IN THE SHADOW OF THE PAGODA

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THE SHWAY DAGONE PAGODA, RANGOON.

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SKETCHES OF

BURMESE LIFE AND CHARACTER.

BY

E. D. CUMING.

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PREFACE.

A RESIDENCE of six and a half years in the country does not qualify one to pose as an authority, and I have not even the conventional excuses to offer in submitting this very superficial book to the public; friends have not urged its publication, and it aims at fulfilling no want. If it gives Englishmen any clearer idea of their fellow-subjects in Burma I shall be satisfied; it is a little singular that a people so interesting and so peculiarly accessible is not better known. I only hope that in the chapters on dacoity I have not brought into unfairly prominent relief the national shortcomings.

I lay no claim to the title of sportsman, but I have included in this book two tiger stories. That they differ in the essential feature from those generally published is my only excuse for adding to the long list of these.

The illustrations are from photographs by Mr. P. Klier and by Messrs. Watts and Skeen of Rangoon.

For kind permission to republish herein several papers, I have to thank the proprietors of *Land and Water*, *Cornhill*, *Macmillan's*, and *Chambers's*.

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IN THE SHADOW OF THE PAGODA.

CHAPTER I.

SOME ASPECTS OF THE COUNTRY.

YOU will not fall in love with Burma at first sight, if like most new arrivals you come to her front door, the mouth of the Rangoon River. From shipboard at Elephant Point the prospect is depressing. The low brown coast-line, raggedly trimmed with jungle, falls away on either hand from the great river, brown from its wandering over miles of alluvial mud. On the left bank, a little back from the stream, the watchtower and flagstaff of the telegraph station give just a touch of lonely civilisation to destroy the mysterious possibilities of virgin jungle. As the steamer feels her zigzag way up the channel from left mud-bank to right mud-bank, under screaming escort of gulls and kites, there is nothing to look at on either side; the swirling river hedged by rank vegetation is the view, devoid of character. A palm tree would give some sort of Eastern colouring; but palms there are none after passing Elephant Point. You look in vain for the saving grace of a crocodile. The smallest crocodile ever born, basking on those shimmering mud slopes,

would redeem the whole from the commonplace. But Nature can afford nothing better than a water-snake coiled pensive on a stump, or slithering lazily water-wards, to the terror of myriads of restless shrimps. There is no river traffic, for the tide is running up, and we passed the fishermen hours ago out in the gulf of Martaban.

You have had time to be thoroughly disappointed before a flutter of fulfilled expectancy stirs the quarter-deck, and "The Pagoda!" is on everybody's lips. Far away over the jungle, to the north, a tiny cone, tapering concavely from its broad base, stands low against the sky. "There it is again!" groans a passenger of full habit, whose capacity for iced drinks has expanded daily since Suez. "Steward!" For the sight of the Shway Dagone to them that know it is provocative of thirst. Past the masked battery of Syriam, born of the Russian scare of '85, and the scattered suburbs of Rangoon crop up in the chimney stalks and mill roofs of Poozoondoung. The Pagoda, solitary in its gilded majesty, glitters on the low hill beyond the town. The prospect is more interesting now. Round the Hastings shoal, where three rivers meet, under the embrasures of Monkey Point battery, and we are in the Port. The rice season is not open yet, but four long lines of masts, flying flags of half the nations of the world, cut the stately waterway into broad avenues. Save for a steamer or two loading teak from nearly submerged rafts alongside, and three ships discharging coal in clouds of black dust over on the left at Dallah, all swing high and light in idleness.

Down the right bank Rangoon throws a long tentacle of mills, native dwellings, and timber yards, varied by an occasional pagoda falling to ruins and overgrown with

vegetation. The distant left bank, the Dallah side, is lined with huge godowns, or sheds, whose low-pitched roofs of corrugated iron shelter coal and salt; a dreary range straggling off in more and larger timber yards, where elephants stalk unmoved amid viciously screaming circular saws and hissing steam. Life at Dallah is banishment. There are few Europeans there; the assistants in charge of the timber yards and engineers at the Flotilla Company's works form the white population. Their visitors are chiefly viceroys and distinguished travellers, whose desire it is to see elephants working timber. Hence the best elephant stories come from Dallah. I think I am right in giving Dallah credit for the elephant which when stacking squares (*i.e.* squared logs) habitually shut one eye and applied the other to the end of the log to make sure he had put it straight.

Presently we come abreast of Rangoon town, a study in greys, browns, and greens toned down with dust. On first landing you see nothing of the natives of the country. Gangs of lank Coringa coolies are working cargo on the wharf and in the godowns. The sampan-wallahs are Chittagonians; the drivers of gharries and bullocks carts are Malabar coast men; if the road is under repair coolies are the labourers; the policeman dozing harmlessly in the shade is probably a Madras man too; and fifteen out of twenty people you meet in the streets are of nationalities strange to the soil. Of the one hundred and eighty thousand and odd inhabitants of Rangoon only seventy-nine thousand are Burmese;* and the large majority of these dwell in the suburbs.

* "The returns are analysed by religions, and though, no doubt, a return of towns by races would have been even better, yet in Burma, as nearly all Burmans are Bhuddists, the return by religions is sufficiently accurate."—(Census report, 1891).

The variety of the races which form the population of the seaport towns is a tribute to the wealth of the country. Europeans of every nation, Americans, Chinese, Armenians, Negroes, and representatives of almost every Indian people between the Himalayas and Ceylon find a home here. The Burmese mingle freely with them all, giving their daughters in marriage to men differing in race, colour, and religion; this, be it said, with the cordial consent of the girls themselves. The European who settles in the country often takes a daughter of the land to wife, so does the Armenian. So would the native of India if he found favour in the ladies' sight. The wealthier Suratis do find such favour sometimes; but the native of India has ever in his mind's eye the home of his youth, to which he will retire to pass the evening of life, and the Burmese girl will not leave her country. The Chinaman, who prospers here even better than he seems to do everywhere else, is glad to get a Burmese wife, whose ways appeal to his business-like instincts. The boys of such a pair are educated and dressed as Chinamen and the girls as Burmese; a fair adjustment of the claims of nationality which has advantages of its own; for the boy so brought up can rely upon the aid of his father's fellow-countrymen, and a Burmese girl can always make her way in the world.

To return to the outward aspect of Rangoon as first seen from the river. The town does not look inviting. The buildings have a substantial solvent air, but the general effect is glaring baldness. It improves on closer acquaintance. The better streets throughout are wide and clean; guiltless of side-walks but shaded on either side by trees in leaf all the year round. The East end is the more important, but even in Merchant Street

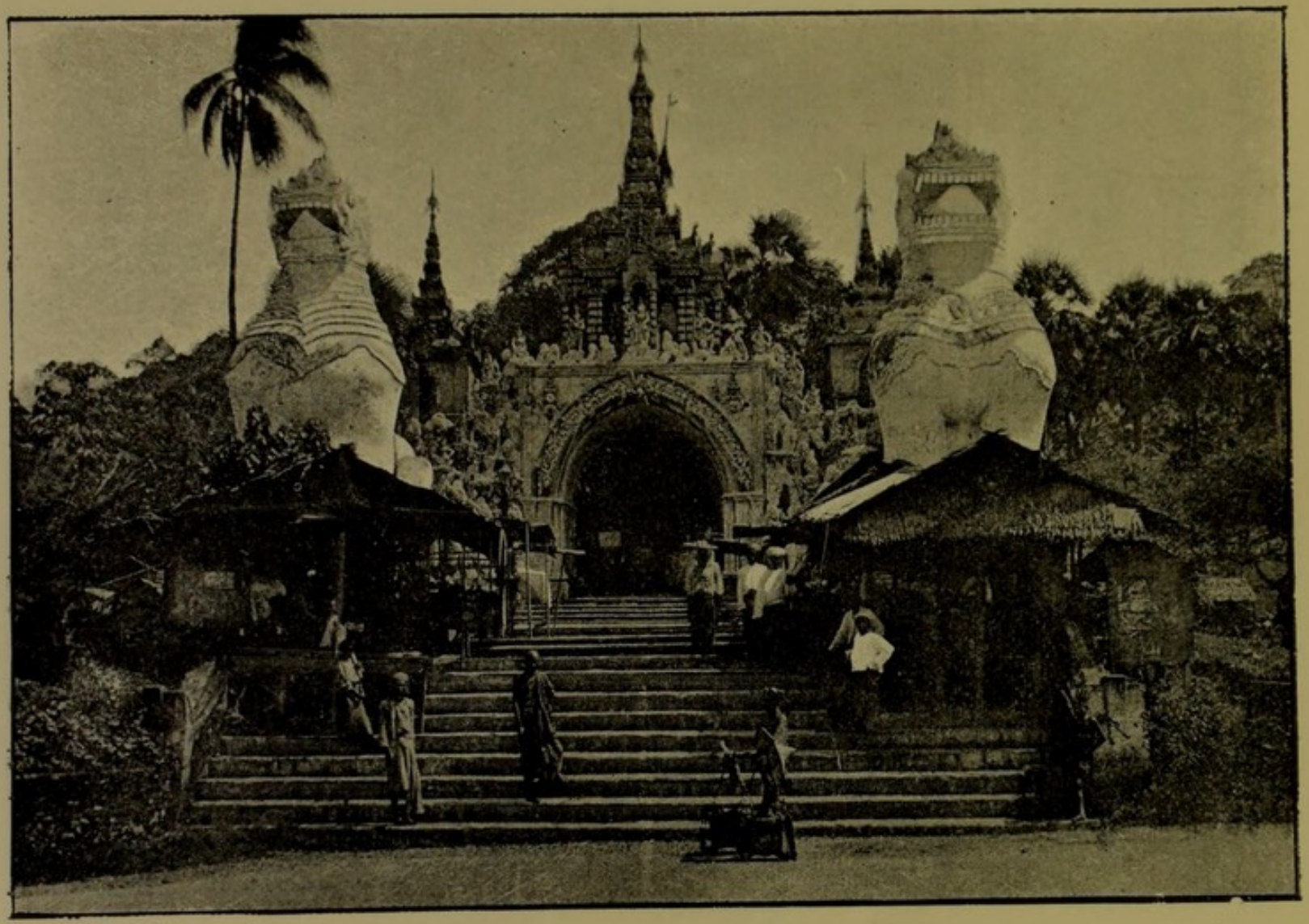
extremes of industry meet. Over against a great mercantile office forming a block in itself, stands a tumble-down tiled shed, the "shop" of Ah Toon whose signboard glibly proclaims him "Carpenter, Furniture and Contractor"; or a Madrassi's dingy sweet-stuff emporium, reached by a plank across the open brick drain, whose customers are coolies and crows. There are a few good shops to cater for European wants—if that may be called a shop which rises superior to window display and wherein a set of double harness or half a pound of cheese may be had on demand. The West side of the town beyond Fytche Square is occupied almost entirely by the Eastern traders who congregate, according to custom, in quarters ruled by race, and streets determined by trade. All the hardware dealers dwell side by side; the crockery men cling together, and the dealers in cloth. It is convenient for the purchaser, and, stimulating competition, makes business distinctly lively.

This was always a bustling part of the town and has been still more so since the introduction of the steam tram-cars. The enterprise was undertaken by the late Mr. Darwood, than whom no man better understood the people. He knew that the success of his costly venture depended chiefly on the patronage of the Burmese, and began by constructing a line along the street most trodden by the people, from the Strand Road, up China Street, to within fifty yards of the gaping, vacuous monsters which guard the South entrance to the Pagoda. In India, native religious sentiment might have been outraged. The Burmese, ever practical when physical exertion is in question, took just the view Mr Darwood anticipated and looked with high favour on an innovation which would save their legs. Every Bhuddist,

man, woman and child, goes to offer prayer at the Pagoda with more or less frequency, and although Dar-woo' thekin was neither Burman nor Bhuddist, it was felt that the author of so meritorious a work, foreigner as he was, had claims on Neikban which could scarcely be ignored. The more orthodox had their doubts at first; but when at dawn on the first day of the great feast of the Full Moon of Taboung, which brings Burmans in thousands from all parts of the country to worship at the Shway Dagone, the line was opened and everybody was carried free in honour of the occasion, the misgivings of orthodoxy vanished. It was unanimously agreed that when Dar-woo' thekin paid the last debt of Nature he would be caught up to the blissful abode of the Nats, in spite of accidents of birth and belief. More substantial proof of approval was forthcoming in the meantime: people took to travelling up and down for the fun of the thing, disbursing their four anna bits on return tickets with reckless prodigality.

Across the Northern limits of the town proper runs the railway, now extended to Mandalay; and, roughly speaking, beyond this we are in Cantonments where most of the European residents live. The approved style of house in Burma is a shallow box smothered under a waste of brown shingle roof, and raised high on piles. Some people enclose and floor the space among the piles to make a basement storey; such are prepared to meet miniature flood in the rains, are indifferent to frogs and scorpions, and take their chance of snakes. The majority are content to utilise it as coach-house, dog-kennel or extra stable.

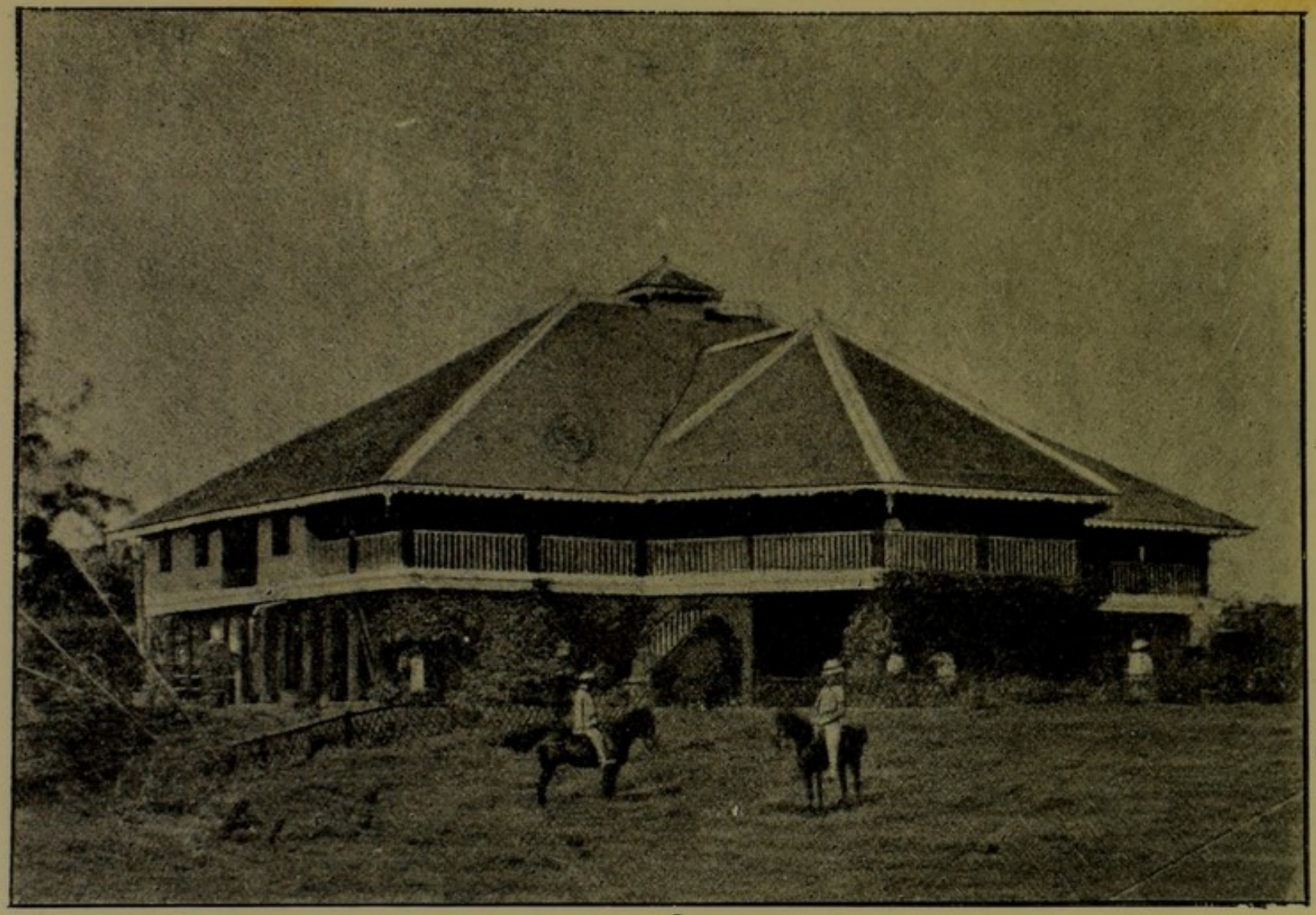
From the town the land rises gently through Cantonments, reaches its highest in the eminence crowned by



SOUTH ENTRANCE TO THE SHWAY DAGONE PAGODA.

the Pagoda and its fortified lower court, and thence rolls away in billowy undulations to a dead level which would be monotonous but for the alternations of jungle and cultivation. Sleeping in the shade of big trees are numerous *Hpoongyee Kyoungs*, or monasteries, and "country houses" of Europeans, Suratis, and Parsees. In the twilight of mango, bamboo and jack tree on either side of the Prome Road, the industrious Chinaman watches the growth of acres of pineapples which he takes by the cartload to sell in Rangoon at two rupees a hundred. The pineapple jungle is a favourite resort of Thomas Atkins, who revels unchecked in the turnip-like plenty of fruit he has known only through shop windows at home. Unfortunately he does not always wait until the pines are ripe, and green pines are not more wholesome than bazaar liquor. Both are factors in the deadliness of the much-abused climate.

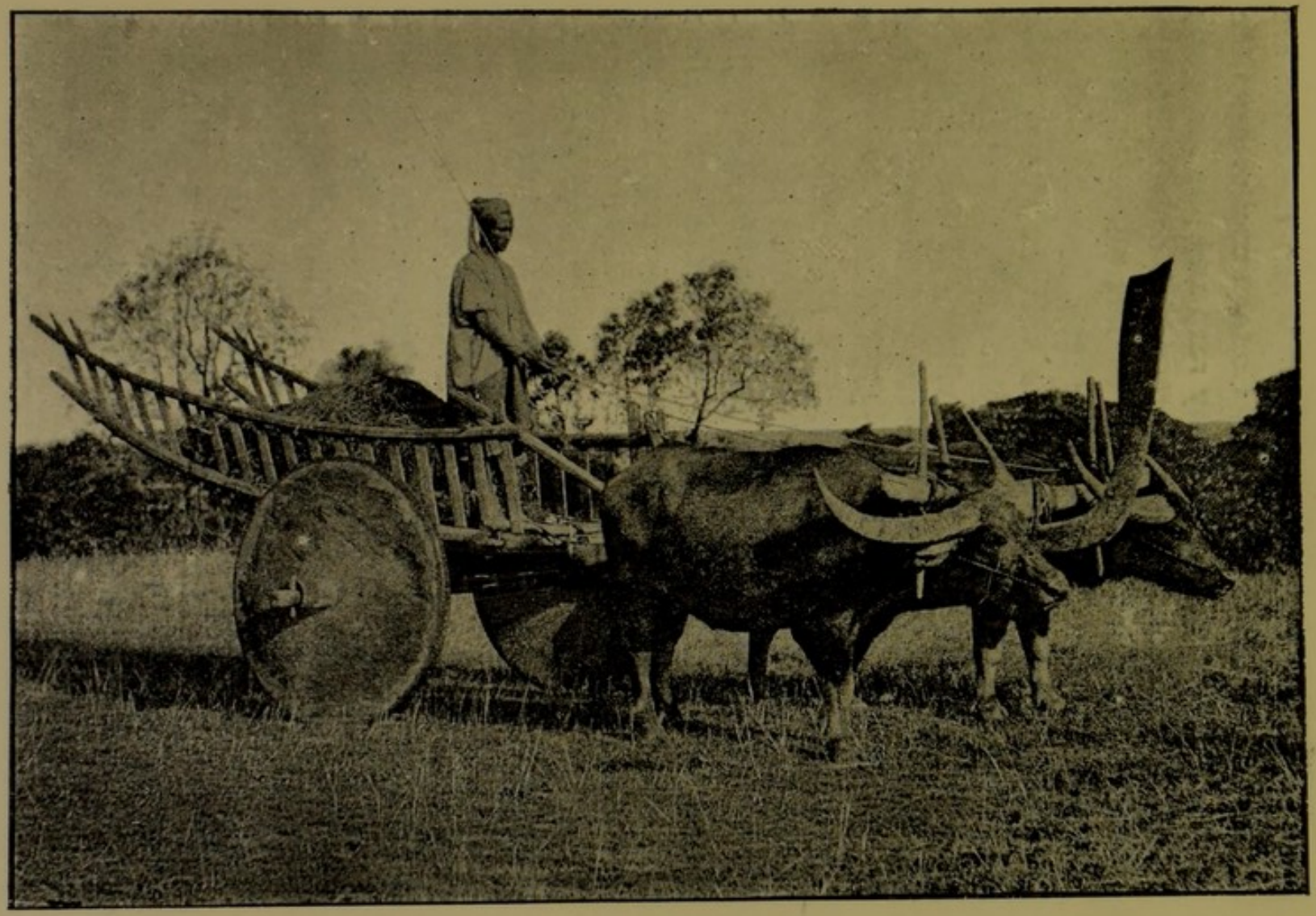
The whole Delta of the Irrawaddy is a maze of waterways, great and small, which tap an endless series of streaks and patches of paddy land. The country is guiltless of roads, save for one or two trunk highways, and, with the exception of a quantity brought to Rangoon by rail, all the grain comes to market by boat. The people congregate in villages on the creeks and cultivate the land within a mile radius or less, according to population. Each area of *kwin* is fenced into squares by low, broad *bunds* of earth to retain the depth of water growing rice requires. Every village is surrounded by a lake of green with shores of jungle and perhaps an occasional island of fallow, which, rising above the level, cannot be water-logged and cultivated. Where such islands are many, there is the ground for snipe, with which bird few countries are better supplied than Lower



KILBEY HILL HOUSE, AKYAB.

Burma and Arracan. The attention paid him by the white man has earned him, among the country people, whose nomenclature is before all things descriptive, the euphonious name of *Boh-sah-hnit*—the "bird the gentleman eats." The paddy lands are oases in a world of jungle, often impenetrable in its tangled density, elsewhere open and park-like, destitute of population and full of game.

The wonderful fertility of the soil is reflected in the character of the people whose predominating traits are amiability and indolence. Famine and anxiety for the morrow are unknown in the rice country, where the minimum of work produces the maximum of result. Ploughing, an operation which consists of churning knee-deep mud with a rude iron-tipped implement drawn by water-buffaloes, is performed in June and July, after the sun-cracked soil has been deluged by the early rains. Then the seed is scattered closely in the nursery kwins. When it has grown up a foot or more, the shoots are thinned out and replanted in the fields, which are more in the nature of shallow lakes. This replanting business is comparatively hard work. Small sheaves of green shoots are placed conveniently on the bunds, and the farmer, his *pasoh* tucked closely about his thighs, wades in, carrying a handful of plants and a stick cleft at one end. Sliding the shoots rapidly one by one through his left hand he dexterously catches each above the root in the cleft stick and therewith plunges it deep into the mud. Such rough usage, one would think, should seal the fate of any growing thing, but the hardy paddy shoot thrives on it. In a few hours it is standing erect and healthy, asking no further aid from man. Planting-out finished, work is over, and the farmer looks on in



COUNTRY CART.

happy idleness till harvest time. When the crops are ready for the sickle he obtains Coringa coolies from the towns and looks on while they reap and pile the grain on the clumsy solid-wheeled carts which convey it to the primitive threshing floors to be trodden out by buffaloes.

From the artistic standpoint the landscape of the delta is seldom attractive. The villages, though often picturesque, nay beautiful compared with the eyesore of mud hovels which form the village of the Northern India plains, lack variety. If you seek scenery you will find it on the other side of the Gulf of Martaban, in the mountainous Tenasserim Division. Maulmain, the chief town is one of the most beautifully situated places in the East. It wanders disjointedly along eight miles of hill-side, overlooked by pagodas. The European town has grown up, intertwined with the Burmese, and the result is a piquant medley of East and West. For instance, the Club faces the clean-swept courtyard of a pagoda surrounded by *zayats* or rest-houses, hpoongyee kyoungs rich in their wealth of carved gable, and seven-storied roofs sheltering images of the Bhudda. From the road along the ridge of the hill the eye runs riot over river, green plain, hill and jungle to the far horizon of the Siamese mountain ranges on the East; on the other hand, over town and river to nearer boundaries of jungle-clad hill broken by waters which melt in mirage to sky. Maulmain is rich in rivers. The Salween, Attaran, and Gyaing meet here and moat her round on all sides but the south. The Attaran boasts being the only stream of any size in Southern Asia which flows northward. Rising sheer and abrupt from the sea of paddy on the Siam side are gigantic cliffs three and four hundred feet in height, standing out

lonely and rugged, like the flood-wrack of a continent washed away. One of these contains the "Farm Caves' whose deeper recesses, so vast as to be poorly illuminated by a ship's Bengal light, are—or were—leased to Chinamen for the guano deposit of myriads of bats. The more accessible galleries are niched for the shrines of Bhuddas, but sacrilegious hands have carried off most of the portable images to send home as curios. There is a tiny kyoung and a few rest-houses on the north side near the mouths of the caves, and there dwelt a solitary hpoongyee, whose guardianship of the sacred treasures was lax. He was a weakened vessel. He kept a soda-water bottle convenient to receive the contents of any white visitor's flask, for he happened to know a man who would drink whiskey.

In the old days, before Rangoon became British property, Maulmain was a busier port than she has been since. Her rivers were the highways from the great forests, and besides exporting more timber than any port in the East, she built ships for "John Company." Within the last few years the teak forests have become worked out to a great extent; the rice business, however, is considerable, and increasing.

The vast hill-districts have a sparse and scattered population of Karens who dwell either alone in solitary huts, in small villages, or in that peculiar barrack-like habitation called a *tai* which shelters under one enormous roof a whole clan of from fifty to eighty families, each occupying its own rooms off the common hall which forms the centre. On the hill slopes with infinite trouble, for Karen appliances are primitive, and the forest growth is heavy, they clear patches of land whereon is grown the rice required for home consumption.

Toungyah cultivation is a very different thing from agriculture in the plains. The paddy is a distinct variety which grows on comparatively dry soil, and needs no standing water; the weeds and undergrowth come up with it and would soon choke off the thin crop unless the Karen worked incessantly to keep his plot clear. Then there are living enemies to guard against. By careful fencing he can keep out the deer and wild pig, which do terrible mischief if they succeed in leaping over or snouting a way through the close-set wattle; but the highest fence is useless against jungle fowl and other seed-eating birds. The only professional shikaries in Burma are Karens, who make a business of going round from place to place to kill troublesome animals. The jungle-fowl the cultivator snares for himself.

Burma is essentially a democratic country. There is no old nobility, there are no large landed proprietors, and no idle rich living on inherited wealth. Social superiority (apart from the priesthood) rests with Government officials; ancient tradition, dating from the oppressive rule of the local governors appointed by the king, breaks out in the deference paid the *thoogyee* of a Circle by the people. The *thoogyee* is the tax-collector, and he does his work with the assistance of *loogyees* and *goungs*, lesser lights who shine only in their own villages. The cultivators hold their lands, patches of from ten to perhaps fifteen acres, from the Government and light taxes represent their sole responsibility in respect thereto: unless their improvidence lead into the money-lender's clutches, which is too often the case.

The character of the Burman produces one curious result in his relations with Europeans in the country.

Outside the ring of officialdom and a section of the mercantile community, Englishmen and Englishwomen have scarcely more than an eye-acquaintance with the son of the soil. He is not fond of domestic service with its mild restraints and petty indignities, so the necessity of acquiring even that smattering of the language, essential in Bengal and Upper India, does not exist. Foreigners monopolise almost all but the interior trade of the country, and only those brought in contact with the farmers and boat-owners and with the Chinamen find a knowledge of Burmese even useful. Hindustani is the tongue of most utility for ordinary needs, and very little of that goes a long way with the majority. The patient Madras man comes over in hundreds to take service as butler, boy and cook, and the Bengali also finds the higher rate of wages paid in Burma an inducement to cross the "black water." These—the Madrassis at all events—bring with them some little knowledge of English and soon acquire as much of Burmese as enables them to transact domestic business in the bazaars. Hence, you may spend twenty years in the country and leave it with your linguistic acquirements confined to the solitary phrase "*Nah mah lay boo*"—"I do not understand."

CHAPTER II.

THE BURMAN IN TOWN.

YOUR first introduction to the Burman is in the office, where he is to be found as a clerk. First—and last—impressions of him in this capacity are distinctly favourable. He is painstaking, neat, accurate, tolerably industrious, sometimes methodical, and always respectful. Moung Hpo now, is an excellent example of the intelligent Burmese *kirani*; I take Moung Hpo because I happen to know him better than any of the other boys —he is rather older than I am, by the way, but that is a detail. His father is a much-respected man, trader, of Edward Street (I quote Moung Hpo.) Old Moung Hla Doon Oung was a judicious parent, and recognised that if his son was to succeed in the world he must have an English education. So after the little Moung Hpo had learned at the hpoongyee kyoung to read and write Burmese and mastered the multiplication table up to nine times nine (for the Burman does not venture into double figures), he was placed in the care of Dr. Marks. The famous missionary conducts his great school at Ahlone on broad-minded principles. He prepares his pupils for the battle of life without concerning himself with their faith; and during his long career he has

equipped a respectable army of boys with a sound, useful education. Moung Hpo is energetic for a Burman, and enjoyed his school days at Ahlone. He took prizes at the school sports for running and high jumping, and if he did not care much for cricket, he made up for it by his attention to football. Football as played in Burma is rather dissimilar from the game in England ; I must confess that after watching many matches I have been unable to discover what rules are in vogue. They resemble Eton more than Rugby or Association, but it appears quite legitimate to pick up the ball by the lace and whack an opponent over the head with it. When the Burman is playing against English or Eurasian boys he wears boots, but they do not improve his play, and he does far better when he kicks them off and tackles the leather with his bare toes.

Moung Hpo admits that he was caned with some frequency, but adds that it did not hurt very much. He would have gone home if it had. His besetting sins were restlessness in class and want of punctuality, but in these respects he erred in goodly company. He was by no means an idle boy, but was neither clever nor industrious enough to be considered a suitable subject to coach for the competitive examinations which lie between the scholar and the Government official. Neither had Moung Hla Doon Oung any "interest." And by consequence, after Moung Hpo had run to seed for a year or two at home, he was glad to avail himself of an introduction and enter a merchant's office as a clerk.

Like every other new boy he began as an unpaid volunteer. A useful, trustworthy man may earn as much as two hundred or two hundred and fifty rupees

a month, so the incipient clerk is glad to accept an opportunity to prove what he can do. Moung Hpo did very well during his probation. He was never noisy, seldom went to sleep in office hours, and acquired what the head clerk, Mr. Edward Moung Kheen, calls the "habit of business" with considerable facility. "Habit of business" I gather means the art of keeping your cheroot alight without detection when a superior visits your desk; looking busy whether you are occupied or not; and punctuality, that is, leaving the office at five o'clock sharp. He also practised, with exemplary diligence, his handwriting, which had grown a little rusty. The quantity of pens and paper he consumed in experimental caligraphy was simply prodigious, but as it betrayed his desire to "get on" and also kept him out of mischief any waste was overlooked. He made mistakes, of course, but Moung Hpo's blunders were usually redeemed by a touch of genius. As, for instance, when he wrote to the Government Stallion at Allanmyo and with due formality "had the honour to inform" that animal of the arrival from Madras of a package to his address, and would he be good enough to send early instructions regarding its disposal. But on the whole he made rapid progress, and was soon able to copy correctly the letters and papers obligingly placed at his disposal by fellow clerks inclined to enjoy a little rest or recreation themselves.

At the end of three months Moung Hpo decided to give us the chance of engaging him; and accordingly one morning I found on my table a laboriously constructed envelope of imposing size addressed to me as "Superintendent Manager" of the firm. The inference was that Moung Hpo regarded the native staff of which

he formed one as the firm, for I superintended nobody else. This, by the way. The envelope contained the usual petition written in Moung Hpo's best hand, and with a spirited attempt at decorative capitals. The writing and spelling were excellent, and if the phraseology was a little eccentric it was agreeably free from the polysyllabic pedantry which makes the Bengali Baboo the laughing-stock of the East. Education has not upon the Burman the terrible effect it works upon the Bengali. The Burman eschews inapposite quotation and "ten thousand horse-power words and phrases." With him language is the means: not the end.

Moung Hpo's petition, written on every second line of a double sheet of foolscap and with liberal margin, was couched in the usual strain. It painted the diligence wherewith petitioner had toiled in my honour's office without pay; dwelt at some length on the difficulty he found in maintaining his wife and little children on nothing at all; laid stress on the advantages retention of his services must confer upon me; and concluded with a confused dual prayer for my honour's eternal good health and a salary of fifty rupees a month.

The punkah-wallah a yard or two behind my chair signalled when I opened the envelope, and forthwith Moung Hpo, wearing his best silk pasoh, a clean white cotton jacket and a new *goung-boung*, or head-kerchief, crept round the doorpost and squatted upon his heels. Adoption of the attitude of respect, like the best clothes, testified to the greatness of the occasion. It would retard the course of business if the clerks habitually moved about the office in the attitude approved by "John Wellington Wells The Sorcerer," but in presenting a petition it is considered proper.

"So you want an agreement, Moung Hpo?"

Moung Hpo, with a spasmodic *shikoh*, would like an agreement if my honour please.

"Well, tell Moung Kheen to come here, and we will ask him what he thinks."

Moung Hpo shikohs again, and glides out round the doorpost as though occupying the least possible space were the first condition of an agreement.

Moung Kheen, baptised Edward, for he is a Christian (the only one on the staff, by the way) is a tall, good-looking man of thirty-five or forty, with a slight moustache which is uncommon among his race. He is the head kirani. Beside English, which he knows very thoroughly, he speaks Hindustani, Tamil and Malay. Moreover, he is a most intelligent and reliable fellow; if all native Christians were as conscientious as Moung Kheen, the missionaries might be proud.

His opinion of Moung Hpo is favourable on the whole; he thinks him sensible and neat. "But," says Moung Kheen with judicial severity tempered by slang which he rather affects, "I have sometimes to pitch it into him for coming late."

Moung Hpo, squirming into a capital C and pressing his hands together, urges that he does not "*too* very often come to office late."

Moung Kheen admits it; and adds that if Moung Hpo "sticks in" he will make a very good kirani. On which certificate of character I offer the anxious youth an engagement for two years at a salary of twenty rupees a month; with a saving clause to allow of dismissal if found necessary.

Moung Hpo's face falls. He clasps his hands and looks beseechingly at Moung Kheen. But Moung

Kheen has been through it too often and looks the other way. Moung Hpo resigns hope of aid from him and pleads his own case.

"Twenty rupees a month, very little, sir! My wife and little children, if you *please*, sir—" but here language fails him. He shakes his head sadly and murmurs, "twenty rupees a month," in a gloomy whisper.

Twenty rupees a month is the usual pay for a beginner and it would not do to consider Moung Hpo's family. I remind him of this, pointing out that at his age he has really no business to possess a wife and children at all. The argument is lost upon him, and he retires, thoughtfully repeating to himself the terms he has been offered, to report the result of his petition and interview to his friends outside. A long and earnest debate is terminated by his decision to accept the offer; and he returns to announce the fact, which he does with a suspicion of forgiving reproach. Thereafter, he returns to his desk, and having procured a new pen, devotes the remainder of the day to transcribing his 'agreement' from a stereotyped form, of whose meaning, it is to be feared, he has but the vaguest understanding.

There is nothing unusual in Moung Hpo's possession at the age of twenty of a wife and two small children, nor does it prove him at all improvident. The fact is this idyllic country's social usages not only sanction very early matrimony, but makes the path of young love easy as that leading in another direction. When Moung Hpo, aged eighteen and a-half, fell in love with Mah Shway Mee, aged sixteen, he told his mother, who mentioned the circumstance to the parents of Mah Shway Mee, who said they would like Moung Hpo very much. And forthwith Moung Hpo, with the merest shred of

ceremony, became Mah Shway Mee's husband and the son of her parents, living in their house. That is the beauty of matrimony in Burma; no stern father to press awkward inquiries about income and prospects; no sordid botheration about ways and means. You marry the daughter of the house and take up your quarters with her under her parents' roof. In the country you contribute to the support of the family by field labour; in town with money if you are earning any; if not, no matter; it is understood that you would if you could and will when you can. Moung Loogalay, the cashier, aged thirty-two and father of four youngsters, only set up house a year ago, although for the last three he has drawn a salary of a hundred and fifty rupees a month. Neither he nor his parents-in-law were anxious to part, but Moung Loogalay's wife, Mah Lay, had ideas of her own about a shop, and, of course, got her way.

The Burmese girl is great at trade. It is not considered derogatory to anyone to have a stall in the public market, and the daughter of a Government official carries on her head a big brass tray laden with fruit to the big bazaar every morning, and squats behind it till she has cleared out her stock. Before marriage and after, until she and her husband set up housekeeping for themselves, she does it as a matter of course; more, it is true, for occupation or amusement than for profit, though the Burmese maiden is a capital hand at bargaining. When the pair have a house of their own the wife, in nine cases out of ten, opens a shop and fills it with a wonderful collection of miscellanies, for every item of which any reasonable offer will be refused. Hard square pillows jostle piles of lacquer betel-boxes

and wooden trays; saddlery and brass-ware lie side by side with coarse English crockery and Burmese sandals. And in the midst of all sits the good lady rolling cheroots for home consumption or for sale, while she keeps an eye on the children playing in the street.

Moung Hpo's father is very well off, but I do not think there will be much money for his two sons to divide when he dies. If you happen to visit the group of kyoungs and zayats in the grove off Godwin Road you may notice a magnificently-carved monastery occupied by a hpoongyee of noted sanctity. Moung Hla Doon Oung assured his future by building that kyoung at his own expense; besides that he has erected a large zayat, and is understood to be contemplating the gift of a bell to be hung on the platform of the Shway Dagone Pagoda. These works of merit are really pious investments bearing interest in *koothoh*, of which Moung Hla Doon Oung has now accumulated so large an amount that his conscience must be quite easy. He is held in profound respect by his neighbours, and if you want to bet with him at the Rangoon Race Meetings you must be sure to address him as *Kyoungtagah*, which means Builder of a monastery.

Moung Hpay, Moung Hpo's elder brother, is a social success. He was a clever boy, and Dr. Marks encouraged him to go in for the examination for the lower civil service. Moung Hpay worked hard, and now shines like a good deed in a naughty world, a *myooke* or magistrate of the fourth grade. He is a great man in his quarter. He is entitled to pose as a magnate and is expected to give himself airs, and he does not disappoint his friends in these respects. In court or office Moung Hpay sits in a Windsor chair under a punkah—it looks

well to have a punkah irrespective of the temperature—and listens with matchless solemnity to the reports of subordinates and petitions of simple citizens who kneel round with carefully hidden feet. In the presence of these he receives big official-looking letters from salaaming chuprassies, whose coloured belts and brasses like oval doorplates proclaim the source of their important errands. When one of those chuprassies hands a letter to Moung Hpo he makes no salaam, and complains if he is kept waiting for the answer. When Moung Hpay walks home through the streets in English shoes and socks, the children make way for him, and their parents stand hoping for the distinction his smile will confer. Moung Hpay is intimate with the English Assistant Commissioner; when the Deputy Commissioner makes his periodical visit Moung Hpay is the responsible spokesman. Then, too, the trustworthy myooke may be transferred to some small station in the jungle over which he will reign supreme. Here Moung Hpay will find his opportunity and if he takes it is a made man.

The native official treads a path paved with rosy possibilities. For him is the prospect of presentation to the Lord Chief Commissioner at Rangoon Government House at evening durbar. In brilliantly lighted ball-room thronged with admiring ladies and gentlemen, the happy man, bent to a semi-circle, but gorgeous in stiff silk pasoh and white linen jacket long of skirt and tight of sleeve, receives public commendation as that valuable and deserving officer the Myooke of Bamawyuahgalay. It is a great moment. Moung Hpo stands afar off, without the gates he may not enter, and shines in his brother's reflected light.

There is, too, another possibility before the diligent native officer—far away, indeed, and so beautiful that he can hardly think of it save as a dream; that is a Decoration. He knows at least one Burmese official who received the great English title, 'Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire.' True, he is not very clear what it means; but is there not a wonderful star and ribbon to explain it? It is a daring hope, but still there is no knowing what may happen in these stirring times, and perhaps some day, when he is an old man, he may come in for a title himself. Only last Queen's Birthday the Decoration Angel winged its lustrous way over the Province, while expectant men held their breath and watched its course with uplifted eyes. Grand and sonorous are the names bestowed upon the elect. There are glad beings who can write themselves "Bearer of a Golden Sword" and "Bearer of a Silver Sword." The man who crowns a life's work with such a halo has not lived in vain.

Neither education nor success leads the Burman astray in dress. Though he attain the dizzy eminence of an Extra Assistant Commissionership, the most he does is to take to himself a gold-topped and silk-tasselled malacca cane, and discard his easy sandals for stockings and shoes. In theory the latter enhance his dignity; in practice they sadly discount it. Garters would overcome the difficulty, but to these the Burman has a rooted antipathy, and official swagger suffers from heavy folds of white cotton stocking about the ankles gathering dust.

This change of foot-gear has become so common that a few years ago official leave was given wearers to retain their English shoes and stockings in Court, &c.

The younger men take advantage of it, but the elders seem unable to reconcile shoe-wearing with the respect they deem due to superiors; and the old Myooke or T'seekai jealously adheres to the custom of removing his shoes in the verandah. He prefers to enhance the privilege of *entrée* by keeping his chief on a pedestal.

Of course a position so precious as Moung Hpay's has its thorns. The nature which revels in incense is impatient of discipline. If Moung Hpay commits a blunder he earns an official wigging, which he must swallow as best he may. If his brother Moung Hpo feels aggrieved by a scolding he can resign his clerkship without sacrificing social advantages. The Burman cannot tolerate any approach to harshness; if you tell a kirani your mind about his stupidity he will wait until pay-day, and on the following morning send a message to say he "does not wish to come any more." Then the easy-going Burman finds in mercantile life many redeeming features. He loves gambling in every shape, and while it would be fatal to the prospects of the Government official to indulge his taste in this direction, merchants religiously close their eyes to their native subordinates' doings outside the office. Government regulations concerning gambling are strict, so perhaps the official gains some slight recompense in punishing others for doing what he cannot do himself. He is expected to set a good example in all respects, and, as we know, setting example under any circumstances is rather hard work. However, the Burman officer acquits himself very fairly well, except when a display of physical courage is demanded of him. Then he is apt to initiate and carry out a policy of excessive caution. It is fair to say that some notable examples of bravery

are on record, but these are exceptional. When a "dacoit scare" has infected a district few native officials can be depended on.

Ambition is foreign to the Burman character. Moung Hpo will be quite content to plod along from year to year at his desk, with no expectations beyond a periodical increase of salary and an occasional holiday to enjoy the Water Festival, and big "Pagoda Days" as the white man calls the Bhuddist feasts. He has no craving to exchange the dust of the town for the quiet of the country, even for a month's holiday. Indeed, he speaks of the *taw-tha*, the son of the jungle, with a cockney's contempt. It must be admitted that life in Rangoon presents attractions. What jungle man, for instance, knows of the delights of a race meeting on the Maidan? Race days are as good as Pagoda days, if not much better; they offer unrivalled facilities for risking rupees with a sustained and repeated excitement not obtainable every day. The dweller in the jungle, too, never sees the circus which every year spends a week in Rangoon; and the man who has not been to the English circus has something to live for. When the great tent is set up on the foreshore near the Harbour Master's office, Moung Hpo and his friends make a night of it six times a week. At every performance the cheaper seats are crammed with Burmans who roar with delight at the antics of the clown and the feats of the gymnast. The short-skirted person who jumps from her bare-backed steed through paper hoops is applauded, too, from the four-anna benches; but the applause is muffled by doubt. The Burmese do not quite understand her. When I asked Moung Hpo what he thought of her performance, he wrinkled his brow and said in a confiding undertone,

"We think women must not let to see their legs." I wonder what he would think of a ballet at the Empire.

Certainly the Burmese dancing girl errs neither in scantiness of attire nor display of limb. But then the Burmese dancing girl is not a dancer as other nations understand the word. Suppleness, not activity, is what she cultivates. Her gay silk *tamein* hangs limp to the ground with inches to spare; she moves her unseen feet only once in two minutes, and then to give a rabbit-like stamp. Her lithe body sways and undulates, and her seemingly boneless arms writhe from shoulder to wrist like snakes; sensuous thoughts are the very last her performance is likely to inspire. She accompanies the movements of her arms and body with a plaintive monotonous song faintly audible under the bray of raucous trumpets, the clash of cymbals, the tap of various gongs hung within the circular wooden frame called *tsaing-weing*, and the drum like an attenuated nail keg; not to mention the mournful piping of the *paluay*, a slender, primitive flute, and bamboo clappers almost as musical as that ravishing instrument the bones. Sometimes—in a European's house—she performs to the music of the Burmese piano. This last is more in harmony with Western notions of music. It consists of a deep oblong box sloping upward and outward at the ends, from which depend strings supporting graduated flat strips of bamboo; the *pattala* is played with two tiny drumsticks, and the notes produced are both true and melodious. It is frequently to be heard in suburban houses about Rangoon, and is the only purely domestic instrument the people have. It is not in vogue for *poays* and outdoor performances; it does not make enough noise.

The jungle village Burman has poays and, perhaps, an occasional theatrical performance; but these bear no comparison with the entertainments the fortunate resident in Rangoon or Maulmain may enjoy almost every night of his life—except in the rains. When Moung Hpo leaves the office in the evening he need take no thought concerning amusement. Times must be bad indeed if there is "nothing going on;" and, moreover, the harassing question of finance does not enter into his calculations. When a Burman gives a poay it is a free show, to which everybody is welcome. The stage is erected in the street, and consists of a covered platform of bamboos and mats brilliantly illuminated with earth-oil lamps. A Burmese play is mounted on the most simple lines; there is no scenery; there is no curtain; there is not even a green-room. The actors and actresses change their dresses and make-up in the glare of the footlights under the eyes of the indulgent audience. And while the play is in progress the performers awaiting cue squat smoking happily on the side of the stage. As a general rule the poay begins an hour or so after dark and goes on till two or three in the morning. A full band is inseparable from the performance, and it plays with heart-breaking perseverance from the moment of beginning till the play is over. The audience bring their own mats, and choosing their own places sit all over the road smoking and eating.

I cannot venture upon so large a subject as the Burmese drama. There are favourite plays for performance both by human actors and marionettes. The skill wherewith the latter are manipulated is marvellous. I have stood watching a marionette poay in a Maulmain street for hours with increasing interest and respect; but a thorough knowledge of the language and legends

is essential to proper appreciation of either class of performance.

The importance of a poay as an institution is to the Burman's mind paramount; and as it is invariably held in the street, a patient Government often suffers much abuse for its regard to larger considerations. Moung Loogalay once came to me at the head of a small deputation from Edward Street to beg that I would address the local authorities on his behalf. He and a few friends had made all arrangements to hold a splendid poay in their street on the following night, and their tardy formal petition for leave to do so had been firmly refused.

"We are very sorry," said Moung Loogalay; "very much sorry. But if your honour will tell the Deputy Commissioner that Edward Street is such a much respectable place, he will give leave."

Which meant that he and his friends were dreadfully disappointed, and could not understand what the callous official meant by calling a high-class dramatic entertainment an "obstruction." Edward Street is one of the important thoroughfares in the Burmese quarter of Rangoon. Holding a poay there meant stoppage of all traffic, foot and wheeled, for about twenty-four hours, and as destructive fires are far from uncommon in the quarter, the official objection did not appear very harsh, I endeavoured to put it in this light to Moung Loogalay. but his reply was conclusive: "Everybody will be sitting in the street, so nobody will want to go through it." When I suggested the remote contingency of fire, by way of showing the danger of obstruction, he smiled. The idea of changing the *venue* of a poay because the whole quarter might be burnt down was to his mind pure foolishness.

A VILLAGE POAY.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE JURY.

THE scene is "The Court of the Recorder of Rangoon"; the occasion the first day of the autumn sessions; and the time ten A.M. on a scorching October day. The court-room and verandahs which flank it are thronged with people of both sexes and all nations, whom curiosity or business has brought hither. Among them are ten or a dozen Englishmen who have been called as jurors, and do not appreciate the compulsory honour, for it is mail-day, and they have had to leave their offices, where the weekly pile of mail-work is awaiting them, to dance attendance at the court, where their services may not be required after all.

His Honour the Recorder has taken his seat on the bench, and the clerk of the court produces a hat, from which he draws five names at hazard. Mine is the last to be called, and I follow the other jurors into the box under the sympathetic valedictory grins of my more fortunate fellow-countrymen, who have been dismissed for the day.

"Elect your own foreman, gentlemen," says the clerk, when we have been sworn. And in deference to my status as the only pure European, my colleagues—three

Eurasians and one aged Burman—unanimously appoint me to that office. The Recorder beams upon us good-humouredly for a few seconds, and then, resuming his wonted air of judicial gravity, directs the clerk to call the first case on the list.

The first case is not particularly interesting. Poonosawmy Moodliar, native of Madras, aged thirty-five, domestic servant in the employ of Septimus Balthazar, trader, of Rangoon, is placed in the dock, charged with felony; in that on the 19th day of September last he did steal and carry away one cotton umbrella, value one rupee two annas, the property of Moung Pho Loo. The clerk reads the charge at a hand-gallop, scorning the very elements of punctuation in a manner that must puzzle my Burmese fellow juror—"property of Moung Pho Loo prisoner do you plead guilty or do you claim to be tried?" &c.

The prisoner, who is undefended, pleads "not guilty"; and in reply to the usual questions, says he has no objection to any gentleman on the jury, and that he understands English. This latter admission is highly satisfactory to all concerned, as cases in which every word has to be interpreted occupy double time. The Tamil interpreter sits down, and the case proceeds forthwith. The first witness is Moung Pho Loo, who identifies the umbrella—a ponderous structure of bright pink cotton—as his, and states that he laid it down on a stall in the Burra Bazaar on the morning of the 19th September, and next saw it in the prisoner's hands a week later.

"No, sah!" from Poonosawmy, and "*Chuperao*" ("Hold your tongue") from half-a-dozen officious policemen, and more officious native ushers.

Moung Pho Loo having given his evidence, is ordered to stand down, and a Coringa policeman takes his place in the box. This witness is not a bright specimen. Asked, "What are you?" he digs his thumbs into his belt and mutely invites the court to inspect the big buckle in front. The European inspector rises to explain, "An extra man, your Honour, he have just lately joined," and he gives the witness a look which makes him first straighten his back spasmodically and then relax with a shudder. The constable's evidence is hard to extract, but is conclusive. He was on duty in the Burra Bazaar on the morning of the theft; saw prisoner take an umbrella off a fruit-stall and walk away with it; did not stop him because hedid not know it was not his: that is the umbrella lying there on the table. That is all.

Does Poonosawmy wish to ask this witness any questions? No; Poonosawmy is now weeping floods of penitent tears, and can only beg the Lord Sahib to forgive him; he is "poor man," and he thought the umbrella was his. Has he then any witnesses who could prove that he owned an umbrella like this? No, Poonosawmy has no witnesses, and he is poor man, sah. Has he nothing else to say in his defence? Yes: he wishes to add that he is poor man; very *poor* man, sah. If Poonosawmy had been charged with murder, high-treason, and incendiarism, he would have pled poverty in extenuation. It is a way the native has; but naturally it does not count for much in an English court of justice. A brief summing-up is followed by a briefer consultation, and a unanimous verdict of "Guilty." A previous conviction is proved against the prisoner; and Poonosawmy Moodliar, sentenced to six months' imprisonment, is removed, dolefully howling at the top of his voice.

I always find it a little difficult to sympathise with the Madras man "in trouble." He has a great idea of the Law and an appreciation of legal process, which he sometimes turns to personal account in a fashion not contemplated by legal authority. On one occasion we had advertised for tenders for a certain annual contract to supply labour. Four tenders were received, including one from the man whose lease of the business was about to expire; and the four applicants were requested to come to the office at noon the next day, that their claims might be discussed. The hour came and with it contractor No. 1, all smiles and eagerness. He was very anxious to be heard, repeating his conviction that the other men had reckoned the task too much for them and would not come. He was told to wait. One o'clock came, but no more contractors. Two o'clock, and three, and four, and five. Contractor No. 1, grew more and more eager to produce his proof of capability, as time drew on, and was finally told to go, and return next day. He went. Six o'clock brought three puzzled men in haste to the office. They came from the Small Cause Court, where they had been hanging about since half-past ten. They had been summoned, by contractor No. 1, to attend and give evidence in an imaginary case.

The next case is one which throws lurid light upon Burmese credulity. Nga Loogalay is placed in the dock charged with cheating. Nga Loogalay, it appears, is a gentlemen of no ordinary attainments, and among other desirable talents he possesses the highly lucrative ability to turn baser metals into gold. About three months ago he made the acquaintance of Mah Too, an old lady residing in Rangoon, where she drove a snug little trade

in dried fish. Mah Too was of somewhat avaricious disposition, hence the knowledge of Nga Loogalay's alchemic accomplishments commended him strongly to her notice; and a few days after the first occasion of their meeting she entrusted him with a sum of thirty rupees, which he kindly undertook to convert into gold. The terms of the transaction were rather sporting in character, and may be shortly described as "Play or Pay" —in other words, it was agreed that if Nga Loogalay failed to effect transmutation within a given time, he was to charge nothing. If he succeeded, he was to receive a handsome percentage on results. The scientific nature of the prisoner's profession enabled him to dispense with the vulgar necessity of giving Mah Too a receipt for the money, so she has nothing to show for it. But we are promised a number of witnesses who will substantiate the charge, to which Nga Loogalay enters a plea of "Not guilty."

The various threads of evidence make it palpable that a very singular degree of ill-luck followed the prisoner throughout the whole course of this little affair. No sooner had he received the thirty rupees than the market price of mercury and other alchemic requisites began to advance, and continued to do so by leaps and bounds until they reached a level quite unheard of; which compelled Nga Loogalay to borrow small sums from Mah Too every week to meet the expense of conducting the operation. These working expenses were to be deducted from his share of the profits; and Mah Too confessed that she had been very much struck by the honesty with which he retained the first-given sum intact.

Nga Loogalay was an enthusiast, judging from the complainant's account. He sat up every propitious

night for six weeks, watching his crucibles and working charms with untiring diligence; but gold did not come. He called upon Mah Too regularly during this period, and was able to give such satisfactory reports of his progress, that she was easily induced to part with the money he required from time to time, which amounted in all to some fifty-five rupees. Half-a-dozen times he was just on the very verge of succeeding, when a cloud obscured the moon, or the wind dropped suddenly, or something else happened and spoilt the whole business.

Mah Too, fully aware of the extreme exactness and nicety required in the operation, forbore to press for tangible results so long as she saw Nga Loogalay regularly. But one day, not having seen him for a fortnight, she grew anxious, and went out to his house at Kemendine—a suburb of Rangoon—to ask how things were getting on. There she saw Mah Hlah, his wife, who informed her that Nga Loogalay had gone to Mandalay on urgent business, and she could not exactly say when he would be back. He had not forgotten his contract with Mah Too, however; indeed, it was solely in connection with this gold-making business that her husband was visiting Mandalay; there are great *sayahs* in that city, and he had gone to consult with them; for she frankly admitted that, up to now, Nga Loogalay had not attained the degree of success so clever an alchemist was entitled to expect.

Now this story was very plausible, even gratifying, and had Mah Too been a more confiding old woman she would have accepted it in a friendly spirit, smoked a cheroot with Mah Hlah, exchanged a little gossip, and walked quietly home to Rangoon in the cool of the evening. But, un-

happily for Nga Loogalay, she was dissatisfied with the report, and hinted at taking her rupees back in their original condition. The dried-fish industry, she said, was not thriving so well as could be wished; she was completely out of cheroots and betel-nut, and, to be candid she wanted a little ready money at once.

Mah Hlah appears to have regarded this as an indication of growing scepticism, and resented it, like the loyal wife she was, with some warmth: and when she declared to Mah Too that she had not a single *mat* (four-anna bit) in the house, high words began. To make a long story short, the two ladies interchanged vigorous personalities for three-quarters of an hour, after which Mah Too proceeded to the police-station, and laid an information against Nga Loogalay for swindling her.

Search was instituted, and the missing alchemist was arrested, not at Mandalay—which in those days would have been a safe harbour—but at Poozoondoung, the eastern suburb of Rangoon, not five miles from his own home.

It might have been his ardent pursuit of scientific knowledge that led him to the Chinese gambling den where he was discovered; or possibly he thought that the "thirty-six animal game" would be an agreeable relaxation after so much studious research; his presence there, I say, was a detail that might have been satisfactorily explained. But when it came out that of all Mah Too's fifty-five rupees he had not a pice left, Nga Loogalay had no right to be surprised at the superintendent's locking him up.

The very small amount of confidence we on the jury had ever entertained in the prisoner's probity, was quite dispelled by these final revelations; and we felt bound

to bring him in "guilty," in spite of the dissentient voice upraised by the Burman juror, Moung Htso. He heard all we had to say with unmoved politeness and patience, but firmly adhered to his opinion, that had Nga Loogalay been allowed sufficient time he would have triumphantly returned to Mah Too the promised ingot of pure gold. As for the gambling-house part of the affair, that was a mere accident that might have befallen anybody; all Burmans gamble more or less, and he did not see why we should lay any particular stress upon it. It is very obvious that an English education has done nothing to impair inherited beliefs, and after ten minutes' argument, I am compelled to accept his "She did not give him time" as a vote of "not guilty." So standing up in my place I inform the Recorder that the majority of four find a verdict of "Guilty." His Honour, looking at the punkah which jerks over our heads, expresses his surprise that the evidence should have failed to convince any one of the jury. He had not thought there existed in Rangoon a juror so blind to the clearest facts. Not a quiver of the judicial eyelid conveys a hint that the Recorder knows which is the blind one, and Moung Htso listens to his strictures with the calm of conscious rectitude.

He informed me afterwards, in confidence, that transmutation was a very difficult thing to accomplish; most difficult. But every sayah worthy of the name agreed that it could be done if you could only find out the right way. It was true he had never met anyone yet who had achieved success; but that was no proof whatever of its impossibility. Nga Loogalay now sentenced to six months in jail, had been very hardly used; and for his (Moung Htso's) part, if he happened to want any money turned into gold by-and-by, and had not himself time

to devote to the operation, he should cheerfully entrust it to Nga Loogalay

A much more glaring case of Burmese superstition handicapping justice occurred a few years ago. It is worth telling if only as illustrating native qualifications for the sacred rights of citizenship. Such a case could only happen in Burma. Nga Shway Oo and Nga Let Gyee, natives of Donabyoo, were placed in the dock charged with the manslaughter of Moung Bah, native of the village of Panlang. They pled not guilty; and if an air of unmoved calm goes for anything, they did not believe themselves to be so.

