THE EBB-TIDE.

A Trio and Quartette.

By

Robert Louis Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne,

Authors of "The Wrecker," "The Wrong Box," &c.

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"There is a Tide in the Affairs of Men."

Concluded.

PART II.

The Quartette.

CHAPTER XI.

DAVID AND GOLIAH.

A shock of repulsion struck and shook the Captain; a scream rose almost to his lips; had he uttered it he might have cast himself at the same moment on the debile body of Huish, might have picked him up and flung him down, and wiped the cabin with him in a frenzy of cruelty that seemed half moral. But the moment passed, and the abortive crisis left the man weaker. The snakes were so high: the pearls on the one; hand, starvation and shame on the other. Ten years of pearls! The imagination of Davis translated them into a new, glorified existence for himself and his family. The seat of this new life must be in London; there were deadly reasons against Portland, Me.; and the pictures that came to him were of English manners. He saw his boys marching in the procession of a school, with gowns on, an usher marshalling them and reading, as he walked, in a great book. He was installed in a villa, semi-detached; the name Rosemore on the gate posts. In a chair on the gravel walk, he seemed to sit smoking a cigar, a blue ribbon in his buttonhole, victor over himself, and circumstances, and the malignity of bankers. He saw the parlor with red curtains and shells on the mantelpiece and with the fine inconsistency of visions, mixed a grog at the mahogany table ere he turned in. With that the Farallone gave one of the aimless and nameless movements which, even in an anchored ship and even in the most profound calm, remind one of the mobility of fluids and he was back again under the cover of the house, the fierce daylight besieging it all round and glaring in the chinks, and the clerk, in an airy attitude, awaiting his decision.

He began to walk again. He aspired after the realization of these dreams, like a horse neighing for water; the lust of them burned in his inside. And the only obstacle was Attwater, who had insulted him from the first. He gave Herrick a full share of the pearls he insisted on it; Huish opposed him, and he trod the opposition down and praised himself exceedingly. He was not going to use vitriol himself; was he Huish's keeper? It was a pity he had asked, but after all! . . . he saw the boys again in the school procession, with the gowns he had thought to be so "tony" long since. . . . And at the same time the incomparable shame of the last evening blazed up in his mind.

"Have it your own way," he says hoarsely.

"Oh, I knew you would walk up," said Huish. "Now for the letter. There's paper, pens, and ink. Sit down and I'll dictate."

The Captain took a seat and the pen, looked a while helplessly at the paper, then at Huish. The swing had gone the other way; there was a blur upon his eyes. "It's a dreadful business," he said, with a strong twitch of his shoulders.

"It's rather a start, no doubt," said Huish. "Take a dip of ink. That's it. William John Hatwater, Esq.—Sir:" he dictated.

"How do you know his name is William John?" asked Davis.

"Saw it on a packing case," said Huish. "Got that.?"

"No," said Davis. "But there's another thing. What are we to write?"

"O, my golly!" cried the exasperated Huish. "Wot kind of man do you call yourself? I'm goin' to tell you wot to write; that's my pitch; if you'll just be so bloomin' condescendin' as to write it down! William John Attwater, Esq. Sir:" he reiterated. And the Captain at last beginning half mechanically to move his pen, the letter proceeded: "It is with feelin's of shyme and 'artfelt contrition that I approach you after the yumilitatin' events of last night. Our Mr. 'Errick has left the ship, and will have doubtless communicated to you the nature of our 'opes. Needless to s'y, these are no longer possible. Fate 'as declyred against us, and we bow the 'ead. Well awyre as I am of the just anger in 'im with which I am regarded, I do not venture to solicit the fyvour of an interview for myself; but in order to put an end to a situyation w'ich must be equally pynful to all, I 'ave deputed my friend and partner, Mr. J. L. Huish, to fly before you my proposals, and w'ich, by their moderyshun, will, I trust, be found to merit your attention. Mr. L. Huish is entirely unarmed. I swear to Gawd, and will 'old 'is 'ands over 'is 'ead from the moment he begins to approach you. I am your r'spectful servant, John Davis."

Huish read the letter with the innocent joy of amateurs, chuckled gustfully to himself, and reopened it more than once after it was folded, to repeat the pleasure. Davis meanwhile sitting inert and heavily frowning.

Of a sudden he rose: he seemed all abroad. "No," he cried. "No, it can't be! It's too much; it's damnation. God would never forgive it."

"Well, and oo wants him to?" returned Huish, shrill with fury. "You were damned years ago for the Sea Rynger, and said so yourself. Well, then, be damned for something else and 'old your tongue."

The Captain looked at him mistily. "No," he pleaded; "no, old man, don't do it."

"'Ere now," said Huish. "I'll give you my ultimytum. Good s'y w'ere you are: I don't mind. I'm goin' to see that man and chuck this vitriol in his eyes. If you s'y I'll go alone; the niggers will likely knock me on the 'ead, and a fat lot you'll be the better! But there's one thing sure: I'll 'ear no more of your moonin', mully grubbin rot, and tyke it s'ryte."

