

then--boys will be boys. It's no good tryin' to look stuffy, Carson.

Mister Corkran will now oblige with the story of Tulke an' Mary Yeo!"

SLAVES OF THE LAMP.

Part II.

That very Infant who told the story of the capture of Boh Na Ghee [A Conference of the Powers: "Many Inventions"] to Eustace Cleaver, novelist, inherited an estateful baronetcy, with vast revenues, resigned the service, and became a landholder, while his mother stood guard over him to see that he married the right girl. But, new to his position, he presented the local volunteers with a full-sized magazine-rifle range, two miles long, across the heart of his estate, and the surrounding families, who lived in savage seclusion among woods full of pheasants, regarded him as an erring maniac. The noise of the firing disturbed their poultry, and Infant was cast out from the society of J.P.'s and decent men till such time as a daughter of the county might lure him back to right thinking. He took his revenge by filling the house with choice selections of old schoolmates home on leave--affable detrimentals, at whom the bicycle-riding maidens of the surrounding families were allowed to look from afar. I knew when a troop-ship was in

port by the Infant's invitations. Sometimes he would produce old friends of equal seniority; at others, young and blushing giants whom I had left small fags far down in the Lower Second; and to these Infant and the elders expounded the whole duty of man in the Army.

"I've had to cut the service," said the Infant; "but that's no reason why my vast stores of experience should be lost to posterity." He was just thirty, and in that same summer an imperious wire drew me to his baronial castle: "Got good haul; ex Tamar. Come along."

It was an unusually good haul, arranged with a single eye to my benefit. There was a baldish, broken-down captain of Native Infantry, shivering with ague behind an indomitable red nose--and they called him Captain Dickson. There was another captain, also of Native Infantry, with a fair mustache; his face was like white glass, and his hands were fragile, but he answered joyfully to the cry of Tertius. There was an enormously big and well-kept man, who had evidently not campaigned for years, clean-shaved, soft-voiced, and cat-like, but still Abanazar for all that he adorned the Indian Political Service; and there was a lean Irishman, his face tanned blue-black with the suns of the Telegraph Department. Luckily the baize doors of the bachelors' wing fitted tight, for we dressed promiscuously in the corridor or in each other's rooms, talking, calling, shouting, and anon waltzing by pairs to songs of Dick Four's own devising.

There were sixty years of mixed work to be sifted out between us,

and since we had met one another from time to time in the quick scene-shifting of India--a dinner, camp, or a race-meeting here; a dak-bungalow or railway station up country somewhere else--we had never quite lost touch. Infant sat on the banisters, hungrily and enviously drinking it in. He enjoyed his baronetcy, but his heart yearned for the old days.

It was a cheerful babel of matters personal, provincial, and imperial, pieces of old call-over lists, and new policies, cut short by the roar of a Burmese gong, and we went down not less than a quarter of a mile of stairs to meet Infant's mother, who had known us all in our school-days and greeted us as if those had ended a week ago. But it was fifteen years since, with tears of laughter, she had lent me a gray princess-skirt for amateur theatricals.

That was a dinner from the "Arabian Nights," served in an eighty-foot hall full of ancestors and pots of flowering roses, and, what was more impressive, heated by steam. When it was ended and the little mother had gone away--("You boys want to talk, so I shall say good-night now")--we gathered about an apple-wood fire, in a gigantic polished steel grate, under a mantel-piece ten feet high, and the Infant compassed us about with curious liqueurs and that kind of cigarette which serves best to introduce your own pipe.

"Oh, bliss!" grunted Dick Four from a sofa, where he had been packed with a rug over him. "First time I've been warm since I came home."

We were all nearly on top of the fire, except Infant, who had been long enough at home to take exercise when he felt chilled. This is a grisly diversion, but much affected by the English of the Island.

"If you say a word about cold tubs and brisk walks," drawled McTurk, "I'll kill you, Infant. I've got a liver, too. 'Member when we used to think it a treat to turn out of our beds on a Sunday morning--thermometer fifty-seven degrees if it was summer--and bathe off the Pebbleridge? Ugh!"

"Thing I don't understand," said Tertius, "was the way we chaps used to go down into the lavatories, boil ourselves pink, and then come up with all our pores open into a young snow-storm or a black frost. Yet none of our chaps died, that I can remember."