The Government Advocate's opening speech revealed the following facts. Early in the previous month the two prisoners, who were travelling in their canoe from their own village of Donabyoo to Rangoon, stopped at Panlang to pass the night, and went to the house of Moung Bah, who was a friend of theirs, to sleep. In the course of the evening, Nga Shway Oo told the company how, during a recent visit to Mandalay, he had rendered some small service to a hpoongyee, who had repaid it by teaching him a potent spell against death by drowning. Moung Bah, who was a fisherman by trade, was much interested in this; and after Nga Shway Oo had related some marvellous stories illustrating the infallibility of the spell, he implored that it might be cast upon himself; and the prisoner consented to exercise his powers for a consideration of five rupees. The money was promptly forthcoming; and Nga Shway Oo, producing the necessary implements, at once set to work to tattoo the figure of a paddy-bird (a small bird of the wader kind) on the victim's chest, muttering incantations as he did so.

When the tattooing was finished, nothing would satisfy Moung Bah but an immediate trial of its efficacy; and as a full moon gave ample light, he insisted upon the prisoners taking him out in their canoe that he might put it to the test before he slept. Two other friends accompanied the party, and a large number of the villagers assembled on the shore to watch the proceedings. Every Burman can swim like a duck from infancy, and though the tide in the Panlang creek is very powerful, with many dangerous undercurrents, any ordinary trial might have been made with perfect impunity. But Moung Bah, bent on making sure that he had got his money's worth, persuaded the two prisoners to bind him securely, hand and foot, before they tossed him overboard. They did so, then threw him into the water, and drifted down with the stream, awaiting the course of events. Whether they expected to see their friend rise to the surface freed from his bonds, or whether they imagined the "spell" would cause him to float like a cork, the learned counsel was unable to tell; but, as might have been expected, poor Moung Bah sank at once, and was not seen again till his body was recovered thirty or forty miles down the river. The prisoners appear to have entertained no feelings but those of friendship and good-will towards the deceased, or they might have been charged with the greater crime of wilful murder.

Mah Lay, widow of deceased, was the first witness. She was present when the first prisoner worked the spell upon her late husband. They had all eaten the evening rice together, and there had been no quarrelling of any kind. She heard Shway Oo tell some wonderful tales. Oh, yes, she quite

believed them and did still. Did not understand why Moung Bah got drowned; thought Shway Oo may have made some little mistake in the words he spoke while tattooing the charm; or perhaps the moon was not favourable; anyhow, was sure that Shway Oo was not to blame. Thought it was an accident.

Moung Zan Way and Moung Hpay, cultivators, resident at Panlang, told the same story in turn. The deceased was very anxious to be made proof against drowning, and begged the first prisoner to tattoo him. They accompanied him on the fatal trip; heard deceased request prisoners to pull right out into the stream, and also heard him ask to have his hands and feet tied; the prisoners did so quite readily, and chewed betel while waiting for deceased to reappear. Yes, they were surprised when he did not float on the top of the water as he should have done. It was very curious indeed his sinking like that. Probably some slight miscalculation of Nga Shway Oo's. Moung Hpay thought, moreover, it was just possible that deceased might have given offence to the water *nats* (spirits), who pulled him under water in revenge. Neither of these two witnesses thought the prisoners at all culpable; if anyone was to blame for the accident it was the deceased himself; certainly not Shway Oo, who was a highly respectable man.

The English lawyer who represented the prisoners brought out most of this evidence by cross-examination; and when the last witness had been dismissed, delivered himself of a short speech dealing with the motives which actuated the pair of charlatans in the dock, and left the matter in the Recorder's hands. His summing-up left no doubt in the minds of the English and Eurasian

jurors, that the prisoners were guilty of manslaughter; But their Burman colleague was not convinced. He was of good education, spoke English exceedingly well, and the many Europeans who knew him in his private capacity, held him a very sensible and intelligent man. But he was a Burman, and frankly of opinion that Moung Bah's death was due to causes beyond the prisoner's control, politely but firmly declined to subscribe to a verdict of guilty.

Addressing the prisoners through his Burmese interpreter, the Recorder told them that they had been found guilty of an act of incredible folly, which resulted in the death of a fellow-man. Fortunately for them it had been made clear that they did not intend to injure the deceased, and he let them off with comparatively light punishment. Light as it was the prisoners appeared thunderstruck; and the Burmese members of the audience, who had listened to the case with breathless attention, were clearly taken by surprise also. Had the jury returned a verdict of "not guilty," and the judge released the spell-worker and his assistant with a few well-chosen words of regret for the failure of their experiment, and advised them to make such in shallow water next time, it had created no astonishment. Far from it; they would have gone home sounding the praises of the wise English judge, whose great mind could justly weigh the mysterious uncertainty of Burmese magic; and in all human probability Nga Shway Oo and Nga Let Gyee would have found a score of confiding patients willing to be drowned at five rupees a head, as soon as they got out of court. English law is a long way above the Burman's comprehension, and in these matters always will be.

CHAPTER IV.

SOME SUPERSTITIONS.

WHAT on earth has happened in the village? I put this question to myself, for want of anyone else to speak to, as, at about two o'clock one morning, I scramble hastily from under the mosquito curtain, and go to the verandah to see what has prompted the peaceable inhabitants to raise such an appalling row at this hour of all the twenty-four. It is far too dark to make out what has given rise to the uproar; so I dress hurriedly, speculating on the probable cause. The sight that greets my eyes when I reach the one street of which the village consists, does not help me in arriving at a solution. Every house is lighted up with tin and earthenware lamps, and every man, woman, and child is busily engaged in the apparently purposeless occupation of making the greatest possible noise with the most efficient available means. Gongs, pots, huge bamboo clappers, drums, trumpets, and other unmusical instruments, are in full chorus. Every one is striving to drown his neighbour's contribution to the general din, and players whose instruments do not demand the aid of their lungs, exert those organs unsparingly in the utterance of fearful and blood-curdling howls.

A large number of the male residents have climbed to the roofs of their houses, presumably to make their share of the noise as widely audible as they can ; and everyone is so completely absorbed in the pursuit, that I walk half-way through the village without meeting anyone capable of answering a question. At length a capering figure reels up against me as it dances backwards across the raised pathway in the middle of the street. It is armed with a large oblong drum, and is hammering thereon a spirited bass accompaniment to a tempest of shrill screams. The musician pauses suddenly as I stop, and reveals the features of the meek little copying clerk who, in the office, sits all day on his stool as quietly as a mouse.

"What *is* all this row about, Shway Pho?" I ask without ceremony.

Shway Pho looks sheepish, and stares at his drum, as though he contemplated seeking refuge from my curiosity inside it. Then he grins faintly. "The Burmese people think this noise is good to drive away the *kala nah* [cholera], sir."

"Oh, has anyone got cholera?"

"All right, now, sir—they are dead," is the glib reply.

He means of course that everyone else is "all right;" but Shway Pho's limited knowledge of English often makes his expressions a trifle ambiguous. Further queries elicit the information that a boatman named Moung Lan, his wife Mah Khin, and a little boy of Moung Hlaing's, have all succumbed to this disease, so inevitably fatal to the native.

"Where is Moung Than?" I ask, naming another clerk, whose steadiness and good conduct are frequently

held up to his juniors by way of example. "What is Moung Than doing to-night?"

Shway Pho explodes in rapturous giggles, and points with exactness to a neighbouring roof, whereon the decorous, the sedate Moung Than is seated, devoting all his energies to the flagellation of a huge iron pot with a bamboo. Shway Pho's delight at being able to point out his senior in this undignified position is intense. He has, like most of his race, a keen sense of the ridiculous, and my undisguised astonishment at finding the "model clerk" where he is, quite overcomes him.

The English-speaking Burman does not like to be caught joining in the superstitious doings of his fellows, so, as Moung Than is too much absorbed in his business to notice me, I tell Shway Pho to call him down, and walk on through the village. It is the same throughout. Everybody of either sex of whatever age is engaged with all his might in the creation of the most deafening din.

Presently, Moung Than joins me, breathless but respectful; and we walk on together to a patch of jungle beyond the village, where the uproar is tempered by distance, and it is possible to make one's voice heard without raising it to its highest pitch. You must always ask an educated Burman what "they" are doing, when you refer to the employment in which he has been engaged with his more ignorant fellows. He is much more likely to be confidential if your mode of address implies that you consider him their superior.

It appears from Moung Than's report that the people are anxious about the cholera, for the Coringa coolies, whose lines are a few hundred yards from the village, have lately had several fatal cases, and the three deaths

amongst the Burmese had established something resembling a scare.

"But what good will all this noise do?" I ask in desperation.

Moung Than hoarsely explains. "These people, sir, think that a bad spirit has caused this sickness; therefore, upon that account they must make much noise, that he may become frightened and run away."

This was straightforward, and so far satisfactory; but the din was quite as brisk now as when it first disturbed me, and I rather anxiously asked, how long it usually took to frighten such spirits?

"I cannot tell," said my informant. "But," he considerately added, "when the people are tired, they will stop."

That was something to be thankful for, at all events; but they showed no signs of fatigue yet, and I made some remark of the kind to Moung Than.

"Soon they will be tired; but this noise must continue four or five nights, sir—until the *nat-soh* [evil spirit] is quite gone, sir."

This was not reassuring to a man who worked hard all day and earned his rest at night; but there was still the consolation of knowing that if the "nat-soh" resembled humanity so far as to possess ears, and owned as much sense of harmony as a pariah dog, it would not voluntarily stay long. It was inconceivable that any spirit could withstand such a terrible notice of eviction.

"Good-night, sir," said Moung Than, beginning to move off in the direction of the village. "I shall now go to my house to sleep, sir."

I walked leisurely back after his retreating figure, and it crossed my mind that the clerk was in a violent hurry

to get to bed. His haste was explained by his reappearance on his own roof *dekchee* and bamboo in hand, doing his best to make up for lost time.

It must have been nearly dawn when the din began to die away, but it shewed signs of collapse at last; individual contribution became more and more apparent, shouting ceased, and at length silence allowed sleep.

Next morning discovered the villagers again on their roofs, but this time to repair the damage caused by last night's orgies. The frail thatches of dhunny and bamboo had suffered severely, being by no means equal to supporting the proprietors in their gambols thereon in a high state of excitement. Indeed, the general aspect of the houses from one end of the street to the other suggested the recent passage of a cyclone.

I believe "occupation of the mind and body" is warmly recommended as a means of fending off the ravages of an epidemic. How far the Burmese specific can be held to afford mental employment, I leave readers to decide for themselves, but even Burmese ingenuity could not devise a more cheerful and exhilarating means of bodily exercise; so perhaps their method of dealing with cholera is less foolish than it appears.

The poor Burman is sadly bothered by the number of nats who perpetually hover about him to bring misfortune and trouble upon his head. However, by dint of propitiatory offerings, and by studying the well-known idiosyncracies of the more malignant spirits, so as to avoid wounding their feelings, he gets along fairly well —much better than any Indian race. Besides, although strict Buddhists disapprove of his regard for the nats' feelings, it is generally acknowledged that the presence

of a hpoongyee or other pious man is enough to render the bad spirits incapable of mischief. And as wearers of the yellow robe are to be found everywhere, the nats are less troublesome than might be expected. Indeed, if you go the right way to work, there are few ills and dangers of life that cannot be avoided in Burma. Some of the Wise Men have such marvellous powers, and are so willing to exercise them for a trifling consideration, that it is your own fault if you run unnecessary risks. I became *thaynat pyee* (gun-proof) myself for five rupees; and nothing but a foolish regard for appearances deterred me from having a really potent charm tattooed in red spots round my neck by another celebrated *sayah*, who kindly offered his services. The gun-charm, however, answered all my purposes, for the sight of such a thing in a white man's hands was enough to encourage the people to talk freely on the great subject of magic. Showing it as if by accident in camp one night I heard some instructive particulars. An old Burman at once begged leave to look at it, and I gave it him with feigned hesitation, and allowed it to be handed round. The charm was a tiny ivory figure of Gaudama in a sitting attitude, not much exceeding a large pea in size. My Burmese servant, Moung Tso, had procured it for me from a hpoongyee, as I doubted whether he would sell one to a European.

"Does your honour always wear it?" asked the man who had last examined the figure, and now returned it to me in both hands.

"I must always carry it in the jungle," I gravely replied. "Are you thaynat pyee yourself?"

"Yes, your honour."

He readily assented when I asked to see his talisman

and produced from some remote corner of his clothing a very dirty bundle of rags as large as a racket-ball which swathed a little tin pill-box in half-a-dozen wrappings. The box contained a figure similar to mine, and was examined with equal reverence by the men round.

"Who gave you that?" I asked.

"The sayah near Thitboungyee. I paid six rupees for it."

"And are you quite safe with that one?"

"It is the best. I can get other kinds for three rupees; but they are not good: I should want many of them."

"If I fired at you with my gun, would you be hurt?" I asked, as he seemed to be wandering from the point.

"Your honour's gun always goes off," said the old man, rather resenting the prospect of facing a gun he had not seen miss fire once in a long day's duck-shooting.

"Well then, what would happen if a dacoit fired at you? Would he miss you?"

"Oh, his gun would not go off," was the reply in a tone of conviction. "This is the *best* charm that can be got," insisted the owner plaintively, again.

"His gun would burst," put in a gray-haired Burman on the other side of the fire, in a sepulchral voice—"the dacoit's gun would certainly burst."

I handed back the charm, and asked to see any others the men had with them. All had curious devices tattooed on various parts of the breast and shoulders, and the majority had more material charms inserted under the skin, where they formed smooth unsightly lumps like huge warts. These the owners admitted had been

acquired from professors of the occult arts, and consisted of magic spells inscribed upon scraps of ivory, silver, and, in one case, gold. The more precious metal did not, however, confer greater immunity from danger than other substances, the value of such charms depending entirely upon the spells written on them.

"I should like to become *dah pyee*" (sword proof), I said, after comparing notes on the gun charms.

"Oh, that is easy. Your honour must eat the medicine to become dah-proof," said two or three at once; for all were now interested in the discussion, and were satisfied that my inquiries were *bonâ fide.*

"What is the medicine made of?" I asked.

"We cannot tell. The hpoongyee can make and give it to your honour."

"I must get some at once," I continued; "but I do not like to eat it."

There was a slight laugh at my squeamishness, and, after a pause, a young man suggested that I might put it in a little bag and wear it round my neck.

"It is not very good like that," said the old man who had first seen my charm. "His honour might be wounded if he did not *eat* the medicine."

The speaker was evidently regarded as an authority on the subject, for the others murmured assent, and the young Burman did not press his plan further.

The "medicine," carefully wrapped in leaves, was afterwards brought to me as a present by one of my jungle friends. It appeared to consist of dried leaves or bark finely powdered, and had the faint smell one might expect therefrom. There was only sufficient to cover a rupee, but I was assured that the quantity was more than enough, if I would only eat it. To satisfy the thoughtful

donor, I undertook to do so, but Moung Tso considerately stole the precious compound, and so spared me the ordeal.

The Burman's faith in these charms is very deep-rooted, and in spite of frequent and painful demonstrations of their fallibility, he never loses confidence in them. An excuse can readily be found for their failure to protect the holder, and the injured man is the first to explain how it happened that his talisman did not fulfil his expectations.

The late Mr. St. Barbe, who was shot by dacoits, was credited with the possession of powerful charms against violent death, for which he was chiefly indebted to his great stature and personal strength. Long after his cruel death, I asked a native official, in the course of a conversation on such things, how he could account for the failure of Mr. St. Barbe's charms to preserve his life.

The man stooped towards me, and in an awe-struck whisper, asked: "Did not his honour the Big Deputy-Commissioner carry his man to the boat when he was wounded and could not walk?"

I assented. The deed would have gained a soldier the Victoria Cross.

"The blood from the shot-wound fell upon his honour; therefore, it was easy to kill him. His charm was no use after that." The man drew back, and shaking his head, gravely repeated, "After the blood from the wounded man touched his honour, it was no use—no use."

"Then, if the blood from a bullet-wound touches a man who is thaynat pyee, his charm is spoiled?"

"Yes; it is spoiled. He must then get another one."

"And is it the same with a charm against dah-wound?"

"Yes; it is the same."

It would seem that the blood from a dah-wound would destroy a dah-charm, but not one against the gun, and *vice versâ*. The man was confident that his own talismans would withstand any reasonable test, but demurred strongly when I suggested a trial. It would be time to test their virtue when he met with dacoits, he said. Of their weapons he should have no fear whatever. English fire-arms were different; they did not appear so amenable to the influence of charms.

It is a regrettable fact; but, if the truth must be told, the Burman's magical appliances add little to his naturally small stock of courage; for when confronted by danger he generally elects to confide his safety to his heels.

The manufacture, writing, carving, and tattooing of these charms is a regular profession, and, thanks to the boundless credulity of the people, by no means a bad one.

I achieved some distinction as a sayah myself once, and might have made a considerable reputation had my tastes pointed that way.

I chanced to be spending a few days in a remote jungle village whilst on a shooting expedition; the rainy season was at hand, and not to be solely dependent on matches, which the searching damp would speedily render useless, I always carried a small unmounted burning-glass. One bright morning, whilst surrounded by the villagers I had engaged as beaters, I drew out the glass and lighted my cheroot with it. The roar of talk ceased in a moment, and the men stared in speechless consternation.

"Ahmay!" ("Mother") exclaimed one old man, recovering the use of his tongue as the smoke came from my lips, "Your honour, where did the fire come from?"

"From the sun," I replied.

Every head was turned instantly to look at the sun. It was still in the sky, and there was a slight murmur perhaps of disappointment.

"But it is not real fire? It will not burn?"

"Hold up your hand, and try," I suggested.

Egged on by his companions one man at last did so, giggling with nervous apprehension.

"Look at the fire-spot. Aaaah! look at the fire-spot!" cried the men, as I focussed the glass. "O wait, Moung Tha, wait!"

But Moung Tha declined. He snatched away his hand and remarked seriously that there was fire though you could not see it; and nobody else expressed a wish to try if it would burn. Even after I had shown them how to use the glass much persuasion was required before anyone would venture to take it in his hands, but their fear once overcome their admiration knew no bounds.

Had I kept the mystery to myself I feel sure that, in the jungles, I might have taken high rank as a wizard, but I threw away the opportunity, laying my embryo mantle on Moung Tha; thereby adding yards to his social stature.

That village was burned to the ground a few weeks after my departure. A gang of dacoits who were hovering about the neighbourhood received the blame, but I have always had an uneasy feeling in my own mind that that burning glass had something to do with the disaster.

CHAPTER V.

THE SHWAY DAGONE PAGODA.

EVEN as the great Pagoda is the most prominent feature in the landscape as you approach Rangoon from the sea or from any direction, so it is by far the most famous and sacred of all the countless pagodas to be found throughout the country. Smaller shrines, the erection of some one pious individual fall to ruin and decay after the death of the builder; but the Shway Dagone has national sanctity, and more merit is to be gained by sticking a square of gold leaf upon its side, than by completely restoring a dozen of the lonely and neglected little pagodas on the banks of the creeks in the delta.

The low hill on which the Shway Dagone stands is, save the plateau hard by occupied by the barracks, the only high ground in the district. The top has been levelled and built up, and forms a wide square platform upon which stands the Pagoda surrounded a space apart by zayats, image houses and altars, backed by foliage. The lower slope is moated and built up on all four sides, enclosing the whole summit, and converting it into a fort. It is merely the conversion of Burmese defensive works into British. The place was a strong one in native

hands as witness the many graves of Englishmen in the north-east corner of the platform among the mangoes and bamboos ; and the batteries rather enhance than detract from the dignity of the Pagoda, while they in no way impair its sanctity. It is to be noted that the guns occupy a lower terrace than the platform, and that there is no communication between the two.

The approaches are four, each over a drawbridge spanning the moat. That on the east is not particularly striking from without, but it overlooks a grand panorama of jungle, field and lake. The north entrance, facing the commissariat elephant lines, is little used and its brick steps have crumbled into a rugged slope. The west gate, overlooking the artillery barracks, native lines and cantonments, is closed by the military authorities. The principal entrance, and by far the most imposing, is the southern at which meet the roads from Poozoondoung on the east, Kemindine on the west, and the town on the south. The lowest flights of steps are open to the sky and are flanked by open-mouthed monsters sitting on their haunches. Just behind these, the steps are covered in by magnificently carved seven-fold roofs, upheld by pillars of brick or wood. The whole long series of flights up to the Pagoda court is thus enclosed, and as the sides are blocked by kyoungs and rude stalls for the sale of offerings the way is one of greater or less darkness. Parts of the ascent are so dark that the most reckless of the European sailors who visit the Pagoda must approach at a pace becoming its solemnity. You must feel your way, and that cautiously, up the worn irregular steps, no two of which are alike in height or breadth. The last flight, that giving upon the platform, is the darkest and most dangerous ; which suggests intention

to compel reverent approach. The devout Bhuddist removes his sandals, or shoes and stockings if he wear them, down upon the road and carries them in his hand. The tolerance of the people allows the white man to retain his boots in any part of the Pagoda surroundings. I compare this, involuntarily, with the angry outcry that warned me, an unconscious trespasser, off sacred ground in Ambar, the old Rajpoot capital.

Passing the dragon-guarded entrance on a big "Pagoda day," is trying to the nerves of unseasoned strangers, and gives the most hardened resident a twinge of apprehension. The steps are lined three deep with clamorous beggars whose hideous diseases are their stock-in-trade. Lepers shew arms eaten off to the elbow, or footless shins to stir your charity; small-pox patients in advanced stages offer their malady in exchange for pice. Any bodily misfortune, the more loathsome the better, gives title to a place on the Pagoda steps.

Save about the time of the full moon, the court is left in comparative solitude, but you will find one or two worshippers there any morning or evening. The devotional attitudes differ for the two sexes. The man poises himself on his toes, sits upon his heels and mutters his prayer to his knees, above which his hands are pressed together. The woman kneels, sitting back upon her heels. While praying, a single blossom of the white frangipani is held between the fingers; this is an offering to be after placed on altar or in shrine. Very often, instead of a flower, a praying flag is offered; this is a tiny flag clipped in white paper and mounted on a thin bamboo slip. They are sold on the stalls at the south entrance, and may be seen intermingled with dead and dying flowers where the worshippers have left them.

SHRINE OPPOSITE SOUTH ENTRANCE.

As you pass the cavernous shrines, pariahs sneak out licking their chops and looking back to snarl and bark; insolent crows tardily seek the roof to drop again upon offerings of rice and fruit. Sparrows, pert as ever, twitter over the good things provided not for them, and in the gloom where Bhudda sits ghostlike, bats flit to and fro, secure from the blazing sun without. The furnishings of the four principal shrines are a strange medley; gilt and fragile white paper umbrellas are collecting dust; lamps of English make, gorgeous in gilt mounts and coloured glasses, depend from the carved ceiling; long limp wisps of muslin and cloth cross from pillar to pillar; vases for flowers and praying flags, and vessels which have contained rice, are scattered on the floor; rude iron-work stands spiked or socketed for candles are all round, and the air is heavy with the smell of molten tallow.

All round the Pagoda, alternating with altars, strange man-headed beasts sit bolt upright staring with meaningless moon faces out over the court at the maze of seven-roofed shrines, zayats and image houses which crowd the outer edge under the trees. These buildings are the work of merit-seeking piety, and each rivals its neighbour in richness and beauty of carved teak gable and falling screen. Among them are stucco altars niched to receive candles and flowers, and bells suspended on rude gallows not always upright. *The* great bell, whose history is written in Shway Yoe's exhaustive book "The Burman," hangs under its own splendidly carved seven-storied and spired roof. Images of the Bhudda are numerous. They are in all materials and in every stage of newness and dilapidation from the latest arrival, a spotless figure in white marble sheltered under

a glass case (!) to the worm eaten wooden images, which huddled out of sight among the trees, are falling into the decay which has long since overtaken their donors. Statues in brick, modelled over with plaster, are commonest; teak is also much used; the alabaster-like marble which rings to the touch like iron is less in vogue, but bronze statues are many. Bhudda is represented in three attitudes only. Standing erect with hand upraised in the act of teaching; sitting with crossed legs, hand on knee, the other in the lap palm uppermost as if awaiting alms; and lying, head supported on arm. His ear lobes reach his shoulder; all his fingers are of equal length, and his toes. Sitting and lying, his eyes are downcast in meditation. The face never varies; it is always calm, passionless, majestic; human, yet higher than human. In the candle-lit darkness of the shrine the placid face inspires awe.

Images, ten or twelve feet in height, are numerous enough; but in parts of the country there are statues of enormous size. The largest I have seen is the recumbent figure near the sacred lakes some eighteen or twenty miles from Maulmain on the Amherst Road. It is sixty or seventy feet from head to heel, but is not imposing: the plaster about the legs has fallen away revealing the brickwork, and the face is not modelled with the skill that makes the smaller figures praiseworthy specimens of the sculptor's art. The climate deals hardly with images in the open air; it is nobody's business to keep the pious work of another in repair, and the Bhuddas exposed to the sun and rain of Lower Burma go the same way as the pagodas whose object is fulfilled by their erection.

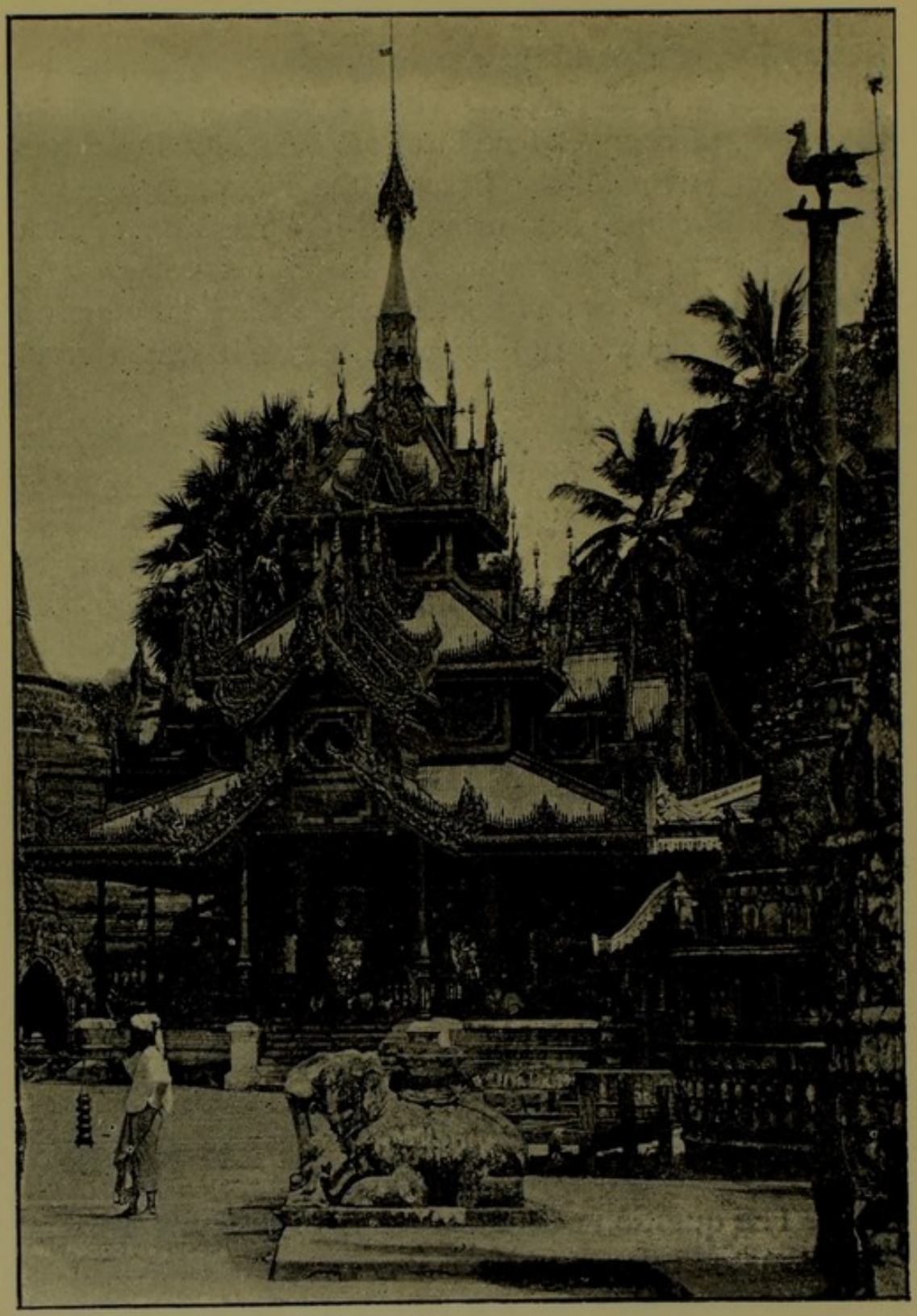
The majority of the buildings and altars on the

Shway Dagone platform are in good preservation, and harmonise for the most part. There is one discordant note, the result, of course, of civilisation. Among the altars and dragons round the base of the Pagoda, some unfortunate impulse has prompted the erection of iron lamp-posts of the commonest English street pattern Their broken panes and bent brackets show they are no one's charges now. If they were a gift, it was a cruel one.

And above all the pious erections of centuries, the great gilded mass of the Pagoda itself sweeps from broad base to tapering spire, glittering in the sun. The summit, with its jewelled iron-work *htee*, belongs less to earth than sky, and the tinkling of its bells might be the music of the spheres. The impression received at night is a lasting one. No work of human hands rouses deeper interest in the people that raised it, and in the religion of which it is a monument.

The Full Moon of Taboung, at the end of March, is the greatest of the many annual festivals in Rangoon and is essentially the Shway Dagone Feast. For days beforehand people from the district have been pouring into the town. The steamers from up country are crowded; hundreds of visitors come over from Maulmain and from distant Tavoy and Mergui. The railway discharges its crowds of passengers, and in the first dozen miles out on the Prome Road you will come upon twenty encampments of pilgrims on the way by bullock cart. The question of accommodation does not arise in this climate during the hot weather; in March it is pleasantest to have only a mosquito curtain between your bed and the stars.

On the morning following the night when the moon



SHRINE OF THE GREAT BELL.

has reached its full, the Pagoda court and the slopes of the hill present a wonderful sight. Every approach is thronged by brilliant crowds; the platform itself is a vast kaleidescope of gorgeous colour and dazzling white. There is nothing to indicate that the gathering has any religious motive; the low hum of talk and laughter, and the quiet bustle are more suggestive of a National "At Home." The shrines are ablaze with the light of countless candles, and in every cavity in the long-niched wall round the Pagoda and on the altars limp dips gutter smokily over blackened beds of tallow. Here and there on the lower steeps of the Pagoda, a seeker after merit has clambered painfully up to cling like a fly while he sticks on a patch of gold leaf, bought for a few annas in the bazaar. Now and again the deep musical boom of a bell bids the Master note some worshipper's offering or prayer. Scattered on the pavement, about every bell are stags' antlers to serve as strikers. These lend themselves again to proof of Bhuddist tolerance. You may see a group of booted and spurred Englishmen, antler in hand, trying who shall strike the loudest note, while the people stand round sometimes interested, sometimes indifferent, but never disapproving. Devotional exercises are got through at dawn, and the rest of the morning is a social function. From daylight, the south and east approaches are crammed with the upward stream; the crowd is densest and gayest from eight to nine; then the tide sets down again.

Business goes on very much as usual in the bazaar and godown on the Feast day, but the number of Europeans to be seen at the Pagoda is surprising. The "rice wallah" is there, he says, to pick up news from jungle

men about supplies of paddy in the district. I never knew him disclose any information acquired at the Pagoda, but perhaps it is imparted under seal of secresy. The "piece-goods" people are there to a man. The European firms do a large import trade in silks and cottons, and Manchester clothes the majority of Burmans in the loud red and yellow, green and yellow, and blue and yellow tartans most affected. Everyone puts on his best pasoh and goung-boung for the occasion which certainly affords excellent opportunity of seeing what patterns and styles are most in vogue; for a goodly number are wearing clothes purchased for the feast, and the bazaar for days previously has been as busy as Bond Street before a Drawing-room. But in view of the Burmese girls' conservatism in the matter of dress it seems strange that the piece-goods men should devote so much attention to the their attire. Feminine fashions in Burma are as permanent and lasting as the Pagoda itself. The working house-dress is a cotton tamein reaching from breast to knee. In the bazaar the lady appears in a silk skirt trailing a few inches on the ground, a white linen jacket with very tight long sleeves ruffled over wrist and forearm, and a pink or yellow kerchief lying loosely about the shoulders. On Pagoda days and great occasions she unconciously emulates her Western sisters by donning a tamein with a "train." Colours, patterns and cut of each tamein do not vary. On the other hand the man is always ready to adopt the latest creation in giant checks, and the European merchant employs a Burman designer to evolve novelties in this direction for the guidance of the manufacturer at home.

Between nine and ten o'clock the crowd on the

Pagoda platform begins to drain away; during the heat of noon the vast majority of visitors sleep in the zayats and kyoungs which extend down both sides of the road to town, or make themselves comfortable in the shade of the Cantonment gardens just over the way from the south entrance. The more restless find on the hill slope opposite the barracks means of secular, not to say frivolous amusement. Here the enterprising Madras man has set up the swing-boats and merry-go-rounds which receive such liberal patronage on the Maidan during the race meetings. Jungle men do not taste these delights in their own quiet villages; the Taboung festival affords them their annual opportunity to visit Rangoon, and they feel it a duty to make the most of it. Hence they cast their easy-fitting dignity to the winds and old men and boys alike tuck up their best pasohs and whirl round joyously on the battered hobby horses, gleefully abandoning themselves to the fun. A switch-back in Rangoon would make the owner's fortune.

There are abundant opportunities in the toddy sellers' shanties, but in spite of the heat and excitement there is neither drunkenness nor rowdyism among the vast crowd. It is noisy enough in all conscience, but a more thoroughly jovial and good-tempered throng would be impossible. Contact with civilisation has done the Burman little harm in these respects.

CHAPTER VI.

AN IDLE MORNING.

It is past six o'clock. My watch succumbed to the climate years ago, but I know it must be long after six because my servant has come in, and, with his head and shoulders smothered in a dingy red blanket, is putting out my clothes. Nothing short of an earthquake would rouse Moung Tso from his sleeping mat at sunrise in the cold weather.

"You are very late!" I say, sternly, scrambling from under the mosquito curtains.

"Your honour," with a comprehensive shiver; "it is *very* cold this morning."

Like most Burmans Moung Tso is truthful. It would be unfair to say he is too lazy to invent excuses, but he is lazy enough to leave most things undone. There are good Burmese servants, but if you are not a Government official, and want a Burman "boy," you must take what you can get. I wanted one for the sake of the language, and Moung Tso deigned to oblige me. How great a favour he conferred in accepting fifteen rupees a month to look after my clothes and wait at table was evidenced by his choice of pronouns when he took up the appointment: he employed the first person singular *Nga* of superiority and approached me with

neighbourly familiarity as *Kimbya.* He was also frankly disinclined to let my convenience interfere with his own private engagements. Now, however, we have changed all that.

He is not a bad boy on the whole. Caught up from the village just outside the compound, to this his first situation, he knows none of the profitable tricks of the too enlightened boy from Madras or Bengal. His pay-bill each month, written out for him by a clerk in the office, is unswelled by larcenous charges for "bazaar cooly," "needil, coton, thred," "cote-buttan," "boot-blak," and like fictions. Nay, so guileless is he that he does not even "go dhobi 'ouse getting Master clean shirt" when he wants a midday nap. On the other hand he will never put in shirt studs properly if he lives to be ninety; nor is there the faintest hope of his earning the silk pasoh I have promised him when his blacking brush discriminates between brown shoes, patent leathers, and bluchers. Also he would resign his situation a dozen times over rather than have upon his head the blood of one single gorged mosquito. This last is a matter of conscience, not indolence; but I am unaware of any passage in the Precepts that prohibits the mending of mosquito nets.

Moung Tso does not like being found fault with.

"*Si-galat ingyee lah?*" he asks, sulkily.

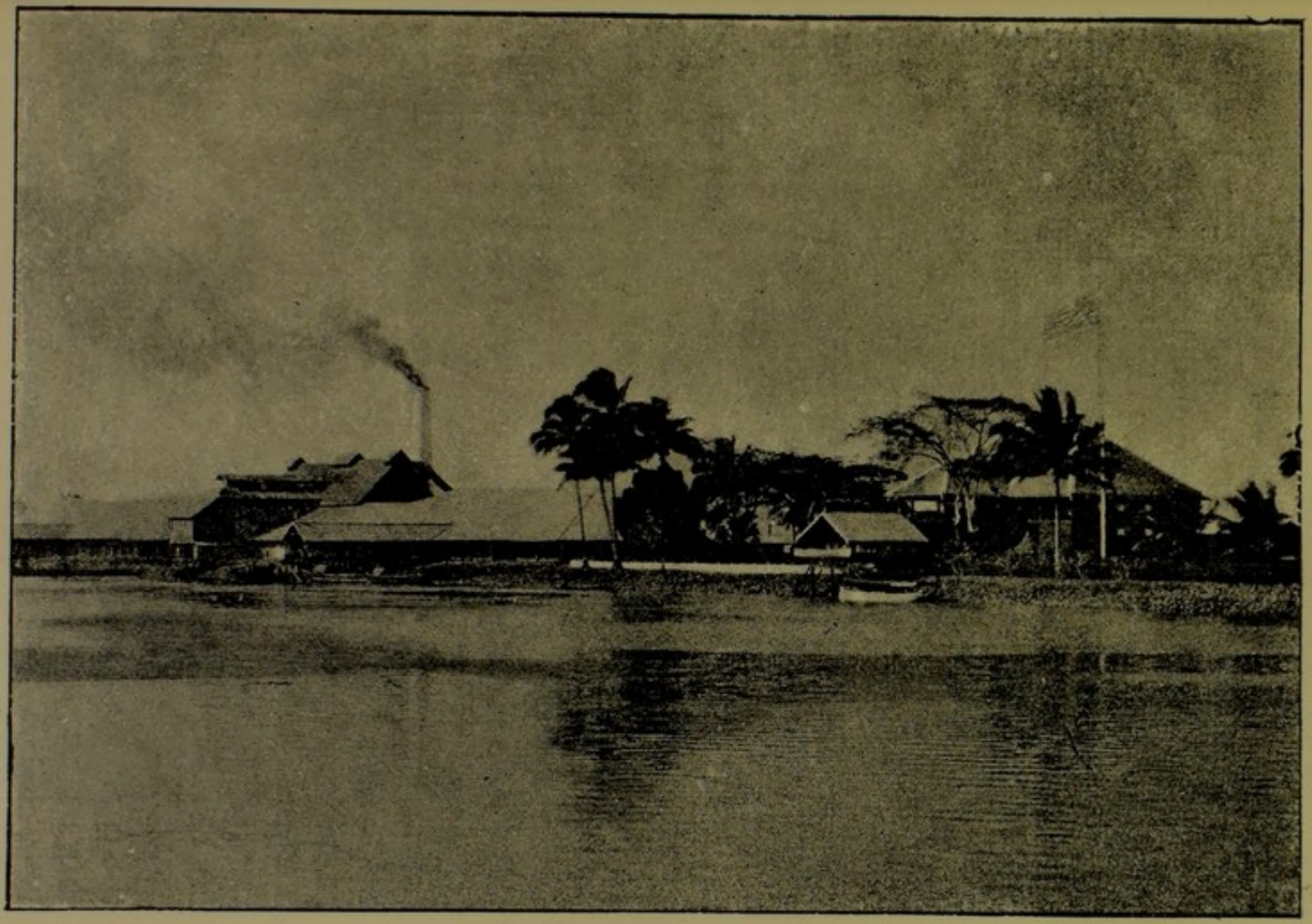
"What do you say?" I demand, emerging from the rough towel and fixing him with an eye.

"Will your honour wear *si-galat ingyee?*" he enquires more respectfully.

Why the Burman cannot apply to English the *th* which abounds in his own language is a mystery. One

would imagine, too, in view of the phonetic gymnastics to which he subjects his consonants, that he should find it easy to combine the sounds of "c" and "l" in cloth. But he cannot do it, and "si-galat" is "thick cloth" Burmesed. It is a very cold morning—for Bassein; I can see my breath quite distinctly; a flannel coat will be comfortable until the sun gains strength. At intervals along the village street just outside the compound the people are squatting over their fires. Burmese dwellings do not lend themselves with any safety to fire-building, and consequently, when a householder gets up on a morning like this, the first thing he does is to step into the street and rekindle last night's half-burned wood. When it burns up, his next-door neighbours come and help him keep it warm.

Chota haziri of tea and toast despatched, I light a cheroot and go out. Our house, a handsome two-storied teak building, is dwelling house above and office below. In front stretches the best-kept lawn in Lower Burma—it is one of my senior's hobbies—and beyond, on the other side of a low grey wall, flows the wide Ngawoon river. On the right, divided from the garden by wall and ditch, a rare hunting ground for rats as the dogs know well, stands the huge rice "godown," whose dreary desert of corrugated iron roof is half hidden from the house by trees. That godown is one of the largest at any Burma rice port, covering with the mill that forms its heart, nearly three acres. Its waste of patched uneven flooring is bare enough now. A speculative crow is pattering about the boards, squarking from time to time as if to enjoy the ring of the echoes in the roof. Smut, my smooth English terrier, sworn foe of crows, dashes at the bird, and drives him on swishing wing



HOUSE AND RICE MILL AT PADOUKCHOUNG.

to shelter under the eaves. There is absolutely nothing going on at Padoukchoung in the cold season, and I spend these idle early mornings among our Burmese employees, who occupy a row of houses in the farthest corner of the godown compound. We have no white neighbours nearer than the town of Bassein, which stands out of sight two miles up the winding river on the other side; and I do not always feel energetic enough to take my gun and look for jungle fowl in the bush behind the village.

It is quite a respectable walk through the godown and along the river bank to the Burmese quarters. There is nobody about except the Punjuabi *chaukidar* who is squatting on a stone by the water performing his toilet. He says "*Jao!*" to Smut, which unclean animal ventures to sniff at his brass *lotah*, and as I call the dog off, pauses in brushing his teeth with a stick to rise and salaam. Either for economy's sake, or from choice, the native of India uses a stick as a tooth-brush. Compulsory experiment in the jungle leads me to think it is economy. From across the river comes a babel of squeaking and grunting; for there dwells a colony of Chinamen, whose vocation is pork. Judging from the number of pigs, they must do a thriving trade in the bazaars. Europeans are not addicted to the consumption of Chinese cured pork; there are doubts concerning the diet of the pigs.

When I reach the row of neat houses in the corner of the compound everybody is up and past the fire-nursing stage. Pho Miah and Moung Choe, the old paddy brokers, clad in fur-lined coats, are already deep in their matutinal chess; and for lack of other occupation, the rest of the residents, and a few early visitors, are looking

on. Chess is very popular among the elderly and intelligent Burmans, and these two old men will squat over the board, playing game after game without stopping, for half a day. I do not play chess myself, but I know just enough of the English game to recognise the differences between that and the Burmese. The board is a massive article, about two feet square and an inch and a half thick, standing on four stout feet. Therefore when the winner's feelings compel him to give them relief by dancing on the board he can do it safely. Pho Miah and Moung Choe get wildly excited over their games, but are too staid to go such lengths as that; nevertheless, an English chess-board would soon succumb to their vigorous moves. The British tar's determined method of playing the winning card at "all fours" on the fo'c'sle is gentleness itself compared with Pho Miah's thump when he places a piece to check his opponent's king: it makes the whole collection jump. The pieces are admirably adapted to express emphasis, being clumsy things modelled in earthenware, five times as large and heavy as English chessmen. Their style is much more warlike than ours. The king, *min*, is attended by a chief, *boh*, a figure with a sword, instead of by his queen; the war-chariot, *vittah*, two wheels supporting a shapeless something, replaces the castle, to which it corresponds in respect of powers; the knight is represented in person and move by the pony, *myin*; and the elephant, *sin*, certainly is more suggestive of warfare than the bishop which with greater mobility it replaces. The arrangement of the pieces is totally different from that approved in England, and could only be described by diagram. The squares are all the natural dingy brown of the wood, and two deep-cut lines crossing the board from corner

to corner play an important part in regulating the moves of the pieces.

Moung Choe is evidently out of form this morning, and, soon after I join the circle round the board, makes a mistake. Pho Miah rises on his toes, clutches his boh, and plants it again with a crash.

"Kwé!"*

Moung Choe gives a grunt of vexation, and takes his cheroot from his mouth to consider the position, while Pho Miah, poised on his toes, parts his knees the better to survey the field.

"Ko Moung Choe now can make one move safely, sir," whispers Shway Oo the store clerk, grinning and nodding to me. "Only one move. I see which it is, sir."

Moung Choe is doubtful; he tries the probable effect of a move with this piece and that, muttering to himself the while, but cannot make up his mind; and, after three minutes' earnest cogitation, moves his myin with a dubious thump.

"Kwé!" from Pho Miah again, advancing his sin with truly elephantine step.

Shway Oo was wrong; the game is not lost yet. Indeed it is only now getting really exciting. The audience puffs absently at its cheroots, sinks upon its heels, and waddles in to wedge itself closely round the champions, each man obviously panting to advise. Moung Choe throws back his warm jacket, and leans forward to concentrate his whole mind on the situation.

"Yattah," hints Shway Oo. "Boh," suggests Chit Oo, who, I believe, holds a higher opinion of his own skill than do his friends. Moung Choe looks from one to the

* "Dead" or "killed" the Burmese equivalent of "check."

other, and clasps his hands about his shins. The movement is the signal for an outburst of advice. Half-a-dozen hands gesticulate, the corresponding half-dozen pounce on two or three pieces to show the proper move, while each of half-a-dozen voices strives to gain the embarrassed player's ear. Pho Miah smokes calmly. He is confident of victory, and rather enjoys the row; it is a tribute to his play.

Moung Choe, pelted from all sides with opinions, resigns any of his own he may have cherished, and excitedly argues with his advisers the merits and demerits of theirs. After ten minutes the uproar is suddenly quelled by two advocates seizing his wrist and compelling the move they recommend. It has evidently been a judicious one, for, though a roof of heads conceals the board, Pho Miah's face betrays increased interest. The torrent of advice is now turned with beautiful impartiality upon him; but he pays little attention to it, keeping his head and his own counsel. A decisive thump, momentary silence, and then a redoubled roar of advice hurled at Moung Choe indicates another good move. Presently a desperate bang, and silence is quickly followed by a triumphant crash from Pho Miah; and the shouting audience falls apart with chessmen raining on its shins. Pho Miah has checkmated and Moung Choe has cleared the board with one comprehensive sweep of his arm.

"A good game, sir!" says Shway Oo, rising and feeling his ancle where a quarter pound sin has caught him. "It was much a pity Moung Choe make that little mistake, sir. Upon that account he lost."

The men are already collecting the battered pieces and setting them out for another game. Very little is said about the one just ended. That, by the way, is one

redeeming grace of the excitable and officious Burmese enthusiast. He never, when the game is finished and over, insists upon demonstrating what ought to have been done. The loser's summary clearance of the board may act as a deterrent in this respect. But some among decorous English whist players might take note.

The sun is growing hot in the still air, and the chess players adjourn with the board from the sand-strewn space before the houses to Shway Oo's verandah. The store clerk's is a species of show house. When jungle people come in the busy season they are permitted to stand without and feast their eyes upon Shway Oo's front room. Beside long-armed chairs, and a table retired from European service for age and decrepitude, whose wounds are veiled under a flaring red table-cover, the owner has gone in largely for minor refinements, well calculated to make the simple country people stare. Pictures from the *Graphic* and *Illustrated* adorn the brown wooden walls; photographs, sadly disfigured by damp, in now neutral coloured plush frames hang from huge nails. But most prized and prominent are the nic-nacs ; these dot the table, crowd the cross-pieces of the wooden walls and cover carved teak brackets. Here are animals in coloured china, camels, monkeys, dogs, cats and frogs ; there, sitting mandarins whose tongues used to wag; Arcadian shepherds and shepherdesses, and Three Little Maids from School, late of Oxford street, W. All rather the worse for wear. A few Benares models of natives shrink into obscure corners, clearly being, in Shway Oo's eyes, less valuable than the English productions. These are castaways from our house which in its time has known many masters, married and single. A few years back a lady going home presented a

number of old drawing-room things to Shway Oo whose duties often took him upstairs and whose respectful admiration of such articles she had observed. Since then his collection has been increased by periodical contributions till he now possesses an assortment of fourpenny ornaments unrivalled by any in the Province. Shway Oo is the only Burman I ever knew afflicted with a craze for porcelain dolls and china camels.

A shallow legless cot containing the heir to all this wealth hangs by long cords from the crossbeam overhead. Burmese babies lie more comfortably than do their parents. Shway Oo's infant is deposited on a pile of soft, pliant rush mats, and to the cords two feet above him is tied a towel, now twisted up out of the way, which hanging down, serves as a punkah kept in motion by the swing of the cradle. Among no people is the baby more master of the house than among the Burmese. A society for the prevention of cruelty to children would find time hang very heavily on its hands in Burmah. Such a thing as intentional cruelty to a child is unheard of, and more fond or indulgent parents do not exist in any country civilised or barbarous.

Mah Noo Mee, Mrs. Shway Oo, is not in the house at the moment, Passing out of the compound gate, and following the path to the creek which enters the river here, I see her kneeling in the stern of a canoe drawn partly up on the mud, washing her hair over the side. Mah Noo Mee, even among her well endowed sisters has splendid hair ; her smooth black coils are thicker than those of any woman about the place. Now she has taken some of them off ; one "switch" (I am told that is the term) is spread out on the flat stern piece of the canoe drying in the sun and Mah Noo Mee is swishing

another about in the water while she talks to Hpo Hpay the fisherman who is patching a net in his heavy fishing canoe a few yards away. There is no false shame among the Burmese in the matter of false hair. Man or woman will sit on the verandah and in sight of all the village comb out a thick tail of hair, and as publicly wind it in with their natural tresses.

Now I am come thus far I may as well go on to Takine village across the creek, which here, at its junction with the river does duty as harbour for a score or two of paddy boats. So I send the unwilling Smut home, and skirt round the jungle to the road which terminates in a high-arched wooden bridge over the stream. Here comes a lively party bound, I suppose, for the ferry to Bassein. Four or five bright-looking girls in their best clothes, flowers in their hair, and powdered as to their faces with the candid *tanáket.* The powder is only used for the sake of coolness; as an aid to beauty it would be literally a glaring failure. They are packed in a passenger bullock-cart, under the care of a demure matron to chaperone, and a sulky-looking young man to drive. The cart is a remarkable piece of wheeled architecture, built on the lines of a cock's comb, the body appearing to be no relation to the wheels. Like the Burmese boat it curves boldly up behind, and though springless is by no means an uncomfortable conveyance on a smooth road. The driver sits on the base of the pole in an ornate species of forecastle so that he can command the tender spots of his bullocks with the blunt point of his stick. The Burman driver, be it noted, is as humane as the Madrasi is brutal, depending far more on his voice than his rod. The cattle, bright red bays, are gorgeously caparisoned with broad scarlet strips of cloth sewn with harness bells.

PASSENGER CART.

On great occasions the bullocks are belted and festooned all over with scarlet bands; but the practicable harness is always sweetly simple, consisting of a cord through the nose tied behind the horns, to which the rein, a single stouter cord, is secured. High ornamental yoke-pieces hold their necks to the cross-bar on whose carved peak a vigorously executed figure squats or dances. At their throats hang chased copper bells squared like English sheep bells and with two noisy tongues. A good pair of bullocks can be made to go at a very tolerable pace at their short jerky trot and are not deficient in staying power.

The party disappears in a cloud of red laterite dust, and I cross over the bridge to Takine. Half the village was burned to the ground last hot season, and rebuilding has progressed very slowly, as do most works in Burmese hands. That village fire was the means of furnishing a notable study in the national character. Some people call it laziness; others, more thoughtful, fatalism; but all agreed that the behaviour of the people on the occasion referred to was eminently characteristic. The fire occurred at about seven o'clock one morning, and was reported by one of the mill hands who happened to see the smoke burst upwards at an early stage. Takine did not stand on my employer's estate, but many of the people were boat-owners who worked for them, and, though the houses were worth little, the narrow creek was full of valuable paddy boats whose loss would be serious. The mill fire-engine was small, but powerful; and I at once had the hands summoned and ran the engine down to the burning village. Three or four houses at the end farthest from the creek were blazing as only planks and dhunny thatch can

blaze. The heat was terrible, and there was just the faintest breath of wind blowing up the river to carry sparks on to the neighbouring roofs. All the houses stood well apart from one another throughout the village, and there seemed good prospect of confining the fire to its then dimensions, for the river was within easy reach of the supply pipe, and the engine hands pumped with a will. In spite of their exertions the next house caught almost as soon as I had persuaded the owner to move out his few goods, and then the next. The heat made work at the engine handles exhausting, and when the men were tired out and streaming with perspiration I called upon the villagers to relieve them. No one moved except to urge his neighbour to do so. I called again, and the goung responded. He was an old man and had no immediate interests at stake, for his house stood at the farthest end of the village, right over the creek; but, by way of setting example as a Government official, he girded up his loins and taking his stand by the pump called for men. His son and another young man got up unwillingly, carefully laid aside their cheroots, slowly twisted up their pasohs, and gingerly felt the handles. The rest of the population squatted round and laughed. I was weak from a long bout of fever, but at least four men were necessary to work the engine and I turned to myself, cursing the idiotic sloth of the people. We did not do much. The old goung was soon literally "pumped out," and when he stopped the other two stopped. The progress of the fire had been checked, but delay would be fatal, so, leaving the engine, I pounced upon the two men nearest and, laughing in strained sympathy with them and their friends, drove them to work. They pumped half-heartedly for

five minutes; then, as ill-luck would have it, a flight of paddy-birds streamed by overhead. They wheeled about to hover over the rolling smoke, and the flames gleamed rosy-pink on their snow-white plumage. The screeching of the pump ceased as I glanced up at them.

"Ahmay! Red paddy birds! Look! Red paddy birds!"

The sight was too much for the lazy wretches at the handles. They squatted on their heels, re-lighted their cheroots and stared upward in delighted astonishment.

I grew desperate.

"Whose house is that?" I demanded, pointing to the one now threatened. The thatch was curling and scorching, and another two minutes would see it well alight.

"Your honour, that is the house of Pho Too and his brother," replied twenty voices.

"Where is Pho Too?"

"He is there."

I turned. The man indicated was one of the two I had driven to the pump. He was squatting on the root of a tree, smoking.

"Are you Pho Too?"

He nodded.

"Is that your house?"

He nodded again and smiled pleasantly.

"It will be on fire at once," I said, catching his infectious coolness.

"Yes, your honour, I think so," he answered, contracting his brows and looking at it with a disinterested air.

I burst out laughing; I could not help it: and the assembled population rocked to and fro roaring with

merriment, as though this idea of trying to put out a fire were the greatest joke in the world. As farther endeavours to save their property would have marred the innocent pleasure these light-hearted people found in its destruction, I told the *serang* to coil up his hose and take the engine home. Why when the villagers so thoroughly enjoyed a blaze at their own expense should an officious white person interfere? So the fire had its fling and a couple of hours later burned itself out on the margin of the wide pathway that cuts Takine in two unequal halves.

Some municipalities in Burma, that of Bassein among them, do their utmost to enforce simple and sensible provisions against fire. Every dweller in a house roofed with the inflammable dhunny must have fixed on the comb of his roof, brackets to support large chatties of water. In case of danger these vessels are smashed with the thrust of a long bamboo and the roof, instantly flooded, is safe from ignition. Also each householder is compelled to keep outside and ready for emergency two rude instruments, a "fire-hook" and a "*mee-put*," for which latter there is no English equivalent. The fire-hook is merely a long bamboo carrying a sharp wooden peg spliced at an acute angle, a most efficacious instrument for tearing off the dhunny, which, when dry, the smallest wind-borne spark will ignite. The mee-put is a tool like a broad bladed paddle, well adapted for beating out the beginnings of a fire. At Padoukchoung and below, we are without the municipal pale, so any man may burn down his house when he likes.

It was quite in keeping with their conduct at the fire that the villagers should have sent an informal deputation asking the kind assistance of our carpenter's staff to

help rebuild their houses. A request which, I need hardly say, was refused. By consequence, though seven months have elapsed since the fire the houses are not all rebuilt yet. No doubt the rainy season has hindered operations, but in view of the style of architecture it does seem unnecessary to take so much time. Pho Too and his brother have done as much as most. The roof covers the rough jungle-wood uprights, and the beams to support the two levels of floor are in place. A quantity of bamboo is heaped on the flooring beams, and a couple of discoloured sleeping-mats, a few rags of clothing, and a betel-box on the bare ground beneath, show where the proprietors pass their nights. The majority of those who were burned out are still quartered on their neighbours, whose hospitality is as unbounded as their laziness.

There is no work going on this morning. Burmese labour uncontrolled is spasmodic, and one day's toil entails about four of total abstention to recruit. The seniors are squatting about the street in the shade, smoking and gossiping, and the juniors are engrossed in the sedentary delights of kite-flying. The Burman is great at kite-flying, but, as might be expected, he constructs his kite so that it may be flown without much exertion on his part. It is a very simple affair. You pare down two twelve-inch slips of bamboo, tie them at their centres crosswise, run a thread round the four tips, and paste upon this frame one thickness of paper. Tie a nail or a small screw-nut to one corner, and your kite is made. The altitude a well-made kite of this kind will reach is wonderful, and the lightest breath of wind will take it up. A hundred and fifty or two hundred yards of strong sewing thread, wound on a skeleton reel of four

inches diameter and eight inches length, completes the equipment. Then, having started the kite by a process of gentle playing, you squat down in the middle of the street, so as to keep your thread clear of the houses, and let the kite help itself. If you have fastened the thread with cunning the kite rises almost perpendicularly, bringing you joy in the envy and admiration of those who cannot make a steeper angle than forty degrees. The kite having taken out all the thread, you sit and contemplate it poised still and clear in the upper air, for a few hours. It is a good plan to let somebody else have the reel to hold for a while before you want the kite down; he will wind up the thread in return for the privilege.

In Rangoon on a still morning or evening hundreds of kites float over the Burmese quarter of the town, some nearly out of sight, others hovering just above the roofs. They are in all colours, like so many green, blue, red, and yellow square stars. The trees and telegraph wires are hung with forlorn skeletons from which the gay paper droops in limp rags. Fortunately a kite is cheaply made, and when one gets stranded thus in its descent the owner winds in all the thread he can, breaks it off, and goes home philosophically to manufacture another. The amusement is by no means the monopoly of childhood. When driving through the Burmese quarter your syce has frequently to halloo out of the way a middle-aged man who is backing slowly down in mid street coaxing his kite up. He goes about the business with a ponderous solemnity that raises it to the dignity of a science.

The sun is high over the betel palms, and I am beginning to think about breakfast. Returning over the

bridge the hollow "tonk, tonk" of a wooden cowbell from the jungle-shaded creek stops me. A stout bamboo planted in the shallow under the bank is bending and quivering to the tugs of what must be a fairly heavy fish on the hook and line attached to it. Three feet down the line, just over the water, a wooden box-like bell with two clappers is dancing noisily to call Hpo Hpay. The dodge would not commend itself to the setter of night-lines on an English stream, but in this free country water-bailiffs and watchers are unknown; there are no restrictions upon ingenuity, and the fixed line with the bell attached is much in favour on the creeks. The advantage of thus making the fish notify his arrival is undeniable, for Burmese tackle is not always to be depended on. Hpo Hpay is not within hearing, but a small boy, guiltless of clothing, comes striding down the bank with an air of manly importance to answer the bell. He draws in the fish and throws it into a convenient canoe to die at leisure; but it is not resigned to its fate, and flops and jumps so vigorously that its escape is imminent. The small boy is equal to the occasion; he steps into the canoe and with his toes kindly but firmly holds the captive down till it ceases gasping and lies still; meantime he rebaits the hook with elaborate care. Strict observance of the Law must sometimes afford the lower animals food for regret.

