Corn in Egypt.

When famine swept the country, and the fabled Horn
Of Plenty was exhausted, and there wasn't any corn,
Jacob called his sons together and told the eldest boy
That in far-distant Egypt—not Egypt, Illinois, but that other ancient country where the ox Nile water drinks,
Celebrated for its mummies, its pyramids, and sphinx—
In Egypt there was plenty; they must the journey make
To purchase the material for their daily johnny cake.
"And without corn," said Benjamin, in a voice as soft as silk,
"How can we our appetites indulge in mush and milk?"
"Without it, too," another cried, "our dad will miss his horn."
And Jacob beamed upon him and acknowledged the corn.

—*"Gris" in Texas Siftings.*

Why, What Was That?

From the Rhymester.

'Tis some lover gently tapping at the pane
Below!
'Tis the rustle on the window of the rain!
Not so.

Is it sighing of the gale?
Is it creeping of the snail?
Or a wandering pussy's tail?
Oh, no!

The idea, of course, is quite a pretty thought.
That's so.
I regret to say it's nothing of the sort.
No, no.

It's a burglar getting in
To collar all your tin,
So, unless you go to win—
Don't go.

Inconstancy.

From the Commercial Traveler.

A month ago along the beach
They walked together;
They passed love glances each to each,
Talked of the weather.
A dream it was of youthful joy
With naught to mar it;
Their pleasure knew no gross alloy—
No flaw to scar it.

Alas! what changes hearts will show;
To-day she met him—
Poor fellow! how was he to know
That she'd forget him?
Upon the stool she calmly sat,
'Mongst shopping callers;
"How much a yard," said she, "is that?"
Said he, "Two dollars."

THE GENI OF THE MINE.

From all the Year Round.

The claimant to peculiar respects on the score of sanctity of life varies in various lands, or, for that matter, in any habitat. He may be a hypocrite, or a fanatic, deceiver or dupe—a man of genuine worth—though, perhaps, for reasons he would scout—or a loafer winning, on acquaintance, deserved contempt. I shall put my old friend, Moung Ko, without a second's hesitation in an upper grade of "holy men."

He walked consciously on high levels of his profession. Not a phoonghie in all Burmah was better versed in the lore, not merely of the pageda, but of nature and of life. His fame for charity was just, and I at least have never been able, since the occurrence of the events I propose to relate, to hold that the wild hill men of Anapoora were wholly mistaken in calling Moung Ko a seer as well as a priest. I shall have to show that he, too, had failed where verily popes have failed. And it may be that the weird gift—never a joy to its possessor—was linked in hidden depths with the romance of a strange career, and the pain of a long fight for repentance.

To be coherent, and even to compass conciseness, it is generally well to begin at the beginning. Moreover, my first meeting with Moung Ko is an integral part of my tale. A hint was offered even then which I was slow to seize, but which later was bathed in revealing light. The existence of the cyphea must be divined before an interpretation can be supplied.

I had penetrated a new district and encountered an accident. A luckless slip on the shelving ledge of a remote gorge had nearly sent me to my doom. I escaped through the circumstance that the thick scrub of the wilderness straggled down the cliff-side to wherever there was a layer of earth to support vegetation, lodged, with a sprained ankle, among brambles; above me, frowning rock; beneath me, the abyss. The outlook was black. If I stirred the odds were that I should go over the brink and be dashed to pieces; if I staid where I was I must starve. Again—and I had plenty of space to think the thing through—if I shouted myself hoarse nobody was likely to come; and if the improbable became a fact, and there was a response, I had no assurance that aid and not a cruel thrust would be the result. It was all uncertain whether friends or enemies were in the neighborhood.

In the retrospect it seems to me that my energies suddenly flagged, and that I passed into a stupor of despair. Surely there was excuse. But as the weary days rolled on my faculties regained their edge. I determined to have a cast for dear life. With much of the gambler's recklessness and fever I cried aloud at intervals a full score of times. The silence remained unbroken. But a queer portent perplexed my mind. From where I was lying the opposite bend of the valley was distinctly in view, and twice along the line of vision flitted a grotesque, undersized figure in a costume certainly not known to me as favored by any Burman, Shan or Karen, male or female. The draperies were flowing and dark, scarcely distinguishable from the color of the rocks. I shivered involuntarily. Did the creature belong to the realm of honest, practical existence? Or was I delirious? I pinched myself, as those do who can not be sure if they are awake or dreaming. The dwarfish apparition did not vanish. It went on to the head of the defile, and was finally lost in the shadows of the teak trees. Another idea, belonging to a state of weakness, came to me. Was it a warning that I must expect the worst?"