The Captain rose like a man in a gulp. Memory, with phantom voices, repeated in his ears something similar, something he had once said to Herrick—years ago it seemed.

"Now gimme over your pistol," said Huish. "I'ave to see all clear. Six shots, and mind you don't wyste them."

The Captain, like a man in a nightmare, laid down his revolver on the table, and Huish wiped the cartridges and oiled the works.

It was close on noon, there was no breath of wind, and the heat was scarce bearable, when the two men came on deck, had the boat manned, and passed above overhead another into the stern sheets. A white shirt at the end of an oar served as a flag of truce; and the men, by direction, and to give it the better chance to be observed, pulled with extreme slowness. The isle shook before them like a place incandescent; on the face of the lagoon blinding copper suns, no bigger than sixpences, danced and stabbed them in the eyeball; there went up from sand and sea, and even from the boat, a glare of scathing brightness, and, as they could only peer abroad from between closed lashes, the excess of light seemed to be changed into a sinister darkness, comparable to that of a thundercloud before it bursts.

The Captain had come upon this errand for any one of a dozen reasons, the last of which was dealer for its success. Superstition rules all men; semi-civilized and green native like that of Davis it rules utterly. For murder he had been prepared; but the horror of the medicine in the bottle went beyond him, and he seemed to himself to be parting the last strands that united him to God. The boat carried him on to reprobation, to damnation; and he suffered himself to be carried passively consenting, silently bidding farewell to his better self and his hopes.

Huish sat by his side in towering spirits that were not wholly genuine. Perhaps as brave a man as ever lived, brave as a weasel, he must still reassure himself with the tones of his own voice; he must play his part to exaggeration, he must out-Herod Herod, insult all that was respectable, and brave all that was formidable, in a kind of desperate wager with himself. So the young soldier may jest as he goes into the breach, and the hatter and highwaymen bleaspheme on the scaffold.

Golly, but it's 'ot," said he. "Cruel 'ot, I call it. Nice d'y to get your gruel in! I s'y, you know, it must feel awf'ly peculiar to not boiled over on a d'y like this. I'd rather have it on a cowld and frusty morning, would'nt you? (Singing) 'Ere we go round the mulberry bush on a cowld and frusty mornin'. (Spoken) Give you my word I'aven't thought o' that in ten year; used to sing it at a blyfast school in Hackney: 'Ackney Wick, it was. (Singing) This is the way the tiger does, the tiger does. (Spoken) Bloomin' 'unbugs, we are you off now, for the motion of a future style? Do you cotton to the tea-fight view, or the old red-'ot Bogyer business?"

"Oh, dry up," said the Captain.

"No, but I want to know," said Huish. "It's within the s'ope of practical politics for you and me, my boy; we may both be bowled over, one up, t'other down, within the next ten minutes. It would be rather a lark, now, if you only slipped across, came up smilin' on t'other s'd e and a hangel met you with a fl ame s under his wing. 'Lilo,' you'd s'y: 'Come! I tyke this kind.'"

The Captain groaned. While Huish was thus airing and exercising his bravado, the man at his side was actually engaged in prayer. Prayer, what for? God knows. But out of his inconsistent, illogical, and agitated spirit a stream of supplication was poured, inartificial as himself, earnest as death and judgment.

"Thou, Gawd, seest me," continued Huish. "I remember I had that written in my Bible. I remember the Bible, too, all about Abinadab and parties. Well, Gawd," said he, apostrophizing the meridian, "you're goin' to see a rum start presently, I promise you that."

The Captain bounded.

"I'll have no blasphemy!" he cried, "no blasphemy in my boat."

"All right, can," said Huish. "Anythink to oblige. Any other topic you would like to sing-geon, the ryne grape, the lightnin' rod, Shykespeare, or the musical glasses? 'Ere's conversyshun on top. Put a penny in the slot, and ——'allo! 'ere they are!" he cried. "Now or never! is 'e goin' to shoot?"

And the little man straightened himself into an alert and dashing attitude, and looked steadily at the enemy.

But the Captain rose half up in the boat with eyes protruding.

"What's that?" he cried.

"Wot's wot?" said Huish.

"Those — blamed things," said the Captain.

And indeed it was something strange. Herrick and Attwater, both armed with Winchesters, had appeared out of the grove behind the figurehead; and to either hand of them, the sun glistened upon two metallic objects, locomotory, like men, and occurying in the economy of these creatures the places of heads—only the heads were faceless. To Davis, hit between wind and water, his mythology appeared to have come alive, and Tophet to be vomiting demons. But Huish was not mystified a moment.

"Divers" 'elmets," you ninny. "Can't you see?" he said.

"So they are," said Davis with a gasp.

"And why? O, I see, it's for armor."

"Wot did I tell you?" said Huish. "Dyvid and Goliar all the w'y and back."