The shade of the godown is welcome by the time I reach it again, and so the villagers seem to find it, for the short roofed wharves standing out into the river shelter groups of Burmans idling away the day in the cool breeze, and a few lank Coringa coolies who are deep in the excitement offered by the pursuit of small game in each other's hair. "Snowball," a big black gibbon whoes

mischievous propensities condemn him to perpetual confinement by chain, is similarly employing his lithe fingers upon the head of a Burmese youngster who lies on his back enjoying the agreeable sensation, while two more lads squat by awaiting their turn. In the busy season, when the godown is thronged, that gibbon has his hands full. Nobody is working except Hpo Hpay; he is busy, for the tide has turned and is running down. His method of managing both canoe and net is ingenious. He lies half on his right side on the flat up-curving stern, feet foremost, and counteracts each powerful paddle-stroke by a sweep of his left foot with which he throws the net overside fathom by fathom as he works across the current in a shallow crescent. The end of the net, which is some forty yards long, is held by a rope tied to a cross-batten in the canoe, and when the whole length is out Hpo Hpay ceases paddling and lets the current belly out the net down stream. After drifting a short distance he tows his end across to that floating loose and hauls up. He is doing well to-day. One cast as I stand watching brings three good hilsar of quite five pounds weight each. They are handsome fish, deep and large-scaled; wholesome looking fellows too, as indeed they are; the hilsar, in spite of the lavish generosity with which Nature has filled it with loose bones, being quite the best fish known to the Anglo-Burman table. The osteology of the hilsar is a mystery to the anatomist and a trial to the gourmand. It is a jumble of loose bones which appear to have no connection with each other or with the owner's spine. Hpo Hpay is a fisherman by profession, and has doubtless weighed the inevitable unpleasantness of the hereafter against the market price of hilsar in the present. At

any rate he does not waste time holding his lively captures down in the canoe till they die. With a handy little truncheon he knocks each on the head in the most businesslike way in the world, and sets to work to arrange the net for a fresh cast as calmly as though the Precepts were unwritten.

A weather-beaten boat carefully lined with mats is lying alongside the ballast-strewn bank opposite one of the openings in the stockade wall of the godown, and Shway Oo, squatting in the shade, is bargaining with the owner, a withered old man who has come for a load of salt and does not want to pay the prescribed price .He requires two hundred *paikthah*—a *paikthah*, otherwise *viss*, is 3·65 pounds—and is strongly of opinion that he ought to have "a reduction on taking a quantity." I confirm Shway Oo's oft repeated statement that the market rate and no less can be accepted, and the old man gives way. A tallyman to weigh the salt and coolies to carry it to the boat are summoned and the purchaser counts out his money.

"Would the gentleman like to eat some turtle eggs?" he enquires of Shway Oo when the transfer of coin is finished.

Shway Oo asks the question doubtfully. I bought some turtle's eggs on his recommendation once before from a down-river man who was taking a quantity, collected on the sea-beach round beyond Cape Negrais, to Bassein for sale. The cook poached them and I screwed up my courage to taste one of the hideous results that came to table; semi-transparent sickly whites with small, pale dead eyes of yolk. Stress of hunger, nothing less, would induce me to touch one of the leather-skinned, chalky-looking eggs again. But anti-

pathy is no reason for hurting the old man's feelings by refusing his present; so I accept the offer with the greatest effusion.

"They are fine large eggs," he says, returning from his boat with half-a-dozen, "and quite new; I took them from the sand only three weeks ago."

I say "it is very good," privately wondering how near the eggs were to hatching when taken from the sand; they are rather firmer to the touch than the last I had. I place them carefully on the floor and we stand round admiring them in silence for a minute. Then the old gentleman collapses upon his heels and presses his hands together.

"Builder of a Pagoda! I want very much an old cloth coat." And he gives a pantomimic shiver of cold.

I have never built a pagoda and it is highly improbable that I ever shall; but I think I have got an old coat, so tell the suppliant if he will come up to the house before he goes I will try and find one. He prays for my preservation from all the accidents, all the diseases and all the misfortunes, and we part. He to go and superintend the salt-weighing, I to surreptitiously drop the horrible eggs in the ditch on my way to bathe and change.

Before seeking the tub I turn over my scanty stock of discarded "Europe clothes." I have been too charitable this cold season, and can discover only an ancient tweed waistcoat. That will have to do, and I instruct Moung Tso concerning its disposal.

Half-an-hour later, while I am splashing in the bathroom he calls through the door.

"Your honour, this son of the jungle says the coat is not good. It has no hands" (sleeves.)

"I have not got a coat with hands I can give him Moung Tso."

In the muffled distance of the back verandah I overhear a long and earnest discussion, in which our old deaf khitmugar bears a prominent part. And in time Moung Tso clumps downstairs to shout through the bathroom door again. That boy has no manners whatever.

"Your honour this son of the jungle wants an old trousers."

I order him away with commands not to address me through the keyhole. I shall be upstairs in a minute—and what in the world does the old man want with nether garments?

He is a little inclined to be pressing when he hears me re-enter my room, so I give Moung Tso a retired pair of tweed trousers and bid him tell the jungle man that he has leave to go. Moung Tso returns to say that the recipient considered the gift "very good," and that he is going to walk up to the ferry and cross to Bassein; he will call to thank me on his return. I am glad he is coming back; a Burman in trousers would be a sight for the gods.

That afternoon while I was writing letters in the office, a figure crept diffidently up to the door and squatted on the sill. It was my aged friend perspiring proudly in a coat of wondrous shape.

"Your honour," he said, eyeing himself complacently, "it is a very beautiful coat."

It was indeed. He had sheared off the legs of the trousers well above the knees and promoted them to the dignity of sleeves.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BURMAN AT HOME.

I HAVE reached the village of Kannee, on my way to the hills, whither I am bound on a shooting excursion. Perhaps I should say *was* bound, for having arrived here, there does not seem to be much probability of my getting any farther. An hour before my arrival, Shway Hmaw, the old carpenter, brought in the startling news that he had seen a party of dacoits in the jungle only a few miles away. No one knows but that they are coming to Kannee, and I find myself now in Moung Daw's house, surrounded by nervous villagers who are dolefully comparing notes on Shway Hmaw's meagre intelligence and promising themselves all the terrors of fire and sword before the sun sets.

Of course no one will accompany me to the hills, so my expedition is effectually stopped. In addition to this, my boatmen are so apprehensive for my honour's safety, that they have positively declined to face the return journey to Bassein,—a paddle of thirty miles through narrow jungle-fringed creeks. At Kannee, therefore, it is clear I must remain for the present; so, with a view to the good graces of a village which has frequently supplied me with beaters, I make a virtue of

necessity, and announce my intention of staying here for to-day at all events. My hearers receive the information with gratitude, and depart with voluntary promises to "follow" next time I come down to shoot.

There is absolutely nothing to do at Kannee, which is just like a thousand other riverside villages in the paddy-growing districts of Lower Burma.

A long street, not too clean, traversed by a raised brick-paved pathway in the middle, runs parallel to the river-bank, losing itself in the jungle at either end. The houses stand at irregular intervals on both sides of it, and are all built on much the same plan, whether they be frail erections of bamboos and mats, or—like Moung Daw's—more substantially constructed of beams and planks. Their size varies much, for everyone builds his own residence, and does it as he pleases, since in this happy valley there are no municipal regulations or local government rules to curb the exercise of a taste which is sometimes a little eccentric.

Before many houses there are bamboo frames upheld by poles, covered with luxuriant creepers which produce immense pumpkins. Their own stalks are insufficient to bear their weight long before they ripen, so the cultivators brace them neatly up to the framework to prevent their falling. This is the only gardening attempted within the village precincts; outside, there are some ill-kept enclosures where a few coarse vegetables are grown.

The interior of a Burman's house conveys the idea that he had only enough material for one entire floor, and by way of obtaining variety, laid the front half two feet from the ground, and the rear half six feet higher; the true object of this arrangement being to avoid having

any one's feet overhead. Thus, a man standing on the front and lower floor has above him only the rafters, and the floor of the rear half has nothing below it but the bare ground. The space between the two floors is left open altogether or is protected with lattice-work, and a flight of rude stairs enables the family to pass from one story to the other. The upper one is screened from public view by a partition, and is used as a general bedchamber, being walled in all round, with a window or two on the floor-level. The lower floor is generally open on all sides, and there the occupants may be found during the day, cooking, eating, lounging, or occasionally working, in full view of the passers-by. The vacant space below the bedchamber is utilised as storehouse, poultry-yard, and cattle-shed; so the owner has his worldly goods under his protecting eye at all times.

The conveniences of civilised life find no place in such villages as this, and the people get on in their quiet way very well without them. The post-office is an institution unknown, for no one writes or receives letters. There is neither lighting, nor paving, nor drainage. There are no policemen, for there is nothing for them to do. No goats trespass on the road at Kannee, to be caught and impounded by the stern servants of the law; and that, as everybody knows, is the occupation without which, in the busy town, the native Peeler would be as a lost man.

My friend Moung Daw, the goung or head-man, is the sole representative of the Imperial Government. He assists the thoogyee of the circle in the collection of taxes payable by the cultivators resident in the village; is responsible for their good behaviour; and, for the

faithful discharge of these duties, enjoys the handsome stipend of ten rupees per month. He is consequently regarded with much respect as the local magnate and leader of Kannee society. Most of the villagers are paddy cultivators or boat-owners, who work hard for five months in the year, and make up for their exertions by complete idleness during the remaining seven. Now, at the end of the hot season, work for both classes is just over, and everybody is at home all day.

It is drawing on towards noon, and the heat is oppressive. I sit down to breakfast, grateful for the light breeze off the river which renders the house with its thatched roof tolerably cool. Even the restless pariahs have sought refuge from the rays of the terrible sun, but a score of naked children, still interested in my doings, though I have been here often before, stand outside open-mouthed, keeping a sharp look-out for scraps of bread or meat: luxuries the recipients generously share with their friends.

Mah Lay, the goung's wife, has finished boiling the rice, and now stands holding the grimy pot in both hands while she pours off the water and issues invitations to breakfast to a few favoured friends who are squatting on the road outside under the mango trees.

"Ho, Pho Loo, came and eat! Ho, Moung Gyee, rice! rice! Moung Tso, good little one, you want your morning food."

Her shrill, good-tempered voice rouses the men, who drift in leisurely and sit down round the heap of steaming rice Mah Lay has turned out on two fresh plantain leaves on the floor. The guests do not go through the ceremony of accepting the invitation in words. It looks rude, perhaps, but it is not so in reality. The manners

HOUSES IN A JUNGLE VILLAGE.

of the Burmese amongst themselves are always easy and pleasant, but unadorned by conventional courtesies.

The hostess supplies more leaves to serve as plates, and each man helps himself from the common pile to a double handful of rice, which for the time being occupies all his attention—and fingers. A Burman never drinks in the course of a meal, but, having swallowed the last mouthful, goes to the chatty that stands in a corner in every house, and takes a little water to wind up the entertainment.

As a race they are naturally temperate, but few jungle men will allow an opportunity of tasting wine, beer, or spirits to pass. All these go by the name of "berrandy." There is no equivalent for *r* in Burmese, but the deficiency seems easily supplied by the Burman if he wants a little stimulant.

Breakfast over, the men assemble round my chair for a chat. I present them with a cheroot apiece, but it is evidently not worth while for every man to smoke his own. Moung Daw, as host, lights his, and the guests stick theirs in their ears for future enjoyment, whilst the one is passed from mouth to mouth round the little circle.

"Has your honour brought the medicine-box this time?" asks Shway Hmaw in a tone of deep interest.

I have brought the box as usual, and my reply in the affirmative elicits a general expression of opinion that "it is good." My stock of remedies is not extensive; in fact it is as limited as it is simple in character, consisting of vaseline, which is the universal cure if a man has anything wrong outside him; and quinine, chlorodyne, and pills for inward application. Thus my patients run at least no danger of being poisoned, if they derive no benefit from the physic.

I have travelled a great deal with the above assort-

ment of medicines, and, absurd as it may seem, can confidently assert that their production at the right time, when the country was disturbed and villages abounded with bad characters, saved me from many difficulties.

The men around me are already discussing the patients who may want medicine, and I overhear sundry remarks on the "cases," which, literally translated, read like exercise phrases from a very primitive grammar.

"Can his honour's medicine cure Moung Pay's heel?"

"I think Moung Pay will die; he is very thin."

"Moung Pay's inside is sick, therefore he grows thin."

"Bah Oo had much pain yesterday."

"Yes, it was his belly; he ate many mangoes."

"The little medicine balls will be good for that."

"Will his honour give medicine for Mah Gyee's cow?"

"I cannot tell. Moung Daw will ask him."

And so on for five minutes whilst I am unpacking my provisions to get at the box required.

"Those people who want English medicine to-day may come to me and I will give it to them," I say with the generosity of a man who has a boundless stock of health at his disposal.

"Yes, your honour, it is very good," the men solemnly chorus.

"Tell anyone who has hurt himself to wash and come to Moung Daw's house now," I continue, with candour unusual in doctors.

The injunction to wash is very necessary, as I have found by experience that the acquisition of a *nah-pouk* "sick hole," be it wound, burn, or sore, is followed by total abstention from the use of water until the place is healed. A curious thing, for the Burman is cleanly in his personal habits, bathing regularly every day when

water is convenient, and in this land of heavy rains few villages are not well supplied.

Half-a-dozen little boys constitute themselves criers, and the proclamation is rapidly conveyed to every house in the village, resulting very shortly in a large assemblage of patients, some of whose troubles throw a striking side-light on the carelessness of the race.

Mah Too's baby is the first. It has a sore head, acquired by being accidently laid on the hot clay fire-place after the ashes had been removed. The shaven head of the poor baby is sadly scarred, but the accident occurred some time ago, and there is nothing to be done, as the injury is healing up.

Bah Oo's four-year boy. Above the piercing howls of the patient, I gather that he kicked his father's dah as it lay stuck through the floor, and cut his foot nearly through. In stentorian tones I prescribe washing, vaseline and bandages to be applied at once; and recovering breath turn to

Bah Oo himself. Severe pains which he thought indicated cholera, but his friends ascribe to mangoes. Is better now but would like medicine in view of a recurrence. Accepts one pill in both hands and chews it with mournful earnestness, dashed with pleasant anticipation of immediate results.

Mah Gyee applies for advice regarding a large boil on her neck. Gratefully receives a strong recommendation to wash, and a bread poultice, which she is uncertain how to use, and is too shy to ask me about. Correcting Mah Lay's suggestion that her friend should eat it hot, I continue dispensing medical comforts and judicious advice, keeping a watchful eye on Moung Tso, who, acting on these occasions as my assistant, dis-

plays great energy in the washing department. Indeed the liberal use of warm water is the initial treatment in every instance, and it is two hours before the last patient takes his departure. Regretfully declining to go and see a man who is lying ill of small-pox at a village two miles off, I wander down the street, followed by Moung Daw, to see what has attracted the little crowd there.

It appears that Moung Saik's eldest boy is to be tattooed to-day, and the *Htokwinsayahgyee*, great professor of tattooing, has just arrived with his formidable-looking instrument and inks.

Of all Burmese customs, one of the most singular is that of tattooing the person, from the waist to below the knees, with figures in black ink. Every man in the country is thus adorned, and unless his skin be unusually dark, he looks at a little distance as though he were clothed in a tight-fitting pair of knee-breeches. The custom is said to be falling into disuse, but I have seen very few Burmans without this "mark of manhood," which is conferred upon him when he is twelve or fourteen years old. The operation is a curious one, and I was glad of the opportunity that now offered to see it, though aware that it takes at least two or three days to complete.

Pho Myin, the subject, is lying quite nude on a mat, with a dazed look in his half-closed eyes, and breathing heavily. Moung Daw nods at him meaningly.

"He has taken much opium," he says, grinning to me.

I am not surprised at it. If the Htokwinsayahgyee was going to exercise his art upon me for four or five hours I should follow the Burman's plan and take opium by way of an anæsthetic.

The tattooing will show well upon the plump fair-skinned lad before us, and the professor evidently thinks he is a subject to take pains with, as he sits carefully mixing his ink in a joint of bamboo, and preparing his weapon. This is a brass rod nearly two feet long and about half an inch thick ; it is weighted at the top with a little ornamental figure, and at the other end has a hollow steel point divided by cross-slits into four fine pricks. The professor examines the "business end" critically, and, having satisfied himself that it is sharp enough, tucks up his pasoh, and squats at Pho Myin's side. Selecting a spot on the thigh, he places both feet on it a few inches apart, and, stretching the skin tight, draws the outline of the first figure—a tiger rampant—with an inky splinter of bamboo; this is soon done, and relieving himself of a large mouthful of betelnut, the professor settles down to work in earnest. Leaning forward through his widely parted knees, he balances the brass style daintily, and, clasping it with the finger and thumb of the right hand, makes a "bridge" of the left which he rests on the surface between his feet. After sliding the instrument through his fingers once or twice, as if to take aim, he makes a start and pricks away steadily with a light firm touch that is wonderfully quick and true. In less than five minutes the tiger with its surrounding border is finished, and the artist removes his feet from the distended skin, and washes off the superfluous ink to see how his work has come out. Everybody presses forward to look at the picture, which shows up in bold relief on the rapidly formed swelling. Moung Saik exchanges a remark with his wife, and the tattooer resumes his working position to draw the outline of the next figure.

The boy, stupefied with opium, lies insensible to the pain, whilst one figure after another appears on his skin. Deep as the points of the style sink, they draw little blood, but the limb swells in a manner that would alarm anyone who did not know it would return to its normal size in a day or two. Fever sometimes supervenes, and in that case the patient waits for a time before the work of illustration is resumed, so it often extends over a period of a week or ten days, during which the inconvenience suffered is considerable. Without the aid of opium the process would be a much longer one. I found that I could not endure the application of the style for more than thirty consecutive seconds without flinching so much as to interfere with the operator's movements; for the skin is pricked over so closely that it becomes painfully tender.

Eight rupees is the usual fee paid to a tattooer for endowing a lad with breeches. The figures composing them vary little, consisting as a rule of tigers, *nagas*, dragons, and *beloos*, devils. Each one is surrounded with a border of sentences, generally illegible, invoking good luck upon the owner of the skin whereon they are inscribed. The waist and knees are neatly finished off with a tasteful edging of point or scroll pattern; these sensitive parts of the body are always the last to be done.

"Where do the children go to school, Moung Daw?" I ask as we leave Moung Saik's house.

"At the hpoongyee kyoung, your honour. This way," and the goung marches off down the village with all the importance of a white man's cicerone. The kyoung stands a few hundred yards from the village in a grove of gigantic bamboos. It is an ancient tumble-

down structure, built on piles nine feet high, which lean a dozen different ways. The beautifully-carved eaves are falling to pieces, and through numerous gaping cracks in its wooden walls a child's head is occasionally poked out and withdrawn. The babel of chatter from the interior of the kyoung seems to promise anything but a sight of industry, as, led by Moung Daw, I climb the rickety stairs, on which the growling pariahs lie as if waiting for school to be over. About thirty children are lying on their stomachs in rows on the floor, learning the alphabet; each one has a ragged book, or it may be only a leaf before him, and, with his head supported on both hands, is repeating his lesson at the top of his voice, waving his feet energetically at the same time.

This is a peculiarity of the Burmese system of tuition, and has undoubted advantages. If the old hpoongyee on his mat at the top of the room does not hear voices, he knows at once that the silent pupils are in mischief, and comes down upon them. Besides, if they adopted the more civilised method of learning, the master would inevitably fall asleep, and every child in the academy would be off to play hop-scotch outside.

The heat has induced the hpoongyee to throw off his heavy yellow robe, and he squats, stripped from the waist upward, lazily waving a huge palmleaf fan as he stares at his unexpected visitors. A fat, mild-looking old man with clean-shaved head, he looks as though his rule was not one of iron. Our appearance produces a dead silence, indicating temporary suspension of work. Having asked about the establishment, I feel that I must not leave the Temple of Learning without some further show of interest in its doings. So after being introduced to the Principal as "the gentleman from Bassein," I sit

HPOONGYEES AND SCHOLARS.

down on a box and request him to point out the best boy in the school. This gratifies his pride, and enables him to pay a neat compliment to the Government official, which will be a stroke of diplomacy.

"I think Shway Pho is a wise boy," says the preceptor thoughtfully, settling his spectacles on his nose. "Will your honour ask him questions?"

Moung Daw grins a grin of paternal pride, which dignity urges him to conceal with the back of his hand.

"My son, your honour: Shway Pho is *my* son." I make a suitable reply, and turn my attention to the dirty-faced brown imp, who in obedience to the hpoon-gyee's summons squats before me. His cocoanut of a head is shaved bare, excepting a patch at the top, whence a wisp of black hair falls on his shoulders; he is inexpensively dressed in a necklace of small beads; a costume well adapted to the climate.

The examination is not a very severe one. Shway Pho can say his alphabet right through without a mistake, and can multiply two by two correctly after thinking the sum over for a bit; and considering that he has only enjoyed the advantages of the kyoung for one year and a-half, perhaps that is as much as can be expected. He is also master of a brief Pali prayer, which he gabbles through at a gallop, secure in my ignorance of a language that might be called the Latin of Burma. He doesn't understand it himself, but Moung Daw says, "It is the custom to learn this," so that I suppose is conclusive.

The other children look on with breathless attention, and smile their congratulations to the candidate as he returns demurely to his place, exhibiting the new four-anna piece I have awarded him.

A low standard of education is universal throughout Burma. In every village resides a hpoongyee who teaches the children the elements of reading, writing, and arithmetic, and it is rare to meet a man who does not possess these accomplishments in a greater or less degree. School fees are paid by the parents in kind—rice, betelnuts, dried fish, vegetables, &c.; and as it is a "work of merit" to feed the reverend gentleman, he is usually quite the fattest man in the village.

The existence led by the majority of the priesthood must have great attractions for the lazy Burman, who is happiest when utterly idle. Living in the seclusion of the kyoung, the ascetic hpoongyee passes his day in meditation (this state might be called "sleep" if you or I sank into it) and in reading. The younger members form a procession every morning, and file through the town with the globular begging-pots slung from their shoulders and held with both hands. With eyes bent on the ground that they may rest on no woman, they pass from house to house, their appearance being the signal for the lady of the establishment to issue forth with a bowl of rice which she drops into the begging-pot. The recipient does not raise his eyes or acknowledge the charity; he passes on, keeping them downcast, no doubt on the pot, taking mental notes of the size of each contribution. After their daily round, they return to the kyoung with the food, which must be eaten by the priests before noon. The rice thus collected is supposed to be all the nourishment wherewith a hpoongyee sustains life. But it is—in a large monastery at all events—generally consumed by the younger priests and the lads who, in accordance with Burmese custom, are spending their two or three months in residence at the

kyoung; a better meal being cooked on the premises for the elders. In villages where there is but one priest he is the schoolmaster, and as such fairly earns the support his flock bring him daily.

The shadows are beginning to lengthen at last, and the hot, sultry day is more bearable as we return to the village, where the people are congregated about the street. A group squats gossiping here, half-a-dozen youths are playing football there, and in a secluded space between two houses an excited gathering is revelling in the pleasures of a cock-fight.

This last amusement is forbidden under English law, and is not much practised in the larger towns, where detection means appearance before, and fining by, an English magistrate. In villages, however, the sport flourishes, for native officials cannot be trusted to put it down. Moung Daw was a Burman before he was a Government servant, and looks with a lenient eye on the doings of the law-breakers who are passing the cool of the day in the pastime they love beyond all that the round of daily life affords.

A space ten feet in diameter is densely surrounded with spectators, and within the ring squat the owners opposite each other, preparing their birds for battle. Each man is holding a cock between his knees, and with the palms of his hands is ruffling the feathers of the neck briskly up the wrong way; a proceeding which appears to have the effect of rousing its angry passions. This preliminary over, the owners take their cocks round the body and swing them to and fro, almost allowing their beaks to meet at each advance. Excited by this treatment to the highest pitch, the birds lose no time in coming to close quarters as soon as they are released

with a gentle cast towards each other by way of a final hint. They are not handsome creatures, these two, but full of fight, and prized accordingly. No spurs are worn, but the combatants make terrible use of their natural weapons, pecking, striking, and clawing viciously, whilst their owners, on all fours, hover round them with chirps and words of encouragement. The furious scuffle, half obscured in a cloud of dust and feathers, results at last in the leggiest, shabbiest, most disreputable-looking fowl of the pair gaining the advantage. A bony-looking scarecrow before the fight, his best friend would barely recognise the victorious champion now, as his backers, who have hitherto watched the bout with speechless eagerness, relieve their pent-up feelings with loudly howled scraps of inharmonious song, and displays of the remarkable posturing which the Burman regards as dancing. The crowd dissolves, and the owners secure their birds, lavishing caresses or abuse as their respective performances merit. The football players pause in their interminable game to ask whose cock has won, and hear particulars of the "form" displayed by Moung Gyaw's new champion; resuming their amusement with the additional zest of a new topic of conversation.

Burmese football deserves a word of notice, being one of the most popular games in which the men indulge. The plaything is a basket-work ball about eight inches in diameter, and the object of the players is to kick it from one to the other without allowing it to fall to the ground. No sides are formed, and any number apparently can join in the game, standing in a circle a few feet apart. The ball is started by a gentle kick from one player's doubled-up toes; another receives it upon his knee, wherewith he drives it skyward to be caught by a

third, who allows it to fall behind him, and sends it up again with a well-directed kick of the heel. Good players keep the light ball up for a long time, timing and directing blind kicks with wonderful accuracy. It is not an intellectual game, perhaps, but it has great vogue among the Burmese.

I am sorry to find on my return to the goung's house that Moung Tso has given grave offence to Moung Daw by addressing him before the villagers without proper respect. Interrogated, he thinks that Moung Tso is a very proud boy, and wants hard words: no good boy would call the goung of a village, and an old man, "Moung," without prefixing "Ko." It is highly improper, and he requests that I will direct the proud servant to address him in future as "Ko Moung Daw," and nothing less. I undertake to correct the boy at once, but as I speak my wandering eye happens to rest upon the delinquent, and I think after all Moung Tso has some excuse for his aggressive pride. What young village Burman could parade amongst his fellow-countrymen in a London-made black tail-coat, and receive their just admiration, without rising the least bit in his own estimation? The total sacrifice of comfort is nothing to him as, conscious of the sensation his appearance creates, he swaggers blandly down the street, smoking one of my cheroots.

I call him to me and administer the wigging he wants. I wish I could do justice to the figure before me: a sturdy, dark-skinned youth, five feet nothing in height, with masses of black hair drawn off his face and neck, coiled in a loose shaggy *young* or knot on the top of his head. His garments are but two; a red cotton pasoh, tucked tightly up round his thighs, as if to conceal it as

much as possible, and my superannuated coat, which hangs from his shoulders in graceful amplitude to far below his knees. The sleeves are turned back to show the now ragged lining halfway up to the elbows. The buttons are ignored, but the pockets are hardly equal to the strain on their capacity. Moung Tso has never owned a garment with pockets before, and makes the most of them. His betel-box—a lacquer-ware trifle, four inches in diameter—rattles against his calves; and a couple of spoons and the tin-cutter keep it company in the depths of one "back coat-bag," as he calls the tail pocket. The other contains a few useful sundries belonging to himself and to me, but why he has bestowed them there he is unable to explain, and their variety is so wide I will not hazard a guess.

The inventory comprises, among other items, two dusters and his own linen jacket (all dirty), a few boxes of matches, one large mango, a couple more spoons, and an assortment of discharged cartridge cases! As Moung Tso, fraught with apologies, sinks respectfully upon his heels, the contents of his pockets are more extravagantly in his way than ever, and, hidden to the tips of his ears in the turned up collar, he looks like a very large and rather ugly monkey. Crestfallen and humbled, he retires to a corner, and, after discharging the cargo detailed above, divests himself of his finery, which he rolls into the tightest possible parcel, evidently feeling his now snubbed condition unequal to supporting the grandeur of his coat for the present.

"We have not heard anything more about the dacoits, Moung Daw," I say, by way of turning the subject.

"I think Shway Hmaw was telling lies," says the

goung confidentially. I do not think dacoits would attack *my* village."

"Then you will be able to get men to row my boat back to Bassein to-morrow?"

"I will ask them, but they are too much afraid upon account of your honour."

My honour is bent upon getting away by the early tide to-morrow, and convinces Moung Daw of this. In spite of the loss of his confidence in Shway Hmaw who is a reliable man enough as his race goes, the goung is very nervous after darkness sets in, and actually forgets himself so far during the night as to wake me with anxious inquiries as to whether I hear guns! This looks serious, for, under ordinary circumstances, the Burman will never awaken a sleeping man; believing that the "life" during sleep takes temporary flight from the body in the form of a butterfly, which is invisible to mortal eye and uncertain in its movements. So, if a man be pinched or shaken during the absence of the butterfly, he will never wake again.

No dacoits disturb our rest, and by morning everyone seems to have forgotten the news that startled him twenty-four hours before. And as my boat pushes off into the stream, the wind bears to me Moung Daw's last farewell.

"Speak well of your honour's servants to his honour the Deputy Commissioner, and bring two soda-water bottles next time you come."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE BUSY SEASON.

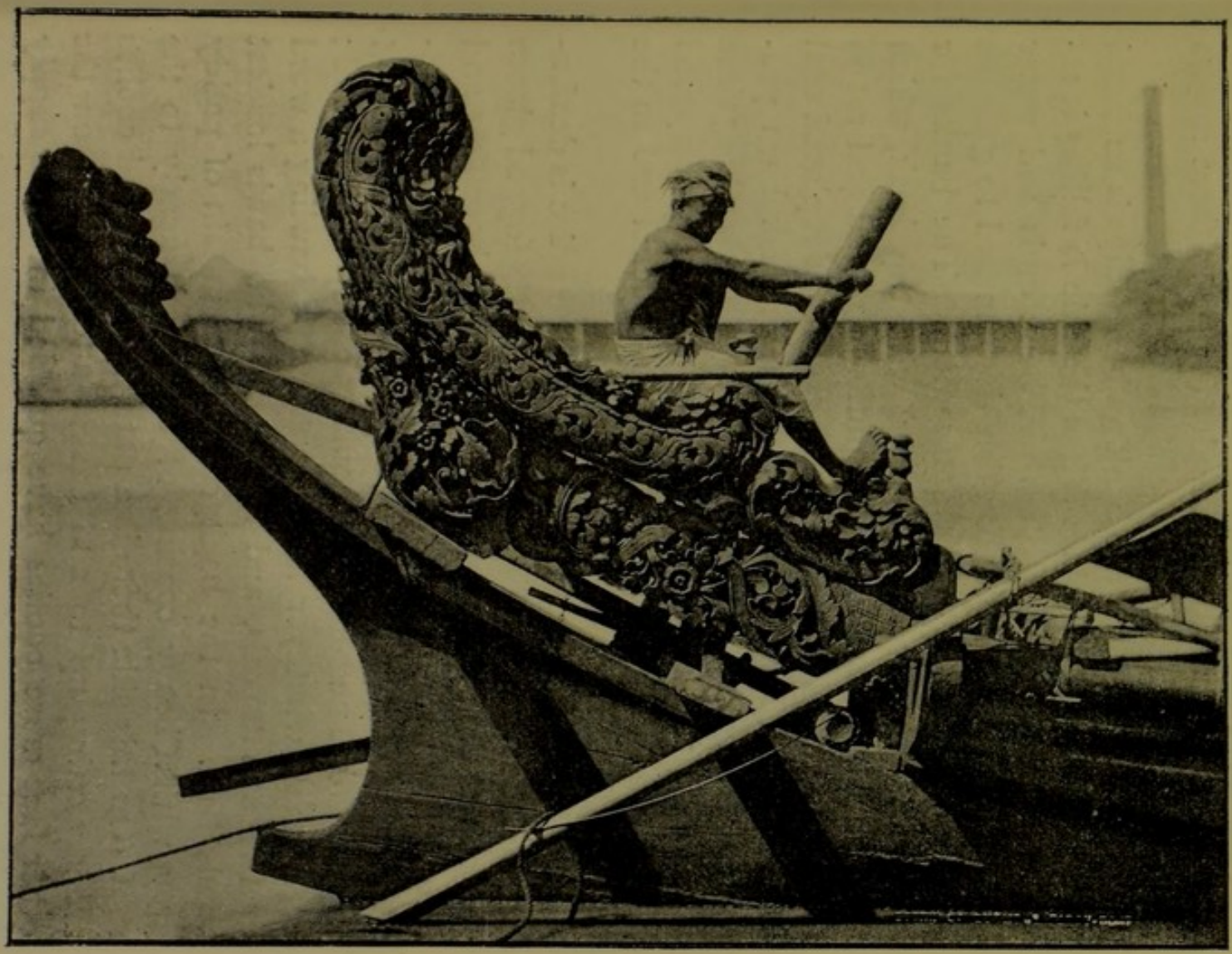
THE sun, pale and sickly, as though the hot night had disagreed with him, is rising over the jungle across the river. The steam whistle is screaming summons to the coolies, who are beginning to trickle from their lines; above the thundering hum of the mill rises the clank of a wheezy ship's pump and the sing-song cry of sailors. It is quite time to be out and at work.

We have reached mid-March, and the busy season is at its height. The great godown is a scene of bustle, compared to which a beehive is a Castle of Indolence. The view of the river is blocked by a big steamer and a full-rigged ship lying off the godown wharves, and two more vessels lying at anchor opposite the garden waiting their turn to come alongside for cargo. The tide is early this morning, and scores of paddy boats are coming up from the down-river creeks. In these disturbed times* the boatmen seek safety from dacoit attack in the narrow waterways by travelling in fleets, and, as their movements are governed by the tide, the whole of the down-river supplies for the day arrive within the space of a couple of hours. We are getting our full share of ar-

* 1887.

rivals, and the ballast-strewn bank is lined with grain-laden boats wedged together by the current, while late-comers, gunwale deep, creep up seeking space to push in. Coolies swarm up and down the slope between the godown and the boats wherein the Burmans, with unwonted energy, are filling baskets for them to carry ashore. The excitement attending discharge of paddy in a crowd like this seems to inspire the Burmese, and with pasohs tucked tight about their thighs, they scoop and shovel with a vigour that is quite refreshing.

Some of the boats are worth looking at. The curious lofty erection on the high up-curving stern, commonly called the "steering chair," in a large boat is always richly carved, from the base up to the little roof, which sometimes shelters the steersman's seat. It is the more striking as the rest of the vessel is left unadorned, except, perhaps, by a figure-head representing some reptile, bird, or beast unknown to zoology, which stands conspicuously on the extreme point of the prow. The boats vary in size, from the simple dug-out, whose full cargo is about fifty baskets (of about 40 pounds) to that carrying fourteen or sixteen hundred baskets. The large boats are decked something after the fashion of a canal-boat, and lying back over the steering chair are mast and sail. The mast of a Burmese boat is unlike that of all other craft. It consists of two bamboos tied together at the top, and held three or four feet apart at the base to form a narrow isosceles triangle. The lower ends of the bamboos are pierced, and run through with a stout piece of wood, each end of which is fixed into a short upright rivetted on either thwart or through the deck; thus arranged the mast can be raised and lowered with the greatest ease. You may always estimate the quantity



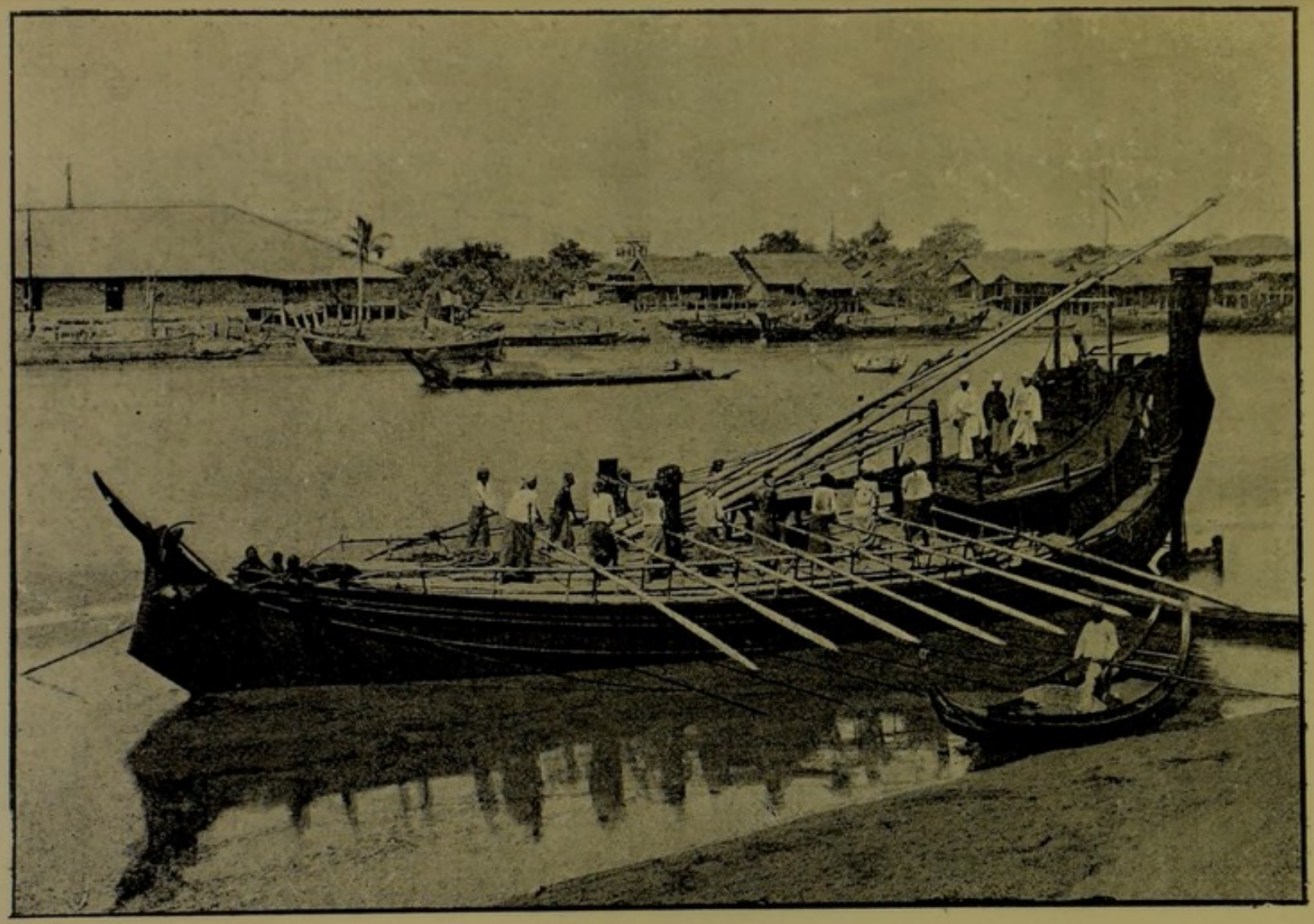
A STEERING CHAIR.

of paddy carried by any boat near enough to enable you to count the rowers who stand to pull. A boat with two oarsmen carries up to two hundred baskets, three rowers up to three hundred, five, five hundred, and so on.

The water between the bank and the ships is surfaced with yellow paddy husk. When the tide is falling it requires a keen eye to detect where bank ends and water begins, as many a little English dog, unused to godown life, has discovered to his amazement. The banks for miles down the river are covered with this husk, which floats in islands away from the mills to strand and rot in rain and sun. For several years now it has replaced coal as fuel in mill furnaces. How to make husk burn properly was a puzzle it took many clever heads a long time to solve. A considerable proportion of it is thus disposed of to the advantage of the mercantile pocket and to the benefit of the river.

Within the godown the air is dust, the noise is deafening and the heat is stifling. Through the befogged gloom you can make out dusky figures bending, shovelling, and throwing, among mounds of grain in process of measurement. Long lines of coolies, basket on head, are trotting to and fro. The "hish" of pouring paddy is all around; every man, whatever his occupation, is bawling a word or two at intervals, and in the din who bawls loudest bawls best. In the background, a mountain of paddy grey with a heavy coating of dust, rises nearly to the roof. On this side there is a path to the top, and coolies are streaming up to add basket after basket; on the other face more coolies have quarried into it to supply the bins which, as it were, form the ante-room to the mill,

From these bins the grain drifts by its own weight



PADDY BOAT.

into sloping double sieves, kept in perpetual motion by machinery, and is there separated from sticks, lumps of earth, straw, and stones. The dust from the sieves forms a grey curtain which divides the godown into two: so dense is it that even the coolies keep a cloth tied over mouth and nostrils. From the sieves the grain is caught in the elevators, endless bands carrying small zinc buckets, which run it up to the topmost floor of the mill. Thence it comes down to the "stones," and from these it goes to the fans to be separated from the husk and remaining impurities. From the fans the rice—as it may now be called—finds its way to the hoppers on the weighing floor a few yards from the spot whence it started as paddy, while the husk is diverted down metal gutters, polished like silver by the friction, to the furnaces and the creek. We mill only "five parts cargo" rice in Bassein; the process of milling and polishing "white" rice is much more elaborate.

It is a relief to get out of the mill when the thunder of machinery silences even the uproar in the godown. The weighing-floor is a busy spot, and a noisy. Coolies run from the weighing-machines to the sewing-floor with bag-laden trucks, which crash and rattle over the uneven boards. Out of the way, in a corner under the husk-shoot, sit half-a-dozen women with rows of little bamboo thimbles counting samples, to see that the proportions of husked and unhusked grain are correct; and farther on the sewing girls and boys, armed with curved packing needles and with hanks of twine round their necks, move slowly along close ranks of gaping bags. The sewing of the bags is an important part of the business, and receives at least its fair share of supervision from young "godown wallahs."

Beyond the sewing and weighing floors are comparative cleanliness and peace; for this is the part of the godown where the bags awaiting shipment are stacked mountains high in thousands. There are no Burmans here; only Chittagonian and Madras tallymen, and muscular Coringa coolies. A strong man is required to carry two hundred-weight bags of rice on his back all day, and the Coringa is the man for heavy work. The Burman, sturdy as he is, does not care for such labour; though, as I write I remember a single pair of tattooed legs in a long procession of bag-laden men. Why that isolated Burman consented to do coolie work I don't know; probably he was working off a debt to the Madras *maistri* who contracts to supply labour. An endless nasal chant rises from the groups of four, who stand lifting the bags from the stacks to load their brethren, but the long files of carriers trot to and fro in silence, dumping their burdens down on the ship's bulwarks and streaming back for more. From the bulwarks the bags are sent flying down wooden shoots, polished by friction, to zigzag from deck to 'tween deck, from 'tween to lower deck, and on to the depths of the hold. Supervision of loading and stowing is not agreeable work. The hundred annoyances and troubles contingent on proper execution of the task are multiplied by ten in the airless dark 110° or more of temperature, flavoured with bilge-water and hot coolie.

There are a dozen of my jungle friends about the place to-day; but while measuring is in progress they have neither eyes nor ears for anything else. It should not cost any great mental effort to keep count of baskets filled and emptied by bending angles in a slip of bamboo; but from the face the Burman wears while

doing it you would think he was pondering some abstruse problem involving the preservation of his life.

It is eleven o'clock and measuring is over. Coolies are carrying away twenty or thirty mounds of paddy direct to the bins, and the Burmans are drifting in their leisurely way to the office for the agreeable purpose of receiving their money. When I sit down, the back verandah is already crowded with groups of two and three ringing rupees on the cement floor.

'Well, Moung Myat what is it?"

Moung Myat is squatting on the door-sill holding out a couple of ten-rupee notes.

"Your honour, I do not want these."

Moung Tha Oo, the cashier, comes in from the clerk's office to explain that he is afraid of running short of silver before the launch comes back from Bassein with a fresh supply, so asked Moung Myat to take a little of his money in notes.

"The paper rupees are very good, Moung Myat. Dacoits will not steal paper rupees; they would be caught when they tried to change them. Paper money is good in the jungle."

"Silver is better," says Moung Myat, stolidly, "with your honour's leave I will have rupees."

It would be a mistake to refuse. So the good man receives cash and proceeds to add to the concert of jingling by testing the coins on the pavement. A beneficent Government has conferred upon Burma a comprehensive issue of notes of convenient denominations from Rs 5 and upwards, which, if only the villagers would take them, would greatly expedite the heavy task of paying in the busy season. But they prefer to load

themselves with hard cash. Probably because it is not easy to change notes in the jungle.

The ringing of rupees outside goes on gaily, punctuated from time to time by the crash of a loaded tray poured out to be counted. A good deal of bad money finds its way into circulation, and the Burman never thinks of leaving the office before he has rung each individual coin. So business-like is he in this respect that if you make him a present, he forthwith squats down and tests each rupee before he returns thanks.

This cautious habit once quite spoiled the effect (in our eyes) of what was intended to be an impressive ceremony. An elderly villager had been the means, by bringing us prompt information, of enabling the police to surprise and kill or capture the whole of a small but particularly troublesome dacoit gang, at a spot about four miles from Padoukchoung. When the police returned with their prisoners and other trophies, and when all the people from within half-a-mile were assembled round the office to see the sight, we presented the informer with a hundred rupees reward. While his conduct was made the text of an eulogistic little speech to encourage the others, the old gentleman sat at the orator's feet solemnly ringing his rupees. At its close he got up, and *coram populo* returned two as doubtful.

Inward promptings remind me that it is breakfast time. The office clock says it is a quarter to twelve, but breakfast time in the busy season is when you feel you must have something to eat. None but a native cook would tolerate the irregularity of our domestic arrangements at this time of the year. Our man keeps pace with us by simply posting his "matey boy" at the cookhouse door to watch when a master goes upstairs to tub.

The temptation to stay and wallow in the clear cold water on such mornings is strong; but time is precious and I am glad only to wash off the godown dust before scrambling into clean clothes and hurrying through breakfast.

As we sit down to table there comes from the river a long-drawn, hideous howl. Moung Tso, who has quite a talent for offering unnecessary information, kindly explains that the *kway meethimbaw* has arrived; he thinks from Rangoon. The steamers which traverse the winding creeks, in addition to powerful electric searchlights, are fitted with that horrible invention known as the "siren" whistle. Hence the Burmese, noting its resemblance to the baying of a gigantic pariah, have named the vessels "dog steamers." The howl adduces another reason for haste as to-day's Rangoon steamer brings the English mail, and that is sure to contain something demanding immediate attention. So forty minutes after leaving the office I am back again. In the back verandah a Burman constable from the *thannah* outside the compound, is squatting with a large, official-looking but dirty volume under his arm. This he presents with a profound shiko.

"Well, what is it?"

"Please write in the book."

"What do you want me to write?"

"Last night, your honour, a soldier fired his gun."

Since dacoity has been so rife in the district the isolated position of Padoukchoung indicated the desirability of better protection than the half-dozen Burman police quartered in the village afford. Hence we have been given a guard of twelve sepoys from the wing of the native regiment stationed at Bassein, and sentries

are posted at the gates and elsewhere at night when attempts at incendiarism are to be feared. Last night the man nearest the house saw somebody creeping across the bare patch of paddy-land on the opposite side of the road and, getting no answer to his challenge fired. Whoever the stealthy intruder was, he bolted promptly, and when we turned out the guard with the alacrity inspired by prospect of dacoit attack, the only thing to be found was a dah dropped in the hurry of flight.

Three lines suffice for the report required by police regulations, and the man retires to ascertain from one of the clerks the meaning of the words I have written; which he afterwards expounds to the inquisitive servants who waylay him. A sentry does not often discharge his rifle at the dead of night and the false alarm was quite an event.

A visit to the purgatorial depths of the vessels loading is the next item of the day's programme. Everything is going on smoothly, and after I have explained to the maistri on the sailer that, inasmuch as the anchor cable must be restored to the chain locker before the ship can possibly sail, it is unnecessary to swathe it in mats, I come ashore. (In stowing a rice cargo every inch of ironwork and wood is covered with bamboo lattice-work and mats to protect the bags.) The feats of stupidity a small gang of coolies can achieve without apparent effort are astounding. The heat of the outer world is scarcely more bearable than the air of the hold. Here and there on the galvanised iron roof of the godown the white coating of rice-dust has caught fire and is sending up pale wreaths of smoke. It looks alarming but is harmless.

The tide has been running down for the last two hours but the Burmans are in no hurry to start for home. Some have gone up to Bassein to make purchases in the bazaar; a few are still counting their money and the rest are smoking and chatting in the godown or wandering about the compound. The tame deer in their paddock have as usual a number of visitors, and the enclosure where my senior keeps half-a-hundred rabbits is also a centre of interest. There are hares in the Upper Province, and, I believe, in parts of the Lower; but few jungle men have seen a rabbit except at Padoukchoung. The Burman takes an intelligent interest in beast and bird. A Punjaubee who brought a camel to Rangoon, if I remember rightly on his way to Australia, made a small fortune by exhibiting it at two annas a head. We have none of the species in Burma and such an animal had never been seen in Rangoon before.

The day has reached its hottest. The punkah is flapping languidly, and every movement provokes a burst of perspiration. One wants much blotting-paper to turn out a presentable letter in this weather, when the chronic state of white man and native is moist.

The mail, a heavy bag of letters and papers, has arrived; and while the chaukidar sorts them on the office floor, under the directions of a kirani, a few of the Burmans lounging in the back verandah close up round the door beside my table to look on.

"Letters from England," remarks Moung Win to his friends. Moung Win has been here before on the incoming mail day so is naturally an authority.

"How do they come?"

"Steamer," replies Moung Win, with a sidelong nod towards the godown.

"I think those little letters would be lost in a steamer."

"No."

"It is very wonderful. See! the gentleman has received one, two, three letters."

Moung Win waddles a little nearer to perch frog-like on the doorsill. whence he can look over my table. The first letter is from home, and encloses a photograph of my father. Moung Win murmurs "A-a-a-h," in admiration and curiosity.

"His honour has received a *nay-yike-pone*" (lit. "sun strike picture"), he says aloud.

"Do you want to see it?" I enquire.

"Yes, yes, please," he answers eagerly, wiping his damp hands on his pasoh before stretching them out.

It is a pleasure to let a Burman look at anything; he treats it with such delicate care. Moung Win holds the portrait with a palm against either edge, and he and his friends study it in silence for a bit.

"Who is the gentleman, your honour?"

"My father."

Silence for twenty seconds.

"Your honour will *never* have so much hair on your face as your father," says Pho Myit critically.

"How old is your honour's father?" enquires Moung Win. And then the questions came thick and fast.

"Why does he wear those clothes?"

I don't know the Burmese for "uniform," so take refuge in the general statement that my father is a soldier.

"A boh?"

In default of a better word I say "Yes, an officer."

"Why does he wear rupees like that?"

"Those are not rupees; the Queen gives her soldiers round silver pieces when they have been in war."

"Ahmay!"

"Your honour's father is a great boh, is he not?"

I have no idea what the equivalent for "Colonel" may be—if there is one; so ask Moung Tha Oo, who comes in, what my father is. Moung Tha Oo glances at the photograph and briefly confers on my parent a distinction unknown to the Army list.

"He command a regiment, Sir?" To Moung Win. "The gentleman in the picture is a *sit-boh-gyee*."

"Great War Chief," echoes everybody now perfectly content: and I feel that the possession of so distinguished a father has raised me in their esteem.

I am glad photographs do not arrive every day. I am called upon to say whether my father "went to Mandalay." Why he did not go? How many men he commanded? How many people he had killed? And a score of other questions put three at a time, until I announce that I have much work and cannot talk any more. Softening the closure with an *Illustrated London News*, I wave the committee of enquiry back to the verandah, where they squat to inspect the pictures, commenting thereon in a strain generally original and sometimes discriminating.

"*Kinchao, punkah wallah!*" And the punkah whose swing had sunk to nine inches, starts with a vigorous jerk that makes the wheel groan. Punkah coolies are prone to doze in the heat of the day when they are most wanted, and drastic measures are necessary to keep them up to the mark. I knew one man who pulled very fairly well when sound asleep—he used his foot, like most of the fraternity—but this valuable accomplishment is not given to all.

Another visit to the loading vessels. The godown is clearer now measuring is over, and the only dust comes from the sieves. The stacks of bags have been reduced considerably since morning, and both steamer and sailer have sunk appreciably in the water. Everything appears to be going on well, but the engineer, whose eyelashes and moustaches are powdered white with rice dust remarks, as he scoops his forehead with one finger and shakes the resultant drops on the floor, "that we shall need to look out." Which means that his practised eye has detected symptoms of "scare" among the work-people.

Whenever there has been any special activity among the bad characters in the district, though the actual scene of the dacoity may be fifty miles away, the people work themselves into a state of nervous apprehension which often culminates in sudden unreasoning flight. The whole scattered staff is seized with panic, as though some mysterious spirit warning had descended. The consequences are troublesome, rather than serious, save when the nervous tension has reached a pitch which forbids night-work. Then the loss of time means loss of money. We can do nothing to prevent scares beyond keeping a European about the godown; his presence gives a certain amount of confidence. But with another mill four miles up the river to look after, and a European staff of only three, this cannot always be managed. Captains of vessels are invariably ready to give assistance, but the presence of even half-a-dozen sailors, who cannot speak to the people, produces no moral effect whatever. One day, after the mill had been abruptly deserted twice in the afternoon, we tried a demonstration of protective force by marching eight or ten chaukidars

armed with unloaded sniders into the godown. The manœuvre was a melancholy failure; the hands saw preparations to meet instant attack, and the stampede that followed was a little wilder than usual.

The sun is creeping across the verandah and the servants are beginning to wake up and move about the back premises, when we in the office are startled by silence, as the miller is awakened by the stopping of the wheel. With one accord chairs are kicked back—there is always the possibility that a scare is not groundless—and we are outside in a moment. A score of men with rags flying are racing across the mill compound; a dozen on the road have pulled up and are looking round fearfully; another crowd is straggling junglewards, while a shrill chorus of feminine enquiry comes from the coolie lines.

Within the godown there is not a soul. The last of the dust-cloud from the sieves is drifting out, leaving a broad, grey path over the boards. Bags, fallen from weighing machine and truck, lie limp, their contents shot far and wide. A symmetrical line of plump bags marks the route from stack to wharf. The hopper is still overflowing in a thin cataract, and the machines below are buried in rice. It is a hideous mess. My senior, who is the most orderly of mankind, groans; the engineer, who appears from the back regions, whither he had run to shut off steam, contemplates the spectacle unmoved. "An hour's work to put that right," he says, "That is when we're getting these folks back."

Those folks are in no haste to return. In the distance we can hear the maistries shouting and threatening what are doubtless unspeakable things, in Tamil; but

the coolies want to assure themselves, by lengthened survey of the outer world, before they venture in again. The mill hands recover courage first, and creep back to their places in an unobstrusive manner, edging unwillingly forward when asked why they ran away. The rice inspector explains that he went to stop the weighing men who, it seems, followed the truck coolies to ask what alarmed them. The *sircar* foreman went to detain his subordinates who, like the mill men and coolies ran away because they saw other people running, The sewing-girls make no excuses. "We were frightened," they say, with shamefaced giggles, "therefore we ran." Someone from the steamer's deck shouts to say that there are a dozen or two of niggers hiding in the after-hold, and shall he send his Jacks to haul them out? "Jack" as a messenger of peace to coolies is not a success, so a maistri is sent for the purpose. Judging by the number of men he coaxes out of a pitch-dark cave of bags, I conclude that coolie instinct regards a ship's hold as a hiding place more to be relied on than the jungle. However, the hiding place is a mere matter of expediency. On one occasion eight men packed themselves in the drain culvert under the road into the compound. The anxiety of those who were next the openings to get out of sight made things unpleasant for the first comers in the middle, and the quarrelling that ensued betrayed them to the maistri.

By degrees the staff is got together again; the booming hum breaks out, the dust floats and the godown recovers its normal aspect. But we have lost nearly two hours and that when we can ill spare it. Investigation proves the necessity, so the order goes out to work till midnight instead of six o'clock. It is a

chance whether during the extra six hours we recover the time lost. It all depends on the work-people's nerves.

"I should like a game of tennis," says my senior wistfully as we sit down in shirt sleeves to afternoon tea, "but there is no chance of it to-night."

There are evenings in the busy season when one of us, sometimes both, can run up to Bassein in the launch and put in a set or two on the club courts. But when "night work" is in orders that may not be; the more so when there has been a scare during the day.

The even tramp of feet below announces the arrival of the sepoy guard, and presently a messenger comes up to say that the *naique* begs permission to speak to the burra sahib. It appears that the warrior who fired his rifle last night thinks his services are worthy of recognition. Five rupees and a *chit* meet the case. I forget what the coveted document said. I know a suggestion that it should certify to the man's not having slept at his post on that particular night was rejected. Marvellous indeed is the greed of chits common to all Indian races. The more half-sheets of note-paper with four lines of writing the Madras or Bengal man can accumulate the prouder he is. I have no information concerning the bazaar price of chits; no doubt it fluctuates according to the laws of supply and demand; a very poor man can hire on moderate terms, but the more usual practice is to buy outright. The dates are troublesome things. White men are so suspicious that if a poor man's chits prove him to have been in only two stations under different masters at the same time he is called names and told to jao. It is of no use explaining that there is some mistake and that he can't read

English ; the master simply says, "So I should think," and throws his chits back at him.

The petition writer in the bazaar will read a chit for a few pice, but I fear he is sometimes very careless if not malicious. How otherwise should I once have found among several concise panegyrics of ancient dates on the excellencies of one Venkatsawmy the following modern testimonial?

"*Venkatsawmy has been my boy for three days. He leaves at my request. Rangoon,* 16*th May,* 1884.

(Signed) *W. H. A*——"

It is unfortunate or fortunate, according to point of view, that the range of names should be so limited. Ramasawmys, and Mahomed Alis, for instance are the easiest to suit with chits.

The Burman rarely asks for a "character." When Moung Tso and I parted, which we did only when I left the country, I offered to give him a special chit to a gentleman in the Forests department who happened to want a servant. Moung Tso said "it was good," and took a day's leave to go and make enquiries. His new employer's own character proved satisfactory, but Moung Tso found that the *thekinma* would not suit him, and negotiations fell through. What the lady's special shortcoming was he omitted to mention.

It is six o'clock and the shouting in the lines indicates that the night shift is being called out. Work on board the ships has ceased, and the bag coolies released for the day are wallowing luxuriously in the cool water. They do not often venture out of their depth, for there are sharks and crocodiles in the Ngawoon ; they are seldom seen, and though fatal accidents do occur they are very rare. In the creeks where men are few and far between

smooth shallow grooves, as though a canoe had been run upon the mud, prove how numerous are "muggers."

The routine business of the day has been finished off in a hurry to avoid the unpleasantness of working by lamp-light; the cash cellar is locked up, and the kiranis dismissed. It is already getting dark. Myriads of bats from the casings of the wooden ceiling are playing with soft flutter of wings among the punkah ropes. Two tiny owls are perched on a beam in the verandah evidently waiting till they shall be left alone with the bats. The office is closed and there is an hour to spare before dinner. Shall I read the home papers or risk a tub? The night-wind is blowing hot from the glowing roof of the godown and the idea of a plunge is alluring. But a cold bath after sundown is the pleasantest way of contracting fever, and I have had too much fever already. My tub must be shorn of its joy by hot water, and I am in no hurry for it. The papers, a cheroot, and long chair under the punkah to keep off the mosquitoes, therefore.