"Talkin' of baths," said McTurk, with a chuckle, "'member our bath in Number Five, Beetle, the night Rabbits-Eggs rocked King? What wouldn't I give to see old Stalky now! He is the only one of the two Studies not here."

"Stalky is the great man of his Century," said Dick Four.

"How d'you know?" I asked.

"How do I know?" said Dick Four, scornfully. "If you've ever been in a

tight place with Stalky you wouldn't ask."

"I haven't seen him since the camp at Pindi in '87," I said. "He was goin' strong then--about seven feet high and four feet through."

"Adequate chap. Infernally adequate," said Tertius, pulling his mustache and staring into the fire.

"Got dam' near court-martialed and broke in Egypt in '84," the Infant volunteered. "I went out in the same trooper with him--as raw as he was. Only I showed it, and Stalky didn't."

"What was the trouble?" said McTurk, reaching forward absently to twitch my dress-tie into position.

"Oh, nothing. His colonel trusted him to take twenty Tommies out to wash, or groom camels, or something at the back of Suakin, and Stalky got embroiled with Fuzzies five miles in the interior. He conducted a masterly retreat and wiped up eight of 'em. He knew jolly well he'd no right to go out so far, so he took the initiative and pitched in a letter to his colonel, who was frothing at the mouth, complaining of the 'paucity of support accorded to him in his operations.' Gad, it might have been one fat brigadier slangin' another! Then he went into the Staff Corps."

"That--is--entirely--Stalky," said Abanazar from his arm-chair.

"You've come across him, too?" I said.

"Oh, yes," he replied in his softest tones. "I was at the tail of that--that epic. Don't you chaps know?"

We did not--Infant, McTurk, and I; and we called for information very politely.

"'Twasn't anything," said Tertius. "We got into a mess up in the Khye-Kheen Hills a couple o' years ago, and Stalky pulled us through. That's all."

McTurk gazed at Tertius with all an Irishman's contempt for the tongue-tied Saxon.

"Heavens!" he said. "And it's you and your likes govern Ireland. Tertius, aren't you ashamed?"

"Well, I can't tell a yarn. I can chip in when the other fellow starts bukhing. Ask him." He pointed to Dick Four, whose nose gleamed scornfully over the rug.

"I knew you wouldn't," said Dick Four. "Give me a whiskey and soda. I've been drinking lemon-squash and ammoniated quinine while you chaps were bathin' in champagne, and my head's singin' like a top."

He wiped his ragged mustache above the drink; and, his teeth chattering in his head, began: "You know the Khye-Kheen-Malo't expedition, when we scared the souls out of 'em with a field force they daren't fight against? Well, both tribes--there was a coalition against us--came in without firing a shot; and a lot of hairy villains, who had no more power over their men than I had, promised and vowed all sorts of things. On that very slender evidence, Pussy dear--"

"I was at Simla," said Abanazar, hastily.

"Never mind, you're tarred with the same brush. On the strength of those tuppenny-ha'penny treaties, your asses of Politicals reported the country as pacified, and the Government, being a fool, as usual, began road-makin'--dependin' on local supply for labor. 'Member that, Pussy? 'Rest of our chaps who'd had no look-in during the campaign didn't think there'd be any more of it, and were anxious to get back to India. But I'd been in two of these little rows before, and I had my suspicions. I engineered myself, summa ingenio, into command of a road-patrol--no shovellin', only marching up and down genteelly with a guard. They'd withdrawn all the troops they could, but I nucleused about forty Pathans, recruits chiefly, of my regiment, and sat tight at the base-camp while the road-parties went to work, as per Political survey."

"Had some rippin' sing-songs in camp, too," said Tertius.

"My pup"--thus did Dick Four refer to his subaltern--"was a pious little beast. He didn't like the sing-songs, and so he went down with pneumonia. I rootled round the camp, and found Tertius gassing about as a D.A.Q.M.G., which, God knows, he isn't cut out for. There were six or eight of the old Coll. at base-camp (we're always in force for a frontier row), but I'd heard of Tertius as a steady old hack, and I told him he had to shake off his D.A.Q.M.G. breeches and help me. Tertius volunteered like a shot, and we settled it with the authorities, and out we went--forty Pathans, Tertius, and me, looking up the road-parties. Macnamara's--'member old Mac, the Sapper, who played the fiddle so damnably at Umballa?--Mac's party was the last but one. The last was Stalky's. He was at the head of the road with some of his pet Sikhs. Mac said he believed he was all right."