The two natives (for they it was that were equipped in this unusual panoply of war) spread out to right and left and at last lay down in the shade, on the extreme flank of the position. Even now that the mystery was explained, Davis was hatefully preoccupied, stared at the flame on their crests, and forgot, and then remembered, the explanation.

Attwater withdrew again into the grove, and Herrick, with his gun under his arm, came down the pier alone. About half way down he hailed and hailed the boat.

"What do you want?" he cried.

"I'll tell that to Mr. Attwater," replied Huish, stepping briskly on the ladder. "I don't tell it to you, because you plyed the trucklin' sneak. Here's a letter for him; tyke it and give it, and be 'anged to you!"

"Davis, is this all right?" said Herrick.

Davis raised his chin, glanced swiftly at Herrick and away again, and held his peace. The glance was charged with some deep emotion, but whether of hatred or fear it was beyond Herrick to divine.

"Well," he said. "I'll give the letter." He drew a score with his foot on the boards of the gangway. "Till I bring the answer, don't move a step past this."

And he returned to where Attwater leaned against a tree and gave him the letter. Attwater glanced it through.

"What does that mean?" he asked, passing it to Herrick. "Treachery?"

"Oh, I suppose so," said Herrick.

"Well, I'm ready for anything," said Attwater. "One isn't a fatalist for nothing. Tell him to come on and look out."

Herrick returned to the figurehead. Half way down the pier the clerk was waiting, with Davis by his side.

"You are to come along, Huish," said Herrick. "He bids you look out, no tricks."

Huish walked briskly up the pier and paused face to face with the young man.

"Were is 'e?" said he, and, to Herrick's surprise, the low-bred, insignificant face before him flushed crimson and went white again.

"Right for you, Davis," said Herrick, pointing. "Now your hands above your head."

The clerk turned away from him and toward the figurehead as though he were about to address to it his devotions. He was seen to heave a deep breath, and raised his arms. In common with many men of his unhappy physical endowment, Huish's hands were disproportionately long and broad, and the palms in particular enormous; a four-ounce jar was was nothing in that capacious fist. The next moment he was plodding steadily forward on his mission.

Herrick's first followed. Then a noise in his rear startled him, and he turned about to find Davis already advanced as far as the figurehead. He came crouching and open-mouthed as the mesmerized may follow the mesmerizer, all human considerations and even the care of his own life swallowed up in one absorbing and unnatural curiosity.

"Halt!" cried Herrick, covering him with his rifle. "Davis, what are you doing, man? You are not to come."

Davis instinctively paused, and regarded him with a dreadful vacancy of eye.

"Put that back, and off the figurehead, do you hear me? and stand fast!" said Herrick.

The Captain fetched a breath, stepped back against the figurehead and instantly redirected his glances after Huish.

There was a hollow place of the sand in that part, and as if were a glade among the cocoa palms, on which the Tropic Sunday sun blazed intolerably. At the far end, in the shadow, the tall figure of Attwater was to be seen leaning on a tree. Toward him, with his hands over his head, and his steps smothered in the sand, the clerk painfully waded. The surrounding circle was hushed and intensified the man's smallness; it seemed no less perilous an enterprise, this that he was gone upon, than for a whelp to besiege a citadel.

"There, Mr. Whish. That will do," cried Attwater. "From that distance, and keeping your hands up, you're a good boy, you can put me in possession of the skipper's views."

The interval betwixt them was perhaps forty feet, and Huish measured it with his eye and breathed a curse. He was already distressed with laboring in the loose sand, and his arms ached bitterly from their unnatural position. A qualm of sickness came upon him; the jar was ready, and his heart thrilled and his voice choked as he began to speak.

"Mr. Hattwater," said he, "I don't know if ever you 'ad a mother. . . . . "

"I can set your mind at rest; I had," returned Attwater. "Henceforth, if I might venture to suggest it, her name need not occur in our communications. I should perhaps tell you that I am not amenable to the pathetic."

"I am sorry, sir, if I 'ave seemed to trespasse on your private feelin's," said the clerk, cringing and stealing a step. "At least, sir, you will never persuade me that you are not a perfect gentleman, and treyte me as a gentleman when I see 'im; and as such I 'ave no 'esitation in throwin' myself on your merciful consideration. It is 'ard lines, no doubt; it's 'ard lines to 'ave to hown yourself beat; it's 'ard lines to 'ave to come and beg to you for charity."

"Then, if things had gone right, the whole place was as good as your own," suggested Attwater. "I can understand the feeling."

"You are judging me, Mr. Attwater," said the clerk, "and Gawd knows how unjustly. Then Gawd seest me, 'was the 'ex' I 'ad in my Bible, w'ich my father wrote it in with 'is own 'and upon the fly leaft."

"I am sorry, I have to beg your pardon once more," said Attwater; "but, do you know, you seem to me to be a trifle nearer, which is entirely due to the potato trap. And I would venture to suggest that you take one, two, three steps back, and stay there."