Dinner is generally a long and leisurely meal, with desultory talk of the "shop" order. But this evening it is a silent scramble for the boom of the eternal mill reminds us that the engineer is awaiting relief. Sometimes, when not working at night, friends come down from the town and we have a rubber, but during the busy season idleness is the greatest after-dinner luxury.

It is my lot to go and extend a protecting arm over the work-people, so Moung Tso is despatched to take a long chair to a particular spot on the weighing-floor. He bullies a meek chaukidar into doing this, reserving for his own burden a cheroot case and box of matches.

The air of the godown strikes hot and stuffy; the

iron roof retains its heat far into the night and the light wind from the river does not pass the stockade wall. In the alternate glare and shadow of the electric lights the people in their shrouds of dust look like spectres. Scantily attired coolies are sprawling asleep all over the place. The sewing girls ply their needles in sleepy silence. The clatter of trucks is the only sound besides the roaring of the mill-stones which seem to have awakened with the night. Bag follows bag from the scales to the sewing-floor. The crush is creeping slowly up to the weighing-machines; there will be a block in five minutes, but nobody sees it. The men at work do their tasks mechanically and the others sleep as though dacoits were not.

"Hi there, Maistri!"

But the maistri, stretched on a billowy couch of bags. is slumbering with open mouth, dreaming of pice. Another shout within a foot of his ear fails to disturb him, so I shake his arm vigorously.

"Coolies, man! Bring coolies and clear the place quickly!"

He jumps up with gurgling noises and looks about for his cane. With this he sets to work, rousing the sleepers with hideous cries, and flogging with frightful ferocity the bags whereon they lie. If he does hit a man it is by mistake. A gang of drowsy coolies is hustled and pushed to work; to the monotonous "ana-mahlay lay lay lay" chant, bags are swung up on bent shoulders, long files trot to and fro, and the floor is cleared. Then the men move away into their dark corners to sleep till they are wanted again.

For my part I lie and smoke idly, with an occasional stroll in the cool night outside for a change. No coolie

in the godown is better pleased than I am when it is time to give the word to stop, and the night chaukidars are left alone to nurse their sniders and meditate on the passing hours. The electric lights sink and die in a dull red glow, as I pass out on my way to the house. The guard at the mill gate is striking, with painful deliberation, twelve on the gong, and follows the performance with a solo to the effect that it is twelve o'clock and all's well. To which the chaukidars chorus,

"*Barra budga,—e barahbar* H-I-I-i-i-i!!"

They have good lungs and shout as if they liked it; but they must shout louder than that to wake me to-night.

CHAPTER IX.

THE KAREN AT HOME.

WE had had a long hot tramp over the dried-up paddy-fields from Kannee and the sight of Ko Chaik's house, standing in a small clearing in the dense jungle, was very welcome. A Karen house is not, as a rule, a picturesque building, and Ko Chaik's was no exception. From the back, as we approached it, the house resembled only a huge shallow box, standing on numerous rough piles six feet high, and surmounted by a low-pitched roof of dhunny. There were windows of a kind, but their positions and shape gave the impression that the architect had forgotten them when he designed his house, and, when it was finished, had desired the occupant of each room to cut his window where he liked if he wanted one. As most of them were protected by thin iron bars, the general effect was not cheerful.

There was no one to be seen about the house. The usual assortment of sleek, tawny pariah dogs and a few fowls and ducks revelled in the dirt among the piles, but the loud barking of the former, rushing to interview our legs, brought a small brown face to a window on the floor level. "Come in," said the proprietress of the face laconically. I accepted the invitation in its widest

sense, and carefully warding off the advances of the growling dogs, approached the entrance with my following of sixteen Burmans. Bidding these wait below, I climbed the irregular steps, and found myself in a large bare room, clear from floor to the thatched rafters. Save for one old tin lamp, a bamboo stool, and a dove in a cage, the reception room was devoid of furniture; it was open on the front, and partitioned from those parts of the mansion used as sleeping and cooking rooms on the remaining three sides.

Half a dozen Karens squatting in a row against the wall, blinked curiously at me. A mob of children, of all ages and both sexes, more or less—generally less—clothed, peered from the narrow doors which, irregular in size and style as the windows, opened on the private apartments. The young lady who had invited us in stood behind one small crowd, nursing a yellow baby about eighteen inches long, and plump as a young sucking pig. All remained silently staring, the men sleepily, the girls and children with all their eyes. Evidently a real live white man in solah topi, heavy nailed boots, and mud-coloured clothes, was a sight to be made the most of in these parts; so I sat down on the rail running across the open front, and, calling to the man who carried it to bring up my camp chair, helped myself to a long drink of water from the chatty in the corner.

"Is Ko Chaik here?" I inquired after a pause.

No one spoke, but one man gave his neighbour a nudge with his knee and grunted.

"Are you Ko Chaik?" said I to the nudged one.

"Yes," was the brief response.

"Can I sleep here to-night?"

"Yes."

"I have got sixteen men with me going to the jungles; can they sleep here too?"

"Yes."

"You have room for them?"

Ko Chaik again replied in the affirmative and turned his head in a clockworky way towards a door on the right, with a bored look which said, "Why on earth can't the stranger bring up his men and leave me alone?"

I called the men up, and their arrival with my guns and baggage brought the sleepy party to their senses; they got up and crowded round to examine everything with the searching but gentle curiosity displayed by a monkey when it receives its first bit of ice. I sat down and lit a cheroot to wait until the excitement had subsided, and presently a small dirty man, whose face was tattooed in a neat pink spot pattern, waddled over and squatted beside my chair. He looked me all over carefully, and after a minute survey of my boots, chewing his betel nut the while, prepared for conversation—that is to say, he expectorated largely through a hole in the floor, pulled his blue cotton pasoh well under him, and propped his back against the wall.

"Got any powder?"

"Yes; do you want some?"

"Yes. Got any caps?"

"No; my guns are *nouk-pwin* ("open-behind"—breech-loaders)."

Ko Chaik's eyes wandered slowly over to a dark corner, where I now perceived three or four ancient-looking double-barrelled muzzle-loaders standing against the wall. A Karen's ideas about guns are more practical than those of a Burman. If the latter can possess himself by any means of an antiquated specimen of firearm

that might once have been a gun, so long as it is recognisable as such it is the fetish of the owner's family. I don't mean to imply that it is regularly cleaned and taken care of, as a jungle Burman never cleans and seldom takes care of anything. But the gun is a gun, and is produced for exhibition to visitors from other villages, and the awful powers of slaughter owned by all guns, and this one in particular, enlarged upon with much vigorous action whenever a suitable occasion occurs.

The ownership of the Government licence to possess a gun also adds greatly to the social importance and moral weight of the holder ; and production of the gun is invariably followed by a display of the paper licence, stained, dirty, and curly from much handling and tight rolling in its case of hollow bamboo. It is not much to look at, certainly, but hasn't the police-goung* in the next village, whom everybody knows, got a brother whose wife's nephew has a friend who is in the Deputy Commissioner's office, and who speaks English? And did not that friend tell the police-goung's brother's wife's nephew that he saw the Ayaybaing (Deputy Commissioner) sign that very licence with a big feather pen? Of course he did! No one has suggested that he did not, but that does not matter, and Moung Pho Loo, or Ko Oung Gyee, puts away his passport to local consideration, and lights another large green cheroot with the air of a man whose position is quite unassailable ; as indeed it is.

"Want some lead," said Ko Chaik after a pause. My host was evidently a man of few words ; in fact, gave

* Police-goung : lit. "police head." The name is commonly applied to the native petty officer in charge of a police station.

one the idea that he was allowed only a small number for use every day.

"All right," I said. "I see you have guns over there; show me your Government licences, and I'll give you what you want."

"Got licences," said Ko Chaik.

I said I would see them in the evening, and proceeded to explain that I had stopped at his house to rest for the night, on my way to the Yomas to shoot, and wanted an elephant and some more men; should be back in three weeks or a month, and that Ko Chaik might come if he liked. I would pay him and his men.

"I'm a rich man," was his reply. "I'll come, and bring all my men. You can give them rice."

I didn't offer to pay this primitive Crœsus again, but told Moung Tso to get dinner ready, and asked Ko Chaik to eat with me. An invitation he accepted with a chuckle, and communicated to the friends behind him in a stage whisper.

"Let's go and get a jungle fowl for curry," I suggested.

Ko Chaik stiffened into a wooden image directly, and said briefly, "No."

"All my meat is in tin boxes," I urged. "Show me where your garden is, that I may shoot one."

"Not to-day; to-morrow I will go."

"Then sell me a fowl."

"To-day is Sunday," said the gentleman with grave emphasis.

I had forgotten the fact myself—indeed, had lost count of the days of the week in my wanderings, and was a little taken aback at being so suddenly brought to book in such a place by such a teacher. I had also

lost sight of the fact that very many of the Karens in Lower Burma are Christians, chiefly through the ministrations of the American Baptist missionaries. However, I did not want to offend a man who could be useful, so said I had forgotten the day. Forgot it was Sunday! How shocked he looked! owing, I afterwards discovered, to the presence of a catechumen from a school in Bassein, who was on a visit to him at the time. Ko Chaik often forgot Sunday in the jungle when I knew him better, but I never thought it advisable to remind him of the views he betrayed on the first day we met.

Evening was coming on, so I got out my towels and strolled down to a small stream to bathe. Which I did before an unblushing crowd of about five and twenty young people of both sexes, who watched the application of soap with intense interest. Travellers in the jungles of Burma must give up all idea of seclusion and propriety unless they carry tents; the mysteries of a white man's clothing are a source of endless amusement to the natives, and as they add to great hospitality and good-nature, pleasant manners and respect for one's property, their curiosity is less objectionable than it might be.

I finished dressing again and went back to the house followed by the regiment of children, who after a whispered conference with some of their elders, deputed a young lady—a Miss Chaik—to ask me to exhibit my legs again to those who had not seen them clearly whilst I was bathing. As they were liberally illustrated with tattooed figures, done a few years before by a Burmese artist of some eminence in this peculiar profession, I took off shoes and socks, and allowed the

admiring family to feast their eyes upon the rather spare limbs with which nature has endowed me.

Moung Daw, by right, I suppose, of his position as a Government official, seated himself before my camp chair, and gently possessing himself of my right ankle, proceeded to point out to the others the advantage of a white skin—as from a professional tattooer's point of view.

"That naga is well done," said this amateur showman whilst I shrank slightly from the lighted cheroot whose end he was innocently using as a pointer. "All the little marks show clear on a white man's skin; look at this on my leg" (he bared a brown thigh shamelessly), "you can just see it."

"Look at this peacock here," cried one of the audience; "it is very beautiful."

The art critics ceased comparing notes on the naga, and finding that my leg was not provided with a universal joint at the knee to allow it to be turned right round, stepped carefully over it, and sat down between my legs, stretched to their widest. As these two connoisseurs could now see both legs—an advantage they smilingly acknowledged to me as proprietor of the show—this vantage-ground was soon uncomfortably full. So releasing the leg on which Ko Chaik was discoursing and throwing it over the heads of those who had secured the best seats, I stood up and inquired for my shoes and socks. These were rescued from some of the younger members of the family, who, unable to see the legs, had privately attached my property, utilising the socks as gloves and the shoes as hammers.

"Will your honour bathe again to-morrow?" anxiously enquired a young man as I stamped on my shoes.

"I will if there is water in the jungle," I replied.

"I will follow you, then," said he. "I wish to see the tattooing again."

At this moment my loogalay, who had been asserting himself as a white man's servant ever since I arrived, came to get out the things for dinner. Fresh wonders! Enamelled tin dishes that could be thrown at a pariah dog and not break as a chatty would. Forks, one of which stuck into Mah Mee's bare foot, when she dropped it. Cow-flesh (beef) in tin boxes with no lids that could be opened, but was ready to eat without being cooked as soon as the top was cut off.

It was wonderful, and Ko Chaik was nervously anxious to begin his dinner. He approached Moung Tso, who was ostentatiously polishing a tin dish with his linen jacket, and squatting beside him entered into whispered conversation. Watching the pair out of the corner of one eye, it became evident that my servant was giving Ko Chaik a few hints on table etiquette. The spoon was clearly a stumbling-block; held firmly like a hammer it appeared quite difficult to manage, though after one or two trials the novice succeeded in getting a potato out of the pot and dropping it on the floor, whence it was rescued by Moung Tso's rather unwashed fingers, and returned to the pot by him with the dignified smile of superior talent.

The course of instruction was still proceeding when I called for dinner, and guest and servant hastily separated. The former squatted opposite me at the low camp table, on which he patiently rested his chin until the saucepan was brought to table (we don't always carry soup tureens in the jungle).

The meal began amid the hushed and curious whispers

of the family squatting round. Once well under way, Ko Chaik took his dinner like a man and enjoyed it. Soup in a tin pudding basin was good, but the spoon a very useless implement ; so grasping the bowl with both hands my guest poured what did not go over his bare shoulders down his throat. Recovering breath with a long sigh, he smiled pensively at the bowl on his lap and looked back at the saucepan, steaming in the middle of a group of his family, and presided over by Moung Tso. He evidently thought no more could be got from that source, so sighed again, and handed the bowl to his wife, who sat behind him nursing a baby.

Tinned beef and potatoes—excellent ; would like a little more of both ; had a good deal more of both, this time discarding the fork he first wielded, as he stuck it into his cheek before, and lost a large mouthful of beef. Rice with jam. This was the climax. Did not know rice could be so good ; mouthfuls (small) dispensed with the fingers to the youngsters, who clamour loudly for more. Would Ko Chaik have a little more? No more rice—there is little left, and I might want it—but some jam, the pot is still nearly full? By all means ; and Ko Chaik, clasping the jar and a spoon to his manly breast, backs in his squatting position against a post, where, using his spoon against the busy fingers of his children, plunged knuckle-deep in strawberries, the pot is soon cleared of its contents. The feast is over, and the jar rolls noisily over the uneven floor, now and then intercepted by a naked and sticky child, who peers searchingly into it to see if another little drop of juice can be fingered out. The children disappear one by one into the dark rooms behind, and the elder girls bring in one or two small and smoky lamps. The catechumen,

streaky with jam, whispers to Ko Chaik, who, streakier than all others, is smoking one of my cheroots—lit at the wrong end—in contented idleness. My host moves over to my chair.

"It is Sunday evening," he says, "we must now sing songs."

It does not seem quite what our *padre* would call "in accordance with the fitness of things," but I cheerfully assent, and take my seat facing the row of Karens, male and female, who are squatting on the floor in a semicircle round the catchumen, who has a hymn-book (English hymns translated) to himself. The others have one book to every four or five, and as the print is large and clear it can be seen easily by all when laid under a lamp.

The sun has set some time ago, and the dense foliage round the house is alive with fireflies, which play in countless swarms over certain bushes for which these insects appear to have a preference. There is the usual ringing scream of the huge green crickets, which nature provides ten sizes larger for Burma than for any other country. A couple of owls are flapping lazily round the house, close to the deep eaves, hooting dismally, as if bewailing the scarcity of rats in this out-of-the-way place.

Ko Chaik's elephant, a huge dusky form, stands on three legs, leaning against a tree, slowly waving his ragged leathery ears to keep off the mosquitoes which swarm about his neck. His bell jangles noisily now and again, provoking an irritable dog below the house to give a low growling bark. There is not a breath of wind stirring, and though it is the middle of January the night is hot and close.

The dim light of the lamps within falls upon a quaint picture. The girls have washed off the jam stains and all wear their best clothes and bead necklaces. The Karen girl's dress is pretty and picturesque. The tamein, or skirt, resembles that worn by the Burmese girl, but the Karen prefers more sober hues. A dark cloth sleeveless jacket made like a short shirt, cut in a low peak at the breast and back, replaces the Burmese white jacket and coloured neckerchief. This is decorated with scroll designs worked in coloured threads banded with narrow red and white braids, and sometimes with spangles bought in the bazaars. It is sometimes further embellished by narrow ribbons, generally made of red flannel, twenty inches long, which are sewn in pairs, under the armholes and at the breast and back. The effect is very pleasing when worn by a bright-looking Karen girl, whose beauty from an English standpoint is at least doubtful.

Ko Chaik comes over to sit beside me; he says he has been a Christian for so many years that he knows the words of all the hymns, and does not want a book.

All are grave, and much in earnest. The catechumen, seated in their midst, gives out a number in a low tone, and then, after one or two false starts, pitches his voice in the key he wants, and the little circle takes up the refrain to the tune of "Ye banks and braes." My Burmese followers squat in a row behind them smoking silently, understanding nothing except that it is the English form of worship which the Karen—despised by the Burman—has in common with the master race. A fact to which they are quite as indifferent as Burmese are by nature to everything that does not concern them personally.

The first hymn over, the Lord's Prayer is repeated by

KAREN GIRLS.

all. This I learn from Ko Chaik who takes no part in the family worship, but constitutes himself Karen-Burmese interpreter. Then another hymn—the Old Hundredth this time—after which a second brief prayer is hastily repeated (I can hardly say offered) by the catechumen, and the family rises quietly, and troops off to bed.

Ko Chaik remains sitting silently by my side.

"They sing very well," I say, to rouse him up.

"Your honour doesn't understand the Karen language," he says, using the respectful *thekin*, for the first time. I acknowledge my ignorance, but point out that as we both speak Burmese it does not much matter, though I should like to understand the words his children sing.

"They are all from the English books," says Ko Chaik, as if that gave me a perfect insight into all the words that had been, and might be, sung. "Shall my children sing for you again?" he adds after a pause. I ask that they may if they don't want to sleep now; and, at a sign from the father to one daughter, who has been peeping through a crack in the door instead of going to bed, the whole tribe returns with lamps and books; the young ladies smiling coyly, and flopping down on the floor, as if it was really too bad to be brought back this way, you know, but suppose, since the white stranger wishes it, it must be done.

This is not a serious matter like Evening Service, so much mutual recrimination and squabbling takes place before a hymn is decided on. Once started, however, they go straight ahead through the hymn-book. The precentor makes the usual false starts at each beginning, which are taken as a matter of course; but now fairly begun there is no stopping them. I shall never ask

a Karen family to sing for me again, I think. Ko Chaik's olive-branches, under the catechumen's able leadership, sang through six hymns averaging five verses each before I could prevail on them to believe that I was satisfied. All were well-known English or American tunes, some hardly recognisable; but the singers' voices were sweet and true, and their "time" was really good.

The catechumen had taught them during his occasional visits, and proudly remarked that they could not sing like that unless he was there. He was going away to-morrow, he added; and as I expressed my regret at his prospective departure, I could not but feel that it might perhaps be an advantage if I should find it necessary to remain under that roof another day.

I stood up yawning and said I should now go to bed; whereupon Ko Chaik scuttled into a long narrow room to show me where Moung Tso had put the blankets. My followers were stretched in a long row, tucked up, heads and all, under their pasohs, some snoring, others chatting in low tones. Having had a long march that day, and the prospect of another and harder one the next, I was quite ready to retire; and sitting down on my kit-bag, took that most useful of jungle comforts, my air-pillow, and began to blow it up.

The Burman nearest my corner, who had lain awake watching my preparations for bed with sleepy interest, sprang to life with a start as he saw the pillow increasing in bulk, and sat bolt upright on his mat.

"Ahmay!" exclaimed he, under his breath. "He, Moung Gyee! Oo Gyaw! Poh Gine! Hi! you fellows! look here, all of you: look at this!"

Slumberers were rapidly awakened by the noisy scrambling of the wakeful members of the party, and I

was soon surrounded by a crowd of squatting figures, whose long dishevelled black hair and eager dark faces made a wild picture. Ko Chaik and his family, awakened by the scramble and loudly-murmured "Ahmays" as the pillow slowly swelled, glided in quickly by twos and threes, and by the time I had screwed up the nozzle the audience comprised the entire household and all the visitors.

"What's that thing for?" asked Moung Gyee, a little wizened-up man like a dried monkey.

"A pillow for the head," replied I.

A Burman has little hesitation in finding a name for a strange article.

"A wind head-bag," said Moung Daw promptly, and his remark elicited a universal murmur of "Houkbah houkbah," which might be freely translated as "Ah, yes, of course, of course."

The pillow was now gently taken from my knees, and passed from hand to hand, patted and pinched, squeezed, smelt, tasted, and bumped on the floor. Eyes were applied to the nozzle, but they could make little of that; and, after passing round the entire room and receiving as much criticism as a new fossil in the hands of a learned society, it was respectfully placed by Moung Daw at the top of the spread blankets, balanced on one end against the wall, where it continued to receive silent admiration.

"Show how it is done," was the next demand. I yawned widely, but unscrewed the tap and returned the curiosity to Moung Daw, who forced out the air in the faces of his friends, to their great satisfaction. I had begun to unbutton my gaiters whilst the second examination was going on, and was detected in the act when the pillow was handed back empty.

"The gentleman will undress now," was whispered excitedly; and those who had risen to go hastily reseated themselves, or moved over to get a better view.

The room was a large one, and as my travelling lamp stood on the floor near me, I was soon, with it, the centre of a tightly-packed circle of squatting figures in a space about six feet in diameter. The audience politely, but firmly, declined to go: so, seeing no way out of it, I began to undress. Each article was quietly taken from my hand as I removed it, and closely examined by every member of the party, who commented freely upon its appearance. This did not disturb me; but when I had exchanged my cords for *pyjamas*, and the former began to undergo scrutiny, I felt that I was blushing. A Burman is nothing if not candid, and those breeches, which had served me long and faithfully in their legitimate sphere of the saddle, and months since had been discarded as only good enough for shooting in, underwent as searching an inspection as if I were a spy suspected of conveying information written on my clothing.

"The cloth is very thick," said Moung Daw, who, often as I had stayed in his house, was quite as much interested as the Karen; "this would cost many rupees to buy."

"They are a little old," said a neighbour, putting on his spectacles (a present I'd given him—the old beast); "you see the cloth is very thin in some places, and there is a hole there."

He held them by the legs up to the light, and continued—

"Look at the buttons! does his honour button *all* those buttons every time he wears his clothing? It must occupy much time, does it not?" he added, addressing me between the legs of my breeches.

"Every time," I answered, briefly, for I was growing impatient; and the audience, broken up now into small groups, were discussing my apparel with a zest that bade fair to last until daylight.

"All those buttons! Every day! What a work!" said two or three in a breath.

"One button in each place would do well," said the critic in spectacles, laying down the pants, thoughtfully. "Why doesn't your honour sew up that large hole?" the terrible creature went on, sticking three dirty fingers through a rent in the leg. I deigned no answer to the last question, but turned to Ko Chaik, who was attentively considering the style of my shooting boots with one on each fist.

"Good boots," he remarked, half to himself. "I think the price must be about two rupees each?" he went on aloud, questioning me.

"No, no," said another; "they are very large beautiful boots, and they would cost quite eight rupees a pair to buy."

This extravagant opinion was received with much merriment, during which a slight "divarsion" was caused by a young Burman audaciously putting one on his bare foot, whence it was roughly snatched as he held his leg up to be admired.

"You will wear the gentleman's boot, Poh Gine! You son of a female dog, take it off!"

Thus Moung Daw the goung, with a severe scowl at the offender, as he stretched out an imperative hand and recovered the boot to return to me.

I had now slaked quite as much of their thirst for information as I felt inclined to; so, passing over a question as to the uselessness of wearing socks with

such fine boots as mine, I called up what must have been a very acid smile, and treated the audience to the following short speech :—

"My friends," I said, "you have to-day seen my legs and clothes, and you have also seen me take off the clothes, as you sat round me. You have seen me prepare the wind head-bag, and I now wish to sleep upon it. I am tired, and to-morrow we shall march many miles to the big jungles carrying our guns. You must therefore now go to sleep. This has been a poay-nya (show-night), but it is now over."

Everybody listened respectfully, interpolating solemn "houkbahs" when I paused. Having finished my remarks, I emphasised the last words by turning out the lamp, which action convinced those inclined to linger, and secured me the peace I had wanted for the last hour to go to sleep.

CHAPTER X.

WANTED, A LIGHT.

THE sun was nearing the summits of the distant mountain range before us; we had been working up stream since dawn against a strong current, and the men at the oars were growing tired.

"It was just about here," Stroke observed absently, but with remarkable distinctness, "that the ayay-baing thekin shot the tiger last cold season."

"It was killed by his honour at this place," assented Two, who, having pulled one oar against two all day, had had enough of it, "this is the very place."

I felt the eyes of my crew upon me in the brief silence which followed.

"I have heard," pursued Bow, with loud earnestness 'that there are many tigers about here."

"And deer," added Two.

"And sambhur," improved Stroke.

They pronounced every word with a care, positively pedantic. I did not know much Burmese and found it rather difficult to understand sometimes, but I could not have missed a syllable of these remarks had I tried. I felt three pairs of wistful eyes upon me again: it really was time that we made an end of our

day's journey, even though we had not reached our destination. There was no faltering in the rhythm of the short, deep stroke which jerked the heavy boat along, so I took the men's delicate hint, shut my book, scrambled from under the low tunnel of dhunny leaf which sheltered the after part of the boat and stood up to look round. The landscape was limited. Up and down, as far as the eye could reach, the broad river, smooth to oiliness, flowed between tall screens of khine grass; in the hazy distance upstream, loomed the dark mountain masses of Siam; on the left, a mile or so away, stretched irregular ranges of smaller hills clad with forest; but what manner of country lay between the river and these, the dense belt of grass concealed.

Mohamed Ali, shikari, cook, guide, valet, interpreter, and presently steersman, was scanning the monotonous left bank from his perch on the high carved stern. We had set out that morning with the idea of passing the night with an acquaintance of his who resided somewhere in this district, and to whom Mohamed Ali was wont to refer as "my friend who has a gun." How he determined his bearings was to me a mystery; but after muttering to himself for a time he made up his mind.

"Sahib," he said with decision, "the house of my friend who has a gun is very near."

Mohamed Ali's father was a Chittagong man, and his mother a Burmese woman; hence jungly Hindustani and the language of the country were alike to him. Me, he always addressed in the former to the exclusion of his Burmese half-brethren. He had a conscience and no caste; hence he was useful, beyond the utility of the ordinary follower.

I told him to steer for the bank and look out for a landing-place; for a broad reach of mud which sloped from the khine grass to the water's edge threatened difficulties. Mohamed Ali nodded sagaciously, saying he saw the *pul* (wharf), which seemed the landmark he had been looking out for. His discovery of it at long range did credit to his eyesight, for we were within fifty yards before I distinguished, half buried in grey mud, the grey tree trunk, which in every part of the Province is the Burman's apology for a landing-stage. Its native slipperiness was tempered by a coating of dry dirt which allowed me to land in my boots; and while the men brought ashore the baggage, and dragged the boat high up on the mud, I went to prospect.

The belt of khine grass was very narrow. Behind it a wide tract of grass land rolled upwards to the base of the hills; its gentle undulations were dotted with ragged patches of low bush, groves of bamboo and jack trees; the grass was thin and dusty, nowhere relieved by cultivation. The only sign of human presence at all was a little-used thread of a path winding in aimless sinuosities till it disappeared in a clump of magnificent timber which crowned a low hillock on the right. Altogether it looked promising country and I felt it would be hard luck if I spent my intended week in the district without getting a shot at something worthy the attention of my express.

Ten minutes' walk along the path aforesaid brought us to a tiny clearing in the group of forest trees; and here, as at the bottom of a well, we found the residence of Mohamed Ali's friend, whose name it now transpired was Pho Ywet. I have enjoyed the hospitality of many a Burmese house, but never of one quite equal to Pho

Ywet's in point of altitude and general airiness. Either the height of the encircling trees had inspired the builder with envy, or he had designed his house thus as a refuge from impossibly high floods, or — flattering thought—from the attacks of wild beasts. Sixteen or twenty stout, rough-hewn posts upheld, at twice my own height, a rude platform. On one side of this stood the dwelling itself, a structure of bamboo matting and thatch so slight that one trembled lest the rising evening breeze should whisk it bodily from its perch; it was walled on the sides overhanging the edges, and was open on the fourth which gave upon the larger and unoccupied part of the platform. This served as open-air kitchen and drying ground; and thereon squatted Mah Khin, Pho Ywet's wife, tending an earthenware rice-pot on a smoky little fire.

"Ho?" exclaimed the lady, questioningly, rising to her feet as the wild barking of a big brown pariah warned her of our approach.

"A gentleman," returned Mohamed Ali, tersely. His manner towards ladies was casual, one might say contemptuous; it was the one blot on an otherwise irreproachable character.

"He has gone to the cattle-pound," said Mah Khin; (the Burmese wife, like the Scotch, refers to her spouse as the only man in the world). "*Heh, kway!*"

The latter remark, emphasised by a well-aimed billet of wood, was directed at the dog, which, with bared fangs and bristling back, was circling nimbly round my legs.

"Come up, your honour," said Mah Khin, adjusting her blue and yellow striped tamein—it was her sole garment, that once gaudy piece of cotton, but it veiled

her knees and its upper marge revealed little that an Englishwoman's ball dress conceals. "Come in, this side."

A primitive ladder afforded access to the establishment; for convenience of removal at night it was not tied to the edge of the platform against which it leaned at an angle of about thirty degrees. As I crawled along the irregular rungs it bent like a trout-rod, and it struck me that Mah Khin's visitors must be, for the most part, monkeys. Nor when I reached the platform could I spare attention for anything but my foothold. The floor consisted of three-inch bamboos loosely lashed at intervals of their own width to the supporting cross-beams. To walk across was tolerably easy; but to traverse the platform lengthwise was a feat the inexperienced might not lightly attempt.

Mohamed Ali and the boatmen, having stowed the baggage in the house, seated themselves, facing inwards, on the edge of the platform, seemingly oblivious of the fact that loss of balance meant a broken neck. Our hostess relinquished her culinary operations, and sat on her heels to inspect me at leisure. White visitors to the district were, doubtless, few and far between, for there was no village within miles to claim the attention of Government officers.

"His legs are very thin," she observed critically, eyeing my nether extremities, "how can he walk?"

Mohamed Ali grunted disapprobation, and the boatmen laughed. My calves certainly compared very badly with those of the sturdy Burmans, but my followers had learned ere now that I could walk, if need be, much further than their laziness approved.

"Why does your honour come to this place?" en-

quired Mah Khin, recognising my comprehension of her former speech, but in no way abashed by it. "What will you do here?"

I told her I had come to shoot, and wanted to stay in her house for a night or two. To which she responded that "it was very good," for a tiger had been prowling about the cattle-pen, and within the last two nights had killed two cows.

"A leopard?" I suggested.

Mah Khin did not know; it might be big tiger or it might be little one; I should be able to see for myself by the footmarks. What she did know was that it had killed two beautiful cows, and, no doubt, would kill more if it was not shot. Pho Ywet's gun was too old to kill tigers, so he said; but I could easily shoot it with those two fine guns. Now, how much did they cost?

The Burman is strong both in candour and curiosity. Our common mother would seem to have made special bequest of her stock of the latter weakness to Burma. Mah Khin's appetite for information, whetted by my reply, forthwith mastered her, and she set to work in earnest. Did I come from Tavoy? Yes. Did I live at Tavoy? No. Where then? At Rangoon. A-a-a-h! (Pause. Rangoon was obviously a mere name to this daughter of the jungle; probably she thought of the city as an excrescence of the Shway Dagone Pagoda.) That was a good coat I was wearing; did I buy that in Rangoon? No, in England. A-a-a-a-h! But then, how much did it cost?

The rice-pot considerately boiled over at this juncture, and Mah Khin reluctantly rose to attend to it. Having poured off the water through the floor she set the rice aside to cool, and returned to resume the catechism.

But she had had only time to ascertain my age when the screaking of the ladder announced her husband's arrival, and suggested the propriety of getting dinner ready. Pho Ywet was a short thick-set man, unusually muscular even for a Burman; a score of smooth wart-like lumps and drawn scars all over his breast showed how well he was supplied with charms against death, accident, and illness. His pasoli was folded tightly round his thighs, and he carried an ugly-looking dah in his hand. Seeing me, as he reached the platform, he dropped his weapon and collapsed in a profound shikoh. Then, respectfully doubled up in an attitude which severe internal pains might induce in a white man, he crept across to the verandah to interview Mohamed Ali, who was busying himself with preparations for my dinner.

The sun had gone down, and night was closing in. The musical cooing of doves in surrounding trees had ceased, and the air was full of the cricket's shrill night-song. Shadowy bats flitted about the low-pitched roof, devouring the insects which swarmed in the firelight. The young moon, a hand's breadth above the darkening sky-line, glinted through the tree trunks, and against the leaf-girt purple above floated the brilliant stars.

Mah Khin, remarking that "the sky is closing," set to work to cut the squares of plantain leaf, which are the plates of jungle people. On these she pressed big double-handfuls of steaming rice, and having produced from a dark corner of the house a battered lacquer tray with ngapee and other mysterious edibles, she put it down near the rice-plates, and dinner was served.

"Come, good men!" she said laconically; and the boatmen, who had been watching the preparations with

all their eyes, drew near, and with never a word of acknowledgment, squatted down to eat. Mah Khin, having seen her guests fairly started, left them to come over and look on at the dishing-up of my dinner, a rough and ready process enough in all conscience as executed by Mohamed Ali, but one she evidently considered worth study in its employment of fork and spoon instead of fingers. My modest table furniture, too, presented attractions which excited Mah Khin's outspoken admiration.

"This is a beautiful little pot," she said, carefully taking up an enamelled iron pie-dish in which Mohamed Ali had brought a small and sickly-looking boiled fowl, "very beautiful"; she held the fowl in its place with one hand, while she turned the dish upside down to examine the bottom. "Has your honour got another pot like this?"

"I have another just like it, which I will give you," I replied gently, but firmly, recapturing my dinner, and turning it right side up.

"It is good," said Mah Khin gravely. "This thing is very useful, is it not? What is it called? Sah-poong? Has your honour got another—sah-poong?"

I had got another spoon, and presented it to Mah Khin on the spot. She said it was very good, and seeing that I was about to begin eating, took her present and retired into the background happy, to smoke her green cheroot until we should have finished.

It is a little curious that Burmese custom should allow women a freedom and universal equality with men in every phase of social life and intercourse save in the matter of eating. Even when husband and wife are alone together he satisfies his appetite before she touches

a morsel; it is the single discoverable suggestion of her inferiority. In all other concerns she is her husband's "partner" in the fullest sense of the word. When, for instance, the cultivator is negociating with the white man's broker for the sale of his paddy crop, the wife is there, and puts in her word as a matter of course: and as the Burmese woman has remarkably sound business instincts, it is, as often as not, her voice that decides the case.

The three heads which, for twenty minutes, had been industriously bobbing backwards—eating rice with the fingers entails work on the muscles of the neck—were at rest; the boatmen had dined, and sat smoking on the verandah. Pho Ywet, who had been sharing Mohamed Ali's dinner, wriggled to his feet, and crept in his attitude of deferential collapse to my side. He had a proposition to make.

"Will it please your honour to hunt the *gyee* (barking deer) with the *mee-toung?* The night is good; the moon will soon go."

Mohamed Ali had frequently enlarged upon the fascinations of sport with the mee-toung or fire-basket; but somehow or other we had never tried it. Probably because after tracking or beating in difficult jungle from dawn to dusk the temptations offered by pillow and blanket were too strong. This day, however, had been one of tedious indolence. I had been cooped up in the boat reading, eating, and smoking, and had had more than one nap. Mohamed Ali, too, was quite fresh; so I unhesitatingly closed with Pho Ywet's offer to show "good jungles."

I did not feel inclined to start so soon after dinner, however, and explained this to my acquiescent host.

Mohamed Ali brought the cheroot box and having lighted up—Pho Ywet and the shikari smoking one turn about—we settled down for a talk. Pho Ywet had plenty to tell about the game of the district. There was that brute of a tiger which had taken up its quarters on the hills over yonder, quite near the cattle-pound, and within the last month he had seen tracks of bison, sambhur, leopard, and also of *tsine* (wild cattle). Now, would I not like to kill a tsine? The meat is very good.

Involuntarily I glanced at Mohamed Ali; he caught my eye, but never a ghost of a smile betrayed that he knew of what the mention of tsine reminded me; it was a secret between us, and he had kept it loyally. I don't believe he will ever tell it, but I will:—When he was out with me on my first shooting trip in the country, we had taken up our quarters for a few days at some nameless village of half-a-dozen huts, whence the entire male population, consisting of nine men and boys, cheerfully turned out to beat for us. It was the first beat of the day, and not far from said village. Mohamed Ali had posted me in a thicket overlooking a long, narrow lane of grass, which wound like a stream between hills clothed with dense jungle. My ambush was not ten feet from the opposite wall of bush, and I sat there with cocked rifle in the breathless expectancy of a novice, Mohamed Ali crouching at my back. I felt his warning finger, and straining every nerve heard the deliberate approach of some animal. I should mention that the Burman goes about the business of beating very quietly; he loiters through the jungle tapping the trees with a stick, and rarely opens his mouth. Hence game is not alarmed. A few moments more and a Jersey-

cow-like head was peering at me over the bushes ten feet away. Vaguely I thought of the neighbouring village and straying kine. For full five seconds that animal and I looked into one another's eyes wondering what the other was doing there; then the head vanished. The bamboos crashed and burst before the rush of a heavy beast in flight, and I knew what I had not done.

"Ah, Sahib, Sahib! Ah, Sahib, Sahib, *Sahib!!*"

Mohamed Ali stood over me, beating his hirsute bosom with both hands in spasmodic grief; his eyes were full of tears.

"A cow?" I stammered, feeling very small.

"*Cow!!*" exclaimed my mentor, sitting down to rock himself to and fro and bang his breast till it sounded like a smothered drum. "*Cow, Sahib!* It was a tsine! *tsine!!* TSINE!!! Oh why did you not shoot? It was dead; it was killed! Why, Sahib, did you not fire?

A tsine! I do not think Mohamed Ali's sufferings were comparable with mine when I learned that the visitor was the rarest and finest game beast to be shot in the country; and he, like the patient man he is, forgave me on the spot.

"*Per-wah ni*, Sahib," he said, rising with a deep sigh, "never mind, you shall kill the next; there are many in this jungle." There may have been. But though we beat and tracked all that day and for many days afterwards, seldom returning to camp without something, the something was never a tsine.

That is the secret Mahomed Ali shares with me.

An hour later we begin to think about starting. The fewer the better is the rule for sport with the mee-toung, so the three boatmen, now snoring in chorus under their

pasohs, in the verandah, were left undisturbed. Pho Ywet dived into the darkness of the house and from behind the hanging cloths which screened Mah Khin's sleeping corner produced his gun, which he fingered fondly before handing to me. It was one of those quaint old firelocks often found in the hands of jungle men whose character or position entitle them to a gun licence. This one may have been at Waterloo, for the rust-eaten lock was engraved "TOWER, 1809," and "42nd F. G." was branded on the stock.

"A very fine gun, if you keep it clean," I remarked gravely, as I returned it to the proud owner.

"I have killed many deer with it," said Pho Ywet, "though my shot are not very good."

The Burman's ideas on the subject of gunnery are essentially crude. He seems to think that it is the gun's business, and not that of the gunner, to kill, and he regards the matter of charge as a minor detail. Hence he is prone to make the most of a present of powder by mixing a little charcoal with it—not injudicious, perhaps, in view of the usual antiquity of his weapon—and his shot he hammers for himself out of stray scraps of lead; for shot is expensive, and often the jungle man does not go near a town where ammunition can be bought, from year's end to year's end. That he succeeds in killing at all with the doctored powder, and dice-like fruits of his hammer, is attributable to his habit of waiting till he can almost touch his quarry. A fair running or flying shot never fails to evoke his loud admiration, for to attempt such a feat himself, even with a borrowed gun, never enters his mind.

Meantime Mohamed Ali had taken from its peg,—

a splinter stuck in a cracked beam,—the fire-basket we wanted for the night's work. It was an extinguisher-shaped contrivance, measuring perhaps eighteen inches from the wide bell-mouth to the apex. A chatty, containing earth-oil and some cotton wick, was placed inside, to be presently lighted; and Mohamed Ali having ascertained that the deep basket-work socket fixed to the side of the extinguisher would fit his head, took it by the cane loop, which served for hand carriage, and coughed his impatience to start. Pho Ywet put away his gun, and bracing his pasoh tightly about his loins, stuck his dah carelessly through its folds behind. I could never see a Burman push his dah into its customary resting-place, with the handle lying athwart his thigh, without a shudder. Instinctively one looks for spouting blood to mark the passage of the naked blade between garment and skin; but it never comes off.

I had no idea of shooting by the light of the meetoung, but, disinclined to wander unarmed about the jungle all night, buckled on my revolver and loaded my gun with bullet in one barrel and a swan-shot cartridge in the other, before I cautiously clambered downstairs. The ladder was run up on to the platform, making the eyrie inaccessible from without; and, the pariah having been admonished that his company was not wanted, we set out.

The sky had clouded over and the night was very dark; as good a one for our purpose as we could have wished. Pho Ywet led the way down a rough path through the heavy timber which presently gave place to bamboo brake; soon we emerged upon open country and reached a shallow *choung* or watercourse, through which we stumbled knee-deep in mud and water.

"Sahib, we will stop here a little time," said Mohamed Ali; and he and Pho Ywet squatted at the waterside while I felt my way up the bank and sat down to pour the water out of my boots. Sounds of plashing and plastering told that the men were coating the interior of the mee-toung with mud. This is necessary to prevent its catching fire.

"Now Sahib shall see his path," remarked Mohamed Ali, reappearing from the choung, which might have been bottomless for all I could see; and suiting the action to the word he struck a match and the wick blazed up in a bright though smoky flame. We were still far from the ground where we might look for game, so the shikari took the fire-basket by the loop, and, throwing a wide tunnel of light on the path, pushed on at his best pace, we trudging after him in silence but for Pho Ywet's occasional word of direction. The night was close and still; the ceaseless ringing chirrup of the crickets was the only sound in the jungle round us; now and again a dazzled bird fluttered for a moment in the light and vanished; in the foliage around twinkled the bright sparks of countless fireflies · huge bat-like moths played in the fire-lit wreaths of smoke that curled from the mouth of the mee-toung; spiders' webs as strong as silk stretching across from the bushes caught me across the face, and breaking, clung to my nose and eyelids as though bird-limed. The strength of the thread spun by the great black and red tree spider is extraordinary, and he delights in throwing it across a jungle path, where it may drag the white man's hat off his head.

We had been walking steadily for a good hour when the path suddenly widened and the hovering swarms of

fireflies outlined the jungle boundaries of open ground in front. Pho Ywet uttered the soft "cluck-cluck" the Burman uses as a signal when caution forbids intelligible speech; Mohamed Ali halted, and stirring up the lamp with a twig raised it carefully on to his head. Then walking forward a few paces he turned and threw the light upon us for an instant. The effect was startling. My eyes had grown used to the dark, and I could make out the man's retreating figure with some distinctness; but as the light flashed in my face he vanished; the oil-fed wick might have been a bonfire in a cavern's mouth on the distant hillside; the bearer might not have been there at all. Two minutes to get used to the dazzle would have dispelled the illusion, but the shikari knew better than show up humanity too long at this juncture. He turned about, and the glare swept away over undulating ground and patches of thorn bush. Pho Ywet touched my arm and we rejoined Mohamed Ali, who began business forthwith.

It is the habit of the gyee and some other species of deer to leave their jungle haunts at night and come out to feed on the grass in the open. Unless compelled by scarcity they never venture far from shelter, but graze along the edge of the jungle for convenience of prompt retreat if alarmed. In this particular glade the grass was fairly plentiful in a long depression which followed the line of the woodland, and along this Mohamed Ali led the way at a funereal pace, Pho Ywet and I following at arm's length behind the scope of the mee-toung as it was turned with slow regularity from side to side.

Speculation being rigidly limited to the ever-moving circle of light, watchfulness was never relaxed during the hours we followed the fruitless "mowing" of the

mee-toung. Any moment might show game, and the patch of light at last led my eyes mechanically. We were out of luck that night. Slowly we skirted round glade after glade and had seen nothing but a jungle cat, which stared for a second and bolted madly to the nearest cover, and a big brown pariah dog out hunting on his own account, who sidled away with the unobtrusive air of conscious wrong-doing. I was beginning to feel sleepy with the soft warmth of the night air and the soothing insect chorus, when Mohamed Ali suddenly stopped quartering the ground and threw the light fixedly on what appeared to my untrained sight to be nothing at all, at the same moment shaking his hand eagerly to enjoin redoubled caution. Continuing our advance at the same slow pace I saw in the charmed circle twenty yards away a pair of shining eyes fixed upon us; but to what they might belong it was impossible to guess. Mohamed Ali shook his hand behind him again, and Pho Ywet touched my gun; but I had no intention of finishing the business with that, and whispered in his ear, "With the dah." Nodding comprehension he drew the weapon and at a swift noiseless trot led the way on a wide semicircle till the owner of the eyes, a well-grown buck gyee, was silhouetted clear and statue-like against the fatal light, now within ten feet of it. There was a pause of half a second while I refused Pho Ywet's offered dah; mingled thoughts of butchery and possible bungling deterred me, and I motioned him on. He, quite willing to show his prowess, crouched and crept quickly and silently up behind the victim. I, used to the light, could see Mohamed Ali's legs; could not the deer? Pho Ywet brushed some dead herbage, and I trembled. But the deer, its short pointed antlers laid back, stood

as if fascinated. The flaming, smoking apparition was now almost over its head; Pho Ywet drew himself upright and sprang forward. His dah flashed in the light and seethed in living flesh. The fire-basket came down with a jerk, and from the ground illuminated a brief but desperate struggle. For half-a-minute men and hamstrung deer were indistinguishable. Then Mohamed Ali, dah in hand, rose breathless and gory, while the blood bubbled and trickled from the gashed throat of the gyee. Respect for the Precepts forbade Pho Ywet to kill the animal; there is nothing in Bhuddist law about houghing, so his conscience was, no doubt, quite clear.

The gyee was in perfect condition, weighing perhaps thirty pounds; no great burden for a sturdy fellow like Pho Ywet, who soon had it slung over his shoulders.

"We will now go that way," he remarked, settling the carcase comfortably against his back; "it is good jungle, and when his honour wishes to sleep he can go to my brother's house near the cattle-pen."

The work of the last fifteen minutes had banished drowsiness and I assented at once; but Mohamed Ali who was peering into the oil chatty, struck in with a decisive "No." He explained that when he dropped the mee-toung in his haste to seize the fallen gyee, most of the remaining oil had been jerked out, and what was left now would not last an hour. We must make our way straight to the house mentioned. It was disappointing; but even granting that Pho Ywet could find his way thither in the dark from wherever we chanced to be when the light gave out, it would be trying work to follow him through the brake and thorn in the pathless jungle. Mohamed Ali was right and I

told him to take the direction Pho Ywet indicated towards the house.

Our route now bent to the left towards the hills; and before we had gone far the level became an increasing slope, and the nature of the country changed. Instead of large and well defined stretches of grass, set in bamboo jungle, we wound in and out among clumps of low bush, and frequent outcrops of rock. Pho Ywet was not always certain of the route, and, at last, after one or two minor mistakes, we found ourselves in a *cul de sac* of thorns and were obliged to retrace our steps We were threading our way back through the bushes, using the mee-toung as a lantern, when I caught faintly that peculiar smell which makes the heart of one who knows it thump against his ribs, and tightens his grip on the rifle. With one accord we stopped, and as I cocked my gun, Mohamed Ali raised the light and spun it round till the flame blared angrily.

"*Kya*," muttered Pho Ywet nervously. "He has smelled the deer's blood, I think."

"It is," assented Mohamed Ali in a low tone which had no enthusiasm in it.

It was a nasty place in which to have come across a tiger. Among these natural shrub-beds he could dog our footsteps unseen, and if so minded, could attack at such close quarters that he would infallibly pull down his man before the quickest shot could cover him. And I was not a quick shot and moreover had had little experience of night-shooting. It was worse than useless to stand there wasting oil, so I told Mohamed Ali to put the mee-toung on his head reversed so as to throw the light behind us. It would be a bold tiger who attacked a party of three in front or in the face of a light. The

men agreed that this plan was good, and we resumed our march, my shikari adopting the further precaution of shouting, in Hindustani, reflections on the moral character of the tiger, its mother and female relatives, which would have made a respectable family tigress shudder. Pho Ywet followed suit with regrettable fluency in Burmese, which language, I may remark, affords large facilities for relieving the mind. This occupation gave the men heart, but diverted their attention from the task of seeking the path, now doubly difficult by reason of the reversed light; and the early result was we went astray again. The mistake was discovered presently, and while the men compared notes concerning the probable direction of some land-mark which ought to be in front but was not, I turned to look back along the way we had come. As I did so, an involuntary "Oh!" escaped me; for in the now sinking light of the mee-toung, not twenty paces in our rear, I saw through some foliage the fathomless green glare of eyes. The tiger was following us.

The situation was growing serious. In another quarter of an hour at most the light would burn itself out, and Pho Ywet, now thoroughly frightened, admitted that he did not know where he was. My shikari, much less familiar with the locality, could not put him right, but opined that we had better go back a little way.

"There is the tiger," objected Pho Ywet. "Why does his honour not shoot it?"

I had been fingering the triggers for the last two minutes half inclined to try a shot at those terrible unwinking eyes. But to fire at such a mark with the smoothbore by the meagre light of the mee-toung was too great a risk. I could certainly not expect

to kill; if I wounded the brute our position would be very much worse; and if I missed him, as was most probable, I threw away one of my precious ball cartridges for nothing. I had brought only four, and they must be kept for extremities: I therefore told Pho Ywet I would fire when it was necessary and it was quite needless just now.

"Go!" exclaimed Mohamed Ali sharply. "We will go back, but not past the tiger; this way is good. Make much noise shouting."

We struck off at right angles to the way we had come, and tramped along, bellowing at the top of our voices.

"We shall find the way," whispered the shikari, hoarse from his vocal exertions, "that jungle man is now so much afraid he knows nothing."

Pho Ywet could have carried the wiry little half-breed as easily as he did the deer, but had not one tenth his pluck. He walked on hitching his burden restlessly, and muttering his conviction that we should all be killed.

"When the fire is done," he began aloud—"Ahmay!"

Mohamed Ali had tripped, and stumbling shot the mee-toung off his head; the chatty fell from it and the light flicked out. Feeling in my pockets for matches I looked back to see if we were still followed, and my heart gave a jump that fairly shook me. The eyes were there and nearer than before; and as I looked they sank slowly to the earth. I knew what that meant, and my fingers trembled as they closed upon the matchbox.

"Light some sticks quickly," I said passing it to Mohamed Ali who stood urging me in a whisper to make haste. Between us we managed to drop the box, and the shikari's cry of vexation made the perspiration bead

out on my back. It was too much for Pho Ywet whose teeth had been chattering like castanets ; he swung the deer off his shoulder and disappeared in the dark.

"Come back," I shouted, "the tiger will catch you."

"Got them Sahib," said a voice at my feet ; and I heard Mahomed Ali scuttle off towards the bushes behind. As he ran, the eyes from which I had never moved mine, rose and floated round to a point much nearer, and pausing sank to earth again. Obviously the brute had seen my companions leave me, and though he would not face three men made light of one. My nerve was going rapidly. I raised my gun, fired both barrels and jumped as I have never jumped before, nor since, to one side to avoid the tiger's spring. A vicious roaring grunt followed the reports, but no charge, and Mohamed Ali screamed to fire again for I had not hit. Steadied by the tiger's half-heartedness, I pushed in fresh cartridges, looking eagerly for the eyes. They had gone. I took a few steps to the left and looked, but could see nothing ; to the right and forward, still no sign of the tiger. He must have sneaked away, unlikely as it seemed. I had not wounded him. Had only one of my swan-shot gone home, he would have charged instantly, and, moreover, Mohamed Ali was not the man to mistake the roar of a wounded tiger. Plainly the beast had thought better of it and had taken himself off.

Meantime Mohamed Ali, with the help of a handful of dry grass had set fire to a big thorn bush ; the flames leapt and crackled with growing fierceness till the whole was in a blaze that lighted up our surroundings clearly as day. Another bush and yet another caught, and soon the entire patch was a pool of leaping, roaring flame.

"That son of a she-dog has run away, Sahib" said

Mohamed Ali squatting on his heels near me where, I had thrown myself down at a comfortable distance from the bonfire. "With his dah we could cut wood for a proper fire."

I thought it very likely that Pho Ywet would return when he saw the blaze, and my surmise proved correct. He presented himself twisting his goung-boung about his head while he smiled the smile of a man who has just done something rather clever.

"The tiger will not come back now," he observed pleasantly, with a nod at the blaze.

"No," retorted Mohamed Ali, "or you would not have come back."

"I was very much afraid," said Pho Ywet with unhesitating candour. "I lay down in a hole when I heard his honour's gun, poung! poung!"

I told him he was safe, and sent him to cut bushes to make a fire. He was disinclined to go far, but in half an hour had collected enough to last for the short time remaining until dawn. I dropped off to sleep where I lay and did not awaken till sunrise, when we pulled ourselves together and made our way to the house we had been looking for.

I wish I could end this story as it ought to be ended. By rights of course when day broke we ought to have found an enormous tiger, shot through the eye and stone dead. I should have preferred that finale too; but as a fact, closest search revealed nothing but his pugs on the loose dusty ground; and they were not the largest tiger pugs I have seen either.

CHAPTER XI.

NOT BY APPOINTMENT.

"THERE'S nothing else for it: we must leave the dingheys and go on in the canoes." Thus spoke my companion, as he once more surveyed the rapids we had failed for the fifth time to pass in the heavy boats, and signed to the steersman of our craft to run it ashore.

We were making our way to a spot on the banks of the lovely Salween river, whither news of a tiger had attracted us. The place was difficult to reach at all times; utterly inaccessible during the rains and for two months after their cessation, for the great rainfall in Lower Burma swells the rivers to an incredible height. So the wild jungles of the Tenasserim Yomas are seldom disturbed by any but an occasional Karen who might fire a shot from his flint-lock once in ten days.

Now, in December, the swollen river had fallen nearly to its normal level, and we had arrived within ten miles of our destination, after much hard pulling, and towing when the rocky banks would allow, with frequent reminders of the dangers of our course from the hidden rocks below the surface. The place at which we had stopped was a wide basin strewn with gigantic rugged boulders, round which the waters boiled and seethed as

if rejoicing in their release from the gloomy rock-bound gorge above the rapid which formed the next stage of our journey. Clearly, there was nothing for it but to trust ourselves and our belongings to the Burmese canoes—a prospect I confess I hardly relished after eyeing the grand but turbulent stretch of water and the crank, narrow craft.

"Let's breakfast first," I said. "It must be nearly ten o'clock now, and it will take some time to get the things transferred."

E—— agreed, and whilst we ate our meal the boatmen redistributed the baggage contained in the two dingheys amongst three canoes, in which some care was necessary to stow it safely.

In half an hour we were again under way. Being the slighter man of the two, the smallest canoe fell to my lot; so seating myself in the bottom, which every five minutes was washed throughout by the water we shipped, I possessed myself of a paddle, and prepared to give as much assistance as could be reasonably expected of a man who had embarked with the conviction that his least movement would inevitably cause an upset.

Four sturdy Burmans manned the canoe, which further contained my kit, my guns in their waterproof cases, and a share of our stores. There was also tied by the leg to one of the narrow seats, a decoy cock, whose drooping tail and generally dejected look seemed to indicate that he was enjoying the voyage even less than I was. E—— followed in a larger canoe, which apparently leaked more than was conducive to comfort, for I noticed that he knelt in the bottom and was much occupied with a capacious tin bailer he held in both

hands. The third carried our servants, two large goats intended as bait for the tiger, and the tent. The last-named luxury E—— insisted on taking, in spite of the risk entailed in conveying so bulky an article in such a boat. It proved valuable however, for the nights were very misty and unusually cold for Burma.

I begin to feel more at ease as we glide up a back-water, past the foam at the foot of the rapid which rushes smoothly down in a wide unbroken sheet for a hundred and fifty yards, after leaving the gorge. We are close to it now, and Oo Byike, the old steersman, seated on the upward-curving stern with one muscular leg curled round below it, takes a firmer grasp of his long paddle, and with two plunging downward strokes, to which the crew instantly respond, drives the canoe into the middle of the rapid.

"*Heey, loolah! Hooh youkkya! Hlaw! Hlaw! Hlaw! Heey!*" (Hi, men! Hi, lads! Paddle! Paddle! Paddle! Hi!) he shouts. The men chorus a deep-chested "*Heey!*" and I skin my knuckles against the bulwarks in a wild effort to help with my paddle. The men lean forward and dig with desperate energy into the roaring flood that rises in a fountain of spray at the bow and hisses along the sides of the canoe. No more shouting now: we are well on our way up the rapid and dare not relax our efforts for a moment. The naked backs and arms before me show every sinew taxed to its utmost: with heads down and faces set, the men make their plunging strokes in perfect time and with extraordinary rapidity. We are gaining way steadily but slowly, and I see that if we are to reach the gorge this time it will be without a stroke to spare, so I seize my paddle and work until the perspiration flows freely. "*Thekin hlawdeh!*" (his

honour's paddling) barks Oo Byike behind me. The crew acknowledge the news with renewed efforts, and at length we feel the decreasing power of the current, and reach the pool for which our steersman has been directing our course for the past fifteen minutes.

"*Heey*," says Oo Byike, raising his paddle with a sigh of satisfaction.

"*Aaah*," echo the crew in a long-drawn breath as they also lay down their paddles to rest. "We could not have done it unless your honour paddled so hard," says Oo Byike to me. The men snigger openly at this barefaced flattery, but are instantly brought to their bearings by the old man, who points out in his most impressive way that the canoe behind us has been swept back again ; and that the other gentleman has not been paddling at all, which quite accounts for the failure.

The man at the bow finds a cleft in the rock into which he can stick his paddle and so moor the canoe, whilst the others turn to watch how our companions will accomplish the pass we have just overcome. It will take them some time to reach us, so I light a cheroot and study the view. From our nook it is wild and beautiful: the broad brown river swirls past between two rugged walls of rock which, ninety or a hundred feet above, fall back and rise steeply in jungle-clad mountains to the height of three or four thousand feet. Down the stream, across the basin, is a sloping green bank dotted with magnificent timber overgrown with flowering creepers. Sprinkled in countless numbers over rocks and trees are brilliant orchids, their lovely, scentless blossoms flashing pink, white, red and yellow in the sun. I recognise some varieties whose luxuriance would drive a collector wild with helpless envy; for Nature has

planted this wonderful garden far beyond reach of human hands.

The Salween is one of the great highways from the teak forests to the port of Maulmain. Every fissure and shelf amongst the rocks and boulders is occupied by immense teak logs which the swollen river has left there during the floods. Far out of reach, they lie heaped and piled in confusion, wedged hard and fast, though many look dangerous where they hang over the torrent eighty feet below. During the south-west monsoon thousands of trunks are floated, away up in the distant forests rarely visited by Europeans. Stripped of their bark, and branded all over with a hammer bearing the lessee's private mark, they are drawn by elephants to the water's edge to be carried away by the rising floods which bear them down to the Government timber-depôt two or three hundred miles off, near Maulmain. There they are identified and claimed by the lessee's agent, who pays the fee and removes his timber to ship or sell, as the case may be.