"Stalky is a Sikh," said Tertius. "He takes his men to pray at the Durbar Sahib at Amritzar, regularly as clockwork, when he can."

"Don't interrupt, Tertius. It was about forty miles beyond Mac's before I found him; and my men pointed out gently, but firmly, that the country was risin'. What kind o' country, Beetle? Well, I'm no word-painter, thank goodness, but you might call it a hellish country! When we weren't up to our necks in snow, we were rolling down the khud. The well-disposed inhabitants, who were to supply labor for the road-making (don't forget that, Pussy dear), sat behind rocks and took pot-shots at us. 'Old, old story! We all legged it in search of Stalky. I had a feeling that he'd be in good cover, and about dusk we found him and his

road-party, as snug as a bug in a rug, in an old Malo't stone fort, with a watch-tower at one corner. It overhung the road they had blasted out of the cliff fifty feet below; and under the road things went down pretty sheer, for five or six hundred feet, into a gorge about half a mile wide and two or three miles long. There were chaps on the other side of the gorge scientifically gettin' our range. So I hammered on the gate and nipped in, and tripped over Stalky in a greasy, bloody old poshteen, squatting on the ground, eating with his men. I'd only seen him for half a minute about three months before, but I might have met him yesterday. He waved his hand all sereno.

"Hullo, Aladdin! Hullo, Emperor!" he said. "You're just in time for the performance."

"I saw his Sikhs looked a bit battered. 'Where's your command? Where's your subaltern?' I said.

"Here--all there is of it," said Stalky. "If you want young Everett, he's dead, and his body's in the watch-tower. They rushed our road-party last week, and got him and seven men. We've been besieged for five days. I suppose they let you through to make sure of you. The whole country's up. 'Strikes me you've walked into a first-class trap.' He grinned, but neither Tertius nor I could see where the deuce the fun was. We hadn't any grub for our men, and Stalky had only four days' whack for his. That came of dependin' upon your asinine Politicals, Pussy dear, who told us that the inhabitants were friendly.

"To make us quite comfy, Stalky took us up to the watch-tower to see poor Everett's body, lyin' in a foot o' drifted snow. It looked like a girl of fifteen--not a hair on the little fellow's face. He'd been shot through the temple, but the Malo'ts had left their mark on him. Stalky unbuttoned the tunic, and showed it to us--a rummy sickle-shaped cut on the chest. 'Member the snow all white on his eyebrows, Tertius? 'Member when Stalky moved the lamp and it looked as if he was alive?"

"Ye-es," said Tertius, with a shudder. "'Member the beastly look on Stalky's face, though, with his nostrils all blown out, same as he used to look when he was bullyin' a fag? That was a lovely evening."

"We held a council of war up there over Everett's body. Stalky said the Malo'ts and Khye-Kheens were up together; havin' sunk their blood feuds to settle us. The chaps we'd seen across the gorge were Khye-Kheens. It was about half a mile from them to us as a bullet flies, and they'd made a line of sungars under the brow of the hill to sleep in and starve us out. The Malo'ts, he said, were in front of us promiscuous. There wasn't good cover behind the fort, or they'd have been there, too. Stalky didn't mind the Malo'ts half as much as he did the Khye-Kheens. He said the Malo'ts were treacherous curs. What I couldn't understand was, why in the world the two gangs didn't join in and rush us. There must have been at least five hundred of 'em. Stalky said they didn't trust each other very well, because they were ancestral enemies when they were at home; and the only time they'd tried a rush he'd hove a couple of

blasting-charges among 'em, and that had sickened 'em a bit.

"It was dark by the time we finished, and Stalky, always serene, said: 'You command now. I don't suppose you mind my taking any action I may consider necessary to reprovision the fort?' I said, 'Of course not,' and then the lamp blew out. So Tertius and I had to climb down the tower steps (we didn't want to stay with Everett) and got back to our men. Stalky had gone off--to count the stores, I supposed. Anyhow, Tertius and I sat up in case of a rush (they were plugging at us pretty generally, you know), relieving each other till the mornin'.

"Mornin' came. No Stalky. Not a sign of him. I took counsel with his senior native officer--a grand, white-whiskered old chap--Rutton Singh, from Jullunder-way. He only grinned, and said it was all right. Stalky had been out of the fort twice before, somewhere or other, accordin' to him. He said Stalky 'ud come back unchipped, and gave me to understand that Stalky was an invulnerable Guru of sorts. All the same, I put the whole command on half rations, and set 'em to pickin' out loopholes.

