

POTTER'S CLAY

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SOME STORIES OF SOUTH INDIA

BY

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FOREWORD TO THE ENLARGED EDITION

WHEN *Potter's Clay* made its first appearance in 1927, I said that the primary responsibility for its existence lay with the Editor of the *Madras Hindu*. That still holds good ; but the responsibility for this Enlarged Edition lies rather with the present publishers whose enthusiasm has been boundless. However this may be, I beg that what was said in preface to the First Edition may be taken to apply here. 'Mere passing comments' these stories are ; and I have never been more astonished in my life than when kind folk have told me that they show a deep understanding of India and Indians. God knows they don't and can't, for I am only too well aware that I stand but on the frontier of an enchanted country ; yet, in so far as one must write, I suppose, with sympathy of that which one loves, they may perhaps show glimmerings of comprehension. If it be so, I am proud to think it.

There is one thing, however, these idle tales may accomplish ; they may stimulate others—others who really do know and understand—to follow in the same line. There is already growing up

in South India a school of indigenous fiction which holds within itself, I do believe, the promise of something really excellent. Men like K. S. Venkatramani, like Nagarajan, like G. K. Chettur are, I hope, but the forerunners of a company who will yet put stories about India in a high place among the world's fiction. If these will but be true to their own traditions and will follow their own line where it will lead them, there will be books worth reading and there will be no further need of half-instructed interpreters—like me.

All the stories which made up the original edition are reproduced here and I have added one or two others. It is at least a bigger book, therefore, if not a better.

HILTON BROWN.

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POTTER'S CLAY

I AM constrained to begin this narrative with three platitudes or general statements. First, some Hidiras drink toddy ; second, the ordinary Indian has no sense of proportion ; third, it is the last straw that breaks the camel's back.

I follow these with three statements of particular which at first sight will appear even more violently disconnected. Perundevi was the wife of Head Constable 909 ; the steps of Baba Chetti's well are old and slippery ; Kelappa, the son of Nanjappa, is dead. There cannot, you will say, be any link or chain between these disparities. But there is.

Lastly, an illustration. Little boys at school are occasionally very nasty to one another ; and for no very apparent reason to adult minds they will choose suddenly to make a concerted set against one of their number and will tease and torment and vex and annoy him by every means in their power. If he has sense he will endure this as peacefully as he can ; but neither boys nor men can have sense indefinitely. And most probably his stoicism collapses suddenly ; one moment he is collected, alert, giving as good as he gets, the next he is a gibbering idiot—swiping, kicking,

screaming. So it was with Head Constable 909. Of Head Constable 909 his departmental superiors wrote highly; but I am compelled to put it on record that on the 15th of May, nineteen—something-or-other, at Dongalcheruvu, Head Constable 909 did behave in no otherwise than as the tormented and hysterical schoolboy just described.

Among the things concerning Head Constable 909 which his departmental superiors loved to write with approbation was that he was a Hidira. (I know there is no such caste as Hidira really, but in cases such as this the wise writer of fiction employs a pseudonym.) You cannot say that Hidiras are altogether a 'backward class'—at least you had better not say so to Hidiras; but peonships in the Revenue or Excise normally bound their ambitions. H.C. 909 had gone further than that and he allowed everybody to know it; and if there were by chance any whom he overlooked, to the instruction of these his wife Perundeivi attended faithfully. Perundeivi was a good-looking lady albeit stoutish; but her voice was like a rattle and her temper was to match. At Baba Chetti's well in the mornings they heard enough of both. Taken as a pair, Head Constable 909 and his wife were not popular in Dongalcheruvu.

Dongalcheruvu is a poisonous sort of place in the middle of a flat desert, burning hot in the hot

weather and well-supplied with budmashes of the first class. As a Police Station it is rated troublesome and the officers sent there are carefully chosen. Now let me say at once that whatever happened afterwards, Head Constable 909 was at the outset an excellent man at his job—alert, resourceful and dignified. But he had three grave difficulties to fight against. These were, in ascending order, the budmashes of Dongalcheruvu, the climate of Dongalcheruvu, and Perundevi's tongue.

Now to Baba Chetti's well and the 15th of May nineteen—whatever-it-was. On that morning Perundevi, according to her usual custom, took a large earthenware pot from her back premises and went to get water. According to her custom she walked slowly and majestically to Baba Chetti's well and proceeded regally to descend. The steps of Baba Chetti's well, I remind you, are old and slippery; not according to custom, Perundevi's feet went from under her about half way down. She crashed heavily and slithered the rest of the way to the water-level—it was quite a way—among the fragments of the pot. There were a number of ladies present, and the percentage of these who did not laugh—loudly, heartily, pointedly—was negligible.

Perundevi gathered herself up stiffly. She had barked one elbow and other less thinkable bits of

her were very sore. She was stoutish, as I said. She was in the most hideous passion but she had just sufficient self-control to keep it under.

'Amma!' said some helpful friend. 'See how the good pot is all broken.'

Perundevi adjusted her sari. 'What is a pot to us,' she said magnificently. 'We can buy a hundred pots. I have only to go now to the potter and get another one.'

She retreated slowly up the steps. There are between twenty and thirty steps to Baba Chetti's well and if you are a stoutish lady toiling up these it is hard to keep your back view dignified before the gaze of enemies below. There were titters from the water's edge which grew to squawks and presently to screeches. The temper in which Perundevi reached the street level was something monumental, epoch-making.

She went, however, to the potter's. But the potter had been attending marriages instead of doing his work and his stock was very low. In particular he had no big pots, like the broken one, at all. Perundevi, never sparing with her tongue, told him what she thought of him. The potter was annoyed; he reached out his arm.

'Here is a perfectly good pot,' he said, 'true, it is not very big, but it is the only kind I have and it will do till I make a bigger one.' And he seized up and planted in front of Perundevi what

is locally known as a *tappidi*. If you look up into well-grown date palms all round Dongalcheruvu, you will see *tappidis* hanging there like black fruit—and what they are there for you know.

Now, I said at the outset that some Hidiras drink toddy. Head Constable 909 never drank toddy—belonged in fact to that contrary sub-division of the caste who would rather drink arsenic; but naturally all Dongalcheruvu said otherwise. Each of us has our own particular insult we resent more bitterly than any other; and with H.C. 909 and Perundevi it was this question of the toddy. It was to them as a red rag to a bull. Whether the potter meant it or not I cannot say—he said afterwards he didn't, and who knows the mind of a potter?—but it seemed to Perundevi, already seething and on edge, that the last unbearable insult had been offered. Control snapped.

Perundevi screamed. She screamed loudly and with all the vigour of her excellent lungs. She went home screaming at intervals. At the Police Lines she tore down her hair and struck herself on the breast and made other spirited demonstrations. Then, thus rehearsed, she went in and delivered her performance to Head Constable 909.

Normally Head Constable 909 was a pretty sensible fellow and Perundevi, as he knew to his cost, was always making an uproar about this or

that. But it was a cracking hot morning, the budmashes had been intolerably bad of late, the Inspector had been snappish and there was this vile, toddy-drinking insult that he just couldn't stand. The Indian at times has no sense of proportion at all. Perundevi's wails, at first ineffective, presently began to work her husband up. The hopeful crowd, waiting patiently outside the Lines, saw him sallying forth with a lathi.

He made straight for the potter's. The glorious news—that the hated Head Constable was at last going to make a final, fatal and suicidal mistake—flashed round like wildfire; the crowd thickened. H.C. 909 was perfectly calm and collected and heeded them not at all. Outside the potter's he stopped.

'Ayya!' he said, 'you say I drink toddy, do you?'

'I never said it,' cried the potter—and had just time to throw up his arm and catch on it the first terrific lathi stroke. Thereafter, steadily and without haste, Head Constable 909 proceeded to beat him, while the crowd—knowing that with every blow he struck himself further and further into ruin—cheered him greedily on. Sometimes he hit the pots and sometimes the potter, but the potter caught enough of it to make him rue the day. Perfectly calm and collected, H.C. 909 strode away back to the lines; and seven petition-

writers took pen, ink and paper and sat down simultaneously to their happy task.

But these petitions were never penned; for at the entrance to the Police Lines, with his tray and boxes, sat one Kelappa, son of Nanjappa, a seller of sweetmeats and *bidis*. And his evil genius moved Kelappa to improve the occasion.

'What injustice is this?' said Kelappa unctuously. 'You have beaten the potter. You should not have done like that. It was very wrong.'

Quite often in India you will meet men—generally executive officials—who have just done something, violent or non-violent, which they know to have been in excess of what they should, could or ought to have done. If such men did not sometimes do such things, India would cease to be governed; but—do not choose that moment to read them a lecture.

Head Constable 909 stood in the blazing sun looking down at Kelappa, the sweetmeat-seller. He knew—or was beginning to know—exactly what he had done; he could hear in his mind those ready pens scratching busily against him. He looked at Kelappa and became suddenly the over-tormented, gibbering, hysterical schoolboy. Control snapped.

Perundevi, when control gave way, had screamed; her husband walked away to his quarters without a word. Presently Kelappa,

peering interestedly, saw him come out carrying something.

'The Head Constable *Garu* is going to clean his carbine,' thought Kelappa; but the Head Constable *Garu* came stalking towards him.

'He is coming to talk to me,' thought Kelappa, 'I will advise him well.' Kelappa was feeling intensely virtuous; self-righteousness radiated from him like an aura. 'I will tell him he must ask the potter's pardon,' thought Kelappa. He thought so till with strange, dancing, tigerish strides the Head Constable *Garu* came within three feet of him and he looked the carbine in its ugly mouth. Then he thought he would get up and run away; but there was a flash and a roar and Kelappa fell screaming and bleeding into his tray of sweetmeats—and was dead before the echo of the shot had stopped.

Fortunately the Lines were close by and they came running and seized H.C. 909 before he could reload and clear the account by shooting himself. Later, he got off the death sentence on the ground of grave and sudden provocation and because it was shown that Kelappa was the last man he would have wished to destroy inasmuch as in point of fact Kelappa owed him seven rupees twelve annas.

As for Kelappa, he was very dead, and—unless as an example to others not to improve unsuitable

occasions—there can surely never have been a stupider or more pointless end. It wasn't even as if he had been the potter.

So you see there was a connecting thread after all in that odd-looking series of facts. But what clay—what potter's clay—in the hands of circumstance we all of us are! For instance, if only the Union authorities had thought to repair the steps to Baba Chetti's well—

SACRIFICE ROCKS

PERSONALLY I hold that stories of what is called the Occult should not be told at all, still less written. Or if told they must be—and they must because they're so eternally interesting—then they should be told only by eye-witnesses. Or if they must be told by other than eye-witnesses—and they must be because the eye-witnesses generally lack the gift of tongues—then let them be indisputably authenticated. I was not an eye-witness of the things that happen in this story ; but to authenticate it I say I had it from Leonard Ashley.

Leonard Ashley is well-known. You know that wretched afternoon-party game where they lift a cloth and disclose a collection of mixed articles ; you get so many seconds to look and then write down those you remember. Leonard Ashley is the sort of fellow who scores cent per cent in that game where you or I make twenty or thirty. He is an observer by birth and training. He was one—in aeroplanes—in the war. He has been tested in this country. He was occupying a front seat when the Hanuman Victory Service's bus went over the Samsha Ghat. All the witnesses who

survived were incoherent except Ashley who gave a perfectly clear and minutely detailed account—so detailed that it squared somehow with all the other contradictions. (This although he was thrown through the wind-screen and twenty feet into lantana.) You can depend on Ashley for an absolutely accurate account of anything. I do not think he has any imagination at all.

The Sacrifice Rocks of this story are not the well-known ones you find on the Admiralty Charts, nor anywhere near them. Indeed they are not Sacrifice Rocks at all except to Ashley and Greening of the Archæological Department, who gave them that name for convenient reference the day they found them. They are on the East Coast of India—I will not be more particular—not far from a row of fourteenth century temples forgotten and mouldering among sandhills. It was to study inscriptions in these temples that Greening went to the place, and Ashley went with him because they were friends and he had nothing else to do. I heard a picnic party, not long before that, call Sacrifice Rocks 'Pip, Squeak and Wilfred'; this shows how different people view the same thing in different ways.

'These rocks,' Leonard Ashley told me, 'are on the beach about six feet above the present high-water mark; they're ten feet high, may be twelve. If you can imagine a wave just curling

over towards the land side, just going to break, suddenly turned into stone, you have the general idea of their shape—the shape God meant them to have anyway. Seen endways they're just like a note of interrogation.' But seen from the land or the sea-side, they're of course quite different.

'Seen that way,' said Ashley, 'their shape's all wrong. It's bad—evil.'

'How can a shape be evil?' I asked for information.

'I don't know. It can be, though. How can a sound be evil or a colour? But you won't deny that they can. So can a shape, an outline. There's a story by Chesterton—'

'Never mind Chesterton,' I said. 'Get on with yours.'

He went on in his slow, exact, word-selecting way. On the sea-side the rocks were rather marvellously carved—Nagas mostly and one head of the Man-Lion. Again the carving was bad—evil.

'There was something about it. You've seen thousands of Nagas; so have I. You've seen millions of Narasimhas; so have I. These were different. I tell you the faces, the expression—Horrible.'

Then on the land side just under the curving crests were three box-like niches—like little cupboards. Greening had explained that these were places for lamps. Below each the rocks ran out

into a flattish slab. Greening had scraped away a lot of sand and had become very excited ; he had showed certain marks or what he said were marks though they seemed mere scratches and knobs to Ashley. He thought he had made a discovery.

'These things are old,' he said to Ashley, goggling over his glasses. 'Most awfully old.'

Ashley pointed to the Nagas and Narasimhas—contemporary work apparently with the temples.

'Oh, these—' said Greening. 'These are modern. Done yesterday. Simply stuck on because it was a handy place. But this side's prehistoric. It's got nothing to do with the other side at all.' He went on to explain learnedly. It was probably—certainly—an ancient place of sacrifice. The slabs below, the niches for Sacrificial lamps above.

'Human sacrifice?' Ashley had asked. Nothing, Greening said, more likely.

Greening was to have several days' work at the temples. They stood on a little rubbly hill up which the sand had crept till it half-buried them. Round the base of the hillock sprawled—and stank—a particularly decayed and loathsome fishing village. But behind Sacrifice Rocks was a clearing among casuarinas and round and in front of Sacrifice Rocks was the most perfect bathing beach. Quite obviously the clearing was the place for the tents.

But the peons and servants demurred. They made silly objections—water ; but there was a well in the casuarinas : too much sun—but there was excellent shade for a desirable orientation : too windy for cooking—as if a shed of tatties couldn't be built. They proposed other places—obviously inferior ; any other place in fact.

I told Ashley at this point that his story was an old story or at any rate was running on very familiar lines. He looked at me reproachfully.

'I never said it wasn't. All these stories are old stories—the same old story. They all run on familiar lines—the same lines.'

'I've written stories myself,' I said. 'You are now going to tell me you had a servant who came to you with Rumours.'

'Of course I had,' he replied. 'It was Muniswami.' Ashley was one of those fellows interested in everything, deriding nothing, who hear things that most of us don't. Sure enough on the first night Muniswami had unburdened himself.

—'This plenty bad place. These peoples saying one devil living here. Long time old time these peoples killing peoples, giving to that devil. That devil still taking peoples. Then these peoples' friends not finding.'

It didn't seem necessary to Ashley to posit devils to account for disappearances along that coast. Several companies of fisher-folk had just

passed along the sands from the unpleasing village or another, so charged with arrack or toddy that they took the width of the beach. One could easily enough imagine a lonely reveller—night—a monsoon sea running—a few false staggering steps . . . Ashley let it go at that.

A night of rare moonlight brought on a happy day for Greening. (Ashley slept perfectly; I told you he had no imagination.) Greening grubbed and scabbled in the hot sand, scraping clearer and yet more clear those smoothed slabs running landwards from the foot of the rocks. He found more marks. He sat back in the sand, wiping his brow—it was a hot dry day—and showing them to Ashley.

'It's old, old stuff,' he said. 'Ages old. You see how it was. There's a kind of causeway; they'd bring the victim along that. Then the sacrifice on the slab. Then they'd light the lamp. Pre-Aryan all this, probably.'

Late in the afternoon Greening, burnt red in patches where the sun had caught him, came in to the tent and said he was going to bathe. Ashley was not allowing himself to bathe just then because of liver or malaria or some such bugbear; also he was deep in some mineralogical reports (he is a mining engineer). He told Greening to be careful of the currents with which that coast is cursed, and went on with his reading. Greening

took off his clothes, threw on a dressing-gown and wandered out.

Ashley read and mused for a long, long time,—how long you may judge by the fact that Muni-swami eventually brought the lamp without being called. It was quite dark. I repeat once more that Ashley has no imagination at all. His thoughts ran, 'Old Greening's having a long bathe. I'll go down to the beach and fetch him home.' Even then he dallied, filling a pipe, idly turning over a discarded report.

Outside he found a black-dark earth and star-studded sky in front of him. He went forward slowly and stumbling to the crest of the low sand-dunes that fell to the beach. The sea roared at him suddenly. And then he was instantly galvanized into activity.

'You know,' he told me. 'I couldn't believe my eyes.'

Against the foam and flurry of the sea and the bright starshine the Rocks with their evil shape stood up very clear. And just under their crest were three tiny squares of orange light.

'I couldn't believe my own eyes,' said Ashley. 'It meant that someone had put lights in the three niches, like Greening had said they used to do after sacrifices. But nobody could have done it. Then I thought Greening must have done it to get the effect.'

He went down shouting Greening's name, looking for him. He didn't find him. Afterwards, with a lamp, they found nearer the sea and some distance away to the left Greening's dressing-gown and soft hat and the stump of his cigarette. He had thrown these down and gone into the sea.

'And what happened *then*?' said Ashley, looking at me.

There were currents. There were sharks. There were devils. It seemed to me I could take my choice.

'Go on about the lights,' I said.

Ashley had gone back to the Rocks after about an hour's fruitless search. The lights had burned for a while and then gone out. Not one of the servants would follow him. Had they seen the lights? I asked. Oh, yes, they had seen them; all the time they were looking for Greening; you couldn't help seeing them—a reddish yellow glow. You could even smell them—burning oil and fat. Just when they went out Ashley couldn't say.

He went back to the Rocks to investigate. 'I was in a blue funk, but I couldn't just leave things there.' He groped his way to the Rocks; he put his hand—I should not have cared to do that—into the three niches one after another. One and all they were cold, dampish, almost slimy to the touch. He scraped them with his fingers; a few grains of sand came away but nothing in the way

of ash. Yet round the whole place hung the once-smelt-ever-unmistakable smell of temple illuminations. But the light that had burned there was a light that burned cold and left no ash.

In the morning they looked again for Greening. They did not find him. No one ever has.

I say yet again—Ashley has no imagination. He has a pair of eyes trained to pick up minute and exact detail and a brain habituated to record their every message. If Ashley says there were lights burning on the Rocks after Greening went into the sea, then we may take it there were. Beyond that there does not seem to me to be anything worth saying.

This is at best a tragic tale—though I suppose an elderly bachelor with threatenings of cancer might have met a much worse end. But if one begins to go into questions of the evil shape of the Rocks and of those lights and of poor Muni-swami's 'devil', then it raises such a series of very horrid ideas that it is quite clear, as I said at the outset, that it should never have been written at all.

BRUTES THAT PERISH

I WONDER how many readers of this book there are who remember Framjee's Circus? I do not mean the broken-up, self-divided, internecine thing that Framjee's Circus became, but Framjee's in its glory when Raja the tiger and the dog Devadattya lived in harmony together and the antics of Lal Beg, the clown, made one laugh who is now an Emperor. Perhaps there are even those who have seen Framjee himself, clad in a wonderful Victorian dress coat of the Dundreary period or thereabouts, cracking his whip and showing his gold teeth. They said his name was not Framjee at all but Francis and that he had been to Cambridge; but what will they not say? Those were the days when the railway ended at Calicut, and Local Boards were young, eager, unsophisticated things, and sessions of the Legislature occupied half a day—ah, dear, what a long time ago it all seems!

Nobody knows when or how Framjee died; perhaps he never died at all but simply faded away back into that other world of his which he had hidden so skilfully from everybody for five and twenty years. At all events he ceased, and

there was no one man big enough to assume his mantle. The ruin of Framjee's Circus began therefore when it fell upon two. One of these was naturally Albuquerque (who was not a Portuguese) who had married Framjee's daughter (who was not a Parsee). The other was Bahadur Singh (or that was what he called himself), the strong man. Bahadur Singh had not married any of Framjee's daughters but he had been a draw before Albuquerque had been heard of and he had the word of command over the mixed Indian brigade of acrobats, gymnasts, jugglers, stunt cyclists and so forth and could do a little himself at all their tricks. Albuquerque had but one accomplishment—he was very good at it but it remained only one—he trained the animals. He trained Raja the tiger and the dog Devadattya ; he could train anything. But the animals are only one side of a circus and the animal trainer cannot be leader of the whole. So Framjee told him.

Albuquerque kicked. He had counted on the Circus coming down to him lock, stock and barrel ; why else had he married Framjee's daughter, a pretty child, but, as he pointed out, of more than doubtful descent? Moreover, he, Albuquerque, was a beautiful figure, dressy and taking the eye ; Bahadur Singh could no doubt lift a carriage and pair without disturbing its occupants but he was an uncouth, brutish, impossible animal. All this

Albuquerque pointed out, as did Rosa his wife ; but Framjee was adamant.

'You could not be put over Bahadur Singh,' he said. 'He would take all his people and leave. Then the Circus would be split.' (Which is just, he probably added to himself. 'What'll happen in any case.')

Happen it did. The immediate cause of quarrel is variously recorded. Some say that the wife of Bahadur Singh mocked the wife of Albuquerque, because, being called Rose, she was more of the colour of coffee. Others say it was because Bahadur Singh called Albuquerque a Cochin Jew—which was perhaps near enough the truth to sting. At all events there was a tremendous row and the next day the two sat down, and, taking pick and pick about like schoolboys choosing a side, broke up Framjee's into two. Bahadur Singh took Lal Beg the clown who made Princes laugh ; and Albuquerque took Mira, an attractive young female who (in imitation of the immortal Zazel) used to be shot from a cannon in the highest corner of the tent. Bahadur Singh took the acrobats and Albuquerque the trick cyclists. The division was scrupulously exact ; even Albuquerque's animals were shared out. Albuquerque kept Raja the tiger, because the splendid beast was essential to his star turn ; and Bahadur Singh took the dog Devadattya, who could pick out any numbers and

answer any reasonable question asked of him. So the division was made.

Now all this about Albuquerque and Bahadur Singh, about coffee-coloured roses and Cochin Jews, is merely by way of necessary explanation. The people this story is really about are Raja the tiger and the dog Devadattya. These were a remarkable pair. From the earliest days of their acquaintance they had lavished upon one another a devoted, self-forgetting love such as no human being on earth has ever attained. If one could not find the other it pined and went sick till it did. If one was ill the other took no food. If they were put into separate cages they made life unsupportable till they were reunited. The explanation of this I leave to our learned friends; I simply record it as one of those things that happen without conceivable reason and in the face of acknowledged principles. It was so. Raja the tiger and the dog Devadattya could not be separated.

Albuquerque and Bahadur Singh had done their partition well and truly but they had forgotten that their joint heritage contained one vitally important item which they could not divide—to wit, its name. There had been no agreement as to which half was to call itself 'Framjee's Circus.' As a result, a week after the split, there was a Framjee's Circus appearing at Kondacole, and at

Hailarpet, a few miles down the line, there was another. This was absurd. Albuquerque and Bahadur Singh wrote recriminations to one another and then Bahadur Singh, in his simple unlettered way, put up a poster of the 'Real, Original Framjee's Circus.' Albuquerque went to the Civil Court to get an injunction and that was indeed the beginning of the end; for we all know that, whatever else they may accomplish, the courts set the seal on hate.