"Softly, friend; have courage. Move not. I will help you."

Sweeter words I never heard spoken in any vernacular than those I thus translate. I knew their meaning, for I had picked up not a little of the native tongue. They were whispered literally into my ear. The newcomer had approached so silently that there was danger even in his announcement of kindly purpose.

The sharp surprise made me start. I tried to look the speaker in the face, and, in the effort, swayed toward the precipice. A swarthy, sinewy hand gripped me and held me back.

"Did I not say 'softly,' friend?" expostulated the stranger, with gentle reproach in his accents.

"Thanks," I answered; "but my ankle is twisted. How will you get out of this?"

Moung Ko was not a man of unnecessary words. For reply he drew aside, with his arm, a bush immediately to my right. A natural recess was disclosed, and, as there was light beyond, I surmised the existence of a tunnel or passage. It was doubtless in this way that he had reached my ledge. And now he proved the wonderful muscular strength that resides in the Burman frame. Stretching himself on the uneven ground, he grasped with one arm a buttress of rock, and with the other he lent me a support which was entirely adequate to my deliverance. The pain of the injured limb made me wince at every movement, but I set my teeth together, and, trusting to the directions acted rather than uttered, I was released from my position of peril.

Then I saw that I owed my safety to a phoonhie, or priest. I have already indicated my impression of Moung Ko's character. I repeat that he was genuine in spite of all. In person he was short, stoutly built, and with features wrinkled, sallow and inscrutible. He was old, but I fancy did not count nearly as many years as his looks gave him credit for, and as the truculent tribes with whom he had settled believed.

The question of concern now was a place of refuge.

"You must stay with me. Can you walk at all—thus, leaning on my shoulder, using my staff?"

And Moung Ko—whose name I had ascertained—led me slowly down the winding passage. Was his monastery near, I wondered? I had seen no signs of such an edifice as I entered the gorge. But it proved unnecessary to put the question into words. There was a cunningly hidden opening in the rock wall. We squeezed through, and within was a wide and airy cave—evidently a place of habitation. Nature had shaped its walls and stretched its roof; but art had transformed the rude mountain eyrie into a palatial hall. Evidences of wealth were on every side. The fine Oriental fabrics were the garniture of shelving floor and lofty recess. Soft rugs were here in bewildering profusion, and furniture and pieces of bric-a-brac that would have fetched fabulous sums in Wardour street. My eyes caught also the unmistakeable gleam of the precious metals.

It was a riddle at first where the subdued light came from, for window there was none. But at last I made the discovery that at one end of the great chamber was a long gallery, communicating, doubtless, with the outside world amidst the inaccessible heights of the cliff. This admitted both air and light; sunshine could be but a brief visitant.

I am weaving together the results of extended and leisurely examination. At the instant of introduction I was too astonished to observe many details. The amazement mirrored inevitably upon my countenance was noticed.

"This is a poor wanderer's occasional home. Its existence is a secret which you will not betray," Moung Ko said. "You are the first stranger I have had the honor to welcome here; and when you are strong enough to go with me down the valley to the monastery I shall ask that you keep strict silence as to where you have been. You can say that you have rested in a cave-man's haunt. It will be true. I am sure my secret is safe."

The calm expression of complete certainty struck me as singular.

"I am flattered by your faith in my gratitude, and I hope and believe that it is not misplaced," I answered; "but is there not a risk? I may disappoint you by some unguarded word. Do you not fear of it?"

I was smiling, but it was no smile that came on Moung Ko's face. A light was in the deep set, neutral tinted eyes, that touched my spirit almost to awe.

"No, I do not," Moung Ko replied in deep, resonant tones. "It is on the scroll of the future that I shall not suffer through you. My own people—they will mete out the punishment that has tarried so long. But what am I saying? Yes, I can read the language of the face. I know that I may trust in you."

The light was gone and I could have fancied that I had not really heard those words of wierd fate, which, nevertheless, I was to remember after many days.

While we talked Mount Ko was deftly preparing and applying a cool compress to the swollen joint. It was patent that he possessed not a little surgical skill.

Suddenly I spoke of the strange figure I had seen while waiting for the flat of late; and I surely felt Moung Ko's fingers tremble. His head was bent down and this was my one warning of the phoonghie's uneasiness. His reply was evasive.

"There is no village in that direction; it is all waste and barren; there are no paths, either. The hill folks talk like you of things that are ill to see. They are cowards. But I say that bushes take wonderful shapes; and sometimes they move in the wind."

