He used the Earth, he used the Seas, he used the Air and all;
And out of black disaster
He arose to be the master
Of Earth and Water, Air and Fire,
But never reached his heart's desire!
(The Apple Tree's cut down!)

A DEAL IN COTTON

Long and long ago, when Devadatta was King of Benares, I wrote some tales concerning Strickland of the Punjab Police (who married Miss Youghal), and Adam, his son. Strickland has finished his Indian Service, and lives now at a place in England called Weston-super-Mare, where his wife plays the organ in one of the churches. Semi-occasionally he comes up to London, and occasionally his wife makes him visit his friends. Otherwise he plays golf and follows the harriers for his figure's sake.

If you remember that Infant who told a tale to Eustace Cleever the novelist, you will remember that he became a baronet with a vast estate. He has, owing to cookery, a little lost his figure, but he never loses his friends. I have found a wing of his house turned into a hospital for sick men, and there I once spent a week in the company of two dismal nurses and a specialist in "Sprue." Another time the place was full of schoolboys--sons of Anglo-Indians whom the Infant had collected for the holidays, and they nearly broke his keeper's heart.

But my last visit was better. The Infant called me up by wire, and I fell into the arms of a friend of mine, Colonel A.L. Corkran, so that the years departed from us, and we praised Allah, who had not yet terminated the Delights, nor separated the Companions.

Said Corkran, when he had explained how it felt to command a native Infantry regiment on the border: "The Stricks are coming for to-night-with their boy."

"I remember him. The little fellow I wrote a story about," I said. "Is he in the Service?"

"No. Strick got him into the Centro-Euro-Africa Protectorate. He's Assistant-Commissioner at Dupe--wherever that is. Somaliland, ain't it, Stalky?" asked the Infant.

Stalky puffed out his nostrils scornfully. "You're only three thousand miles out. Look at the atlas."

"Anyhow, he's as rotten full of fever as the rest of you," said the Infant, at length on the big divan. "And he's bringing a native servant with him. Stalky be an athlete, and tell Ipps to put him in the stable room."

"Why? Is he a Yao--like the fellow Wade brought here--when your housekeeper had fits?" Stalky often visits the Infant, and has seen some odd things.

"No. He's one of old Strickland's Punjabi policemen--and quite European--I believe."

"Hooray! Haven't talked Punjabi for three months--and a Punjabi from Central Africa ought to be amusin'."

We heard the chuff of the motor in the porch, and the first to enter was Agnes Strickland, whom the Infant makes no secret of adoring.

He is devoted, in a fat man's placid way, to at least eight designing women; but she nursed him once through a bad bout of Peshawur fever, and when she is in the house, it is more than all hers.

"You didn't send rugs enough," she began. "Adam might have taken a chill."

"It's quite warm in the tonneau. Why did you let him ride in front?"

"Because he wanted to," she replied, with the mother's smile, and we were introduced to the shadow of a young man leaning heavily on the shoulder of a bearded Punjabi Mohammedan.

"That is all that came home of him," said his father to me. "There was nothing in it of the child with whom I had journeyed to Dalhousie centuries since."

"And what is this uniform?" Stalky asked of Imam Din, the servant, who came to attention on the marble floor.

"The uniform of the Protectorate troops, Sahib. Though I am the Little Sahib's body-servant, it is not seemly for us white men to be attended by folk dressed altogether as servants."

"And--and you white men wait at table on horseback?" Stalky pointed to the man's spurs.

"These I added for the sake of honour when I came to England," said Imam Din Adam smiled the ghost of a little smile that I began to remember, and we put him on the big couch for refreshments. Stalky asked him how much leave he had, and he said "Six months."

"But he'll take another six on medical certificate," said Agnes anxiously. Adam knit his brows.

"You don't want to--eh? I know. Wonder what my second in command is doing." Stalky tugged his moustache, and fell to thinking of his Sikhs.

"Ah!" said the Infant. "I've only a few thousand pheasants to look after. Come along and dress for dinner. We're just ourselves. What flower is your honour's ladyship commanding for the table?"

"Just ourselves?" she said, looking at the crotons in the great hall. "Then let's have marigolds the little cemetery ones."

So it was ordered.