So, throughout the processing years, the downfall and collapse of Framjee's Circus went on. I do not know what the courts decided in the matter of the injunction or if they ever decided anything at all; always both organizations were called 'Framjee's Circus' and at times one or other would add the adjective 'Real' or 'Original'. The principals bickered on incessantly and pestered all Magistrates in whose domain they encamped with petty criminal complaints, 'bandobust' petitions and so forth. They were forced to hang close on each others' tracks; partly because only thus could they keep strict watch on each other and partly because these were the *mamul* routes to take, but principally because Raja and Devadattya had to see each other or life became misery for all. Greatness and reputation fell from them both like the jewels and properties they pawned from place to place. In three years 'Framjee's Circus' was

forgotten, in six it was dead. On both sides rats left the sinking ship. Lal Beg departed in search of a better audience than gaping Telugu rustics; Mira, poor soul, grew too fat for the cannon and joined a drama. The brilliant troupes of tumblers Framjee had collected gave place to hack gymnasts; the trick cyclists, the conjurers, the jugglers, the elephants, the clowns faded away in search of better wages. 'Framjee's Circus'—whichever one you saw—was a dud.

The time came when, leaving out Albuquerque and Bahadur Singh themselves, only one member in each troupe kept the show going and the pay-desk open. These were, I need not say, Raja the tiger and the dog Devadattya. Raja did one turn which has never been done anywhere else and which in itself was enough to make the name of any circus in South India. Albuquerque and Rosa were the wicked prince and the chaste princess he was carrying off into the jungle; Albuquerque would cast the lifeless Rosa down in front of a potted palm and inform the audience in detail of all he was about to do to her; at that moment there would be a roar and a rush and the avenging goddess in the form of a tiger (Raja) would come leaping from nowhere and carry off Rosa in her mouth. The story comes from Hindu mythology somewhere; but whether they knew the legend or not the audience always 'ate' the play. It wasn't

so dangerous as it looked, for Raja leapt from a concealed cage and ran into a concealed net ; but as a spectacular moment it took some beating. It took more beating—this was the fatal part—than Bahadur Singh could find any item in his repertoire to give. His own feats of strength were colossal, but strong men are common enough ; the dog Devadattya grew cleverer and cleverer every day, but he made the unfortunate mistake of being cleverer than two-thirds of the bucolic audiences he now encountered. He could add and subtract and answer questions far better and quicker than they could—and they didn't entirely like it. Bahadur Singh was faced with closing down.

And all these weary years of human hate and quarrelling and strife, Raja the tiger and the dog Devadattya loved one another selflessly, saw each other and went to each other whenever they could and were an integral part of one another's lives and the whole of one another's happiness. And so at last they were the one bond that kept these rivals circling round each other on the weary road ; because each of them was all that his owner had left and his wishes were therefore vital.

Albuquerque said many unjust things in his time but one thing he said that was fair and that was when he called Bahadur Singh an impossible brute. He was indeed. He was the worst type of 'strong man'—a carnal thing of flesh, a hulk of

matter that hardly reasoned its course from day to day. He saw himself faced with closing down and he did therefore what it was in his nature to do. He poisoned Raja.

He poisoned Raja—that noble generous beast that was worth ten thousand of his abominable self. There was no proof; but there are some things neither requiring nor capable of proof. Bahadur Singh, either by his own hand or by subordinate, poisoned the great Raja; that I know as I knew few things on this earth proven or otherwise.

So knew also Albuquerque, and he knew there was no proof and never would be. So he went to kill Bahadur Singh with his bare hands, but they beat him off with sticks and pitchforks and he came home and shot himself that evening in Raja's cage. Wherefore there was again one Framjee's Circus and one only.

There was—for a period of exactly a fortnight; and at the end of that time there was no Framjee's Circus at all, because except for Bahadur Singh there were no performers and one Strong Man does not make a Circus. For the dog Devadattya was dead.

On the day after they buried Raja (and Albuquerque) the dog Devadattya found his way across the intervening village to the other Circus; but there was no Raja to meet him there. He

went and came again the next day but there was still no Raja and there never would be any more. So the dog Devadattya returned to his caravan and lay there foodless and sleepless and open-eyed till the great heart broke in his body and he died. And that was the end of Framjee's Circus.

It served Bahadur Singh right? It did indeed. But I am glad to be able to record that he was served righter yet, for he lived to be hanged. Brutes that Perish, verily. He was hanged for throttling a Marwari merchant in a train on the South Indian Railway. He was hanged; he perished; Bahadur Singh was hanged. I write it with joy and happiness and delight and a heart overflowing with gratitude to God for his many justices and mercies.

FLANAGAN'S LEAP

ROY COPELAND was the Inspecting Engineer of the Haginahalla group of tea estates. He was a man young, popular, good to look upon, favoured of the gods ; wherefore they slew him early. He 'joined up' in the first months of the War and wandered away to East Africa where he was shot dead in due course by an irrelevant tribesman armed with a cheap German rifle. He has really nothing to do with the present story except in so far as he was instrumental in bringing into the world his son Roy Junior, who has a good deal. He never saw Roy Junior, having married only a few months before he went to East Africa ; but that again is of no present consequence.

Mrs. Copeland—Roy Junior's mother, that is—was a daughter of old Crabtree of Virginia. I say 'a' daughter advisedly for there were many, and it used to be a joke in the Haginahalla Club that Virginia was an estate well named. I forget the exact number, but it was upwards of five anyway. As seems the natural fate of those who run solely to numerous daughters, the resources of Crabtree and Virginia were narrow and strained. After the death of Roy Senior, Mrs. Copeland

collected his 'gratuity' from the company and went back to her father's house and lived on there—pretty miserably. If you want to know why she was miserable ask any married lady of your acquaintance whom ill-fortune has driven back to the parental mansion where unmarried sisters still persist.

Nor did it greatly mend matters that she was—as she always had been—the prettiest sister. Dressed in any old rag she could not help cutting out the Miss Crabtrees. I doubt if she would have helped it if she could; anyway she didn't. Armed with Roy Junior, by now a handsome little five-year-old in curls and a white suit, she made a very attractive post-war widow indeed. So thought Glendinning of Urlindi, a cast-iron tea-planter of much success.

Now some say one thing and some say another, but nobody is likely to deny that Mrs. Copeland was very anxious to marry Glendinning. She would have married almost anybody to get away from Virginia; but Glendinning was a *parti*. He was rich, he was young—youngish anyway—and he was attractive to women. And he was very strongly attracted by the post-war Mrs. Copeland and her nice little son. At the beginning of the Vayala Race Week, when many wild bets were made, I do not think anyone would have laid anything appreciable on the ultimate failure of a

union between these two. Certainly Mrs. Copeland wouldn't.

The moral of this tale is that, if you want a thing to happen you must concentrate. Mrs. Copeland was not very strong on concentration; she was apt to chatter herself away into side issues and forget the main object. She forgot to attend to the little things—hence what happened. She was very well aware that she and Roy Junior were a pretty picture and she was over-ready to suppose that all eyes were focussed on this picture to the exclusion of all other interests. So far as Glendinning was concerned, this was an error.

Glendinning had another love. The other love bore no resemblance to Mrs. Copeland—was not even of the same sex. He was a horse called Flanagan. His virtues were not those of Mrs. Copeland; he was neither placid nor pretty. He was in fact an ill-tempered and ill-favoured brute. His one qualification—hardly, of course, to be expected in his rival—was that he could jump like a stag. Glendinning thought he would win the Vayala Cup with Flanagan. He not only thought it; he determined he would.

'I'll win that cup,' said Glendinning to himself, 'and *then* I'll propose.' He did not say so to Mrs. Copeland in so many words; but as his mind was by this time an open book to her, this was presumably unnecessary.

Glendinning had no lack of concentration. For the time being he concentrated on that Cup and put other things out of his mind. This Mrs. Copeland could not be expected to understand. No woman in her circumstances has ever yet understood that she *and* an achievement can both occupy a man's mind at one and the same time.

Consider now the different attitudes of mind in which these two approached that cardinal issue, the Vayala Cup Race. Glendinning's: 'I've got to steer Flanagan over the jumps and past the post first: I've *got* to win this race: if I don't I'll be mortified for life. I *must* have it.' Mrs. Copeland's: 'My man'—nobody by this time disputed the possessive pronoun—'my man is now going to show himself off cleverly by winning the Cup: how nice it'll be.' Mrs. Copeland's eyes were full of an artistically-grouped picture of herself and Roy Junior welcoming in the winner; Glendinning's eyes were full of Flanagan's big feet and where he was going to put them. 'He is going to win the race *for my sake*,' thought Mrs. Copeland. 'He is going to win the race,' thought Glendinning. The omission makes the difference.

Seven ran and they went off to a level start; but one refused at the first fence and another fell. That left five—Flanagan, ever a grudging starter,

last. At the third fence he showed his temper and tried to run out; but Glendinning, having none of it, hurled him over it cursing. Flanagan went on breathing fury—last now by several more lengths. Somebody side-slipped at the bend and Flanagan passed him; he passed another going into the straight. And coming up the straight Glendinning had the sudden merciless knowledge that barring miracles, the other two in front were going to beat him.

I should have said—any competent racing reporter would have said it first—that there had been a thunderstorm with torrents in the night. The going was desperately heavy and the straight, cut up by the first two races, was like glue. Flanagan couldn't do it. There was just one possible hope; along the side of the guardrail ran a narrow cinder-track. By main strength Glendinning heaved Flanagan out of his course and on to this track. It worked; Flanagan's big feet gripped; Flanagan began to gain; Flanagan began to win the Cup for Glendinning.

Mrs. Copeland was dreaming in the stand, nervously patting her hair this way and that, thinking more and more of the picture. She was lost to time, space and circumstance. Consequently she was one of the last people on the stand to look up and see Roy Junior standing on that very cinder-track waving to the pretty horses. Flana-

gan, coming like a train, was about ten yards away.

I have heard a hundred descriptions of the next minute—all different. Some shut their eyes, some ran and shouted, some froze into sightless incapable petrification. A few, keeping their senses, heard Glendinning's excusable oath, saw him clap the spurs into the unstoppable, unswervable Flanagan; saw Flanagan tower up in a curious sideways leap over this unaccustomed fence; saw Roy Junior crawling safely under the rail; saw it splinter as Flanagan hit it terrifically broadside on; saw Flanagan come down like a ton of masonry. . . . Very, very few saw young Semple on Children's Hour winning the Vayala Cup.

No one trained outside a Rodeo could have stayed on Flanagan's back during that mad minute; Glendinning didn't. Fortunately for himself he left it early; fortunately again he went outwards and into the mud and slush of the straight. First he lay; then he sat up; then he stood. And all the time he swore—not jestingly or by mere excitement but bitterly and hard.

'I thought he was dead,' said Newson, who got to him first, 'but when I heard him swear, I knew he was all right. It was special.'

Mrs. Copeland, white-faced and distraught, was foolish enough to meet him as he was coming

in. The meeting was dignified by a one-gun salute—Stevens shooting Flanagan who had broken two legs.

I don't know what Mrs. Copeland expected; but at that time, as I have been at pains to point out, she was a woman of one idea. She fluttered forward and said 'George!'

Glendinning looked at her without a word. A man who has just missed his ambition and narrowly escaped death or worse or both in missing it is not likely to mince his words. Some one said: 'Steady, old chap.' But when Glendinning spoke, he swore not at all.

'You foolish careless woman,' he said—and his voice, they tell me, would have cut through six-inch steel—'you foolish, careless woman; you ought to be in jail.'

As the concluding words of a courtship these deserve to be remembered.

Perhaps Glendinning was sorry for them afterwards; though I never heard so. But I expect Mrs. Copeland concentrated next time.

ROYAL AND ANCIENT

THE royal and ancient game of golf is so called because it is now-a-days neither the one nor the other. No royalty to-day is a golfer of any particular prominence and the game as played has become so different from that of our forbears as to be practically a new and modern thing. But it still gives scope for the royal virtue of enterprise and also for the ancient vices of jealousy and deceit. As witness this story.

Melmuri is one of those places which Bishop Heber described but which are not so common in India as he appears to have thought ; those places, that is to say, where every prospect pleases but only man is vile. There are such places in India, but there are a great many others where the surroundings are at least as detestable as the inhabitants or the inhabitants are at least as pleasing as their environment, whichever way you like to put it. But within limits Melmuri comes very well up to the Heberian description. It is a place, almost scandalously lovely, set six thousand feet up on the rounded crests of the Muri Hills, above all heat, fever, snakes or mosquitoes. It lies in that favoured but narrow latitude of India which gets a little of both monsoons but not too much of either. It is dotted about with the beautiful

houses of planters and retired officials who never die. In fact, every prospect pleases. But it must be admitted that the Muria, the hill-man of these parts, is rather more than a little vile.

The family history of a Muria in the Melmuri region is typical. In the first generation he is an industrious agriculturist, living in some remote village of the upland valleys and toiling day and night in the rearing of what he knows as Inlis vishtab, that is to say, carrots, peas, rhubarb and the like. He is a decent, self-respecting fellow and clothes himself according to his station and pursuits, than which no man can do more. The second generation begins by taking the produce to market at Melmuri where he learns (a) that Panchama, Mission-Christian or Eurasian servants habitually cheat their masters, thus making money much more easily than by raising Inlis vishtab; and (b) that father, though a fine judge of soils and seeds, is rather a bonehead in matters of finance and can be diddled pretty easily over the market accounts. This second generation usually makes money, quits the upland valley, hires labour for the Inlis vishtab, and settles in a house in Melmuri bazaar. It also takes to a coat and trousers, a watch and petty litigation. In these circumstances the third generation is spawned, which forsakes the shandy for the garage of the Sri Krishna Motor Company, clothes itself

like nothing on earth, and smokes forty Cocanada cigarettes a day. At intervals it works as a 'dreiver' (which means a petty thief) or as a 'yagent' (which means a loafer); but generally it does nothing at all. The fourth generation (if it does not die in infancy which it does nine times out of ten) is usually a rickshaw cooly; the fifth goes back to the land and the cycle restarts.

Now the brothers Davy and Sammy were descended from an exact reproduction of this sequence in which they represented the fourth generation. Their names were not Davy and Sammy (they were in point of fact Devayya and Swaminathan) but they were known by these simplified appellations to the golfers of Melmuri first as caddies and later as writer (Davy) and caddy-master (Sammy). Something of the grit of the old vishtab-raising ancestor had persisted in these two and where their fellows passed from trailing golf-bags to trundling rickshaws they stuck to the golf-club and made good. For there is a fly in every ointment, and Melmuri is cursed with a natural golf-course—a beautiful rolling eighteen holes designed for driver and mashie since the world began. Natural golf-courses are all very well, but sooner or later there must come the hubris-ridden idiot who insists on 'developing the station.' He came in God's good time to Melmuri in the person of one Kettle, a retired

planter, and thereafter there was no more peace. Development for development's sake is a lure to which even Governments succumb ; and besides if you can extract money from a lot of visitors during a 'season' you as a resident live much more cheaply for the rest of the year, which is good business. So Kettle, who was full of vigour, boomed Melmuri. It was at this time that the golf-club felt the need of a writer (Davy) and a caddy-master (Sammy).

For the benefit of those unacquainted with Indian life in these strata, I should record here that Davy and Sammy hated each other like poison. For all others this will be a purely superfluous observation. They would hate each other. They did—bitterly. They were as jealous of one another as cats.

However, Melmuri boomed and rose and Davy and Sammy inevitably rose with it. More and more people came to Melmuri as a hill station and they all played golf. Davy did good business over imported clubs and balls, but Sammy scored over the petty repairs. Kettle waxed enormously. He drove two aged residents into their graves by extending and virtually rebuilding the club-house, and then proceeded to cause the premature break-up of several others by demanding a professional.

'Ladies come to me,' said Kettle, 'and say they want lessons. God knows they do, too, for

the course is simply hacked to bits. We must have a professional. He needn't know much really. One rupee a lesson, eight annas to the professional and eight annas to the Club. We'll make on it.'

The Committee; as usual, gave way and Kettle approached Davy with a proposition. The Club would pay to send him to Ooty, would pay for a couple of months' teaching there, and would then give him eight annas out of every rupee he made in teaching the lady visitors to have a little mercy on the Melmuri turf. What did he say?

What Davy *said* was that it was very kind of master but that he couldn't think of leaving his poor dear old mother who was very seeck. 'I go so far, then my mother all the time crying.' What this *meant* was that Davy's fourth generation Muria heart failed him. It is long long way to Ooty; no Muria ever went there; he couldn't go—no, no, not for all the eight annas in the world. Wherefore he pitched the story about his poor old mother—who did in point of fact exist but whom he daily drove out of the house and made to carry baskets at the shandy.

Kettle knew his Muria; he also knew his golf-club committee and that he would never get them to rise to the expense of a professional from outside. He damned Davy and went rather unhelpfully and repeated the offer to Sammy. Years of

younger brotherhood to Davy had toughened Sammy's spirit; he jumped at it. He went off to Ooty with the best golf-clubs (at trade prices too) that Davy's stores could provide.

Months ran on; another season hove in sight and Melmuri boomed and boomed. Sammy came back from Ooty and found he was to call himself no longer caddie-master but 'pro.' He had the young Indian's Heaven-sent eye and general aptitude for any kind of ball-hitting game, and he played round Melmuri in a steady 78 to 82. (Bogey is 76.) Moreover, he had the Heaven-sent Oriental patience and he bore day after day with amorphous, club-footed, web-handed visitors, smiling his sunny, ingratiating smile. He was a success; he made money. He made—and this was the terrible thing—more money than Davy, and the fury and hate of Davy were hideous to see. The fact that it was all his own chicken-hearted fault that his brother was making this fortune and not himself rendered it no sweeter. Davy's was the real fourth generation Muria brain—the brain of the reverting cooly. He didn't see ahead. He hadn't believed in Kettle's offer. Now he saw and it drove him mad.

Melmuri boomed and boomed. Kettle, having started a Real Estate Agency and having bought blocks of shares in all the bus companies, decided that it was time he returned his admiring (and

bountiful) public something of a *quid pro quo*. So he caught Captain Nicolls, the amateur golf champion of India, who happened to be passing these parts and cajoled him into participating in an 'Exhibition Golf Match on the celebrated Melmuri Links.' (*Vide* the posters.) The locals of Melmuri fought shy of opposing this redoubtable before the 'record attendance' Kettle predicted; and as a result the red and green bills that defiled the station announced that Captain Nicolls would meet 'S. Nathan, the local professional.' It was all good for the Club as Kettle explained; ('We'll make on it'). Nicolls cared nothing whom he played, and Sammy knew he could go round in about 79 while Nicolls was unlikely to do better than 75, so his reputation could hardly suffer materially. He extracted a promise of a cash bonus from Kettle, win or lose, and worried no more about it.

Kettle had made sure of his record attendance in advance, but in point of fact there was one. It was one of these Heavenly April Melmuri days, and Kettle had cajoled a dozen ladies into putting up a free tea, and naturally everyone within miles attended. A vast V of eager spectators stretched away from the first tee on which Captain Nicolls waited first gracefully, then testily and finally with open rage. Because there was no Sammy. There was no Sammy; and at last a caddy came and

gave out that Sammy was taken very ill indeed with dreadful pains and other distressing symptoms and was lying in the club-maker's shop incapable of movement.

Kettle—and a very angry man was he—made the necessary announcement and the spectators drifted off to make what they could of the free tea, for which they had to wait some time. Nobody saw a very green-looking Sammy getting wearily and painfully into a jatka ; nobody heard what he said to the youth who was to have carried his clubs.

'This is my brother's work,' said Sammy, 'but who will believe?'

Who indeed? For in the Club-house Davy respectfully approached the raging Kettle and the indifferent Nicolls.

'I very sorry my brother do like this,' said Davy. 'How he has blackened master's face ! But that boy no good. He never like to play unless he can win.'

Nicolls shrugged his shoulders ; he wasn't interested. But Kettle took it up. 'Shamming, eh?'

The worthy Davy was shame and regret personified. 'That boy is quite well. But he knew he could not beat this master so he pretend all this. I very sorry.'

Kettle—it is the penalty of long residence in India—was ready to believe the worst about anybody. He believed this.

'I'll make *him* sorry,' he said, and turned with apologies to Nicolls. Nicolls said something conventional : it wasn't his affair.

Kettle took a dutiful sip of the free tea and went home early—the notes for the nice little extempore speech he had prepared still in his pocket. He was in a very vile temper which was not improved when halfway up his own drive an old coolie woman crawled out of the shrubbery and embraced his feet. The cross-questioning of elderly coolie women is a thing to be done in a calm and leisured hour, and Kettle at the moment was neither the one nor the other ; but as the second or third question elicited the fact that this was Davy's mother—and therefore also Sammy's—he took her on to the house. There, with the help of a long drink and his butler, he got more out of her—a great deal more.

For Davy's was the mind of the fourth generation Muria—the mind of the reverting coolie. He saw so far and no further. And though he had no doubt read the Hindu equivalent of the proverb, he had forgotten that the typical function of worms is to turn.

'It was *dichi*,' said Davy's mother. 'To-day after I had carried many heavy baskets, my elder son made me go back to the shandy and buy *dichi*. I bought *dichi* and gave it to my elder son. Then I made coffee for my younger son before he

would go to the *kalub*. But my elder son put that *dichi* in the coffee. Ai-yo! Ai-yo!

Now *dichi* is the Muri name for a local herb whose effects are too terrible to mention.

'Why did you put *dichi* in your son's coffee?' said Kettle.

'What could I do?' said the old woman. 'Always my elder son is beating me to make me work. To-day he beat. So I did it. What could I do? Unjustly he beat me.' She rocked herself to and fro, wailing.

A greenish face appeared suddenly from the verandah.

'What my mother saying all true,' said a faint voice. 'My brother has done it. Now I am quite well, but all the afternoon'—he went into gruesome details.

'And why the devil,' roared the outraged Kettle, 'did you not come and tell me?'

'I thought no good,' said Sammy feebly. 'Master not believe me. Master always believing my brother, not believing me.'

For the first time for many years Kettle's conscience pricked him—hard.

So the upshot of it all was that Davy skipped one generation in the Muria cycle and went on from the fourth to the fifth—that generation, you will remember, which goes back to the land. For at this very hour—to the best of my knowledge

and belief—he toils in a remote village of the upland valleys, toils day and night growing Inlis vishtab by the hundredweight. And the entrance to the field in which he labours is made glorious by a large black board on which is written 'S. Nathan & Co., Vegetable Dealers.'

But on the other hand, at the Melmuri Golf Club, you will be greeted by a pleasant young man, tending a little towards stoutness, whom the older members call 'Sammy' and the younger 'Nathan' and who is in complete charge of everything—stores, stock, bar, caddies and accounts. If you take him out he will poke his way round in a steady 80 and will tell you about his vegetable farm and how his brother works on it.

'My brother not clever,' he will say, 'but very very hard-working man. All day he works. Very good man, my brother.'

Which is all as it should be.

GENIUS

I FIND it written in the authoritative works of Professor Pickling that 'our system of education in India produces a numerous but exceedingly level mediocrity ; it is practically impossible now-a-days for a genius to arise.' Professor Pickling knows all there is to know about education, and if he says so, then it is so. But even to rules made by Professor Pickling, there must be exceptions. There was one at any rate in this case—observe, please, that I say 'was.' There was Balaji Rao.

Balaji Rao was the son of Venkoji Rao and was nominally a Mahratta, his remoter ancestors having ridden and ravaged, no doubt, with one or other of Sivaji's lieutenants. A little later a more prudent if less spectacular forbear served as a private in the company of a certain Captain Hazel and was the first of his corps to follow that gallant officer into Tippu's fortress of Hudali Drug. (Tippu was not there at the time, nor was anybody else, the garrison having bolted overnight by a back door ; but let that pass.) Captain Hazel—who had no necessity or desire to minimise the exploit—reported Balaji's ancestor as a very brave fellow and interested himself in procuring him a

small grant of land in the neighbouring village of Dod Hudali. There the ancestor settled down and begat offspring and in the fulness of time these culminated in Balaji's sire Venkoji.

Venkoji Rao was a man in whom the predatory and pugnacious spirit of his fathers survived strongly. An absurd and old-womanish Government allowed him only one D.B.B.L. gun 'for sport and protection,' discouraged martial exploits and when called on to review his occasional gallantries, pedantically quoted sections of the Penal Code. Venkoji's militarism was suppressed; but they couldn't prevent his fighting. He turned to the natural safety-valve of the disarmed and went in for litigation. There was an upstart creature across the way in Chik Hudali who called himself a Mittadar and eked out his somewhat meagre revenues by taking up arrack-shop, toll-gate and other petty contracts. On him Venkoji declared war and the struggle raged mercilessly through all relevant courts of first instance and appeal.