It sounded like satire, and Mong Ko was a clever diplomatist. He had nearly persuaded me that I was the victim of a delusion. A man recovering from a swoon may easily be cheated by shadows. I let the subject drop. It occurred to me later that Moung Ko was relieved to find that I did not insist on the realty of my experience.

I had fallen into capital hands. If a tie of kinship or creed had existed I could not have been better cared for. And at the end of a week I was able to walk gingerly about with a crutch. My host now suggested migration to a zyat or hostlery for travelers, hard by his padoga, in a village of the lower plateau. I was perfectly willing to move. It would give me opportunities for becoming acquainted with the inhabitants of the district, and with local customs and characteristics that were hitherto only matters of hearsay.

The man who had laid me under so great an obligation was more and more a marvel and a mystery. His life, as gradually disclosed, seemed full of contradistictions. It was abundantly clear that he was held in extreme reverence by the brethren of his order as well as by the villagers. But, with innate skepticism, I declined to think there was anything in his common fame as a seer. Still he accepted the homage; and it was equally hard to believe him an imposter.

Your vulgar trickster does not devote himself to the wants of a poor and primitive people as Moung Ko did. Without fee or reward he was always at their service. He was strict—none more so, I learned—in fulfillment of the ritual of the pagoda. Yet, by the law binding on phoongies, he could possess no personal property; and I had seen what I had seen. Perhaps I lingered in the district longer than I should otherwise have done because I wanted to fit an answer to my enigma.

Tragic circumstances supplied it. The tribesmen of Upper Anapoora were turbulent and headstrong, and it was one of Moung Ko's most difficult and delicate tasks to maintain peace.

"There has always been strife between mountain and plain. Two races touch in these hills," he said. "The feud will break out afresh, one day, in spite of me. Yes, and soon. I have heard the sound of the dismal wind—of the war wind—sighing in the air where no forest trees are. It will come, and then the vengeance falls and I go."

The sad eyes were gazing through the veil we all seek to pierce, but may not. Moung Ko was in boding contemplation of issues that, as yet, were below the horizon of his fellows.

I frowned at myself, for I was conscious of a certain eerie impression, produced in defiance of reason, upon my mind. And, to the outsider's judgment, the sky had no clouds.

Although I was a guest, and not a prisoner, and although Moung Ko had expressly stated that he trusted me, it was a notion that grew in strength as the days went by that I was watched and that Moung Ko preferred that I should not wander far afield.

Call it ingratitude or the mere spirit of contrariness and self-assertion, as you please, the fact remains that one fine morning I secreted my revolver and a stock of ammunition upon my person and managed to elude the surveillance. I got up once more into the heights, and in the exhilarating sense of freedom snapped my fingers at the cautious old priest.

The day was better chosen than at the first moment of my revolt I guessed. While I was continuing and extending the exploration previously interrupted by my accident the storm broke. The peace had been treacherous after all. Some spark fell on the combustible material of race passion and tribal jealousy, and there was a disastrous outburst of sanguinary fury. But of this, at the same time, as I say, I was in ignorance. The care that came to me was of a different sort. When a declining sun warned me to work my way downward if I did not wish to camp out, I made a blunder and took my bearings so indirectly that I was lost.

Instead of striking the track I looked for I had strayed into a desolate gulch, strewn with the debris of mighty rocks, shattered, no doubt, in some remote natural catastrophe. How to escape I knew not, except by the weary expedient of retracing my steps. A wall of adamant blocked the path in front. Suddenly I halted, in the cover of a huge bowlder. A mysterious figure, which I instantly recognized again, was at work among the stones a little distance ahead, apparently burying treasure. I saw bundle after bundle pushed into a yawning hollow. With stupefied gaze I watched. What genius of Desert Mountain was this? Uncouth, unrobed, dwarfish; I do not wonder that, for a space, I believe in a being of other lineage than the human. But when the strange, squat figure moved off, I was sufficiently daring or sufficiently magnetized to follow.

Pursuit was unexpected, and stealth ruled my conduct. I was led by winding ways into yet another place of bewilderment. Of Burmese ruby mines I knew a little by report and reading. Now I was in one. On every side were tokens of the fact, abruptly realized, that caprice had brought me into one of nature's notable treasure houses. Astonishment induced carelessness. My foot overturned a stone and my presence was discovered.

It was an instant of curious crisis, and I fancy my unwitting guide was as uncertain of result as myself, but I was in light just then and he was in shadow, and it gave him the advantage of quick knowledge. He came forward, not even pausing as he heard the click of my weapon, drawn against eventualities. Closer scrutiny revealed a deformed Burman boy, with the stamp equally of intelligence and suffering on his pinched, prematurely old countenance, and it was a startling thing that he called me at once by my name, without prefix or explanation.

