

The BRONZE BELL

BY LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE
AUTHOR OF "THE BRASS BOWL" ETC.
ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS

SYNOPSIS.

David Amber, starting for a duck-shooting visit with his friend, Quain, comes upon a young lady equestrian who has been dismounted by her horse becoming frightened at the sudden appearance in the road of a burly Hindu. He declares he is Maharajah Lal Chatterji. The appointed mouthpiece of the Hindu, addresses Amber as a man of high rank and presents a mysterious little bronze bell. "The token," says the Hindu, "disappears in the woods. The girl calls Amber by name. In turn addresses her as Miss Sophie Parrell, daughter of Col. Parrell of the British diplomatic service in India and visiting the Quains. Several nights later the Quain home is surrounded and the bronze bell stolen. Amber and Quain go hunting on an island, disappear, and Amber is left marooned. He wanders about, finally reaches a cabin and recognizes as his occupant an old friend named Rutton, whom he last met in England, and who appears to be in hiding. When Miss Parrell is mentioned Rutton is strangely agitated. Chatterji appears and announces Rutton is a meeting in a mysterious place. Rutton sends a revolver and dashes after Chatterji. He returns wildly excited, says he has killed the Hindu, taken poison, and when dying asks Amber to go to India on a mysterious errand. Amber decides to leave at once for India. On the way he sends a letter to Mr. Labertouche, a scientific friend in Calcutta, by a quicker route. Upon arriving he finds a note awaiting him. It directs Amber to meet his friend at a certain place. The latter tells him to know his mission is to get Miss Parrell out of the occult and attempt to discover the Token to a money-lender. It is mistaken. A Russian agent escapes being mobbed. A message from Labertouche causes him to start for Darjeeling.

CHAPTER XI. (Continued.)

"Ah, that voice!" cried Amber in exasperation. "I grow weary of the word, Ram Nath."
"That may well be," returned the man, imperiously. "None the less it were well for you to have a care how you fondle the revolver in your pocket, sahib. Should it by chance go off and the bullet find lodgment in your tonga-wallah, you are like to hear more of that voice, and from less friendly lips."

"I think you have eyes in the back of your head, Ram Nath," Amber withdrew his hand from his coat-pocket and laughed shortly as he spoke.
"There is a saying in this country, sahib, that even the stones in the desert have ears to hear and eyes to see and tongues withal to tell what they have seen and heard."
"Ah-h! . . . That is a wise saying, Ram Nath."
"There be those I could name who would do well to lay that saying to heart, sahib."
"You are right, indeed. . . . Now if there are eight of truth in that saying, and if one were unwisely to speak a certain name, even here—"

"The echo of that name might be heard beyond the threshold of a certain Gateway, sahib."
Amber grunted and said no more, contented now with the assurance that he was in truth in touch with Labertouche, that this Ram Nath was an employee of the I. S. S. The wink was now explained away with all the rest of the tonga-wallah's churlishness.
As the tonga swiftly lessened the distance, his gaze, penetrating the thinning folds, discerned the contours of a cotton-wain drawn by twin stunted bullocks, patient noses to the ground, tails a-switch. Beside his cattle the driver plodded, god in hand, a naked sword upon his hip.

Deliberately enough the carter swung his benches aside to make way for the tonga, lest by undue haste he should make himself seem other than what he was—a free man and a Rajput. But when his fierce, hawk-like eyes encountered those of the dak traveler, his attitude changed abruptly and completely. Recognition and reverence fought with surprise in his expression, and as Ram Nath swung the tonga past the man saluted profoundly. His voice, as he rose, came after them, resonant and clear:
"Hail, thou Chosen of the Gateway! Hail!"

Amber neither turned to look nor replied. But his frown deepened. The incident passed into his history, marked only by the terse comment it added from Ram Nath—words which were flung curtly over the tonga-wallah's shoulder: "Eyes to see and ears to hear and a tongue withal . . . sahib!"
The Virginian said nothing. But it was in his mind that he had indeed thrust his head into the lion's mouth by thus adventuring into the territory which every instinct of caution and common-sense proclaimed taboo to him—the erstwhile kingdom of the Maharaja Har Dyal Rutton.

CHAPTER XII.

The Long Day.