Now, marigolds to us mean hot weather, discomfort, parting, and death. That smell in our nostrils, and Adam's servant in waiting, we naturally fell back more and more on the old slang, recalling at each glass those who had gone before. We did not sit at the big table, but in the bay window overlooking the park, where they were carting the last of the hay. When twilight fell we would not have candles, but waited for the moon, and continued our talk in the dusk that makes one remember.

Young Adam was not interested in our past except where it had touched his future. I think his mother held his hand beneath the table. Imam Din--shoeless, out of respect to the floors--brought him his medicine, poured it drop by drop, and asked for orders.

"Wait to take him to his cot when he grows weary," said his mother, and Imam Din retired into the shadow by the ancestral portraits.

"Now what d'you expect to get out of your country?" the Infant asked, when--our India laid aside we talked Adam's Africa. It roused him at once.

"Rubber--nuts--gums--and so on," he said. "But our real future is cotton. I grew fifty acres of it last year in my District."

"My District!" said his father. "Hear him, Mummy!"

"I did though! I wish I could show you the sample. Some Manchester chaps said it was as good as any Sea Island cotton on the market."

"But what made you a cotton-planter, my son?" she asked.

"My Chief said every man ought to have a shouk (a hobby) of sorts, and he took the trouble to ride a day out of his way to show me a belt of black soil that was just the thing for cotton."

"Ah! What was your Chief like?" Stalky asked, in his silkiest tones.

"The best man alive--absolutely. He lets you blow your own nose yourself. The people call him"--Adam jerked out some heathen phrase--"that means the Man with the Stone Eyes, you know."

"I'm glad of that. Because I've heard from other quarters" Stalky's sentence burned like a slow match, but the explosion was not long delayed. "Other quarters!" Adam threw out a thin hand. "Every dog has his fleas. If you listen to them, of course!" The shake of his head was as I remembered it among his father's policemen twenty years before, and his mother's eyes shining through the dusk called on me to adore it. I kicked Stalky on the shin. One must not mock a young man's first love or loyalty.

A lump of raw cotton appeared on the table.

"I thought there might be a need. Therefore I packed it between our shirts," said the voice of Imam Din.

"Does he know as much English as that?" cried the Infant, who had forgotten his East.

We all admired the cotton for Adam's sake, and, indeed, it was very long and glossy.

"It's--it's only an experiment," he said. "We're such awful paupers we can't even pay for a mailcart in my District. We use a biscuit-box on two bicycle wheels. I only got the money for that"--he patted the stuff--"by a pure fluke."

"How much did it cost?" asked Strickland.

"With seed and machinery--about two hundred pounds. I had the labour done by cannibals."

"That sounds promising." Stalky reached for a fresh cigarette.

"No, thank you," said Agnes. "I've been at Weston-super-Mare a little too long for cannibals. I'll go to the music-room and try over next Sunday's hymns."

She lifted the boy's hand lightly to her lips, and tripped across the acres of glimmering floor to the music-room that had been the Infant's ancestors' banqueting hall. Her grey and silver dress disappeared under the musicians' gallery; two electrics broke out, and she stood backed against the lines of gilded pipes.

"There's an abominable self-playing attachment here!" she called.

"Me!" the Infant answered, his napkin on his shoulder. "That's how I play Parsifal."

"I prefer the direct expression. Take it away, Ipps."

We heard old Ipps skating obediently all over the floor.

"Now for the direct expression," said Stalky, and moved on the Burgundy recommended by the faculty to enrich fever-thinned blood.

"It's nothing much. Only the belt of cotton-soil my chief showed me ran right into the Sheshaheli country. We haven't been able to prove cannibalism against that tribe in the courts; but when a Sheshaheli offers you four pounds of woman's breast, tattoo marks and all, skewered up in a plantain leaf before breakfast, you--"

"Naturally burn the villages before lunch," said Stalky.

Adam shook his head. "No troops," he sighed. "I told my Chief about it, and he said we must wait till they chopped a white man. He advised me if ever I felt like it not to commit a--a barren felo de se, but to let the Sheshaheli do it. Then he could report, and then we could mop 'em up!"

"Most immoral! That's how we got--" Stalky quoted the name of a province won by just such a sacrifice.