The devil, at this staggering disappointment, looked out of Huish's face, and Attwater was swift to suspect. He frowned, he stared on the little man, and considered. Why should he be creeping nearer? The next moment the gun was at his shoulder.

"Kindly oblige me by opening your hands. Open your hands wide; let me see the fingers spread, you dog. Throw down that thing you're holding," he roared, his rage and certitude increasing together.

And then, at almost the same moment, the indomitable Huish decided to throw, and Attwater pulled the trigger. There was scarce the difference of a second between the two resolves, but it was in favor of the man with the rifle; and the jar had not yet left the clerk's hand before the ball shattered both. For the twinkling of an eye the wretch was in hell's agonies, bathed in liquid flames, a screaming sodiamite; and then a second and the more merciful bullet stretched him dead.

The whole thing was come and gone in a breath. Before Herrick could turn about, before Davis could commute his cry of horror, the clerk lay in the sand, spewing and convulsed, but beyond sin or suffering.

Attwater ran to the body; he stooped and viewed it; he put his finger in the vitriol, and his face whitened and hardened with anger.

Davis had not moved; he stood astonished with his back to the figurehead, his hands clutching it behind him, his body inclined forward. Attwater turned deliberately and covered him with his rifle.

"Davis," he cried, in a voice like a trumpet. "I give you sixty seconds to make your peace with God."

Davis looked, and his mind awoke. He did not dream of self-defence, he did not reach for his pistol. He drew himself up instead to face death, with a quivering nostril.

"I guess I'll not trouble the Old Man," he said, speaking with a drawl. "I was on; I guess it's better business to just shut my face."

Attwater fired; there came a spasmodic movement of the victim, and immediately above the middle of his forehead a black hole marred the whiteness of the figurehead. A dreadful pause; then again the report, and the solid sound and jet of the bullet in the wood; and this time the Captain had felt the wind of it along his cheek. A third shot, and he was bleeding from one ear, and along the levelled rifle Attwater smiled like a red Indian.

The cruel game of which he was the puppet was now clear to Davis; three times he had drunk of death and he must look to drink of it seven times more before he was despatched. He held up his hand.

"Steady!" he cried. "I'll take your sixty seconds."

"Good," said Attwater.

The Captain shut his eyes tight like a child. He held his hands up at last with a tragic and ridiculous gesture.

"My God, for Christ's sake look after my two kids," he said, and then after a pause and a falsetto, "for Christ's sake. Amen."

And he opened his eyes and looked down the rifle, with a quivering mouth.

"But, don't keep fooling me long," he pleaded.

"That all your prayer?" asked Attwater, with a singular ring in his voice.

"Guess so," said Davis.

"So?" said Attwater, resting the butt of his rifle on the ground, "is that done? Is your peace made with Heaven? Because it is with me. Go, and sin no more, sinful father. And remember that whatever you do to others, God shall visit it again a thousandfold upon your innocents."

The wretched Davis came staggering from his place against the figurehead, fell upon his knees and waved his hands and fainted.

When he came to himself again his head was on Attwater's arm, and close by stood one of the men in divers' helmets, holding a bucket of water, from which his late executioner now laved his face. The memory of that dreadful passage returned upon him in a clap; again he saw Huish lying dead; again he seemed to himself to totter on the brink of an unplumbed eternity. With trembling hands he seized hold of the man whom he had come to slay, and his voice broke from him like that of a child among the nightmares of fever: "O! isn't there no mercy? O! what must I do to be saved?"

"Ah!" thought Attwater. "Here is the true penitent."

CHAPTER XII.

A TAIL PIECE.

On a very bright, hot, lusty, strongly blowing noon, a fortnight after the events recorded, and a month since the curtain rose upon this episode, a man might have been spied praying on the sand by the lagoon beach. A point of palm trees isolated him from the settlement, and from the place where he knelt the only work of man's hand that interrupted the expanse was the Farallone, her berth quite changed, and rocking at anchor some two miles to windward in the midst of the lagoon. The noise of the Trade ran very boisterous in all parts of the Island; the nearer palm trees crashed and whistled in the gusts; those further off constituted a humming base, like the roar of cities; and yet, to any man less absorbed, there must have risen at times over this turmoil of the winds the sharper note of the human voice from the settlement. There all was activity. Attwater, stripped to his trousers and lending a strong hand of help, was directing and encouraging five kanakas; from his lively voice and their more lively efforts it was to be gathered that some sudden and joyful emergency had set them in this bustle; and the union jack floated once more on its staff. But the suppliant on the beach unconscious of their voices, prayed on with instancy and fervor, and the sound of his voice rose and fell again, and his countenance brightened and was deformed with changing moods of piety and terror.