"What do you do here, Ho-Ton?" he asked in a shrill, troubled voice.

"I want the path to the lower village," I answered. "I have missed it."

At last I got a clue to much that was puzzling.

"You are far out of your way. You can not reach the zyat to-night. It will be better to stay in father's—in our cave again. Come."

I obeyed the word and gesture, and a very few paces brought us through a steep descent on to my old ledge, and thus once again into the familiar quarters of Moung Ko's secret home.

My geni of the mine, then, was Moung Ko's son.

"Hark!" said he. And a terrified look came upon his countenance.

I listened, but could hear nothing. My senses were less acute than his.

"Yes, yes; it has come, as he said it would," the boy cried, smiting his breast. And his eyes dilated with fear.

"What is your trouble?" I asked, though I could already guess.

"Hark, I say again!" he answered in an agony; "the wailing is louder! There is fighting below in the valley. Oh, they will kill him!"

Kill the loved and revered phoonghie, of whose lapses from orthodoxy there seemed no current suspicion! I thought it very unlikely. Yet the forboding words of the seer echoed in my memory.

The eventide went in anxious watching and waiting. It was marvelous how the one touch of nature made us kin. But the boy spoke no word of his past.

When the morrow dawned, two anxious faces watched from the friendly veil of the bushwood the bend of the great valley. A solitary wayfarer came into view. Relief, ringing into exuberant joy, was in my companion's accents.

"It is my father. He is safe!" the poor lad said.

Alas! the gladness was doomed to a speedy eclipse. I thought that Moung Ko crept upward slowly, and staggered as he walked. And once within the mountain fastness it was plain that his sombre forecast had not been so false as we would willingly have believed.

Moung Ko looked at me first with consternation and then, I was almost sure, content. I know that with genuine unselfishness, he wished me well. A man was a man and a brother to Moung Ko, whether he were Burman or Briton. It is the glory of the world-bond that in all lands there are these hearts loyal to humanity. But the phoonghie reeled and sank upon the floor. To the boy's horror and my own we saw that his coarse robe was dyed crimson at the side he gripped so tightly. Moung Ko was wounded.

It was my turn to play the surgeon, aided, as to appliances by the devoted, despairing son. But my skill was infinitely below Moung Ko's. It was the patient's suggestions that I had to follow.

"And it will be in vain," the old priest gasped, wearily, "the time is at hand. I have known it from the first. It is my fate and I deserve it. Listen and I will make the dark thing clear. The law of the pagoda allows neophites to go back to the world if they like not the life of the solitary. I was sent on a mission soon after I became a priest, and they lost me. In another province I broke my vows for a woman's sake. I loved and married. But it was an unhappy match. My wife deserted me, and I understood that our babe was dead. Then I returned to Anapoora as if nothing had happened. It was my great transgression. The story I told was true, but only half the truth, and so, in another sense, a lie. And I could not rest. I wandered much and I found the mine—and this cave. It was occupied by—would you guess it?—my wife! She was hunting me to my disgrace, and death had overtaken her here. I could not save her. But we were reconciled and she confessed that our son lived. I sought the child and I brought him here. We have been much together. Now I go."

There was a long breath, and then the story reached its end.

"The hill men rose, as I knew from my visions they would. They came against the village. Many houses have been burned—the zyat among them. You escaped in time. I went into the fight—a man of peace, to stay the hand of the fratricide, and in the confusion the blow fell. It was not struck of intent, and I triumphed through the fact. I pointed to the stream of blood—pleaded my works for their welfare. The cruel pillage ceased. Then I got away by a secret path—and that is all. Only—care for Dara Maillu—my poor boy!"

The voice died into silence. There was a soft sigh. I looked again, and Moung Ko's eyes, open as they were, saw no earthly scene. He was dead.

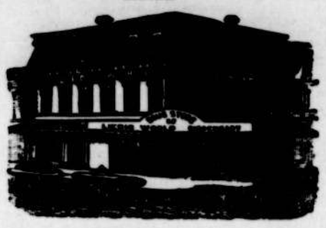
I kept the phoonghie's charge, and lived a cave life for many months, subsisting on the stores hidden where first I had found Dara Maillu. It seemed that traders came into these hills at certain seasons, and then rubies were exchanged for necessaries.

But Dara Maillu never recovered the shock of his father's loss. Before a year had passed around he had rejoined Moung Ko in the land of shadows. It was a gentle, painless, fading away.

And thus I only was left with the secret of the Anapoora mine.

MINERS, ATTENTION!

EXTRA!



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