In the files of some wretched Sub-Magistrate you will find the bulky records of the Hudali rioting case. Several learned judgments were passed on this case at various stages, but what really happened God alone knows. Any way there was a case and counter-case, Dod Hudali charging Chik Hudali with assault, causing hurt and illegal rescue under the Cattle Trespass Act; and Chik charging

Dod with causing hurt, assault, insult and anything else that would lie. It was a grand case and went on in the Sub-Magistrate's Court for fourteen months and seven days. Both sides—this is really the important point for present purposes—employed High Court Vakils and round these two generalissimos the battle roared and surged. Daily was seen the impressive sight of Venkoji, bowed and in humble guise and staggering under a dozen volumes of Indian Law Reports, following down the musty verandahs of the Taluk Office an imperial sailing figure in a black gown and pince-nez. Daily this spectacle was observed round-eyed and awestricken by a small boy of about ten in a plush jacket and a purple cap with gold lace. This being to whom the proud Venkoji deferred so abjectly, who bullied everyone from the Sub-Magistrate downwards, surely he must be of the very gods themselves. So thought the small boy, gazing. Now that small boy was Balaji.

At the end of the fourteen months and seven days the Sub-Magistrate, reviewing an enormous mass of contradictory evidence, presumably tossed for it and awarded both cases to Chik. Dod, hesitating not at all, appealed to the Sub-Divisional Magistrate and employed this time two High Court Vakils. They argued the joint appeal with flaming rhetoric and magnificent gestures for two hours and ten minutes. For the first hour of this

—until the Sub-Divisional Magistrate said 'For God's sake clear that mob out of the verandah' and peons came rushing—a small boy in a purple cap sat on his uncle's shoulder at a window gazing again spell-bound. The Sub-Divisional Magistrate deliberated for a short time and then reversed everything the Sub-Magistrate had done. It was a great moment for Dod. Venkoji ran to his vakils with garlands—like a devotee, like a servant. Venkoji!

Of course Chik went up to the High Court on revision, but the Sub-Divisional Magistrate had written a cast-iron judgment and the attempt failed, Dod winning easily. Balaji did not attend this case, because he had gone up meantime to the Provincial College. Venkoji, shaken a little by the Sub-Magistrate's original perversity, thought it was time they had a Magistrate in the family and designed Balaji for Government service. But the Provincial College altered that. Balaji had to fill up his curriculum with a makeweight subject (this, of course, was much later) and some one told him chemistry was a good one for getting marks easily. Balaji took up chemistry.

Henshaw was Professor of Chemistry at this time. He held the theory that India needed indigenous chemists pretty badly, but he found from experience that they were somewhat to seek. Most people took up chemistry for the reasons

that had actuated Balaji Rao, and even then they were not too satisfactory.

'Here's a country' said Henshaw : 'crying out for qualified chemists ; here's big Indian firms paying huge salaries to Americans, Dutch, Germans, Japanese—anybody but Indians. And will these blighters of mine take up the thing seriously? They will not.'

Then one day he burst into the Principal's room very much excited.

'Blake,' said he, 'does it convey anything to you when I say I've a boy in my class who can identify Element Number Seventy-five in Samarskite? Does that mean anything to the thing you call a mind?'

'Not very much,' said Blake. 'What's his name anyway?'

'Balaji Rao,' said Henshaw. 'And it means that he's in the way to become a first class chemist. I mean a chemist. A real one. He'll be teaching me in a year or two.'

Six months later Henshaw came again.

'That Balaji Rao I told you about,' said he. 'He goes on and on. By James, Blake, I've got the thing I've been praying for at last. He's a born chemist ; he's a genius. He'll sweep the boards.'

And then a year later (Balaji being by this time in the advanced stages of the Provincial College

and an acknowledged devotee of chemistry and nothing else)—

'Blake, old boy, we've made history. We're sending out the greatest chemist India's ever known. I've got a scholarship out of Government. He'll go to Europe. He'll clean up everything. He'll make a fortune. The greatest chemist—' And so on and so on.

Balaji, at the moment, was in the Research Laboratory doing something delicate with balances. Said a friend at another bench :

'Why you stick on at all this? You should be a vakil. Vakils only make big money.'

Balaji snorted. 'You think like that, eh? No-ot much. Listen, I will tell you what Nobel's pay their chemists—yes, and so-and-so and so-and-so.' He quoted statistics. 'I will ask more than that.'

The friend, goggling, said that which in an English boy would have been 'Gosh!'

Now at that same hour, far away in a patch of scrub jungle between Dod and Chik Hudali, that uncle from whose shoulder Balaji had watched the appeal stood gazing at an unpleasant object. The object was—or had been—a member of the Chik party with whom the uncle had a little private vendetta. It was now a very unmistakable corpse. Balaji's uncle was no great lawyer but he knew that persons who lie in wait for their enemies in

patches of scrub and hit them—whether by mistake or otherwise—so hard that they die, rarely get off with culpable homicide. What principally occupied his mind was the thought of how angry Venkoji would be and the horrible score it would be to Chik Hudali if he were hanged. This latter he saw little hope of avoiding.

Balaji, still working with his balances, received a wire saying his mother was dangerously ill. Being conversant with accepted formulae, he entertained no anxiety regarding his mother, but went home hurriedly to see what had really happened. There he learned.

‘Did my uncle really do it?’ he asked foolishly.

‘Of course he did it,’ said Venkoji, and added musingly. ‘We shall have to get a very good vakil.’

They did—the best possible, regardless of expense. Under his orders, they made no fight in the preliminary enquiry; this ran swiftly through to the relief of an apprehensive magistrate, who committed Balaji’s uncle as a dead certainty. In the Sessions Court, however, they unmasked their batteries; the supreme vakil began to play, card by card, his elaborate game.

Balaji attended every hour of that trial, and years and the Seventy-fifth Element in Samarskite fell from him like a garment. Once more he was the little boy in plush jacket and purple cap, only

this time everything was better understood and more splendid. And once more all was but a frame for the vakil—glorious demigod. At the beginning his uncle stood there with a rope round his neck ; it was only a question of letting go the drop. Then the rope slackened a bit ; the executioner stood back from his levers. Then it slackened a little more, came untied, vanished altogether : there stood in the dock a respectable agriculturist brutally accused by a herd of perjurers. Do not ask me how it was done for I never saw through a conjuring trick in my life and I am not conversant with miracle-workers. But done it was. One assessor said there was no case ; another thought perhaps the uncle had voluntarily caused grievous hurt ; the Judge acquitted. Dod Hudali won the victory of its life, and Balaji went back to his first love exulting.

Venkoji and his friends gathered round their vakil in attitudes of reverence—as well they might. To them came Balaji weeping and faint with hysteria.

‘Master,’ he said, ‘yours is the greatest calling. You have power of life and death. Take me as disciple. Only teach me how it is done and I am your man for ever.’

The vakil spoke kindly—as well he might in his turn.

Ten days later Henshaw invaded Blake again—more excited than ever.

'Upon my soul!' he said. 'Upon my sacred soul. Upon the soul of my eternal grandfather. Read this!'

Blake read, pursed his lips, tossed back the letter.

'Well; I don't know what you expect. They're all the same—always. Sell all that thou hast and—become a vakil. B.A., B.L. Nothing else matters.'

'But Balaji!' Henshaw was inconsolable. 'Balaji was a chemist. He had it in him. He'd have gone very far. He was—well, in a way he was a genius.'

Blake shrugged. 'He isn't now anyway.'

I thought of all this the other day when I was passing a certain munsiff's court that shall be nameless for Balaji's sake. Within stood one addressing the bench, addressing it in the hopeless maundering sing-song of the tenth-rate pleader—that soporific drone that never convinced anybody of anything yet. And I happened to know that on that man's card was Balaji Rao, B.A., B.L.

As Pickling says, it is practically impossible for a genius to arise in this country; but it doesn't seem to be always the fault of our system of education. The only other moral I can draw from this tale is that little boys at an impressionable age should not be taken to criminal courts. This last is surely incontestable.

SENTENCE COMMUTED

THERE are perhaps half a dozen sets of circumstances in which it is right and necessary and proper to take away a man's wife. In all other cases it is a vile thing to do.

The case of Daniels fell certainly in the latter category. Daniels was some sort of subordinate engineer on a Native State railway ; he was just a little darker than 'country'—a description everyone will understand. He was a big, stupidish, slow-moving, slow-thinking man with blue glasses and a stoop. He was a good enough man at his work but utterly lacking in that 'guid conceit' without which it is ordained that no man, in a world of face values, shall succeed. Wherefore he needed a wife—whose encouragement in the quiet hours should counter the cold indifference of every day. Whether he needed a wife like Ella, Mrs. Daniels, is another question.

The maiden name of Ella Daniels had been Welsh, but she was, well,—not Welsh. She and her family—she had a futile and slightly dishonest father, an expansive mother and five sisters—banked on Daniels as a young man who was likely to go far. So many people mistake for the still

waters that run deep the still waters that are merely stagnant. The scanty soul of Ella had but two ideals—money and a Good Time and by a Good Time it understood tennis, Railway Institute dances and clothes. Ella produced no children and she was incapable of amusing herself for five minutes on end.

Daniels plodded on with his work, and got little forrader. Presently it became evident that he never would get much forrader, whereat Ella, instead of encouraging and fortifying him, tongue-lashed him because he did not 'push himself'—a thing wholly and at all times foreign to his nature. As a machine for making Good Times he was a lamentable failure. Ella became first cold to him, then cruel. Finally, and in pursuance of the only useful purpose for which God made her, she ran away with Saldanha.

Saldanha was darker than Daniels and, as his name implies, differently bred. He was a gleaming, flashing, purring, posturing creature, and he owned a remote and God-forsaken coffee estate in the Muri Hills from which he pretended to make much more money than he actually did. He played a masterly game of tennis and danced, Ella thought, divinely. (Now Daniels was a fool at all games and danced like an untrained buffalo.) He came on visits to a relative and told swash-buckling tales of dances at the Muri Club and race

meetings at Banhatti. (He did not mention that he was not a member of the Muri Club or that he had no connection with the race meetings beyond witnessing them from the one-rupee enclosure.) Ella verified in so far as to ascertain that he did own a coffee estate, and took the rest as corollaries. The facile love of their class smote them at an Institute dance. They misbehaved for a while secretly and nastily; then Ella left for the Muris.

In the little baking red-roofed railway quarters of Dengli opinions varied as to how Daniels was taking his disaster. Wise folk regarded him as well out of Ella, but Daniels—so much was clear—did not so regard himself. He just went plodding on, stooping and blinking behind his blue glasses. He said very little unless perhaps to Father Bertram who gave nothing away, and in course of time public opinion came round to the belief that he had made up his mind to let things slide. Some called him wise, some called him a worm. All alike were off the mark.

Ella, always careful of her own comfort, had timed her departure to coincide with the beginning of the hot weather; just about the end of it—and a long hot weather it was that year—Daniels put in for two months' leave. He said he wanted to go shooting. Ella was pretty well forgotten by this time at Dengli, and even this very frank state-

ment of his purpose struck no spark of interest or question. At the Institute he volunteered the information that he was going to shoot bison, and for the pursuit of this large and formidable animal he armed himself with a duck gun borrowed from a Traffic Inspector friend and an old Army-pattern revolver of his own. He had bought the latter long since because Ella was afraid to be left alone at nights on account of 'natives'. From Dengli, the Muri foot-hills are as convenient a place for bison shooting as any other—all being most inconvenient; and if Daniels told anyone his destination, it attracted no comment. Probably he didn't for the simple reason that no one ever asked him. He started off in a grey dawn in a jatka with the aforesaid weapons, a roll of bedding, a bottle of quinine tabloids and an unkempt chokra. Nobody, to my knowledge, took enough interest to see him off.

Daniels was a born incompetent as he very soon found out. An elementary knowledge of Indian geography will indicate that from Dengli to the Muri Hills is almost due south-west; an elementary knowledge of Indian meteorology suggests that after the hot weather the south-west monsoon sets in. Daniels had forgotten both these facts or if he remembered them he failed to read them together. He had time and occasion to think about them when, on the third day out, wave after wave

of light, racing cloud-wrack shut out his sun. On the fourth day there was a disheartening drizzle, thin but penetrating; on the fifth he was on a sodden road plashing through soaking rain. About two days ahead, wrapped in a black mystery of water and wind, lay the Muris.

Some would have given it up and turned back; not so Daniels. He was no particular hero, but he had thought and thought over this business during long, stewing afternoons and long, airless nights and he knew what he meant to do. Literally, he didn't care if it snowed. It didn't snow, though it did almost everything else, and the last day the jatka, bogged in foundrous by-roads, achieved less than walking pace. In the end Daniels cast anchor in the Travellers' Bungalow at Kilmuri. He was very comfortless there partly because he was an incompetent campaigner and partly because his chokra instantly lay down and said he had fever. It occurred to Daniels, cleaning his revolver carefully—the duck gun remained in its case—that the sooner the job he had come for was done, the better for all concerned.

Kilmuri is at all times a wretched place and after twenty-five inches of rain in six days it would challenge for misery Hell's own self. Daniels found the Post Office and enquired after an estate called Hosabili. It did not seem so well known to the Post Office as it should have been from

Saldanha's descriptions, but they had heard of it. A dripping Sahib planter swung in for his letters, said, 'You trying to get to Hosabili? God help you!' and swung out again. Daniels gathered that Hosabili was seven miles away and on the top of a mountain. Could you take a jatka there? Emphatically not: in the dry weather perhaps, but during the six months of the monsoon Hosabili walked. Did Mr. Saldanha come out much? He did not; if Daniels ever reached Hosabili, he would understand that once you got there, you stayed there.

Daniels, with the loaded revolver in his pocket, started for Hosabili next afternoon. He did not go in the morning because he hoped the rain might stop. It did not. The steady wind-and-water roar of the monsoon surged about him as he took a steep, barrelled track between decayed silver-oaks. At times it was foot-packed clay, hard as rock and slippery as glass; at times it was six, seven, ten-inch mud. It clambered and wound interminably. Once it dropped and rose in impracticable ziz-zags to cross (without benefit of bridge) a thundering torrent of brown flood water, and on two stretches of fifty yards or so the bank had slipped and lay in a sodden mess across the road. Never a soul appeared ascending or descending. The solitude and the covering noise of dripping or rushing water encouraged Daniels to

try a shot into a tree-trunk, and the responsive bark of the revolver was almost like a friendly voice. Daniels marked that his shot had been very straight and thought vaguely what would happen when next he fired like that. He was no particular hero, but he had thought about this till it came like a routine duty. First Saldanha anyway; then perhaps Ella, perhaps himself; he would have to see how things went.

And climbing up the sodden path now through rank lantana, now through patches of rain-blackened coffee, Daniels thought of Ella his wife. Of Ella who was afraid to be left alone for a night even among the comfortable bungalows of Dengli; of Ella who kept a permanent darzi at work that she might show herself in a different dress every other week; of Ella who went from a set of tennis to a hand of whist and from that to a gramophone dance; of Ella who was incapable of amusing herself for five minutes on end. Of Ella who could not sit alone, could not read, could not sew, could not think; could only flit, chatter, posture, show herself, dance, play, trifle; of Ella who needed company as a plant needs light. By the grim gods of the Muris, thought Daniels floundering in the slough of the track, there was little company here. Unless Saldanha was company—Saldanha and Love.

In the dusk a rotting board nailed to a trunk

pointed Daniels up a 'drive' even worse than the path he left. It was a short drive, hung and swamped in black, silent, gloomy coffee; it led presently to a bungalow or rather a shanty half-Indian, half-European in style. The rain had eased off for the moment but the wind roared evilly in the tall trees that closed up on the back of the house; in the adjoining godowns a servant's child and a chained pi-dog howled in dreary unison. Daniels thought of the neat, red-tiled, purple-creepered cottage at Dengli and of Ella's grumblings thereat, and drew his eyes back to this sodden, ill-found hillman's hovel. The black, dismal coffee surged almost up to the verandah, and Daniels went forward with it. They had lit the lamps inside, and the windows were innocent of curtains. Skulking in the coffee, Daniels looked in and saw Ella sitting at a table.

Daniels, his revolver ready, looked through the unadorned window and saw Ella his wife, and it seemed as if he saw there the very incarnate spirit of all that gloomy, water-logged, God-forsaken, God-forgotten place.

Ella sat behind the shadeless kerosine lamp and a little to the side of it, so that she got the full benefit of its unkindly light. She sat with her elbows on the table and her fingers under her chin, sat and simply stared in front of her as if there were nothing for her to do but await an in-

finitely horrible end. The light glared on the pale peaky face that had once been pretty, but the great horrified eyes stared through it and past it and saw nothing. Daniels drew a bead on her with his revolver, held it for perhaps a couple of minutes and then dropped his hand. Ella stirred no more than a picture.

'My girl,' thought Daniels with sudden illumination. 'If you knew this was here, you'd run to meet it.' He put the revolver back in his pocket. Overhead the great wind, roaring in the dark, threw down a splashing shower.

There may have been a quarter of an hour of this, Ella sitting like a graven image and staring into the lamp, Daniels fiddling with his revolver and the black monsoon raging over all. Then there was a commotion at the back of the house and someone came in and through, not into the room Daniels could see but as it were into one next door. A man's voice shouted and snapped. Ella's head had flickered round for a moment at the first sound and then come back to the same motionless despairing straightahead stare. Saldanha could not be seen.

'He didn't kiss her when he came in,' thought Daniels, watching fiercely.

Presently the man off-stage began to snarl in a hard, menacing voice. At first the woman took no notice, then her head flickered round again, and

she snapped back. She snapped shortly once or twice and then arose a sound Daniels knew well—the shrieking staccato of Ella his wife tongue-lashing her man. Snarl and shriek, blending in unlovely chorus, cut out over the thunder of the weather; you caught no words, but Daniels could see Ella's face, hate-lined, horrible. Then suddenly Saldanha—a rather unkempt down-in-the-world Saldanha he seemed to Daniels—came striding into the room and took her by the shoulders and shook her. She leaned back in her chair resisting him; she shrieked and spat.

Daniels had a moment of terrible happiness. He took the revolver from his pocket and drew an exact bead first on one and then on the other. Then with great deliberation he broke the weapon and slid into his right palm one by one his six cartridges. For an instant he held them there, then with a jerk he sent them in a little lump far into the blackness of the coffee.

The monsoon heavens opened and let down a crashing deluge. But Daniels was groping his way down the impossible track to Kilmuri.

Daniels came back to Dengli before—long before—his leave was up. He went to return the duck gun to his Traffic Inspector friend and the friend saw at once that in some curious way Daniels was looking better. He said so.

'It is no thanks to that place, then,' said Daniels

and described the elemental wrath of the Muri Hills in July. The friend was astonished.

'Mann,' he said, 'it is a wonder you did not die.'

Daniels grinned contentedly. 'There's worse things than death,' he said, 'for some folks.'

'What on earth, mann,' said the mystified friend, 'do you mean by that?'

But Daniels didn't tell.

RESERVED SEATS

IF you foist upon a patient Eastern people knowing nothing of time and steeped in a philosophical eternity the restless habits of raw, crude, Western democracy, you may anticipate trouble. In the old days when India was India we never read, for example, of such a thing as a general election. War, yes; battle, murder, wild beasts, floods and epidemics—all these occurred; but it has been reserved for the present age to put the crown on horror, the coping-stone on frightfulness. This is what we call Progress and it is, of course, a splendid thing altogether.

In the old days India was so delightfully constituted that even if there had been a general election it wouldn't have mattered very much. The village purohit would have gone in unopposed and the council or assembly or witenagemote or whatever it might have been would never have met because nobody would have been so silly as to call it. Even if such a disturber of the peace had arisen there would still have been a sufficient number of members with sense enough to stay away and so there would never have been a quorum. But to-day all these things are changed and whether it be for the better or for the worse let

him say who considers himself competent to decide.

The rules of general elections, like the rules of golf, are made to defeat the player who intends to cheat. In the village purohit days there would have been no necessity for these because there would have been no necessity for cheating. But as I said at the outset if you foist West upon East you prepare for yourself a mountain, a very Mahameru, of trouble. As a result the intelligent Indian voter of to-day has a very clear idea of the practical value of a ballot-paper ; and he demands motor car rides to the polling-booths and largess and cajolery and this and that and the other ; and when he has got all these and is brought to the scratch he sticks his tongue in his cheek as like as not and votes for the other candidate, and in short comports himself in manner not unlike to his less enlightened brother in the West. So that altogether he is the very devil.

Moreover the rules of elections, again like the rules of golf, are very difficult to dodge ; and when once the contest is set and the lists entered, they are awkward material to manipulate to any purpose. Considering this with what has been said on the elusiveness of the intelligent electorate, it will be seen that the wise candidate—and Dewan Bahadur Itakaswami Rao (of whom presently) was a very old hand at the game indeed—the wise

candidate has as little to do with the intelligent voter and the election rules as he possibly can. That is to say, he goes in—whenever and wherever it is remotely possible—unopposed.

Dewan Bahadur Itakaswami Rao sat for the Eastern Agriculturists' constituency in the first Reformed Council and the next. He liked sitting for the Eastern Agriculturists and he intended to go on sitting for them till either he or the Council dissolved. He was a shrewd old man, handsome with the elderly Brahmin's placid serenity, kindly (except to a few), and a fluent if slightly maundering orator. Very few in that talented assembly could speak with such apparent fire and such manifest lucidity and sit down having said so little. Invariably he appeared to have committed the Party—of which he was a major satellite—to absolutely definite announcements; but when you came to analyse you invariably found he had only said that if X were Y, P might be Q, but if X weren't it mightn't. He never said that X *was* Y or even that P *would* be Q. You will at once see that he was a most valuable member of any Parliamentary assemblage, and the party held that to lose Dewan Bahadur Itakaswami would be to lose a digit. Dewan Bahadur Itakaswami thoroughly agreed; he had no intention of being lost whatever. And so when the general election came round, he stood once more.

The planks in the Dewan Bahadur's platform—so far as he stood on anything solid enough to be called a plank—were tried and tested; Co-operative Societies, demonstration farms and improved educational facilities for ryots. These were unassailable, and he could talk about them—anybody can—almost interminably. They served him through the first Council very well. But towards the close of the second, there arose a most pestilent upstart called Panichi Pillai, who had attained some fame as a Taluk Board President somewhere and was anxious to attain more. He played up to the agriculturist gallery, and the infernal thing about him was that he really knew something about rural economics (which not so many people do). It was common knowledge that he was behind the Agriculturist Subsidies Bill and the Consolidation of Small Holdings Bill, both of which were debated towards the close of that second Council. Both of them were the least thing beyond the Dewan Bahadur and in both debates he made just the trifle of an ass of himself. Panichi Pillai pointed out in the press that he had done so. The net result of all this was that there arose among the Eastern Agriculturists a sect who held that the Itakaswami was a back number (which he wasn't) and that he was a bit of a humbug (which he was).

The Dewan Bahadur was not very seriously perturbed. If it came to a poll these seceders

might make themselves nasty, but he had no intention that it ever should come to a poll. He proceeded therefore according to well-established formulae. He knew there were only two men who were likely to be nominated against him and one who pretended he was but wasn't. The latter was settled in five minutes ; and a little tact and negotiation dealt with the other two as they had been dealt with before. He got the head wobbler of the constituency to propose him on one nomination form and the arch hedger to propose him on another. The way was clear. And then suddenly, five days before the closing date for nominations, the Young Sect showed their hand and announced their intention of putting forward as a candidate—Panichi Pillai. With the certainty born of long Parliamentary experience the Dewan Bahadur knew he was up against it.

Panichi was no great genius but he was a sound student of mob psychology and he knew his electorate. There was no time to win the seat on a basis of reason ; he had sprung his dramatic surprise and on a basis of dramatic emotion the thing had to go through or fail. He had to produce effects and keep on producing them till polling day. He knew—as all knew—the Dewan Bahadur's reputation for subterfuge, so he stood as the Fair-play Candidate, the Straightforward Man You Know. He did it very well. He knew—as all

knew—that the Dewan Bahadur had been nominated on no fewer than twenty-seven papers; the notice-boards bristled with them. So Panichi exhibited to every audience he addressed 'My one and only nomination paper, signed by my proposer and seconder, which I will present with my own hand, when I know—and not till I know—that this electorate really and truly and wholly approves. If not—I tear it up.' Then the dramatic moment, 'Shall I tear it now?', and the paper (or something like it) held ready between the uplifted hands. And of course the answering, reassuring roar from the susceptible mob.

