor yet for you, ’cause you’re a blinkin’ government servant an’ you loses your gawd a’mighty job if you monkeys with business—for which I’m real sorry, Mr. Commish.”

His eyes bored into the other’s soul until the latter was forced to look away.

“But Commissioner Sahib, cheer up; it ain’t goin’ to be lost. ’Cause I know of some men, white men, who can use that concession, an’ me, too, an’ pay me a bonus for gettin’ it, too—an’ commissioner sahib, listen again. I ain’t

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goin' to be locked up again, nor yet knows it!"  
leave your district! An' s'welp me Once again the Commissioner was  
Gawd, you're the man as bloomin' well silent.