"About noon there was no end of a snow-storm, and the enemy stopped firing. We replied gingerly, because we were awfully short of ammunition. Don't suppose we fired five shots an hour, but we generally got our man. Well, while I was talking with Rutton Singh I saw Stalky coming down from the watch-tower, rather puffy about the eyes, his poshteen coated with claret-colored ice.

"'No trustin' these snow-storms,' he said. 'Nip out quick and snaffle what you can get. There's a certain amount of friction between the Khye-Kheens and the Malo'ts just now.'

"I turned Tertius out with twenty Pathans, and they bucked about in the snow for a bit till they came on to a sort of camp about eight hundred yards away, with only a few men in charge and half a dozen sheep by the fire. They finished off the men, and snaffled the sheep and as much grain as they could carry, and came back. No one fired a shot at 'em. There didn't seem to be anybody about, but the snow was falling pretty thick.

"'That's good enough,' said Stalky when we got dinner ready and he was chewin' mutton-kababs off a cleanin' rod. 'There's no sense riskin' men. They're holding a pow-wow between the Khye-Kheens and the Malo'ts at the head of the gorge. I don't think these so-called coalitions are much good.'

"Do you know what that maniac had done? Tertius and I shook it out of him by instalments. There was an underground granary cellar-room below the watch-tower, and in blasting the road Stalky had blown a hole into one side of it. Being no one else but Stalky, he'd kept the hole open for his own ends; and laid poor Everett's body slap over the well of the stairs that led down to it from the watch-tower. He'd had to move and replace the corpse every time he used the passage. The Sikhs wouldn't go near the place, of course. Well, he'd got out of this hole, and dropped

on to the road. Then, in the night and a howling snow-storm, he'd dropped over the edge of the khud, made his way down to the bottom of the gorge, forded the nullah, which was half frozen, climbed up on the other side along a track he'd discovered, and come out on the right flank of the Khye-Kheens. He had then--listen to this!--crossed over a ridge that paralleled their rear, walked half a mile behind that, and come out on the left of their line where the gorge gets shallow and where there was a regular track between the Malo't and the Khye-Kheen camps. That was about two in the morning, and, as it turned out, a man spotted him--a Khye-Kheen. So Stalky abolished him quietly, and left him--with the Malo't mark on his chest, same as Everett had.

"I was just as economical as I could be,' Stalky said to us. 'If he'd shouted I should have been slain. I'd never had to do that kind of thing but once before, and that was the first time I tried that path. It's perfectly practicable for infantry, you know.'

"What about your first man?' I said.

"Oh, that was the night after they killed Everett, and I went out lookin' for a line of retreat for my men. A man found me. I abolished him--privatim--scragged him. But on thinkin' it over it occurred to me that if I could find the body (I'd hove it down some rocks) I might decorate it with the Malo't mark and leave it to the Khye-Kheens to draw inferences. So I went out again the next night and did. The Khye-Kheens are shocked at the Malo'ts perpetratin' these two dastardly outrages

after they'd sworn to sink all bleed feuds. I lay up behind their sungars early this morning and watched 'em. They all went to confer about it at the head of the gorge. Awf'ly annoyed they are. Don't wonder.' You know the way Stalky drops out his words, one by one."

"My God!" said the Infant, explosively, as the full depth of the strategy dawned on him.

"Dear-r man!" said McTurk, purring rapturously.

"Stalky stalked," said Tertius. "That's all there is to it."

"No, he didn't," said Dick Four. "Don't you remember how he insisted that he had only applied his luck? Don't you remember how Rutton Singh grabbed his boots and grovelled in the snow, and how our men shouted?"

"None of our Pathans believed that was luck," said Tertius. "They swore Stalky ought to have been born a Pathan, and--'member we nearly had a row in the fort when Rutton Singh said Stalky was a Pathan? Gad, how furious the old chap was with my Jemadar! But Stalky just waggled his finger and they shut up.

"Old Rutton Singh's sword was half out, though, and he swore he'd cremate every Khye-Kheen and Malo't he killed. That made the Jemadar pretty wild, because he didn't mind fighting against his own creed, but he wasn't going to crab a fellow Mussulman's chances of Paradise. Then

Stalky jabbered Pushtu and Punjabi in alternate streaks. Where the deuce did he pick up his Pushtu from, Beetle?"