It was terrible stuff but it went down; the Panichi faction strengthened and grew. It grew till the Dewan Bahadur began to feel uneasy. But the fact remained that 'my one and only nomination paper' was not put in and so far there was officially no other candidate at all. And the days to the final day shortened to three, to two, to one.

On the day before the final day Panichi addressed an audience at Salagundi and he left so well satisfied with himself that he determined to put in 'my one and only' that afternoon. He thought he could just make the returning office before three. But between Salagundi and Sekharam there is a piece of road running through paddy-flats and bordered with coco palms, and by some extraordinary fate two of these—in windless

weather, mark you—had fallen across the road. You cannot drive a car over two coco palms. Panichi did not get within miles of the returning office till after dark. Never mind; he had the whole of the next day from eleven till three. 'It'll be eleven,' said Panichi, 'and no more risks.'

But at nine the next morning there came a wire which threw Panichi into terrible distress. His nephew, his brother's son, out beyond Kengodi, was desperately ill; come at once. Panichi did a rapid calculation. Calculating coolly, he saw he could reach Kengodi by half past ten, learn the worst, explain the circumstances and be back at the office by one with two clear hours to spare. He was set, absolutely set, on presenting that paper himself. He had made such a tremendous point of it that he could hardly do anything else.

Panichi drove like the devil to the big paddy-field house beyond Kengodi and the first thing he saw was his nephew playing heartily in the garden with a ball of many colours. Without stopping his engine or regarding the signs of his brother who was waving to him to come in, Panichi wheeled about and set off back to town. His eyebrows were raised and his expression was grim.

'Aha, my friend,' he said, 'that telegram was delivered rather earlier than you meant. And a glorious card I will make of it yet. I shall be at the office by noon now.'

And then, in the middle of that desolate stretch of scrub jungle near Jibalur, the car suddenly petered out. The driver made some investigations and announced with every symptom of amazement that his petrol tank was dry.

'It was full last night,' he said bemusedly, 'but anyway it doesn't matter ; I have a spare tin on the step.'

'Quick, then,' said Panichi, the least thing nervously.

The boy tore at the tin and it came away with a jerk. It came away very easily because it had no weight. And it had no weight because it was empty.

For the first time sweat stood out on Panichi's brow. It was only eleven-thirty and they were only twenty miles out and it was a main road and some one with a car was sure to come along. A bus even would do. They would ; they must. If they didn't.—And at that instant a big Studebaker saloon came purring up behind him. In answer to Panichi's frantic signalling it drew in and stopped.

'Whose car is this?' said Panichi. The driver, a somewhat saturnine Mahomedan, answered with a single word, but that word was music to Panichi for it was the name of one of his most prominent and powerful friends.

'Now praise God,' said Panichi. 'Drive me very very fast to the returning office. Aha, my

friend, aha !' The Studebaker purred away sweetly and Panichi sat back smiling.

It was the sudden wrench of the right-angled swerve into the Kalpur Road that shook Panichi from his pleasant dream, the sudden terrific acceleration of the car that threw him into horrible wakefulness. For the saturnine driver was crouched over his wheel and the car was tearing away at a solid fifty miles an hour and every one of these miles was going west, west instead of south, south—and away and away from the returning office and the seat for the eastern Agriculturists.

Panichi screamed in anguish. There was a glass partition between him and the driver's seat and he broke it with his stick and shrieked at the driver ; the driver only went a little faster. He opened the door a little and thought of a leap ; but the flying kaleidoscope of road and prickly pear and palm trees made him shut it again quickly. He could not break enough of the partition to get at the driver—and would not have known what to do if he could. He was absolutely and utterly beaten. He lay back in the corner, his face in his hands, and wept, while the Studebaker roared westwards like a shell.

Now the toll-gate keeper at the Patnam cross-roads was a man soured and made vindictive by long contact with evil-doers. If he kept his gate open motorists rushed it and fled in clouds of dust ;

if he put up his bar and stopped them they abused him and sometimes beat his servants. But he had come to the decision that the latter alternative was the better because—unless in very extreme cases—one at least got the rupee. Hence when he looked out from his little hut and saw a big car coming like the devil from the east he took rapid action.

'Here's another of them,' thought the toll-gate keeper and started to drag his primitive bamboo bar across.

The horn—both horns—of the Studebaker shrieked. The toll-gate keeper panicked suddenly, lost his head, thought he would get the bar across, thought he wouldn't and finally leapt for life just as the bonnet of the Studebaker struck the projecting bamboo. The pole splintered but the shock threw the car against the right-hand gatepost which stood. The car swung round sharply, slithered broadside along and across the road and settled heavily into the ditch. The driver went gracefully through the windscreen into the road. Panichi had a series of confused moments at the end of which he found himself crawling unhurt out of a kind of duckpond.

The driver lay sprawled in the road where he had fallen, dead or senseless; but Panichi did not feel himself particularly concerned with the driver. The toll-gate keeper was running away across

the fields in the opposite direction, but Panichi had no interest in him either. The facts uppermost in his mind were that this was the Patnam cross-roads and that six or seven miles to the south was a town called Patnam which presented itself to Panichi as a telegraph office with houses clustered round it. His watch had stopped at twelve-forty-seven. And there was a bicycle leaning up against the toll-gate hut.

These were the facts. Panichi took off his neat alpaca coat, threw it into the car, mopped his brow and pedalled away southwards.

At ten minutes to three Dewan Bahadur Itakaswami Rao sat chatting pleasantly to the returning officer. The returning officer was telling him how pleased he was at his success.

'Anything so long as I don't have to count votes,' he said, 'I thought that Pillai was to stand.'

Itakaswami shook his head and pursed his lips. 'He will not stand. All talk. Wha-at chance?'

The returning officer turned in his chair peevishly. 'I wish,' he said, 'we had a law in this city against motor horns. Just listen to this brute outside.' And indeed, outside the office, a large black car was turning the day into hell. The hooting merged presently into a babel of voices, the voices turned to steps in the verandah and the steps resolved themselves into two rather breathless young men who planked down a paper on the

table. The returning officer recognized the leader as a young Chetti, a youthful firebrand from the Panichi bonfire.

'What the devil's this?' he asked.

'Nomination paper Panichi Pillai,' said the young Chetti, still rather breathless. 'I'm proposer; this gent'man seconds.'

'It looks all right,' said the returning officer running one eye down the electoral roll. 'Numbers all right. Signature all right.'

'It is false,' burst out the Dewan Bahadur. 'It must be false. He had only one nomination paper and we know it.'

The young Chetti had recovered his breath; he looked at Itakaswami with a hysterical blaze in his eyes.

'So *you* thought,' he said. 'But Mr. Panichi wasn't such a fool as you supposed.' He threw a yellow crumpled telegram on the table. 'Read this, Dewan Bahadur.'

The Dewan Bahadur read with a changeless face. Looking over his shoulder the returning officer saw that it came from some place called Patnam and was addressed to the young Chetti. 'File spare nomination paper immediately,' it said. 'Tell Dewan Bahadur I have witnesses for everything.'

Itakaswami handed it back with perfect courtesy and a face like a mask. He knew those 'witnesses'

were no bluff; he pictured impossible election meetings, unanswerable questions—failure, ruin. He glanced at the paper and nodded.

'So you had a spare paper all the time,' he said.

'All the time,' said the young Chetti, his eyes leaping, 'just in case of—er—accidents.' He turned to the returning officer, 'The nomination is valid?' Three o'clock struck.

'So far,' said the returning officer wearily. 'Scrutiny on the twenty-first. Good-afternoon.'

The returning officer looked at a pile of untouched files.

'So now we'll have a count,' he said, 'Of all the nuisances.'

The Dewan Bahadur had risen to go.

'I do not think there will be a count,' he said. 'Now that Mr. Panichi Pillai is nominated I think I will withdraw. It will be a business withdrawing twenty-seven nominations, but I have time till the twenty-second. Good-day, Sir.'

He walked out of the room; and his step was the step of a man not elderly but old.

The returning officer stared after him dumb-founded.

'God knows what's happened,' he said to himself. 'But any way, so long as I don't have to count votes—'

He went back to his work.

So in due course Panichi Pillai became—without opposition—Mr. Panichi Pillai, M.L.C., and misrepresented the Eastern Agriculturists in various manners. But whether he will ever introduce a Bill for the Amelioration of the Pay, Prospects, Comforts and Conditions of Toll-Gate Keepers remains to be seen.

THE GOOD EYE

ALL superstition is of course ridiculous, and absurd are they who believe in it. Dead people are dead and do not come back and inanimate objects *are* inanimate and have no possible means or power of influencing human affairs. How can a thing that man has made—a ship, say, constructed of mundane planks and prosaic iron and owing its motive power to a series of mechanical devices—how can such a thing become endowed with an entity and a spirit, even a vindictive angry spirit, rent by human emotions and capable of human design? It can't, obviously. The thing is preposterous. . . . However, listen to this.

Everyone in South India knows the vast, sleek, wind-rippled estuary of the Amganeru. Most people in South India have heard a vague something about the Amganeru Project. Unless Maclean, Livesey and Co. have finished their work on this last—which is not at all likely—you should find in some creek of the Amganeru estuary an ancient paddle-wheel steamboat called the Onana. (Maclean, Livesey's irreverent assistants allude to it as the Banana, but that is because they know no better.) It is supposed to be called the Onana because one of the Managing Directors'

daughters bore this unusual name, but there is a much better reason than that. There is a bridge in Madras which is called the Barbers' Bridge because it was built by an Engineer called Hamilton; and by a similar process of reasoning the *Onana* is called the *Onana* because it carries on the cover of either paddle-wheel a large, staring and lavishly painted eye. I do not say no Managing Director of Maclean, Livesey ever had a daughter called Onana—though I should doubt it; but even if there were a dozen Onanas they could only have been a coincidence and not a cause.

For the *Onana* began her life, and spent forty odd years of it on another estuary, not wholly unlike the Amganeru in that it was sleek and muddy and rippled by winds, but many a long mile further East; and that was the estuary of the Suweng river, which may be in Annam or may be in Cochin-China—you can go and look it up. And in those days the *Onana* was called, quite properly, the *Ho-Nan* and Ho Nan is Chinese for Good Eye, so you see it is all quite clear really. The *Ho-Nan* lived in and amongst and for the Chinese coolies she ferried across the Suweng river twice, daily, and the Chinese have quite definite opinions on superstition and the inanimity of inanimate objects. If a man wished to be accounted an idiot in a Chinese community, he could hardly do better than recite the opening paragraph of

this tale. For the Chinese regard these matters in just the opposite way ; to them it is incredible that anything on earth can lack a personality and a soul. They may be right ; at any rate neither you nor I can prove anything to the contrary.

What the Chinese said, very reasonably, was —‘Boat no can see, how fashion can walkee?’ So they painted, on the shield of either paddle-wheel, those large, staring and lugubrious eyes you may see the remains of to-day. And they were so far justified in that the *Ho-Nan*, during forty odd years of the mixed weather, changing currents and shifting sand-banks for which the Suweng river is disagreeably notorious, made her two trips a day in absolute safety and never touched anything.

At the end of that period a minor revolution swept down that way and there came a demand for a faster boat to ferry troops across the Suweng. So the old *Ho-Nan* went out of commission ; whereupon Maclean, Livesey, having a use for her, bought her for a song and sent her across to the work on the Amganeru. They sent with her an old Chinese Serang whom they called—it may have been his name as it certainly fitted his demeanour—Wo.

Wo was devoted to the *Ho-Nan*, in which he had spent practically his whole life. When Maclean, Livesey's people were speculating as to

the cost of painting and repairs he said to them once more—'Boat no can see, how fashion can walkee?' They laughed and allowed him to renew with great splendour the Good Eye on either side. So the *Ho-Nan*, that was soon to become the *Onana*, lay off Ghausti Point and stared up the Amganeru delta with those inscrutable eyes.

In the good old days on the Suweng the *Ho-Nan* had run to a Captain and an Engineer, one of whom said he was Belgian and the other of whom—there are subtle differences in these things—said he was not Chinese. On the Amganeru, however, expenses were cut to a minimum and bridge and engine-room were both in the control of a single individual who announced daily and almost hourly that he was an Englishman and nobody had better go forgetting it. His name was Pringle and about the hour when the parrots flight home to the lankas and thirst is at its zenith he would tell you he was connected with the Pringles of Lincolnshire (or Leicestershire or Nottinghamshire or Warwickshire; it varied). Englishmen abroad are—allowing, of course, for exceptions—of two main types; either they know they are superior to everything in sight and are content to leave it at that, or else they know they are superior to everything in sight and insist on raising you to the same level. To the latter type Pringle belonged. He had the Englishman's hearty,

contempt of childish superstition and he fell foul of Wo about the Good Eyes.

'You paint them things out,' he said, 'Silly, they are.'

Wo sounded his time-honoured slogan. 'Boat no can see, how fashion can walkee?' His superior looked at him with pitying contempt.

'Yer poor ignerant, 'eathen,' he said in the best manner of the Lincolnshire Pringles, ''Ow can a boat see? You paint 'em out when I tell yer.'

Wo didn't; and the eyes survived till one morning about a fortnight later. The eyes always troubled Pringle most in the early mornings, and this morning they were special. The 'O-Nan (Pringle had already started the Managing Director's daughter on her way by dropping the initial 'h') was facing downstream and the hot-weather sun coming up out of the Bay struck them fairly. Pringle loosed off some language which would have surprised the Lincolnshire family very much.

'W'y 'aven't you painted out them eyes' he screamed. 'Like wot I told yer. I 'ate the dam things. Starin' at a feller an' starin'. 'T ain't right.'

Wo, squatted miserably on the engine hatch, tried it again.

'Boat no can see, how fashion—'

An effective boot caught him behind.

'You say that once again,' said Pringle, 'and I'll dump yer in the river. Paint them eyes out *ek dum*, yer miserable Chink, or I'll see to yer.'

The meditative East has ever given way before the violent West. Between the morning and afternoon journeys, Wo moored the '*O-Nan* in mid-channel—please note that it was in mid-channel—just off the Project 'office' and carefully annihilated the Good Eyes with green paint.

Their last function, however, had been to shake Mr. Pringle pretty badly and while Wo was painting out the eyes his superior devoted himself to medicinal treatment. The result was that the '*O-Nan* started out on her afternoon trip with the leap of a kangaroo and the swerve of an International three-quarter. Righting herself in mid-channel just exactly opposite the 'office' and within feet of the place where the eyes had been painted out, she ran full tilt on something that felt at first like dritwood and then like a shoal and finally like a range of mountains. There she stuck remarkably fast with a fine star-board list.

Pringle again forgot the Lincolnshire tradition and gave way to his feelings. He demanded of the universe at large, with more especial reference to hell, how and why a forcibly-described sand-bank had suddenly developed in the double-underlined fairway. It was Wo's turn to look pitying,

for of course Wo knew all about it. To him it was perfectly clear. His lips even began to frame the wonderful words 'Boat no can see'—but he caught Pringle's eye and desisted. It would have been foolish to go on.

Well, of course, the Amganeru estuary is a curious place and currents veer this way and that and stuff comes suddenly down from upstream so that where there was clear water to-day there may be a bank to-morrow. So there was nothing so very miraculous in the *Ho-Nan's* misadventure. On the other hand the difficulty in getting her off was unnaturally great and the damage she had contrived to do herself was perversely severe. Wo bore it all very patiently as befitted one who knew the truth; Pringle less so, especially when Maclean, Livesey wrote him a nasty letter. He was inclined for a moment to tell them it was the eyes that had upset him, but like Wo thought better of it. Wisely.

As a matter of fact, Pringle for the next few weeks behaved himself very well, but this was more than could be said for the *Ho-Nan*. If she could blunder into anything on the water or under it—driftwood, shoal, tidal bank, native craft or swimming buffalo—into it she went. Where formerly you could bring her up to the jetty with a single smart one-handed turn, she would now sidle back from the thing and then leap crashing

against it like an inebriated pugilist going into a fight. Where formerly she would sit quiet on anchor or mooring, she now tugged and strained and dodged this way and that like a blindfold man in a crowd. 'The devil's in the boat,' said Pringle and for the first time found Wo in entire agreement. Wo went on bearing it patiently for of course the whole thing was so obvious; 'boat no can see—.' Maclean, Livesey's assistant was less forbearing and he wrote off to his principals. 'You had better transfer this man Pringle,' he wrote, 'before he goes down with the ship and all hands.' The firm concurred.

So Pringle would have left the Amganeru but for the *Ho-Nan* herself. As it is, he is there still. For one monsoon night he met, at the head of his afternoon run, an old old friend employed on the dredger up-stream; and with one thing and another he delayed and delayed and delayed starting back. Dark fell and blasts of monsoon wind and rain came roaring down the river and still the *Ho-Nan* lay off Number Five Jetty while Pringle and his friend recalled old Lincolnshire (or Warwickshire) days. Eventually against everyone's advice (for it was a really nasty night in every way) Pringle came off in a rowing-boat. They couldn't lay the *Ho-Nan* against the jetty because the river was too high but she was only a few yards out and all Pringle had to do was to make

one short easy step on board his own command. Wo was holding the *Ho-Nan* head on to the current and she was steady enough. What exactly happened no one knows ; but Wo *said* that just as Pringle stepped the *Ho-Nan* leaped away from him like a goat. Pringle was in no great form for acrobatics and down he went into twenty feet of Amganeru flood water. The number of persons who have done this in the dark and been heard of again is negligible : Pringle did not add to it. So I suppose, as I say, that he is there still.

They sent down to take his place a stolid Dutchman, who found on his paddle-wheel shields when he took over two conspicuous eyes very recently and crudely painted. Being a Dutchman, he took no interest in these things and made no comment upon them then or afterwards.

But the Dutchman—his name is Roosboom and you can go and ask him—is very pleased with his charge.

'She is like von life thing,' he says. 'She steer so nice. A mahn would say she had eyes.' Wo smiles ; he knows, of course, that she has.

The moral of this tale *may* only be that it is a mistake to kick and bully respectable Chinese serangs. But I don't think so. Rather I should say that East knows the East best and a wise man doesn't try to teach it. That would be *my* conclusion ; you can take your choice.

THE LUNATIC AT LANZA

THE persons in this narrative are three : Parasurama Iyer, Syed Ahmed and P. P. Bhose, I.C.S. Of these the last was the greatest because he was Collector of Quilay. There is also another character in the story : I don't know his name because he was never very sure of it himself, but he is hereinafter called The Lunatic.

Parasurama Iyer was Deputy Collector of Lanza which all know to be a division of Quilay. Syed Ahmed was Deputy Superintendent of Police of the same place, and they didn't get on. I don't know why this should have been, for there are many stations where a Hindu Magistrate and a Mahomedan Policeman co-exist and get on splendidly. In any case it is of no present consequence. The fact remains that they did not get on and friction, discord and disagreement were the order of many days. Where the Magistracy is 'agin' the Police' or *vice versa* you have a fertile field wherein to raise a crop of all kinds of stupidities, and zealous subordinates on either side tend and water that crop assiduously. You can easily imagine the sort of things that happen. They all happened at Lanza.

Parasurama was young and pushing and he was

particularly anxious to stand well with Bhose ; he is not to be blamed for that. Syed Ahmed was not at all so young ; he had been shot into backwaters for years and years and he was disgruntled and cared very little how he stood with anybody. He thought of giving it all up and going and joining his brother in the tamarind trade. Bhose was an irascible little man and rather short-sighted. I do not think that any further particulars are necessary about these three.

Now the Lunatic. The Lunatic *was* a lunatic ; of that I think there can be no reasonable doubt. He was a harmless lunatic but withal troublesome and a nuisance because he had nobody to look after him and nothing but the infinite charity of India on which to support himself. He was in no way dangerous or even particularly offensive, but he did foolish lunatic things which frequently required the intervention of the Police. The Police in Lanza have quite enough to do without lunatics and Syed Ahmed was very anxious to get rid of him. To this end he brought him before Parasurama on more than one occasion and applied for the necessary steps to have him removed to a place where he would be better cared for. This in the circumstances was quite enough to assure Parasurama that the Lunatic was a model of sanity. He told Syed Ahmed his application was a characteristic attempt on the part of the Police to avoid their

legitimate duties of watch and ward. He said the same thing every time anyone was brought up under the security sections : he was that kind of Magistrate. I am sure he meant, as he always did, exceedingly well, and he was probably convinced that the Lunatic was sane and was a victim of Police *zulum*. But Syed Ahmed got tired of it.

Lanza is in a corner of Quilay which as all know is an enormous district, and the Collector has not much occasion to go there. Thus Parasurama and Bhose had been several months together in the District without setting eyes on one another. Or rather, to be exact, they had once seen each other distantly but had not spoken. On the day when Bhose took over charge of the District, Parasurama had attended the function and had been all unwittingly marked down by Bhose. Parasurama affected a somewhat vivid style of dress and on the day in question he had attired himself in his favourite suit which was as near magenta in colour as any suit can decently be. It was a terrible suit—even for a man in Lanza. Bhose was aware of a tendency in some of his countrymen to sartorial exuberance ; he dressed very quietly himself and was sensitive on the subject. He said to Hale, whom he was relieving, ‘Who in God’s name is that fellow in the purple clothes?’ Hale told him. Parasurama had to rush off and catch a train before introductions became possible. But the suit

stayed in Bhose's mind. It was not the sort of suit anyone could easily forget.

Just before the monsoon Bhose announced that he was coming down to inspect Parasurama's office. The office was in a very good state and Parasurama was glad that Bhose should come and find it so before something went wrong with it. He also was glad to meet Bhose at last and show him that he was an efficient officer—which indeed he was.

Bhose was due to arrive on a Wednesday evening. On the Tuesday afternoon Syed Ahmed brought up the Lunatic for a final attempt. Parasurama was more exasperating than ever, was indeed quite offensive about it. The Lunatic wandered off into the office, stole a watch from a clerk's coat, tried to offer it that evening at the Vinayaka Koil and had to be chased by the Police once more. Syed Ahmed was fed up with him. He was even more fed up with Parasurama.

Bhose, I say, was due next evening. In the afternoon Parasurama went out to do an inspection that would just enable him to close another six-months' file in his office. That is the sort of thing that matters when you are Deputy Collector at Lanza. Six-months' files bulk in your life like festivals or voyages in the lives of normal mortals. Parasurama might have been better advised to sit down and wait for Bhose. But as I say, he meant

terribly well ; and that file in his mind was at least half the size of a Collector. He went out.

Shortly afterwards one Budan who sold sweetmeats under a tree woke from a doze and saw a constable leading the Lunatic along the back of Parasurama's quarters. Almost immediately the Police Inspector came cycling from the opposite direction and turned in at Parasurama's gate. Budan thought nothing of these sights and went to sleep again. The house was absolutely deserted. Parasurama's wife did not like Lanza and was living with her people in another district ; he had sent his only servants to the Travellers' Bungalow to make things ready for Bhose ; and he had taken the peon on duty out with him for the inspection.

It is matter of common knowledge that you can depend on Collectors never to do things according to programme ; either they arrive hours early or else hours late. Bhose adopted the former. He abandoned some inspection on his route and instead of arriving at Lanza at six he arrived at half-past three. The arrangement had been that he was to come straight to Parasurama's quarters for refreshment ; this he adhered to and his car groaned to a standstill in Parasurama's porch while Parasurama was assiduously checkmeasuring something miles away. Bhose got out and made his way into the verandah where he saw a gentleman approaching him rapidly.

It was darkish in the verandah after the glare outside and as I have said Bhose was rather short-sighted. But neither twilight nor myopia could conceal the fact that it was the celebrated Purple Suit that was advancing upon him. Once seen, that suit could never be forgotten or mistaken. Bhose held out his hand.

'Ah, Parasurama,' he said, 'how are you?'

The Purple Suit, to his very great amazement, took several dancing steps in front of him, cracked its fingers loudly in the air and chanted a stave in Hindustani which I will be excused from translating here.

Bhose stepped back hurriedly with a gasp. 'Are you ill?' he said.

The Purple Suit leapt forward, seized him by the arm and crammed over his head an enormous garland. It appeared to be composed mainly of vegetable matter purloined from shops and several of its components were prickly in the extreme. It was a most unpleasant thing and the Purple Suit rammed it home with needless force. It then fell down in front of Bhose and worshipped him noisily.