This casual method of conducting the trade provides means of livelihood for numbers of natives, who haunt the river with canoes and ropes to collect the drifting logs; for each of which they receive a reward of eight annas at the depôt. The marks obviate the likelihood of the timber being stolen by the collectors, who however sometimes get a windfall in the shape of an unbranded waif. On the upper reaches of the Salween, *kyodans*, enormous cables of bamboos lashed together, are stretched across from bank to bank and skim the surface of the water, arresting and detaining the drifting timber on its downward course. These the watchers at the kyodan collect and raft, to send on to the depôt and claim

the salvage. E—— whose knowledge of these matters qualified him to judge, estimated that on our upward voyage we passed a quantity of stranded timber sufficient to supply the Maulmain market (the largest in the East) for quite two years. This represented a sum of about one million and a quarter sterling in inaccessible logs! Much of the lumber would of course be borne away by the next floods which in their turn would leave more in the same case.

Whilst I have been admiring the prospect and discussing the teak-trade, E—— has succeeded in getting up the rapid, and now runs in alongside my canoe, heated, breathless, and ruffled in temper at the delay. The sun is hot, and the men are exhausted by their efforts to work the boat up, and must have rest before continuing the laborious paddle through the gorge. The servants' canoe is still in the midst of its difficulties and, badly steered, sways about in a manner that every moment threatens its destruction against the rocks.

"They'll lose the goats," says E——, shading his eyes with his topi: "I wish I'd taken them in my own canoe. Hi, Shway Loo!" he shouts to his servant, "hold the large goat, he will fall out."

The large goat is rolling about with such violence that Shway Loo has difficulty in securing its legs and throwing it on its back. It is safer that way, for whilst standing it had passed the time making half-hearted attempts to jump overboard.

Eventually the canoe arrives in safety, and presently all three crews settle down to paddle again, and continue the slow, trying journey up the stream together.

By-and-by we reach the end of the gorge and emerge upon a wider part of the river, where the current is less

powerful, and we can make better progress. From a long stretch of sand which now forms the left bank, we are hailed by some Burmans who have camped there to cut bamboos on the neighbouring hills, and crossing over to hear their tidings we learn that a large tiger has visited the locality every night since their arrival a week before. It roars so much that they are afraid and cannot sleep, and hope the gentlemen will bring their guns and kill it. We listen to their tale of woe and then run the canoes ashore. No mistake about it: numerous pugs on the sand confirm the bamboo-cutters' news, so the baggage is landed and the tent pitched in the shade of the jungle.

We have landed on a belt of forest which during the monsoon is an island, for behind it there is another broad curving sweep of sand, studded with rocks and pools and strewn with teak logs. Here and there the forest is divided by narrow creeks which mark the course of the river when in flood. Beyond the strip of sand are lofty hills, whose bamboo-covered slopes afford concealment to plentiful game, for sambhur tracks cross and recross the sand in every direction; the edge of one particular pool showing it to be a favourite resort of the deer for their nightly drink.

The place was beyond all doubt the regular "beat" of a tiger, possibly the one of which E—— had heard. Pugs old and recent formed many definite well-trodden paths, one of which ran within a few yards of the bamboo-cutters' hut, though concealed by jungle. He was certainly not far off now, and we congratulated ourselves on our luck in finding him at home.

Returning to camp we find everyone hard at work on the construction of a "lean-to" of bamboos and grass,

under whose shelter our followers intend to pass the night.

Evening is closing in, and we must delay the arrangement of a plan of campaign until to-morrow, when we can examine the locality. The difficulty of river transport forbade our bringing cows, and no one could be found willing to seek a path through the jungle by which they might be driven in this direction. Goats are a poor substitute for the larger cattle; we must sit over them all night, for a tiger would carry off such a mere mouthful as soon as he had killed it. Apparently the tiger rarely kills during broad day, and as seldom eats at night; but I express this opinion with diffidence, as my knowledge of the species is limited, confined to purely "game" tigers, who exist solely on deer, &c., and never tax village cattle-pens for their meat.

There is much difficulty as to the disposal of the goats to-night with "Stripes" in the immediate neighbourhood, and our decision to tether them near the lean-to is productive of a good deal of grumbling. Tie up goats beside poor naked boatmen! why they will cry all night and when the tiger comes it will certainly take a man instead: not a doubt of it. Near the tent, now, would be a much safer place. However we persuade them that there is no danger (for there really is none), and finally after lighting large fires at four different points round the lean-to, the occupants consent to picket the goats near it.

The morning breaks cold and misty. Surrounded as we are by mountains the sun cannot fall on our encampment until late; but we are awakened early by the weird howling of the gibbons, which were numerous though invisible on the hills across the river. We are

soon dressed and drinking our coffee by the fire; round which the men are congregated shivering, with their blankets over their heads.

A tour of inspection is necessary before we can make our arrangements; and previous to starting I recall a hint given me by a well-known shikari in India and make up a bundle of clothes—shirt, trousers, and thick coat—in a towel, and give it to Moung Tso to bury till evening. The earthy smell thus acquired by the clothes renders the presence of humanity less likely to be detected by the tiger.

To find trees adapted for machans is our first care, and in such extensive cover the only difficulty is to make a choice. We soon satisfy ourselves in this matter; and, after setting some of the men to work, go back to camp and breakfast.

The mist has cleared away and the sun is growing hot: the heat and the glare from the white sand drive E—— into the tent, where he lies smoking until sleep overtakes him.

It would never do to disturb the jungle by shooting to-day, so I call the young Burman who owns the decoy cock and tell him we will go and catch jungle-fowl. Proud of the invitation, he arms himself with a bundle of nooses, and taking the decoy carefully under his arm, leads the way across the sand into the shade of the bamboo jungle, through which he noiselessly and swiftly threads his way. Presently the crow of a jungle-cock in the distance brings him to a sudden standstill; and clearing the dead leaves from a space about eight feet in diameter, he drives the peg, to which the decoy is attached by the leg, into the ground, and sets about placing the snares. Each of these consists of a piece of

wood six inches long, to which an elastic slip of bamboo is neatly spliced; to the tip of the bamboo a plaited horse-hair slip-knot is bound; the snare when stuck into the earth being more than sufficient to withstand the wildest struggles of a jungle-fowl. A couple of dozen such nooses are driven in at intervals to completely surround the decoy, but well out of his reach, as he struts round and round his peg scratching amongst the roots and pluming himself.

We retire behind a clump of bushes and sit down to await victims. A loud crow from the decoy is soon answered by one from a cock some way off. Our bird, hearing it, stands more upright and listens for a few seconds before responding, which he does loudly and defiantly. Again the unseen jungle-cock crows: it is evidently approaching the decoy, whose excitement is manifest. He tugs at the cord, flapping his wings and calling angrily as he tries to free his leg. As the stranger draws near the interchange of crows becomes less vigorous, and at last he alights with a flutter on the ground outside the ring of nooses which are almost invisible from our ambush. With ruffled feathers and outstretched head he manœuvres round the decoy which stands impatiently awaiting his attack. With a shrill cry he comes on, straight at the foe, thirsting for battle. Alas for his hopes! A noose tightens round his leg, and, bending double with the strain, the springy bamboo converts his charge into an ignominious sprawl and whips him back with outspread wings. The plucky little chap is up again and with a shake of his firmly-entangled leg makes another charge at the excited decoy with the same result. The boy beside me, who has been watching the proceedings with open-mouthed interest,

does not seem in a hurry to complete the capture, but after a poke or two from my stick springs up and seizes the snared cock just as he succumbs to his fourth rush. Fighting his human foe gamely with beak and spurs he is deposited in a bag his captor carries, where he soon gives up struggling and lies motionless.

The common jungle-cock is one of the handsomest birds in Asia. Resembling a large bantam in shape, with bold upright carriage, splendidly varied plumage and long spurs, he looks a game-cock all over ; a determined fighter, he does not know when he is beaten, and I have seen a bird too exhausted to use his spurs seize his opponent by the hackle and cling to it with the tenacity of a bull-dog. The Burman enjoys few sports more than cock-fighting ; and in many districts seven paddy-boats out of ten may be seen with the owner's bird on board tied by the leg, ready for a bout if opportunity occurs.

When the shadows began to grow long we returned to the camp where, having finished dinner, I called on Moung Tso to produce the clothes I had given him in the morning. He received the order and started as if to carry it out, but stopped suddenly with a bewildered look round him. Taking a large splinter of bamboo he knelt down and began to grub in a speculative, uncertain way in the sand behind the tent ; he dug out a few handfuls and paused, rose from his knees, and looking doubtfully about selected a spot a few paces further on and began another hole. This attempt also proved futile, and Moung Tso, dropping his bamboo, thought hard for at least three minutes without moving. Again he roused himself and, grasping his shovel, devoted all his energies to digging a third hole, as if with the

unswerving purpose of finding the clothes this time, whether they were there or not. No result again; and my servant, in a profuse perspiration induced by overtaxed memory and hard work, sat down and rocked himself to and fro in sheer desperation. Then he sprang to his feet and walked hurriedly up and down, round the groups of men, round the tent and the fires, his brow wrinkled into an agonised frown of perplexity, and his eyes fixed upon the sand. Once more he paused; then taking a great resolution crawled timidly to my knees, and crouching respectfully on his heels begged for forgiveness. He could *not* find my honour's clothes!

I have told this little incident as an example of the exceedingly casual way in which a Burman servant performs his work, and not by way of accounting for our want of success that night; for E—— and I, posted in our machans, patiently watched our goats until day, undisturbed by the tiger. We have all read thrilling accounts of successful shooting; but no one obtrudes a record of monotonous wakeful nights, fruitlessly spent among the gloomy surroundings of the jungle waiting for the tiger that does not come. Yet to convey a true picture of shooting in the East, it were well that the aspiring shikari should feel, in print, his limbs grow stiff on the hard bamboos; the insects investigating his eyes and exploring the penetralia of his clothing, while he dare not smoke to keep them off. He should know what it is to depend on a goat which, reckless of missiles in the shape of sticks showered upon him, *will* lie down and go to sleep when it ought to stay awake and "baa." He should learn how it feels when after hours of watching, a family party of sambhur strolls past within easy shot, inviting the bullet that must be kept for the tiger

which may be afoot close by. This is so uninteresting and happens so often that your sporting writer does not mention it.

Disappointed at the tiger's failure to give us a meeting on the night we were prepared for him, we next day decided to let him take his chance, and arranged to spend the approaching night on the outlook for the sambhur which had tempted our guns on the previous one. I selected for my ambush a nook on a low sloping rock, overlooking a large pool round which there were numerous fresh tracks of deer. This nook I had roofed in roughly with khine grass to keep off the heavy dews, and to assist in concealing me.

It was a lovely moonlight night, clear and cold, when shortly after dark I took up my station, accompanied by a young Karen, to whom I entrusted the responsibility of keeping me awake. Hour after hour we sat there, three feet above the level of the sand to which the rock shelved gently down. The startling bark of a distant deer, the musical ringing call of the bell-bird, and the screaming of insects in the foliage around, were the only signs of life. Cold and chilly the night drew on, whilst on the far side of the pool, well out of range, an occasional sambhur issued from the jungle to stalk silent and ghost-like across the sand, stopping every dozen yards to sniff the air suspiciously. I leaned back against the rock, weary and sleepy, as a sambhur disappeared for the third time without giving me a shot: my rifle lay across my knees, and some evil spirit prompted me to open the breech, that it might lie more easily.

The moon was sinking; a white clammy mist came rolling in huge billows down the mountain-side, hiding

the trees thirty yards away, and making the night colder and damper with its heavy shroud. Darkness and discomfort have a bad effect on the nerves, and I felt, as I sat there, in no mood for great deeds of daring. Overcome by sleep I had dozed off, when my companion touched my arm lightly and whispered the single word "*kya.*" I awoke with a start, and looked in the direction indicated. Here he was, coming slowly through the mist, straight towards the rock, with the rolling shoulder-hung swagger of a tiger on the prowl. I clutch my rifle and snap the breech. Great heavens! for the first time since I owned the weapon, *it refuses to close!*

The tiger, off which I have not taken my eyes, has reached the foot of the rock, and attracted by my movements, deliberately pauses to gaze at us. With the useless rifle in my hands, I sit facing it, utterly unable to move; the Karen crouches beside me, with his head between his knees and his hands clasped above it, trembling in every limb. The lithe grey-looking brute is barely six feet from me; with two steps he can enter the nook and select either of us at his leisure. The fixed stare of the blazing green eyeballs paralyses me; for fully half a minute—it seemed an hour—he stands there motionless; but at length passes on, still keeping his eyes on me until he disappears round the corner of the rock a few feet away.

Relieved of that appalling stare I breathe more freely, and, straining my eyes in the direction I expect the tiger will take, with desperate eagerness exert all my strength to close the breech of the rifle. I can feel no obstruction, for it is of course too dark to see, but it will not close, and I pause—to see once more that mesmeric gaze fixed upon me.

Dissatisfied with his first scrutiny, the tiger has passed round the rock and come back. It is sickening. Helpless and dazed, I sit blankly returning the steadfast stare that so perfectly unnerves me. This interview lasts longer than the first: I cannot close my eyes even if I would. The perspiration streams down my face, and I feel the cold drops trickling slowly down my back. How I curse the brute for his calm dispassionate gaze! How I curse my own folly in not having selected a tree to shoot from! For now, though I am shaking all over, a strange defiant feeling is creeping over me, and—thank God! the tiger once more turns away, and this time quietly takes the path towards the opposite jungles, disappearing into the fog-wrapped night. Gone! and I lie back and give way to a fit of "cold shivers," such as I have never felt before.

Daybreak, long delayed, comes at length, and cramped and shivering I hasten to examine the rifle. A small, but thick fleshy leaf had found its way into the grip action, and, crushed though it was, the stringy fibres refused to allow the close-fitting mechanism to work. The Karen who is watching me murmurs in Burmese, "witchcraft," and after the night I have just passed through I am more than half inclined to agree with him.

We hurried back to camp, and at once organised a party to follow up the pugs, but chase was useless: we neither saw nor heard anything of that tiger again during our stay.

Curiously enough, only two weeks afterwards information was brought to E—— that a Karen who had selected that identical rock to shoot sambhur from, had been pounced upon and carried off by a tiger as he left

his hiding-place just before daylight. Screams were heard by his brother, who occupied a safe position near, and on going to the spot at sunrise, he found the gun and bag belonging to his hapless relative on the sand. Tiger pugs and a few blood-marks told the rest of the tale, and not a vestige of the unfortunate man's body, or even of his clothing, was ever found by the friends who made search for his remains. E——'s informant added with grave simplicity: "The white face of your friend was new to the tiger: on that account he escaped."

CHAPTER XII.

SOME COMPULSORY ACQUAINTANCES.

THE MOSQUITO.

I FEEL that a book on Burma, however superficial, should contain some detailed mention of the insect which plays so large a part in the daily life of white man and brown.

Bearing strong personal resemblance to a large gnat, the mosquito is the most innocent-looking creature in the world; but both his appearance and conduct are deceptive. While you are awake and have your eye upon him, his behaviour leaves nothing to be desired; his movements are easy and deliberate, his manner unobtrusive to shyness; he hovers over you, singing in a low soothing tone, as though his one mission in life were to lull weary humanity to sleep. So long as you keep him under strict supervision, his demeanour is faultless; he follows you at a respectful distance when you move, and appears to be dancing attendance in order to go messages or receive your valued commands. He is a gross impostor; in reality, this entomological courtier is at once the smallest and the greatest plague to be found throughout the length and breadth of the Empire. Living on human blood and revelling in human misery, he is a miniature vampire; he exists only to eat, and he knows content only in satiety.

By care and judicious management we may escape, or at least tone down, all the ills of Eastern life but one; and that one is the mosquito. From him there is no escape. He is with us always: in the house, on travels by road or rail, in the bare dâk bungalow and the stuffy tent; he is here, there, and everywhere, ever alert and ever hungry. The climate of the Hills does not suit his constitution, but nevertheless he will not suffer you to go thither without him; he hears you give the order to "pack up," and straightway secretes himself among your clothing. And when you begin to unpack on reaching your destination in the far-away heights of the Himalayas, lo, the mosquito, emerging brisk and cheerful from every fold of the garments you shake out. He has come, and though he dislikes cold, he stays; and unless frost cut him off in his sins, he will be ready to return to the "plains" with you, in the same robust health he enjoyed when he arrived. You cannot convince him that his society is unwelcome: he is deaf to discouragement, and insensible to all argument but the crushing one administered with the palm of your hand.

Naturally intelligent, he acquires at an early age an exhaustive knowledge of the anatomy of man, displaying an intimacy with the spots where the cuticle is thinnest, which does credit to mosquito methods of tuition. When he finds his victim asleep, he can exercise his trained instincts at leisure, and devotes his attention to the ears, neck, or knuckles. If the forepart of your wrist chance to be exposed, he shows preference for that tender locality; but he is not exacting. Whilst you are awake, he exhibits the unobtrusive side of his character, and pastures on your ankles. To

do this he must, of course, penetrate your sock; and here again you discover how thoroughly he has been prepared by education for his career. He doesn't waste time over worsted; he has been taught that its thickness exceeds the length of his proboscis, and he passes that fabric huffily by, to browse upon ankles protected only by thin cotton or silk; they offer no obstacle worth mentioning, and he knows it. Leather is an abomination in his sight; if you want to protect your feet effectually, don your long riding-boots instead of slippers; he can't understand the manœuvre at all; it baffles him hopelessly, and makes him lose his temper.

In taste, the mosquito is dainty and discriminating. He despises the black man, and turns up his proboscis at a tough, sun-dried old Anglo-Indian. The meal that rejoices his heart is that to be drawn from the veins of a tender young Briton fresh out from home; and for this victim he has an unerring eye. So marked is this epicurean preference, that if you sit next to a nice rosy-cheeked boy at the dinner-table you will be utterly ignored by the mosquitoes, in his favour. They won't pay the slightest attention to you while the new arrival is there. This does not make you jealous.

His appetite is gigantic, for he is all stomach. Watch him while he is feeding—on somebody else—and you marvel at his extraordinary elasticity and power of accommodation. Having waited until his victim's closed eyes betoken slumber, he ceases the song he has been singing thoughtfully to himself, and drops, softly as a floss of thistledown, upon the spot of his choice. He folds his gauzy wings, unfurls his trunk, strokes the creases out of it, gives it a flourish or two, and plunges it in. At first he stands on all eight legs, ab-

sorbed in his repast; but presently, the first sharp edge of hunger dulled, he begins to show signs of enjoyment. Raising his hindmost pair of legs, he works them stiffly up and down, as though to aid by this pump-handle performance the process of suction; his body, no thicker than a thread when he alighted, begins to take decided shape, and his black and grey bands show up distinctly. Steadily and uniformly he increases in bulk from end to end; a pinky hue suffuces his whole being, and he seems to blush all over with delight. By-and-bye the hindmost legs cease pumping, and resume their proper office; the distended body sinks down as though the slender limbs could no longer support its weight. The mosquito has finished; in other words, he is as full as he can hold. He rolls up his proboscis, and imagination hears his microscopic sigh of repletion; he feels his now portly form all over with his legs, just to make sure before he goes that he *can't* hold any more; then spreads his wings, and sails heavily away to digest his meal in the seclusion of the punkah fringe.

There is a vast difference between the mosquito hungry and the mosquito dined. The former is as lithe and wary as it is possible to conceive; strike at him, smartly as you will, when first he alights upon your skin, and your blow falls harmless; the insect has his eye on you, and dodges your hand light-heartedly, to come back the moment your attention is diverted. But let him gorge himself, and he is another creature: indolent and lethargic, so that you may almost take him between your fingers: he is an unwieldy sloth, indifferent to the fate brought upon him by gluttony that has no limit but capacity.

Nature, with more regard for the mosquito than for

man, has ordained that you shall not feel the effects of the irritant poison wherewith the insect replaces the blood he draws, until he has concluded his meal and sufficient time has elapsed to let him make his escape. Hence, if you are asleep or absorbed in your book, you don't discover that you have been "bitten," as the phrase goes, until the round white swelling which betrays the point of the mosquito's operations warns you that the mischief is done; a warning that asserts itself unpleasantly for many hours afterwards. Neither mosquito-curtain nor punkah is so reliable a means of defence as could be desired. The insect knows well the careless habits of the native servant; and as soon as you have tucked down the netting over your bed, he sets to work to explore the whole expanse of muslin in search of the inevitable hole. A single broken mesh affords him means of ingress, and, calling all the friends within hail, he points triumphantly to his discovery, and issues invitations to dinner at your expense right and left. That these are never declined is evidenced by the scores of gorged revellers which adorn the curtain in the morning; for the degraded creatures are in no condition after dinner to do anything but sleep; they don't attempt to find their way out, and stay in their roomy prison to await your destroying hand.

The wind set in motion by a vigorously-pulled punkah will prevent the mosquito settling anywhere within its scope; but this is scarcely worth discussing, as vigour is a quality unknown in punkah coolies. The mosquito is as little disturbed by the soft fanning granted master by his servant as is an able seaman out on the the yard by a three-knot breeze.

Like all notorious evil-doers, the mosquito is saddled

with crimes not his own. Your servant would have you believe that this incorrigible insect makes the holes by which he enters your mosquito curtain; whereas a glance at the boy's own formidable finger-nails suggests a more reasonable explanation. The water-carrier who fills your tub does not scruple to assert that the muddy scum floating on the water is the handiwork of the mosquito. That the insect lays its eggs on the surface of stagnant water is a well-known fact, but it is difficult to believe the *pani-wallah's* story, particularly as a small deduction from that menial's pay persuades the mosquito to transfer breeding operations elsewhere.

There is, however, one serious charge brought against him from which he has so far been unable to clear himself. The Civil Surgeon says he is the direct means of carrying infection, and so disseminating disease; that the mosquito drawing one meal from a patient in the station hospital and the next from some healthy man outside inoculates the latter with the sick man's malady. We don't accuse the mosquito of doing this with malice aforethought, of course. But such mischief is quite in keeping with his character, and certainly infection spreads in a mysterious and fitful manner in the East. It is very much to be wished that the mosquito could find some way of refuting the charge; his bite is disagreeable enough in itself, but it becomes a source of real anxiety when you recollect that any one of these itching white pustules may cover the germ of smallpox or typhoid, and it would set one's mind at rest if he could prove his innocence.

Under favourable climatic conditions, the little plague attains a size that renders him really formidable. Down in the delta of the Irrawaddy, where water lies on every

hand, and jungle vegetation grows in such rank luxuriance, he thrives his worst. There he grows thrice as large and thrice as venomous as he does in other parts of the country. In that unhappy valley, where white men are few and far between, his tastes are vulgar and uneducated. One large village enjoys unenviable fame for the size and ferocity of its mosquitoes; there, at Maoobin, the European residents not only practically live under netting themselves, but keep their ponies under similar protection. It is true that the "creek mosquito" has been shot at in mistake for a snipe; but the man who did this has since been persuaded to "take the pledge."

THE CROW, perhaps ought to have come first in this chapter. He wears the outward semblance of the common jackdaw, but the most abandoned jackdaw is a model of probity and virtue beside the crow. The English bird has defective ideas regarding ownership, and is admitted to be an undesirable neighbour; but his shortcomings are as nothing in the eyes of him whose fate it has been to make acquaintance with the crow. A kleptomaniac by birth, the crow makes theft his profession from the hour he leaves the untidy nest in the mango tree, wherein his parents reared him on stolen goods. From the hour he can use his wings he pursues a career of audacious wickedness that would shock a jackdaw into honesty: living by peculation and larceny, purloining from man and beast alike. His character is blacker than his wing: he revels in cannibalism, stealing the fledglings of other birds, and tearing them limb from limb to devour while the blood runs warm. He has not a friend in the world: every hand, every tooth, and every beak is against him, and he glories in it, comporting himself with brazen sprightli-

ness. In the boundless jungles he might dwell in peace and earn an honest livelihood; so he does not live there. He rears his family in the trees lining the busy bazaar, where men not only leave him undisturbed, but find, unintentionally, a living for him. He never strays far from the haunts of mankind. The poor black man's rice and chupatti are sweeter to him than the growing fruit and grain; and he does not disdain to swindle the pariah dog out of his inheritance of garbage. He is omnivorous and insatiable, combining the appetite of the vulture with the tastes of the ostrich. Nothing comes amiss to him; one minute he steals the toast off your breakfast table, and the next is one of a party discussing a rat killed last week.

Look at him as he perches there on the verandah railing. His legs are bent, his wings are half open, and his body is thrust forward in readiness to take the instant flight for which his uneasy conscience warns him always to be prepared. He carries his head on one side, and his beak agape; and his wicked eye is restlessly rolling; he looks exactly what we know him to be—to wit, a bad, bold, evilly-disposed bird. He is on the railings for no good purpose; he never went anywhere yet on an honourable errand, and he never will. He is waiting until your back is turned to drop noiselessly in at the open window, thence feloniously to steal and carry away your pen, shirt-studs, money, or penknife—no matter what, so long as it is something loose and portable, which you want, and he does not. He purloins from sheer superfluity of naughtiness, for in nine cases out of ten he leaves his booty on the most inaccessible part of the bungalow roof, and in the tenth drops it down the well, pretending to do so by accident. As

soon as he has disposed of your property, he comes back to the verandah to hear you scold your boy for losing an article he never touched.

The black servant hates the crow with a deep undying hate not unmixed with awe, for he regards him as the abiding-place of an evil spirit. Cynical persons of broad views have been known to say that dishonest *nokkurs* become crows when they die; and certainly the bird's close intimacy with the minutiæ of Eastern housekeeping gives the theory a plausible colouring. This by the way. I was about to refer to the boy's practice of saddling his own misdoings upon the crow. Anything bright and shining, like a silver spoon or gold stud, has an irresistible attraction for the crow, and the boy knows it. Hence, when such an article mysteriously disappears, as things do disappear in Burma, the boy always "saw crow done come took it." A crow once took away four table-spoons in this fashion; but very kindly brought them back and laid them in a drawer of the table in the back verandah, when he discovered that they were electro-plate of inferior manufacture. I mention this as an exceptional case. Both khitmugar and mesalchee recollected seeing the crow carry off those spoons but could not remember seeing them brought back, though they agreed with me that it must have taken the bird some time to open the drawer and to shut it again. Needless to say, the crow never goes to the trouble of restoring anything that is convertible into annas and pice in the bazaar.

But inasmuch as the hardhearted European sceptic insists in holding his poor black servant responsible for the crow's misdeeds, and docks his monthly *tullub* in accordance with this principle, native ingenuity is ever on the rack to devise means of circumventing the enemy.

The bird's cunning is so extraordinary that no ordinary trap deceives him, and the boy has recourse to all kinds of dodges to accomplish the desired end. Sometimes he makes a few strong paper cones, and smearing them inside with bird-lime, drops a morsel of juicy raw meat into each, and throws the snares down on the rubbish-heap behind the cookhouse where the crows do mostly congregate. Down comes a crow to investigate; he turns over a cone thoughtfully, and applies his eye to the interior. Meat! In goes his beak, and before he can claw off the sticky encumbrance, he is borne struggling and squarking into the smoky cookhouse. There the boy squats on the floor and holds him tight, while the *bowachee* fastens a cork upon his nose with a bit of wire from a soda-water bottle; and thus adorned, he is released, to wear a badge of shame for the rest of his days. Being caught by the superior craft of man is the only thing of which a crow is ashamed.

But so admirably is the crow Intelligence Department organised that the most subtly designed trap soon fails The corked example goes about, a melancholy warning against the allurements of paper cones, and tells every fellow he meets how he came by the decoration. Thenceforth, those instruments are doomed to failure and derision; you may spend a lifetime making paper cones and charging them with the choicest dainties, and the crows will come and sit round, squarking sarcastic remarks. If you leave the snare long enough, the birds will set to work and take out the bait from the apex end in safety; but no appeal to the crow palate will induce them to fall in with your scheme.

The intelligence of an elderly crow is exasperatingly human. Point your gun at him and he seems to vanish

into thin air; in reality, he has dived behind the nearest cover like a flash of black lightning. Threaten him with the unmounted barrels, and without stirring a feather, he croaks back a jeering "Squark." He regards a hand-thrown missile with utter contempt; waiting until it is fairly launched, he calculates its course with mathematical precision, steps aside to let it pass, and resumes his old perch, yawning. Try and frighten him with mere empty-handed demonstration, and he smiles.

Crows are intensely clannish. If you are consumed with a morbid curiosity to ascertain how many reside within a radius of five miles round your bungalow, or, if you conceive a philanthropic wish to relieve your neighbours of their share of the crow population, it is very easy—once you have caught a member of the race: that, I admit, is difficult. But assuming that you have succeeded, all you need do is, tie a red rag to his leg and let him go. In three minutes all the crows of the district have heard of the outrage, and the air over your compound is darkened by thousands of angrily protesting birds, all crows, and possibly a jay or two; other feathered creatures ignore the carryings-on of this disreputable family. It is an indignation meeting, and the crows, flying just out of gunshot, hurl down unanimous and deafening votes of censure with all the power of their lungs. If you show yourself outside, the uproar becomes positively bewildering; all you can do is remain quiet indoors and wait. Presently there is a lull; a committee has been appointed to examine your victim. and the business is in progress on the top of a high tree. It is a crow Supreme Court of Judicature, and only two methods of procedure are known to it: if the rag can be pecked off, the committee remove it; if it can't, they lose

their tempers, swear that the rag-adorned crow has himself to blame for his misfortune and kill him out of hand. This done, the meeting, which has hovered in waiting, bursts forth in votes of still more vociferous censure, and breaks up. Then you venture forth, feeling like a man who has passed scathless through a Burma thunderstorm and a South American earthquake rolled into one.

I have already mentioned the crow's taste for young birds; and there is in this nothing very remarkable. A half-fledged sparrow is a tender and succulent morsel no carnivorous bird need despise. But what in the name of gastronomy is there to recommend the scorpion as an article of diet, even to the depraved appetite of a crow? If you see half-a-dozen crows standing silently in a circle on the road, you may be sure there is a scorpion in the middle, lashing out on all sides with his dangerous curved spur. It is one-sided strife. One crow takes his place in front of the reptile, to engage his attention; the rest hop round, seizing every opportunity to give the ever-moving tail a vicious dig. The scorpion is tough and active, so it takes some time to disarm him; but his strokes grow fainter and fewer, and the crows' digs harder and more frequent. At last a well-aimed peck strikes home between the overlapping scales, and the tail is severed. It is all over; as the spur and its underlying sac of poison fall off, every beak closes on some portion of the scorpion's anatomy, and a tug of war ensues "all against all"; it is torn to pieces and swallowed on the spot.

I saw, early one morning, a very curious contest between a number of crows and a bandicoot rat. The rat had obviously been out all night, and was making his

way home along a shallow open drain, when the crows caught sight of him. He was a sorry specimen, being mangy and decrepit; but a bandicoot's teeth are long and sharp, and the birds were not inclined to come to close quarters in the open; they formed up in single file on either edge of the drain, and escorted the now hurrying rat till he reached his hole. Then they began operations; the instant the bandicoot's head disappeared they fell upon him pell-mell, and drove their iron bills into every tender spot they could reach, while one of the gang held on to his tail, seemingly bent on dragging the owner out. Either the strain on his caudal appendage overcame him, or thirst for vengeance banished thoughts of safety, for after a few seconds the bandicoot backed out and snapped fiercely at his foes, who retreated a step or two and waited. Giving his tail a defiant waggle to make sure it was free, the rat made another rush for his burrow. No sooner was his head out of sight than a crow pounced upon his tail again, and the others resumed the attack, drawing blood at every peck. I began to understand the *modus operandi*, and grew interested: the general idea was to worry him till he succumbed to exhaustion; and the plan of action, in detail, was only to assault when the rat could not bite back. It took the birds just twelve minutes to achieve a victory; the bandicoot grew weary, and presently the crows confined themselves to simply dragging him out whenever he got half-way into his hole. As soon as it appeared safe, they pounced upon him with one accord, pecked out his eyes, and literally stabbed him to death. Then, in half the time it had taken to kill him, they ate him, and flew away happy.

When Nature organised her great scheme of adminis-

tration she appointed the crow to the sanitary department, together with the pariah, the vulture, and the kite. These three are conscientious and painstaking officials whose utility no one denies: but it is almost idle to add that the crow neglects his work; never does any, indeed, unless it suit his private ends to appear industrious for the moment. His chief purpose is to furnish us with a synonym for wickedness and cunning, and our servants with a scapegoat.

THE TUCTOO is another of our most intimate friends, but he is unknown to many who are only too familiar with mosquitoes and crows, because he has elected to reside only on the eastern side of the Bay of Bengal.

He is a member of the family *Geckotidæ*, and is otherwise known as the "trout-spotted lizard." An excellent authority on Burma, and all matters pertaining thereto, writes this name "Toukté;" but the reptile himself—who ought to know best—distinctly pronounces it "Tuctoo."

His appearance is more striking than attractive. A full-grown tuctoo attains a length of eight or nine inches; his head is broad and frog-like, and his eyes stand out like those of the crocodile. His ground colour is pale brown, and he is liberally embellished all over with pink spots. He looks so large and clumsy running about the wall after the insects on which he feeds, that until you get used to him you are in perpetual anxiety lest he should fall off. It is rare that he loses his footing, however; I only once saw a tuctoo tumble off the wall. He was fighting with his wife and got thrown.

I do not wish to disparage him, for he has at least one good point: but it must be confessed that he is wanting

in refinement. His dress is loud, his voice is loud, and his manners are deplorable. I believe that his natural haunt is a hollow tree; personally, I cannot imagine a tuctoo living all by himself with no one to listen to him; and in course of long acquaintance I never remember to have met him elsewhere than in human habitations, or very near thereto. He associates with man only from self-interested motives. Men use lamps, lamps attract insects, and the tuctoo lives on insects; hence he takes up his quarters in your house, and lets you know he is there.

His favourite resort is about the angle of the verandah wall and the ceiling; and from this coign of vantage he beguiles the passing hours after sunset by bawling out his name at short intervals. If he would do so once, and have done with it, we should not object; but anything like self-restraint is foreign to tuctoo character. He wants to attract notice; and he always succeeds. He begins by remarking "Cr-r-r-r!" in a pleasant conversational tone; then "Cr-r-r-r!" a little louder, as if he thought you had not caught what he said. After this he pauses a moment, and what was really weighing on his mind comes out. "Tuctoo!" You might imagine that he was paying a visit and giving his name to a very deaf khitmugar, for in a second out it comes again, "*Tuc*too!" a third time "TUC-too!" ("Confound it. Can't you hear?"), "*Tuc*too!" "Tuc-too!" Then he recollects that he must not lose his temper with a servant, and repeats "Tuc-too" in a languid drawl. He finishes off with a "Crrr-crrr-crrr"—of ruffled pride, which seems to mean, "Not a bad name when it's properly announced, you know," and relapses into his previous state of silent thought for a few minutes.

He is very indolent. Except when pursuing some insect, he lounges about the wall, with his hands in his pockets; at least he sticks out his elbows as if his hands were in his pockets. He will not associate with his semi-transparent little cousin the gecko, affecting not to see him when he passes, and pushing past him in the most offensive way when there is a moth or something eatable in sight. The tuctoo always looks bored and *blasé*. If you shout at him and threaten him with a boot, he merely turns his head and stares without moving; from this I gather that his sight is bad, but it makes him appear insolent. He has, indeed, been spoiled by the natives. Among other ideas of sparkling originality, the Burman has a notion that it is "lucky" to have a tuctoo in the house. I do not know what particular good fortune he is supposed to bring; but I do know that the Burman, educated or ignorant, makes him welcome, and would as soon think of turning his child out of doors as of trying to eject the lizard. The tuctoo has discovered this, and has naturally acquired an exaggerated idea of his own importance; so he comes in and makes himself more than at home.

You do not generally find more than one tuctoo in a bungalow. There appears to be a definite understanding that each shall have a separate establishment, and that no tuctoo shall enter a house already appropriated unless by special invitation of the occupant. When you find two in the same house you may safely assume they are husband and wife. Tuctoo marriage seems rather a failure. I have watched a pair on the wall, by the hour, of an evening, and the only interchange of courtesies I ever remarked was a careless "Cr-r-r," exchanged at long intervals and at a distance of two feet or more. If

the couple happen to lay hold of the same moth at once, unless the victim breaks easily, there is sure to be unpleasantness; the two captors jerk and scramble backwards, glaring at each other as though eyes could kill.

Not every bungalow is patronised by the tuctoo. Some, owing no doubt to architectural defects hidden from human eyes, are avoided by the species. The native superstition infects the white man sometimes, for the owner of such a boycotted dwelling may often be heard to say, "Ah! you've got a tuctoo. I haven't," betraying his thought that you are unfairly favoured. Why any sane man should want a tuctoo to chum with him is an unfathomable mystery. The only time I feel indulgent towards the tuctoo is on the first night of the rains. Then, when the black monsoon clouds come up from the south-west, and torrents roar upon the shingle roof, when every spout is a shooting cataract, when the blinding straight-down torrents drive myriads of *boochies* of every shape, size, smell, and hue, to seek shelter in the bungalow, you bless the busy little gecko and forgive the tuctoo. You see their long thread-like tongues at work round the lamp, where the insects throng, and as each disappears into a tuctoo-tomb you remember that but for the lizard that "green bug," or that white moth, might have fallen in your soup or your tumbler. There are lots in your plate already—far more than you know what to do with, and on a really bad night fifty active and hungry tuctoos could make little impression on the swarms.

He has a certain sense of humour, but shows it only in playing unkind practical jokes. I shall never forget how one concealed himself on the pulpit on the very first Sunday evening our new chaplain preached, and

brought the poor padre's sermon to an abrupt close, by announcing his presence during an impressive pause; and I don't think the padre will forget it either.

It is really alarming to a new arrival to be awakened at night by his bawling. I found it so, at all events. I had only been a few hours in the country when I went to bed, and the strange sounds of the Burma night kept me awake, wondering what the next new voice would be, for there was immense variety. Just as I was dozing off a tuctoo spoke up from a spot about a yard and a half from my pillow. I am not ashamed to confess that I bounded out of bed and snatched up my new revolver. Fortunately for the other fellows in the wooden bungalow, the chaukidar heard me, and came up with his lantern. Even when the man pointed out the lizard I could not believe so small a creature spoke with so large a voice. The tuctoo seemed to divine my doubts, and forthwith began again, just to let me see what he could do. I have hated him from that hour.

It is not easy to catch him, though I conceive it might be done by means of a fine fly hook. I made one prisoner once—took him by surprise while he was trying to dispose of a large moth, and simply took him in my hand. To say he was surprised and annoyed would convey a very inadequate idea of the feelings he betrayed. He gurgled abuse and clawed at me in the most ferocious way. I did not mind being called bad names by a lizard, but there was something peculiarly objectionable about the grip of his suctional feet, so after cursory examination I put him into an old filter globe and shut him safely in with a book, for future study. During the night, however, the tuctoo pushed aside the book, and having got out, pulled it back again. Moung Tso could not understand at all how he escaped.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HEAD OF BOH GWAY.*

JOHN GRAHAM had been in the Burma Police for only a few months when the annexation of the Upper Province opened up a vista of speedy promotion. At that time he was discharging the humble duties of European Head Constable in Maulmain, the chief town of the Commissionership of Tenasserim. The life was not exciting. The Deputy Commissioner was a firm and energetic officer, under whose rule the huge mixed population of Burmese, Chinese, Shans, and Indian natives was quiet and orderly. Graham's principal occupation was to parade the streets, keeping his native subordinates awake; for the Burman possesses the dog-like faculty of going to sleep anywhere and at any hour in ordinarily favourable circumstances, and is particularly prone to take a nap when on duty during the scorching quietude of noon. He was necessarily brought much in contact with the people, and had taken full advantage of the opportunities thus given him to learn the language. Hence, when the requirements of the new territory created a drain on the resources of Lower Burma his hopes of promotion were fulfilled, and he was appointed to an inspectorship.

The first result of his step in rank was transfer to Tha-

* Founded on facts.

tone, the headquarters of the district of that name, some eighty miles up river. He went there in December, one of the busiest months of the year for agriculturists. The low-lying plains which surround the little town of Thatone were a shining yellow sea of ripe paddy, steadily disappearing before the sickle. The people were hard at work reaping and threshing their crops, and making ready the boats to transport them to Maulmain. The district was entirely free from dacoity and serious crime, and for a little while after he took up his new appointment he had not much to do beyond the daily routine work of his office.

But the European residents of the station—all officials—were aware that this peaceable state of affairs could not last, and that the disturbances which followed the annexation would soon bear fruit in the Lower Province. They knew that the rebels of Upper Burma would ere long be among them as dacoits, and made their preparations accordingly; nor were they kept waiting very long.

The first Thatone heard of the dacoit advance was that a jungle village had been burnt to ashes and several of the inhabitants slaughtered. The place was a long distance beyond the boundaries of the Thatone district, and outside its authorities' jurisdiction; so the police were only cautioned to hold themselves ready for action at immediate notice, and await the course of events. For a week or two they heard nothing further; then came more news of the same kind; another village, larger and more important than the last, and thirty miles nearer, had been burned by the same gang. To make matters worse, this second village had contained a police-station, and the Burmese constables, taken by sur-

prise, had purchased their lives by surrendering their Snider rifles and ammunition. After this dacoity followed dacoity in rapid succession. They were all the work of one large gang, and the fact that each outrage occurred nearer than the previous one marked the steady advance of the dacoits towards Thatone. At last they began operations in the neighbourhood, some five-and-thirty miles away, and the frequent arrival of refugees at the station established a regular dacoit scare.

The gang was currently reported to be very large and well-armed, carrying the Peacock flag, which proved its origin in the Upper Province. Of course no certain information as to its numbers could be obtained, but, making due allowance for native exaggeration, the strength was estimated at from eighty to a hundred men. The band was under the leadership of Boh Nga Gway, whose name by this time was a household word all over that part of the country. Trade in the Thatone district was paralysed. The farmers dared not venture a mile from the town to collect their grain, and even had they done so the boat-owners would not have attempted to face the long voyage down the river.

The little force of Burman police at Thatone had been augmented by a detachment of twenty Goorkhas armed with carbine and *kookri*. And when John Graham received instructions to take thirty policemen and march against Boh Gway, it was with no small satisfaction he learned that half his force was to consist of Goorkhas.

We need not follow him step by step through six weeks of barren pursuit. Day after day, and night after night, the police forced their way through dense jungle and malarial swamp, ever upon the heels of an active foe,

who seemed always just beyond their reach. It was wearying and disheartening work. The necessity for moving rapidly obliged them to carry little in the shape of food, and they were almost wholly dependent on the supplies they could obtain from people who were not too much afraid of Boh Gway's vengeance to sell to police. Perpetual false alarms were breaking down even the hardy Goorkhas. These alarms were the most trying and exasperating feature of the whole business. Often after a long day's forced march, just as they had encamped in some deserted, and perhaps burned-out village, a Burman, travel-stained and breathless with excitement and haste, would suddenly appear, and rouse them to renewed activity with news that Boh Gway was harrying a village only a mile or two distant Boots would be pulled on, the half-cooked and much-needed food left to itself, and guided by the Burman, they would go at the double for perhaps some six or eight miles along some treacherous, break-neck jungle track, stimulated to the utmost by the glare of flames in the night-sky ahead. Hunger forgotten, the Goorkhas, ever more eager to fight than eat even when half-starving, would stumble along at a pace that often sorely taxed Graham's feet to keep him in front of them. At last they would reach the spot to which they had been making their way, and there see nothing more unusual than a heap of burning straw tended by a few villagers. When questioned these would tell them that yesterday or the day before, or it might be a week ago, the dacoits had passed that way; but where they might be now they knew no more than the police did. Their Burman guide would be quite unable to understand it. He would confidentially explain that the villagers were lying through fear, for his brother's

wife had been told by a friend, whose son had seen them that they were at this very spot.

It would be difficult to say exactly how many times a false alarm sent them off on some such wild-goose chase as this. Graham was bound to act upon any information, no matter how slight, if he meant to catch Boh Gway. The two thousand rupees reward which had been placed upon his head had no interest for a Government servant; but he felt tolerably certain that the officer who succeeded in ridding the country of so notorious a character would not be passed over when there was any promotion a-foot.

The dacoit's continued success in committing depredations with impunity had been followed by the usual results—a steady increase in the number of his followers; and he was growing more audacious every week. He had looted more police-stations, and was therefore better armed than ever; latterly, indeed, Graham had exercised considerable caution in selecting his nightly camps, for it was by no means improbable that the dacoits might suddenly assume the offensive and endeavour to surprise the party. He knew that Boh Gway must be accurately and regularly posted in the movements of the police, by his method of directing his own; and he had long made up his mind that unless he could manage to bring him to bay, he might continue this hopeless, stern chase until the setting in of the monsoon.

They all were growing heartily tired of hunting an enemy they never saw, when Graham got the first really fresh and trustworthy news of his whereabouts. He received the information in a most characteristic fashion, from no less a person than the Boh himself.

In following up a report which appeared to be neither

more nor less trustworthy than usual, he arrived one day at noon at a small cluster of huts, hardly to be dignified by the name of village. He found it deserted and silent, but there was nothing remarkable in that; and he led the men into the hamlet, hoping that as soon as the people discovered the strangers were not dacoits, they would return from the jungle in which they had hidden. He shouted once or twice in English to reassure the men he supposed to be hiding near, but no answer was returned, and no one appeared; so he chose one of the houses at random, and went towards it intending to breakfast under its shelter. It was an ordinary specimen of Burmese jungle-village architecture, standing on piles two feet high, and constructed of bamboo matting and dhunny leaves. When he stepped on to the low verandah he took in the whole interior at the first glance. But as he did so he stopped short, for in front of him he saw an object that made his blood run cold.

Standing out in horrible distinctness against the pale yellow of the mat-wall against which it leaned was the dusky body of an old Burmese woman in a sitting posture. It had been decapitated, and the livid face framed in blood-stained, dishevelled grey hair, was upheld in the lap by the stumps of the wrists. The filmy dead eyes looked straight into his, and held them spell-bound. The feet and hands had been hacked off and were carefully disposed about the corpse, which was quite nude, and was moreover mutilated in a manner too hideous even to suggest. For a minute Graham stood unable to move. He guessed at once that this was Boh Gway's work, and so soon as he recovered full power of thought he realised that the brute had done it as a play-

ful act of defiance. Calling his Burman police-sergeant Moung Wah, he pointed the body out to him. With a murmur of "Ahmay!" he crept across the floor, and squatting besides the remains looked over them with quiet scrutiny. It takes a great deal to shock Burmese sensibilities.

"Boh Gway has done this, your honour," he said almost immediately.

Graham nodded assent for he could not trust himself to speak.

"She has been dead,—a few hours," continued Moung Wah, examining the head closely. "*He!*" he exclaimed, snatching something from the mouth and leaping to his feet. "Your honour! a little letter!" He stepped to his superior's side as he spoke and crouched on his heels to present a strip of palm-leaf, upon which was traced in blood a few words of Burmese to the following effect:—"To the Ingalaik Palik Goung (English police-officer). I am at Payayhlah. Come and take me. Mah Too will give you this." This was Boh Gway's message, and *that* was Mah Too, his messenger.

The poor old woman had doubtless remained in her hut when the appearance of the dacoits bade her more active neighbours seek safety in flight; either she had been too feeble to accompany them or had trusted to her age to protect her. It was just possible that the dacoit chief had attempted to give her his message verbally, but finding her deficient in intelligence, had chosen this method of insuring that her lips should deliver it to the police.

"Boh Gway and the dacoits are at Payayhlah," said Graham, handing the sergeant the palm-leaf. "Do you know the place?"

"Payayhlah is a large village about four hours from here," replied Moung Wah promptly; "it stands upon a little hill."

Stood upon a little hill. That looked as though Boh Gway really meant fighting.

"When do you think that woman was killed?"

The sergeant went over to the body again and minutely examined the severed neck for a minute; then he raised the arm. The imperturable calmness of the man almost disgusted Graham; he made his inspection without the slightest sign of emotion of any kind.

"She was killed," he answered, "soon after the second crowing of the cock this morning."

That meant about five a.m., fully seven hours ago. Moung Wah had grown old in the police service, and was an expert in these gruesome matters, so his opinion was accepted without hesitation.

Graham hastily reviewed the situation. The enemy had occupied a defensible position four hours march distant; they had already had three or four hours to recruit and prepare for the attack, and would necessarily have four or five more, even if he started at once. The police had just finished a long and unusually tiring march, and it would be madness to ask them to set out in the heat of the day, to tramp for another four hours, unfed to boot, and expect them to make a good fight at the end of it.

Calling Moung Wah into another hut, he sat down, and bade him tell all he could about Payayhlah. Was it surrounded by jungle, and were there near it any pagodas that the dacoits might utilise as forts? It was several years since the sergeant had been there, but he was able to give a very full description of the village.

It stood on rising ground clear of jungle, and to reach that ground it was necessary to cross a wide belt of paddy-land; many of the houses were built of wood, and there was one small pagoda close to the village, which however had no wall round it. This last was the only satisfactory detail. Boh Gway had chosen his ground with considerable skill. Calling in the Goorkha *naique*, Graham held a council of war forthwith.

He soon had a plan of action sketched out. They would rest where they were for a couple of hours, and at three o'clock start for Payayhlah, so as to arrive within sight of the place in time to reconnoitre by daylight. The moon would set a full hour before sunrise next morning, and having refreshed the men with a good night's sleep, they would cross the open under cover of darkness and endeavour to carry the village by assault.

Accordingly, after breakfast had been cooked and eaten, Graham mustered the men for an inspection of arms and ammunition. All were in good order, and every man had thirty rounds in his pouch; so at three o'clock sharp they took the road towards their destination, with Moung Wah in front as guide.

The route lay through the shades of a magnificent teak forest, now wrapped in the stillness of day. The steady even tramp of the booted Goorkhas was the only sound that broke the silence, for the Burmans, as usual, marched barefoot, and anticipations of the prospective fight made those generally loquacious people thoughtful. The path was smooth and easy, so Moung Wah, his pasoh tucked high about his waist, went forward at his best speed. The sun was nearing the horizon when the freshening breeze warned them that they were ap-

proaching open country; so, ordering the men to pile arms, Graham took the naique and the sergeant and went stealthily forward to reconnoitre.

The forest ceased abruptly some fifty yards farther on, and a long gentle incline, covered with low bush, sloped down to the paddy-fields which were now clothed with thin and ragged stubble. Drawing his glasses from their case, he sat down on a convenient log to take a look at Payayhlah. It was a rather large and compact village standing on an oval patch of rising ground—not to be called a hill—which lay like an island in the midst of a lake of paddy-land, whose shores, to continue the simile, were formed by the forest. The compass showed that the police were due north of the place, and, as well as could be judged, it was about three-quarters of a mile distant. The path had led to the nearest point by which it could be approached unseen, for the teak forest embraced the open in widening curves on the east and west. On the south was an undulating plain of grass land dotted with sparse clumps of elephant bamboo. Numerous curls of blue smoke rose from the village itself, and told that some one was at home; and as Graham looked, some figures gathered round the well half-way between the houses and the fields caught his attention. He watched them carelessly for a few moments until they began to file up the slope back to the village; then he saw that the figures were those of men. Drawing water is women's work; therefore the inhabitants had vacated the place, and it was in the dacoits' hands. The last qualms of doubt as to Boh Gway's intentions were dispelled. He and his gang were there—waiting.

The sun had set by the time the survey was finished,

and fifteen minutes later night had closed in. Placing double sentries at the verge of the forest with orders to report at once if they should detect any stir in the village, Graham intrusted the naique with first watch; and having eaten a cloying dinner of cold boiled rice as the men had done, lay down on his blanket for a rest. All fires, and the smoking which might have led to a conflagration, were interdicted; but in spite of it the Burmans lay awake dolefully comparing notes on the prospect of being killed next day.

The night passed uneventfully. Sentries were changed every two hours that all might have as much sleep as possible; and at half-past four the men got quietly under arms, and in Cimmerian darkness they moved forward. They marched half-way across the open paddy-fields in Indian file; then Graham changed the formation and continued the advance in very open skirmishing order, taking a place in the centre himself, and placing the naique on the extreme right and Moung Wah on the extreme left of the line. The first signs of dawn were beginning to brighten the sky over the far-away Siamese mountains when they reached the foot of the slope. Arrived there, Graham slackened his pace to let the wings of the line come up that they might partially surround the village; and he was giving the order to fix bayonets, when a flash and report from the nearest house told him that their presence was discovered. There was no longer need of silence. Shouting to the men to advance, he set the example by starting up the slope at a sharp run. The village was barely two hundred yards away, but ere half the intervening space was covered, the dacoits were all on the alert, and opening fire from twenty different houses. In the darkness,

however, their fire was so wild that no one was hit, and and the police pushed rapidly forward firing volleys from the right and left alternately. They entered the village at a dozen places at once, and a stubborn fight ensued, first from house to house, and then in the long irregular street. For twenty minutes the place rang with the report of firearms, the shouts of Goorkhas, and the hideous yells of the Burmese. Some one had set light to the village, and the blaze threw a lurid glare upon the now hand-to-hand conflict. The Goorkhas had fairly broken loose and fought like devils incarnate. Kookries and bayonets flashed as, always in front, they fought their way over dead and prostrate bodies. The police were outnumbered by three to one, and Graham was not happy about the issue; but suddenly the dacoits ceased their cries of defiance and literally melted away. Dark figures flitted out of sight between and under the houses, and the fight was over. The rising sun fell upon a burning village and the survivors of the dacoit gang flying in all directions towards the jungle.

Hastily despatching the two officers with all the men he could spare in pursuit, Graham summoned the only unwounded prisoner to ask news of his chief.

"Was Boh Gway among the killed?"

The prisoner did not know.

"Do you know Boh Gway?"

With some hesitation the man confessed he did. "Then," said Graham, "you will go with these men and point out his body if you see it."

Fully thirty-five of the forty dead and wounded were dacoits, and though he knew the Boh would take care of his own skin, Graham had some hope that he might have met the fate he deserved. But as the men came

forward to escort the prisoner, he shrank from them, and, pressing his hands together in supplication, offered to tell about the Boh.

"What is it?"

"Your honour cannot kill Nga Gway. He is gun and sword proof."

Passing over this assertion which did not surprise him, Graham angrily asked, "Do you mean that Boh Gway has escaped?"

"Your honour, yes; he has run away with Nga Loo Hto, his brother-in-law."

"Which way did he go?"

"Your honour, he went towards the south."

"Now, see here," said Graham, "you will have to come with me to Thatone and be put in jail there. Then you will be sent across the sea to the Kullah country (strangers' country, in this case the Andaman Islands) to the prison where dacoits are shut for all their lives."

At this threat, more terrible to the Burman than that of death itself, the man grovelled and begged for mercy. It had made him pliant, which was precisely what it was meant to do, and Graham continued, feeling certain that he would now tell the truth,

"You saw Boh Gway run away. Describe him. What kind of pasoh did he wear?"

"Your honour, he wore a Mandalay pasoh of the dog-tooth pattern."

"Had he a gun?"

"He carried his two-barrelled gun which opens behind."

This confirmed the current report that Boh Gway had a double-barrelled fowling-piece. Graham was about to

rise and set off in pursuit at once, when the prisoner, who was still crouching before him, shaking all over with fright, begged leave to speak.

"Your honour, Boh Gway will go to Mah Shway Mee's house. Your honour, I am not a dacoit. Nga Gway threatened——"

"Where is her house?" interrupted Graham.

"About three miles from this place; it stands alone in a little garden of plantain trees."

He did not wait to hear more. He left the prisoner in charge of the men who were to occupy the village until the pursuing force returned, and calling a young Goorkha who was in the habit of acting as his orderly, told him they were going to chase the dacoit chief.

"Very good, Sahib," he replied calmly; and with him at his heels Graham started at an easy trot in the direction the prisoner had indicated.

The sun was now well up, but they could calculate on two hours of comparative cool before the heat grew insupportable; and ere then they should have gained the shade of the thin bamboo jungle which covered the country beyond the tree-dotted meadow-land. Before they had gone two miles the Goorkha descried on the grass a dah with a blood-soaked handle. It told them they were on the right scent, and they pressed on harder than before. Passing a clump of bamboo they made another find—a Burman shot through the shoulder, who had fallen faint from loss of blood, and seemed unable to rise, for he made no effort to move when they turned from their path to come to him. Graham glanced at his pasoh; it was a common red cotton garment of Manchester make, quite dissimilar to the elaborate silk one Nga Gway was said to be wearing; but as all the

other dacoits had fled to the teak jungle, he hazarded a bold shot.

"You are Nga Loo Hto, Boh Gway's brother-in-law?"

The wounded man stared, apparently unable to understand; then he cast a look at the Goorkha, which that worthy answered by laying his hand upon his kookri. The orderly's movements seemed to inspire the unfortunate wretch, for he found his tongue at once.

"Your honour, I am Nga Loo Hto. Your honour, I have never hurt a——"

"Which way has Boh Gway gone?" asked Graham cutting him short.

"He is a wicked man, your honour, and I——"

"Did Boh Gway go to Mah Shway Mee's house?" he demanded sharply. Again the man hesitated. The Goorkha, with a pensive air, drew his kookri and ran the tip of his forefinger lightly along the edge.

"Yes, your honour, he was going there. Your honour, will certainly find him there," he added eagerly.

Graham was loth to leave the wounded dacoit where he lay, but time was precious; the capture or destruction of Boh Gway was his great object. He turned his back upon the man, and resumed the pursuit.

The sun was high now, and the heat was growing intense. Graham's *karki* jacket was soaked with perspiration, and the water ran from his hair and down his face in streams; nor was the Goorkha in more comfortable plight. The bamboo jungle which had promised shade proved to be only a narrow belt, and on the farther side of it they found themselves in perfectly open country. They passed an occasional herd of buffaloes feeding, but never a human being did they see from whom they might ask news. They had covered a good

five miles before they saw, three hundred yards on the right of the path, a small hut half concealed by plantains, which Graham rightly conjectured to belong to Mah Shway Mee; and they bent their way towards it; not a little elated at having run Boh Gway to earth at last.

He was not taken yet, however. The open ground gave him, hidden in the house or plantain grove, every chance of picking off one or both as they approached; and they advanced obliquely at a run to avoid giving him an easy shot. But no sign betrayed the presence of humanity, even when they had entered the unfenced garden, and with rifles at the ready were creeping towards the house. Graham's nerves were strung to the highest pitch, and he strained his ears to catch the slightest sound as they advanced to the rickety ladder which gave access to the dwelling. In vain; and his heart sank as he thought the Boh had escaped.

The house was a very small, unpretentious building, raised on piles eight feet high. The ladder rested on the edge of a wide platform on which a few cooking and household utensils were scattered about; and from that Graham stepped right into the single room of which the hut consisted, and looked around. A dingy cloth, serving as a purdah, screened one corner, and as he stepped over the creaking bamboos which formed the floor, he heard someone move behind it. Cocking his revolver, he called upon the person concealed there to come out; and a little old woman, bent double with age, came forward, huddling her tamein about her as she did so.

"Are you Mah Shway Mee?" he enquired.

"Yes."

"Do you know the dacoit Boh Nga Gway?"

Mah Shway Mee had often heard of him, but had never seen him in her life,—never!

"I am told that he is hidden here in your house," continued Graham.

The crone laughed shrilly, and told him he might search if he pleased, but he would not find Boh Gway or anyone else. No one could come into her house without being seen.

He threw another glance round. The room contained a water chatty, a small teak box, a stool, and a roll of mats; nothing in which a child, much less a man, could hide. He pulled up the purdah and looked behind it. There was the mosquito curtain of thin transparent cotton, suspended over the sleeping mat whence the old woman had just risen; there, by the pillow, stood her open betel-box and a half-smoked cheroot—nothing more. Perhaps the dacoit was hidden underneath the house. The floor was constructed of bamboos lashed an inch apart to cross-beams, so that one could look through and see everything there was below. There was the hand-loom, the paddy-mortar, and the big mat granary now almost empty; the usual paraphernalia of a jungle home,—nothing more.