"Yes, but the beasts dominated one end of my cotton-belt like anything. They chivied me out of it when I went to take soil for analysis--me and Imam Din."

"Sahib! Is there a need?" The voice came out of the darkness, and the eyes shone over Adam's shoulder ere it ceased.

"None. The name was taken in talk." Adam abolished him with a turn of the finger. "I couldn't make a casus belli of it just then, because my Chief had taken all the troops to hammer a gang of slave kings up north.

Did you ever hear of our war against Ibn Makarrah? He precious nearly lost us the Protectorate at one time, though he's an ally of ours now."

"Wasn't he rather a pernicious brute, even as they go?" said Stalky. "Wade told me about him last year."

"Well, his nickname all through the country was 'The Merciful,' and he didn't get that for nothing. None of our people ever breathed his proper name. They said 'He' or 'That One,' and they didn't say it aloud, either. He fought us for eight months."

"I remember. There was a paragraph about it in one of the papers," I said.

"We broke him, though. No--the slavers don't come our way, because our men have the reputation of dying too much, the first month after they're captured. That knocks down profits, you see."

"What about your charming friends, the Sheshahelis?" said the Infant.

"There's no market for Sheshaheli. People would as soon buy crocodiles. I believe, before we annexed the country, Ibn Makarrah dropped down on 'em once--to train his young men--and simply hewed 'em in pieces. The bulk of my people are agriculturists just the right stamp for cotton-growers. What's Mother playing?--'Once in royal'?"

The organ that had been crooning as happily as a woman over her babe restored, steadied to a tune.

"Magnificent! Oh, magnificent!" said the Infant loyally. I had never heard him sing but once, and then, though it was early in the tolerant morning, his mess had rolled him into a lotus pond.

"How did you get your cannibals to work for you?" asked Strickland.

"They got converted to civilization after my Chief smashed Ibn Makarrah--just at the time I wanted 'em. You see my Chief had promised me in writing that if I could scrape up a surplus he would not bag it for his roads this time, but I might have it for my cotton game. I only needed two hundred pounds. Our revenues didn't run to it."

"What is your revenue?" Stalky asked in the vernacular.

"With hut-tax, traders' game and mining licenses, not more than fourteen thousand rupees; every penny of it ear-marked months ahead." Adam sighed.

"Also there is a fine for dogs straying in the Sahib's camp. Last year it exceeded three rupees," Imam Din said quietly.

"Well, I thought that was fair. They howled so. We were rather strict on fines. I worked up my native clerk--Bulaki Ram--to a ferocious pitch of enthusiasm. He used to calculate the profits of our cotton-scheme to three points of decimals, after office. I tell you I envied your magistrates here hauling money out of motorists every week I had managed to make our ordinary revenue and expenditure just about meet, and I was crazy to get the odd two hundred pounds for my cotton. That sort of thing grows on a chap when he's alone--and talks aloud!"

"Hul-lo! Have you been there already?" the father said, and Adam nodded.

"Yes. Used to spout what I could remember of 'Marmion' to a tree, sir. Well then my luck turned. One evening an English-speaking nigger came in towing a corpse by the feet. (You get used to little things like that.) He said he'd found it, and please would I identify, because if it was one of Ibn Makarrah's men there might be a reward. It was an old Mohammedan, with a strong dash of Arab--a smallboned, bald-headed chap, and I was just wondering how it had kept so well in our climate when it sneezed. You ought to have seen the nigger! He fetched a howl and bolted like--like the dog in 'Tom Sawyer,' when he sat on the what's-its-name beetle. He yelped as he ran, and the corpse went on sneezing. I could see it had been sarkied. (That's a sort of gum-poison, pater, which attacks the nerve centres. Our chief medical officer is writing a monograph about it.) So Imam Din and I emptied out the corpse one time, with my shaving soap and trade gunpowder, and hot water.

"I'd seen a case of sarkie before; so when the skin peeled off his feet, and he stopped sneezing, I knew he'd live. He was bad, though; lay like a log for a week while Imam Din and I massaged the paralysis out of him. Then he told us he was a Hajji--had been three times to Mecca--come in from French Africa, and that he'd met the nigger by the wayside--just like a case of thuggee, in India--and the nigger had poisoned him. That seemed reasonable enough by what I knew of Coast niggers."

