The BRONZE BELL

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS

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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 Rohan Lal Chatterji, "the appointed mouthpiece of the Bell," addresses Amber as a man of high rank and presents a mysterious little bronze box, "The Token," into his hand, disappears in the wood. The girl calls Amber by name. He in turn addresses her as Miss Sophia Farrell, daughter of Col. Farrell of the British diplomatic service in India and visiting the Quains. Several nights later the Quain home is burglarized and the bronze box stolen. Amber and Quain go hunting on an island and become lost and Amber is left marooned. He wanders about, finally reaches a cabin and recognizes in its occupant an old friend named Rutton, whom he last met in England, and who appears to be in hiding. When Miss Farrell is mentioned Rutton is strangely agitated. Chatterji appears and summons Rutton to a meeting of a mysterious body. Rutton seizes a revolver and dashes after Chatterji. He returns wildly excited, says he has killed the Hindu, takes poison, and when dying asks Amber to go to India on a mysterious errand. Amber decides to leave at once for India.

CHAPTER VII.

Masks and Faces.

Like many a wiser and a better man, Amber was able upon occasion to change his mind without entertaining serious misgivings as to his stability of purpose. Therefore, on second thought, he elected to journey Indiawards via the Suez canal rather than by the western route. Rutton's instructions had been explicit upon one point: Amber was to enter India only by the port of Calcutta. In deferring to this the Virginian lost several days waiting in London for the fortnightly P. & O. boat for Calcutta: a delay which might have been obviated by taking the overland route to Brindisi, connecting there with the weekly P. & O. boat for Bombay, from which latter point Calcutta could have been quickly reached by rail across the Indian peninsula.

Now Quain's letter to Labertouche went by this quicker route and so anticipated Amber's arrival at the capital of India by about a week; during all of which time it languished unread.

A nice young English boy in Mr. Labertouche's employ received and stamped it with the date of delivery and put it away with the rest of the incoming correspondence in a substantial-looking safe. After which he returned to his desk in the ante-room and resumed his study of the law; which he pursued comfortably enough with a cigarette in his mouth, his chair tilted back, and his feet gently but firmly implanted upon the fair printed pages of an open volume of Blackstone. His official duties, otherwise, seemed to consist solely in imparting to all and sundry the information that Mr. Labertouche was "somewhere up in the Mofussil, hunting bugs—I don't know exactly where."

Precisely why Mr. Labertouche maintained his office was a matter for casual conjecture to his wide circle of acquaintances; although it's not unlikely that, were he the subject of discussion, the bulk of the wonder expressed would be inspired by his unreasonable preference for Calcutta as a place of residence.

Now upon the morning of the day that found the steamship Poonah nuzzling up the Hooghly's dirty yellow flood, Mr. Labertouche's clerk arrived at the Dhurrumtollah street office at the usual hour; which, in the absence of his employer, was generally between 11 o'clock and noon. Having assorted and disposed of the morning's mail, he donned his office coat, sat down, thumbed through Blackstone until he found two perfectly clean pages, opened the volume at that place, tipped back his chair, and with every indication of an untroubled conscience imposed his feet upon the book and began the day's labors with a cigarette.

Presently he became aware that an especially dirty and travel-worn Attit mendicant had squatted down across the way, in the full glare of sunlight, and was composing himself for one of those apparently purposeless and interminable vigils peculiar to his vocation. Beneath their drooping lashes the eyes of the clerk brightened. But he did not move. Neither did the Attit mendicant.

In the course of the next half-hour the clerk consumed two cigarettes and entertained a visitor in the person of a dapper little Greek curio-dealer from the Lal bazar, who left behind him an invitation to Mr. Labertouche to call and inspect some scarabs in which he had professed an interest. It was quite a fresh importation, averred the Greek; the clerk was to be careful to remember that.

When he had gone the clerk made a note of it. Then, glancing out of the window, he became aware that the Attit mendicant, for some reason dissatisfied, was preparing to move on. Yawning, the clerk resumed his street coat, and went out to lunch, carelessly leaving the door unlocked, and the memorandum of the Greek's invitation exposed upon his blotter. When he returned at three o'clock, the door of Mr. Labertouche's private office was ajar and that gentleman was at his desk. The memorandum was, however, gone.