Before his closed eyes the skiff had been for some time tacking toward the distant and deserted Farallone, and presently the figure of Herrick might have been observed to board her, to pass for a while into the house, thence forward to the forecastle, and at last to plunge into the main hatch. In all these quarters his visit was followed by a coil of smoke, and he had scarce entered his boat again and shoved off before flames broke forth upon the schooner. They burned gayly; kerosene had not been spared, and the bellows of the trade incited the conflagration. About half way on the return voyage, when Herrick looked back, he beheld the Farallone wrapped to the topmasts in leaping arms of fire, and the voluminous smoke pouring like a pall along the face of the lagoon. In one hour's time, he computed, the waters would have closed over the stolen ship.

It so chanced that, as his boat flew before the wind with much vivacity, and his eyes were continually busy in the wake, measuring the progress of the flames, he found himself embayed to the northward of the point of palms, and here became aware at the same time, of the figure of Davis immersed in his devotion. An exclamation, part of annoyance, part of amusement, broke from him; and he touched the helm and ran the prow upon the beach. Not twenty feet from the unconscious devotee. Taking the painter in his hand, he landed, and drew near, and stood over him, and still the voluble and incoherent stream of prayer continued unabated. It was possible for him to overhear the suppliant's petitions, which he listened to some while in a very mingled mood of humor and pity; and it was only when his own name began to occur and to be conjoined with epithets that he at last laid his hand on the Captain's shoulder.

"Sorry to interrupt the exercise," said he, "but I want you to look at the Farallone."

The Captain scrambled to his feet, and stood gasping and staring. "Mr. Herrick, don't startle a man like that!" he said. "I don't seem someways rightly myself since——" he broke off. "What did you say any way? Oh, the Farallone," and he looked languidly out.

"And," said Herrick, "there she burns! and you may guess from that what the news is."

"The Trinity Hall, I guess," said Davis.

"The same," said Herrick, "sighted half an hour ago, and coming up hand over fist."

"Well, it don't amount to a hill of beans," said the Captain, with a sigh.

"Oh, that's rank ingratitude!" cries Herrick.

"Well," replied the Captain meditatively, "you mayn't just see the way that I view it in, but I'd most rather stay here upon this island. I found peace here, peace in believing. Yes, I guess this island is about good enough for John Davis."

"I never heard such nonsense!" cried Herrick. "What! with all turning out in your favor the way it does, the Farallone wiped out, the crew disposed of, a sure thing for your wife and family, and you yourself, Attwater's spoiled darling and pet penitent!"

"Yes, Mr. Herrick, don't say that," said the Captain gently, "when you know he don't make no difference between us. But, oh! why not be one of us? Why not come to Jesus right away, and let's meet in yon beautiful land? That's just the one thing wanted; just say, Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief! And He'll fold you in His arms. You see, I know! I have been a sinner myself!"

[THE END.]

A FRENCH WOMAN SPY.

The Career of an Adventuress of World-wide Notoriety.

The career of Mme. Millescamps, the woman recently convicted of espionage by the criminal court of Paris, would furnish abundant material for a sensational romance. Her maiden name was Marie Forêt. She worked at dressmaking and gave lessons in music. She was a well-educated and handsome young woman. In 1863 she married one Gennot, a rich and stupid man, who for many years remained completely under her control. Shortly after her marriage she determined to see the world, and turned her husband into a traveller. With him she went to Philadelphia and lived there for a couple of years. Then she came to New York and remained here for some time, engaged in business. Next she turned up in Buenos Ayres. It became too hot for her there, and she proceeded at once to Berlin, where she led a gay life and moved for a time in high society. From Berlin she went to live in London, and continued there her old style of life.

At last her husband got tired of her and thought it was high time for him to go to California, or to South America, and keep himself beyond the reach of his fast and extravagant better half. This he did, and Mme. Gennot was good enough not to take the thing too much to heart, she reported that he was dead, and in 1880 returned to Paris, where she married M. Millescamps, a well-to-do business man. In a short time she brought him to the verge of bankruptcy. But somehow or other she managed to get well off again. Just where her funds came from remained a mystery. On coming down somewhat in funds again she started a store in Rue de Bretagne, where she sold religious books, pictures, and statuettes. As she was remarkable for her piety, good Christians patronized her, and for three years the business flourished. In 1884 M. Millescamps died suddenly, and some of the pious widow's neighbors were left under the impression that she facilitated his departure for a better world. This suspicion, however, did not materialize. After the death of her husband No. 2 she carried on the business on her own account, in the evenings she received company. Her little salon was frequented by a cosmopolitan group. She was a linguist, a conversationalist, and an accomplished musician.

But, in addition to her religious establishment, she carried on in another quarter of the city a matrimonial bureau and also a fabulous turning establishment, at which she was the leading spirit. In the art of teaching the tables how to dance and talk with their legs she had no equal in Paris. Wonderful stories are told of her interviews with the departed, and it is said that many prominent men, including Lord Lytton ("Owen Meredith"), often consulted her.

After a time she abandoned the spirits and devoted herself to the more profitable business of espionage. According to a prominent man on the Paris police, women are at present in France quite numerous and the most active agents in this business. The police know its eye on many of them, but they are hard to catch. Mme. Millescamps's nature was too bold and incautious to fit her for a long career in her new profession. She took large contracts and great risks, and was "pinched" at last. The evidence against her was conclusive, and she was sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

Mr. Somebody's Explosive Collar.