"You believed him?" said his father keenly.

"There was no reason I shouldn't. The nigger never came back, and the old man stayed with me for two months," Adam returned. "You know what the best type of a Mohammedan gentleman can be, pater? He was that."

"None finer, none finer," was the answer.

"Except a Sikh," Stalky grunted.

"He'd been to Bombay; he knew French Africa inside out; he could quote poetry and the Koran all day long. He played chess--you don't know what that meant to me--like a master. We used to talk about the regeneration of Turkey and the Sheik-ul-Islam between moves. Oh, everything under the sun we talked about! He was awfully open-minded. He believed in slavery, of course, but he quite saw that it would have to die out. That's why he agreed with me about developing the resources of the district by cotton-growing, you know."

"You talked of that too?" said Strickland.

"Rather. We discussed it for hours. You don't know what it meant to me. A wonderful man. Imam Din, was not our Hajji marvellous?"

"Most marvellous! It was all through the Hajji that we found the money for our cotton-play." Imam Din had moved, I fancy, behind Strickland's chair.

"Yes. It must have been dead against his convictions too. He brought me news when I was down with fever at Dupe that one of Ibn Makarrah's men was parading through my District with a bunch of slaves--in the Fork!"

"What's the matter with the Fork, that you can't abide it?" said Stalky. Adam's voice had risen at the last word.

"Local etiquette, sir," he replied, too earnest to notice Stalky's atrocious pun. "If a slaver runs slaves through British territory he ought to pretend that they're his servants. Hawkin' 'em about in the Fork--the forked stick that you put round their necks, you know--is insolence--same as not backing your topsails in the old days. Besides, it unsettles the District."

"I thought you said slavers didn't come your way," I put in.

"They don't. But my Chief was smoking 'em out of the North all that season, and they were bolting into French territory any road they could find. My orders were to take no notice so long as they circulated, but open slave-dealing in the Fork, was too much. I couldn't go myself, so I told a couple of our Makalali police and Imam Din to make talk with the gentleman one time. It was rather risky, and it might have been expensive, but it turned up trumps. They were back in a few days with the slaver (he didn't show fight) and a whole crowd of witnesses, and we tried him in my bedroom, and fined him properly. Just to show you how demoralized the brute must have been (Arabs often go dotty after a defeat), he'd snapped up four or five utterly useless Sheshaheli, and was offering 'em to all and sundry along the road. Why, he offered 'em to you, didn't he, Imam Din?"

"I was witness that he offered man-eaters' for sale," said Imam Din.

"Luckily for my cotton-scheme, that landed, him both ways. You see, he had slaved and exposed slaves for sale in British territory. That meant the double fine if I could get it out of him."

"What was his defence?" said Strickland, late of the Punjab Police.

"As far as I remember--but I had a temperature of 104 degrees at the time--he'd mistaken the meridians of longitude. Thought he was in French territory. Said he'd never do it again, if we'd let him off with a fine.
I could have shaken hands with the brute for that. He paid up cash like a motorist and went off one time."

"Did you see him?"

"Ye-es. Didn't I, Imam Din?"

"Assuredly the Sahib both saw and spoke to the slaver. And the Sahib also made a speech to the man-eaters when he freed them, and they swore to supply him with labour for all his cotton-play. The Sahib leaned on his own servant's shoulder the while."

"I remember something of that. I remember Bulaki Ram giving me the papers to sign, and I distinctly remember him locking up the money in the safe--two hundred and ten beautiful English sovereigns. You don't know what that meant to me! I believe it cured my fever; and as soon as I could, I staggered off with the Hajji to interview the Sheshaheli about labour. Then I found out why they had been so keen to work! It wasn't gratitude. Their big village had been hit by lightning and burned out a week or two before, and they lay flat in rows around me asking me for a job. I gave it 'em."

"And so you were very happy?" His mother had stolen up behind us. "You liked your cotton, dear?" She tidied the lump away.

"By Jove, I was happy!" Adam yawned. "Now if any one," he looked at the Infant, "cares to put a little money into the scheme, it'll be the making of my District. I can't give you figures, sir, but I assure--"

"You'll take your arsenic, and Imam Din'll take you up to bed, and I'll come and tuck you in."