Bhose staggered back, clawing at the atrocity round his neck and calling feebly for a peon. But in a moment the Purple Suit was up and had wrenched the glasses from his face, singing gross buffooneries the while. Without his glasses Bhose

was blind. He crashed back into a table, was drenched from head to foot by a cold douche—in point of fact it was a coconut—and collided violently with his peon and driver rushing to the rescue. Collector, peons and Purple Suit rolled on the floor together. In the midst of the hubbub a bicycle bell rang furiously and Bhose, re-armed from somewhere with his glasses, looked up into the concerned face of the Police Inspector.

It is difficult to be dignified on such occasions but Bhose made a shot at it.

‘What is the meaning of this?’ he demanded. ‘What is the matter with the Deputy Collector?’

The Inspector stared. ‘Your Honour,’ he said at last, ‘this is not the Deputy Collector. This is this wretched lunatic who has been so troubling us all. But the Magistrate. . . .’

The Purple Suit made a sudden rush and Bhose got hastily into the car.

‘I will see Mr. Parasurama Iyer,’ he said coldly, ‘at the Travellers’ Bungalow.’

He did—an hour or so later, a Parasurama still sweated and in shorts and barely coherent, who babbled unintelligible vapourings about *Zulum* and Police plots. He got little comfort.

‘It serves you right,’ said Bhose frigidly. ‘You admit you failed to take proper action against this madman and it serves you right. I do not see there is anything to be said for you at all.’

Parasurama put in for a transfer—I do not see what else he could have done—and is in Lanza no longer. Neither is the Lunatic; he lives now at Provincial Headquarters. Syed Ahmed may be in Lanza or he may be in the tamarind trade, I cannot say. But the last time I passed through Lanza I saw the village toti going on his lawful occasions in what was unquestionably the upper portion of the Purple Suit. If you doubt my narrative, go you and see him too.

But what I would like to know is—how was the affair stage-managed? How did Syed Ahmed know that the Collector was coming early? How did he coach his Inspector? However did he coach the Lunatic? How did he keep things quiet before, during and after? How did he get the Suit? How did he get the Lunatic into it? How—oh, a hundred how's I cannot answer.

Anyway, the conclusion is cheering. For what hope have criminals in a country with Police like these?

CACOETHES

LET it be admitted at the outset that journalism, speaking generally, is low and more especially that branch of journalism which makes its living out of fiction and fancy. I ought not to be writing these stories ; Jafferson should not write these silly little sketches in the comic press which make everybody laugh ; while as for that light verse of Niggleby's, it amounts to a positive indecency. If Niggleby compiled Economic Statistics for Seventeen Districts and Jafferson wrote a monograph on the Heliolithic Cults of the South Comorin Dododas, it would of course be perfectly in order. They don't, however, and neither will I ; instead I will write yet another story to show that whether imaginative literature be a low field or an exalted, it is at any rate one where the author may strike many a stony surprise and reap at times a rich crop of misunderstanding.

Long, long ago, two young men were just going into the examination hall of Burlington House to sit for the I.C.S. examination. As young men do on such occasions they went to splash a final ablution of cold water over the fevered brow, and they cannoned in the lavatory door. One was a gaunt,

sunken-eyed cadaver with wisps of unbarbered black hair falling over a clammy-looking forehead; the other was a small, rosy, bird-like being with neat, upstanding hair of an irritating yellow. Each glared, each muttered, each thought to himself 'What a horrible-looking fellow!' and each passed to his place in that hall whence each was to emerge victorious.

Now the first of these—the thin, sour, black cadaver—was Milver, and the other—the chubby, wide-eyed bird—was Cotts; and the odd thing about them was that each, in character and manners, exactly followed his looks. Looks so often go by contraries that Milver should have been a philanthropist and Cotts a murderer, but it was not so. Milver was a snarling, girning misanthrope, always "agin' the Government," always with a grievance about something from the Morley-Minto Reforms down to his last T.A. bill. Cotts on the contrary was probably the most orthodox and respectable man who ever landed on the long-suffering shores of Hind; he had a perfect passion for what he thought was tradition and he even wrote his Home Mail in *Officialese*. (They say he wrote his love letters in it too, but that is part of another story.) Milver's many nicknames varied with his stations, but neat, consequential little Cotts was 'Mamul Cotts' from start to finish. If a thing wasn't Mamul it was Milver's meat and

Cotts's poison. Seventeen years of the I.C.S. never taught Milver to part his hair or stop biting his nails ; seventeen years of India never taught Cotts to look like anything but a hen that has hatched its first egg and is devilish proud of it. If Milver had been a hen he would rather have hatched a boa constrictor.

Throughout the years they met, separated, passed, jostled, met again, feigned intimacy and fled as Civilians in seventeen years of service do. But not so much as most Civilians for their ways were normally apart. Cotts gravitated naturally to the Secretariat—I will be excused from detailing the reasons why. Milver, spitting fire and venom and writing caustic ten-page letters over his Annuity Deductions, gravitated as naturally from one hot and undesirable corner of the Presidency to another. I will again be excused from stating why this was so ; it ought to be as obvious as the other. But in any case their mutual opinion of one another, formed in that initial clash at Burlington House, never altered. Cotts had the poorest opinion of Milver and Milver of Cotts. They lampooned one another—both were talented with the pen ; we are getting warm now—from Club to Club and district to district. The odds in this contest were against Cotts for whereas his own name lent itself to innumerable *facetiae*—‘X Cotts,’ ‘Spring Cotts’ and so on and so on,

Milver's was practically pun-proof and rhymed with only one possible word in the English language. Besides Cotts at his most virulent was milk to Milver ; it wasn't Mamul to say some of the things Milver said—not about anybody.

After seventeen years of service the inevitable happened. It is a well-known fact that all persons who are talented with their pen invariably, sooner or later, write a book ; the unfortunate thing, of course, is that men of real genius never do, this being one way by which their genius becomes known. However, let that be. At any rate Milver wrote a book. If it was strange that Milver's character—anybody's character—should be like Milver's appearance, it was still more strange that Milver's book—anybody's book—should also be like that same. Books but rarely represent their authors but there were uncombed hair and bitten nails in every page of Milver's. Being Milver, he naturally did the unusual thing and expressed himself in the medium of fiction—in fact a novel, a degraded act to which no member of his Service should have stooped. He had not even the decency to camouflage it as a treatise on the Palæolithic Habits of the Carnatic Qui-Hai or anything of that kind. It was a sheer blatant novel, a horrid thing about men and women and sex and love and hate ; especially hate. Milver wrote it with a purpose (which was a really dis-

graceful act) and the purpose was, as he himself would no doubt have put it, 'to make these swine sit up.'

I picture Milver finishing off that novel in the most God-forsaken T.B. in the worst district in the Presidency. I imagine him doing it by the light of a feeble D.P.W. lantern, his warped grin flickering on his face, the rank hair flopping, his red-ink pen jabbing in last-minute venom on the margin of his proofs. I have no grounds to imagine any such thing, but it pleases me to do so, and the book supports me by internal evidence. It marched under the brisk title of *Sham*, and the slight suggestion of Noah's Ark and childhood conveyed in this monosyllable was instantly dispelled on the first page. It was a bitter book—oh, a bitter book. It set forth to expose the Sham of the whole of life out here—our sham Government, our sham society, our sham hospitality, the sham deference of the Indian, the sham prestige of the official—sham honesty, sham tradition, sham reward. In reality it exposed nothing but the miserable existence Milver had led for seventeen weary years. You could see it all coming out; if you had a long enough memory you could even place the original snubs and chastisements and suppressions that were now, as poor Milver thought, being 'paid back.' It wasn't a story or a novel or even a tract; it was just a long string of

the things Milver had wanted to say—but hadn't dared—during these seventeen years. Such was Sham. I read it once, and I daresay so did you ; in which case you will agree that it was a pretty rotten production.

The oldest and wisest among us never knows what will happen when he publishes a book. There may be a yell of execration, a shriek of despair or a world-wide demand for ten rapid editions. It is largely a matter of luck. I do not know what Milver expected—possibly a call for his resignation or a challenge to meet the Chief Secretary with pistols ; at any rate I will guarantee that it was not that which transpired. The public—not a very large public but a fair proportion of men in the services and in South Indian Clubs and on estates—read Sham and decided that Milver intended to be funny. They ranked Sham with Curry and Rice and the Chronicles of Dustypore and Colonel Bowlong. One reviewer said it was 'clever caricature,' another remarked that the fun was spoilt by occasional bitterness, a third worked in Milton's attack on the bishops and a fourth prosed for half a column about Catullus and said it was a pity good honest humour should be blemished by too much lampooning. The general public, taking their lead from this, read through Sham conscientiously, sniggered dutifully here and there, yawned rather more frequently and—left

the book in the next T.B. in which they cast anchor. It was forgotten in a month, and Milver went quietly on in the God-forsaken taluks of the worst district in the Presidency. Of all the literary shells that ever were fired, never fell there such a dud.

But there was one person, and one only, who took Sham seriously and that was Mamul Cotts. Cotts was shocked, horrified; for a time he was almost unconscious. It was Cotts, immaculate soul, who carried a copy of *Sham* in a pair of tongs through the lounge of the Ootacamund Club and deposited it in the fire; the only drawback to this gesture being that no one present realized what he was doing. It was Cotts who in the course of one impassioned sitting evolved a parody of Sham which for sheer viciousness amply outdid the model; the only drawback to this was that hardly anyone privileged to see the parody had read the original. It was Cotts who wrote a violent article on Sham for *The Morning Post* full of telling phrases about 'nest-foulers' and 'snakes in the grass,' the only drawback this time being that they didn't publish it. It was Cotts, and Cotts alone, who credited Sham with any importance, any public or any sales. And it was Cotts, rosy, prim, respectable little Cotts who determined that something must be done to wipe out the horrible impression of us all that this scabrous abomination

(the words are his) must have produced in the civilized world at large.

So Cotts, the good, worthy little fellow, sat down and wrote *Raymond Bransome*. Just why he chose the form of the novel for his reply is a psychological point I am not sufficiently learned to solve; for none had been more shocked than he when he found that a fellow Collector (Cotts' words again) had descended to a work of common fiction. It may have been some manifestation of that *cacoethes scribendi* the ancients so justly deprecated, or it may not; at all events *Raymond Bransome* is an indubitable novel. It suffers from the same grave fault as *Sham* in that it was written with a purpose, but it is certainly a much better book because it is evident that here and there little Cotts was caught up by his story and forgot about Milver and his purpose altogether. It has plot and balance and if Raymond as hero is a cross between a prig and the ideal Under-Secretary (who has never existed), Marion the heroine isn't really a bad sort of girl at all. Naturally, because Cotts was out in the first instance to counter Milver, we are all shown a little nobler and purer and sweeter than we are; but a man who can't be flattered is a brute. So little Cotts wrote and published *Raymond Bransome: A Novel of Indian Life*. It was the only un-mamul thing he ever did.

And he paid for it. The knight-errant's is a beautiful part but before setting out to slay dragons it is as well to make sure that there is really a damsel in distress. Otherwise you are liable only to trample people's flower-beds with your horse and scratch their new paint with your spear. In the natural course of publishers nearly a year elapsed between the publication of *Sham* and the appearance of the avenging *Raymond*. Even those who had read *Sham*—and they were a minority—had utterly forgotten it, and the rest of course failed to recognize the knight-errant at all. They picked up *Raymond* with suspicion, which grew to dislike, which grew to a firm conviction that Cotts was 'getting at' them. The virus of hate had robbed poor Milver's characters of any semblance of humanity and it had been impossible to take them seriously; but Cotts, having but little imagination to help him out, had gone to nature for his models, merely patching a little here or gilding there or white-washing yonder. The result was that his people were not only very like real people one could imagine but very like real people one knew. They were—especially Marion; but that again is part of the other story—recognizable.

The sub-consequence of that I need not tell you. I said that no man however old or wise knew what would happen when he published a book;

but one thing he can count on and that is that his friends and acquaintances will recognize themselves in it if they possibly can. Having done so or having had themselves pointed out to themselves, the corollary is that they will not be pleased. They will do this when the author has rendered it as impossible as can be done in any story about the human race and the planet Earth; when, as with Cotts, it is made comparatively easy they (the friends and acquaintances) rush at it with both hands. Within a month of *Raymond's* modest *debut* Cotts found he had done the most dreadful things; he had 'raked up forgotten scandals' which in point of fact he had not forgotten but had never heard of; he had 'published intimate matters within his personal knowledge'—which really weren't at all; he had defamed half the men in South India and insulted three-quarters of their wives; he had 'abused hospitality,' he had 'divulged confidences'—God only knows what he hadn't done. Doors began to close to him; friends to give him the cold shoulder; acquaintances to remember engagements when he came into the bar. And all because he *would* be a knight-errant to the damsel propriety who is rarely distressed and is generally pretty well able to look after herself.

Some men can stand up to opprobrium; little, chirping, harmless Cotts couldn't. He took six

months' leave. At the end of that time he had the pleasure of relieving Milver in the worst District in the Presidency. This, of course, must have been pure coincidence. He stayed there nearly a year and then, because human memory is short and the stupidest tongue yelps itself into silence in time and because he really was a good, reliable mamul little man, he was taken to headquarters and put on special duty to reorganize the working of Takkavi. He wrote no more novels and his opinion of imaginative literature and the writers thereof was not enhanced.

The only moral of this tale appears to be what I said at the outset—that journalism is a low pursuit and better avoided. If this cannot be and if the *cacoethes* is irresistible then do not write with a purpose or at any rate not with a purpose for good. Or if you cannot restrain yourself even from this last, then expect no thanks and look out for what's coming to you.

THE FROG

THE English (by which I mean the British), though in many ways a sound and intelligent people, have made in the course of their career some amazing utterances. For example, a poet very highly esteemed in their annals once put forward the preposterous statement that names were of very little consequence. 'What's in a name,' said he, and went on to give examples. We know better here in India. We know only too well that 'hundred-danger hour' when the *dhai* sits and mutters in the corner and the idol blinks over its musty flowers at the red flower of the fire; and we know that is an hour when God knows what may enter, riding devil-wise on the *vahanam* of the little new life. And when that hour is past, there comes, as we know, the time of naming and woe betide the father or mother who makes a blunder here. 'What's in a name' indeed. Well, listen.

I do not know what his real name was, but in the village he was always called the Frog, and it was his mother who began it. He gave her a lot of difficulty over his arrival and when once he was safely there she looked at him and said—not that he was an ugly little wretch, as many might have said and did say, but that he was

rather like a frog. She was a fond, foolish, soft-breasted, soft-headed creature and meant no harm ; but one or more of Those who had entered with the new life took note. It was a foolish thing to say ; but once said it was said, and it was repeated again and again. Because he *was* like a frog. Worse still, when it came time to give him a name they gave him one which was so like the vernacular for Frog in that particular district that it only made things a hundred times more obvious. Before he had finished playing games in the dust with the village brats his name was perverted into Froggie. Of course it was of no consequence ; of course.

'They are calling thy son a Frog,' said his father.

'He is my little frog,' said his mother and his father told her not to be a fool.

But thereby his doom was sealed. Because names *do* matter, as anyone but a poet—and British at that—has the sense to understand.

Well, the Frog grew up and in spite of his ugliness—or perhaps because of it, for who knows what guides the feather brains of women—he was rather a ladies' man in the village. He was married, of course, properly and in due course ; but his wife died young and thereafter there was nothing to restrain him. He was enamoured of many and with some he succeeded and with some he did not ; but most of all was he enamoured and

most of all did he succeed with the wife of the karnam.

Now everybody knows that karnams are not men to be trifled with. Cross their devious paths and you are liable to meet with extreme and serious trouble. Thwart their designs and you are likely to find yourself in court. Interfere with their domestic affairs and you are likely to be found dead in a well. And serve you right. The Frog must have known all these things for he possessed the rudiments of a brain; and yet he went on his way rejoicing.

He went on till the day came when a friend came to him and said—'The karnam has found out. Run and run and run and don't stop this side of Calcutta.'

'Is the karnam angry?' asked the Frog. It was the sort of question he did ask.

'He is so angry,' they said, 'that where he treads smoke rises from the ground and where he breathes the green paddy withers on the stalk. Run, man, run.'

Now the Frog, if left to himself, would not have run; he would just have sat down apathetically and waited for his end—which would most surely have come. But the karnam's wife was fortunately made of sterner stuff. She had no desire to go back to her father's house which she had always regarded as a most unpleasant place; and

of the many alternatives presented by a dubious future that seemed on the whole the least deadly. So she sought out the Frog.

'You must take me away out of this quick,' she said.

'Where shall we go?' said the Frog and added miserably, 'He will follow.'

'We will go where he cannot follow,' said the Karnam's wife, 'or where if he does follow, he will not be able to find us. Brother the *kangani* is in the village to-day.'

The Frog dimly remembered to have seen a figure in an old uniform tunic and a red turban striding about the village with a stick and distributing leaflets extolling the advantages of the Malay States; but like most Indians—and all wise men—he paid little attention to what did not immediately concern him. Now he brought his mind to bear on the *kangani*. His mind revolted.

'I do not want to go to Malaya,' said the Frog.

'Neither do I,' said the karnam's wife patiently, 'but it is better than—some other things. Besides,' she added, 'we need not really go. One can always slip away at the harbour.'

The Frog thought, and a piece of village lore came into his mind.

'How can we get away?' he said. 'You know that the *kangani* is not allowed to take away anyone unless the headman signs on the list.'

Into the patience of the karnam's wife's face there crept a touch of genuine pity ; he *was* such a Frog.

'Do you really think,' she said, 'that there will be any difficulty about that? Come along to the headman's house now.'

Now this particular village differed from all other villages in South India in that the karnam and the headman did not get on very well together and were always ready to do one another a bad turn. If this happened often, things in India would be even worse than they are ; but fortunately, of course, it doesn't.

'This man's name is Thambuswami,' said the headman to the *kangani*, 'and this is his wife. I have known them both from birth. Yes, I will sign.'

'I am asking no questions,' said the *kangani*. 'If you are satisfied, I am. I start for the Depot in half an hour.'

'Make it a quarter,' said the headman.

In the Depot the Frog sat looking miserable and responding but feebly to the comments of the karnam's wife. He was surprised to find that he was given the opportunity to take a bath, and was supplied with a mat and a quite adequate cloth. There was plenty of good drinking water with a slightly peculiar flavour due to some long word—it was 'chlorination' as a matter of fact, but you

couldn't expect the Frog to get that—having fallen into it. Presently they served him out some very eatable curry. The Frog began to think there might be worse places than Malaya. With the karnam's wife's jewels they might start a little shop and who knew what might happen.

He was sitting, replete and comfortable, watching some men from another village doing a *kola-tham* and calculating the interest on the karnam's wife's jewels when a voice hissed suddenly in his ear.

'The karnam is here,' said the *kangani*. 'I knew this would be a day of troubles. Get up and hide yourself quick.'

'Where shall I hide?' said the Frog as usual.

'I don't care,' said the *kangani* 'but get out of it as fast as you can.'

The Frog rose and cast a despairing eye round the Depot. Then he bolted and—vanished from sight.

The Emigration Agent came slowly down the lines with the karnam and a police constable at his heels.

'I don't think they can be here,' he said, 'but of course you never know with these *kanganis*. Still, this is a bit too daring. I don't think—'

'There she is!' said the karnam, and leapt forward suddenly.

They hunted for the Frog till night fell and thereafter while the Kitson lamps glared down

upon the Depot they hunted still. But there was no Frog to be found. As if the earth had swallowed him up he had vanished from human ken.

'You'd better give it up,' said the Agent at last. 'He's jumped on a train or something and got away. Or he's sneaked off into a tope. You'll never find him anyway. Take the woman away and give him up. If I catch him I'll deal with him.'

The karnam went away with his wife, who wept a great deal, and the Depot composed itself for the night. Under the flaring lamps the Agent, with the Medical Officer and a maistry went his final rounds. He went from shed to shed and past the drinking cisterns of chlorinated water and so to the big covered well. He put his head into the opening and looked down.

'There's a thundering big frog down there,' he said to the doctor and withdrew his head and turned away.

The maistry was very deaf and knew no English. He asked the doctor—'What did the *dorai* say?'

The doctor bawled back in the vernacular. 'FROG down there.' And as if the words had been a *mantram* of the most potent school they conjured from the black depths of the well a wailing and demoniac voice that cried—'Ayya! It is true. I am here.'

The doctor leapt; the maistry frankly ran. The Agent wheeled back sharply.

'What in the name of the devil—' said he, and flashed his electric torch into the cavity. By its light they beheld the Frog. He was standing on a submerged step (where he had been standing for some hours) and the upturned, miserable, frog-like face of him was all they could see.

'So *there* you are,' said the Agent who could put two and two together as quickly as most. 'Come up, friend: we've something waiting for you here.'

And they had; in fact the Frog was almost glad when the police came and took him away.

But you see now—even supposing you didn't see before—that names matter more than a little. And you see how important, how vitally important, it is to avoid giving a foolish name or an inauspicious; for even if you give it in kindness or in jest, there are Those always abroad who will pervert it to your misery.

BY PROXY

THIS is what Abdul Aziz, twenty-six years of age and convict Number 7362 in the Central Jail at Gandindi, told me one warmish morning in the carpet-making shed. The shed was full of the acrid smell of new jute and in one corner a ray of fierce sunshine came through a crack in the roof and danced amid a heap of many-coloured sweepings. While 7362 talked, his companion droned Hindustani numbers out of a pattern book, and 7362 plied the clacking shuttles like a machine. In time—in the time of 7362 and his companion—the carpet was to go to Government House.

Keble, the Jail Superintendent, spoke to me of Abdul Aziz. 'That's the fellow,' he said, 'who slung a bomb at old Snell when he came down to open the Mussalman College. *You* know. At Kondacole.'

I remembered vaguely; the revered Sir Marshall Snell had come within an ace of joining the saints, but as usual the assassin, good up to a point, was just not competent enough. A young man, I thought, who swore innocence vehemently throughout.

'Correct,' said Keble, 'He got off with five years on that account. He's only twenty-six now. Go and talk to him.'

I did not go and talk to him just then because I find that prisoners of this class are conversationally tedious; but after a time I met a very worthy gentleman called Arulandam Pillai, who was Secretary of the Prisoners' Aid Society. Arulandam was vexed because Abdul Aziz would listen to no plans for his future whatsoever. His plans, he said, were fixed; he had a work to perform and after its performance he would kill himself. He required no assistance with either task from the Prisoners' Aid Society.

I thought that sounded more interesting and drifted into the carpet-shed. I do not know what it was I said that unlocked the lips of 7362, but at all events unlocked they were and he spoke at length while the shuttles clacked and his work-mate droned from the card and the sunlight danced with the gay threads in the corner.

'It is true, Huzur, that I am an innocent man. The Sahib says that many innocent men are in Jail? That is a true word—truer maybe than the Sahib thinks. And many guilty men out of it? Very good talk! At any rate it is God's truth that there is one and the name of that one is Kanakshi Ramiah. All the time I am working here at my loom and all the time I wake in the nights I am praying that God will allow me to see yet again Kanakshi Ramiah.

'Where is this Ramiah? I know but I will not

tell the Sahib. Why not? Because the Sahib would tell him I think of him so much and I do not want him to know that. I want to come in the night, carrying a good knife, to the tiled house where he lies among his wives and concubines and—and—last of all will I die myself.

'I am an innocent man, Sahib; why should I tell you lies? I am here—Convict 7362, and I can get no advantage by saying what is false. In the court I told the truth; I appealed and I told it again. Many times we told it, I and my vakils and my witnesses. We were not believed. Now I am here. Truly is it written, "There is but one step only and that is the first." I took the first step; I will take the last. It was written so. Hear and I will tell how all fell out in succession.

'I am the son of very poor parents. My father was a cooly and we had not any money—not any at all, you understand. Still, I thought I should become educated, because it is the duty of all Mussalmans to become educated in English and take posts in Government service. It is because our ancestors were foolish for a time and refused the education of the English that the Hindus have so gained the ascendancy over my people. It was not so in the days of Akbar; *Bapri bap*, it was not so! So I strove to educate myself. I did not eat much, but I read many books. I did not sleep much except in the light fortnight of the month

when the moon was not strong enough for reading; in the dark fortnight the Municipality lit the street lamps and under these I sat and read all night. In the day time I had to work. Not without toil can a man get education.