"We must go back," said Graham to the Goorkha who stood outside on the platform; "the Boh is not here."

"Not here, Sahib!" exclaimed the man coming to his leader's side.

"No; come along. We must hurry back and take that other dacoit we found wounded."

The Goorkha's face fell, but he went towards the ladder

to descend without saying anything more; as Graham followed him out of the hut, he turned and looked round again. It was a careless glance, but it showed him something he had not seen before, and he called to the orderly to stop.

In the darkest angle of the roof, supported on a beam which connected the two uprights of the house, was a tiny garret, or cock-loft, with an opening into it about eighteen inches square. It was high above his head, and he could not touch even the beam on which it rested with his hand. The most active man could not get into it without a ladder, and it seemed impossible that a human being could curl himself up in such a box of a place.

It was a last hope and a very small one; but he could not leave the hut without taking a peep into that loft, so he called to the Goorkha to bring the ladder inside. In another minute they were propping the crazy thing against the garret door-sill.

"You hold it steady while I go up and look in," said Graham, laying down his rifle and preparing to mount.

"Pistol, Sahib!" hinted the Goorkha, with an ugly smile.

He took the revolver in his hand, and began carefully to climb the ladder; it was dangerously shaky and he had to go slowly. There was perfect silence above. Mah Shway Mee squatted below, looking on, her wrinkled face utterly devoid of expression.

One step, two steps, three steps. Was that a sound, or only the ladder grating on the door-sill? Four steps. He could see the upper part of the loft now, its darkness being made visible by the chinks in the cob-webbed roof. As Graham drew himself cautiously up the next

rung his eyes came on a level with the door-sill; and he threw himself bodily from the ladder, two loud reports issued from the door, and his helmet was dashed violently from his head. Almost before he had crashed on to the floor, the Goorkha sprang like a cat up the ladder into the dense smoke. There was another report, and the rattle of a falling carbine; then followed two horribly suggestive slicing cuts, and from out the clouds of smoke came a dark something, like a hideous comet, which bounded to Graham's feet as a calm voice said pleasantly, "There it is, Sahib!"

It was Nga Gway's head.

The Goorkha's cool promptitude had in all reasonable likelihood saved both their lives. Had he delayed a second after Graham's fall, the dacoit would have had time to slip in cartridges to receive his next visitor. As it was, they found the dead fingers tightly closed over two which had been placed in readiness.

Boh Gway must have watched their every movement from the moment they entered the hut, and no doubt thinking that they represented the force that had routed his gang a few hours before, had decided not to betray his presence if he could help it, for he could have shot both with little risk to himself had he been so minded.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE QUEEN'S PARDON.*

WHEN, at the end of the year 188-, I was sent to take up the duties of Assistant-Superintendent of Police at Pyeemana, in the Hanthawaddy Division of Lower Burma, I was told, before I left Rangoon, that I should find there no lack of opportunity to distinguish myself; and, I soon discovered how truly this hint reflected the condition of the district. The country was literally overrun with dacoits, who found it a peculiarly favourable field for their malpractices. The villages were small, far apart, and, comparatively speaking, well-to-do; roads were practically *nil;* and boundless tracks of jungle and teak-forest afforded secure shelter for the light-heeled gang-robbers who haunted them. The police garrisons were few, and consisted entirely of Burman constables, whom their lawless compatriots utterly despised.

Of the numerous gangs which lived upon the peaceable inhabitants, the largest and most mischievous was one led by a man named Boh Hlan. This outlaw was a species of Burman Robin Hood, who owed his

* Mr. St. Leger Aldworth, Assistant-Superintendent Burma Police, tells this story. If I remember rightly the exploit gained him his promotion, and the thanks of Government.

immunity from capture to his cheap generosity. He was the terror of the cultivators whose houses were worth looting, and the unfailing friend and patron of poorer men. What he stole with one hand, he lavished broadcast with the other; hence information which might have enabled the police to arrest him was particularly difficult to obtain.

To compass the death or capture of this man was the the chief end of my professional life during the first months of my stay at Pyeemana. For weeks together I hunted his gang from cover to cover, and from village to village. Such jungle-work during the hot season is not conducive to health of either white man or native; and by the time the rains were due, my constables were completely worn out by the hardships of their life, while I myself was almost incapacitated by repeated attacks of fever, brought on by sleeping out in marshy jungle and living on the poorest diet. At intervals I took my men back to Pyeemana, to let them rest and recruit; but these much-needed holidays from dacoit-hunting never lasted very long. Sometimes an alarm from a remote corner of the district drew us out on a wild-goose chase; or impatient despatches from head-quarters asking what was being done, and how I explained the continued paralysis of trade in my locality, or private letters from my superiors, urging me to renewed efforts, drove me out into the forests again, with followers scarcely fit to carry their own rifles.

I was thoroughly sick of the whole business, and would have done anything to get rid of the perpetual worry, when I was surprised by a visit from the officer in charge of the Police Department. He had come to Pyeemana to "inspect," for which ordeal I was quite pre-

pared; but besides inspection, he came to give me new and unexpected instructions regarding the attitude I was to assume towards the dacoits.

"The Government," he said, "has determined to try what effect an offer of pardon will produce on these fellows. Do you think any of those who are harrying your district would come in if promised free pardon for past offences?"

I considered the question carefully. Although we had failed to bring down or arrest any of the outlaws, we had kept them so remorselessly on the move that they had had no time to do any mischief for the last two months. No man grows tired of his business sooner than an idle dacoit, and Boh Hlan had made no raids worth anything lately. I therefore answered in the affirmative. I believed many would "come in" if they could be convinced they might do so without fear of the consequences.

"Very good," said my chief. "You are empowered to treat with the dacoits in your district on these terms: full pardon to every man who has not a price upon his head who comes in and gives up his arms before the 31st July next. See what you can do."

He went away next day, leaving me to my own devices. I cannot say I relished the idea of carrying out these instructions. I was obliged to confess to myself that, with the means at my command, I could make little headway against the storm of crime; but to offer free pardon looked too much like admission of disability to be palatable. However, the order had been given, and I resolved to turn the chance it offered to the best account. I lost no time. I determined to begin with Boh Hlan, who chanced, quite undeservedly, not to be

one of those for whose head a reward had been proclaimed. He was the greatest pest I had to deal with, and, moreover, he had his gang so well in hand, I felt certain that if he consented to apply for pardon his entire following would do the same. So, an hour after Colonel X—— had gone, I sent an orderly to summon the old hpoongyee who was the sole occupant of the tiny monastery outside Pyeemana. The person of a hpoongyee is sacred, even to dacoits; and I subjected the old man to no risk in appointing him my ambassador to Boh Hlan.

The hpoongyee soon appeared, and entered the verandah of my house at the slow, stately pace observed by the Bhuddist priesthood. He had been a tall man; but now he was bent with age, and the yellow robe which had fallen from his shoulder discovered a frame as gaunt and shrivelled as that of a mummy. With his shaven head, sunken eyes and cheeks, and dry parchment-like skin, he looked a messenger more fitting to carry tidings of Death than of peace.

Infirm though he appeared, he was still active both in body and mind; and when I had explained what I wanted with him, he readily consented to "help the Government side." Could he ascertain Boh Hlan's present hiding-place, and make his way thither? The old man had no doubt he could—if he went alone. Then would he attempt it, and deliver with his own lips the message I wished given the dacoit chief? He would, certainly, if I would write the message down?

I did what he required and begged him to go soon; and having received the old man's assurance that he would start at once, I dismissed him, praying that success might attend his mission.

How or where he found the Boh, I did not think proper to inquire; but five days afterwards he reappeared, looking, if possible, a shade more withered than before.

"The Boh," he began, without any preliminaries, and in the matter-of-fact tones he might have used in delivering a casual message from a next-door neighbour—"the Boh is willing to treat with your honour, and names a place of meeting."

"Very good!" I exclaimed. "You have indeed done well!"

The old hpoongyee smiled at me pityingly. "Boh Hlan's words were these," he continued: "Tell the police officer to come and meet us at Thongway village a week hence. He must come alone and without arms. If he carries any weapon, we shall know his fine words are lies."

I could not repress a gasp of astonishment and dismay. The hpoongyee fairly burst out laughing.

"Of course your honour will not go?" he observed.

"Yes; I shall," I replied though my heart beat like a hammer at the prospect.

"If your honour go to Thongway," said the hpoongyee, "he goes to his death."

An opinion given by this man was well worth consideration; but continued failures and official wiggings had made me reckless; and I was not in a mood to listen to reason. Here at last was a chance of doing something tangible; it was literally "neck or nothing!" but I had no idea of missing it. I therefore warmly thanked the old hpoongyee for his services and his kind advice; but reminded him that if I declined to meet the Boh, even on such preposterous conditions, it would

produce a very serious effect on the state of the country. Would he oblige me by seeking out the dacoit leader again, and telling him I would meet him at Thongway on the day named?—My adviser flatly refused; he would help no man to his death.

"Did Boh Hlan say he would be there on Thursday?" I inquired.

"Your honour, he did; but——"

I cut the old gentleman short, and told him he had permission to go home to his monastery. This was Monday, and I had no time to waste in argument.

I did not grow more enamoured of the plan as I thought over it. Boh Hlan was a thorough scoundrel. I could not forget that in our only skirmish I had wounded him with my own gun, and he was not likely to have forgotten it either. But I was determined to meet him. If he consented to "come in," I should score a good mark at headquarters; if he played me false——

Thongway was a small hamlet of notoriously bad repute, lying under the hill range about fifty miles away. If the dacoits agreed to lay down their arms and give up their business in return for pardon, it would be no easy matter to persuade them to come in as prisoners and go through the form of trial, as the authorities required: they would never consent to follow me back tamely on such terms. I therefore resolved to take the whole police force I had at command, encamp at a spot I knew of, about ten miles from Thongway, and bring them in under guard; always supposing they meant fair play. I did not care to ponder over the alternative.

I pass over the two days' march to the place I had selected for my police encampment. We arrived there

late in the evening, very thoroughly done up by our wearisome tramp in the heat of the sun, and all hands turned in early. The following day was that fixed for the meeting at Thongway, and, tired as I was, idle speculations on the task to-morrow had in store kept me awake all night. I was up at daylight, but I did not set out for the rendezvous until the sun was high. The residents of Thongway were to a man friends of Boh Hlan; and if I appeared first on the ground, they were not likely to lose such an opportunity of taking my head as an acceptable gift for their patron. They might have learnt from the Boh that their village had been chosen as a meeting-place; but more likely not; and to go early was to run unnecessary risk.

Giving my sergeant the only orders I could depend upon his carrying out—namely, to return with all haste to Pyeemana if I failed to appear before midnight, I took my stick, filled my pockets with biscuit, and started for my destination. The country through which the path to Thongway led was very lovely; open and grassy, splendidly timbered, and wonderfully rich in orchids, whose blossoms gleamed, pink, yellow, red, and white, from almost every bough; while the darkly-wooded hills rose to a height of five thousand feet right before me. I remember the scenery now, though I did not pay much attention to it at the time. I don't think I am more of a coward than most men, but I do not mind confessing that I walked that ten miles to Thongway in a condition of unspeakable funk.

I reached the belt of jungle which surrounded the village at a little distance, about eleven o'clock; and when I emerged on the open paddy-land which lay between me and the cluster of bamboo huts, I paused to pull my-

self together and try to discover whether the dacoits were true to their tryst. I could see no one in the village save a few romping children; but on moving a little farther to the left, I saw a crowd of men squatting in the shade of a clump of elephant bamboos, a little way on the far side of the hamlet. So far so good. I wiped the perspiration from my face and hands and went on. My heart sank a little lower as I drew near, for I saw that every man of the assembly was armed. That did not look as though they intended peace.

The screams of the children, frightened by such a strange monster as a white man, spared me the trouble of announcing my arrival to the dacoits. They rose with one accord and, making very unnecessary display of their dahs and spears, began to slouch towards me in two and threes. I took my stand under a huge tree, and threw up my hands to show I was unarmed, according to agreement. Then, actuated by somewhat mixed motives, I shouted in commanding tones to the advancing dacoits: "Lay down your arms! I will not speak with any man who comes to me with a dah, spear, or gun in his hand!"

The effect of my speech was far from satisfactory; every man stopped, paused for a moment, and then slunk back to the shade, where all sat down again. I did not like this. It denoted that the dacoits were in no good-humour, and I wished myself well out of the place. But having forbidden them to come near me armed, it would never do to retract, and I sat down on the ground to consider my next move. It was not left to me to make one. After twenty minutes of hot discussion the dacoits appeared to have formed some plan of their own. Four men very deliberately set up bam-

boo tripods and squatted down to rest their guns on them, in accordance with the Burman's practice when he means to take a good aim; then one man, carrying an antiquated carbine, was pushed and scolded out of the group, evidently charged with a message to me. He came very slowly, and I could see he was in a terrible fright; but I was growing painfully anxious to open negotiations, and rose to receive him, holding out my hands and trying hard not to look at those four levelled guns.

"Come here," I said persuasively; "I have no arms."

The man grinned the sickliest grin I have ever seen on human countenance, and stammered out something relative to my *thaynatgalay* (pistol; literally small gun). As well as I could make out, his friends had sent him to ascertain that I had not a revolver concealed about me. They did not believe I would come without it, and would like to be quite sure.

This was more reassuring. I held up my hands again and begged the trembling messenger to come and satisfy himself.

"Come!" I said as persuasively as I could—"come, and look all over me. Look! I take off my coat, that you may see I have no pistol." I threw my karki jacket on the ground and held up my hands again. The fellow took heart of grace and came nearer.

"Turn round," he requested. "They will shoot you dead if you kill me."

"I can't kill you," I replied shortly, as I turned slowly round for convenience of inspection. "I didn't come here alone to kill anyone; I came to talk to Boh Hlan about this matter of pardon."

The man grunted an assent; and having ascertained

that the bulky contents of my coat-pockets were nothing more dangerous than biscuit and cheroots, bawled to his companions to "Come!" Those gentry then laid down their weapons and obeyed, laughing and talking with insolent defiance.

Five minutes more, and I found myself the centre of a tightly-packed crowd of squatting figures, who stared at me as though eyes could kill. I did not feel easy, hemmed in on all sides by ruffians to whom murder was child's play, and whose lives I had been diligently seeking for the past five months. No attempt was made to hustle me; but the expression on every one of the lowering savage faces told how light a word, how slight a slip of the tongue was necessary to set them at my throat. Now and again I caught some half-jeering observation as to my helpless condition there in their midst; and I was half tempted to hurl some scathing challenge to them which would ensure my death at once and leave them an inheritance of bullet or rope. All were talking at once, to me and at me, and my patience was sorely tried before a momentary lull gave me a chance of making myself heard. It came at last, after the very worst quarter of an hour I ever spent, and I made my speech. In brief, I explained the terms on which pardon would be granted; insisted strongly on the increase of the Punjaubee Military Police, then in process of organisation; reverted again to the pardon now offered, and exhorted them to take advantage of the opportunity.

"Now, Boh Hlan," I concluded, addressing the leader, who was squatting almost on my feet, "what do you say?"

The man ran his finger nervously over the unsightly

lumps on his chest, which marked the spots where charms had been let in below the skin, and said "he would like to talk it over."

"It is good," I replied, breathing more freely. "I am here to talk with you."

"I have here," said the chief, raising his arm and showing a puckered white scar, "a wound from your gun. Moung Tsit has a wound on his leg; many of us have received hurts from the police."

The Boh's reference to wounds was followed by a slight commotion; half-a-dozen men stood up to show newly-healed bullet-wounds, and some, hideous suppurating sores which made me sick to look upon.

"The police guns have made these wounds," said Boh Hlan, looking at me fixedly.

My rising hopes sank to zero again. An ominous silence reigned over the gang for a couple of minutes, and I did not care to break it.

"The police guns made these wounds," repeated the Boh.

The man was evidently playing with me, or trying to work up the vengeful feelings of his men. If I gave their resentment time to hatch, my life was not worth an hour's purchase. I felt that my voice trembled when I spoke.

"Those men who have been wounded," I said, "will be taken into the Government hospital and cured. Or if they prefer it they shall have as much English medicine as they please."

I was unutterably relieved to see the general approval these remarks evoked. The dacoits' brows cleared, and in my heart I gave thanks for the Burman's unshakeable faith in the efficacy of "English medicine."

I followed up my advantage by lighting a cheroot, and after taking a pull or two at it I passed it to the Boh; he hesitated a moment, for smoking one cheroot, turn about, is only practised among friends and neighbours; but finally he accepted it, drew a full mouthful of smoke, and handed the tobacco to the man next him.

A better understanding being now established, the dacoits became anxious to hear more about the intentions of the Government. Over and over again I had to reiterate that not a man who gave himself up should have a single hair upon his head cut off; that they would be brought before the judge and pardoned without delay; and that they should have nothing whatever to fear from the police after their release; they might live wherever they pleased and do what they liked.

After two hours' hard assertion and promise, I drew out my note-book and asked Boh Hlan point-blank if I should write down his name as an applicant for pardon. He hung back a little, but at length gave way; and soon I was taking down names as fast as I could write. I was delighted with the success of my foolhardy errand; but I was not yet out of the wood.

"Now," I said, closing my book, "there are still some nen who have not asked to come in. I will come back to-morrow and give them one more chance."

"Where are you going?" then demanded the Boh, curtly.

"To my camp, ten miles from here," I answered.

"Are the police there?"

"Certainly."

A loud murmuring arose from the crowd, and the Boh made no attempt to quell it. Clearly the information that the police were so close at hand disturbed them.

"See!" I shouted at the top of my voice, "what would it matter though the police were here in this village? They will not hurt you now."

But the alarm was not to be so easily allayed.

"You must stay here to-night," said Boh Hlan firmly turning to me.

"If I do not return," I answered, "my men will think I am killed, and will go quickly to Pyeemana. The Deputy-Commissioner will then send out five hundred men after you."

The Boh laughed. "For how many months have you been trying to catch me?" he jeered. "But you shall not go. How can I tell but that you will return at once with your police to-night, they being so near at hand? Now you know where we may be found you will again try to shoot us."

There was no arguing with such obstinate distrust as this; but the position was exceedingly awkward. I could not go without the dacoits' sanction, and to remain would inevitably bring out an expedition to avenge my imaginary murder. All I had half-done would be undone, and more besides, before matters could be explained.

"I will stay," I answered, recognising the necessity, "but you must send two of your men to my camp with the letter I shall write, and those two men must remain with the police as hostages."

I was agreeably surprised by the Boh's ready consent to this arrangement; and without delay I sat down and pencilled a note to my sergeant, explaining my delay and bidding him detain the messengers.

I did not sleep much that night. I occupied a hut with the dacoit chief and a dozen of his men, who were

as wakeful as I was. The outlaws talked all night about my visit to them, and the probability of the Government keeping its promise of pardon. They seemed unable to believe that it was not a ruse to make prisoners of them, and several predicted that their fate would be death or—even worse to the Burmese mind—exile to the Andaman Islands. Some boldly voted that I should be killed at once as I lay asleep, and that an attack should be made on my police camp. This suggestion found several supporters, and for an eternity I lay listening while my fate was shuttlecocked to and fro. In vain I listened for Boh Hlan's voice ; either he was asleep or held aloof from the debate, for he did not speak a word until, in the advanced hours of the morning, a hot dispute began between some of his band regarding their conduct on the following day. Then he delivered his own decision straightforwardly enough.

"Silence, you!" he cried. "Listen! This English police officer is alone, and he cannot take any man against his will. Those who like may run away. I believe the Englishman has spoken truth, and I shall follow him to Pyeemana. Those who will may follow me."

Not another word was said; and worn out with anxiety and fatigue I fell asleep.

I was up at dawn, eager to start back to camp before the dacoit chief should change his mind. I found that five of those who had promised submission had thought better of it, and had bolted ; but Boh Hlan and twenty-seven of his men professed themselves ready to accompany me. I was a proud man when I marched into my camp at the head of this file of dacoits.

I need not linger over the sequel. The gang gave up

their arms and assumed the *rôle* of prisoners with a good deal of murmuring; and their reproaches did not decrease when they were committed to the lock-up to await their formal trial. That ordeal took place almost immediately, and they were set free on promising to be of good behaviour for the future.

The impression this treatment made upon them was evidenced in a remarkable manner. Within a month of their dismissal pardoned, no fewer than eighty-seven dacoits came in voluntarily and gave up their arms.

PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF A DACOIT.

CHAPTER I.

THE VICTIM OF OPPORTUNITY.

SINBOUNGWAY is a small fishing village on the Irrawaddy, some eighty or ninety miles below Mandalay. It is not an important place: it never was; but when the Lord of Earth and Sea, Master of a Thousand White Elephants, and countless gold umbrellas, caused to be issued to all Mingyees, Woons, Woondouks, and other officers his Royal Proclamation that the English kullahs threatened the Golden City of Palaces, and commanded the said Mingyees and others to prepare to resist and drive the audacious enemy into the sea, Sinboungway was hastily put into a state of defence and garrisoned.

Now, although the village was only a collection of the very poorest mat and bamboo huts, huddled together on

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NOTE.—In "Passages in the Life of a Dacoit," I have strung upon one thread a few examples of dacoits' performances and their milder methods. The full true tale of dacoit atrocities will not bear the light of print. The incidents described occurred, some many times, in the Lower Province after the annexation. I do not think it does any injustice to Boh Hline, now undergoing penal servitude for life, to appoint him hero.

a hill overlooking the river, it was easy to repair the existing defensive works and collect a militia garrison within a couple of days. This was due to the government which had been devised by the wisdom and foresight of His Golden Majesty. Almost his first step on ascending the throne after the death of Mindoon Min was to abolish numerous extravagant Western eccentricities of administration which that monarch had adopted. King Theebaw's infinite sagacity had discovered that if you only went the right way to work, officers would pay for their appointments instead of requiring payment. The scheme of government he organised was surprisingly simple and remunerative. He permitted his Mingyees, or ministers, to parcel out the whole realm, and place each district under a Boh who inflicted justice in the shape of fines, and who collected as much revenue as he could. With the money so gathered, the Boh paid himself, the Mingyee who appointed him, and satisfied the claims of the Royal Treasury. For his pocket's sake he had to protect his district against neighbouring Bohs, and for this purpose he maintained a bodyguard of armed men who also did the dirty work of tax-gathering. Beside this bodyguard, there existed a reserve or militia consisting of a large proportion of the able-bodied men in every village. The necessity of a militia was discovered in the cupidity of neighbouring Bohs and the frequent desirability of making up shortages by raiding their villages. The beauty of this scheme of administration is obvious. His Majesty obtained his Royal revenues without trouble or expense; the Mingyees did a most lucrative patronage and commission business; the profits of Bohs were limited only by the earnings of the people and their own talent for extor-

tion ; and appointments in the rank and file of the bodyguard were highly prized. It is possible that the taxpayers saw defects in the machinery ; but in a country free from popularly elected assemblies and daily press no such incubus as public opinion handicaps the Executive. The people submitted patiently to the squeezing of their own Boh and turned out with avidity to repel intrusion or deliver attack. When the squeezing became intolerable they watched their opportunity to migrate southwards into British territory and settle there. Just as in British territory when the attentions of the police grew disagreeably pressing, thieves and vagabonds sought and found refuge in His Majesty's dominions.

Hence, when the Royal Proclamation reached Boh Tet Boo, "Eater" of the Sinboungway district, he sent out messengers to his villages to call out the militia, and in two days collected a hundred and eighty men. These had no arms of their own; but the Mingyee caused guns and ammunition to be supplied from the Royal Arsenal at Mandalay. Few of the men, except the bodyguard were acquainted with the use of firearms, and Boh Tet Boo did not waste time drilling them, nor waste powder and ball at target-practice. The English were already on their way up the river and there was no time to lose. He set all hands to cut down young trees in the jungle about Sinboungway, and directed them to trim and plant these in the gaps which had been broken in the old stockade. This was a close set palisade ten feet high, which stood half-way up the low hill. When it was finished Boh Tet Boo went outside with a few of his bodyguard to inspect the fortifications.

"It is very good," said Koon Hmoung, who had

superintended the work, "a pariah dog could not get through."

But Boh Tet Boo had visited Minhla and Myingyan and remembered how terrible those fortresses looked, with big black cannon lowering over the earthworks. The mere sight of those guns was enough to frighten away armies. There was not the very least chance of the English getting past Minhla, but at the same time it would be wise to further strengthen Sinboungway. Steps must be taken to frighten the enemy from coming near the stockade.

"Call carpenters," said Boh Tet Boo, when he reached the shade of the house he had chosen for his own quarters; and the bodyguard ran among the huts calling for "men skilful with the hands." It was midday and very hot, though the month was November; but the men were anxious to gain the favour of the Boh, and ten skilled carpenters obeyed the summons, bringing such tools as they possessed.

"His lordship," said Koon Hmoung, when the ten carpenters had arranged themselves in an attitude of respectful attention on their stomachs, "commands that cannons be made to frighten the English kullahs. There is plenty of wood and black paint. Go to work."

Moung Hline of Tygyaing village begged leave to speak, and receiving it, expressed his amazement at the military genius of his lordship the Boh; he further declared his ability to turn out a supply of cannons as bad to look at as those of Minhla. Whereat the Boh smiled graciously and told Koon Hmoung to remember the speaker when there was a vacancy in the bodyguard. Meantime he appointed this intelligent fellow Master of the Ordnance.

Moung Hline withdrew from the presence shikoing profoundly and laughing with pleasure. Pho Gyike of the bodyguard, who collected the taxes in Tygyaing village, had wrung a good many rupees out of him by threats of laying false information. Moung Hline promised himself that when he got his appointment he would make up his losses. There was Mah Waik who had forty rupees hidden which very few people knew of; he would have that, rupee by rupee. Then old Moung Gyo had a silk pasoh concealed in his house which he dared not wear nor sell; Moung Hline would have that pasoh for himself. Moung Gyo was always letting his bullocks stray into his neighbour's paddy, so there would be no difficulty about getting up a charge against him, when Moung Gyo would be glad to buy remittance of the charge with a gift of the pasoh.

Moung Hline felt that there was a future before him, and he ordered the carpenters to work with the air of the Boh himself. He certainly did his duty. He went into the jungle below Sinboungway and through Moung Myat, his cousin, pointed out the trees he wanted cut down. He saw the logs dragged inside the stockade, and stood over the men while they barked and tapered and blacked them. Koon Hmoung had earthworks thrown up on the slope overlooking the river, well back from the stockade, and in these Boh Tet Boo's guns were mounted on bamboo trestles, also painted black. Moung Myat said it made his back cold to walk in front of the battery; and really a few hundred yards away it did look very formidable. Boh Tet Boo inspected the works and told Koon Hmoung in Moung Hline's hearing that no matter how their priests tattooed them the English soldiers would never face those guns.

Talking of tattooing he thought it would be wise to tattoo the militia-men. Each man of the bodyguard, as a matter of course, had been made proof against bullet and sword at the time of his enrolment; it was necessary in view of the nature of the corps' official duties. No doubt the others had charms and medicines, but it would be neglecting a precaution if he omitted to make them invulnerable. He should charge them only one rupee eight annas each, and Koon Hmoung would be good enough to proclaim at once that every man in Sinboungway who was not proof against violent death must come and be tattooed on the following day.

Moung Hline was among those who came to be tattooed, and was much gratified at the fresh mark of the Boh's favour the proceeding obtained for him. He was tattooed free of charge.

"You are greatly honoured," said Moung Myat to him afterwards.

"I have gained his lordship's favour," said Moung Hline, holding up his head. For Moung Myat had shikoed when he spoke: he had never shikoed before.

The battery having been made and all the garrison tattooed, the men spent their days as they pleased. They had plenty to eat, for Boh Tet Boo had levied food contributions on the neighbouring villages; and the people of Sinboungway, turned out of their houses for the bodyguard, were kept at work to supply the ahmoodan with fish. It was a pleasant life. In the cool of the morning the men bathed in the river and afterwards lay in the shade of the mangoes, which grew about the hill tops, and there slept away the heat, or smoked, gambled, chewed betel, and talked. Naturally

the English army was much discussed. As Moung Hline had once been in Rangoon he was an authority upon this subject, and became a more important person than ever: one day even two of the bodyguard sat down to hear him speak. It was the story Moung Hline had told twice a day for a week, but there were always new hearers.

No, Moung Hline would say, looking down upon the great river which merged shining into the sky-line in the south-west, the English army would never pass Minhla; and if they did succeed in doing so by night or with the help of magic they would be cut to pieces by the guns at Myingyan. It was a very small army, the white one. He had seen it one day on the Rangoon racecourse and had counted the men, four hundred and eighty-two including officers. They all had guns, it was true; but such boys as they were! The Burmese ahmoodan could wipe them out like mosquitoes with their bare hands. There were some black kullah soldiers too, but who cared for them? As for the English they were so much afraid of His Golden Majesty's soldiers that when they heard that Moung Hline had counted their army, they seized him and put him in jail for six months. How did they hear he had done it? Well; he mentioned the fact to a friend who laid an information against him. Yes, it was true that friend declared that Moung Hline had robbed him of two hundred rupees, but it was not the case. He thought the money was his own when he took it. The English jail was not a good place. You got plenty to eat, but you were never allowed to go out, and were worked very hard all day.

From listening to Moung Hline's account of the English army, the garrison at Sinboungway acquired a lofty

contempt for it. At first the sentries, whom it was the Boh's pleasure to post under a bamboo clump on a knoll in the corner of the stockade, used to stay awake nearly all day, keeping their eyes on the river till they ached. But when days went by and nothing was heard of the English, the men, wondering why no news of victory came from the south, grew lax and slept in the shade instead of watching the shimmering plain of water between its jungle borders.

One evening, when the sky was closing, Moung Hline and Moung Myat, who happened to be the sentries that day, woke and glanced carelessly down the river, before picking up their muskets and climbing the hill to the village. As they did so they dropped on their heels and rubbed their eyes: for far away, standing out clear against the oil-smooth river, were two blots and two long trails of smoke; and while they looked the heavy rattle of anchor chains came grumbling faintly over the water.

"Ships," said Moung Myat in a low voice.

"They are come," said Moung Hline, grasping his gun fiercely.

It grew dark, and the ships faded into the night; but the men could still see where they lay because strings of lanterns, white, green, and red, could be made out from time to time, first on one ship then on the other.

"Magic?" said Moung Myat.

"I cannot tell," replied Moung Hline uneasily. He had never seen ships signalling at night and did not know what the lights meant.

They shouldered their guns and went up to the village to report what they had seen. Every man in the garrison turned out to look at the lights, but nobody could under-

stand what they meant, changing and changing again so silently. The Boh decided that four sentries instead of two should keep watch on the knoll during the night, and caused Koon Hmoung to announce that he should review the troops at daylight next morning and give out ammunition.

Nobody slept that night. The men, with their pasohs drawn over their heads, sat around the fires talking of the great deeds they were going to perform next day if the English came near enough to fight. There was, in spite of the brave talk, a feeling that it would be satisfactory to know how the ships had got past Minhla and Myingyan without being blown out of the water. Moung Hline gave it as his opinion that the Bohs at those fortresses let the ships pass up unharmed in order to trap the English and make their escape impossible. Some agreed that this was the explanation, but others were doubtful, thinking with Moung Myat that those coloured lanterns proved the presence of great sayahs on board the ships.

The cocks were still crowing when the gongs beat to summon the men, and in a betel-chew* or less the garrison attired in their everyday pasohs, and naked from the waist upwards, had been pushed and hustled by the bodyguard into a ragged line. The Boh smoking a big green cheroot stalked out of his house followed by Koon Hmoung and a young man carrying his gun in a red flannel cover. The troops received the chief sitting on their heels, shikoing as well as they could for their muskets. The review did not take long. The Boh stood facing the line and said that he was proud to command so fine a body of men and was sure that they would

* Fifteen or twenty minutes.

render a good account of the enemy if they had a chance of fighting. He thought, however, that when the English soldiers saw the wooden cannons they would be afraid to come near and steam away back to Rangoon. In that case he should send the soldiers home to their villages and himself go to Mandalay to report the victory. Then he relighted his cheroot, which had gone out while he spoke, and the garrison shouted excited approval, flourishing their guns. Ammunition was then served out and the review was over.

The two ships were now seen to be steaming up the river. They were near enough to show the men on board moving about, and the troops sat down in groups to watch them. "I wonder how near they will come," said a young man to Moung Myat.

"They will come on till they see the great black guns below us," said Moung Myat. For Moung Hline was within hearing and it is wise to flatter the rising star. Koon Hmoung was in the act of ordering men down to pretend to load the wooden guns, when a great puff of smoke belched over the white side of the leading ship, and almost before the men could laugh at the fools who fired when they were a mile away, there was a curious whistling scream and a terrible explosion overhead in fire and smoke.

"Rotten shot!" cried Koon Hmoung; and several broke from the now standing knots of men and ran, nobody calling to them to stop; for three men lay on the ground bleeding from jagged wounds.

"Come down to the cannons!" shouted Moung Hline, capering out in front of his comrades and shaking his gun. "Come down to the cannons!"

Nobody paid any attention to him, and he crept back

again among the men who stood staring at the slowly approaching ships and murmuring fearfully. While they stood uncertain what to do, a woman with her tamein torn to shreds came through the rear gate of the stockade and ran up, crying that thousands of kullah soldiers, white and black, were coming through the jungle.

The Boh let his cheroot fall.

"Kullah ahmoodan coming by land!" he said.

"Hear them!" cried the woman, pointing.

Now their attention was drawn, the men could hear in the jungle, a very little way off, the crash of branches and the smothered scuffle of many men pressing through underwood.

"They are very near," said Koon Hmoung, looking at Boh Tet Boo.

"Let us go and kill them in the jungle," cried the Boh; and he ran towards the gate followed by the body-guard and many of the militia. Moung Hline, not wishing to fight, stayed in the stockade with Moung Myat and a few more.

"We will wait to drive off the ships," he said.

Another burst of smoke came from the leading vessel and Moung Myat, crying "I see it coming," dropped his gun and ran after the Boh. The shell came screaming up and burst in flame and smoke. Another man fell, shrieking that he was killed.

"Go!" shouted Moung Hline, "we shall all be killed by the rotten shot if we stay," and the party turned and raced down the slope to the gate of the stockade. Before they reached it scores of white soldiers appeared all along the broken line of the jungle a hundred yards away, and a man on a pony his feet nearly touching the ground,

galloped forward, shouting. Moung Hline guessed what he meant and put down his gun to crouch on his heels and shiko; all the others did the same, and the officer called to his men. These, standing clear of the jungle, slid together in a close line and poured after him through the gate into the stockade, where they surrounded Moung Hline and his comrades who fell on their faces and prayed for their lives.

There was a long delay until an interpreter came up. When he arrived he asked Moung Hline what had become of the garrison.

"His lordship went to fight in the jungles when he heard you were coming," said Moung Hline.

The white soldiers laughed a great deal when they understood what he said; and Moung Myat, laughing too, said he thought the Boh had run away. Meantime the officer had dismounted and was looking the prisoners over.

"Are you soldiers?" he asked through the interpreter.

"No," replied Moung Hline.

"How do you come to be here bearing arms?"

"It was the order of the Boh," answered Moung Hline.

"What are you by trade or profession?" asked the interpreter.

"I am a carpenter," replied Moung Hline; "this man is also a carpenter, and that one."

The other men being questioned replied truly that they were poor cultivators and had been ordered to Sinboungway by the Boh.

Several officers on ponies had now come up and the open ground outside the stockade was crowded with white and black soldiers. Moung Hline looked up and

down between the stakes and thought he could not have seen all the English army that day on the Rangoon race-course.

The officers spoke together and then the interpreter speaking in a loud voice told Moung Hline and the rest to lay down their arms.

"We have put them down," said Moung Hline, pointing to the guns he and his friends had dropped when they saw the English troops.

"And go peacefully to your villages," continued the interpreter, "there to resume your daily occupations without let or hindrance." He said a good deal more, but the prisoners scarcely listened after they learned they were to be allowed to go home unhurt. It was a curious way of making war.

"I think the English are fools," said Moung Myat to his cousin; he had expected nothing but crucifixion.

Moung Hline did not answer. He had been thinking over the leniency of the English, and meant to try and strain it a little farther.

"Lord," he said to the officer at whose order the interpreter had told them to go home peacefully; "Lord, if we are sent home without our guns the Boh will certainly kill us. The Boh and his men will come and burn our village and kill our wives and little children. We are peaceful villagers, and we are very much afraid of the Boh who eats our district." Moung Hline looked piteously at the faces of the English officers while the interpreter repeated what he had said. Some smiled scornfully and others looked doubtful. The officer who was giving orders looked perplexed; but at length he addressed Moung Hline mouth to mouth in Burmese, and told him that he and his comrades might

retain their guns; he went on to say that this favour was granted in order that they, as peaceable men, might defend themselves against dacoits and bad characters, and that if the guns were used against subjects of the Queen, or against her soldiers, the consequences would be very serious.

"Take your guns and go," he concluded.

Moung Hline threw himself on his face and blessed the kind officer; and the soldiers made a lane to let him lead the way out of the stockade.

A few of the men were anxious to get away from the neighbourhood of the white soldiers, and took their several paths homewards as soon as they left the gate. But Moung Myat and four or five others remained with Moung Hline, who proposed to stay about in the jungles and see what the kullahs would do next; they marched north-east along the river bank for about a mile until they came to a low sparsely wooded hill like that on which Sinboungway stood. Here they lay down in the shade and waited.

The English made very short work of the defences. Moung Hline saw them rolling his beautiful wooden guns down the hill through a gap cut in the stockade, and watched boats come and tow several off to the ships which were now anchored close in under Sinboungway. Flame and smoke shot up from the village, and then from fifty different places round the stockade. It was a great ring of fire when boats began to ply from and to the ships taking the soldiers on board again.

"Look!" cried Moung Myat, pointing. Far down the river, growing slowly into sight, was a great fleet of ships. They came on nearer and nearer in a long procession, until the men could see that they were the

Irrawaddy Flotilla Company's steamers they knew so well. Each had on either side, a flat, or roofed barge, filled with soldiers and cannon. Never had Moung Hline imagined that the English Queen had so great an army. The upper decks and iron roofs were covered with dots and blotches of red.

"Ahmoodan?" asked Moung Myat.

"Yes," replied Moung Hline; "all soldiers."

The others said nothing. They squatted, staring with all their eyes.

As the ships came slowly up past the blazing village, the soldiers could be heard shouting all together, and soon they were near enough to be seen waving their helmets. Presently the notes of bugles floated up and the soldiers disappeared from the roofs of steamers and flats. The two ships which had arrived first weighed anchor and passed on up the river with the rest.

"They will go to Mandalay," said Moung Myat, in an awe-struck whisper.

Moung Hline did not answer. He watched the long line of ships steam slowly up against the swift stream until the last went by churning the water into foam under her stern.

"They go to Mandalay," said Moung Myat again.

Moung Hline drew a long breath. Boh Tet Boo had run away, and, no doubt, had been killed. It was good that a man take care of himself when there was no bodyguard appointment to be hoped for.

"The English soldiers have gone to Mandalay," he said. "There are now none left in the south. There are many rich villages in the south. Go! we are charmed against death." He tapped his breast. "Let us march into the English-ruled country and eat the

villages there. We shall find much money and goods. Follow me!"

Moung Myat jerked himself upon his feet and waved his gun. "Go!" he shouted. "We follow Boh Hline to the villages in the south. It is better to eat than be eaten."

CHAPTER II.

NOBODY'S GUEST.

CONSTERNATION and subdued excitement reigned in Kyoukchoungyee. Boh Hline's gang had been lurking about the district for a month past, but, although Moung Tha and other idle talking men spent more time than was good in repeating that one night the village would be burned and all the people cut to pieces in their sleep, nobody had been much frightened. That story about the English soldiers going to Mandalay, and taking the king away, was too stupid to be believed by sensible men; but there was no denying that rumours of dacoits had been very rife since it began to be put about. And that very morning, while Moung Ghine's little boy was tending the buffaloes on the grass at the far end of the paddy-fields, a strange man, carrying a spear, had come out of the jungle, and had said to him: "Go to the village and say, 'To-night Boh Hline and his men will eat their rice at Kyoukchoungyee."

News from the outer world was rare at Kyoukchoungyee village. It stood far up the stream whose name it bore, which came from somewhere, no one knew where, in the hills on the West. Boats of six hundred baskets could come up to the village; but a mile

or two farther up the water shallowed so that only canoes could pass. That was what made life so dull at Kyoukchoungyee. At most creek villages, when you sit on the bank and smoke or chew betel of an evening, there are boats passing and repassing ten times in the hour, and the people stop rowing to hang on their oars and gossip. You hear what is going on in the district. How the Theinway cultivators have sold their paddy at eighty-five rupees the hundred baskets, the best price obtained this season; what the Bassein broker's runner says about the paddy market; how Sing Yo, the Chinese pedlar, in coming through the little creek above Mayahgyee, yesterday morning, ran his boat on a snag and lost all the beautiful cottons and cloths he was taking to sell in the jungle villages; how the English police officer at Yandoon has had a petition to come and shoot a leopard which petitioners said was killing their cattle; and how he would not go because he said he had to look after dacoits. Everybody who passes has something to say, if only to tell where they are going, and what they are going to do when they get there. You know from day to day, at most creek villages, what the world is doing.

At Kyoukchoungyee it was different. Three or four times in the year a travelling merchant came with the remains of his goods and made hard bargains with the women for yarn and cloth. But most of the passers-by —and they were not many—were bamboo cutters; these brought news when they came up on the way to the hills, but had nothing to tell worth the hearing when they passed down with their rafts. There was but one path from the village. It straggled through the jungle on the hill slopes to Pyeemagone village, two days dis-

tant, and was not much used. There was nothing to bring Pyeemagone folk to Kyoukchoungyee, but Kyoukchoungyee people sometimes went that way to give alms to the old hpoongyee who lived in the little kyoung outside Pyeemagone. True, the path also led to the Karen *tai* miles away up in the hills, and those people often came down ; but who wanted to talk to a sulky Karen ? The paddy kwins, cut into squares by bunds as high as your knees lay behind the village, and were hedged in on all sides by thick thorn jungle with an open patch here and there where the cattle could graze.

The men had come by twos and threes to the house of Moung Wah the goung, and sat on the road or on the verandah talking sadly. The dacoits were coming that night, and everyone would be beaten, or tortured, or killed. Mah Thet, a silly old woman, called from her house that it would be good to send to Henzada for the police ; she did not seem to remember that the dacoits would be very angry if the police were told, and nobody even noticed what Mah Thet said. But everyone was surprised when Moung Wah spoke.

"Moung Loogalay and Shway Gyaw," he said, "shall paddle very fast to Thitghine and say to Moung Toon Pay, the goung :—Send men to Henzada to tell the police that Boh Hline is at Kyoukchoungyee."

"It is very good," said Moung Loogalay and Shway Gyaw.

"The police will come in their little fire-ship to protect us to-night. Moung Loogalay and Shway Gyaw will come with them to show the way. Let them go now."

The two young men stood up, and having lighted fresh cheroots, walked down to the wharf and pushed off in their canoe.

"I think the police will not come before the sky closes?" said Moung Tha when they had gone.

"I will fire off my gun," said Moung Wah. "If the police do not come before the sun goes down, I will fire my gun many times. The dacoits will hear poung! poung! and will think the police are come."

Two or three of the men said it was good, but they spoke as men who do not think what they say. And as they got up to go and sit in their own houses, they told each other that Moung Wah was a fool.

"His words are very foolish," said Moung Nyoon, one of the elders, "the Ayaybaing at Henzada told him to fight dacoits, and he thinks to make us sleep in our houses to-night. The police will not be here till midnight. When the sky shuts, and they are not come, Moung Wah will be wise like other men."

Moung Wah had told the story of his visit to the Ayaybaing at Henzada very many times. He was proud of the way he had been spoken of before a crowd of thoogyees and other officials. He had gone to ask for leave to buy a gun to defend himself from dacoits. Only good men were allowed to have guns. The Government was very strict about it. When he prayed for a gun licence the Ayaybaing had risen from his chair and with his own lips said to the people, "Ko Moung Wah, goung of Kyoukchoungyee, shall have a permit because he is a man of known loyalty." The licence was signed and given into his hand there and then. He had gone at once to the English shop kept by the kullah Aratoon where he bought a fine gun for thirty-five rupees. He had taken it to show to the Ayaybaing, who smiled and said, "Now you must fight dacoits and not run away."

Moung Wah, thought over that visit to Henzada as he sat in his house after the villagers had gone. He was the only man within many miles who had a gun licence and was much respected on that account. He was very proud of the gun, but he never used it. He was a devout man ; he had twice been all the way to Rangoon to stick gold leaf on the Shway Dagone Pagoda, and he had put up a handsome carved teak hutch for public water-jars in the village, besides performing several lesser works of merit ; he was the last person to break the Law by trying to shoot birds or deer. But for the honour of owning the gun he might as well be without it. Just now he heartily wished he was. He was loyal as ever to Government, but when he went to Henzada on purpose to ask for a gun licence he had not expected that dacoits would ever attack Kyoukchoungyee. There was nothing in the village to attract them—until he bought the gun ; that was a prize worth risking something to obtain. Most likely Boh Hline was coming just to get that ; and Moung Wah wished his gun at the bottom of the river. But he dared not hide it or throw it away for everyone in the Circle knew he had it in his house.

The April sun was high overhead when Moung Tha returned to his house. Mah Lay, his wife, and a neighbour, Mah Yoh, sat smoking and gossiping in the shade of the verandah.

"Do you go to the jungle to-night," asked Mah Lay, as he stepped up the short ladder from the street.

Moung Tha said "Yes," and added that she must cook rice for him to eat early, and also put some in leaves to take to the jungle.

"They say the police will come," said Mah Lay.

"Boh Hline will come first I think," answered her husband, "and will kill me if I stay here."

Mah Yoh stood up to leave, saying she had no rice ready and must set to work at once to clean some; the dacoits would ill-use the women who stayed, if they found nothing ready to eat when they came. Besides, she must take little Moung Too and Mee Mee across the river and hide them carefully before night. If the dacoits were in a tiger humour they would kill the children for sport to see their mothers weep.

Any stranger passing through Kyoukchoungyee that afternoon would have seen that something unusual was afoot. Instead of the silence which should prevail in a peaceful village glowing in the heat, the dull slow thumping of pestle in mortar sounded from under nearly every house. There was none of the lively chatter that accompanies ordinary evening rice-cleaning, either. The women stepped on the lever to raise the pestle, and off to let it fall, mute as men on the tread-mill, only pausing from time to time to winnow the husk from the cleaned rice and refill the mortar with paddy. The women who were too old and stiff for the hard work of rice-cleaning sat in the dark shade of the houses diligently rolling cheroots and cutting betel, instead of sleeping as usual.

Even seen under your hand in the dazzling glare, Kyoukchoungyee was picturesque. The wide unpaved street was shaded at intervals by great trees, beneath which the brown wooden houses looked small and homely. At either end and behind, dense jungle rose to close it in, save at one spot where a corner of the paddy land came right up to the village. In front, a steep bare bank fell to the river where a score of empty paddy

boats swayed gently at their moorings. On the other side of the creek was jungle, dense and high.

The day drew on. The pounding died away by degrees and the clouds of grey dust from the winnowing baskets sank. The pariah dogs awoke, snarling and snapping at the flies, and, stretching themselves, trotted down to the water-side to wade belly-deep and drink. The sun, a red fire-ball, was sinking upon the near horizon of forest-clad hills, and a faint warm breeze chased away the hot stillness. Moung Wah, yawning, rose from his mat in the dark shade of his house and went into the street to look over at the boats. Perhaps Moung Loogalay and Shway Gyaw had come back instead of going to Henzada with the Thitghine men. It was possible, as both men had money to hide from the dacoits. Their canoe was not in its place on the bank, and Moung Wah went on up the street to the great nyeem tree beneath which his neighbours were gathering.

"They have not come back," he said.

"Will they come back to be killed?" asked Moung Nyoon with a sneering laugh in which the others joined.

Moung Wah did not reply. If the messengers were not coming back, they were not, and there was no more to be said. It was time to remember one's own safety. The sky would close in three betel-chews and then the dacoits might appear at any moment.

He went back to his house thinking. He found his wife Mah Hnit very busy. She had unrolled all the best mats to spread on the floor, with wooden pillows as for honoured guests. Cheroots filled one lacquer tray, another held dried fish, and a third contained betel-nuts with neatly moulded little cones of lime, and bunches

of soap-leaves pinned together with bamboo skewers. Two English wall-lamps, from which the last trace of japanning had flaked, burnt dimly, smoking their broken chimneys and the cobwebbed rafters. Mah Hnit was pouring rice into her big cooking-pot, while little Poh Myin sat cutting plantain leaves for plates, and chattering in his shrill baby voice.

Moung Wah stood twirling his cheroot as he looked round.

"Have you given ngapee?" he asked.

"I have not," rejoined Mah Hnit. They did not make ngapee at Kyoukchoungyee, and it was expensive to buy.

"Give ngapee," said Moung Wah.

"See!" exclaimed Mah Hnit, rising and waving her hand. "Rice, fish, cheroot, betel, worth two rupees. Two rupees!" shaking two fingers in his face. "Will you give these dogs' sons all our food?"

"Give ngapee," said Moung Wah again with a wistful sniff, as Poh Myin, eager to snatch a taste, opened the box where their small stock of fish paste was kept. "Give all you have. Hide nothing."

Mah Hnit scowled savagely, but said nothing more. Moung Wah went upstairs to the rear part of the house, and from behind the mat partition which screened their sleeping-room produced his gun. This, with a tin containing caps, a leather-covered powder-flask, and some shot tied up in a rag, he placed on a mat in the middle of the floor. Perhaps if the dacoits got the gun without trouble they would go away without even beating anybody.

"Take it to the jungle with you," said Mah Hnit, remembering how many rupees it had cost. "Take it with you to hide."

Moung Wah shook his head.

"I do not wish to be killed," he said.

Then Mah Hnit lost her temper. She told him that the dacoits would not stop to search the jungle when they heard the police were coming. They would eat their rice, take anything they could easily carry, and go away as quickly as they could. She was going to take the money with her, also her silk tamein and Moung Wah's dog-tooth pattern pasoh. He must take the gun. The Ayaybaing would be very angry when he heard the dacoits had got it; and look too, how much they had paid for it.

But Moung Wah, though he let her scold till she was breathless, would not consent. No doubt the Deputy Commissioner would be angry, but what was a poor man to do?

The sun had gone down now, and it was nearly dark. Lights shone from every house in the village, but not a soul could be seen in the street. Down at the wharf all was bustle and confusion. The murmur of voices mingled with the plunge of paddles and screeking of oars. One by one canoes and small boats drew out from the clustered craft and flitted down the stream. All at the river-side were gone but three bent and tottering figures, which slowly climbed the bank, and stood to watch the last boat departing.

Only Moung Wah, his wife, and three old women were left in the village.

"Where will you go?" asked Mah Hnit, hushing Poh Myin, who was crying to her to take him away.

Moung Wah stooped over the rice-pot, and hurriedly ladled a few steaming handfuls into a corner of his pasoh. His trembling fingers dropping half over the floor

He jerked his head towards the river, and, without a word, glided out into the dark.

Mah Hnit remained sitting at the edge of the verandah soothing Poh Myin, who redoubled his prayers to be taken away when he saw his father go. There would be plenty of time to run and hide when she heard the dacoits approach. They must come by the path from the hills; there was no other way. That was at the other end of the village, and it would be easy to slip out of the house and creep into the bushes unseen. Presently Poh Myin ceased whimpering and fell asleep, nestling against her. Mah Hnit lighted a big green cheroot, and sat gazing idly down the street. The old crones moved from house to house, hunting out the pariahs which tried to muzzle off the pot covers and eat the dacoits' dinner. Their shrill cries of abuse, and now and then the sharp yelp of a punished dog sounded strangely in the silence. Evidently they thought themselves alone in the village, for when old Mah Thet hobbled down to chase a dog from the house next the goung's, she gave a cry of surprise at seeing Mah Hnit.

"You are foolish," she said in her cracked voice. "A pretty young woman is not safe among Boh Hline's men."

"You are not afraid of dacoits," replied Mah Hnit, "yet they may kill you."

Mah Thet laughed aloud. "An ugly old hag like me afraid of dacoits! Yes they may kill me. What then? I am a very old woman, and have great pain in the rainy season."

She *was* ugly. Her back was bent. Her shrivelled skin was drawn over the bones of her thin shoulders, and her eyes were dull and bleared. The great hole in

her ear, where she used to wear her *nadoung* was broken, and the loose lobe shook against her withered neck.

"Make haste to the jungle," urged Mah Thet, seeing that Mah Hnit did not move. "Do you want Boh Hline to kill the little one?"

Poh Myin stirred in his sleep. Mah Hnit rose to her feet, and taking him upon her hip, grasped the bundle of clothing she had made ready. She walked quickly up the street, turned through the houses and out upon the thin stubble of the paddy kwins. She could not bring herself to go far. She found a nook in the bushes where she could creep in with Poh Myin, and having laid him down to sleep, crouched at the edge of the jungle watching. The scrub hid all the village but two or three houses, but the pariahs would tell her when the dacoits arrived.

She had not been waiting long before a chorus of barking and howling told of the coming of strangers. Mah Hnit could hear Mah Thet and the other women screaming to the dogs to be quiet; and after a time all was silent again. Mah Hnit looked round at Poh Myin. He was quite hidden in the dark bushes, and his breathing proved he was sound asleep; she could leave him there safely. She rose and crept back across the paddy-fields till she came to a bund higher than usual: it was scarcely a stone's throw from the nearest house, but Mah Hnit wanted to see what was going on. She squatted down behind it and looked over: she found she could hear distinctly all that was said, and at several places between the houses see into the street. The dacoits must have been hungry for they went on eating a long time and talked very little. They had chosen the houses where the best dinners were, and kept the old women

running about to bring what they wanted. Boh Hline and two or three more were in Moung Wah's house; Mah Hnit could just see into it from her hiding-place, and knew the Boh by the way his companions shikoed when he spoke to them. Presently the dacoits left off eating and began to go from house to house in search of plunder. From wherever they entered came the splintering crash of wood and tearing of mats, as they broke open boxes and tore down paddy-bins to look for hidden property. Mah Hnit heard them calling to one another that Kyoukchoungyee was a poor place not worth coming to eat rice at. They found so little that they grew angry and amused themselves smashing the weaving looms under the houses and everything else they could find, even the water chatties.

By-and-bye arose shrill cries and screams from Mah Soh's house. Two of the men dragged her out into the street and tore off her tamein while she screamed that she had no money and lived on her son's charity. Mah Hnit could see the men beating her and heard the heavy blows upon her thin old back. While they flogged her, Mah Thet came running from her own house and pressed something upon Boh Hline, who stood looking on. The Boh spoke, and the dacoits stopped beating Mah Soh and left her lying on the ground.

"Mah Thet has given up all her own money," thought Mah Hnit; for she knew Mah Soh had not a pice of her own.

The dacoits now gathered round Mah Thet, and calling her horrible names, told her to give up her own money or she should be beaten to death.

Mah Thet laughed at them. "Make haste," she cried, "make haste and beat your mother! The police are

coming. Be quick and beat me before the police come and kill you."

Boh Hline interfered at this. He pushed among the men and, raising his dah, asked Mah Thet if anyone in Kyoukchoungyee had dared send to tell the police of his coming.

Mah Thet seemed to have gone mad. She shook her hands in Boh Hline's face and cried that he was a thief and the son of a dog. "Kill me," she shrieked, "two men went this morning to call the police; the big black kullahs from Henzada, who will eat you."

"Kill!" howled Boh Hline stepping out from the press. The men crowded in plying their dahs like canes. Then they fell slowly apart from a shapeless heap on the ground.

Mah Hnit's heart stood still. She rose and flew back across the dark fields, tripping in the sun-cracks and scrambling over the bunds as though the dacoits were behind her with those red-dripping dahs. Her one thought was to snatch up Poh Myin and run with him far away into the jungle. If he awakened while she was absent he would cry out and be heard by the dacoits. Mah Hnit ran as she had never run before.

CHAPTER III.

LEFT NO ADDRESS.

DAY was breaking and the lascars were bending their backs over the winch in the bows of the police launch. She had lain at anchor at the mouth of Kyoukchoungyee creek for the past three hours. "Ready there, serang?" called an English voice from the little glass-sided cabin.

"Ready sah."

"Go ahead full-speed as hard as you can drive."

But Abdul Ali, serang, knew the creeks better than Rennie Sahib, A.S.P., and he knew that this was called Big Stone Creek because there was such a number of rocks at its mouth.

"Not can do sah, full eeshpeed; too plenty eestone in water sah."

Rennie swung himself off the cabin seat where he had snatched such sleep as anxiety to get on and the mosquitoes allowed, and went forward. The stream was wide enough, but here and there, tiny swirls and ripples hinted faintly of dangers beneath. He cursed his luck silently, and returned to the cabin to pull off the three pairs of socks which kept his feet unbitten, and put on his boots. He had got the word to start at three o'clock on the previous afternoon; and half-an-hour later was on

board the launch with a Burmese police sergeant, and twelve Punjaubees carrying twenty rounds apiece in their pouches and "spoiling for a fight." They had had to take a much longer route than the men who brought the news of dacoits. The network of water by-ways in the great Irrawaddy delta will pass a canoe, but a launch of three feet draught must follow the main streams: and for every mile the Burmese messengers had travelled the police had to cover five or six.

Slowly the launch snaked and swung up the sluggish stream. Lascars stood at bow and stern handling long iron-shod bamboos to feel the way and pole her off the rocks. Looking down into the clear water Rennie thanked his stars for Abdul Ali, and wondered which of the jagged edges a foot below would have torn out the bottom of the launch had his order been given a serang of less experience. But the delay was none the less trying when every minute was of importance.

"Getting round this corner can go full eeshpeed sah," said Abdul Ali, smiling back from his post at the wheel in the bow. "I done come this place one time with survey gentleman. I know." Rennie nodded and sat down to brew his morning coffee. His Burmese servant had not been able to come on the expedition. He had explained that he had no fear of dacoits when his master was with him, but a bad headache obliged him to stay at home. With thoughtful desire to avoid argument he had entrusted the explanation to the orderly on duty and had gone to the bazaar until master had started. The Punjaubees being high caste men could not cook food on board, and stayed their hunger with plantains.

The corner indicated by Abdul Ali was rounded at last; the lascars laid their poles on the cabin roof, and the

launch answered the gurgling rush of the screw, throwing long wave-trails to wash the weed-bound banks behind her. The creek wound through the jungles in endless curves, so that nothing could be seen more than a few hundred yards ahead. The current was growing swifter, but the water was deep, and though the fireman kept up full steam it was near three hours before the launch turned the last bend and came in sight of her destination.

"Gone, hours ago!" was Rennie's muttered comment as he scanned the thin forest of charred timbers which was all that remained of Kyoukchoungyee. A black cloud of smoke still hung over the ruins, and a burst of sparks from time to time showed that the fire had not quite burned out yet. The launch slowed down off the wharf and the current drifted her in alongside the paddy boats which still lay moored there. Three policemen were told off to remain by the launch, and Rennie sprang ashore followed by Sergeant Moung Waing and the rest.

He stopped at the top of the bank and looked up the street and down. There was not a living thing to be seen but a band of pariahs which sneaked growling away from something in the roadway and stopped at a safe distance to bristle and bark.

"What is that?" he asked.

Moung Waing laid down his snider and went to look. "Two women folk," he replied, scrutinising them with unmoved calm. "Two old women folk cut all over with dahs."