Agnes leaned forward, her rounded elbows on his shoulders, hands joined across his dark hair, and "Isn't he a darling?" she said to us, with just the same heart-rending lift to the left eyebrow and the same break of her voice as sent Strickland mad among the horses in the year '84. We were quiet when they were gone. We waited till Imam Din returned to us from above and coughed at the door, as only dark-hearted Asia can.

"Now," said Strickland, "tell us what truly befell, son of my servant."

"All befell as our Sahib has said. Only--only there was an arrangement--a little arrangement on account of his cotton-play."

"Tell! Sit! I beg your pardon, Infant," said Strickland.

But the Infant had already made the sign, and we heard Imam Din hunker down on the floor: One gets little out of the East at attention.

"When the fever came on our Sahib in our roofed house at Dupe," he began, "the Hajji listened intently to his talk. He expected the names of women; though I had already told him that Our virtue was beyond belief or compare, and that Our sole desire was this cotton-play. Being at last convinced, the Hajji breathed on our Sahib's forehead, to sink into his brain news concerning a slave-dealer in his district who had made a mock of the law. Sahib," Imam Din turned to Strickland, "our Sahib answered to those false words as a horse of blood answers to the spur. He sat up. He issued orders for the apprehension of the slavedealer. Then he fell back. Then we left him."

"Alone--servant of my son, and son of my servant?" said his father.

"There was an old woman which belonged to the Hajji. She had come in with the Hajji's money-belt. The Hajji told her that if our Sahib died, she would die with him. And truly our Sahib had given me orders to depart."

"Being mad with fever--eh?"

"What could we do, Sahib? This cotton-play was his heart's desire. He talked of it in his fever. Therefore it was his heart's desire that the Hajji went to fetch. Doubtless the Hajji could have given him money enough out of hand for ten cottonplays; but in this respect also our Sahib's virtue was beyond belief or compare. Great Ones do not exchange moneys. Therefore the Hajji said--and I helped with my counsel--that we must make arrangements to get the money in all respects conformable with the English Law. It was great trouble to us, but--the Law is the Law. And the Hajji showed the old woman the knife by which she would die if our Sahib died. So I accompanied the Hajji."

"Knowing who he was?" said Strickland.

"No! Fearing the man. A virtue went out from him overbearing the virtue of lesser persons. The Hajji told Bulaki Ram the clerk to occupy the seat of government at Dupe till our return. Bulaki Ram feared the Hajji, because the Hajji had often gloatingly appraised his skill in figures at five thousand rupees upon any slave-block. The Hajji then said to me: 'Come, and we will make the man-eaters play the cotton-game for my delight's delight' The Hajji loved our Sahib with the love of a father for his son, of a saved for his saviour, of a Great One for a Great One. But I said: 'We cannot go to that Sheshaheli place without a hundred rifles. We have here five.' The Hajji said: 'I have untied as knot in my head-handkerchief which will be more to us than a thousand.' I saw that he had so loosed it that it lay flagwise on his shoulder. Then I knew that he was a Great One with virtue in him.

"We came to the highlands of the Sheshaheli on the dawn of the second day--about the time of the stirring of the cold wind. The Hajji walked delicately across the open place where their filth is, and scratched upon the gate which was shut. When it opened I saw the man-eaters lying on their cots under the eaves of the huts. They rolled off: they rose up, one behind the other the length of the street, and the fear on their faces was as leaves whitening to a breeze. The Hajji stood in the gate guarding his skirts from defilement. The Hajji said: 'I am here once again. Give me six and yoke up.' They zealously then pushed to us with poles six, and yoked them with a heavy tree. The Hajji then said: 'Fetch fire from the morning hearth, and come to windward.' The wind is strong on those headlands at sunrise, so when each had emptied his crock of fire in front of that which was before him, the broadside of the town roared into flame, and all went. The Hajji then said: 'At the end of a time there will come here the white man ye once chased for sport. He will demand labour to plant such and such stuff. Ye are that labour, and your spawn after you.' They said, lifting their heads a very little from the edge of the ashes: 'We are that labour, and our spawn after us.' The Hajji said: 'What is also my name?' They said: 'Thy name is also The Merciful' The Hajji said: 'Praise then my mercy'; and while they did this, the Hajji walked away, I following."