"Never mind his language, Dick," said I. "Give us the gist of it."

"I flatter myself I can address the wily Pathan on occasion, but, hang it all, I can't make puns in Pushtu, or top off my arguments with a smutty story, as he did. He played on those two old dogs o' war like a--like a concertina. Stalky said--and the other two backed up his knowledge of Oriental nature--that the Khye-Kheens and the Malo'ts between 'em would organize a combined attack on us that night, as a proof of good faith. They wouldn't drive it home, though, because neither side would trust the other on account, as Rutton Singh put it, of the little accidents. Stalky's notion was to crawl out at dusk with his Sikhs, manoeuvre 'em along this ungodly goat-track that he'd found, to the back of the Khye-Kheen position, and then lob in a few long shots at the Malo'ts when the attack was well on. 'That'll divert their minds and help to agitate 'em,' he said. 'Then you chaps can come out and sweep up the pieces, and we'll rendezvous at the head of the gorge. After that, I move we get back to Mac's camp and have something to eat."

"You were commandin'?" the Infant suggested.

"I was about three months senior to Stalky, and two months Tertius's senior," Dick Four replied. "But we were all from the same old Coll. I should say ours was the only little affair on record where some one

wasn't jealous of some one else."

"We weren't," Tertius broke in, "but there was another row between Gul Sher Khan and Rutton Singh. Our Jemadar said--he was quite right--that no Sikh living could stalk worth a damn; and that Koran Sahib had better take out the Pathans, who understood that kind of mountain work. Rutton Singh said that Koran Sahib jolly well knew every Pathan was a born deserter, and every Sikh was a gentleman, even if he couldn't crawl on his belly. Stalky struck in with some woman's proverb or other, that had the effect of doublin' both men up with a grin. He said the Sikhs and the Pathans could settle their claims on the Khye-Kheens and Malo'ts later on, but he was going to take his Sikhs along for this mountain-climbing job, because Sikhs could shoot. They can, too. Give 'em a mule-load of ammunition apiece, and they're perfectly happy."

"And out he gat," said Dick Four. "As soon as it was dark, and he'd had a bit of a snooze, him and thirty Sikhs went down through the staircase in the tower, every mother's son of 'em salutin' little Everett where It stood propped up against the wall. The last I heard him say was, 'Kubbadar! tumbleinga! [Look out; you'll fall!] and they tumbleingaed over the black edge of nothing. Close upon 9 p.m. the combined attack developed; Khye-Kheens across the valley, and Malo'ts in front of us, pluggin' at long range and yellin' to each other to come along and cut our infidel throats. Then they skirmished up to the gate, and began the old game of calling our Pathans renegades, and invitin' 'em to join the holy war. One of our men, a young fellow from Dera Ismail, jumped on

the wall to slang 'em back, and jumped down, blubbing like a child. He'd been hit smack in the middle of the hand. 'Never saw a man yet who could stand a hit in the hand without weepin' bitterly. It tickles up all the nerves. So Tertius took his rifle and smote the others on the head to keep them quiet at the loopholes. The dear children wanted to open the gate and go in at 'em generally, but that didn't suit our book.

"At last, near midnight, I heard the wop, wop, wop, of Stalky's Martinis across the valley, and some general cursing among the Malo'ts, whose main body was hid from us by a fold in the hillside. Stalky was brownin' 'em at a great rate, and very naturally they turned half right and began to blaze at their faithless allies, the Khye-Kheens--regular volley firin'. In less than ten minutes after Stalky opened the diversion they were going it hammer and tongs, both sides the valley. When we could see, the valley was rather a mixed-up affair. The Khye-Kheens had streamed out of their sungars above the gorge to chastise the Malo'ts, and Stalky--I was watching him through my glasses--had slipped in behind 'em. Very good. The Khye-Kheens had to leg it along the hillside up to where the gorge got shallow and they could cross over to the Malo'ts, who were awfully cheered to see the Khye-Kheens taken in the rear.

"Then it occurred to me to comfort the Khye-Kheens. So I turned out the whole command, and we advanced a' la pas de charge, doublin' up what, for the sake of argument, we'll call the Malo'ts' left flank. Even then, if they'd sunk their differences, they could have eaten us alive; but they'd been firin' at each other half the night, and they went on

firin'. Queerest thing you ever saw in your born days! As soon as our men doubled up to the Malo'ts, they'd blaze at the Khye-Kheens more zealously than ever, to show they were on our side, run up the valley a few hundred yards, and halt to fire again. The moment Stalky saw our game he duplicated it his side the gorge; and, by Jove! the Khye-Kheens did just the same thing."