From the St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

BEAVER FALLS, Pa., Jan. 14.—A singular accident occurred here last night, which may result in the death of the victim, a Pole, who is the possessor of an unpronounceable name. The man had put on a new celluloid collar and was preparing to spend the evening in society, but before he finished making his toilet he was seized by a sudden attack of toothache. Stooping close to an open grate, with his mouth open, in order to heal the aching tooth, he remained for several minutes, but all at once there was a flash of fire, and instantly the celluloid collar was converted into a ring of fire around his neck. It was entirely consumed before he could realize what was the matter, burning the flesh on his neck almost to a crisp.

SNAKES OF INDIA.

Their Looks and Their Poisons.

BY E. G. COTES OF THE INDIAN MUSEUM, CALCUTTA.

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"Hazoor, samp hai!"—"Your Honor, here is a snake"—says a voice at my elbow on the veranda where I am sitting in Dehra Doon, under the shadow of the Himalayas, in northern India. It is Wahid Khan, the usually silent cook, who has come in from the bazaar for his day's work, and now stands holding up proudly for inspection his long iron-shod bamboo walking staff, upon the end of which balances uneasily the still wriggling body of a heavy snake, about three feet in length. "Take care," I cry hastily, for the thick-set dusky body the color broken by evil-looking white rings at intervals throughout the length, reminds me of the deadly karait with which the valley of the Doon abounds, though the slaughter of many an innocent species has taught me that there is nothing more deceptive about a snake than its color.

A moment later I have the creature's head inside a pair of forceps, for the art, which enenables the native snake charmer fearlessly to catch even the most poisonous and lively snake with his bare hand, is one that I have never attempted to acquire. Sure enough, I find the oval head which characterizes the Colubridæ, and a glance at the side makes it plain that the scale in front of the eye extends right down to the scale in which the nostril is situated. This indicates almost certainly that the species is poisonous. To satisfy myself completely, I force open the wide mouth which still snaps at my fingers, and on either side above am able to make out, almost completely sunk in folds of the skin, the single vicious little fang, which in poisonous snakes replaces one of the long rows of small, sharp teeth found in harmless species.

This clenches the matter and shows beyond doubt that the reptile is one of the poisonous Colubridæ or asps, the markings indicating that it is a karait. Karaits are an especial nuisance where they occur, for they love to live about human habitations, and have an uncomfortable habit of dropping upon one's bed out of the thatch with which bungalows are roofed. They lurk on the tops of window-sashes, coil themselves up behind the basin on the washstand, and like the privacy of an empty drawer. They are too stupid or too lethargic to get out of the way, unless actually inconvenienced, and the result is an appalling number of deaths from their bites. For although a strong man may recover, provided the wound is promptly cut out and cauterized, there is little chance for the less robust native of India.

The story of the man who drove the forty-two miles which separate the Valley of the Doon from the nearest railway station, in a sleeping carriage with a karait coiled up under his pillow, and only discovered his fellow traveller on arriving at his destination, is probably quite true. Indeed, throughout the whole of northern India one has to be very cautious about even walking across a room at night, for fear of treading unon one of these unwelcome visitors in the dark.

More deadly even than the karait is the almost equally common cobra and the comparatively rare hamadryas. These creatures are both related to the karait and can be distinguished from harmless snakes by the same signs. The cobra, it is true, will usually get out of the way when it hears footsteps, but, upon the other hand, its temper is exceedingly short, and when it does bite medical science is seldom of much avail. Prompt action is the only chance, and numerous cases are upon record where lives have been saved by instantly cutting out the bitten place. Once the poison has passed into the circulation, and this happens in an incredibly short space of time, it is usually too late. An instance which is generally believed out here is described where a man who was cutting wood was bitten by a cobra upon the finger. With the courage of despair and without waiting an instant to reflect, he raised his axe in the other hand and chopped the finger clean off upon the spot. For the time being he felt no effect of the poison. Presently he began to call himself a fool for having cut off his finger, and to think that he might as well make an effort to save it. He replaced it in position. The poison penetrated into his system through the rejoined blood vessels, and the result was one more death from snake bite. A case where a woman was bitten in the hand by a cobra while she was nursing her child, with the result that both mother and infant died, has been recorded officially by a qualified physician, and shows how exceedingly virulent the poison sometimes is. The other day a case was reported which occurred close to Calcutta, where a man killed a cobra and cut off its head. He then proceeded to exhibit his trophy to a friend. In doing so he accidentally scratched his hand against one of the fangs, and died shortly afterward from the blood poisoning which ensued.