Beneath the floor of a small house standing back from the line of the rest and only half burned, more pariahs congregated, snarling and lapping from the ground.

"There is something lying in that house, Sahib," said one of the Punjaubees.

Moung Waing went to look in, and made his report as stolidly as before.

"One woman killed with dahs."

Ordering the police to make haste and cook their rice, for they should march as soon as they had finished eating, Rennie walked away down between the rows of blackened timbers, hoping to see some of the inhabitants creeping back to what yesterday had been home. He knew they must be in hiding near and would have heard the approach of the launch. He must try and discover in which direction the dacoits had retreated, and the people might have had the sense and the courage to ascertain. But of this, past experience did not make him very hopeful.

He had reached the end of the street, and was looking about to see if there was a path through the jungle, when a rustling attracted his attention, and a man wriggled his way out of the bushes and crouched upon his heels. His skin was torn and bleeding in twenty places, and there was barely enough left of his pasoh for decency. His appearance told his story, and Rennie did not waste words.

"Did you see the dacoits last night?" he demanded.

"Lord, I saw Boh Hline and his men."

"Which way did they go?"

"Lord, I cannot tell. All the night I stood under the branches in the water,"—he placed his hand across his chest to show how deep. "I heard them shouting and killing the women."

"And you did not come out of the water to see which way they went?"

"Lord, I was too much afraid."

"I hope you spent a pleasant night," remarked the

officer in English. "Do you know where the headman hid last night?" he continued, in Burmese.

"I am your Lordship's servant, Moung Wah, goung of this village."

"Ah! You have a gun, I believe," said Rennie who, as a police officer should, knew the name of every licence-holder in his district.

Moung Wah huddled his rags about him, and blinked nervously. "The dacoits took it," he answered.

"You fired at them, of course," said Rennie, knowing very well what the reply would be.

"Your honour, no! They would certainly have killed me."

"The third gun Master Boh Hline has picked up within a month," said Rennie to himself. "He will be an awkward customer to tackle when we do come up with him. I wish to God he would make a stand and give us a chance." For this was not the first trip by many that Rennie had undertaken after Boh Hline. "There is a path to the jungle at the other side of the village," he said, after a pause. "Where does it lead to?"

"Your honour, it is the way to Pyeemagone village, and also to the Karen *tai*."

The dacoits would not be likely to attack a Karen settlement, whose inhabitants were well armed, as Rennie knew these to be. Pyeemagone, in all likelihood, would be their next point, unless they had temporarily retired to their hiding-places in the hills, for they had left ample proof in sacked villages that they were working in a northerly direction. They would surely not omit to visit Pyeemagone; it was a flourishing place of over seventy houses, standing on a creek

which drained a tract of rich paddy land, and the people were well-to-do. There was money and loot to be got at Pyeemagone.

"You remain here," he said to Moung Wah; "If I want a man to show the way, you will go."

Moung Wah pressed his hands together, and pleaded that he could not go. He was very sick; he had fever, and could walk very little. Rennie looked at him suspiciously, but had to confess to himself that what he said was true. His eyes were red and watery, and he looked ill; fever was a natural result of spending the night neck-deep in water, and it would be useless cruelty to compel the man to act as guide.

He went back to the shade of the scorched trees, Moung Wah creeping respectfully behind him, to see how his men were getting on. They were busy preparing their rice, each having his own lotah over his own little fire in his own jealously marked circle, in accordance with the mysterious requirements of caste. At least another half-hour must elapse before they were ready to start, so Rennie returned to the launch to send the remaining men ashore, and get his own breakfast. While he ate, he considered his next move. It seemed he could not do better than make all haste to Pyeemagone, and the only question was whether to go by land or by river. It was two days' ordinary march through the jungle, but Boh Hline was notorious for the rapidity of his movements, and unencumbered by baggage, would do the journey in one. Abdul Ali, questioned, thought if the coal held out, the launch could go round there in ten hours; but he reminded Rennie Sahib that the current in the river and in Pyeemagone creek was very strong, and if fuel ran short they might find them-

selves obliged to stop. That matter, however, was speedily settled. The ruins of Kyoukchoungyee were laid under contribution, and a supply of what Abdul Ali described as "firs' killass" wood replenished the bunkers.

The Punjaubees having finished their meal were recalled on board, and the launch swung slowly round on her stern to head down stream. There were no boats to be warned out of the way by the blast of the steam whistle the fireman gave from sheer force of habit, as he turned his lever to the full; but the screw had not made many turns before men, women, and children appeared as if by magic on the bank, to watch the launch till she passed out of sight.

. . . . . .

"The officer wished me to show the way to Pyeemagone," said Moung Wah, addressing a circle of friends squatting in the shade of the tree above the wharf; "but I had fever and could not walk, so he went away in his little fire-ship."

"Boh Hline will go to Pyeemagone," observed Moung Nyoon. "I thought the police would want a man to show the path."

Moung Wah nodded. "While the Boh ate rice in my house I was lying on my stomach in the jungle very near. I heard him say 'To-morrow I shall lead you to Pyeemagone.'"

"You did not tell the police?" asked Moung Nyoon anxiously.

"No," returned the goung; "the officer asked which way they had gone, but I said 'I was hiding and did not see which way the dacoits went.'"

"Was he angry?" inquired Moung Nyoon, lighting his cheroot from his neighbour's.

"His voice was angry, but he did not say hard words," replied Moung Wah.

"It does not matter if the police are angry," said Moung Tha. "They do not even beat a man if he cannot answer. One must tell a dacoit everything or he will kill you."

CHAPTER IV.

A MORNING CALL.

OUNG ZAN was walking much faster than a man usually walks when his big leaf and cane-work sun-hat makes the only shadow. It was noon, and Oung Zan had been out since dawn looking for a stray buffalo. It was a wild beast that big buffalo: in the hot weather nights, when the mosquitoes teased, it was continually breaking its rope and wandering far away to wallow in some distant jungle stream. Other beasts broke away, but they went no further than the muddy choung above Pyeemagone, which ran into the creek, and one always knew just where to seek the muzzles peeping out of the water. If the runaway had not been such a fine strong beast, Oung Zan would have sold it to anyone for one rupee. It gave him more trouble than all the rest of the plough cattle put together.

He came striding down the raised brick pathway which ran along the middle of the straight shadeless street. Nobody was about, for the people were dozing through the heat under their cotton mosquito-nets.

"Did you find it?" asked Mah Ngway, as her husband stepped into the house.

Oung Zan threw off his *kamouk*, and shaking his

head squatted down to drink, one after the other, three cocoanut-shells of water from the chatty. His pasoh, girt about his thighs, was wet through from the perspiration which streamed down his body, and his knot of hair hung loosely over his ear.

"You have walked very quickly," remarked Mah Ngway.

"I went a great way," he replied. "I have seen smoke over Kyoukchoungyee village."

Mah Ngway forgot the lost buffalo—generally she scolded her husband when he came back without finding it,—she sat down and looked in his face while he coiled up his hair, repeating, "I have seen much smoke over Kyoukchoungyee. The village is burned."

"Boh Hline has burned it," said Mah Ngway at once.

"I think dacoits have burned it," replied Oung Zan.

"Mah Too! ho, Mah Too!" cried Mah Ngway, rising and calling across the street. "Dacoits have burned Kyoukchoungyee village."

The news passed from mouth to mouth, and almost in the time one lights a cheroot it had spread from end to end of Pyeemagone. The people rolled upright upon their sleeping-mats, and only stopping to put clothes and hair to rights went out into the glare to ask how the report had come; and before long all were crowding into and around Oung Zan's verandah. Nobody said Kyoukchoungyee might have been burned by accident; everybody said at once, "Boh Hline's men." And one said to another, "Next the dacoits will attack Pyeemagone," after which everybody went back to his own house to sleep again.

The air was hot upon the skin, though the shadows

were long when the people awakened that afternoon. Oung Zan got up and strolled down to the creek side, where he found his neighbours sitting as usual.

"You did not find the buffalo?" asked Oo Shway Mya as he came up.

"No," answered Oung Zan; "it is a bad animal."

"I think Boh Hline has taken it," said Oo Shway Mya; and everyone laughed.

"I wish he would take it," said Oung Zan. "This morning I walked many miles after it."

"A canoe is coming up this side," said Moung Lonk, the goung, looking down the river. "It is Bah Hpo."

There was a general turning of heads. Bah Hpo was a Bassein paddy-broker's "runner," and was always a welcome visitor when he came, as he did about once in six weeks. He spent his time travelling through the creeks from village to village collecting information for his employer. He heard all the gossip wherever he went, and therefore, could tell more news than anybody else.

"Bah Hpo has come to see Boh Hline," said Oo Shway Mya; and everyone laughed again.

Bah Hpo threw down his paddle and drew his canoe up on the hard sloping shore. He was a handsome young man, whose skin was tanned dark by the sun, and whose muscles stood out in knotted lumps from long days of paddling.

"Well, have you fellows got much paddy left?" he asked as he joined the group.

"I have twenty thousand baskets," replied Oo Shway Mya gravely.

"You will want that for house rice," retorted Bah Hpo

Oo Shway Mya was short and very fat; he was a great eater so Bah Hpo had the laugh on his side. Pyeemagone village sent about forty thousand baskets of grain to market when the harvest was a good one, and did not retain as many hundred for seed and food.

"Is the price going up?" asked Moung Louk, who, like several others, had held back a quantity of his paddy in hopes of a rise.

Bah Hpo did not think prices were likely to go up. There were only three small ships in the Bassein river when he left, a week ago, and the merchants had plenty of rice to load them with. He had not heard that more ships were expected. If more did come there might be a little rise in prices for paddy; but one could not tell. The busy time was over. One mill had ceased work altogether for the season, and not one was working at night now. His own opinion was that people who did not bring their grain in soon would have to take what they could get for it.

But last year, Moung Louk reminded him, there was a rise of eight rupees in almost the very last week of the season; just about this time while the last two Pyeemagone boats were at Bassein. Why should not the same thing happen this year? Yes, yes, they had heard about that great fire-ship which arrived late and required such an immense quantity to load her; but how did Bah Hpo know that same fire-ship was not coming again this season? Oung Zan, too, would like to know when the strange looking white fire-ship which had lain off Bassein town for months was going to sail. It would not stay there all the rainy season; no ship ever did. Yes, everyone knew it was a Government fire-ship carrying wonderful cannons which would kill men

farther than they could be seen ; but, of course, before it went away it would be loaded with rice like every other fire-ship.

Bah Hpo would not be positively certain, but he thought the Government ship would not take in a cargo of rice. He had been on board and had seen inside ; it was not at all like other ships. It was a *sit-meethimbaw*, a war-steamer, to protect Bassein from dacoits. Had anyone from Pyeemagone been inside the ship?

No one had, though every man who had been to Bassein that season had seen it. Moung Louk said they should like to hear about it ; so Bah Hpo laid aside his cheroot and described the wonders of the war fire-ship as he had done at a score of other villages. It was very interesting to hear about the cannons which opened at the back so that you could see right through them, and the rows of little guns on iron stands which fired poung, poung, poung, faster than you could count, when a handle was turned. Bah Hpo had so much to tell, and told it so well that the men sat listening till it was quite dark, forgetting all about Boh Hline and their fears of the morning.

But when Bah Hpo went away with Moung Louk, who had asked him to eat rice and sleep in his house ; Oung Zan began to wonder where the dacoits were and whether they were likely to attack Pyeemagone that night. Oo Shway Mya grew serious and tried to reckon how long it would take Boh Hline to march from Kyoukchoungyee. In the shade of the jungle men could walk fast all day, and it was quite possible that the dacoits would come that night. On the other hand, they might stop in the jungle to sleep, when they would not arrive till to-morrow or to-morrow night. There was

really no saying when they would appear, and perhaps it would be safest to go and hide in the jungle. Moung Pho Thet thought they need not hide to-night. Unless they went in the direction from which the dacoits would come from Kyoukchoungyee, they would have to walk a long way over the paddy-fields to reach jungle good to hide in. He thought, however, it would be pleasant if all were to sleep together that night. His house was large and his friends might bring their mats to it; those for whom there was not space could go to Moung Louk's house which was next to his.

Everybody agreed it was good that all should sleep together, and each went to his own house to eat the evening rice before going to Pho Thet's. Oung Zan and those who lived at the end of the street near the jungle walked close together and talked in very low tones as they went. In the dark the dacoits seemed so much nearer than by day.

Mah Ngway said nothing when her husband, after eating his dinner, rolled up his mat and went out. He had often shared his own floor with a dozen of their neighbours when there was a dacoit scare, and this time he was going to sleep out himself. Mah Ngway did not mind being alone, but when she saw three or four other women going to Mah Too's house just over the way, she determined to join them, so rolled up her own mat and stepped across the street to be received by Mah Too as a matter of course.

Oung Zan found himself among twenty-five of his neighbours in Moung Pho Thet's house. They were tightly packed when they lay down, but nobody complained. To be wedged thus among friends gave a sense of safety, though the heat was terrible. To shut

out thoughts of dacoits they let down the heavy wood-framed mats which, hinged to the crossbeam under the eaves, shaded the verandah when propped up, and formed a wall when down. Little air could get in anywhere; and all through the hot night the men lay sweltering and sleepless, slapping at the swarms of mosquitoes which sang over them and straining their ears for warning to fly to the river or the jungle. Oung Zan, weary with his journey in the morning, dosed off from time to time, waking with a start at a pariah's growl, or cry of the tuctoo in the roof.

"Crr-r-r-r, Crr-r-r-r! Crrrrr!! Tuctoo!" said the lizard.

"They are coming! Let us go!" exclaimed Oung Zan, springing up.

"Oung Zan will run away from the tuctoo," said Oo Shway Mya drowsily. "Sleep, my friend: I will not let it kill you." And Oung Zan lay down again, joining in the nervous laughter of the rest, while the lizard drawled out its cry.

At last the cock roosting on the cart under the back part of the house began to flap his wings and crow. It was still quite dark, but the men were wakeful and restless. The creaking of the mats on their cane hinges and the clink of the cocoanut-shell ladle in the water chatty told that they had found courage to push their way out and drink. It would soon be dawn now, and one by one the men got up and went to sit in the cool air on the verandah. Presently the crows began to stir and squark, the pariahs got up to shake themselves and yawn; a gleam of faint red ran over the sky, and Heaven drew up her blind.

Oung Zan left his night companions, and walked down

to his own house, coiling up his hair as he went. He had nothing to do all day. Mah Ngway would want him to go and look for the buffalo again, but he did not feel inclined to do that: he would sit about in the shade gossiping with the neighbours until it was hot enough to sleep again. Mah Ngway was sweeping the floor with her worn straw besom, stopping at every second stroke to talk to Mah Too across the road.

"There are no sticks for the fire," she said to Oung Zan as he entered. Oung Zan got a handful from the scattered store under the house, and squatted to break and cut them between the whiffs of his cheroot. This was his share of the daily housework; Mah Ngway did all the rest, even to carrying the water from the creek. Toon Gyaw, Oo Shway Mya's ten year old son, and another boy passed on their way to drive the plough cattle out to feed on the grass slopes between the paddy land and the jungle. They would rather have joined the rest of the children, who were shouting and splashing in the creek; but the buffaloes were stamping and tugging at their nose ropes, and must be fed and watered. It was the special business of the boys, and could not be put off on the girls like most other duties.

The sun grew hotter and hotter. Oung Zan tucked up his pasoh and went down to bathe. His own children were among the rest, and ran to him at once, begging for water-rides; and presently he was swimming out in mid-stream with little Moung Lwin on his back, playing that he rode a buffalo. And so time passed till Mah Ngway came to call that rice was ready.

Oung Zan had eaten his breakfast, and was sitting on the verandah rolling a betel-chew, when Moung Lwin, who squatted beside him, stood up, and saying "Dacoits

are come!" burst into a howl of fear. Oung Zan sprang to his feet, thinking to run to the jungle, but it was too late. The dacoits had come up to the village so quietly that no one heard or saw them till they were right in the street. They had fairly taken Pyeemagone by surprise. Oung Zan sank down upon his heels, and then as the dacoits started to rush down the street and fire their guns, he threw himself on his face to beg for mercy. They did not come to his house, and when they had passed he took heart and looked up. He saw all the people coming out to shiko to the dacoits, who, though they shook their dahs and spears, and occasionally fired a gun, did not hurt anybody. When they reached the middle of the village they stopped, and Oung Zan seeing what his neighbours did, went also to shiko to the Boh. As he came up and crouched upon his heels, he heard Boh Hline say, "I want ten thousand rupees and three guns. Let the money and the guns be brought to me in that house," and he pointed to Moung Pho Thet's.

When he said that, Moung Louk crept forward, and lying on his face, begged Boh Hline to take all the money they had, but not to ask for guns, for they were poor cultivators, and had not one gun in the village.

"It is a lie," said Boh Hline. "Moung Myat and three men will go to this man's house and search it." He knew from one of his men who came from Pyeemagone that Moung Louk had a gun.

As the dacoit named ordered him to show which was his house, Moung Louk's lips turned yellow, for his gun stood in the corner of the sleeping-room, and would be found at once. The rest of the people looked frightened, for they thought when only one gun was found the Boh would be angry.

"Shway Gyee and ten men will help the people to bring the money," said Boh Hline, when Moung Louk had been taken away. "If any man hides money I will burn him and his children; even the child that cannot speak." And he turned to Moung Pho Thet's house, where Mah Shway Noo quickly spread a mat for him to rest on.

Oung Zan got up with the others, and went slowly back with Mah Ngway, who had followed him. They had four hundred and twenty rupees in the teak box, for they had sold their paddy well that season, and were careful people.

"We will hide two hundred rupees," said Mah Ngway under her breath, as they went into their dark sleeping corner, "the dacoits will not find it."

Oung Zan agreed. They did not stop to count the money for fear they should be caught, but divided it, and tied each portion in a cloth.

"Where?" asked Oung Zan, running his eyes over the rafters for a hiding-place.

"Not in the house, not in the house," whispered Mah Ngway. "I will go underneath, and you drop the money through the hole by the post. I will hide it."

The ground under the house was riddled with rat-holes. Mah Ngway ran down, and Oung Zan dropped the bundle of rupees through the floor to her. She quickly pushed it far down a large hole, taking care not to break away the earth.

"Nobody saw," she said, as she came in again, trembling a little, "Mother! hear the screaming."

A terrible noise of shrieks rose from the far end of the village. Oung Zan looked and saw the dacoits coming from Moung Louk's house. "I think they have killed

Moung Louk," he said. "Let us make haste. The dacoits are going into every house."

They left the teak box open for the dacoits to search if they wished, and Mah Ngway sat down on the verandah to make rice ready in case they demanded food, while Oung Zan carried the money to Moung Pho Thet's house, whither several of his neighbours were already going, each with a weight of rupees in his pasoh or a cloth. Boh Hline sat surrounded by his men, receiving the money. Each villager was compelled to place his rupees before the Boh, and beg him to accept them; the man who escaped unhurt from this ceremony was fortunate. Oo Shway Mya carried a heavy bundle, and in creeping forward let his feet be seen.

"He does not show respect!" cried the dacoits cutting at his feet with their dahs. "Hide your feet from the sight of his lordship."

Oo Shway Mya dropped his rupees and screaming with pain rolled off the verandah on to the ground, while blood from his feet splashed over the people. The dacoits laughed loudly and bade him come back for the toes he had left.

When Oung Zan's turn came he was very frightened, for although half the men in the village had paid tribute, there was not more than three thousand rupees before the Boh. The dacoits counted them into piles of twenty, and placed these piles in blocks of fifty, so that each thousand stood separate. Half-rupees, small silver, and pice were heaped together on one side.

"Tell that man I want more money from him?" said the Boh, as he pushed his bundle forward and untied it.

"Lord, I have not one rupee left," said Oung Zan, grovelling on his face.

"Look," said a dacoit laying aside his dah and shaking something towards him. "These are the hands of a man who said he had no gun."

Oung Zan shivered as cold drops blotted his shoulder, but he had faith in Mah Ngway.

"Lord, send to my house, and if more money is found, kill my children. I have a beautiful Mandalay silk pasoh if the lord will let his servant lay it at his feet."

"Tell the dog's son to go," said Boh Hline, who seemed to be getting impatient. And Oung Zan shuffled out as fast as he dared, with Oo Shway Mya's misfortune in his mind. He went back to his house and was just in time to get the pasoh before the dacoit Shway Gyee and his party came to turn everything upside down in "helping." He felt that he had been very fortunate. Half the village men he met were bleed- from some hurt, and he was almost grateful to Boh Hline. While he waited outside Moung Pho Thet's house, where people were still paying money, Moung Lin came up shouting and hustling his way through the crowd. "He is drunk," thought Oung Zan; "the dacoits will certainly cut him to pieces." Moung Lin was the worst man in the village. He never did any work, and was always brawling with some one. He gambled away all his money and had not lived with his mother for many years. Moung Louk had often said he wished Moung Lin would leave Pyeemagone, he was so quarrelsome and bad to the women. He stepped up on the verandah and Oung Zan saw he had his dah hanging from his shoulder. He threw down a very small bundle of rupees and shouted that he was a "Man," and was going to follow Boh Hline.

"It is good," said the Boh. "Give this fine fellow back half his money."

Moung Myat quickly counted out the rupees; there were only eighteen, and he poured nine into Moung Lin's hands so that all the people could see it. Moung Lin laughed loudly and gave the coins back.

"I do not want them," he cried, holding up his dah. "I will follow the Boh and eat the country." Whereupon the Boh and all the dacoits laughed, saying Moung Lin was indeed a Man. They made him sit down with them, and look on while the villagers brought their money, telling him wonderful tales of the hoards of rupees they had hidden in the jungle. While this was going on, Shway Loung, Moung Lin's cousin came; he was only seventeen years old, and spent more time with Moung Lin than his friends thought good for him. Several times Moung Louk had threatened to send for police and have him sent to gaol for stealing paddy from his neighbours' bins, but Shway Loung had escaped by promising better behaviour. When Moung Lin was absent from the village, his conduct was better, though he was always an idle and lazy youth.

"Here is another Man," shouted Moung Lin. "He will follow too; he has been waiting for this chance."

Shway Loung started and looked from his cousin to the Boh and back. He had had no thought of joining the dacoits; but now he thought what bold swaggering fellows they were, and how his own friends cowered before them, and hesitated.

"He is a fine young man," said Boh Hline, smiling; and the gang began to praise his strong arms and limbs, saying he could kill a buffalo with his hand.

Shway Loung had not the courage to refuse after this.

He said he would follow Boh Hline and was received with shouts of welcome. Oung Zan saw old Mah Lay, his mother, creep away weeping quietly, but Shway Loung would not look towards her.

Shway Gyee and his party now returned. They brought several dahs and a large bundle of silk pasohs and tameins, but no more money. Shway Gyee, crouching respectfully before the Boh, told him they had been to every house and had searched everywhere.

"How much money is there?" asked Boh Hline.

"Payah, the village begs you to take eight thousand and four hundred and seventy rupees," said the dacoit who had been noting down on a palm-leaf the sums as they were brought in. Boh Hline looked fiercely at the people, and said that he had ordered ten thousand. "Is there not more hidden?" he asked turning to Moung Lin.

Moung Lin did not wish to make the Pyeemagone people his enemies: when he was tired of dacoit life he should want to come back. So he replied that the villagers had still a great deal of paddy unsold or there would have been more than ten thousand rupees in their hands. He thought they had given all they had. Boh Hline appeared to reflect for a few moments, while the villagers, their backs glistening in the glare without, waited anxiously. At length he said that since two good men had joined him he would for the present remit the balance due, and, moreover, would not burn the village. On hearing this the people fell upon their faces and blessed him; even Oo Shway Mya, lying where he had fallen, faintly groaned his thanks.

"Let the women bring rice quickly," said the Boh; for he wished to leave the village as soon as possible now he had got all it could give him.

The women had made rice ready and hastened to bring it. They were paid in abuse and blows. Mah Koh, whose first pot had been overthrown by Shway Gyee's men, brought rice half boiled and too hard to eat.

"This female dog has sharp teeth," said a young dacoit, spitting out a mouthful; and rising he struck Mah Koh in the mouth with the butt of his dah. "Now you will always boil rice soft," he shouted, laughing, as she fled, choking with blood and splinters of broken teeth. Mah Ngway fared worse. She was a handsome woman, and a dacoit laid his hand upon her; she struck it aside and at once the men tore off her tamein and swinging her by shoulders and feet threw her naked out upon the roadway. She did not feel her bruises as she flew, weeping for the shame put upon her, to the creek. Oung Zan's fingers twitched, but he judged it wise not to move.

When the dacoits had eaten they prepared to go. Moung Myat tore the pasohs off Moung Pho Thet and another man and cut them up to make bags for the rupees. Others directed the women to make up packages of rice in plantain leaves for them to carry away, and when all was ready Boh Hline spoke. "The Kyoukchoungyee people," he said, "betrayed me to the police dogs, now they are all killed and their village is burned. Remember it! Boh Hline and his men," he beat his chest with his clenched hand, "cannot be killed. They have slain scores of English dogs and thousands of police, men and kullahs. They will go even to Rangoon and sweep the English into the sea with their empty hands."

The dacoits applauded this speech; and the villagers

once more prayed for Boh Hline's favour, hoping they might never see his face again. The bundles of rupees and clothing were slung on bamboos to be carried between two men, and the Boh led the way down the village, while his followers shouted that they were on their way to take the Government Treasury at Bassein. Not one of the villagers spoke, until the dacoits passed the house where Moung Louk lay bleeding to death; then Mah Noo Hla, the goung's wife, rose from her husband's side and came out shrieking terrible curses on Boh Hline's head, and saying she would herself paddle to Henzada to call the police. Boh Hline stopped and ran his eye over the long line of the men.

"The two Pyeemagone sons," he said.

Moung Lin ran up at once, shikoing to the ground; Shway Loung followed looking afraid.

"That woman has a baby," he said, pointing to a cot slung from a beam in the house, "let it sleep in the paddy-mortar. Moung Myat! help these men."

Mah Noo Hla snatched up her baby and flew from the house, but Moung Myat caught her, and with the help of other dacoits dragged away the child. Moung Lin and Shway Loung were ordered to the foot-beam. Mah Noo Hla buried her teeth in the arms and hands of the men who held her, and screamed to them to kill her and spare her flower.

"You shall eat it with your rice," said Boh Hline.

"Shall we kill her?" asked Moung Myat.

"No," replied the Boh; "she shall live. Go!"

CHAPTER V.

WILL O' THE WISP.

THE police launch had been very unfortunate. The best navigated craft is liable to mishap in jungle waters, and the commonest and least avoidable had befallen Mr. Rennie's. She had turned into the Pyeemagone creek an hour before sunset, and while running at full speed had stranded upon a submerged tree trunk. The impact had swung the trunk round and the stiff roots had fouled the screw, leaving the launch helpless. Night fell while the crew were still struggling to pole her off and at length Rennie was forced to recognise that his party must wait where they were till morning. He would have swum ashore and continued the journey on foot, but the lascar he sent to examine the country returned with the report he feared; the jungle was so dense as to be impenetrable. When day broke he lightened the launch by sending the police ashore; then by dint of hauling they succeeded in getting her clear of the snag, but with the loss of a blade of the screw. Little time was lost in getting the men on board again; and the launch pursued her way hung with karki clothing put to dry in the sun. The current was swift, and the crippled screw drove her but slowly

against it. Hence, instead of reaching Pyeemagone at midnight, as he had hoped, it was two o'clock in the afternoon when Rennie stepped ashore.

There was nothing in the appearance of the village itself to indicate that anything out of the way had occurred. But as the launch came opposite the cluster of paddy boats the population assembled on the brink, watching with seemingly stolid indifference. As Rennie sprang from the prow of the boat he had used as a landing-stage, he took in the situation at a glance. The silent, brooding men were nursing hideous wounds, and many were still trying to staunch the flow of blood from clean, gaping gashes. The police streamed ashore and fell in to await orders, but the villagers looked idly on with scarcely a sign of interest.

"How long have the dacoits gone?" asked Rennie of the crowd.

The men looked at each other and moved uneasily; but no one spoke.

"When did Boh Hline go?" demanded Rennie, addressing himself pointedly to one man.

"Your honour, he went away some time ago," was the tardy answer.

"Which way did he go?"

Nobody knew. Rennie repeated the question. A slow shake of the head was the only reply. He pressed it, threatening penalties for screening dacoits, and the men stared at him blankly quite unmoved. He was about to make a demonstration of taking someone into custody, when from between the houses at the top of the slope appeared a woman dishevelled and blood-drenched, who flew to him holding out the crushed form of a child.

"Boh Hline killed it," she shrieked. "Boh Hline, the tiger! Kill him, my lord. I will show the way he went."

Her voice echoing over the silent village stirred the people squatting on the bank; they drifted round and sat murmuring.

"The little one that could not speak," cried Mah Noo Hla, pressing the terrible burden to her breast. "My lord, come! see its blood upon the paddy-mortar."

The murmurs of the crowd grew louder and more intelligible. Rage was mastering fear.

"You can show the way Boh Hline went?" asked Rennie quickly, signing to the posse of police.

"Follow!" shrieked Mah Noo Hla, springing to her feet, mad with grief and passion. "He lies in the house bleeding to death, and the little one is killed. Follow! I will show the way."

She hugged what had been her baby more closely, and ran swiftly down the street. Rennie followed with the police at his heels, while a dozen of the villagers, now fairly roused by hopes of vengeance, brought up the rear.

"Follow!" screamed the maddened woman without turning her head. "They are only now gone! Follow quickly!"

Rennie scooped the blinding perspiration from his forehead and led his men after her at his best pace. They were in hard enough condition, but it was all they could do to keep up with the blood-soaked tamein that flapped in front. Mah Noo Hla, silent now, content to hear behind the clatter of the Punjaubees' loose shoes on the sun-baked earth, sped along a narrow path over the thin paddy-stubble. Rennie's

heart beat fast. Never in all his experience had he received such aid as this. There was every prospect now of coming to close quarters with the greatest scoundrel in the district; the wounds he had seen were so fresh that half-an-hour could scarcely have passed since they were given. The dacoit gang was ahead; and a guide thirsting for revenge was leading the way. It would be hard luck, indeed, if Boh Hline was not dead or in irons before nightfall.

Mah Noo Hla ran on; the police panted after her at a long steady trot, and a hundred yards behind came the group of villagers led by Oung Zan, loudly promising one another that they should see Boh Hline killed. The path lay across the paddy kwins towards a long promontory of bamboo jungle overtopped by large trees, which swept in a wide curve from the hills on the right to dwindle gradually into bush over the creek bank on the distant left. Rennie did not ask whither it led; the dacoits had taken this path, and that was reason to follow it to the end wherever it might be. Perhaps Boh Hline would make some sort of stand in the jungle if hard pressed. Mah Noo Hla entered upon the narrow sinuous tunnel of cane-brake, in which the glare was strained through foliage to twilight, and still pushed on. But nature was asserting herself, and presently the woman's pace grew uncertain; soon she tottered helplessly and fell.

"Go," she panted; "it is but one path. Kwins are beyond. You shall see him there."

She dragged herself aside and crouched under the bamboos to make way, and the police filed past her, dripping as though they had just come out of water. Rennie felt the blood mounting to his head from his

exertions, but he could not bring himself to stop even for a moment, for more than once his ear caught the scuffle of many men running, close in front. The path wound so sharply and continuously that he could never see thirty yards ahead; but expecting every turn to sight the rear-guard of the retreating dacoits he drew his revolver from the holster. The path, churned in the rains by the passage of cattle, had hardened into hoof-holed ruggedness, and the now exhausted police began to stumble and fall about. It would not do to come upon the dacoits with men so blown that they could not use their rifles, and he grudgingly slackened his pace to a sharp walk. Soon after the path widened and the jungle on either hand grew thinner. They were approaching the open and the moment had come.

He halted and turned to see if the men were sufficiently recovered to make trustworthy practice with their weapons. Each dark face glowed with eagerness, and fingers played hungrily about triggers. The men were still panting, but time was too precious to delay and Rennie was about to go on, when suddenly a Burman, with flying hair, and eyes starting from his head, dashed among the police from the rear, and wriggled through them, shouting to the officer to go back,—back instantly.

"Quickly, your honour," he panted breathlessly. "The dacoits are killing the men."

Guessing what had happened, Rennie pushed the man aside, and led the men back as fast as they could run. He had not gone far, when at a sharp bend in the path he tripped over the body of one man and fell therefrom full length upon another. He rose with his karki jacket stained dark from shoulder to belt. Holding his

breath, he tore it off and flung it away. Mere slaughter had not contented the dacoits; five bodies of men strewed the path, hacked as though by a score o drunken butchers, and a little apart lay the headless body of Mah Noo Hla, with the now worse mutilated corpse of her child.

Rennie clutched a bamboo for support; body and brain were giving way together before the sight and smell. The sense of his own impotence, contrasted with the superiority of the dacoits in this jungle warfare, almost overcame him. Six persons cut to pieces within easy call of a strong detachment of police, and never a sound heard! He knew that, even as he stood there, Boh Hline and his followers were lying close by in the gloom of the forest—perhaps watching him. To attempt search there meant the inevitable death of every man of the party, yet he was sorely tempted to lead the police in on the poor chance of making a single capture.

He led the way slowly back to the village. His men grumbled audibly, seeming to believe the woman had tried to betray them. They were tired and hungry, having eaten nothing but fruit since their meal more than twenty hours ago at Kyoukchoungyee. Some talked of the uselessness of following dacoits in their own jungles; of the folly of hunting pariahs who would never fight, and always ran away. Rennie heard it all and ignored it. He had done the best he could with the materials supplied him, but he had long since realised that Punjaubees were not the right men for this kind of work. They would fight with the best, but these continual chases after a foe they never saw disheartened and demoralised them; and worst of all, their

caste restrictions, which must be respected, handicapped them out of the running with the Burmese.

Oung Zan followed the police back to the village, keeping as near the white man as he could, while he talked in undertones to the Sergeant, Moung Waing, who had taken an inconspicuous part in the day's proceedings. Neither expressed the least surprise at the turn affairs had taken. Oung Zan, indeed, hinted his astonishment at the leniency Boh Hline had shown in not killing all the police; he could have done it so easily. He was anxious to know whether the police would go away at once, or remain for the night at Pyeemagone, but on this point Moung Waing could not inform him.

"It will make the dacoits angry with the village if they stay," said Oung Zan, dolefully.

The villagers saw the police return without the least display of feeling. The half-dozen who had escaped from the onslaught in the jungle had told their friends about it, and everyone agreed it was just what might have been expected. Oung Zan and the rest were fools to have gone; they ought to have known better. As for Mah Noo Hla, well, she had been killed, and there was an end of her. Moung Louk had died soon after the police left, and so was spared hearing his neighbours' opinion of his wife.

Rennie went on board the launch to change his clothes and get something to eat, while his men collected firewood, and boiled their rice on the bank. None of the villagers had any sticks to spare, but the Punjaubees were not in a mood to be trifled with, and helped themselves. When Rennie came ashore again, he brought a bundle of surgical bandages and lint. The

wounded came readily to have their injuries dressed, and bore the pain of his rough-and-ready doctoring stoically; but those who were recommended to go home and lie still for a few days, though they conceded that the advice was "very good," failed to act upon it. For they left the amateur doctor's hands to make or to supervise preparations which Rennie knew were predictive of immediate flight. Moung Waing frankly confirmed his conjecture that they were "going to the jungle."

"These people think, your honour," he said, "that when the police have gone away, the dacoits will come back and burn the village."

"Do you think they will?" asked Rennie.

Moung Waing could not tell; he thought that the dacoits were very angry with the Pyeemagone people for showing the way they had gone. Moung Waing understood his fellow-countrymen, and before he gave his cautious opinion Rennie had thought such a move very probable; he therefore decided to make one more bid for a fight, by strategem. He explained what he meant to do to his Punjaubees, and gave them strict orders to remain on the lower part of the sloping bank until dark. No man was to go into the village nor so far up the bank that even the top of his head could be seen from the other side of the street. Moung Waing was to do the same, in view of his uniform coat and red-striped pasoh. Then he went on board the launch and gave Abdul Ali instructions to cast off at once, pile wood in the furnace so as to make plenty of smoke, and steam down the creek till he reached the mouth. There he was to anchor and wait till morning, when he was to return. The serang grasped the

object of this manœuvre at once, and grinned from ear to ear.

"Yes, sah; I know, sah. You making trap to catching this dacoit mans. Very good, sah."

A lascar brought bedding and some food ashore for Rennie, and half an hour later the launch was on her way down stream, belching volleys of black smoke into the clear air, and emitting an ear-splitting blast from the whistle.

"I wish Abdul would leave the whistle alone," muttered Rennie, as another puff of steam heralded a second and quite gratuitous shriek. "That's the worst of the black man; he overdoes the thing."

The launch disappeared round the corner, and much to his relief no more farewells were sounded. The villagers, seeing her go, inferred that she had been sent to bring reinforcements; but Burman curiosity is not content with speculation, and Oung Zan appealed for enlightenment to Moung Waing. That officer did not object to impress simple jungle-men with an idea of the tactical ingenuity of the force he adorned, and at once explained his superior's intentions; promising, moreover, to show Oung Zan the heads of Boh Hline and all his men in the morning.

The people were somewhat diffident about running away under the eyes of the police, but after one boatload had gone without hindrance, or even notice, they took courage, and bundled themselves and what portable property the dacoits had left them into boats, and rowed away up the creek to seek jungle beds for the night.

"We shall have a clear field, at all events," thought Rennie, as the last canoe, containing the helpless Oo Shway Mya among others, pushed off. "If they had

stayed, and the dacoits do turn up, we might have had accidents." For in a dacoit row at night the Punjaubee is apt to shoot wild.

It was now quite dark. The jungle and village loomed black against the star-lit purple sky; feathery plumes of bamboo trembled, and the dhunny thatch whispered eerily in the soft night wind. The slow screek of rattan-tied oars had died away in the distance, and the ripples from the last canoe had faded from the river's face. The low voices of the police and the gurgle of their *huqqas* only gave the silence depth.

There was no necessity to keep the men outside all night, so Rennie sent Moung Waing to select a house which would shelter all and commanded a view of the open ground behind the village. This found, the men removed their shoes and streamed noiselessly across the street to take up their quarters. Sentries were posted with orders to bring instant news if they saw anyone approach the village, and the rest lay down to sleep. Rennie went to the rear and higher floor of the house where, low down in the wall, almost at the floor level, a rude square hole, guiltless of shutter or lattice, looked over the bare expanse of the paddy kwins. Glancing out as he began to unbuckle his sword-belt he saw what stayed his hand, and made his heart leap—the red gleam of fires against the dark background of foliage a short mile distant. The dacoits had obviously camped at the spot where the path emerged from the jungle. The villagers were right; the dacoits would not have stayed in the neighbourhood unless they intended to burn Pyeemagone. "They won't be long in coming to do it either," thought Rennie.

"They know better than to think we have cleared out altogether." He was very tired, but the sight of the camp fires banished all idea of sleep; he lay down and rested on his elbow to keep watch at the window. Half an hour passed, and there was no sign of movement on the dacoits' part. They would come across the open ground; believing the village to be deserted, they would not trouble to make the long detour necessary to approach under cover. An hour had gone; the gleam was growing faint, and still no sign of advance. Rennie became uneasy: the dacoits' delay was inexplicable—unless, indeed, they suspected or had discovered the ambush prepared for them—and he began to consider the propriety of making an attack. To do that with the smallest prospect of success, he must find a way round to the spot where the Burman overtook his party that morning and come back along the path to take the dacoits from the jungle side. To try and approach them otherwise would be worse than useless. The difficulty was to find the way in the dark. He knew that the path to Kyoukchoungyee ran along the base of the hills on the right; the only feasible plan was to follow that till they passed the peninsula of jungle and could turn down on to the open ground Mah Noo Hla had said lay beyond. Then they must skirt the jungle until they found the path through it. Assuming that they could find the way, it would not do to leave the village, for the dacoits delay might be due merely to false sense of security or to mere laziness, and the bare possibility of Boh Hline's coming to burn the place as soon as the police were fairly on their way round to take him by surprise made Rennie desperate. He did not like dividing his party, but if he took the offensive it must

be done. Burmese report gave Boh Hline's following as from ninety to a hundred men; say, therefore, the dacoits numbered thirty-five. He would attack a gang of that strength with half a dozen Punjaubees, and not feel that he did anything foolhardy. But to leave the same number, under a Burman sergeant, to meet an advance of the gang was another matter. There was all the difference in the world between attacking and being attacked.

However, he could not reconcile it to his sense of what was proper to lie there watching dying fires and listening to the snores of his men. He rose, felt his way down the short flight of steps to the front part of the house and roused the sleepers. They pulled themselves together resignedly and resumed the clothes they had taken off; none raised the objection of weariness they reasonably might have done when told to prepare for the march, but there was a languor about their movements, a listless indifference, which compared badly with their previous keenness and made Rennie feel that he was playing for a big stake with a bad hand,

"Bring in the sentries and post them behind this house," he said to Moung Waing, on whose fears he depended to keep the village party awake; "change them every hour and keep your eyes open."

He told the Punjaubees what he expected of them—they knew not one word of Burmese, nor Moung Waing of Hindustani, but the English words of command were familiar to both races—and, suppressing a yawn led the way up the village towards the hills. The path was smooth and the undergrowth comparatively sparse. It was dark of course, but not so dark as to oblige them to "feel the way," and once the men were fairly awake,

they followed as fast as Rennie could wish. He halted them frequently to strain his ears for any suspicious sound, but beyond the call of the night birds, the song of the crickets, and the occasional bark of a deer he heard nothing. After travelling a mile or so, the path sloped downwards towards the kwins, and presently emerged to run along the top of a broad margin of bush-studded grass which formed, as it were, the gently shelving beach o. the flat paddy land on the left. In the distance, the view was sharply blocked by the ragged outline of the promontory of bamboo jungle, on whose fringe a couple of miles down Rennie fondly hoped to find the dacoits sleeping. If they were waiting for daylight to go and burn Pyeemagone they would certainly be asleep.

They pushed on steadily. The men had left their clumsy slippers behind that their footsteps might not be heard, and Rennie in rubber-soled tennis shoes moved as noiselessly. The path led them straight on along the edge of the hill jungle and was found to traverse the outgrowth across its junction with the rising ground. The tract proved broadest here at its base, and it was a full half-hour before Rennie led the way out of black obscurity into the starlight. Arrived in the open, he turned sharply off the path and trudged along the fringe of the jungle, pushing through headlands of bush when they were not too dense and skirting patiently the deep coves and bays lest he should miss the path. It was a slow and painful march; from the branches overhead hung long trails of the horrible creeper which drops tough threads close set with up-curved thorn hooks perfectly designed to ensnare the passer-by. The men lost their turbans, and bemoaned long ragged scratches

at every step. Twice Rennie sprang from a writhing snake on which he had set foot, and gave the bare-legged men behind pause before they would follow him on.

"It is well that the Sahib wears shoes," remarked the man next him as he made his second leap. "Our feet are hard to the ground, but soft to the snake's teeth."

"Keep close behind me," said Rennie, "if you leave space a snake may cross between my feet and yours."

The man assented and passed the word to his comrades to close up. They were tired and footsore, but two encounters with the dreaded *samp* had roused them and they plodded on talking in low tones, now and again shying at some dead stick or swiftly moving lizard. They came to the path at last, and Rennie called a halt for a few minutes. The men squatted on the bare earth well away from the shadows where snakes might lie, and Rennie struck a light to look at his watch. It was half past eleven; they had taken more than three hours to perform their journey. The march through the jungle would occupy quite another half hour, and he gave the word to fix bayonets and move on.

They had made no undue noise before, but now as every turn in the path brought them nearer the dacoits camp, the party glided through the darker shades in breathless silence. To Rennie this last part of the march seemed interminable. Half-way through the jungle they encountered the reminders of the morning's exploit, and he had much ado to steady the men excited almost beyond control by stealthy rustlings in the jungle all around.

"Pariah dogs!" he whispered vehemently. "Not dacoits!" and stepping high over the terrible obstacles

he drew the men away. He felt that they were strung to the highest pitch, and dreaded the random shot that would undo all. His own heart was thumping wildly, but as he neared the goal he recovered himself.

The last thirty yards of the path was straight, and widened to the bell-mouthed entrance. As soon as Rennie saw open ground he started off at a run, prepared to turn his men to right or left as necessary the moment they were clear of the jungle. Out on the open sward he looked from left to right and from right to left; checked himself sharply, and stopped dead while a murmur of awed dismay ran through the rank behind him.

For only ragged blots of cold white ashes remained of the dacoits' camp.

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Three miles up the creek and on the further side, the Pyeemagone refugees squatted in the dark shadows round one who had just arrived after a long and rapid journey. "It was very foolish," said Moung Pho Thet: "you would have been killed if they had caught you."

Oung Zan nodded gravely. He was the hero of the night.

"I did not go very near," he said, "I hid in the jungle till Shway Loung came near to gather sticks to burn. Then I called out to him, and ran away at once very fast."

"It is good," said two or three voices thoughtfully. There was silence for a few moments; the people were weighing the results of Oung Zan's heroic exploit.

"I think," said Moung Pho Thet, rising and speaking with the air of a man well satisfied, "that Boh Hline is now our friend."

"Yes, certainly," agreed Oung Zan, "Boh Hline will now be our friend."

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST LAW OF NATURE.

PHO SAN, the police goung, sat up on his mat and twisted up his hair, yawning. It was too hot now to sleep inside the thannah, so he and his constables spread their mats on the bare brown earth outside. The air seemed a little cooler under the sky, but the mosquitoes were very troublesome and kept the men much awake. They were still sleepy when dawn broke. The sun peeped over the jungle through the heat haze, but there was no Morning in the air; the windows had been shut all night.

"The rains are very near, I think," remarked the goung to Constable Moung Ouk whose mat was close by. "The padouk trees have flowered again," and he sniffed the scent greedily.

"Very near," assented Moung Ouk, rolling on his heels and pulling his pasoh under him; "three times now the padouk has flowered."

The night had turned the trees which shaded Kyit-boung village from dull green to blazing yellow, and the close air was heavy with the scent of the laburnum-like blooms.

"Yes, the monsoon will certainly be here after two or three days," repeated Pho San, hopefully; and he rose

and went among the piles under the thannah to pour a few shells of water from the big chatty over his shoulders.

Moung Ouk remained squatting on his mat, mechanically moulding a chew while he blinked at the village, and over it at the river glistening in the rising sun. The air was so still that the toddy palms seemed asleep, and the little red dust clouds settled again on the sparrows scuffling on the laterite road. Moung Ouk thought with a sigh of relief of the hot season so nearly over. There had been many dacoit scares and many long hot marches for days and nights together in the jungles at the heels of the English Superintendent of Police, who thought he could catch dacoits if he walked far and fast enough. It was dreadfully hard work tramping in the heat of the day with a heavy rifle chafing one's bare shoulder. However the rains would soon begin and then there would be no more dacoit hunting. Moung Ouk chewed his betel and thought of the easy life he should lead during the monsoon.

Kyitboung was a village of some forty houses standing on high ground over the Ngawoon River. The road from Bassein to Henzada ran through it, and, as there were no other villages within many miles, officers travelling in the district made it their halting-place. Hence, in a fenced clearing a little way apart from the houses, stood the dâk bungalow. It was occupied perhaps two nights in the month, and its dhunny roof was sliding over the eaves, and the half-open doors showed empty rooms and dusty floors. The new teak police thannah standing a dozen yards back from the highway on a bare patch of ground half-way between the dâk bungalow and the village caught your eye at once. It was so clean and smart-looking compared to the thatched bamboo and

mat houses which straggled down either side of the road. It was a square shed, roofed with shingles and standing high on piles. At the back, and half-way along either side, it was walled from floor to roof; the rest was planked up only so high that you could rest your elbows on the top and lean over to talk to people below; the thannah was entered by a steep flight of stairs in front. Though Pho San and six men lived in it there was no furniture to speak of. A rack against the back wall held the sniders and bayonets, and ammunition pouches, with a few pairs of rusty handcuffs, hung on nails above; there was a shelf-desk, with the register on it, in a corner, and rolls of mats on the floor. In the middle, under the peak of the roof, stood the cage for prisoners; this was built of stout teak bars, bolted together, and was entered by a hutch door only large enough to admit a man creeping on hands and knees. It was empty. The thannah had only been established at Kyitboung quite lately to protect the people from dacoits; the cage was to keep dacoits in when the police caught them. It had never had an occupant. In the darkest corner, half hidden under rush-work *pahs* and dusty uniform coats, stood the iron safe in which the thoogyee of the Circle, who lived in the nearest house, locked up his tax-rolls and the money he collected from the tax-payers. He kept the key himself during the day; at night, when he remembered, he gave it in care of the police. Just outside the thannah was the pound for stray animals.

Except when the English District-Superintendent of Police suddenly arrived, as he would at mid-day or midnight, to call ou Pho Sar and his men to follow in chase of dacoits, duty at Kyitboung was very light. The knowledge that Gor-doung thekin might come at any

moment had kept the constables up to the mark, and the men on patrol always slept with their sniders at hand. For two or three weeks past, however, Mr. Gordon had not been near Kyitboung and their vigilance had been relaxed.

It was Moung Ouk's turn for duty this morning so he was in no hurry to get up. He sat watching the women as they moved to and fro at their household duties, and the naked children playing in the deep dust of the road, until the sun looked over the trees and let him feel its early strength. Then he rolled up his mat, and, hitching his pasoh about his waist, went to the thannah for his baton. It was far too hot to think of putting on his blue serge uniform coat; but the red striped pasoh prescribed by regulation was so different from any pattern worn by private persons that it told the wearer's calling if he had not carried the naked baton. The police truncheon in Kyitboung, as in other villages, was nothing more than a rod of office. Moung Ouk had spent ten years in the police and had never raised the weapon against anything worse than an obstinate bullock which would not be driven to the pound.

Certainly there was little for the most energetic constable to do, and Moung Ouk was glad to sit down on Mah May Noo's verandah and talk about the approach of the rains indicated by the third blooming of the padouk: topics of conversation were few at Kyitboung and the near change of season interested everyone. Mah May Noo was busy; so Moung Ouk wandered on to repeat his remarks to the next woman who had leisure to listen to him. Nearly all the men were spending the morning as usual in the shade on the river bank. They had no work to do until they felt inclined to dismantle

their paddy boats and haul them up on the bank for the monsoon. But this was a task nobody was anxious to begin, for the boats were heavy and the banks steep. The propriety of making a commencement had been discussed every morning for a week—ever since Moung Kan, who had been the last to market his grain, had returned from Bassein—but no one had yet said "Go! let us work."

The only man doing anything this morning was Moung Saik, the toddy-farmer. He rented all the palms in the village from Government, and, though the Kyitboung people were very temperate, made a good business of it. He was particularly busy just now. Many of the public works, such as road making and surveying, would soon stop for the monsoon, and gangs of kullah coolies would be passing through the place every day. Those lank, ugly black men were Moung Saik's best customers, though they haggled over the pice as Burmans never did.

Seeing a pair of legs up among the great fan leaves of a palm, Moung Ouk squatted below till the owner should have finished emptying into his bamboo bucket the contents of the little red chatties which hung on the cut stalks to catch the sap; and in a few minutes Moung Saik, his ankles in a cane loop to give foot-grip of the smooth straight trunk, came down in long frog-like jerks.

"Much juice this morning?" asked Moung Ouk as the climber reached earth and withdrew his feet from the loop.

"Yes; will you taste it?" replied Moung Saik, swinging forward the big bamboo joint which hung at his back. It is wise to have the good will of the police when one keeps the village toddy-shop.

Moung Ouk took a pull at the frothing liquor in the bamboo, and said it was good; he preferred the fresh juice to the heady stuff produced by fermentation.

"I hear there are many kullahs now on the road," remarked Moung Saik, as he carefully poured the juice from the bamboo bucket into a big chatty which stood at the root of the palm. "Those who passed through yesterday morning said there were many hundreds coming."

"What was the talk of the strangers who passed yesterday?" enquired Moung Ouk.

"Their talk was of annas and pice," replied Moung Saik with good-humoured contempt. "Of what else do kullah coolies speak?"

"They said nothing of dacoits?" asked Moung Ouk. For sometimes coolies arrived eager to tell how they had had to fly from dacoits in the jungle.

"They said no word about them," answered Moung Saik. "I think Boh Hline's gang has broken up now the rains are so near."

"We have heard nothing of them for many weeks," assented Moung Ouk.

"It is not good to live in the jungles during the monsoon," observed Moung Saik. "A great many years ago when I followed Boh Tin, who was shot by the police at last, we hid for a little time in the Kyouktheing jungles after the rains broke. Each path was choked with thorns and soft mud half up the legs. We were wet day and night, even our hair; all got the fever, even Boh Tin who had the very best charms. The rain wetted the powder so that our guns would not go off; and our rice was very quickly spoiled. How can one live in the jungle in the monsoon?" And he glanced up the tree

he was about to climb as if there was nothing more to be said.

Moung Ouk watched him adjust the foot-loop and work his way swiftly up into the leafy crown, without answering.

Everyone in Kyitboung knew that Moung Saik had been a follower of the dacoit Boh Tin, and had come in to receive pardon after the chief had been shot. Nobody thought any the worse of him on that account; rather the contrary. Moung Saik could tell wonderful stories of dacoit life, and still did so, though the thoogyee said it was bad to tell them before young men. When the police came back worn out from chasing Boh Hline's or some other gang, Moung Saik would laugh and relate how Boh Tin used to trick the police. He would send Moung Saik or another of his men to act as a villager and lead the officer in the wrong direction; or he would set fire to a lot of paddy straw near one village to make the police think the village itself was burning and hurry out to it, while he and his men safely raided another. Moung Saik enjoyed these recollections so much that people often wondered why he did turn dacoit again. Moung Saik sometimes wished to do so himself, but he was growing old now, and, moreover, knew that if he turned dacoit again and was caught he would be sent to the Andaman Islands for the rest of his life. That had been explained to him by the English officer who gave him his pardon.

"You think Boh Hline's men have gone to their villages till the rains are over?" said Moung Ouk, when his friend stepped down from the bole of the palm and paused to scoop the trickling drops from his face. Moung Saik certainly thought so; Boh Hline's men

came from all the district and would want time to get home. Pho San might as well take down the Proclamation he had stuck upon the thannah wall.

It was breakfast time now, and Moung Ouk turned his face up the village to the thannah, in the shade near which Constable Moung Nyo was ladling rice out of the pot on to plantain leaves. As he passed the Proclamation he stopped. It was in large letters that all might read the promise of Government to pay into the hand of any man who captured the dacoit Nga Hline and brought him in alive or dead, the sum of two thousand rupees. When it was first put up the villagers used to come and squat there to spell it through and laugh at it. Did the Ayaybaing, by whose order it was there, suppose any man in Kyitboung would go and be killed for rupees? What use were rupees to a dead man? Why Gor-doung thekin himself knew by this time that Boh Hline's magic enabled him to escape all the police in the district, and it was well known that no chains nor bolts were strong enough to keep him if he were caught. He could break thick iron bars with a blow of his hand, and splinter mere wood with the breath of his mouth.

While the police sat eating their morning rice, Moung Ouk told what Moung Saik had said. Pho San agreed that the toddy-man had spoken well; not that it mattered one way or the other. If Boh Hline was still in the jungles he was, and if he was not, he was not, and that was all that could be said. *They* could not catch him anyhow, and for Pho San's own part he was not going to trouble himself about Boh Hline or any other dacoit.

The sun was high when they had finished breakfast, and Pho San and the others were glad to leave the

shade of the trees for the dark corners of the thannah, where they lay down to smoke and talk and one by one drop off to sleep. Moung Ouk sat with his back against the wall trying to remember that he was on duty. Hungry mosquitoes sang about his neck and did their best to help him. Only the snores of his comrades broke the silence of the heat. He got up and stood at the top of the thannah steps to look down the road. Nobody was stirring. The hot still air scorched the skin, and the floor where the sun struck burned even Moung Ouk's hard feet. The glare was blinding. The crows perched overhead under the eaves with drooping wings, and beaks gaping wide as if for breath. He went back to his corner by the safe and sat down again. The stillness pulled at his eyelids till he gave in and lay back, settling his head on his arm. Then there was not a man awake in Kyitboung.

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Pho San sat up blinking, and huddled the hair off his face to look at the man who stood before him ; vaguely he heard outside the murmur of many voices which had awakened him, but there was something in the bearing of the stranger which held his attention.

"Well, neighbour," he said, "what do you want?"

The strange man laughed defiantly. "You do not know me?" he asked.

Pho San's heart gave a jump. The visitor addressed him as an inferior servant, whereas villagers always used words of respect to a police sergeant. He seemed quite at his ease in the thannah, too, though he had no business there. He carried a gun in his hand, and his cotton pasoh, girt about his thighs, showed many rents, as if the wearer had been pushing through jungle. He

was a small slight man, and his bare breast was crossed by a line of little drawn lumps and shiny wens which hid charms. While Pho San stared at him Moung Ouk and the other constables also awoke.

"Boh Hline!" cried Moung Ouk without meaning. He had been dreaming of the dacoit.

The stranger laughed and dropped the butt of his gun on the floor when his men crowded into the thannah shaking their dahs.

"Yes," he said, "these are my friends come to see you. I have read the Government notice. Will you take me?"

"Take his lordship!" shouted the dacoits pressing round. "You will get two thousand rupees for his lordship's head."

Pho San, yellow with fear, lurched forward on his heels and shikoed.

"My lord will not kill us," he cried hoarsely; and the constables threw themselves on their faces and prayed with tears for their lives, while the dacoits reached over them and took the rifles from the rack, jeering loudly.

"It is a pity to kill such fine men," said Boh Hline, with a short laugh; and when he spoke there was silence. "Yet if we do not kill them they will certainly betray us to the English dogs."

"No, no!" cried all the policemen stretching their hands to the Boh's feet.

Boh Hline slid his hand down his gun barrels and squatted against the cage, looking from side to side at the row of backs. Then he passed his gun to a man who crouched to receive it, and very slowly made up a betel-chew from Pho San's box which lay near. Seeing

what their chief did, all the dacoits sat on their heels and waited for him to speak.

"There is a Karen village near this place," said the Boh after a few minutes; "tell the way to it."

Pho San raised his head and explained how the path lay through the jungle to the village. It was ten hours distant but the way was easy to find.

"How many guns have the Karen dogs?" asked Boh Hline.

Pho San was not quite sure. The thoogyee had told him that the Karen pastor had got ten guns from the missionary at Bassein; but the Burman myooke of that district did not love Karen people, and had advised the Deputy Commissioner to disarm them. He did not know if they had been disarmed yet, but thought not. There was a strong stockade round the village, Pho San added.

"Stockades are nothing to us," said Boh Hline, boastfully; and his men shouted that stockades fell down when their leader touched them with his finger.

For a few minutes Boh Hline sat thinking, while the policemen doubled up on knees and elbows, pressed their faces on the floor and continued to beg for mercy. Suddenly the Boh raised his foot and kicked Moung Ouk's head.

"The key of the cage," he said.

Moung Ouk got up and stooping to let his pasoh hide his feet, stepped to the nail where the key hung and took it down.

"Open the door," commanded the Boh.

Moung Ouk, crouching humbly, made his way round through the press of dacoits and, unlocking the padlock, pulled up the door.

"Now," said the Boh, addressing his followers, "strip these police dogs, and put them in their own cage."