Mr. Labertouche was in the process of opening and reading a ten-days' accumulation of correspondence, an occupation which he suspended temporarily to call his clerk in and receive his report. This proved to be a tolerably lengthy session, for the clerk, whose name appeared to be Frank, demonstrated his command of a surprising memory. Without notes he enumerated the callers at the office day by day from the time when Labertouche had left for the Mofussil with his specimen box and the rest of his bug-hunting paraphernalia; naming those known to his employer, minutely describing all others, even repeating their words with almost phonographic fidelity.

Labertouche listened intently, without interrupting, abstractedly tapping his desk with a paper-cutter. At the end he said "Thank you," with a dry, preoccupied air; and resumed consideration of his letters. These seemed to interest him little; one after the other he gave to his clerk, saying: "File that," or "Answer that so-and-thusly." Two he set aside for his personal disposition, and these he took up again after the clerk had been dismissed. The first he read and reconsidered for a long time; then crumpled it up and, drawing to him a small tray of hammered brass, dropped the wadded paper upon it and touched a match to it, thoughtfully poking the blazing sheets with his paper-cutter until they were altogether reduced to ashes.

Quain's was the second letter. Having merely glanced at the heading and signature, Labertouche had reserved the rather formidable document—for Quain had written fully—as probably of scant importance, to be dealt with at his absolute leisure. But as he read his expression grew more and more serious and perturbed. Finishing the last page he turned back to the first and went over it a second time with much deliberation and frequent pauses, apparently memorizing portions of its contents. Finally he said, "Hum-m!" inscrutably and rang for Frank.

"He left New York by the Lusitania, eh?" said Mr. Labertouche aloud. The clerk entering interrupted his soliloquy. "Bring me, please," he said, "Bradshaw, the News—and the latest P. & O. schedule." And when Frank had returned with the articles, he desired him to go at once and enquire at Government house the whereabouts of Col. Dominick James Farrell, and further to search the hotels of Calcutta for a Miss Farrell, or for information concerning her. "Have this for me tonight—come to the bungalow at seven," he said. "And . . . I shall probably not be at the office again for several days."

"Insects?" enquired the clerk.

"Insects," affirmed Mr. Labertouche gravely.

"In the Mofussil?"

"There or thereabouts, Frank."

"Yes, sir. I presume you don't feel the need of a capable assistant yet?"

"Not yet, Frank," said Labertouche kindly. "Be patient. Your time will come; you're doing famously now."

"Thank you."

"Good afternoon. Lock the door as you leave."

Immediately that he found himself alone, Labertouche made of Quain's letter a second burnt offering to prejudice upon the tray of hammered brass.

This matter attended to, he lost himself in Bradshaw and the Peninsular & Oriental Steamship company's list of sailings; from which he derived enlightenment. "He was to come direct," mused Labertouche. "In that case he'll have waited over in London for the Poonah." He turned to the copy of the Indian Daily News which lay at his elbow, somewhat anxiously consulting its shipping news. Under the heading of "Due this Day" he discovered the words: "Poonah, London — Calcutta — Straits Settlements." And his face lengthened with concern.

"That's short notice," he said. "Lucky I got back today—uncommon lucky! . . . Still I may be mistaken." But the surmise failed to comfort him.

He drew a sheet of paper on which there was no letter head to him and began to write, composing deliberately and with great care.

The building in which his offices were located stood upon a corner; at either end of the long corridor on the upper floor, upon which the various offices opened, were stairways, one descending to Dhurrumtollah street, the other to a side street little better than an alley. It may be considered significant that, whereas Labertouche himself was not seen either to enter or to leave the building at any time that day, an Attit mendicant did enter from Dhurrumtollah street shortly after Frank had gone to lunch—and disappeared forthwith; while, in the dusk of evening, a slim Eurasian boy with a clerkly air left by the stairs to the alley.