Dried and pulverized the poison is almost as deadly as when injected by the live cobra. Native doctors use it medicinally in microscopic doses, and have a barbarous method of extracting it. They put a cobra into an earthen pot, and put a banana in after it. They then tie down the lid, and heat the pot over a fire. The wretched snake is soon tortured into a rage in its baking prison, and bites the banana in its paroxysm. The fruit is afterward carefully dried, and is then ready for use. It is pronounced under some circumstances to be a wonderfully powerful stimulant, but is only used in extreme cases, and even then probably does infinitely more harm than good. The same preparation is also said to be employed by gamblers or workers for poisoning other people's cattle. Some village, with a view to afterward buying up the hides cheap. This is a form of crime very prevalent in India, and one that the authorities find most difficult to check. For how is the ignorant native cultivator to prove that his plough bullocks have not died of cattle diseases? If any complain to the nearest magistrate, and the magistrate may order the beasts to be examined, but snake poison leaves no external marks, and is almost impossible to detect chemically. It is not surprising, under these circumstances, that he often decides to accept the loss, and not incur the enmity of the cattle poisoners by seeking redress.

A monarch among poisonous snakes is the enormous hamadryas, which grows to be as much as fourteen feet in length, and is so fierce that it will frequently attack and even chase any one who ventures near to its haunts. Native snake charmers who will handle the fiercest cobras fearlessly are usually loath to touch a hamadryas, though I have occasionally seen a large specimen of this venomous reptile in their bags. It lays its eggs in a heap of decaying leaves, which it collects for the purpose, and sits upon the top to keep off intruders. A road through the jungle will sometimes be closed against all comers by a pair of these snakes, and woe betide the unfortunate traveller who stumbles unawares upon the nest. The hamadryas feeds largely upon other snakes, but is fortunately somewhat rare. Curiously enough, it is not always aggressive. Indeed, it sometimes happens that it is quite unwilling to strike. Superficially it is not unlike the common rock snake, and not very long ago in Burmah a man brought one into the jungle and kept it loose in his house for some days, under the impression that it was one of these creatures. During the whole of its captivity it never attempted to bite any one, and its captor, who had been familiarly pulling it about by the tail, only realized his mistake by a forest officer who happened to turn up and who knew a good deal about snakes. It is easy to imagine the haste with which the amateur snake charmer proceeded to dispose of his captive.

The karait, the cobra, and the hamadryas are all colubrine snakes or asps, related more or less closely to the poisonous coral snake of the American continent, and probably also to the asp with which Cleopatra committed suicide in a bygone age.

India also has a plentiful supply of viperine snakes, or those vipers which are to be recognized without difficulty by their broad swollen heads and their necks covered with tiny scales.

Vipers are divided into pit vipers, characterized by the possession of a little hole or pit easily visible upon the side of the head between the eye and the nostril, and true vipers, which are without this organ. The pit vipers of India are related to the rattlesnake, though none of them have the curious arrangement of horny scales at the tip of the tail, which forms the rattle of this well-known creature. Very few people die of a bite from a rattlesnake, for though deaths are occasionally caused by them, their victims are far more likely than not to recover. The bite is none the less painful until the effects pass off.

Far more fatal than any of the Indian pit vipers are the daboia and the echis, which are both classed as true vipers. The daboia is a bright yellow-colored species, with conspicuous black chain-like markings upon the back. It is a fierce, sluggish creature, which will hardly trouble to get out of the way, though it hisses loudly when it happens to hear one coming. It has enormous movable fangs and a poison so deadly that once a man has been bitten by it deeply he has hardly any chance of recovery. The echis is sand-colored and very much smaller, but if anything even more vicious. It accounts for a good many deaths, especially in the province of Sind, for it makes up in aggression what it lacks in size, and has a most unpleasant habit of darting to strike its prey.

To complete the catalogue of the poisonous snakes to be found in this part of the world, which can well claim to be the headquarters of deadly species, I should mention the sea snakes. These reptiles are sometimes exceedingly numerous in the Bay of Bengal. Only last year a number of them came swimming up the Hooghly River all the way to Calcutta, which is at least eighty miles from the sea. They were very troublesome for a time, and are even said to have made their way into the city water pipes which derive their supply from the river. Sea snakes can always be recognized by the flattened, oarlike tails with which they steer their way through the waves. They appear to be invariably poisonous. Native fishermen know them well and tell most blood-curdling stories about their deadliness. One of the best known instances of their bite occurred to a sea captain who was bathing in the Monimein harbor. The immediate result was to raise his spirits and to make him unusually sociable. He is said to have declared that he felt a glow all over him which was rather agreeable than otherwise, but he died all the same in seventy-two hours after. Some of the native fishermen of the place said that it was only the use of stimulants which kept him alive so long.

Altogether about twenty thousand persons die each year in India from the bites of the various snakes I have mentioned, and it is no exaggeration to say that some sixty of Queen Victoria's subjects who were alive and well yesterday, are to-day being burnt or buried out here as the sequel to these accidents. The same will happen to-morrow and the next day, and at least one death from similar causes may be expected to occur every half hour between now and the time that the readers of THE SUN peruse what I have written. Mortality of this magnitude is a terrible thing, though the fact must be remembered that it is distributed among a population four times as large as that of the United States, and thus passes to a great extent unnoticed.