The dacoits roared with delight, and all who could get near pounced upon Pho San and his comrades to drag them to the door. Before each was thrust in, his uniform pasoh was pulled off; and the seven policemen crouching together in the middle of the cage, watched their captors lock them securely in. For some minutes the dacoits thronged round the bars telling the police to be sure to report the dacoity in Kyitboung, asking if they liked the cage, and assuring them that they would be sent to Port Blair, for losing their arms.

"Go," shouted Boh Hline at last, "let these poor men finish the sleep we disturbed. Hé you!" he continued addressing his prisoners, "where is the key of this box?"

It happened that the thoogyee had left the key in the thannah on the previous night and had not come for it. Pho San pointed it out, and Moung Myat and another man opened the safe and took out the money. Boh Hline ordered the tax-rolls to be torn up saying it was his right to collect taxes. This done, he chose six men by name and ordered them to put on the police pasohs and coats, which they did with much talk and laughter, while Boh Hline arrayed himself in Pho San's coat with the good conduct stripes. The policemen looked over their shoulders at them, laughing shamefacedly; they were happy, having had their lives spared.

"Now then, let us go," said the Boh, when each of the six had armed himself with a snider and bayonet. "You may come out to make report to the Ayaybaing when you please," he said to Pho San, shaking the cage-door key and putting it into the fold of his

pasoh. "We leave clothes in exchange for these we have borrowed."

The rest of the dacoits were already outside laughing at the Proclamation.

"Let us pull it down and make the police dogs eat it," shouted Moung Myat as Boh Hline came down the steps.

"No," said the chief, "bring me the ink and pen from the corner."

Moung Myat hastened to obey, and held the ink bottle while the Boh stood, pen in hand, before the placard, surrounded by his men eager to see what he would write.

"Boh Hline will pay two thousand rupees for the head of the Ayaybaing who signed this paper."

Everybody read it aloud, and roared with laughter at the leader's humour. Moung Lin's voice could be heard above the rest. He and his cousin were the newest members of the gang; they had been tattooed only three weeks, and wished to stand well with the Boh. Moung Lin it was who ran up to tell the police they could earn two thousand rupees by taking the Deputy Commissioner's head. The prisoners laughed very much; their own were safe.

Nevertheless, they dared not move while Boh Hline and his men sacked the village. The people had fled to the jungle, and for an hour the policemen sat listening to the crashing and splintering which told of broken furniture and boxes. Presently the sounds of breaking ceased, and the Boh's voice was heard calling for fire. At that Pho San sprang up, and clinging to the bars, shrieked to the men he could not see to let them out before they burned the village. The crackle of burning

mats answered. Louder and louder it grew as the flames crept from house to house ; bamboos burst like gun-shots, and the dry timbers hissed and spluttered to the swelling roar of flames; the smoke swept up and floated out in a black cloud, which rained sparks and smouldering dhunny about the thannah. The policemen screamed to the dacoits that they were burning, and would follow the Boh if they were released ; but nobody answered, even to jeer. Pho San said "Gone," and the rest repeating the word, sat down and remained silent.

Now and again a curl of burning stuff ran off the eaves, and fell in a trail of smoke ; the shingle roof was steep, but dry; it would take fire when the nearest house caught. It was fate. The men sat and watched without speaking the wreathing smoke, chased upward by pale, sun-lit flames. Sometimes a man mumbled his tongue, and looked towards the far corner at the water chatty out of reach, but no one spoke a word.

The flames roared nearer. The thoogyee's house was on fire. Moung Ouk got up,and stretching his leg through the bars, delicately drew a betel-box to his hand. Having made up a chew, he passed the box on, and clasped his ankles again, idly watching the fire. The men sat chewing silently. Every moment they expected to hear the angry split of burning shingles overhead ; but the live sparks which lodged on the roof rolled off and smouldered out harmlessly on the ground. Some times a man bent over to empty his mouth through a knot-hole in the floor ; but otherwise no one moved or spoke.

It was late in the afternoon when the roaring of flames died down in the spit and snort of smouldering beams. The smoke-cloud hung high and black, purpling the sun

now peeping under the eaves, and sweeping the prisoners to the farthest side of the cage. The thannah had escaped, and the men sat watching the swarms of blacks which floated thickly all round.

"The people will come back when the sky shuts," said Moung Nyo thickly.

The others grunted assent; their mouths were too dry to speak.

The sun went down, and the evening breeze stirred the heat. A pariah trotted out from the jungle, and, looking round with pricked ears, turned tail and disappeared. A black and yellow whip-snake slid out of the ditch by the road-side, and writhed a smooth track across the dust, its head pointing high as if to see the way. Half-way across the road it stopped, and lay still until the crows came to circle over and scold, when it wriggled away out of sight under the bushes.

It was dark now. The jungle was alive with the cricket's song, and owls flitted, ghost-like, round the thannah, screeching mournfully. Pho San, looking through the bars over the ruins of the village, wondered when the people would return. If they did not come that night to give him and his comrades water they would find them dead next day. The moon rose to make the shadows darker, and Pho San, straining his ears to catch the sound of footsteps, heard someone moving softly behind the thannah. He called, and the noise stopped; he called again, and a man's voice answered fearfully.

"Come quickly!" cried Pho San. "Bring water; we are locked in the cage."

The man advanced, and Pho San's ears followed his steps eagerly until Moung Saik appeared on the thannah stairs.

"Water, water!" cried the men, springing to the front of the cage.

Moung Saik hesitated.

"Boh Hline is far away," said Moung Ouk in a whisper. His tongue was so dry it could scarcely form words.

Moung Saik, muttering that he would certainly be killed for doing it, came up and drew the chatty to the bars for the prisoners to help themselves. Then having passed in the ragged pasohs the dacoits had left, he squatted by the cage, and said it was surprising that the Boh had not killed them all.

"Will you bring a dah and break the lock?" asked Moung Nyo, doubtfully. He felt that it was a good deal to ask.

Moung Saik laughed, and said that Boh Hline would cut him to pieces if he did; but when Pho San and all the others pleaded with him only to bring the dah, he went out to look for one among the ruins of his house.

While he was groping about in the dark, a number of the village people came in from their hiding-places in the jungle. These went with him to the thannah, and as soon as they had got over their amusement at finding the police in their own cage, set to work to wrench off the padlocks, vowing the while that they killed themselves by undoing the Boh's work.

"He will not come back here," Pho San assured them again and again; "he has taken our rifles and police clothes. He will not come back."

"If he does he will kill us," said the villagers; and the prisoners now being set free, they all went out and sat round to hear about the Boh's visit to the thannah.

Moung Saik nodded wisely when Pho San said that Boh Hline had asked about the Karen village.

"He wants their guns," he said; "he will go there with his men in police clothes and say, 'It is the Government order to take away your guns; I am come to receive them.'"

The people laughed at this. "Boh Hline is very cunning," they said, "even he will not fight Karens."

"Karens are fools," sneered Moung Saik; "they fight when they have plenty of time to run away."

CHAPTER VII.

A SHEEP IN WOLF'S CLOTHING.

THE monsoon had burst. Twice that morning an advance guard of big drops had smatted on the roof of the Lanthadaw Mission House, or knocked up dust-puffs on the road. Then while earth held breath the long purple-black clouds sailed up, swelling, from the south-west, and, as if the string of a shower-bath had been pulled, the rain thundered on the shingles and hissed dully all round. The Rev. Edgeworth K. Mans, sitting at the table in his dining-drawing-room and office, looked up from his letters to lay down his pen and button his coat with the luxurious shiver of the sun-dried. From the spout on either side of the porch a solid cataract was shooting heavily on to the path below; a reed curtain of rain from the eaves was the edge of a grey fog of waters, and the road down the compound was a stream churned into spray.

The plash of water on his papers roused Mr. Mans to look round for a dry spot for his table, twice moved already. The heat-shrunk shingles leaked, and countless drips puddled the floor. Twenty-four hours of deluge would make the roof water-tight; meantime there was scarcely a square yard of floor without its widening puddle. Mr. Mans selected the least leaky spot, and,

dragging his well-loaded table to it, sat down to work again. The Superintendent of the American Baptist Mission to the Sgaw Karens, Lanthadaw, was busy with correspondence concerning arms for his Christian villages in hourly peril from dacoits. The Government recognised the loyalty of the Karens; but Regulations, Rules, and Procedure are more than Empires, and red tape was the nightmare of Mr. Mans. "Let me hang all your Burmese myookes and understrappers with your red tape," the good missionary was wont to say, "and my Karens will knock the bottom out of the rebellion in one calendar month." And the Commissioner on Special Duty smiled and sent fresh forms on beautiful blue foolscap, with minute detailed instructions for use.

Mr. Mans was deep in an argument intended to convince the official mind that it was unwise to issue guns without ammunition to the most loyal Karens, when the doorway was darkened by two wet figures, who paused to wring the weight of water from their clinging garments before they came in.

"Well, my children," said Mr. Mans cheerily, "did you get everything you needed from Bah Oo?"

The children, who were elderly Karens, replied that they had made all their purchases, and were come to ask for a letter to the magistrate at Bassein, who would then give them a permit to buy powder and shot.

"Ah, dacoits have not taken away your guns yet, my children," remarked the missionary jocularly.

The Karens laughed; then Ko Thwah, the elder, said gravely that guns were useless without powder.

"Worse," returned Mr. Mans, running thin brown fingers through his ragged beard, and looking over the half-finished letter before him.

"Give us plenty of powder and bullets," said Moung Peh Bya, raising his voice a little, "and we will bring in Boh Hline's head in a week. Now we must stay in our village and keep our shots to defend it."

"Here is the letter to the Assistant-Commissioner," said Mr. Mans, scribbling off four lines. "Go to the Court, and give it into his own hand."

"We shall try, sir," replied Ko Thwah, "but the Burmese officials will stop us if they can."

"Three days ago," said Moung Peh Bya, with a short laugh, "the police came to Yawboolay and said, 'We are come to take away your guns, by the order of the Deputy-Commissioner."

Mr. Mans took his cheroot from his mouth and opened his eyes.

"Police came to disarm you!" he said.

The Karens nodded with gleeful chuckles. "We answered," said Ko Thwah, "'We have Government guns obtained from the Mission by Pastor Ba Kaw; if Government command us to give up the guns we will ourselves return them to the Mission; not to you.'"

"I don't understand it," said Mr. Mans thoughtfully; "the police have no power to disarm Christian Karens."

"We did not understand it," said Ko Thwah, "therefore we refused, and the police went away saying they would report to the myooke."

"How many police were there?"

"Six men and a sergeant," replied Ko Thwah.

Mr. Mans pushed his chair back and brought his hands down on his knees with a resounding slap.

"If that was not Boh Hline and Company," he exclaimed in English, "I'll go out and kick myself round the school-house in the rain."

"My children," he continued in Karen, "your police were dacoits."

"After they had gone, Pastor Ba Kaw said it might be that they were police turned dacoits," said Ko Thwah.

"Listen," said Mr. Mans, rising from his chair, "there is news that last Saturday Boh Hline and his men found the Kyitboung police asleep in their thannah and took their seven rifles and uniforms. It was a trick. Give thanks that you were not taken in."

The Karens did not give thanks. They grunted intense disgust.

"Sir, can you spare us twelve charges of powder and a few big shot?" asked Ko Thwah, after a short silence.

Mr. Mans assented, and, calling a school teacher who was also his store-clerk, bade him give the visitors what they wanted. Having received the ammunition, Ko Thwah rolled the tin of powder carefully in paper and rags to protect it from wet, and got up to leave.

"We do not go to Bassein," he said, as he shook hands with the missionary, "we go to take Boh Hline's head. We thank you, sir, for the two hymn-books for Yawboolay school."

They said their English "Goo'-bye," and plodded out in the rain, their guns and plump shoulder-bags tucked carefully under their arms and sheltered by yellow paper umbrellas. Mr. Mans waved a kindly farewell and turned into his room again, muttering that if he were Boh Hline he would sell his head for half a dollar.

The hot, damp smell of clothes drying over charcoal floated in from the back verandah; splay tracks of muddy feet crossed the bare planks from door to door; the cotton curtains were already beginning to hang limp

in the moisture-laden air, and the wreckage of bamboo tatties flapped sadly in the rising wind.

"I wouldn't leave such a field as this," said Mr. Mans, rubbing his hands, "to be Bishop of Ne' York."

. . . . . .

It was near sundown when Ko Thwah and Moung Peh Bya, grey to the knees with mud, passed through the narrow gap in the stockade, which fenced Yawboolay on three sides. The rain had ceased and the clouds had drawn up a little that the sun before he went to bed might see how a day's washing had freshened dusty earth. The village streets were coursed and furrowed by the streams now draining off in turbid rivers to the creek; the wet thatch glistened in the sun, and the air was fragrant with the earthy smell born of rain.

Yawboolay was small but compact, built in a solid square instead of a straggling line like a Burmese village. The high stockade ran out into the creek, and for a mile all round was open paddy land. There was neither pagoda nor kyoung in or near it, but about the middle of the village a dhunny roof, having a wooden cross at one end, overtopped its neighbours. Ko Thwah and Moung Peh Bya went to this house, and leaving their guns and bags at the open door, stole inside, quietly; for the people, led by Pastor Ba Kaw, were singing.

When service was over they made their way through the congregation and drew the Pastor aside to tell him what they had heard at Lanthadaw.

"We have brought a little powder and some large shot which Mr. Mans gave us," said Ko Thwah, "and have returned quickly to go and take this dacoit chief. Come with us?"

Ba Kaw said he would, and, bidding them go and get

rice, went back to the school-house, where several of the people still lingered.

"Moung Hpon," said the Pastor, singling a young man from the group, "I go to seek the dacoit Boh Hline. The police who came here three days ago were Boh Hline and his men."

A murmur of angry disappointment rose from the people.

"You, Moung Hpon," said Ba Kaw, "will take my place at school and at evening service till we return. I will give you the new hymn-books which Mr. Mans has sent from Lanthadaw."

"It is good," said Moung Hpon, privately resolving to select his favourite tunes.

"Do not forget to say prayers for our success," said the Pastor, gravely addressing his flock, "and to pray that we may be protected from the fever and evil spirits of the jungle.

The people answered that they would say prayers, and Ba Kaw, saying a general good-bye, turned to go to his house, where Ko Thwah, Moung Peh Bya, and two other men chosen by lot, were waiting for him. Besides his gun and dah, each man carried his fringed Karen bag, hanging nearly at his knees, and a long, thin sausage of rice over his shoulder, crossed under the elbow and tied round the waist. Ba Kaw went in and got his gun, and bidding Moung Hpon, who had come to see them start, take care that none of the five guns remaining were taken outside, led the way towards the gate of the stockade.

The sun had gone down now, and the night was very dark; but Ba Kaw had lived at Yawboolay all his life and could have followed blindfold every path in the jungle for miles round. He splashed along over the

kwin at a quick walk, and, closely followed by the four, entered the blacker darkness of the jungle without slackening his pace. The dacoits, when they left the village, took this path, which ran five hours' march before it branched to right or left. Near the point where the path divided was a Karen tai. There Ba Kaw proposed to rest until dawn.

Half an hour after the party started thunder began to mutter angrily, and a blue fork of lightning flashed on the wet tree trunks. Rain began with a crash as though the sluice had been whipped up.

The Karens, never faltering, swung from their shoulders the guns they carried, muzzle foremost, and tucked the locks close under their armpits. Now the path was wide and even, and they pushed on fast; now, crossing the shoulder of some low hill, they slipped and stumbled on the greasy slope; now, filing through a tunnel of undergrowth, thorns they could not see tore their clothing, scored their flesh with long ragged scratches, or held one securely hooked until his comrades cut him free. In silence they filed along, crawling through dense jungle, scrambling waist-deep through swollen streams, and churning their way through mud, hearing nothing but the sucking plash of their own footsteps above the hissing roar of the rain. Ko Thwah and Moung Peh Bya had walked thirty miles already that day, but they moved as lightly as the others.

It was a toilsome march, and all were beginning to sob as they drew breath, when distant barking told they were near the tai. Presently the trees showed darkly against the black sky, and they made out the long roofline of the barrack, standing high on piles in the midst of a clearing on the hill side. The alarm given by the

dogs had roused the men within, and when the party came to the foot of the ladder a surly voice from the darkness demanded their business.

"It is I; Ba Kaw, of Yawboolay," said the Pastor. "We seek the dacoit, Boh Hline, and will sleep here till day."

Several voices cried out heartily that they were welcome; and the Pastor, with his friends, climbed the ladder, to find a score of men, armed with spears and dahs, gathered at the top. One man dropped his weapon to put a match to a torch, which flickered smokily in the cavernous gloom of the great hall of the tai; others quieted the growling dogs, and went to their own rooms to bring sleeping mats and dry pasohs. The food each carried was taken from him and laid aside, the men of the tai saying, "You will eat of ours."

While they ate, the Yawboolay party told how it was they had come to hunt Boh Hline; and their hosts said at once that only two days ago seven policemen, with many armed followers, crossed the toungya and took the path that led to Mayzalone village.

"They left Yawboolay at evening," said Ko Thwah, "after they had eaten rice. Without doubt they slept that night in the jungle near."

"They carried many bundles, and marched slowly," remarked a grey-haired Karen.

"We shall find them, if it is the will of God," said Ba Kaw, hopefully.

"Boh Hline is a tiger," said Kyaw Zan, the old man who had spoken before. "We are told that Government will pay two thousand rupees for his head."

"We shall take him alive," observed Ba Kaw.

"They are many; you are few," said Kyaw Zan.

"We are Karens," rejoined Bah Kaw, proudly. The crowd, squatting round the fire and listening to the whisper of the rain on the thatch, murmured approval.

"Go, brothers! Let us sleep," said Ko Thwah, yawning; and the old man rose to show the room where mats had been spread.

It seemed to Ko Thwah that as soon as he shut his eyes, the cocks under the tai began to crow. The dull dawn glimmered through the low window on the floor level, and the steady rustling drip outside told that rain was falling. There was a smell of broiling meat, and soon Kyaw Zan looked in to tell them food was ready. He and his sons had risen early to boil rice and roast the flesh of a deer they had killed yesterday.

"Eat much," he said, as they sat down by the red embers, over which two hot-faced young Karens were holding dice of meat on long wooden skewers. "Eat much; we have filled a bag with food, for it may be that you cannot make fire to-night in the wet jungle."

"It is true," said Moung Peh Bya; and all fell to on the rice and meat, eating like men who eat once in the day.

The rain was heavy, and the black sky threatened worse when they were ready to set out. Ko Thwah's face fell, saying he feared that the dacoit gang would have broken up, when it would be hard to track the Boh.

"Go!" exclaimed Ba Kaw, snatching his gun up under his arm and leading the way down the ladder. "We carry food for fifteen days, and will follow till we find."

They wormed their way among the great half-burned tree trunks which strewed the toungya and took the path to Mayzalone village. It was rough but wide, and

the party filed along at such a pace that the dogs which had come to see them fairly started had to trot to keep near them.

It was pleasanter marching by day than by night. Hanging thorn-sprays and holes or slippery sheet rock could be seen and avoided, and there was less bumping against leaning bamboos and bringing down drenching showers from their feathery crowns. It rained pitilessly; but for seven hours the men, carefully shielding gun-locks and powder-flasks, pressed on, never varying their pace except when the water flooded the track and compelled them to turn aside and find a way through the jungle. Early in the afternoon, Moung Peh Bya, whose eyes were sharp, picked up a brass button with a shred of blue twist. "From a police coat," he said, passing it on to his companions. A little further on, while scrambling across a deep choung, they saw in a nook under the rocks some black patches of ash, each having three large stones about it. "Here they ate rice," said Ba Kaw. Ko Thwah went to the spot, and stooped to search the sand by the rocks near the fireplaces. Hastening up the stone-strewn path out of the choung to catch up the rest, his foot slipped, and a sharp point tore the nail off his great toe. He looked at the oozing blood, then laying his gun on the rocks, drew his dah, and with its tip cut away the hanging nail.

"The dacoits slept there," he said as he came up, limping a little.

"They march slowly," said Ba Kaw. "We shall soon come up with them if we get news."

"It is bad luck, the monsoon breaking yesterday," remarked Moung Peh Bya, thinking how easy it was to track footmarks in the dry weather.

And still it rained. The water rustled on the leaves like paddy poured from the winnowing perch, and beat into spray like thin mist. In the whole long wet march they met no one; until near evening. Then, coming out of the forest upon the rain-swept kwin, which surrounded Mayzalone, dimly visible in the grey fog of water, they overtook a Burmese woman carrying home a load of sticks. She asked whither they went.

"To Mayzalone," replied Ko Thwah.

"You seek Boh Hline?" said the woman.

"We seek Boh Hline," answered Ko Thwah.

The woman had quickened her steps, and walked beside the Karens as they filed along the path.

"You must not go to Mayzalone," she said. "He came yesterday with many followers, and after taking all our money, tried to burn the village, but the rain came and he could not. Then a young man arrived from the west, who told Boh Hline the English police officer with fifty kullahs was seeking him."

She paused for breath, and the Karens waited eagerly to hear more, though they did not slacken their pace nor turn their heads.

"The Boh rewarded the young man with money he had taken from my son-in-law," continued the woman, "and, saying he went to kill the English policeman and his black dogs, marched away to the west."

Ba Kaw, who was leading, halted.

"Which path?" he asked.

The woman slowly turned her head with its load, and pushing the wet wisps of hair off her eyes, tilted the faggot carefully, to look first at the misty outline of the village, then to the right where the brown of the earth faded into the grey of the rain.

"Go that way," she said, pointing; "you will come upon the path which leads from the village to the great road many hours' march distant. The dacoits followed Boh Hline that way."

"It is good," said Ba Kaw. And the Karens turned sharp off the track that waved along the bunds, and struck across the kwins towards the west, leaving the woman to re-settle the load upon her head, and draggle home through the wet.

They found the path, and turning their backs on Mayzalone, were soon in the jungle again. The rain ceased, and the evening sun bursting through the ragged clouds, clothed the leaves in diamonds. Coming to a clump of bamboos, Ko Thwah stopped and said, "Let us eat now."

Since the meal at daybreak they had eaten only a few plantains as they walked. All were hungry, and it would be wise to make the fire while the rain was off. So stacking their guns against a tree, they prepared to cook rice. One cleared the wet leaves and earth from between the high buttress roots of a tree, while others gathered sticks and stripped off the soaked bark. Moung Peh Bya, with a few dah strokes, felled a great green bamboo as thick as a man's thigh, and trimmed two joints to serve as pots. Water in pools and runlets was on every side, and Ko Thwah soon had the rice simmering. Old Kyaw Zan had put venison wrapped in leaf packets into Ba Kaw's bag, and the men dined well. Within an hour of halting bags were slung, guns shouldered, and they were off again.

Nightfall brought back the rain, and for hours the men pressed on, wet and weary, but firm as ever in their purpose to run down the dacoits. They slept in the

jungle that night under a few sticks laid against a fallen tree and roughly thatched with khine grass. The rain dripped through upon them, and at dawn Moung Peh Bya and Saw Koung, the youngest of the party, woke with bloodshot eyes and pale lips. They had fever, and while the others ate the cold rice saved from last evening's meal, they lay in their wet clothes, shivering and burning by turns. When Ba Kaw gave the word to start, he and Ko Thwah each carried two guns, and the sick men, huddling their clinging pasohs over their heads, plodded on with the rest, though the jungle seemed spinning round, and they could see no more than the backs of the men before them. The rain stopped soon after day broke, and the clouds parted before the sun. For the first time since they left Yawboolay the men's clothes were dry, though not for long. As the sun rose higher, the still air grew close and muggy, with a damp choking heat more exhausting than the dry scorch of the hot season. The men panted along, drenched with perspiration, feeling as though ropes were tightening round their necks. Their pace was faster than ever in spite of it; for the footprints of many men had trodden out the pitting of the rain-drip on the sandy path.

The sun was overhead, and the birds were mute when Ko Thwah broke the silence with a low "cluck," and, turning aside among the bushes, called to the rest to come and look. Two police coats lay on the low scrub.

"Thrown down this morning," whispered Ko Thwah, thrusting his hand underneath. The coats were quite dry and the leaves below heavy with raindrops. Moung Peh Bya, forgetting his fever, lifted one coat and felt the sleeve about the arm-pit.

"Wet," he said eagerly. "The dacoits grew hot and threw these away. They are thick, hot coats."

"Go!" muttered Ba Kaw hoarsely. As he rose, Saw Koung took his gun from him and drew himself up as if he had shaken off the fever. Moung Peh Bya also resumed his gun, and the men, pausing to gird their pasohs tightly about their loins, moved forward at a trot. Ko Thwah left a track of blood at every step, but he scarcely limped.

They had been running steadily for half an hour when Moung Peh Bya, who led, put his hand behind, and, spreading his fingers against his back, checked his pace to a fast walk and stopped. He and Ko Thwah then moved forward a few yards, and, kneeling on the path, laid their ears on the ground for a moment. They looked back smiling as they got up, and seeing it, every man squatted with his gun-stock thrust behind and the muzzle in his lap to draw the charge which had been in for the last two days, and reload. That done, they unwound the long, sausage-like rice-bags from their shoulders and hid them, with their cotton jackets and bags, in the roots of a tree. Then with pasohs girt up afresh, gun in hand and dah hung to shoulder, they stole forward, treading softly and lifting dry twigs aside as men who stalk deer.

Rounding a bend in the jungle, Ko Thwah signed and stopped again. The path in front ran down between walls of naked earth to a stream which sparkled past in the sunshine.

Beyond the stream a narrow vista of sand, dancing in its sun-drawn steam, rose gently up for a bow-shot to a fringe of grass and bush which billowed back into forest. The murmur of voices was distinct above the

babble of the water, and the Karens drew off the path into the cover of the jungle, while Ko Thwah laid down his gun and started to crawl on hands and knees into the underwood.

Guided by the voices, he writhed almost on his belly to the brink of the cliff which overhung the water twenty feet below, and commanded the open stretch of sand beyond. A light puff of wind rustled the leaves and left them still again. Ko Thwah reached out his hand and waited for another; it came, and he pressed aside the grass which screened the view. Then raising his head, he craned forward to look; and as he looked his eyes blazed with triumph. He could have flicked a betel-nut into the midst of the dacoits.

They were lounging in the shade of a tree whose roots had been undermined by the swirl of flood, and which now leaned out over the stream, stayed by a tangled rigging of creepers. Ko Thwah studied their faces carefully. There was the Boh, who had worn the police coat with stripes; he wore only a pasoh now. He also recognised four of the other men who had come to Yawboolay. Two sat with the Boh, a little apart from the rest of the gang; they were evidently his lieutenants. Next, Ko Thwah counted the men, and more particularly the guns: there were fourteen of the latter, including the police sniders. Several had tripods of bamboo tied to the barrels, to be used as rests; others had been used to carry the bundles, which were still secured to them. The dacoits were evidently in no fear of attack; some were asleep, some sprawled idly on their backs and smoked, others sat in little knots talking, and one young man was dawdling over the collection of clothes which had been spread to dry in the sun. Ko

Thwah took advantage of the next puff of wind to change his position. He looked right and left, then at the water below. The stream swollen by the rains, was steadily wearing down the earth cliff, which was pierced in fifty places by roots. As Ko Thwah looked, he saw the brown wavelets lick leaves and scraps of stick off the sand. The water, already waist deep, was gradually rising. He drew noiselessly away from the edge, and turning in his tracks like a cat, crept back to his friends.

"We must run quickly through the water and attack them on the sand," he said, after describing what he had seen. "There are only twenty-one of them, and fourteen guns."

Ba Kaw rose to his feet. "I fear they will run away and escape," he said, without a change in his stolid face. "Go!"

The others got up and followed him at a run down the path. With their guns held high, they dashed into the stream and struggled through, giving a yell which made the woods ring again. The dacoits sprang to their feet like one man, and hesitated whether to stand or run. Reaching the opposite side, four of the Karens fired, dropped their guns, and rushed on with their dahs. The dacoits turned, and spread out like a fan in flight to the jungle, leaving, among scattered heaps of clothing, three men clutching at the sand in their death agony. Ba Kaw still carrying his gun, singled out Boh Hline from the flying crowd and followed him as fast as he could run, passing more than one dacoit. Ko Thwah heard him call twice to the chief to surrender or be shot; then he saw Ba Kaw drop on one knee and fire. Boh Hline stumbled, fell, and scrambled to his feet again; but Ba Kaw had thrown down his gun, and, coming up, caught him by the

neck, threw him on his face, and sat upon his shoulders, holding his wrists.

"Bring cord!" he called to Ko Thwah. "He is very little hurt, I put only half powder in my gun." He looked round after the dacoits and laughed. They were flying with streaming hair through the reeds and grass; not one paused to look behind him.

Ko Thwah found some rough coir rope among the dacoits' baggage and having knotted one piece about Boh Hline's neck, Ba Kaw got off him and bade him stand up. The dacoit, groaning over three bleeding shot-wounds in his back, protested that he could not move; whereon Ba Kaw set to work and tied his arms from the elbow tightly to his sides; then he grasped his shoulders and stood him on his feet.

"If you cannot walk," he said, "we shall carry you slung on a bamboo."

Ko Thwah gave the cord round his neck a gentle pull, and the Boh followed meekly to the spot where Saw Koung knelt, cutting off the head of a dacoit as one cuts firewood.

"What is his name?" asked Ba Kaw, pointing to the pallid loose-lipped face, drawn by its own weight as Saw Koung held it up by the hair.

"Moung Myat," replied Boh Hline, sullenly.

The Karens grunted with satisfaction. Moung Myat was wanted.

"Name him," said Ba Kaw, stepping over a body and lifting another head.

"Moung Lin," answered the Boh.

The Karens looked at one another in doubt for a moment; then Moung Peh Bya said, "He is one of those who murdered the little child at Pyeemagone."

Ba Kaw dropped the head with a gesture of disgust.

"Let us collect the guns," he said. "We will go home now, for we have much to carry."

They tied the guns and police sniders in threes, and then examined the bundles. In one, slung upon a bamboo for two men to carry, Moung Peh Bya found a heavy bag of rupees.

"We will divide it," he cried.

Ba Kaw turned to the Boh and asked from whom he took the money.

"The Mayzalone village gave it," he answered, sullenly as before.

"You shall give it back," said Ba Kaw; and he told Moung Peh Bya to tie up the bag and hang it round the Boh's neck.

The clothes and food were piled in a heap and set on fire. Then the three heads were slung by the hair upon a spear, and the heavily loaded party filed down to cross the stream into the jungle. The sky was already alive with vultures floating lower and lower over the three corpses on the sand.

Boh Hline, his arms bound so tightly that the blood swelled his fingers, marched between Ko Thwah and Saw Koung. The butt of the spear on which the heads were slung was tied to his neck, and Saw Koung, in front, carried the other end on his shoulder. The flies swarmed in thousands, and Saw Koung chose the fore-end because they were least troublesome there.

They marched far and fast before nightfall and rain came. Ba Kaw thought it likely that the dacoits had stopped when they reached the jungle and, having seen how small their party was, it was just possible that they might follow and attack them. It was not probable,

since they had taken away the guns, but he felt it wise to take his prize in to Bassein as quickly as he could. He grudged making the journey round by Mayzalone, but he wished to show the villagers the captive dacoit-chief and return the money.

Boh Hline trudged along, knowing where he was going, but saying not a word. He had three shot-wounds in his back, his arms ached terribly, and he was nearly blinded by the flies which settled about his eyes. The Karens paid no more attention to him than if he had been a bullock, until they halted to boil rice and rest. Then they made him sit down, and having tied his feet in rough stocks notched in great lengths of bamboo, fed him with their hands.

When they had eaten, Ba Kaw, speaking as one who has just remembered something, said, "Let us give thanks," and turning out his bag found his soiled hymn-book.

The rest agreed, and moved in a little nearer, clearing their throats. They loved singing, and liked best the English tunes taught by the Mission.

"The Evening Hymn," suggested Ko Thwah, laying aside his cheroot.

"It is good," murmured his comrades.

The rain-drops hissed and spluttered in the dying fire flickering upon their dark faces. The blackness of the jungle night was loud with the roaring hiss of the rain, and the leaves overhead glistened and dripped. Ba Kaw bent over the book he had laid on the ground, pitched his voice and led the hymn, mechanically grasping with one hand the rope tied to Boh Hline's neck.

CHAPTER VIII.

CALLED BEHIND THE CURTAIN.

"AND the sentence of the court is that you be kept in penal servitude for the term of your natural life."

Thus the judge concludes his address to the prisoner, and the interpreter mechanically repeats the words to him in his own tongue.

The trial, which has lasted all day, is over; Nga Hline has been convicted of dacoity accompanied with incendiarism and mutilation. For months his name has been a terror in the district, and it seemed as though he could defy the law and ravage the country with impunity. The gang he led is known to have committed more than one murder, besides lesser crimes, but the guilt of these could not be brought home to Nga Hline himself.

A miserable-looking object he is, as he cowers in the dock, apparently trying to realise the full meaning of his sentence. A small, spare, thin-visaged man, whose features have nothing in them that would bear out his character of a cruel ruffian and leader of men; whom, had he come before the court on a charge of stealing a handful of rice, anyone would have passed by as a poor hungry-looking wretch, hardly dealt with if he got a week's imprisonment. And yet such was the power of his name that for months a sum large enough to be a

fortune to any three natives was offered to whoever should kill or capture him, before his career was checked.

"Penal servitude for life." To no man on earth has the prospect such terrors as to the Burman. Lazy and indolent by nature, to change the unrestrained liberty of the jungles for the existence it is Nga Hline's destiny to lead behind those high grey walls outside the town, is a fate worse than death itself. He knows what he has to expect too, for his trial has brought to light the fact that he spent six months in prison a few years ago. He will find plenty of his old companions there, who, less fortunate than himself in evading the law, have long since been lodged in safety, forgotten by all who knew them. Every jail in Burma has its complement of such life convicts—reckless desperadoes whose presence is a standing source of anxiety to those in charge of them.

Let us follow Nga Hline, and, having heard the tale of his atrocities, learn how he is to atone for them.

He is ushered through the main gates of the prison into a small office just inside them where the officials transact business. The fettered convict squatting on the floor pulling the punkah, stares idly at the new-comer who looks about him as though awakened from a dream. Two warders take possession of him and strip off such clothing as he wears—a blue cotton pasoh and a dirty white jacket—presenting him in exchange with a coarse brown cloth to bind around his loins, and a strip of sacking which is to serve as his bed. The convict barber next appears in charge of a warder, and the long masses of black hair of which the owner was so proud are shorn off close. You would hardly recognise Nga Hline now, for he is released from the barber's hands bald as your palm. Stay, there is a small tuft left on the top of his head

which distinguishes him, as a convict for life, from those undergoing terms of years, who are shaved quite bare. The jailor enters his name in the big prison register, and Nga Hline has done with it for ever. He is No. 5002 now, and will never be anything else. In addition to his loin-cloth and bedding, he receives a *thimbone*, a metal plate measuring about nine inches by five, on which a paper form is pasted, bearing his number, age, sentence, the number of the section of the Indian Penal Code under which he was convicted, and ruled columns headed "Punishments" and "Awards."

He has got everything, and his escort hurries him away to the blacksmith's workshop—a doghole in the wall, six feet by four, closed by a locked iron gate. Within sits the convict smith beside his forge, in readiness to rivet the irons upon No. 5002's legs. He is pushed in unceremoniously, and a wooden ticket branded with his number is handed in after him. Then the creaking gate is relocked until the job shall be completed.

At one time a new arrival in the jail received a tin medal stamped with his number, which was hung round his neck with a string; but it was discovered that a regular system of exchange was carried on amongst the men, whereby a long-term prisoner could exchange identities with a short-term fellow, adjusting the bargain with the friends of the latter outside. It is common for an habitual criminal to be taken up, immediately after his release, upon some other charge which has been allowed to stand over pending his reappearance in the outer world; and a man conscious of his liability to this, would be willing to exchange medals, and therefore sentences, with another for a consideration.

In a large prison it is, of course, impossible for the

officials to remember the personal characteristics of the ever-changing convicts; and numbers could therefore be bartered almost with impunity. A new system was consequently introduced, and each convict now wears, welded round his neck, an iron ring as thick as a lead-pencil, which passes through another attached to the wooden ticket, and thus ensures him against the danger of losing his identity.

The smithy gate is unlocked, and No. 5002 stumbles forth. Round each ankle he wears a heavy ring, and two iron bars a foot long, linked together, connect them. Round his throat he has the necklet to which his ticket is secured.

Holding up his irons by the centre ring with one hand, and hugging his bed and thimbone with the other, he makes his awkward way to the ward to which his attendants lead him. This is a large bare room, whose walls consist of square teak posts four inches thick, placed about three inches apart. A wide verandah runs all round it, so that the sentries who guard the occupants at night can see from any point of their beat every movement within. It looks more like a pen for cattle than a habitation for human beings, but, in spite of its iron roof, it is airy and cool, and well adapted for its purpose—the safe custody of the convicts at night. No. 5002 is ordered to place his bedding at the end of a row of bundles like it, and there we will leave him for the present, and go into the work-yard.

The yard is a triangular space, with a well in the middle of a grass lawn. Two sides are bounded by work-sheds, barred like the sleeping wards, and the third by the main wall of the prison. This last is at least twenty feet high, but to give additional security a few

tiers of loose bricks are laid along the top in such manner that the displacement of one would bring down an avalanche of its neighbours, and inevitably alarm the sentries in the nearest watch-tower. The mouth of the well is closed by an iron grating, to frustrate attempts at suicide. Opium-eaters, who by their incarceration are suddenly deprived of the drug, have been known to throw themselves into wells in a state bordering on insanity; so the grating is placed there, and a warder retains the key of a small trap through which a bucket can be let down.

It is nearly dinner-time, and two convicts are busy laying out the meal under the eye of a warder. Two long cement slabs raised six inches from the level of the ground serve as tables, and upon these the uninviting viands are distributed—a tin can of washy-looking vegetable soup, and a wooden platter of boiled rice for each man; the latter shovelled carelessly out of a wooden contrivance like a kitchen coal-scuttle, in which it is brought from the cook-house.

In a far corner of the yard a number of convicts are engaged cleaning their irons with sand; they have just come in from working timber in the mud of the tidal creek outside and having washed themselves, are now, in accordance with rules, polishing up the fetters. The assiduous care some of them devote to the business draws from the superintendent the caustic remark that "Some men will take a pride in *anything*."

Squatting in a row on one side is another gang of thirty or forty convicts, presided over by warders. The superintendent's arrival is the signal for them to prepare for his inspection, and the head warder shouts in a dreary monotone the Burmese words of command.

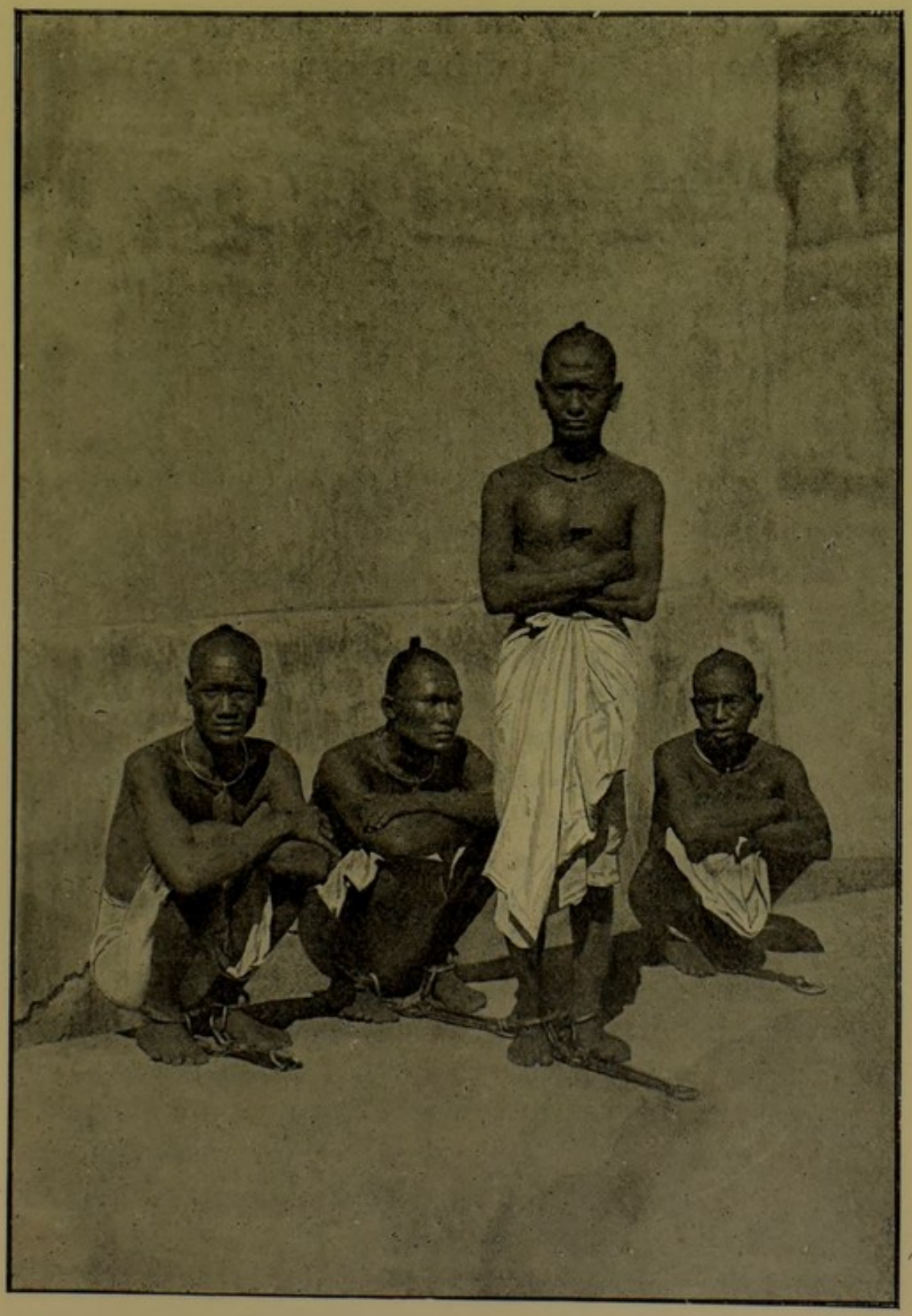
"Stand up!" All rise doggedly.

"Irons straight!" Every man places his feet together and lays the bars connecting his ankles straight out before him.

"Show slates!" Every man takes his thimbone by the lower corners and holds it against his breast with both hands, that the superintendent may see the face of it, as he passes slowly down the line followed by the jailor.

If there is a type of revolting human ugliness, it is the Burmese jail-bird, with his shaven head and the unmistakeable stamp of criminal on his vicious face. All convicts seem to acquire that look of low, half-defiant cunning from their associates, and a physiognomist would not hesitate to describe nine-tenths of the men before us as bad characters, if he saw them in any society. Many of this gang are dacoits, and their breasts, arms, and necks are picture-galleries of tattooed devices, fondly cherished by the owners as charms against death or capture. Some have rows of unsightly warts, like large peas, upon the breast and arms, which mark the spots where the charms have been inserted—scraps of metal and other substances inscribed with spells known only to the wise men who deal in such things. One or two natives of India are amongst the gang, and these are conspicuous by the absence of the tattooing universally found on the Burman's thighs.

The inspection proceeds. One prisoner's ankles are galled by his irons, and he applies for their removal; as examination shows one leg to be slightly injured the sufferer is marched off to the blacksmith, who takes off the anklet for him. Such complaints are common, but are viewed with suspicion, as the prisoners often cultivate abrasions in order to get a turn in the hospital,



BURMESE CONVICTS.

where, of course, they are not called upon to do any work. Another convict with sore eyes is put on the sick list, and a third, who has an attack of fever, follows him to the hospital.

A powerfully-built convict at the end of the rank, in addition to the usual irons, has his ankle-rings connected by a single straight bar, so that he can only stand with his feet twelve inches apart.

"Look at that fellow," says the superintendent; "he is in for five years, and his time would have been up in three months. A week ago he was down at the creek with his gang working timber, and must needs try to escape. He was up to his waist in water, and dived under a raft, coming to the surface a good fifty yards down the stream. The guard never missed him until a shout from another man drew their attention, when they saw him swimming as hard as he could go, irons and all, towards a patch of jungle on the opposite side."

Amongst a repulsive horde this man would take first place without competition. "Reckless scoundrel" is written on every line of his scowling face, and such he undoubtedly is. After the severe flogging his attempted escape earned for him, he assaulted and bit his guards and fellow-prisoners, and the bar between his anklets was the immediate result. The superintendent of a jail in Burma has not charge of a flock of sheep. The "lifers" and long-term convicts to a man are desperate ruffians, who would mistake leniency for weakness, and can only be ruled by the sternest discipline and severest measures.

The inspection is over, and the order is given to go to dinner; the gang shambles off clanking, and the men take their places round the slabs a convict warder, or

good-conduct man distinguished by his blue forage-cap, taking the head of each. Another word of command, and they sit down and attack the food; the noonday sun is blazing upon their bald heads, but no one minds that, and the convicts dispose of their soup and rice with a vigorous satisfaction that betrays this to be the event of their day.

Dinner over, they go in pairs to the trough beside the well, where they take a drink of water and fall in to await the order to return to their various occupations. Some spend the day at looms whence the coarse cloth used in the jail is turned out, others at the oil-presses and sawpits, or the mortars wherein the paddy is husked for the prisoners' daily rice. Gangs of short-term men are marched off holding hands, to work outside the walls at the timber-yard, or, if fortunate, well-behaved convicts, to the garden. Long-term prisoners are sent to the hardest, coarsest work within the walls; there is no prospect of the slight change of scene ex-mural labour affords, for them. Hammer in hand, they sit day after day breaking stones, which they do in the listless mechanical way peculiar to prison labourers. Well fed and kept steadily at work, they are, as the superintendent points out, in perfect muscular condition—a fact to which they are quite alive, and which does not conduce to their good behaviour.

Conspiracies to break out are not uncommon, although, owing to the system of never allowing one batch of men to remain together for more than a night or two in succession, they are seldom matured. A determined attempt to "break jail" took place in the great central prison at Rangoon a few years ago, resulting in a stand-up fight between warders and convicts. Some twenty

"lifers," confined in a large stone cell whose gate opened upon their work-yard, were the culprits. The hammers and road-metal which provided their daily labour were kept in this yard, and the first aim of the convicts was to obtain access to the shed where these weapons lay. About midnight the attention of the sentry was called to the illness of one of the occupants of the cell by another man, who was apparently the only wakeful member of the gang besides the sham invalid. A Madrasee apothecary was called to the grated window of the den, and obtained sufficient information to enable him to prepare some remedy. On his return with the potion, seeing that all the convicts were sound asleep, he did not attempt to give the medicine to the sick man through the window, but, against rules, caused the guard to open the gate, intending to take it into the cell himself. The instant the gate was opened the slumbering convicts sprang to their feet, rushed at the apothecary, and knocked him down in such a position that his recumbent form effectually prevented the guard behind closing it. They quickly made their way into the work-shed, and, arming themselves with hammers and stones, prepared to resist the warders who had been attracted by the noise and the shouts of a sentry on the wall. A furious conflict now ensued between the warders, big muscular Punjaubees armed with heavy cudgels, and the convicts with their extemporised weapons. The warders were reinforced until both parties were fairly matched, and the rough-and-tumble fight in the dark progressed amid extraordinary confusion. The work-yard was overlooked by two huge wings of the jail in which a large number of prisoners were confined; these men, roused to a frantic pitch of excitement by the

uproar below, dashed about their wards like caged animals, with screams and yells of encouragement to their fellows; while the sentries in the watch-towers on the main wall kept up a desultory fire in the air, to prove to the convicts the impossibility of escaping, even if they should succeed in scaling the high spiked iron railing of their yard.

The combatants fought hand-to-hand for some time, neither side gaining any advantage, whilst above the roar of human voices, and the sickening crash of heavy clubs on the convicts' shaven skulls, the alarm-bell clashed out warning that military assistance from the distant barracks was required. Warders had been summoned from all parts of the jail, and a general outbreak seemed imminent, when the appearance of the superintendent with a revolver suddenly decided matters. Panic seized the convicts; they dropped their weapons with one accord, and crowded back into the cell, leaving two of their number dead in the yard.

It would be impossible to conceive a more ghastly sight than that row of naked, trembling convicts, as the warders now ranged them in the vault-like den to be counted. The dim light of oil-lanterns fell upon upturned faces, before repulsive enough, but now positively startling in their hideous disfigurement of dust and clotting blood.

Every man was streaming with blood from wounds about the head, more or less severe, for the convicts had fought with the desperation of men to whom success meant liberty. They were doomed to drag out their lives in that earthly hell; a flogging was the worst that could happen them if their attempt failed, possible freedom the reward if it succeeded. Who would not risk

the first for the slenderest chance of the second? They took the risk, and fate had gone against them. The excitement was over, and they huddled together against the wall of the cell in an agony of fear for the consequences their night's work would bring upon them to-morrow, staring enviously at those whose wounds necessitated their removal to hospital. For them, at least, a few days' reprieve was certain before they suffered lash and punishment drill.

Stone-breaking, after all, is not the worst form of labour. Come over here, under the main wall, where twenty-five or thirty prisoners are undergoing two hours "shot-drill." They stand in four ranks, about six feet between each man and rank; just now they have paused for a few minutes' rest, and every eye is fixed upon the warder who is about to give the signal to begin again. Each man has a heavy shot lying at his feet, and the warder, standing in the shade where he can keep the squad in full view, holds a small Burmese gong and hammer. "Tang" goes the gong, and every convict stoops, picks up his shot in both hands, and stands erect with it upon his shoulder. There is a five seconds' pause, when "tang" goes the little gong again, and the convicts grasp their shot and replace them on the ground. Another pause, and the monotonous "tang" bids them repeat the process, which they do with the silent precision of automata. No wonder men kept long at such purposeless labour acquire the lowering look of brutal stupidity that is so general amongst them. It is terribly hard work; the state of perspiration they are in seems to prove that shot-drill, under the blazing Eastern sun, is ample punishment for any ordinary breach of rules a prisoner may commit.

It is curious to observe how work, properly so called, influences the countenance of a convict. By way of contrast to the men at shot-drill, look at those in the sheds, employed on carpentry and the beautiful wood-carving which is a Burmese speciality. The prisoners thus employed take an interest in their work, with the most marked results; those in the wood-carving department, particularly, seem a totally different class from the convicts outside. The mind works with the fingers in the carver's case; watch the nicety with which he finishes off that dragon's tooth, and the attention he bestows on it. This is not mechanical work, which leaves the prisoner free to brood over his captivity, and, it may be, plan attempts at escape. It seems rather an anomaly, perhaps, that a convict should expiate his crime by working at a trade he can actually enjoy, as a carver does; but reclamation as well as punishment is aimed at in a prison, and a man whose talent for such work becomes known during his confinement is sure of finding an honest means of livelihood on his release.

The jail is a great institution in Indian and Burmese stations. Your syce breaks the shaft of your dogcart; send it round to the jail to be repaired. New matting is wanted for the verandah; you can get in the jail. You want a piece of furniture; whether it be a wardrobe or a whist-table, you will find what you require in the jail workshop, and if there does not happen to be one ready you can get it made. They take a longer time to do it than free artisans; but you can depend upon sound material, good workmanship, and reasonable prices; so the jail industries flourish, and the cost of supporting the criminal classes falls with comparative lightness upon taxpayers.

At one time the making of furniture and vehicles in the jails was stopped by the Government as constituting unfair rivalry with free workmen outside. In prisons where large numbers of men had been so employed, huge difficulty was experienced in finding work to keep them occupied. Nothing is so dangerous as an idle population, and it was a great relief to those responsible for the safe custody of prisoners when the veto was removed.

The garden is another valuable adjunct of the jail. The best-behaved convicts are sent outside to work among the vegetables with "mamootee"* and hoe; and as this is the pleasantest form forced labour can take, it is a sphere of usefulness greatly coveted. Its chief attraction is the facility given for glimpses at the world around, for these amateur gardeners may be seen pecking at the earth with their tools in the same sleepy way the stone-breaking gang inside wield their hammers. But then, the warders are lax in the administration of prison rules in the garden, and the convict, screened by shrubs, can enjoy the luxury of tobacco. He saw the fag-end of a cheroot on the road this morning, and managed to pick up the prize and secrete it in his loin-cloth without being observed. It is at least two inches long, so he bites it in two and secures the everlasting goodwill of the "good-conduct man" beside him by presenting him with half. Of course, even could they procure a light they cannot smoke, but the cheroot is carefully unrolled and chewed into a "quid," with the bliss forbidden joys give all mankind.

The vegetables, beside supplying the prison, are eagerly purchased by the residents of the station, who cannot depend upon their own gardeners' exertions. For a small

* A tool resembling a magnified adze.

monthly payment you can get daily supplies of whatever may be in season; certainly the variety in Burma is not large, consisting in the cold weather of tomatoes, French beans, peas, carrots, salad, phenomenally small cabbages, and parsley. During the hot season pumpkins and a few other indigenous vegetables make up the list; but most of us at that time are glad to take what we can get, and try to be thankful.

The warders in Burmese jails are nearly always men from the Punjaub and Northern India; the Burman is sometimes employed in this capacity, but his education has imbued him with prejudices of which he cannot divest himself, and these come frequently in collision with his official duties to their disadvantage.

I recall a striking instance of this, in which a hpoongyee was implicated. He was spending a couple of years in jail, and had been sentenced to a few days' solitary confinement for being in possession of some betel-nuts. These, by the way, he had obtained by exercising the influence of his sacred office upon a Burman warder. The Buddhist law carries greater weight to the mind of a true believer than mere prison regulations, and as the former distinctly says that it is in the first degree meritorious to administer to the wants of a hpoongyee, perhaps we should regard the warder's breach of the latter with a lenient eye. Anyhow, early training prevailed, and the warder's action no doubt earned him much credit in Neikban as a set-off to the punishment he received from the authorities in Rangoon.

The apartment in which the reverend convict was confined was a stone cell, whose sole furniture consisted of a plank, the ends of which were inserted into slots in the walls. It opened on a passage where the guard

kept nightly watch, and in the door was a barred aperture, about fifteen inches square, to allow the tenant to be inspected. Nothing is more in accordance with the Precepts than solitary meditation, and one might suppose that the hpoongyee would have gladly embraced the opportunity his temporary seclusion afforded, to indulge in that sedentary but virtuous pursuit. He was however, inclined to take more active exercise, and after nightfall cast about him for means wherewith he might effect his escape. The board which served as his bed was, as I have mentioned, fixed into the walls; it was not very rigid, so the hpoongyee proceeded to jump on it with a view to forcing the ends out of the shallow sockets. He was interrupted by the appearance at the door of the Burman sentry, who begged him to desist.

"I am a yahan" (priest), said the convict, "and, as you must know, am forbidden by the Law to sleep upon a raised place."

He had got the board free by this time, and, thinking perhaps that the guard might not feel it inconsistent with his religious views to raise an alarm, lay down upon it feigning sleep.

The sentry was satisfied, and returned to his post; but a few hours later he was placed in a new dilemma by the apparition of the convict hpoongyee walking softly down the passage. He had used the narrow plank as a lever to force out two of the bars in the door, and with great exertion had managed to squeeze himself through the aperture.

It was certainly an embarrassing position for the sentry; to lay violent hands upon the holy man (who was in trouble over a little matter of stealing) was out of the question to a strict Buddhist, whilst to permit him to

escape in so deliberate a fashion would get him into a very serious scrape. The passage doors were locked, and the hpoongyee was safe for the present, so the sentry stifled his conscience, and ventured to remonstrate with his charge on the impropriety of his behaviour. His eloquence proved in vain, and the situation was growing critical, when the tramp of the relief-guard was heard outside. The sentry fell on his knees, imploring the obdurate hpoongyee to return to his cell, and the door opened upon this impressive tableau. The Punjaub men who formed the fresh guard, not being Buddhists, were no respecters of hpoongyees, and the enterprising priest was promptly bundled into a new cell, where he might meditate, if he pleased, on the prospect of the flogging in store for him next day.

Apart from the ordinary sleeping and working sheds is the condemned cell, a dark but cool and airy cage barred in front with iron, and, save for the wooden floor, not unlike the dens in the lion-house in Regent's Park.

"To be hanged next Monday," remarks the superintendent, indicating one of the two occupants. "You need not pity him," he adds; "that's the fellow who murdered the girl Mah Pan and her child, on the maidan three months ago."

Recollection of the cold-blooded crime dries up sympathy; it was one of the most revolting ever committed. The Burmese would have lynched him, so furious was popular indignation, but for his prompt arrest by the police. The condemned man looks bored rather than fearful; he is smoking a cheroot while he chats with the convict-warder, who, in accordance with rule, is locked up with him. Not that there is any chance of

his anticipating the gallows by suicide; were he under sentence of transportation to the Andamans it would be necessary to watch him closely. I remember a case in which some Madras sepoys were escorting a number of convicts from up-country to undergo sentences in Rangoon or elsewhere. Two of them were destined for Port Blair; these two, after futile efforts to find more efficacious means, made some pretext to borrow boot-laces from the Madrasees, and with these succeeded in strangling themselves.

I have referred once or twice to the jail hospital. An ordinary sick ward is depressing, but this long, narrow shed, barred like the others, with its row of invalids on their charpoys,* sends a cold shudder through the unseasoned visitor. A heavy sackcloth screen distended on bamboos is hung outside to intercept the rays of the evening sun; just now it only serves to give additional gloom to the dreary place. Some of the men, not too ill to be restless, or suffering from a complaint that will not keep them here long, still wear their fetters; the harsh clank of iron and the low moans of men in pain are the only sounds that disturb the stillness. Here is a man, worn almost to a skeleton, lying half-unconscious; looking at his helpless, emaciated form, one forgets his crimes and remembers only his awful fate in awaiting the hand of Death amid such surroundings. Never a friend to come in with a kindly word; no one to chat with about the gay funeral ceremonies the dying free man loves to arrange for himself. The hospital attendants are convicts themselves, and appreciate their duties only for the facilities they afford for stealing the poor

* The rude bedstead commonly used in India.

dainties provided for patients; they have no sympathy with him. He will drop out of the dismal ranks unnoticed, and a number removed from the prison rolls will be all the difference. The warder slams the iron gate behind us, and turns the key noisily as though reminding the inmates that Death, when he calls here, will find only prisoners.

He has been there lately, for at the main doors of the jail a little procession is waiting, on its way out. Two convicts with mattock and mamootee lead it; two others follow, carrying, slung loosely to a pole, a long mat-swathed bundle. Two warders behind hasten the lagging footsteps of the party as the doors swing slowly open.

This is what No. 5,002 will come to at last. For twenty years the man whose body those mats enshroud toiled day after day at stone-breaking, varied by bouts of shot-drill, knowing he had nothing else to look for in this world. He saw prisoners come, work out their sentences, and go, sometimes to return again for a while, to find him still drifting hopelessly on with time. It is all over now; fever brought him his discharge last night in hospital, where they found him dead this morning. Take him away—the law has done with him. Scrape a shallow hole in the shady jungle, where nameless creatures like him rest forgotten. Who was he? Nobody knows. Nobody cares to know. He was only a number yesterday, and for many yesterdays before; he had a name once, but had probably forgotten it himself long ago. Put him in, put him in; don't keep the warders waiting. That's it! tramp him down if the grave is too narrow. Now stamp down the earth; the pariah dogs will soon find him out if you don't.

No need to mark the place ; no one is ever likely to ask where you buried him ; and after next rains it will be so overgrown with weed and jungle that the spot will be completely lost.

This last act is in terribly grim harmony with those that lead up to it.

THE END.