The Infant made some noise in his throat, and reached for more Burgundy.

"About noon one of our six fell dead. Fright only frights Sahib! None had--none could--touch him. Since they were in pairs, and the other of the Fork was mad and sang foolishly, we waited for some heathen to do what was needful. There came at last Angari men with goats. The Hajji said: 'What do ye see? They said: 'Oh, our Lord, we neither see nor hear.' The Hajji said: 'But I command ye to see and to hear and to say.' They said: 'Oh, our Lord, it is to our commanded eyes as though slaves stood in a Fork.' The Hajji said: 'So testify before the officer who waits you in the town of Dupe.' They said: 'What shall come to us after?' The Hajji said: 'The just reward for the informer. But if ye do not testify, then a punishment which shall cause birds, to fall from the trees in terror and monkeys to scream for pity.' Hearing this, the Angari men hastened to Dupe. The Hajji then said to me: 'Are those things sufficient to establish our case, or must I drive in a village full?' I said that three witnesses amply established any case, but as yet, I said, the Hajji had not offered his slaves for sale. It is true, as our Sahib said just now, there is one fine for catching slaves, and yet another for making to sell them. And it was the double fine that we needed, Sahib, for our Sahib's cotton-play. We had fore-arranged all this with Bulaki Ram, who knows the English Law, and, I thought the Hajji remembered, but he grew angry, and cried out: 'O God, Refuge of the Afflicted, must I, who am what I am, peddle this dog's meat by the roadside to gain his delight for my heart's delight?' None the less, he admitted it was the English Law, and so he offered me the six--five--in a small voice, with an averted head. The Sheshaheli do not smell of sour milk as heathen should. They smell like leopards, Sahib. This is because they eat men."

"Maybe," said Strickland. "But where were thy wits? One witness is not sufficient to establish the fact of a sale."

"What could we do, Sahib? There was the Hajji's reputation to consider. We could not have called in a heathen witness for such a thing. And, moreover, the Sahib forgets that the defendant himself was making this case. He would not contest his own evidence. Otherwise, I know the law of evidence well enough.

"So then we went to Dupe, and while Bulaki Ram waited among the Angari men, 'I ran to see our Sahib in bed. His eyes were very bright, and his mouth was full of upside-down orders, but the old woman had not loosened her hair for death. The Hajji said: 'Be quick with my trial. I am not Job!' The Hajji was a learned man. We made the trial swiftly to a sound of soothing voices round the bed. Yet--yet, because no man can be sure whether a Sahib of that blood sees, or does not see, we made it strictly in the manner of the forms of the English Law. Only the witnesses and the slaves and the prisoner we kept without for his nose's sake."

"Then he did not see the prisoner?" said Strickland.

"I stood by to shackle up an Angari in case he should demand it, but by God's favour he was too far fevered to ask for one. It is quite true he signed the papers. It is quite true he saw the money put away in the safe--two hundred and ten English pounds and it is quite true that the gold wrought on him as a strong cure. But as to his seeing the prisoner, and having speech with the man-eaters--the Hajji breathed all that on his forehead to sink into his sick brain. A little, as ye have heard, has remained.... Ah, but when the fever broke, and our Sahib called for the fine-book, and the thin little picture-books from Europe with the pictures of ploughs and hoes, and cotton=3Dmills--ah, then he laughed as he used to laugh, Sahib. It was his heart's desire, this cotton-play. The Hajji loved him, as who does not? It was a little, little arrangement, Sahib, of which--is it necessary to tell all the world?"

"And when didst thou know who the Hajji was?" said Strickland.

"Not for a certainty till he and our Sahib had returned from their visit to the Sheshaheli country. It is quite true as our Sahib says, the man-eaters lay, flat around his feet, and asked for spades to cultivate cotton. That very night, when I was cooking the dinner, the Hajji said to me: 'I go to my own place, though God knows whether the Man with the Stone Eyes have left me an ox, a slave, or a woman.' I said: 'Thou art then That One?' The Hajji said: 'I am ten thousand rupees reward into thy hand. Shall we make another law-case and get more cotton machines for the boy?' I said: 'What dog am I to do this? May God prolong thy life a thousand years!' The Hajji said: 'Who has seen to-morrow? God has given me as it were a son in my old age, and I praise Him. See that the breed is not lost!'

