

superintendent held to be in innocent possession of the stolen goods or not or whether he should be arrested as receiver of the stolen goods he was not prepared to say. That must rest with the higher authorities to decide. He suggested that it might be better to refer it to the judicial commissioner.

Valentyne in the meantime had to be guarded at the hospital, for Mi Mrs discovered that the Phoongyes had set a scheme on foot to kidnap him and incidentally carve him up to find the sacred stone.

There were many reasons why they should recover it as soon as possible. Their Buddha had lost all prestige since his maltreatment, and no pilgrims came now to lay their generous offerings at his great square feet. The pagoda had ceased to do a paying business, for Uzsana's ruby had been a drawing card. It had been a good investment that for 13 centuries had gone on making money for the priests.

Valentyne applied for and obtained sick leave, handicapped with an order that he must not take the ruby out of the jurisdiction of the Burmese courts.

It was a splendid bit of judicial ruling that, and the deputy commissioner smiled grimly when it passed through his hands.

The surgeon swore like a trooper when he heard about it, for he had ordered Valentyne off to Darjeeling for a change. "You can't stop here," he said, "because if you don't die of fever they'll murder you sure. By Jove! your body will be worth something for dissecting purposes, though, if they don't get the first slash at you."

But Valentyne steadily improved. The wound was healing up nicely, the ruby seemingly giving him no trouble whatever.

As soon as he was able to sit up and love about he discovered a new source of annoyance. Devout Burmans were constantly coming and prostrating themselves at his feet, touching their foreheads to the ground and muttering their prayers.

"What does it all mean?" he asked long Uouray.

"Sar, they are worshipping the Bada which you, by the grace of God and at wicked Hpo Thit, have got."

"This is intolerable," thought Valentyne. "I am a ruby mine and a Burmese god and a receiver of stolen goods all in one."

As he got better the beauty of his new life was further enhanced by the eluge of official correspondence that commenced to pour in upon him.

By order of the chief commissioner he was asked to explain how he meant to make good to the pagoda the value of the ruby he was still retaining on his person. It was cheerfully pointed out that if half his salary was escheated for this purpose it would take at least 40 years to make up the value of the jewel.

A delay of this sort would hardly be air to the Phoongyes. Besides, in that uncertain climate his salary might cease at any moment. At any rate, under the 55 years' service rule, he could retain his position in service for at length of time, and his pension could be barely enough to live upon.

The civil surgeon was raked over the coals for not acting upon the deputy commissioner's suggestion and probing matter to the bottom, as it were—not making another effort to recover the jewel.

It was in vain that he wrote in answer that the superintendent's life could have been endangered by another eruption.

His answer only brought another literary wiggling, in which he was curtly

replied.

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figer they had seen down at Rangoon.

"I'll have the bullet out of you in a jiffy," said the civil surgeon to Valentyne, as he rolled up his sleeves and opened his case of shining instruments.

"D—d if I can understand it, though," he said, as he probed away, for the jiffy time had gone by and he hadn't even touched the bullet yet. "It must be one of those infernal skewgee slugs of theirs that he has pumped into you. It seems to have struck you under the arm as you were flourishing that sword of yours, and then traveled on down along your ribs. God knows where it is now, for I can't find it. You've lost enough blood over it for just now, anyway, but if there seems to be any complication setting in I'll have another try for it."

The surgeon saw it was about time to desist, for Valentyne was looking pretty well used up.

Then Hpo Thit was brought up before the deputy commissioner for a committal hearing, as it were, charged with stealing the sacred ruby, and with attempted murder of the superintendent.

But the priests were clamorous for the ruby eye of their Buddha, for the matter of Valentyne dying or not they did not bother their heads—even they would let Hpo Thit go free, so be it they could come by the sacred gem again. The Burmese archbishop, the Thathanabaing, had come down from Ava to see about the recovery of the stone.

They begged the deputy commissioner to give Hpo Thit promise of pardon if he would only disclose where he had hidden the Bada.

"I can't do that," he said, "for the wounded sahib may die. The doctor has fished for the bullet and can't get it, and it looks bad for the superintendent's life. If he dies, Hpo Thit will have to swing."

But if the Bada might be recovered they would pay to Valentyne's family his full value in good English sovereigns.

The deputy commissioner was as anxious to recover the jewel as they were, as he promised Hpo Thit that if he would tell where it was it would help him much when the time of his sentence came.

"I will tell," said Hpo Thit, "because it will be easy for the thakine to get it, and then the thakine will remember at the time of the sentence."

The priests craned their thin, shaven, buzzardlike heads eagerly forward. Even the deputy commissioner was intensely excited, for if he should recover this sacred Bada it would be well; if not, the papers all through India would have their fling at it and his life would be made miserable answering inquiries from the government.