One travels dak by rails casually disposed along the route at the whim of the native contractor. Between Badshah Junction and Kuttarpur there were ten stages, of which the conclusion of the first was at hand—Amber having all but abandoned belief in its existence.
Slamming recklessly down the bed of an ancient water course, the tonga spun suddenly upon one wheel round a shoulder of the banks and dashed out upon a rolling plain, across which the trail snaked up over farther hills that lay dim and low, a wavy line of blue, upon the horizon—the hills in whose heart Kuttarpur itself lay oc-

cult. And, by the roadside, in a compound fenced with camel-thorn, sat an aged and indigent dak-bungalow, marking the end of the first stage, the beginning of the second.
Ram Nath reined in with a flourish and lifted a raucous voice, hailing the eyes, while Amber, painfully disengaging his cramped limbs, climbed down and stumbled toward the veranda. The abrupt transition from violent and erratic motion to a solid and substantial footing affected him unpleasantly, and with an undeniable qualm; the earth seemed to rock and flow beneath him as if under the influence of an antic earthquake. He was for some seconds occupied with the problem of regaining his poise, and it was not until he heard an Englishman's voice uplifted in accents of anger, that he remembered the other wayfarer with whom he was to share his tonga, or associated with the white-clad figure in the dark doorway of the bungalow with anything but the khamansah, coming to greet and cheat the chance-brought guest.
"Where is that tonga-wallah who deserted me here last night?" the woman was demanding of Ram Nath, too preoccupied with her resentment and removed his pith helmet and stood staring as if he had come from a land in which there were no women.
"Where," she continued, with an imperative stamp of a daintily-shod foot, "is that wretched tonga-wallah?"

"Sahiba," protested Ram Nath, with a great show of deference, "how should I know? Belike he is in Badshah Junction, whether he returned very late last night, being travel-worn and weary, and where I left him, being sent with this excellent tonga to take his place."
"You were? And why have I been detained here, alone and unprotected, this long night? Simply because that other tonga-wallah was a fool, am I to be imposed upon in this fashion?"

"What am I," whimpered Ram Nath, "to endure the wrath of the sahib for a fault that is none of mine?"
"I beg your pardon, sir," said the girl, turning to Amber, "but it is very annoying." She looked him over, first with abstraction, then with a puzzled gathering of her brows, for he was far from her thoughts—the last person she would have expected to meet in that place, and very especially, disguised in dark and dirt besides. "The tire came off of the wheel just as we got here, late yesterday evening, and in trying, or pretending to try, to fit it on again, that block-head of a tonga-wallah hammered the rim with a rock as big as his head and naturally smashed it to kindling-wood. Then, before I could stop him, he flung himself on the back of a pony and went away, saying that it was the will of God that he should return to Badshah for a better tonga. Since when I have had for company one stable-eyed, one deaf-and-dumb patriarch of a khamansah and . . . the usual dak-bungalow discomforts—insects, bad food, and a terrible fear of dacoits."

"I am so sorry, Miss Farrell," Amber put in. "If I had only been here . . ."
The girl gave a little gasp and sat down abruptly in one of the veranda chairs, thereby threatening it with instant demolition and herself with a bad spill; for the chair was feeble with the burden of its many years, and she was a quite substantial young person. Indeed, so loudly did it creak and protest and a warning that she immediately arose in alarm.
"Mr. Amber," she said; and, "Well . . ."
"You'll forgive me the surprise?" he begged, going up on the veranda to her. "I myself had no hope of finding you here."
"But," she protested, with a pretty flush of color—"but I left you in the States such a little while ago!"
"Yes?" he said gravely. "It seems so long to me. . . . And when you had gone, Long Island was a very lonely place indeed," he added, with calculated impudence.
Her color deepened and she sought another chair, seating herself with gingerly decision. "I'm sure you followed me half round the world!"
"Why not?" He brought another chair to face her. "Besides, I haven't seen anything of . . . India for a good many years."
"Mr. Amber!"
"Ma'am?" he countered with affected humility.
"You're spolling it all. I was so glad to see you—I'd have been glad to see any white man, of course—"

"Much obliged, I'm sure."
"And now you're actually flirting with me—or pretending to?"
"I'm not," he declared soberly. "As a matter of solemn fact, I had to come to India."
"You had to?"
"On a matter of serious business. Please don't ask me what, just yet; but it's very serious, to my way of thinking. This happy incident—I count myself a very happy man to have been so fortunate—only makes my errand the more pleasant."
She regarded him intently, chin in hand, her brown eyes sedate with

speculation, for some time. "I believe you're been speaking in parables," she asserted, at length. "If I'm unjust, bear with me; appearances are against you. There isn't any reason I know of why you shouldn't tell me what brought you here—"