CHAPTER VIII.

First Steps.

Forward on the promenade deck of the Poonah, in the shadow of the bridge, Amber stood with both elbows on the rail, dividing his somewhat perturbed attention between a noisy lot of lascar stewards, deckhands, and native third-class passengers in the bows below, and the long lines of Saugor island, just then slipping past on the starboard beam.

Up to the day that the Poonah had sailed from Tilbury dock, London, from the time he had left Quain among the sand dunes of Long Island, he had not been conscious of any sort of espionage upon his movements. But from the hour that the Poonah with its miscellaneous ship's company, white, yellow, brown, and black, had warped out into the Thames, he had felt he was being watched—had realized it instinctively, having nothing definite whereon to base his feeling. He was neither timorous nor given to conjuring up shapes of terror from the depths of a nervous imagination; the sensation of being under the surveillance of unseen, prying eyes is unmistakable. Yet he had tried to reason himself out of the belief—after taking all sensible precautions, such as never letting the photograph of Sophia Farrell out of his possession and keeping the Token next his skin, in a chamois bag that nestled beneath his arm, swinging from a leather cord round his neck. It was quite conceivable that that jewel, intrinsically invaluable, was badly wanted by its former possessors, whether for the simple worth of it or because it played an important part in the intrigue, or whatever it was, that had resulted in Rutton's suicide. For his own part, Amber cared nothing for it.

Such, in short, had been his frame of mind up to eight o'clock of the previous evening. At that hour he had made a discovery which had diverted the entire trend of his thoughts.

Doggott, ever a poor sailor, had been feeling ill and Amber had excused him early in the afternoon. About six o'clock he had gone to his stateroom and dressed for dinner, unattended. Absorbed in anticipations of the morrow, when first he should set foot in Calcutta and take the first step in pursuit of Sophia Farrell, he had absent-mindedly neglected to empty the pockets of his discarded clothing. At seven he had gone to dinner, leaving his stateroom door open, as was his habit—a not unusual one with first-cabin passengers on long voyages—and his flannels swinging from hooks in the wall. About eight, discovering his oversight through the absence of his cigarette case, he had hurried back to the stateroom to discover that he had been curiously robbed.

His watch, his keys, his small change and his sovereign purse, his silver cigarette case—all the articles, in fact, that he was accustomed to stuff into his pockets—with one exception, were where he had left them. But the leather envelope containing the portrait of Sophia Farrell was missing from the breast-pocket of his coat.

From the hour in which he had obtained it he had never but this once let it out of his personal possession. The envelope he had caused to be constructed for its safe-keeping during his enforced inaction in London. He had never once looked at it save in strict privacy, secure even from the eyes of Doggott; and the latter did not know what the leather case contained.

Thus his preconceived and self-constructed theory as to the extent of The Enemy's knowledge, was in an instant overthrown. "They" had seized the very first relaxation of his vigilance to rob him of that which he valued most. And in his heart he feared and believed that the incident indicated "their" intimacy not alone with his secret but with that which he shared with Colonel Farrell.

Since then his every move toward regaining the photograph had been fruitless.

In the end, and in despair, Amber posted a notice on the ship's bulletin board, offering 50 guineas reward for the return of the photograph to him either before landing or at the Great Eastern hotel, Calcutta, and having thereby established his reputation as a mild lunatic, sat down to twirl his thumbs and await the outcome, confidently anticipating there would be none. "They" had outwitted him and not 500 guineas would tempt "them," he believed. It remained only to contrive a triumph in despite of this setback.

The Poonah slipped in to her dock under cover of darkness. Amber, disembarking with Doggott, climbed into an open ghari on the landing stage and was driven swiftly to his hotel.

As he alighted and, leaving Doggott to settle with the ghariwallah, crossed the sidewalk to the hotel entrance, a beggar slipped through the throng of wayfarers, whining at his elbow.

"Give, O give, Protector of the Poor!"

Preoccupied, Amber hardly heard, and passed on; but the native stuck leech-like to his side.

"Give, hazoor—and the mercy of God shall be upon the heaven-born for ten thousand years!"