The court was as silent as the graven image of Buddha itself as they waited for Hpo Thit to speak.

Putting the palms of his hands together in front of his face in the form of supplication, Hpo Thit said: "The red stone which I took from the Kyong, even from the forehead of the Buddha, is in the police thakine's body. I fired it from my gun the last time because I had no bullets and because, if it could work a miracle, it would stop the police, that I might get away."

This statement took away the breath of the court. The silence was unbroken for a full minute. Then the chief Phoongye said: "Hpo Thit is telling lies. He has hid it. We must swear him."

"Yes," said the deputy commissioner, "he must make oath to that," for things were better done judicially.

He ordered the clerk to swear him on the palm leaf Burmese bible.

"No, thakine," said the priest, interrupting, "he is not a disciple of Buddha. He is a juggle man, and we must swear him on a branch of the lepan."

But after the oath it was the same—the red stone was in the police thakine's body.

"I think it is the truth," said the deputy commissioner.

"It is true," said the priests, "and the police thakine must give up the Bada."

"Well, we'll see what can be done in the matter," answered the deputy commissioner, and Hpo Thit was remanded to await developments.

"By Jove," said the surgeon, when he heard about it, "that accounts for the infernal thing taking that cork-screw course."

"You'll have to get it out of him some way," said the deputy commissioner, "for it's worth about two lakhs of rupees, and, besides, it won't be healthy for Valentyne to live in Burma with the eye of a Buddhist god in him."

"Look here, Grey," said the surgeon, "I am jiggered if I probe for the cursed thing again. I nearly let Valentyne's life out of him the other day for fear of poisonous consequences, for I thought it was a slug. But if it's a good, clean out ruby it will probably never hurt him, and I'm not going to take any chances."

The deputy commissioner was in despair. The Phoongyes, headed by their archbishop, haunted his office and his bungalow night and day, clamoring for the ruby, for their sacred Bada, for the eye of their Buddhist god.

But the surgeon was obdurate.

"Valentyne is a friend of mine," he said, "and I'm not going to murder him to please any yellow robed Phoongye. I wouldn't do it even if he were my enemy. I'd leave the service first."

Of course the deputy commissioner had to report it to the commissioner, and he to the chief commissioner.

The report read that the sacred Bada, the famous ruby, had been stolen from the forehead of the image of Buddha in the pagoda there by a hill man, Hpo Thit; Hpo Thit had been captured and the ruby traced to the possession of the superintendent of police, Mr. Valentyne; that it appeared from Hpo Thit's evidence that he had fired it from a musket into the superintendent's body, but as to whether Hpo Thit's evidence could be accepted and the su-

dently it was another case of oppression of the poor native. One of their temples had been desecrated, one of their most sacred idols violated, and a jewel, to which they attributed miraculous powers, stolen, and the jewel was now in the possession of one of the government superintendents of police.

There was a cock and bull story, he said, about it having been shot into his body, but even if it were so they could not set a whole nation of Buddhists by the ears for the sake of one man. In common honesty they must give the jewel up, and if this man couldn't part with it, why, he would have to go with it, that was all.

The viceroy seemed inclined to look at it in this light, too, and it really seemed awkward for Valentyne.

In the meantime a civil suit to recover the value of the ruby had been instituted in the courts in Rangoon against the government in general and Valentyne in particular.

Lookily for Valentyne the secretary of state was a hard headed man, not much given to nonsense, and he said in equivalent official language that he'd be d—d if he'd see an innocent Englishman deliberately cut up to recover any fetch bauble.

But all the same the superintendent would have to be retired on half pay, for his usefulness was gone. The two could not be combined, the dual position of Burmese god and superintendent of police, for the natives still persisted in reverencing him, though ready as soon as the word was given to cut him up.

Just when he thought his troubles were at an end and he might go home they applied for an injunction to prevent him from moving the ruby out of Burma. They showed to the court on medical authority that there was every possibility that the ruby might work itself out some day, and so be recovered; but if Valentyne were allowed to leave the kingdom the chances of the rightful owners ever becoming possessed of it were very slim indeed.

They undertook to pay Valentyne a salary of 10,000 rupees a year so long as he remained in Rangoon, and all they asked in return was the privilege of coming to worship the Bada at certain periods, and that a medical officer, appointed by them, should have free access to Valentyne's person with a view to keeping track of the perambulations of the ruby, and that when it made its appearance near the skin anywhere, so that it might be extracted without danger to him, that he would relinquish all claim upon it and allow the surgeon to hasten its appearance.