The casualties are confined almost entirely to the poorer and more ignorant natives, who habitually go about with bare feet. For all the creatures like the hamadryas and the echis are occasionally spoiling for a fight, as a general rule a snake is no more anxious to be trodden upon than a man is to tread upon it. The consequence is that people who wear boots are hardly ever bitten. This is not so much because of the protection of the leather as on account of the noise made by a boot upon the ground, which warns the snake to get out of the way. The ordinary native in bare feet makes hardly any sound as he walks along, and is consequently very liable to surprise a snake in the path. The white man on the other hand, in a good pair of stoutly boots, is so safe that it is most exceptional to hear of an accident where he is concerned.

Another reason which tends very largely to increase the mortality among natives is the way these poor people have of resigning themselves to die as soon as they are bitten. They thus too often waste the first precious moments which the white man would employ in cutting out the bitten place with his pocket knife. For, although a really severe bite from a bad species is almost certain to prove fatal, it very frequently happens that the wound is only half inflicted, and that prompt immediate action may result in saving life. As a general rule, when a native lies down and declares that death is written upon his forehead, death comes surely enough; but an amusing instance occurred only the other night where a delegation of two came to remonstrate. We had just arrived in the valley of the Doon, and were in the middle of dinner, when the head servant announced that one of the punkah pullers had been bitten by a snake. Hurrying out, we found the man lying already almost unconscious. A dozen willing hands seized him, and he was then carried off to the station dispensary, and being examined by the station doctor, who luckily happened to be upon the spot. Coma seemed to be fast coming on, and when roused the unfortunate man could only point feebly to one of his feet, and mutter, "Samp hai!" as a snake has struck. Beyond this nothing could at first be elicited. A most careful examination failed to discover the slightest sign of tooth or fang, otherwise the place would have been excised ruthlessly. A strong dose of whiskey and water was given to the patient, who was supported up and down the veranda alternately by two stalwart chuprassies—messengers—to try and prevent his becoming quite insensible, for he could not put one foot before the other himself, and it seemed most likely that his case would terminate fatally. The relatives began to lament. The local snake charmer was brought in, only to be unceremoniously turned out by the doctor in charge and told to do his magic outside. In the mean time the sufferer appeared to be sinking, and it was not until a goatskin of particularly cold water had been brought to pour over him—it was a somewhat chilly night—that he showed any signs of returning animation. From this point onward he began to mend, and eventually it transpired that the whole thing was a scare. He had been coming along a dark path when he trod upon what was in all probability a perfectly harmless snake. The creature coiled itself round his leg, and in his terrified imagination he thought that it struck at him. Immediately the belief seized him that he had been bitten by a poisonous snake. The shock to his nerves was so great that he very nearly died, and he remained for a long time under such circumstances is by no means unknown, and the fact is less surprising when it is remembered how small are the chances of recovery after a man has really been bitten.

The British Government does what it can to get rid of poisonous snakes. Large rewards are annually paid for their heads and in this way great numbers are destroyed. Attempts are constantly being made to clear away the rubbish which accumulates around village sites, and thus to reduce the shelter in which these creatures breed. As yet, however, hardly any appreciable effect has been produced. Year after year the tale of deaths remains unmitigated, and people appear just to die as their predecessors are killed off. For a long time the supposition was widely entertained that the professional native snake killers regularly bred the creatures for the sake of the reward, but a scientific men have quite failed in their efforts to persuade poisonous snakes to multiply in confinement, the belief seems scarcely reasonable.

If the people themselves would only cooperate vigorously with the authorities in killing snakes, the task of dealing with the problem would be greatly facilitated. Strangely enough, however, the prejudice, well known for its reactionary quality in cases of marrons glaces taken in toxic doses, I was speaking of Austin Dobson's mention of Gouffé. Let me read you. It is one of his Rose Leaves:

"Here's a present for Rose,
How pleased she is looking!
It is vanity—it is pleasure,
Here's a present for Rose!
'Plats,' 'Entrées,' and 'Rôts,'
Why, it's 'Gouffé on Cooking!'
Here's a present for Rose,
How pleased she is looking!

"That's one of his confections."

"But, Major," asked Mrs. Max, with artless sincerity, "isn't that poetry?"

"It is so deemed by those who, like me, think Dobson the worthy successor of Praed as a writer of society verse."

"How lovely! I should think you could write some things like that; you know all about snails."

"I have had the subject in mind for some time," the Major answered, solemnly tipping his glass of whiskey and water toward the setting sun with a significant upward inclination, for he had been grinning enormously, but suddenly shut his mouth and wrinkled his eyebrows.

"In fact," resumed the Major, when he had emptied his glass, "I had just about made up my mind to write some verses for the betterment of American prosody, but I happened to hear a strange thing about the only American who, it seems to me, has given evidence of ability to write the kind of verses Mr. Dobson does, a Mr. Bunner. Ever