'But I did get it. The Sahib sees I am an educated man. By God's grace the Sahib understands Urdu; do I not speak it well? Once also I used to speak English, but now,'—his whole voice, manner and demeanour changed suddenly—'*Ei do naht theenk Ei spik it too much, noh.* Still,'—he went back to his Urdu—'even *that* I can speak a little. I studied innumerable books on all subjects, I sat outside windows and listened to lectures going on inside; when I could scrape an anna or two, I would buy books of notes from the College students. But the good ones sold their notes dear and the cheap ones were difficult to follow and made no sense. Still, I have read hundreds of such books. If I say I am a College man, is it a lie?

'I am a College man and a man of education and—and—Convict 7362. Four years ago I was a College man and a man of education and *not* Convict 7362. I wished to be a school teacher in the Board Schools. But I had not passed examinations and we had no money wherewith to buy appointments where such things are not needed. There was no work for me. I thought

of being a clerk and I paid money to other clerks and Sarishtadars and Managers of offices, but they took the money and gave me no place. Always they said, "There is no vacancy ; wait a little." There was no work for me. I, an educated man, a College man in a manner of speech, I would have become a peon or a police constable ; but always it was the same—"There is no vacancy." I was an educated man but there was no work for me. If you, Sahib, had become educated by sitting in the night-time under street lamps and going without so much as a mouthful of curry in order to buy books to study—would not that have seemed to you very, very hard?

'For a time I became furious. I strode about my city, day and night, cursing aloud those who would give me no appointment. I came to hate all mankind and especially those who had appointments to give but would give me none. For a time my people thought I was mad and they had me treated by a Mahomedan doctor. But it was of no avail except that his potions threw me into fevers and sweatings and great weakness.

'To all occasions cometh the man, to all material the hand destined to shape it. It was at this time that I fell into evil company—or into company which the Sahib would call evil, though for me they were men just in the same state as myself. They were all educated men and some of

them were very clever, but they were all too poor to buy themselves appointments and so they starved. There was one of them, a Bengali, called Gupta—oh, a very clever man. “Are you then starving?” he said to me one day, “then come and starve with us and we will show you how to do one good deed at least before the end.” So, I joined them and we all starved together and made plans to do good deeds. What kind of good deeds? Ha, ha, I will tell you some. Do you know who killed that fat Brahmin Police Inspector at Kalikuri? I do. Do you know who it was that shot the Sub-Collector of Ramsa? They never found out, so well it was done, but I could tell you. Old tales, do you say, Sahib? No doubt; but I speak of a time when neither the tales were old nor I myself. Oho, we starved together and planned good deeds. And the deeds were done too.

‘That clever man Gupta was not always with us; sometimes he went away to Bengal. At those times Kanakshi Ramiah was the important man and with him a man we called the Naidu—though he had no caste really, that Naidu, and we only called him that from civility. Kanakshi Ramiah—whom God curse and destroy—was clever like all Brahmins, though he was not so clever as Gupta. The Naidu was not very clever, but he was very strong. He was a dismissed village servant and

in the old days, he told us, he had to run miles over mountains carrying all the karnam's accounts on his head. What a life ; and what pay—seven rupees was all he got for it ! But then, of course, he was not an educated man.

'One day when I came to the place where we took our meals—when there were any meals to take—I found all gathered and talking together ; but when I appeared they stopped. Then Kanakshi Ramiah came to me salaaming and took me by the hand—we had no caste in our company ; what did caste matter to us?—

' "My brother," he said, "I congratulate thee. A great fortune has fallen to thy lot."

'I knew this could be none other than the fact that the choice had fallen on me for a good deed, and so I asked him, "Am I chosen?" "My brother," he replied, "indeed thou art chosen for what will be the greatest of our deeds." "Then," said I, "I will go out and buy the ar-rack"—for that was our custom. I brought ar-rack and we drank it together—I have said there was no caste amongst us and we were all meat-eaters and spirit-drinkers if only there was meat to eat or spirit to drink. Then I asked them what I should do and they told me. It was Kanakshi Ramiah who told me and the Naidu and a Christian called David sat by him. I tell no lies. It was so.

'There was a Member of Government then called

Snell Sahib. He was coming to Kondacole, they said, to open the Mussalman College. "Ha!" I cried, "a place where they will educate Muslims like me in order that they may thereafter refuse them work and drive them all mad?" Ramiah said it was so. Then I swore by God, saying that this thing should not take place. They flattered and praised me, especially Kanakshi Ramiah, whose house may God exterminate. The Naidu brought camphor and we took some omens. They seemed good for the deed but not specially good for me. "No matter," I said, "I am but an educated man for whom there is no vacancy. The deed is the thing."

'I tell no lies, Sahib; as it happened I tell it all.

'I took a revolver loaded in six chambers and went to Kondacole. And a bomb? Nay, Sahib, I had no bomb. A bomb was thrown at Snell Sahib? I do not say it was not. Hear the true tale, Sahib, the true tale. With a revolver loaded in six chambers I went.

'Outside the College they had laid a long roadway of red cloth with flags on either side, and along this Snell Sahib had to come, walking slowly and smiling pleasantly as Sahibs have to do on these occasions. Without any difficulty at all I made my way to the front line of the crowd so that when he came he must come within three feet of

my revolver. How was I not stopped? Who should stop me? The Police? Were the Police to search every Mussalman in Kondacole to see if he had a revolver? Besides no Mussalman was suspected that day : they did not know the evil of these colleges as did I. There were many thousands of Mussalmans. I had no difficulty at all.

'Was I pleased? Neither pleased nor displeased, Sahib. This was—a deed that had to be done and I had been chosen. It was written so. There is no point in telling lies.

'When Snell Sahib came there was a great cheering and I saw he was a very small man, fat and with a red shining face. I was sorry for him—only the uneducated are inhuman—but it was a deed that had to be done. It is not right to open colleges that educate people for whom there is no vacancy. Just opposite me on the other side of the red cloth there was a very big Mussalman in a green shirt. I thought when Snell Sahib came between me and that man I would fire.

'Snell Sahib came along very slowly, smiling and bowing and asking questions of those with him. Next to the man in the green shirt was a man in a waistcoat and a fez ; Snell Saheb came between me and that man ; so near his death he came ! I was just getting my revolver ready for his next step when all of a sudden—Zoom ! Zoom !—there was a terrible explosion on the red cloth

just in front of me. Something went Zaz ! Zaz ! over my head ; I saw Snell Sahib falling back ; I saw a great red patch coming on the man's green shirt, then he too fell down screaming. Many were screaming and crying out ; the man beside me was bleeding from many wounds. I was confused ; I thought at first my revolver had gone off by mistake all barrels at once ; and while I was still confused someone beat me on the head with a stick and I heard voices crying, "This is he. This is the man." I was seized from behind, and turning I saw that Kanakshi Ramiah held me by one arm and the Christian, David, by the other and the Naidu was beating me on the head with a lathi. Poor fool, I had been so intent on Snell Sahib that I had not seen these three creep up and station themselves behind me ; nor had I seen Ramiah throw a bomb nor indeed anything at all till they hurled themselves upon me, according to their plan, with false accusations. Even then I was too confused to know what I did or said for they beat me very severely with the stick and many others also came and beat and lastly the Police came and seized me and took me away. So I did not see it done. Aie ! Aie ! Aiyo !

'How do I know Kanakshi threw the bomb? Sahib, how do we know the existence of God? It is not proved, but we know it. Even so do I know Kanakshi threw that bomb. Besides, of

these three, he alone would do it ; and of all our band, when Gupta was away, only he could have thought out such a scheme of throwing the guilt on me. No, it was none other than Kanakshi.

'And so it is I sit here making carpets. Why should I lie? I am an educated man and I make carpets in this Jail. But I shall not always sit here making carpets. There will come a time when I must be released and then I will choose a day—or better a night—and I will go to the fat house of Kanakshi Ramiah with its tiled roof, and with the help of God there will be none under it when dawn breaks who will have need again of a roof tiled or otherwise. . . .'

That is what Abdul Aziz, Convict 7362 at Gandindi, said ; and it may be truth or it may be lies or it may be a mixture of both. But there is just one thing. I do not know if Kanakshi Ramiah is a reader of books, but if he is and if he sees this narrative, I would beg him to reflect that in about May of 1928 one Abdul Aziz will cease to be Convict 7362 at Gandindi ; and to bethink him whether a migration to the Bombay side—or further—would not be beneficial to his health. I know what I would do, anyway, if it were me.

GREATER LOVE

THIS is either a beautiful story or a silly story or a sentimental story or just a plain lie. If you go about and about and ask questions you will find schools of thought adhering to each of these classifications. Let each man form his own judgment. I will personally go so far (and no further) as to say I am pretty sure it is not altogether a lie.

The story is concerned with the soul of Mrs. Lamartine. On this again the schools of thought conflict. It was either a beautiful soul or a silly soul or a sentimental soul or just a plain fraud. Again let each man judge. For myself I will go so far as to admit that Mrs. Lamartine was a very talented amateur actress : but I am pretty sure the soul was not entirely a fraud.

We are further concerned with Mrs. Lamartine's body, and here fortunately there can be no two opinions. It was a beautiful body ; wholly beautiful. It was tall and graceful and deliberate ; it neither slouched nor slumped nor sprawled ; it walked sailingly and it carried its head on high. Very, very beautiful was Mrs. Lamartine, and everybody in the hill station of Melmuri was aware of it. They said so frequently with all the cattish

qualifications that are beauty's tribute in this unhappy clime. And the commonest of these qualifications when a new-comer made favourable comment, was—'Yes, lovely of course ; but how *does* she keep it up?' And then, to the new comer's natural question,—'Oh, didn't you know? She's been exactly like that for twenty years.' Which was very nearly a fact.

To explain this we have to go back a little into history, that history into which the casual visitor to hill stations never has time to delve. Mrs. Lamartine first saw the Muri Hills as Miss Julie de Vaz—a fact which should explain a good deal. Old de Vaz had a pioneer coffee estate on the lower slopes of the Melmuris and for a time he was by way of being a minor coffee king. (It was at this period that he imported the Italian wife who became Julie's mother.) Then he was smitten with the Ceylon theory of growing coffee without shade, and he cut all his shade trees—this in a blazing dry climate—and the next thing was borer, and God knows how many acres of good bearing coffee had to be burnt as dangerous rubbish. Then old de Vaz, after the manner of his kind, threw good money after bad, and the Italian wife died and in the latter end old de Vaz and his three daughters lived in a little bungalow in Melmuri and old de Vaz was very glad of any employment he could get.

Now all the three daughters were beautiful and de Vaz might have married them well and so reaped comfort in his old age ; but we must assume that he was as bad a match-maker as he had been a planter for he let them all slip. One married a subordinate kind of man on the railway, another married an auctioneer ; Julie, being then twenty-five, married Lamartine. Melmuri to-day is a little hazy as to what exactly Lamartine did ; I think he was some sort of electrical engineer.

Anyway the less said of Lamartine the better for he was wrong from start to finish. He was a big, blond, goodish-looking man with a vast idea of his powers as a lady-killer and every intention of giving these powers full rein whenever opportunity offered. At times he drank too much, though not habitually. To his wife he was always a brute ; he is said to have spoken in public of what he called 'my Dago Missus.' If that is true (and it probably is) no more need be said of Lamartine. He made Julie very unhappy for four or five years and then one night, without warning or intimation, he slipped away gracefully down the ghat—and never came back. He had had enough of Julie and Melmuri, and Lamartine was never one to tie himself down.

This may have been about twenty years before the events we are now to consider. Fortunately old de Vaz died just about the same time and so

Mrs. Lamartine got the Melmuri house and a pittance. She was then, as the cats with perfect truth told the newcomer, exactly as she was twenty years later ; past her first youth (Lamartine had knocked that out of her) but still, you would have said, well the right side of thirty ; tall, graceful, deliberate, with a curious, carefully considering look in the Italian eyes she turned upon you. She dressed herself plainly but always with distinction, she was always a member of the Club and she was always called upon and received. And yet every adult male who came to Melmuri in these twenty years regarded her as fair game.

I am not a psychologist and I never had more than a bowing acquaintance with Mrs. Lamartine, so I am unable to tell you what she thought of life during these years. I would guess, however, that her outlook on it was just about as hard as woman's outlook could be. One presumes she had been fond of Lamartine, and when a man to whom you have given your little all behaves to you like a beast for five years and then silently abandons you to what may befall, it can hardly raise feelings of confidence in the essential goodness of this world. I should imagine Mrs. Lamartine had reached the stage when she didn't care what happened—or who ; and that she regarded the world permanently as a place from which all canons and standards had departed and where you had just to get as

much fun as you could out of the meagre stuff that was left. To Mrs. Lamartine, I fancy, all stuff was meagre—though her admirers ranged from a Lieutenant-General to a Secretary to Government, all intermediate stages downward and upward being also represented. They all came and hung round Mrs. Lamartine and some of them were very badly smitten indeed and some proposed marriage and some proposed other things ; but I will guarantee that any one of them came away in the end with no more than any other. This I can guarantee because I know Melmuri and I know something of the narrow and deadly path the Mrs. Lamartines of such places tread. There were enough anxious mothers with plain but mature daughters to watch every yard and foot and inch of that path minutely. One slip and the shouts would have gone up to heaven.

Mrs. Lamartine never made that slip. But what kind of life do you suppose she led?

However, there was one thing left her, given which no woman will ever throw down her hand altogether—to wit, her looks. Various estimates have been given me of the time Mrs. Lamartine spent daily upon these, and of course the daily period became longer as the twenty years spun out their weary course. Anyway, whatever she did, she kept them. The brightest April sun on the golf course could not lighten one strand of her

dark hair; the cruellest electric light in the Club dressing-room could not pick out a line in her face newer than those Lamartine had set there twenty years before. Year after year she was as she had been. She was a little slower on the tennis courts, a little shorter off the tee at golf—for these are ravages of time no mirror and dressing table can make good: otherwise she went on from year to year unchanging. People said she had the secret of perpetual youth, people said she was immortal; there was even a school who maintained that the dressing-table stories were all an invention and that she really did nothing to herself whatsoever but had just kept her youthful looks by a miracle. To this their opponents rejoined—'Miracles don't happen.'

They were right—as was proved to the huge delight and enjoyment of the major part of Melmuri. And the instrument chosen for the proving—though he himself would rather have died first—was young Sendall of the Gunners.

Young Sendall came up to Melmuri to play golf and to shoot sambhur; but on the first day of his leave he saw Mrs. Lamartine and thereafter he saw absolutely nothing else. And presently the astounding story went round that Mrs. Lamartine was caught at last in her own snare, that Mrs. Lamartine the immoveable, the resister of all temptations, was in love. 'Rot!' said the men,

'it can't be true.' But the women, in their more deadly Pavilion, covertly watching Mrs. Lamartine from behind *Vogues* and *Queens* and *Eves*, said triumphantly, 'It is. It is.'

On the last night of his leave young Sendall, having spent every possible hour with Mrs. Lamartine, proposed marriage. Everyone in Melmuri knew he was going to do this, and so it is reasonable to suppose that Mrs. Lamartine knew it too. At all events she met his impassioned outburst very steadily, considering him carefully out of her dark eyes. Then very gently she put him aside.

'I like you very much,' is the gist of what she told him, 'but hill stations are silly places and boys like you get crazy ideas. Come back here this time next year and see if you still feel the same.'

Sendall, one presumes, protested that a hundred years would make no odds; but Mrs. Lamartine was immoveable. Sendall went down the next day defeated. I should perhaps say more explicitly that Sendall was a particularly nice boy with looks and breeding and even a little money; but he was a Second Lieutenant and his age was twenty-four. Mrs. Lamartine, as you must know if you have followed my figures, was just twice that and a little more.

Sendall went down the next day in a hired car. Mrs. Lamartine, according to promise made, went

to a high point and waved to him so long as the car could anywhere be seen on the dropping bends of the ghat road. Then she went home to her room and sat looking into her mirror for a long, long time.

Mrs. Lamartine went away from Melmuri all that cold weather and she did not come back till after the first of April. The evening she came back she walked into the Melmuri Club and sat down in a chair with her face to the light; and in five minutes Melmuri was buzzing like a hive.

'Have you seen Mrs. Lamartine?' said Melmuri, 'What *has* she done to herself? She's *old!*'

One woman, bolder or more illnatured than the rest, stopped Mrs. Lamartine as she was leaving the Pavilion and asked point-blank if she had been ill.

Mrs. Lamartine gave her her slow look of careful consideration; and as she looked the other woman saw it all—the grey strand under the hat-brim, the wrinkles, the fallen cheeks. 'Why should you think I had been ill?' said Mrs. Lamartine.

The other woman boggled; Mrs. Lamartine herself helped her out. 'I've just let myself go—that's all.'

'But why?' gasped the other woman, '*Why?*'

'Oh, there wasn't any special reason,' said Mrs. Lamartine with her slow drawl, 'I just did.'

She sailed away to her rickshaw leaving uproar behind her.

Young Sendall was, as I have said, a particularly nice boy ; and a boy of that type, when he gives his heart, is much like a girl—he doesn't go back on it. Punctually in the middle of May, his one year being up, he came back to Melmuri. He arrived at tea-time ; and on a crisp, clear evening, the sun's rays shining low and level and showing up every detail with microscopic clarity, he drove to Mrs. Lamartine's. Not less than sixty per cent of the female population of Melmuri—and maybe five per cent of the male—watched him go.

It was the same woman who had tackled Mrs. Lamartine before who burst presently into the Ladies' Pavilion hysterically excited, gasping for breath. When asked what was the matter she broke out into wailing.

'Oh, oh ! Don't ask me. I've just seen Mr. Sendall—coming back. His face ! So white ; so dreadful. I couldn't bear it. I asked him—"Are you—are you making a long stay, Mr. Sendall?" Just like that. And he said "I'm going down to-morrow." Just like that. But his voice—oh, his voice—'

She was not a lady to let a situation slip or to make less than the most of her chances. They crowded round her eagerly.

And the next day Sendall went down.

So there is the story. You can now argue the case on its merits. I make only two postulates—first, Mrs. Lamartine was in love with Sendall and to be married to Sendall and taken away from all that life at Melmuri must have seemed to her like some inconceivable Heaven: second, her looks were—Sendall excepted—her world and her all. So she stripped her false colours and, in her own words, let herself go. Now was it rather a fine thing that she did or was it a silly thing or a sentimental thing; or was it just a *beau geste* to terminate boldly a state of affairs that must have ended soon anyway? Or was it, as one thin-lipped—and thick-skulled—matron of Melmuri told me, that she was ‘so sure of that silly boy that she just didn’t bother any more?’

I know what *I* think. But the debate is open.

GODOWN LAW

I WRITE this story principally to explain to my friend John Stevens why he got a very bad dinner one Sunday about a month ago. I know it was a bad dinner because I ate it. It was a terrible, a death-dealing dinner. It was so bad that Stevens himself, who has the appetite of an ostrich and the palate of a hyaena, began to notice it. The soup was wash, the fish was ghee, the side-dish—but why struggle through that intolerable sequence again. It was a menace, an indecency, an assault, an offence under most of the sections of the Indian Penal Code. Let us forget it and thank God we live.

At intervals throughout the dinner Mrs. Stevens wailed, 'I can't think what can have happened to Ratnam. He usually cooks so nicely. What can it be?'

Stevens is a man who explains all things Oriental on a rough-and-ready basis. 'The brute's drunk,' he said; and when we had sent the savoury away, he called him in. Ratnam came. He stood like a block while Mrs. Stevens wailed over him and Stevens told him he was drunk. Ratnam said not a word and in the end he salaamed and departed. The expression on his face—it was

the expression of a barber's block or a temple carving—never altered for one moment.

'Dead drunk,' said Stevens contentedly. 'Let's get into a long chair.' Simple explanations suffice for Stevens.

But in India it does not always do to take things at face value, though nine times out of ten it is wiser. The unkind Gods have cursed me with the imagination they have mercifully withheld from Stevens, and I was impelled to make enquiries. A man who talks to his servants is admittedly not a Sahib ; but he learns a good deal of information some of which is valuable. Now Ratnam was my cook for a time and he did not drink, or if he did it made no difference to his cooking which was all Mrs. Stevens had said of it. Also, standing in the Stevens' dining-room, he did not look dead drunk. Dead, yes ; drunk, no. He looked downed, broken, comatose—but not from strong waters. Moreover the Stevens' butler stood by his side all the time ; and I saw from his face that he knew all about it and thought Stevens almost as great an ass as I did.

Wherefore I made enquiry, and what follows is the story of Ratnam as I heard it. I tell it, as I have said, to explain Stevens' dinner to him, but perhaps it has some ethnological value as well. It casts a sort of sidelight.

The father of Ratnam is not known to history,

and—rather unusually—Ratnam himself possessed no wife, not even temporary. His menage when he was with me and during the earlier pre-Stevens' period consisted of himself and his mother. His mother was a formidable old lady called Ponnamma. She was built on generous lines but if you made some allowance for figure and for grey hair she was a distinctly handsome old person. She was magnificently respectable, held the highest ideals and commanded, I believe, the universal respect of the godowns. I once heard her telling off a tunnykutch and it was a liberal education. Of an afternoon she would relax and, disposing her person on the kitchen steps, would chew betel and crack jokes which must, I think, have been extremely vulgar—at all events they made the other servants laugh very much. I considered her an ornament to the compound and when I parted with Ratnam under the importunities of Mrs. Stevens I missed her presence more than his.

Ratnam himself, son of this exceptional mother, was a remarkably sensible youth. He was aware that his mamma was a gold mine to him in that she abstracted all his savings, doling out a little only for cash and cigarettes. Ponnamma had realized that wonderful dream of all her class—she held land on *patta*, not very much land may be or very good, but still land. That land would be

Ratnam's. She had money invested in the co-operative bank ; that also would be Ratnam's. Ratnam knew quite well that his mother made him ; and quite apart from self-interest he loved her with that intense devotion which Indian sons so often feel. They were perfectly happy together—note this, please—and I do not think they ever quarrelled at all. Of course now and then Ponnamma would reprimand her son or advise him with Oriental vigour, but that was all in the day's work and hurt nobody. So long as it was clearly understood that Ponnamma was mistress, that Ponnamma's was the last word, that Ponnamma was the dispenser of justice and the interpreter of ethics, things *chez* Ratnam went like clock-work.

Just before they left me—that is to say, about six months before that lamentable dinner—their household received an addition in the shape of a small female cousin, an orphan, they said ; she may have been eleven or perhaps a little more. I knew her as a pretty little thing encountered occasionally on godown inspections, scrupulously attired and with a gift for embarrassing salaams which broke into fits of giggles. I don't know her name ; I think they called her Baba—which will suffice. When they migrated from my godowns to those of the Stevens', she went with them. Both Ratnam and Ponnamma were very

fond of her, though the old lady had to watch her with some strictness—principally on account of one Mari, the Stevens' cook's matey. Mari was a low *jat*, a pilferer, a liar, a wastrel ; there is little to be said for him.

These, then, are the persons involved ; and the only thing I want to emphasize about them here is that they were perfectly ordinary sane practical persons, living sensible and balanced lives and bound together 'by ties of affection. You could have found reduplicating sets exactly like them in a hundred compounds throughout South India. Now listen.

I said Ponnamma doled out a portion of his wages to Ratnam for cigarettes. Ratnam had a weakness for cigarettes—it was practically his only vice—and he thought the sum allotted was insufficient. He was therefore the more intensely annoyed when 'acting on information received' he detected Baba in the act of clandestinely supplying a packet of Scissors or some such things to Mari. Ratnam was very angry indeed. He chased Mari out of the compound and then returned to execute summary justice on the person of Baba, who had meantime taken refuge in the Ratnam godown. It was a hottish afternoon and tempers were thin ; that is all that can be said—and it is clearly inadequate—in extenuation of what followed.

Ratnam reported to Ponnamma and announced his intention of chastising Baba. Ponnamma thoroughly agreed with him and said she would deal with the culprit later on when the air cooled a trifle. Ratnam repeated that *he* would chastise Baba himself. Ponnamma said she was mistress in her house and that orphan cousins came under her direct rule. Ratnam replied that they were his cigarettes. Ponnamma announced that if he took it upon himself to lay hand on Baba she would walk out of the house and never return. Ratnam, adopting the retort valiant, made a dive at Baba, caught her and slapped her soundly. Ponnamma emitted one curious sort of squawk and sat down heavily and began to weep.