Valentyne's counsel, seeing which way the wind was blowing, agreed to accept this ruling of the court, only stipulating that Corbyn be appointed surgeon, for the nether stone had suffered most in the grind, and Corbyn was out of the service.

One little formality the court demanded, and that was that the archbishop and three or four of the chief Phoongyes should go on a bond for Valentyne's personal safety.

So the superintendent was lodged in a beautifully furnished bungalow and was treated very much like a distinguished state prisoner.

Life went very pleasantly with him, and it did not seem such a bad affair after all.

Mi Mrs was living in Rangoon, too, as it happened, and Hpo Thit, in consideration of his turning queen's evidence against himself re the ruby, was let off with two years in jail and was then busily engaged in pushing a conveyance cart about town with a clanking chain running from his waist to either ankle by way of ornament.

The Europeans in Rangoon, with oriental playfulness, bestowed upon Valentyne two or three names expressive of his occupation. He was known down at the "Gym" as the "Burmese god," "Bada," and the "Jewel Merchant."

The fellows were never tired of offering him as security, swearing roundly that he was worth two lakhs of rupees dead or alive.

One or two playful attempts on his life relieved the monotony of his existence, but as these laudable efforts were usually frowned down both by the Phoongyes and the officials, and as one of his assailants caught a cold steel in his right lung, they ceased altogether after a time, and he was leading a comparatively happy life.

He almost began to wish that the ruby would stay where it was. "We're fixed for life," he said to Corbyn, "if this Bada thing doesn't turn up. I must be more careful of myself. I must stop riding, for the shaking up may dislodge the infernal thing and start it working out."

He had even got used to seeing the natives plump down in front of him and fall to praying.

Strangers always took him for the chief commissioner when they saw this sort of thing going on, and many were the mistakes made in consequence.

Once he received an offer from Bar-nun at a salary which made his paltry 10,000 rupees look like pin money only. The enterprising American guaranteed to smuggle him out of Burma also, and pay all legal claims too.

After he had been in the business about two years he began to feel a pain in his back. He confided his fears to his attendant physician. "It's working out, I'm sure," he said sorrowfully.

And so it appeared, for a distinct lump was forming just below the shoulder blade.

The Phoongyes were notified, and there was great rejoicing among them. They came and beat tamtams all night long in front of Valentyne's bungalow. This was to drive the Nahts away, so that they would not steal the Bada again.

Valentyne was loaded down with presents and feasted like a bullock for the sacrifice.

"I shall be a rich man," he said to Corbyn, "if the thing holds off for a time."

But the incessant drumming and noisy making about his bungalow was

driving him nearly mad for want of sleep.

Then one day Corbyn made a discovery. It was only a boil, the result of mango eating.

The Phoongyes were in despair. Just about that time Hpo Thit walked into his bungalow one day and, bumping his forehead on the floor, begged Valentyne's forgiveness for wounding him. He had served his time and was going away. If he remained in Burma, they would kill him for stealing the Bada, so he was going to some other country.

And that was the last anybody ever saw of Hpo Thit in Burma.

Three years more of playing Buddha at the rate of 10,000 rupees a year passed, and this time there could be no mistake about it, so Corbyn said. The ruby was coming not far from the place where the boil had been. In fact, it was the irritation of the Bada that had most likely caused the boil.

It was the same old thing over again—tamtams, and poays, and presents, and much praying, and the working of charms to keep the Nahts away—only stronger than before, for they were sure of it this time.

Corbyn could take his fingers and push it about under the skin, and the grim, butternut colored faces of the Phoongyes relaxed when they realized how close they were to getting the heaven sent relic.

Even the officials were pleased—pleased with Valentyne, pleased with themselves and with the way they had managed the affair. The Phoongyes would have their ruby back again, and Valentyne would have done well out of the deal. In fact, he might be reinstated in the service if this spirit of Buddha were cast out of him.

The chief commissioner graciously extended his patronage to the extracting of the stone.

Apart from all this it had a great surgical interest. All the medical fraternity in Rangoon asked Valentyne's permission to be present. In fact, if he had chosen to charge an admission fee of two rupees a head he might have had his compound filled at that price the day Corbyn summoned the Phoongyes to be present to take delivery of the ruby.

Everything was in readiness. The archbishop had brought a sacred dish that was supposed to have at one time belonged to Buddha Gudama, to receive the Bada in.

Valentyne's back was bared. Corbyn made an incision with his scalpel, pressed gently with the forefinger of his right hand downward, and in a second something lay in his left hand.

He gave it a little rinse in a bowl of warm water he had ready and held it up to the expectant gaze of the many craning heads.

It was a piece of oblong lead—a slug. Hpo Thit had lied, that was all, and had the ruby away with him—at least it was never found.

THE END.

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