Now "heaven-born" is flattery properly reserved for those who sit in high places. Amber turned and eyed the man curiously, at the same time dropping into the filthy, importunate palm a few annas.

"May the shadow of the heaven-born be long upon the land, when he shall have passed through the Gateway of Swords!"

And like a flash the man was gone—dodging nimbly round the ghari and across Old Court House street, losing himself almost instantly in the press of early evening traffic.

"The devil!" said Amber thoughtfully. "Why should it be assumed that I have any shadow of an intention of entering that damnable Gateway of Swords?"

An incident at the desk, while he was arranging for his room, further mystified him. He had given his name to the clerk, who looked up, smiling.

"Mr. David Amber?" he said.

"Why, yes—"

"We were expecting you, sir. You came by the Poonah?"

"Yes, but—"

"There's a note for you." The man turned to a rack, sorting out a small square envelope from others pigeonholed under "A."

Could it be possible that Sophia Farrell had been advised of his coming? Amber's hand trembled slightly with eagerness and excitement as he took the missive.

"An Eurasian boy left it for you half an hour ago," said the clerk.

"Thank you," returned Amber, controlling himself sufficiently to wait until he should be conducted to his room before opening the note.

It was not, he observed later, superscribed in a feminine hand. Could it be from Quain's friend Labertouche? Who else? . . . Amber lifted his shoulders resignedly. "I wish Quain had minded his own business," he said ungratefully; "I can take care of myself. This Labertouche'll probably make life a misery for me."

There was a quality in the note, however, to make him forget his resentment of Quain's well-meant interference.

"My Dear Sir," it began formally: "Quain's letter did not reach me until this afternoon; a circumstance which I regret. Otherwise I should be better prepared to assist you. I have, on the other hand, set afoot enquiries which may shortly result in some interesting information bearing upon the matters which engage you. I expect to have news of the Fs. tonight, and shall be glad to communicate it to you at once. I am presuming that you propose losing no time in attending to the affair of the goldsmith, but I take the liberty of advising you that to attempt to find him without proper guidance or preparation would be an undertaking hazardous in the extreme. May I offer you my services? If you decide to accept them, be good enough to come before ten tonight to the sailors' lodging house known as 'Honest George's,' back of the Lal bazar, and ask for Honest George himself, refraining from mentioning my name. Dress yourself in your oldest and shabbiest clothing; you cannot overdo this since the neighborhood is questionable and a well-dressed man would immediately become an object of suspicion. Do not wear the ring; keep it about you, out of sight. Should this fail to reach you in time, try tomorrow night between eight and ten. You would serve us both well by burning this immediately. Pray believe me yours to command in all respects."

There was no signature.

Amber frowned and whistled over this. "Undoubtedly from Labertouche," he considered. "But why this flavor of intrigue? Does he know anything more than I do? I presume he must. It'd be a great comfort if . . . Hold on. 'News of the Fs.' That spells the Farrells. How in blazes does he know anything about the Farrells? I told Quain nothing. . . . Can it be a trap? Is it possible that the chap who took that photograph recognized . . . ?"

The problem held him in perplexity throughout the evening meal. He turned it over this way and that without being able to arrive at any comforting solution. Impulse in the end decided him—impulse and a glance at his watch which told him that the time grew short. "I'll go," he declared, "no matter what. It's nearly nine, but the Lal bazar's not far."

In the face of Doggott's unbending disapproval he left the hotel some 20 minutes later, having levied on Doggott's wardrobe for suitable clothing.

Once away from the Great Eastern he quietly insinuated himself into the tide of the city's night life that tirelessly ebbs and flows north of Dalhousie square—the restless currents of native life that move ceaselessly in obedience to impulses so meaningless and strange to the Occidental understanding. Before he realized it he had left civilization behind him and was breathing the atmosphere, heady and weird, of the Thousand-and-One-Nights. The Lal bazar seethed round him noisily, with a roaring not unlike that of a surf in the hearing of him who had so long lived separate from such scenes.