In the face of woman's tears there is nothing left to man but bravado. Ratnam lit himself one of the recaptured cigarettes and—feeling, I doubt not, pretty miserable the while—swaggered out of the godown. As he went, the devil impelled him to improve the position by one of those things infinitely better left unsaid.

'What do I care!' he said, 'You can go if you like and stay.'

He then went out and sat at the back of Stevens' stables and smoked too many cigarettes and bit his nails to the quick and, I well believe, wept.

Ponnamma is said—but the only real witness is Baba—to have sat and cried to herself for quite

a long time. Then she rose and very carefully tidied up the godown and began to pack her personal belongings. 'Amma!' said Baba several times. 'Where wilt thou go?' But she received no answer. Presently she ceased to speculate as to her aunt's antics and catching sight of the head of Mari over the compound wall she made a transparent excuse to get out. Her aunt said nothing whatever—nor spoke a word when she daringly opened the door and fled. So exits Baba—and Mari with her.

About five-thirty—Ratnam being still engaged in the business of smoking himself silly behind the stables—the tunnykutch saw Ponnamma emerging with a bundle. She made the same enquiry as Baba but met with a better response. 'I am going,' said Ponnamma, 'to the burial ground.' Thus the tunnykutch, with much gruesome inflection on the words; but the chokra who was standing close by gave it as 'I am going to the chatram,' while the waterman thought she said 'patnam.' There seems to be a number of those 'minor discrepancies' in the evidence on which vakils love to dwell. Any way, the chokra would appear to have been in the right, for to the chatram Ponnamma went—the big chatram near the railway station—and there deposited her bundle.

This would be somewhere on the back of six. What Ponnamma's bodily movements were for the

next hour and a half is but sketchily known ; still less, therefore, is it possible to say what were her mental processes. We have it on the word of one Karuppan, a seller of dining leaves, and one Muppan (I fear) a drunkard, that she attended the temple of her sect and prayed long and fervently. Also she saw a petition-writer and had him draft a patta transfer application in respect of her land. She bought a stamp for this and posted it. That accounts for most of the hour and a half, though not perhaps all ; for the rest she presumably wandered. She must have done one thing—and there are many who would like to know how she did it—which will appear in the sequel. Eventually—this also will appear—she got back to the chatram.

Just about the hour when slaves were preparing my bath in anticipation of that infernal dinner-party, one Ramaswami, a 'cousin-brother' of the Stevens' butler came rushing to the compound. 'Ohe, Ratnam !' he called ; and when Ratnam came, 'Ohe, Ratnam,' he said, 'thy mother hath taken opium in the chatram and is dead.'

'Thou art a liar !' said Ratnam, but he ran to the chatram none the less, leaving the Stevens' dinner (and mine, alas, and mine) to the mercies of Mari. In point of fact the cousin-brother was a liar, for Ponnamma was not quite dead, though next thing to it. No human organism can consume

the quantity of opium Ponnamma had consumed—now where and how did she get it? That is the thing that many would like to know—and live out many more hours. Ponnamma was solidly unconscious and died in about ten minutes.

What did Ratnam do? What do such as Ratnam on these occasions? He became the plaything of nervous reaction; he went back to Stevens' bungalow and botched up still further the incomparable hash Mari—partly on purpose—had made of that carefully-chosen dinner. Presently he heard—or perhaps he didn't—Stevens saying he was drunk; and salaamed and went away as I have told.

Well, there it is; and what are you to do with such people? I will make oath that Ponnamma loved her son and that he in turn was devoted to her. I will swear that he cared little really for the cigarettes, and that she would have made but a transient uproar over the question of domestic rights. But she had said, 'I will go and never return' and he had replied, 'You can do it for all I care', and when you get a people who live upon words and words only and nothing but words—well, then, there you are.

Ratnam is still with the Stevens'. I am quite certain they know nothing about it all and never will. They are that kind of people. I doubt if they ever knew Baba was in the compound or

Ponnamma. If they had, they would have accounted for them on the basis of some immoral relationship with Ratnam. Simple explanations suffice for them ; they are devoid of imagination—and that is the great, the crowning mercy.

BO 99

I HAVE discoursed elsewhere on the absurdity of supposing that a mechanical object can by any possibility be or become endowed with human attributes. It seems a point on which it is hardly worth while wasting good breath; it is preposterous; insane; nobody on earth is going to stand for such stuff. No doubt; yet on the other hand tales are told which make one wonder. There was the *Ho-Nan*, you remember. There was also BO 99.

Messrs. Caley and Co.'s invoices show that BO 99 was landed ex. *S. S. Nauera* and that she was a 4-cylinder Quissett Tourer, rated at twenty-three horse power (American) and painted black. She had also balloon tyres and all accessories, which is irrelevant. She was one of a batch of four which came in the same steamer. I have traced two of these and they are both perfectly normal. Messrs. Caley say that the Quissett 4-cylinder is a very good car and has a special reputation for strength (which is not of great consequence to our story) and controllability (which is of very great consequence indeed). They sell lots of Quissetts every year and have done since 1916.

Nothing strange ever happened—except with BO 99. Messrs. Caley indeed say nothing strange ever happened even there ; but judge yourself.

People who arrive in India are not prone to tell much of their previous history, and I have been unable to learn anything of BO 99's. But this much I know— that the Captain of the *Nauera* said he had had a rotten voyage and that if you look up *The Hindu* of that date you will find that 'Sub-Inspector Ritchie of the City Police held an inquest to-day on the body of one Thambuswami, the cooly who was killed yesterday at the harbour.' Thambuswami was working at the unloading of the *Nauera* when a rope broke or a derrick bent and a large case fell upon him. He died in five minutes. Now, in view of subsequent events, I am willing to bet that BO 99 was in that case.

BO, of course, stands for Bommari, and Bommari was the first district in which she was registered ; because almost as soon as she landed she was snapped up by the young Zemindar of Rellakonda, which estate is in that favoured district. Young Rellakonda had just come out of the Court of Wards—or rather his estate had—and he wanted a car that would be a little faster than the Court's Standing Orders. BO 99 satisfied his aspirations ; it was much faster. They are good

cars, Quissetts; and with young Rellakonda on board BO 99 went—literally—like hell. If you can imagine hell crytallised into a small cubic content and hurtling at speed through a peaceful Indian district you will get some idea of Rellakonda out for a drive in BO 99. He had three horns—electric, bulb and exhaust, and he kept them all going at once. He had got his estate from the Court and he didn't care who knew it. Bommari, as a whole, got little chance to forget.

One evening, when BO 99 was about six weeks old, Rellakonda was returning towards the ancestral halls over a bad road at a quiet forty-five. In front appeared two ryots and five cows. It was a straight stretch and all three horns gave tongue grandly. One ryot fled incontinent into the ditch; the other desperately shoo-ed the cows to the far side of the road and then turned to join him. There was heaps of space—the whole width of the road—for the car to pass between the man and the cows. Rellakonda never thought of slowing down, but went hard for the gap. . . .

This is what the second ryot—he in the ditch—said afterwards to the Magistrate or is recorded as saying :—

'I was hiding at the roadside. Kristappa was just at the edge of the road. There was plenty of room for the car to pass. It was just about to pass when it turned aside and sprang upon Krist-

appa. Yes, I say it turned and sprang upon him. It was like a tiger springing on a man. He said, "Aiyo, swami" and fell under the wheels'—and so on to the dismal details. Rellakonda in Court admitted to nothing more than a swerve or a skid ; but I believe that among his friends he said it was something much more than that.

Well, anyway, Kristappa was very dead ; and Rellakonda who was a thoroughly good-hearted boy was extravagantly sorry. He scrapped his exhaust horn and took to driving at a crawl. At a crawl he was driving home one evening when an old woman walked suddenly out of a field track on the near side. Going at any fair speed he could have swung out and round her with ease ; but a slow-moving car with balloon tyres is notoriously hard to shift sideways. Perhaps Rellakonda got flustered ; anyway there was no budging BO 99 from her track. On the contrary she put down her head and charged. Rellakonda wept about it in court : 'I put on all my brakes. What more I could do? What if ; still the car went forward.' Brakes wouldn't stop BO 99 when she saw a victim in front of her—as the poor old woman had found.

Two fatal accidents in a year is more than the most lenient authority can be expected to swallow ; the authorities of Bommari choked. They took away Rellakonda's licence and he sold the car.

He sold it—perhaps for obvious reasons—cheap.

You may remember that particularly horrible accident which happened just about that time to Sewell, the Vet. : Sewell was coming down the Shalindi Ghat—and a more careful not to say wearisome driver never sounded a horn—when something—God knows what—happened and he went over the khud. The steering-gear was supposed to have broken, but expert examination afterwards found that the steering mechanism was not broken. A man who was cutting bamboos said the car suddenly turned aside and jumped over the parapet wall and down the drop. He said it jumped 'like a horse'—rather reminiscent of the ryot's tiger ; in both instances, you observe, it seemed to eye-witnesses like a live thing, animate, self-impelled, leaping. This time—it was a most horrible accident—Sewell and the baby were killed and Mrs. Sewell was smashed almost beyond repair. The bamboo-cutting man ran away in terror and they had to lie—but why remember these intolerable things.

The present point is that Sewell was driving a car registered as KA 200 ; but that car was a four-cylinder Quissett and I am prepared to prove with incontestable evidence that it was once called BO 99.

Poor Sewell and his family were thrown out and smashed but the car itself stuck up on a tree

and was in point of fact wonderfully little damaged. Men came with ropes and bullocks and salvaged her and as X 40 they advertised her for sale down on the Coast. One Sandlich, a Missionary—of all people—thought he would try her. He did—on the Beach Road at Amay, a nice fast straight stretch. Sandlich was no Jehu and he was doing a steady twenty when a fisherman started to walk across the road some seventy yards in front. BO 99 leapt instantly. The speedometer needle flew up—I give you what Sandlich said and he was a man of God—as if the cable had parted; Sandlich screamed out aloud; the fisherman gave one despairing yell and flung himself into an aloe hedge. He just escaped; but Sandlich didn't buy BO 99.

Someone else soon did, however, and there ensues another period of obscurity in BO 99's dark history. She was in three districts to my knowledge; and I suspect she was in more. I suspect she was the car that killed that cycling Sub-Inspector near Nandi Mahal and drove away without stopping and was never identified. I know for certain she was SHI 76 in Shivanagar when she slew a village munsiff, a most respectable and respected man and a local philanthropist. I know she was in Kattim again, this time as KA 267; I don't think she killed anybody there, but her owner (the D.S.P.) sold her quick and cheap.

And I know she fetched up in Quilay as QU 110 and was run by the Tuluva Hanuman Company as a fast bus.

You remember that extraordinary and depressing accident in Quilay, just near the Aidangadi cross roads. A marriage party turned out of the road from Birur into the main Vayala-Amay road. A bus was coming down, pretty fast, from the Vayala side, overtaking them. It was about a hundred yards away when the rear of the procession got into the road. They were going with music and couldn't hear much, but they were well to their right side. The bus 'became suddenly out of control' (I quote from the contemporary press, but how did it do that?) and went slap into the tail of the procession and ploughed through it like a bating ram. Two women and a child were killed and I forgot how many were injured. The bus turned over into the ditch and one of the passengers cracked his skull against an avenue tree. The thing was a holocaust.

I make no comment. But it is not disputable that the bus in question was QU 110, which was KA 200, which was BO 99. I would remind you that according to Caley and Co.—and many other authorities—the Quissett is a specially controllable car.

After this horrible episode QU 110 was again for sale and she lay for a month or two in the Coast

shops. There she was discovered by Clements, a young rubber-planter, who wanted a good car cheap. BO 99 had never done much work and in spite of her many smashes she had contrived to do herself singularly little damage; so at her current price she was undoubtedly a bargain. So much so that Clements smelt a rat and asked questions.

'To tell you the honest truth,' they said, 'she's got rather a bad name. She—well, she kills people.'

'Who does she kill?' said Clements, 'driver or third parties?'

They told him she wasn't particular—sometimes one, sometimes the other. Clements laughed at them.

'You won't kill me with a car,' he said, 'I've driven in road races, and I taught aeroplane pilots in the War. I've fallen out of everything that runs on wheels at every possible pace. She won't kill *me*—and I'll take good care she doesn't kill anybody else.'

'Let's hope she's met her master,' they said as they wrote the receipt.

I daresay you know Amay and the northern approach to that thriving city and port. If so, you know the long red laterite sweep of Beach Road running down from the north to the big turning circle where the West Coast Rifles Band plays on Fridays. If you remember Amay as it

was you will remember that circle as empty ; but if you know Amay as it is you will know that it is split in the middle by the statue of King Edward Seventh erected there by Sir Kesava Menon. The statue stands on a high plinth which in turn is surrounded by a broad low base with green grass, pots of flowering cannas and a laterite border.

One Friday evening about six p.m., there being many people present, Clements came down Beach Road towards the statue, driving BO 99. He had been travelling fast, but had slowed ; all admit he was driving carefully and had his car in perfect control. A cloud of witnesses sat all about on the stone edges of the circle. The band was playing rather loudly.

Khan Bahadur Mohammed Nur-ud-Din Sahib had a friend staying with him from the Madras side and he had brought him down to the King Edward Circle to see a real Quilay sunset. They drove down, parked the car and were standing looking seawards with their backs to the road. The nine-year-old son of the Khan Bahadur Sahib had seen many sunsets and was bored. He caught sight of the ten-year-old son of Habibullah Sahib sitting in a car on the opposite side of the Circle. He thought he would cross and have a few words with this gentleman.

He started across the Circle at its widest point

just north of the statue—a gaudy little gold-and-purple figure. It was wider and lonelier than he had thought. The band blared suddenly and the child lost nerve. Clements, coming down from the north, saw the position and hooted gently—a kind, friendly, comforting little hoot.

BO 99 leapt instantly. Everyone says she did, including Clements. She lunged forward like lightning. The child ran forward, then back, then forward again. BO 99 went for him like a shell. A hundred yards can be a very short distance and five seconds a very brief interval of time. It looked inevitable. Men started up—hopelessly too late—from the sides of the Circle; the Khan Bahadur—hours too late—turned from his sunset and ran. The child stood paralysed in front of BO 99 waving his arms. Clements was alone in the car; by God's grace he kept his own imperturbable head.

'You murdering brute!' he said through his teeth, 'no, you—damned—well—don't!'

With all the force at his command he wrenched BO 99 to the right and drove her slap into the statue. There was a crash that shook Amay. BO 99 stopped. Clements soared.

Clements should have broken his neck; he just didn't. Clements should have fractured his skull; he just failed. Clements should have broken every bone in his body; in point of fact he only broke

two. Clements should have been killed six times over. In point of fact, he wasn't killed at all, nor was he even very much the worse. No doubt he went sideways into the cannas but still—talk about miracles!

But BO 99 was done. Spectators say that she leapt the laterite border of the base 'like a stag'—still, you see, the leaping, uncontrollable animal—at which point Clements left her for the cannas. She then flung herself like a ram upon the plinth. She carried away the bottom left-hand corner (the mend was not very well done and you can see the place to this day) and simply telescoped. She stove herself in from radiator to dash and bits of her flew all over the Circle. A flying triangle of her windscreen cut a man who was picking up the undamaged son of the Khan Bahadur, but it was the last injury she did to mortal man. After that she lay down dead among the ruin of the cannas.

So that was the end of BO 99, murderess. Because, honestly and soberly and taking all the facts into careful consideration, I don't know what else you could call her. What do *you* think?

NATURAL RESOURCES

LONG, long ago, in the great days of the seventies or eighties, India had a Viceroy who set much weight on what he was pleased to call Developing the Natural Resources of the Country. Where Viceroys lead, administrations local and imperial must necessarily follow ; and as a result if you look through the G.O.'s of the ensuing ten years or thereabouts you will find a great deal about the natural resources of this and that province, their exploitation and development. I don't remember exactly which Viceroy it was that started this particular hare ; but anyway he would have liked to meet Rameswara Rao, sometime Manager of the Dandamukhi zamindari. Rameswara Rao on natural resources was good.

The Dandamukhi zamindari lies in that forsaken corner of the Gauthara district which abuts upon Haiderabad. Its zamindar belongs to the Solar race but not very much belongs to him. His domain consists of one township with palace, a dozen derelict villages, a certain acreage of bad, stony, dry land, a few ill-considered and fruitless tanks and finally a rising wave of borderland hills clad with sparse but not unpromising jungle. According to the *District Gazetteer of Gauthara*,

which may or may not be correct, the zamindari was originally founded by a hill riever or chief from the Haiderabad side ; if so, I should imagine there must have been a price on his head, for unless a man were wanted by the police he would hardly be such a fool as to settle and found a house in so utterly God-forsaken a tract. However that may be, founded the house was and it has held itself no small beer ever since. Its history has been the usual history of small zamindaris in that area—much shadow and little substance, much *tamasha* and magnificence with an equal number of unpaid debts, a few law-suits, innumerable mortgages and a persistent chicanery on the part of all concerned almost too blatant to be credible. Occasional spurts of efficiency, brief eras of reform, kept it from total disintegration ; for the rest it struggled along somehow in a manner which economists would find it difficult to explain.

Rameswara Rao's career was almost equally chequered and quite equally precarious. He began with a long spell of acting and being 'ousted' in various taluk offices and at last became permanent 'attender' (whatever that may be) at Kalakonda. Kalakonda is a dry glary unattractive taluk, but it contains the Dandamukhi estate and the Dandamukhi, Kalakonda and Haidargiri Forest Reserves. The reserves lie north and south and Dandamukhi is in the middle—all on

the Haiderabad frontier in the extreme corner of a large and heavy district. No Collector has penetrated further into it than Kalakonda itself since the nineties, and no D.F.O. for many years has had time to visit these miserable reserves. So it was at all events when Rameswara Rao laboured amidst its austerities.

To Rameswara Rao, however, Kalakonda meant bread and butter ; or at any rate to begin with, it meant bread. He set out to find the butter by the devious means admissible to permanent attenders and acting seventh clerks of Taluk offices. There was a good Deputy Collector in charge of the Division at the time, however, and Rameswara's praiseworthy attempts to develop the Natural Resources of the Kalakonda Taluk Office were nipped in the bud. According to the custom of attenders he then took long leave and came back and tried again. For a time he met with better success ; but all mortal effort on this sorry globe is but transitory and doomed to failure. He quarrelled with the head clerk and the head clerk gave him away and this time Government decided that they could do without him in future.

An attender's bread, even eked out with clandestine butter, is no feast, but it does at least prevent a man from starving. Rameswara had no savings and he was on his beam ends ; but he could

still pull a few strings and when one of these was pulled sufficiently hard it became apparent that the young zamindar of Dandamukhi (who had just succeeded to the *gaddi*) required a Manager. It further became apparent after a little more string-pulling that he required Rameswara Rao. The emoluments were rupees twenty a month—and what you could make.

Strolling round his new jurisdiction, Rameswara came to the gloomy conclusion that this statement required revision, and that the emoluments were rupees twenty a month only, because what you could make would be nothing. The estate ryots were on very close terms with starvation and the estate treasury contained a thriving colony of white ants but very little else. If there had been any possibility of repairing the irrigation works there would have been contracts which are always useful things ; but there was no such possibility. If there had been a criminal tribe or two there would have been the beginnings of a chance, but all criminal tribes had long deserted the region as hopeless. There was a little—a very little—minor forest produce, which was auctioned ; but the entire revenue from the sales would hardly have fed Rameswara's not negligible family. Take it by and large, the Natural Resources of Dandamukhi were amazingly poor and the possible avenues along which they might be developed

were nil. Worse still, the rupees twenty were by no means a stone-cold certainty, as one or two pay days proved.

No man will ever actually starve in charitable India, but Rameswara and his (increasing) household came for a time remarkably near it.

Then one day the D.S.P. camped at Dandamukhi and sent for Rameswara.

'Look here,' he said. 'I want your help. You're Manager of the zamindari here and I want you to help me in running down the people who're stealing sandalwood out of the Government Reserves next door. It's becoming a regular trade. They take it over into Haiderabad and sell it.'

Rameswara moistened his lips. Sandalwood! Magic word.

'If your Honour could inform me the names of some of these persons—'

The D.S.P. laughed. 'If I could do that I wouldn't be sitting here. But I can tell you the names of several people who'll be very well worth watching.' He did; a good dozen of them.

'By all means the samasthanam will assist,' said Rameswara. 'We will be very glad because it will help us to get a better price for our own sandalwood.'

The D.S.P. looked at him curiously. 'You got much mature sandal?' he asked.

'Oh, yes,' said Rameswara, 'we have a lot. Soon we will start selling.'

Now sandal had been one of Rameswara's first hopes and many a weary day he had tramped the estate forests in search of that profitable plant. He knew just how much sandal there was in them ; there was none. Previous generations had seen to that.

However, truth is a winning card and only a fool plays it first. Rameswara went back to his master and told him that somehow or other fifty rupees in cash must be raised. 'I want it to print sandalwood permits,' he explained, 'Permits for exporting sandalwood. No printing press in India will give us credit.'

'You must be insane,' said his employer. 'You know as well as I do that there is not a seedling of sandal on all this estate, let alone mature trees.'

'What if?' said Rameswara, 'It is not sandalwood I want but sandalwood permits. Do as I say and you will see.'

Thereafter Rameswara girt up his loins and trudged over the dry hills and the indifferent jungle into the Haiderabad villages. There he held prolonged speech with certain gentlemen mostly Mohammedan. They were very frank and open with him. It was quite true, they said, that sandalwood was extracted from the Government Reserves and no doubt there was a profit to be

made on it. But the hill tracks were so impossible and the lead to the rail-head on the Haiderabad side was so disastrously long that the profits were cut to a negligible margin.

'I can show you a better plan than that,' said Rameswara. And did.

From Dandamukhi to Kalakonda is twenty-two miles of very bad District Board road, but at Kalakonda is the terminus of a famine railway. It was on this road and within five miles of this terminus that a zealous Sub-Inspector of Police stopped two carts loaded with sandalwood billets. It was a soft, moonlight night and the air for many yards round reeked with the sweet scent of them.

'Ha ! ha !' said the Sub-Inspector, 'I have you this time. Now which reserve did you steal this out of? Was it Kalakonda or Haidargiri? Speak up.'

Indian cartmen at night are rarely talkative and the driver of the leading cart said nothing at all, but he fumbled in his loin-cloth and produced a screw of pink paper. The Sub-Inspector unscrewed and smoothed it and read in good, neat print—'Dandamukhi Estate. Permit to export Sandalwood.'

'Did this sandalwood come from the samasthanam?' said the Sub-Inspector.

The cartman was a man of few words ; he nodded and held out his hand for the permit. The cart went rumbling on.

That year there were strange portents at Dandamukhi. The palace was whitewashed—the whole of it, not only the front. They did up the temple and repaired the village well. Rameswara and his household went appavelled like zamindars; Rameswara bought himself a motor cycle. The zamindar and his household went appavelled like princes; the zamindar bought himself a Morris-Cowley. Truly sandalwood is a profitable plant and lucky are they on whose estate it grows.

The Divisional Officer said to the Deputy Superintendent of Police that affairs at Dandamukhi seemed to be looking up. The Deputy Superintendent said that as far as he could see they were doing their level best to denude the estate jungles of sandalwood; judging by the quantity that was coming down under estate permit to Kalakonda, the process was not likely to take them very long. The Deputy Collector permitted himself some sage observations on the habitual improvidence of the Indian landowner.

Meanwhile Dandamukhi flourished. They paid off a mortgage. They celebrated the zamindar's birthday by feeding the entire poor of the estate and they fed them in such style that there were five deaths from repletion. The contractors of Kalakonda were almost stunned by an invitation to put in competitive tenders for the repair of the estate irrigation works. The zamindar bought

himself guns and clocks and cameras and silver plate and cut glass and typewriters. To the amazement of the tradesmen he paid for them all. Meanwhile Rameswara, slowly and steadily, bought bank drafts on Rangoon. For there are games, as a wise player knows, that are altogether too good to last.

In the seed-time of the third year there came to Gauthara West a new D.F.O. He was young and enthusiastic and he had a motor-cycle almost as good as Rameswara's and he went about and about and into every corner. He was a young man with neither wife nor child and he loved neither man nor woman but only trees. And of all trees he loved sandal the most, for in sandal he had specialized.