"He walked then from the cooking-place to our Sahib's office-table under the tree, where our Sahib held in his hand a blue envelope of Service newly come in by runner from the North. At this, fearing evil news for the Hajji, I would have restrained him, but he said: 'We be both Great Ones. Neither of us will fail.' Our Sahib looked up to invite the Hajji to approach before he opened the letter, but the Hajji stood off till our Sahib had well opened and well read the letter. Then the Hajji said: 'Is it permitted to say farewell?' Our Sahib stabbed the letter on the file with a deep and joyful breath and cried a welcome. The Hajji said: 'I go to my own place,' and he loosed from his neck a chained heart of ambergris set in soft gold and held it forth. Our Sahib snatched it swiftly in the closed fist, down turned, and said 'If thy name be written hereon, it is needless, for a name is already engraved on my heart.' The Hajji said: 'And on mine also is a name engraved; but there is no name on the amulet.' The Hajji stooped to our Sahib's feet, but our Sahib raised and embraced him, and the Hajji covered his mouth with his shoulder-cloth, because it worked, and so he went away."

"And what order was in the Service letter?" Stalky murmured.

"Only an order for our Sahib to write a report on some new cattle sickness. But all orders come in the same make of envelope. We could not tell what order it might have been."

"When he opened the letter--my son--made he no sign? A cough? An oath?" Strickland asked.

"None, Sahib. I watched his hands. They did not shake. Afterward he wiped his face, but he was sweating before from the heat."

"Did he know? Did he know who the Hajji was?" said the Infant in English.

"I am a poor man. Who can say what a Sahib of that get knows or does not know? But the Hajji is right. The breed should not be lost. It is not very hot for little children in Dupe, and as regards nurses, my sister's cousin at Jull--"

"H'm! That is the boy's own concern. I wonder if his Chief ever knew?" said Strickland.

"Assuredly," said Imam Din. "On the night before our Sahib went down to the sea, the Great Sahib--the Man with the Stone Eyes--dined with him in his camp, I being in charge of the table. They talked a long while and the Great Sahib said: 'What didst thou think of That One?' (We do not say Ibn Makarrah yonder.) Our Sahib said: 'Which one?' The Great Sahib said: 'That One which taught thy man-eaters to grow cotton for thee. He was in thy District three months to my certain knowledge, and I looked by every runner that thou wouldst send me in his head.' Our Sahib said: 'If his head had been needed, another man should have been appointed to govern my District, for he was my friend.' The Great Sahib laughed and said: 'If I had needed a lesser man in thy place be sure I would have sent him, as, if I had needed the head of That One, be sure I would have sent men to bring it to me. But tell me now, by what means didst thou twist him to thy use and our profit in this cotton-play?' Our Sahib said: 'By God, I did not use that man in any fashion whatever. He was my friend.' The Great Sahib said: 'Toh Vac! (Bosh!) Tell!' Our Sahib shook his head as he does--as he did when a child--and they looked at each other like sword-play men in the ring at a fair. The Great Sahib dropped his eyes first and he said: 'So be it. I should perhaps have answered thus in my youth. No matter. I have made treaty with That One as an ally of the State. Some day he shall tell me the tale.' Then I brought in fresh coffee, and they ceased. But I do not think That One will tell the Great Sahib more than our Sahib told him."

"Wherefore?" I asked.

"Because they are both Great Ones, and I have observed in my life that Great Ones employ words very little between each other in their dealings; still less when they speak to a third concerning those dealings. Also they profit by silence.... Now I think that the mother has come down from the room, and I will go rub his feet till he sleeps."

His ears had caught Agnes's step at the stair-head and presently she passed us on her way to the music room humming the Magnificat.

THE NEW KNIGHTHOOD

Who gives him the Bath?
  "I," said the wet,
Rank Jungle-sweat,
  "I'll give him the Bath!"

Who'll sing the psalms?
  "We," said the Palms.