At a corner where there was more light he came upon a policeman whose tunic, helmet, and truncheon were so closely patterned after those of the London Bobby that the simple sight of them was calculated to revive confidence in the security of one's person. He inspected Amber shrewdly while the latter was asking his way to Honest George's, and in response jerked a white-gloved thumb down the wide thoroughfare.

"You carn't miss it, sir—s'ylors' boardin' 'ouse, all lit up and likely a row on at the bar. Mind your eye, guv'nor. It ayn't a plyce you'd ought to visit on your lone."

"Thanks; I've business there. I reckon to take care of myself."

Nevertheless it was with a mind preyed upon by forebodings that Amber stumbled down the cobbled way, reeking with filth, toward the establishment of Honest George.

He stopped in front of a building whose squat brick facade was lettered with the reassuring sobriquet of its proprietor. A bench, running the width of the structure, was thick with sprawling loafers, who smoked and spat and spoke a jargon of the seas, the chief part of which was blasphemy. Within, visible through windows never closed, was a crowded barroom ablaze with flaring gas jets, uproarious with voices thick with drink.

One needed courage of no common order to run the gauntlet of that rowdy room and brave the more secret dangers of the infamous den. "You've got to have your nerve with you," Amber put it. "But I suppose it's all in the game. Let's chance it." And he entered.

Compared with the atmosphere of that public room a blast from hell were sweet and cooling, thought Amber; the first whiff he had of it all but staggered him; and he found himself gasping, perspiration starting from every pore. Faint with disgust he elbowed his way through the mob to the bar, thankful that those about him, absorbed in the engrossing occupation of getting drunk, paid him not the least heed. Flattening himself against the rail he cast about for the proprietor. A blowsy, sweating barmaid caught his eye and without a word slapped down upon the sloppy counter before him a glass four fingers deep with unspeakable whisky. And he realized that he would have to drink it; to refuse would be to attract attention, perhaps with unpleasant consequences. "It's more than I bargained for," he grumbled, making a pretence of swallowing the dose, and to his huge relief managing to spill two-third of it down the front of his coat. What he swallowed bit like an acid. Tears came to his eyes, but he choked down the cough, and as soon as he could speak paid the girl. "Where's the boss?" he asked.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Like a Flash the Man Was Gone.

Film Drama for 108,000,000 Russians.

Cinematograph theaters are tremendously popular in Russia. Almost every village has one. Moscow and St. Petersburg have about 80 each. For the empire the number is estimated at 1,200, with an aggregate attendance last year of 108,000,000. At the average admission of 20 cents, $21,600,000 was taken in. Admission charges range from 8 to 67 cents. Many houses entertain 1,000 a night. On Sundays and holidays the crowds are enormous. The pictures shown are largely educational and do much good, especially as so large a proportion of the Russian population is illiterate.

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NATURALLY.

Hix—Did you notify the police of the robbery?

Dix—Yes, and I am expecting at any moment to hear that they have arrested the wrong man.

The Girl's Handicap.

In her pretty new frock sister Mabel felt quite proud as she sat on the front step and watched some boys playing on the sidewalk.

After a time one litle boy came up to talk to her and to admire, in his rough little way, her bright shiny shoes and pink sash.

"See my nice square-cut waist," exclaimed the girlie, "and my nice coral beads! Don't you wish you wus a girl?"

"No sire-ee," replied the boy. "I wouldn't want to be any girl at all, because lookie how much more neck you haf to wash."

Exactly.

Noting that another piece of valuable china had been broken, Senator Allen asked his housekeeper how the breakage occurred, and she hastily replied:

"It fell down and just broke itself."

"Merely an automatic brake," quietly commented the senator.

The Modern Trend.

"How is the water in the bath, Fifi?"

"Please, my lady, it turned the baby fairly blue."

"Then don't put Fido in for an hour or so."

Many a girl marries a man simply to keep some other girl from getting him.

To The Last Mouthful

one enjoys a bowl of crisp, delightful

Post Toasties

with cream or stewed fruit—or both.

Some people make an entire breakfast out of this combination.

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