The first time he came south on tour he came no nearer to Dandamukhi than Haidargiri and there he was watched musingly (though he did not know it) by a very well-dressed and prosperous Brahmin whose mouth tightened and whose eyes crinkled as he watched. The D.F.O. went away to his next camp ; but the Brahmin went back to Dandamukhi and told his master the zamindar that he had been offered a very lucrative post in Rangoon and he would take his blessing and go. So the zamindar blessed him—as well he might—and Rameswara went. For to gamble is no doubt good ; but he is the wise player who knows when to leave the table.

The next time the D.F.O. came south he came straight to Dandamukhi and he sat on an inlaid chair in the zamindar's reception room, and he told the zamindar—much as the D.S.P. had told Rameswara—that he wanted his help.

'I want to start some experiments on spike here,' he said, 'and for that purpose I want to make a detailed survey of all the sandal we have. What I want you to do is to let me survey your jungles also. In fact, I'll start with them. Have you any idea how much mature wood you have left?'

The zamindar goggled, his knees knocked, his blood turned to water. He tried to think, he tried to pray, but he could do neither. He would have fled—if he could have risen. He would have wired for Rameswara—if he had known where he was. As it was, he had to say something. What he said, 'all in one piece, was 'Oh-my-god-please-excuse!' Then he broke down.

'And to think of it!' said the D.F.O. afterwards. 'These blighters with not a stick or seed of sandal on their whole estate, issuing permits for stolen stuff out of the Government reserves and pocketing God knows what commission on every ton that went through. Week after week, month after month, year after year. And there must have been hundreds—thousands—that knew

of it all the time and never said a word. My God, what a country !'

Well, of course there was a *cause celebre*, but in the nature of things very little evidence was forthcoming, and the results were negative. An extremely able and expensive vakil got the zamindar off on the ground that he didn't know what he was doing and wasn't responsible. Various departmental subordinates caught it in various ways. Over Rameswara Rangoon closed like the waters of Lethe.

But I can't help thinking that the Viceroy with whom we began would have liked Rameswara. Because if he didn't develop the Natural Resources of Dandamukhi, what did he do? Why, the man even created them.

PETER AND PAUL

THERE may be certain indulgent readers of these pages who remember Melmuri, that delectable station on the Muri Hills of which something has been already written. It is a place which readily exhausts the superlatives of the most prolific writer ; but, as I have been constrained to observe elsewhere, it is also a place where man, as typified by the hill Muria, is more than a little vile. The habits of the Muria like those of the Lord in *The Young Visitors*, are many and various ; but the preponderating balance of them are objectionable.

Melmuri was designed by a merciful Creator as a haven of absolute rest and perfect peace, where those spent in the struggle with less favoured places might take a short breather before going back to their labours. It was meant to be a place where nobody ever did anything or bothered about anything. So it was until Kettle came there. Kettle was the man who devised that fatal thing the Melmuri golf course ; and then insisted on periodically improving it ; and then agitated for

bus services ; and so boomed Melmuri in the public prints that it degenerated into a hill resort. There are Kettles everywhere ; they are estimable fellows in many ways, but suffer from the grave defect that they do not know a good thing when they see it. Hence they cannot let well alone—which is always disastrous.

One day when Kettle had done his uttermost to the golf course and had seen more buses running than the local population could possibly support and had induced several semi-insolvents to buy up land and begin to build houses thereon, he was walking along considering what further mischief might come to his hand. He was walking along that particular road of Melmuri which is called Ghat View and which is joined at one point by a very steep track coming up from the lower-lying region of Kilmuri. There is a proper ghat, of course, but this track cuts off several miles. As he neared the junction Kettle's questing eyes beheld a string of laden hill ponies debouching from the track, each with a Muria in attendance. The ponies were bringing up a varied cargo of bricks, potatoes and paddy. I have said that they were ponies belonging to Murias ; it would be superfluous to add that they were one and all grossly and cruelly over-loaded and as the Muria owners were in attendance it would be still more superfluous to describe the rain of curses and

blows under which they staggered along. Overloading and beating ponies is one of the commonest of Muria habits.

As the string came scrambling up into the road one unfortunate beast about the middle fell heavily, just abreast of the watchful Kettle. Everybody's business was Kettle's business and he went forward to investigate. He observed that the near foreleg of the pony was cut nearly through and bandaged up with some rags of incredible filth. He went through the string of ponies with care; three had cut legs or minor lacerations and no fewer than five had the most grisly back and shoulder galls into which the harsh ropes and the sacking round their loads were rubbing delightfully. Kettle spoke and gesticulated; the Murias watched him sulkily and presently went on. Your Muria is constitutionally unable to realize that a pony has feelings; so long as it is neither dead nor utterly incapable, it is a beast of burden and must carry on. There are others with less excuse who hold somewhat similar tenets.

But Kettle's resolve was made. That day he called a meeting at the Club and inaugurated the Melmuri branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. That is to say, he induced the oldest resident—a retired planter of eighty-nine who was deaf, purblind and nearly senseless—to assume the office of Chairman while he

himself was appointed Secretary. This was his invariable method: it meant that the Melmuri S.P.C.A. became, like most other things in that favoured spot a possession and manifestation of Kettle.

Kettle threw himself heart and soul into the Society—and this was so far to the good in that it kept him from further destroying the golf-course or capering with building-lots. He put into the Society all that devastating energy which had turned Melmuri from a place of peace to a place of turmoil, from a haunt of fairies to a haunt of trippers. The Society—naturally under such a leader—went ahead by leaps and bounds. But Kettle's constant complaint was that he could obtain no co-operation from the local officials.

These last were two. There was a Sub-Magistrate, an elderly Brahmin who would never go further and knew it and who clung desperately to service because, as is not uncommon with elderly Brahmins, he had young children to educate. He was the gentlest, kindest, most soft-hearted (not to say soft-headed) Magistrate who ever sat on a bench. In vain did his superiors deal out to him reprimand, warning and peremptory instruction; nothing could induce him to deliver in any case whatsoever a sentence worthy of the name. Kettle fulminated against him and reported him

every time the Society brought a case into court—but in vain.

The other official against whose apathy Kettle complained was the Sub-Inspector of Police. He also was elderly ; he also had been long in Melmuri—and was like to remain there longer still. He was a Christian named Sebastian and his history was curious. In the early years of his service his wife had run away with a catechist and thereafter he had renounced woman—and indeed all mankind, and devoted himself solely to animals. His house was a menagerie. He had three cats, two dogs and one specimen each of parrot, dove, myna and mongoose. He was known to be passionately fond of animals. He did not like the Sub-Magistrate and had nothing to do with him.

Kettle was sceptical as to his love of beasts. 'It's all humbug,' said Kettle. 'Here's this fellow professing to be a friend to all animals and so on, but if I bring him a case he won't take it up. Says he can't get evidence, or if he does take it up he makes a mess of it. All humbug and hot air, that's what *he* is.'

'If I could get even rudimentary co-operation from these infernal officials,' said Kettle, 'Persecution of dumb animals would cease on the Muri Hills.' But he couldn't.

On the other hand, it was increasingly obvious that the general public as a whole was intensely

interested. When Kettle appeared at your door demanding a subscription for this or that, the simplest thing was to give him money and get rid of him : but subscriptions arrived from well-wishers even beyond the range of Kettle's importunities. It is a good cause, of course, the suppression of cruelty to animals—there is hardly a better ; it appeals to all creeds and all castes and naturally the inhabitants of the Muris came forward to support it. All sorts of odd, unexpected people sent in small sums. And presently there appeared, as the time went on, a most mysterious and intriguing person who sent in a varying contribution on the first of every month. The money came always in small notes in a plain envelope addressed to Kettle in block capitals, and wrapped up in a half sheet of paper on which was written 'from your unknown friend.' Sometimes the envelope was posted at one office, sometimes at another—which Kettle assumed to be a cunning device for deflecting the scent ; but always it reached Kettle on the first of the month. The oddest thing was that the sums varied so widely ; thus the receipts on the firsts of July to December were twenty-two, nineteen, forty-seven, twelve-eight, five and sixty-three. Kettle, for reasons best known to himself, came to the conclusion that some member of the club was devoting his monthly bridge winnings to this purpose ; but the

club bridge book did not bear him out. Besides, no one can win at bridge every month.

Kettle was stumped. The odd monthly variations as well as the odd amounts themselves certainly suggested that some definite fund or income was being handed over ; but it would be a very odd income that would vary so. Besides it was wholly contrary to the habits of the Melmuri residents to hide their light under a bushel in this manner. When it came to giving they liked to give with a trumpet.

Then another matter drove these speculations out of Kettle's head. His hated enemy the Sub-Inspector Sebastian was beginning to play into his hands.

What with the golf-course and house-building and bus-running Kettle came into contact with a good many specimens of the moneyed Muria—who is one of the worst Murias of the lot. And with one accord and single voice these Murias—contractors, cart-men, brick-makers, wood-cutters—began to insinuate to Kettle that Sebastian was taking bribes on a large scale. Kettle, needless to say, was all ears. It was one of his axioms—it is an axiom with a good many foolish people—that all Indian officials took bribes. He made no very detailed enquiry or investigation. He accepted the stories as they were told him and said, 'Now we'll get rid of this slacker at last and

get in a young energetic man who'll push our prosecutions.' He sat down and wrote a long letter to the D.S.P. saying that Sebastian was become incalculably corrupt and that he had witnesses to prove it.

The D.S.P. was never averse to a camp at Melmuri and he decided to make a full-dress enquiry. Sebastian's reputation for honesty had so far been unusually honourable in a land where everyone is always ready to believe the worst ; but one never knows what long seclusion in an out-of-the-way corner may bring about. Possibly Sebastian had gone wrong.

When the hour of the enquiry came, Kettle found—as many another has found before and since—that his cloud of witnesses was somewhat to seek. His Muria friends began with one accord to make excuse ; the contractors had to go down to the plains on urgent business, the cartmen disappeared, the brick-makers were away on the brick-fields and the wood-cutters in the remoter forests. In the end, it came down to a triangular meeting between the D.S.P., Sebastian and Kettle.

Kettle, feeling rather a fool, became flustered. He wanted the D.S.P. to take his bare statement in proof ; the D.S.P. urbanely explained that in the absence of any witnesses this would hardly suffice. They were becoming a little hot and ill-

tempered when the calm voice of Sebastian himself fell on their ears like a cooling douche. He addressed Kettle.

'May I ask a question, Sir?' Kettle acquiesced, with a venomous glance at the D.S.P. who was rather amused.

'Would you say, sir, that cruelty to animals on these hills was increasing or decreasing?'

'Oh, decreasing,' said Kettle. 'Our Society—'

'Has the Society had many successful prosecutions?'

'No, it hasn't!' snapped Kettle 'And you know why.'

'Then how is it, sir, that the cruelty to animals is becoming less?'

Kettle was beginning to say something about moral effect, but the D.S.P. cut him short.

'Let's hear Sebastian,' he said, 'Speak up, Sebastian, I see you know all about it.'

'It is true, your honour,' said Sebastian. 'I myself am responsible. I am very fond of animals, as is well-known, and I was very glad when the Society was started. I was very eager to put up cases. Was I not, sir?'

'You were at first,' said Kettle grudgingly.

'Several cases I put up,' said Sebastian, 'and they all ended in conviction. But our Sub-Magistrate let them all off with fines of eight annas. What is eight annas to so-and-so and

so-and-so?'—he reeled off some half a dozen of Kettle's principal informants. 'Soon I saw it was useless. So after that, when I detected a case, I did not put it up. Instead I went to the man and said, 'Give me money not to put up this case.' Always they gave. I made them give ten times—twenty times—what Ramamurti would have fined them. They paid gladly in order not to be reported to Mr. Kettle who gave them much work.'

The D.S.P. gasped.

'Of all the cool admissions,' he said. 'And what did you do with the money?'

Sebastian smiled and spoke in the patient voice of one used to training animals. He took a little note-book from his pocket.

'In this book, your honour, I have noted down what I received from each man. On the first of every month I sent all to Mr. Kettle as a subscription to the Society. If Mr. Kettle will compare the books he will see that all is in order.'

Kettle gasped. 'So *you* were the unknown friend?' he said.

The D.S.P. burst out laughing. 'Upon my soul, Kettle,' he said, 'you seem to have put your foot in it this time. Your old Society was getting it both ways—suppressing the trouble and pocketing the fines as well. Of course it'll have to stop now. But if only you'd let well alone—'

Kettle's face was a study ; so was Sebastian's.

I hate passing judgments.' But if ever there can be extenuating circumstances in which robbing Peter to pay Paul is justified, I would like to suggest that the case of the M̄elmuri S.P.C.A. might have the benefit of these.

THE GHOST SHIP

THE folk who live on the West Coast of India contend that everything wonderful happens or has happened there, but in this they are wrong. No doubt many wonders have transpired on the Kerala side, but not all; the East Coast has come in for its share. No doubt it was on the West Coast that Rama made his miraculous cast of the axe; but it was on the East Coast that they had the Ghost Ship of Pakkam.

Pakkam is on the East Coast—very much so. It is almost in the middle of it, that is to say, it is not very far from Madras. It is a fishing village with a sea-worn temple and a series of terrible smells; and it is mentioned in the *Gazetteer* because it contains a stone slab with an inscription which the Government Epigraphist once went to see. This stone slab is said to have appeared one wild monsoon day, floating in from the sea, and to have beached with deliberation in an astronomically correct position with regard to the fore-mentioned temple. This has nothing to do with the story; except in so far as that in a place where one miracle has occurred another may perhaps be expected. Looking north from

Pakkam on a clear day you may see the smoke smudges of steamers in the Madras Harbour ; looking south you see nothing on any day except sand, surf, tree-tops and mirage. This again has nothing to do with the story except perhaps that it indicates the loneliness of Pakkam.

Now for the story itself, which goes back to the queer days of the War and the queerer traffickings that then took place. In those days all sorts of odd rigs—barques and barquentines, brigs and brigantines—poked about from one forgotten port to another all up and down that same East Coast, and across the blue bay on which it abuts. Some were very rotten and sank and were heard of no more ; and some were very rotten and became suddenly beautiful with paint and new sails owing to the profitable tradings of these times. It paid then to carry rice and food-stuffs even a little distance from A to B, and salt from B to A ; and, owing to the disturbed condition of the age, it paid still better to pack certain articles in the rice-bags or the salt-bags and carry these also. It was in this manner that the barques and barquentines and brigs and brigantines flourished exceedingly.

Now there was, during the War, one wonderful period when it was possible for weeks on end to buy gold sovereigns in Singapore for a certain sum and sell them in Madras for a good deal more. Such happy epochs cannot last and it was

necessary for those who desired to make hay to make it quickly ; hence all, great and small, were pressed into the service. It is said (but I do not believe it) that the big steamers with mighty names carried their cargo of this kind ; it is said (and I do most certainly believe it) that the barques and the barquentines and the rest of them carried as much of it as they could manage. And amongst those which indulged in this form of easy moneymaking was the brig *Alifa*—owner Mahomed Sultan of Georgetown, Madras and Dock Street, Singapore—which was afterwards to become famous as the Ghost Ship of Pakkam.

The *Alifa* was not in herself a craft either beautiful or well-found ; in fact Mr. Mahomed Sultan had more or less abandoned her to a drowsy old age half-beached in a backwater near Cuddalore. From this pleasant retreat the War called her once more to the risks and perils of the greater deep. Mr. Mahomed Sultan, after an interminable haggle with the contractor, patched and painted her into a semblance of respectability and put her, praying for luck, into the Burma rice trade.

The *Alifa* went on. She should have sunk many times, she might have sunk any time, but in fact she didn't. Then came the time of the sovereigns and Mr. Mahomed Sultan who had a good nose for gold took her as far as Singapore.

Business was brisk and Mr. Mahomed Sultan, being put in touch with the proper quarters, obtained that which he sought. You cannot, however, load even a small brig with nothing but sovereigns and Mr. Mahomed Sultan looked round for a camouflage cargo. He wanted rice but there was no rice to be had at the moment and he was in a hurry to cut sticks and depart. So he loaded up with what he could get, which was a full cargo of inferior oil. And so off again for the Coromandel Coast.

Mr. Mahomed Sultan was a secretive man and believed that what is shared is half lost ; so he did not propose to share. He said nothing to his serang or crew about the sovereigns and he was blissfully convinced that the serang and the crew knew nothing about them. In that, unfortunately, he erred. There was one man on board—a Mussalman named Latif—who somehow (I know not how) discovered the secret. He not only knew there were sovereigns on board but he knew exactly where they were stored. He had among the riff-raff crew two Mussalman friends, Ghammi and Ghouse, and to these he confided his knowledge.

What followed is a tale as old as the treacherous sea. They were beating up to Madras from the south (their usual tack at that season) on a dark, gusty night, the *Alifa* holding together by a series

of miracles. She was rolling and pitching prettily in the cross sea and it was a simple task for Ghammi and Ghouse to put the remaining members of the crew over the side. (There may have been a little opium in the evening *pilau* ; I will not deny it.) Meanwhile Latif descended to the box of a cabin and cut Mahomed Sultan's throat. He then went aft and murdered the serang. Latif, Ghammi and Ghouse then shared out the sovereigns.

So far the tale is so commonplace as to be hardly worth recounting ; but it now becomes more interesting. Ghammi and Ghouse (they sound like a music-hall duo but they were very far from comic characters really) were for navigating the ship to Madras and beaching somewhere about Cassimode ; but Latif had more imagination. He placed in their hands large sharp axes and crowbars and under his able instructions the trio stove in all the oil-casks and rent a hole in the bottom of the '*Alifa*' big enough to take through all three of them together. They then, not without panic, dropped into the dinghy, cut the painter and pulled in the direction of the Madras Coast.

Grey morning dawned at Pakkam and one Periannan, a fisherman, came down to the beach. It was still half-dusk and drizzling and there was a sea fog so thick as to blanket everything more

than a few hundred yards from the shore. Out of this fog Periannan saw emerging and rushing on the shore as fast as a monsoon sea could carry it, not a miraculous stone slab but a small ship's boat containing three men. While he watched, the boat tackled the first of the breakers, came through it, hit the second, shot into the air, turned completely over and vanished in a smother of foam. Periannan, a phlegmatic individual, had seen this sort of thing happen before and took no great interest; apparently the crew of the boat were also accustomed to the work, for they clung on to their upturned vessel as if it had been a catamaran and came through the surf at speed. Presently they were walking up the beach to where Periannan waited; he observed that they were three Mussalmans.

'We are the survivors of the brig *'Alifa,*' said the tallest (in point of fact it was Latif), 'God's curse upon the owner of that same. Because he was too mean to keep her in repair she sank in the sea last night and many good men are drowned.'

'And I,' said Ghouse, corroborating, 'have lost several brass pots, a praying-rug and two complete outfits of clothes.'

'I too,' said Ghammi. "What hope have the poor, brothers, in a world like this?"

Now it has been enjoined on Pakkam ever since

the stone slab came miraculously to land that whatsoever the sea should send in to her, that she must take and cherish. Periannan was aware of this and in any case your fishing villagers are hospitable souls. He sat down Latif, Ghammi and Ghouse in a comfortable spot on the beach and ran to call his friends. They came in large numbers bearing fruits and eatables; the headman of the village came and constituted a panchayat; the women and children came and formed a semi-circle at a respectful distance. And Latif, Ghammi and Ghouse sat there and ate and drank and repeated time and again the story of the loss of the *Alifa* and the dastardly meanness of Mahomed Sultan.

'Will you swear that this is truth?' said the headman at last.

'I swear it to be true' said Latif, feeling the while the cold wad of sovereigns in his cloth.

'Will you swear it on the Stone of Pakkam?' said the headman, adding half-apologetically, 'It is our custom here.'

'On the Stone of Pakkam,' said Latif, 'I swear it.'

Now miracles are miracles and you know no more about them than I do: but the facts are these. As Latif said the words 'the Stone of Pakkam' there came a blast of wind from the south, the fog lifted like a lid and there, riding

comfortably on the billows not a quarter of a mile to seaward and slipping nearer with every lift and roll, was the brig *Alifa*—she that had a hole in her bottom big enough to take three well-grown men ! Her sails fluttered in rags, her yards slapped hither and yon but she sailed, as the stone slab itself, straight on Pakkam.

Said Periannan, stolid soul, 'There is a ship out there' ; and gaped at it. But the headman's eyes were quicker.

'It is not only a ship', said he. 'It is the *Alifa* of Mahomed Sultan. I have seen her a thousand times and I know her well. What evil is this?'

'It is the *Alifa*,' said one and then another ; and a third. 'And he said she had sunk to the bottom of the sea. What lies !'

At that the inevitable happened. Ghouse, weak vessel, tore a packet of sovereigns from his waist, threw them on the sand and fell prone beside them, shrieking polyglot prayers. Ghammi stuck to his sovereigns but grovelled at the headman's feet gasping incoherencies about devils. Latif, as befitted a leader, showed better spirit : he knocked down the headman with one hand and Periannan with the other and legged it for the casuarina tope behind the village. He might have got there but for that respectful semi-circle of women and children ; they were too slow to get out of his way

and he tripped over a naked brat and fell. He became entangled somehow in a sari ; shrieks rose to heaven ; and next minute the headman was straddling on his back and beating him on the head with a piece of driftwood.

They tied up Latif, Ghammi and Ghouse to pillars of the *mantapam* and when they saw that God in his own time would bring them the *Alifa* without labour on their part, they sat down on the beach and waited. The fog came down again and the drizzle thickened, the winds drew and veered and the rollers thundered home in ceaseless agony ; but about three in the afternoon the *Alifa* came comfortably through them all, and the waters around her were stilled as she came. And that was not a miracle, but simply because she floated—as she had floated all night—in a great bath, basin or dry-dock of inferior oil which the folly of Latif and his friends had let loose all round her. Yea at three in the afternoon, or it may have been four, the *Alifa* beached unharmed at Pakkam—quite likely (though I have not heard it said) in a correct astronomical position with reference to the Stone.

And then, of course, there was a rush to go on board and *then* it was indeed all over with Latiff, Ghammi, and Ghouse. For they had been careless, as murderers will ; the living crew they had cast overboard but the dead Mahomed Sultan with

his throat cut and the dead serang with his head stove in they had not cast overboard ; and these still lay in their respective places, rolling and jiggling as the breakers heaved the ship. And it was as if they looked up into the faces of the people of Pakkam and cried for vengeance.

And that is the true and authentic story of the Ghost Ship of Pakkam and how the *Alifa* and her owner, both of them being dead, came questioning on the track of their murderers. Now some have said that the *Alifa* came through the surf with the speed of a motor car and that Mahomed Sultan stood in the bows and the serang stood steering at the helm ; and others that she came flying through the air : but I do not say these things, which may not have happened, but recount merely those which are supported by credible evidence and by statistics and dynamics and by chemical causes. They are miracle enough for me.

Also they tell of a new miracle ; how that one day when the *Alifa* had a good deal broken up but was still kept and cherished at Pakkam (as was laid upon these people from the days of the Stone), the headman's grandson was playing in her when he found a store of sovereigns of which Latif and his friends had never known. And with these sovereigns the headman restored the temple and set up a cement platform for the Stone which formerly was always apt to become buried in the

sand. This also, I do not myself tell because I do not wholly believe it. Not that the headman had not a grandson, not that the temple has not been restored, and a cement platform constructed ; but rather that I think these sovereigns were taken off Latif, Ghouse and Ghammi. For only a few were recovered from them by the Police : and who knows how many they brought on shore ?

ENVOI

Mother India, ere the Sphinx
To the Pyramids was mated,
Thou wast waiting here, methinks,
With thy riddle set and stated.

Ere the seventy schools arose
In confusion worse confounded,
Thou thought'st fit thy lips to close
On thy secret there impounded.

Hard as famine, grim as crime,
Tireless as a devil-dancer,
Thou hast sat and questioned Time;
Time has never found the answer

To thy riddles black as night,
Thick as sand and long as sorrow:
Shall I guess them then aright—
I the child of young to-morrow?

Take the worst conundrums known
Since this world began revolving,
Add what'er hath Science shown
Hopeless and beyond all solving:

Multiply the mass by three,
Mix their heads and tails and middles—
We shall have a glimpse of Thee,
Mother India asking riddles;
Riddles, riddles, riddles, riddles,
Quite unanswerable riddles,
Unto all eternity.

* * * *

P.S.—

Thou hast asked a few of me,
Wherefore praised may Heaven be;
Though my wits they overtasked,
Thank the Lord I heard them asked!