"There's every reason, in point of fact," Miss Farrell; only . . . I can't explain just now."
"Very well," she agreed briskly; "let's be content with that. I am glad to see you again, truly; and—were to travel on to Kuttarpur in the same tonga?"
"If you'll permit—"

"After what I've endured, this awful night, I wouldn't willingly let you out of my sight."
"Or any other white man?"
She laughed, pleased. "I presume you're wondering what I'm doing here?"
"You were to join your father in Darjeeling, I believe?" he countered, cautious.
"Just I found he'd been transferred unexpectedly to Kuttarpur. So, of course, I had to follow. I telegraphed him day before yesterday when I was to arrive at Badshah Junction, and naturally expected he'd come in person or have some one meet me, but I presume the message must have gone astray. At all events there was no one there for me and I had to come on alone. It's hardly been a pleasant experience, that incompetent tonga-wallah behaved precisely as though he had deliberately made up his mind to delay me. . . . And the tonga's nearly ready; I must lock my kit-bag."

She went into the bungalow, leaving him thoughtful for perhaps. . . . But the back of Ram Nath, as that worthy bustled himself superintending the harnessing in of fresh ponies, conveyed to him no support of Ms half-credited hypothesis that this "accident" had been carefully planned by Labertouche for Amber's especial benefit.
The girl joined him on the veranda in due course, very demure and

since him down with jar after, and fell like himself for the first time in five days when, shaved and dressed, he returned to the common living room of the resthouse.
The girl kept him waiting but a little while. Lacking the attentions of an ayah, she had probably been unable to bathe so extensively as he, but eventually she appeared in an immeasurably more happy state of body and mind, calling up to him the smile, stronger than any other, of a tall, fair lily after a morning shower. And she was in a bewitching humor, one that ingeniously enough succeeded in entangling him more thoroughly than ever before in the web of her fascinations. Over an execrable curry of stringy fowl and questionable rice, asked out with tea and tinned delicacies of their own, their chatter, at the beginning sufficiently gay and inconsequent, drifted by imperceptible and unsuspected gradations perilously close to the shoals of intimacy. And subsequently, when they had packed themselves back into the narrow tonga seat and again were being bounced and jugged breathlessly over shocking roads, the exchange of confidences continued with unabated interest.
For all the taint upon her pedigree, she proved herself to Amber at heart a simple, lonely Englishwoman—a stranger in a sullen and suspicious land, desiring nothing better than to return to the England she had seen and learned to love, the England of ample lawns, of box-hedges, and lanes, of traveled highways, pavements, and gaslights, of shops and theaters, of home and family ties . . .

but India she knew. "I sometimes fancy," she told him with the conscious laugh that depreciates a confessed superstition, "that I must have lived here in some past incarnation." She paused, but he did not speak. "Do you believe in reincarnation?"
Again he had no answer for her, though temporarily he saw the daylight as darkness. "It's hard to live

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cause I didn't clap and shout that she rebuked me, a frown wrinkling her pretty brow.
"Why don't you applaud this masterpiece?" she said.
"Masterpiece?" said I, and I laughed sarcastically. "Masterpiece? Oh, dear."
"Don't you like this music?" she demanded, in amazement.
"No," said I. "It's the work of an amateur."
"You know nothing of art," she cried, "or you wouldn't talk like that!"

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Marjorie—Gracious, I hope not! Why, I accepted him.—Lippincott's.

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Fuccini Was Well Galled

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"One of my strangest musical reminiscences," he said, "relates to Milan. Visiting Milan on a rainy winter day, I dined in the arcade near the cathedral, and then I strolled, cigar in mouth, in the direction of La Scala. Lo and behold, my own opera of Tosca was billed at La Scala for that evening, so, of course, I couldn't resist a stall.
"La Tosca was received warmly by a crowded house. The applause was almost frantic. In fact, a young lady seated on my left got so annoyed be-

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"That's a nice little game you played on that girl in not showing up at the church when you were to be married to her."
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Fuccini Was Well Galled

How the Famous Composer Came to Be Quoted as Attacking His Own Opera of Tosca.

Sig. Fuccini, the composer of The Girl in the Golden West, was responding in excellent French to a toast on music.
"One of my strangest musical reminiscences," he said, "relates to Milan. Visiting Milan on a rainy winter day, I dined in the arcade near the cathedral, and then I strolled, cigar in mouth, in the direction of La Scala. Lo and behold, my own opera of Tosca was billed at La Scala for that evening, so, of course, I couldn't resist a stall.
"La Tosca was received warmly by a crowded house. The applause was almost frantic. In fact, a young lady seated on my left got so annoyed