"Yes, but," said Tertius, "you've forgot him playin' 'Arrah, Patsy, mind the baby' on the bugle to hurry us up."

"Did he?" roared McTurk. Somehow we all began to sing it, and there was an interruption.

"Rather," said Tertius, when we were quiet. No one of the Aladdin company could forget that tune. "Yes, he played 'Patsy.' Go on, Dick."

"Finally," said Dick Four, "we drove both mobs into each other's arms on a bit of level ground at the head of the valley, and saw the whole crew whirl off, fightin' and stabbin' and swearin' in a blindin' snow-storm. They were a heavy, hairy lot, and we didn't follow 'em.

"Stalky had captured one prisoner--an old pensioned Sepoy of twenty-five years' service, who produced his discharge--an awf'ly sportin' old card. He had been tryin' to make his men rush us early in the day. He was sulky--angry with his own side for their cowardice, and Rutton Singh wanted to bayonet him--Sikhs don't understand fightin' against the

Government after you've served it honestly--but Stalky rescued him, and froze on to him tight--with ulterior motives, I believe. When we got back to the fort, we buried young Everett--Stalky wouldn't hear of blowin' up the place--and bunked. We'd only lost ten men, all told."

"Only ten, out of seventy. How did you lose 'em?" I asked.

"Oh, there was a rush on the fort early in the night, and a few Malo'ts got over the gate. It was rather a tight thing for a minute or two, but the recruits took it beautifully. Lucky job we hadn't any badly wounded men to carry, because we had forty miles to Macnamara's camp. By Jove, how we legged it! Half way in, old Rutton Singh collapsed, so we slung him across four rifles and Stalky's overcoat; and Stalky, his prisoner, and a couple of Sikhs were his bearers. After that I went to sleep. You can, you know, on the march, when your legs get properly numbed. Mac swears we all marched into his camp snoring and dropped where we halted. His men lugged us into the tents like gram-bags. I remember wakin' up and seeing Stalky asleep with his head on old Rutton Singh's chest. He slept twenty-four hours. I only slept seventeen, but then I was coming down with dysentery."

"Coming down? What rot! He had it on him before we joined Stalky in the fort," said Tertius.

"Well, you needn't talk! You hove your sword at Macnamara and demanded a drum-head court-martial every time you saw him. The only thing that

soothed you was putting you under arrest every half hour. You were off your head for three days."

"Don't remember a word of it," said Tertius, placidly. "I remember my orderly giving me milk, though."

"How did Stalky come out?" McTurk demanded, purling hard over his pipe.

"Stalky? Like a serene Brahmini bull. Poor old Mac was at his Royal Engineers' wits' end to know what to do. You see I was putrid with dysentery, Tertius was ravin', half the men had frost-bite, and Macnamara's orders were to break camp and come in before winter. So Stalky, who hadn't turned a hair, took half his supplies to save him the bother o' luggin' 'em back to the plains, and all the ammunition he could get at, and, consilio et auxilio Rutton Singhi, tramped back to his fort with all his Sikhs and his precious prisoners, and a lot of dissolute hangers-on that he and the prisoner had seduced into service. He had sixty men of sorts--and his brazen cheek. Mac nearly wept with joy when he went. You see there weren't any explicit orders to Stalky to come in before the passes were blocked: Mac is a great man for orders, and Stalky's a great man for orders--when they suit his book."

"He told me he was goin' to the Engadine," said Tertius. "Sat on my cot smokin' a cigarette, and makin' me laugh till I cried. Macnamara bundled the whole lot of us down to the plains next day. We were a walkin' hospital."

"Stalky told me that Macnamara was a simple godsend to him," said Dick Four. "I used to see him in Mac's tent listenin' to Mac playin' the fiddle, and, between the pieces, wheedlin' Mac out of picks and shovels and dynamite cartridges hand-over-fist. Well, that was the last we saw of Stalky. A week or so later the passes were shut with snow, and I don't think Stalky wanted to be found particularly just then."

"He didn't," said the fair and fat Abanazar. "He didn't. Ho, ho!"

Dick Four threw up his thin, dry hand with the blue veins at the back of it. "Hold on a minute, Pussy; I'll let you in at the proper time. I went down to my regiment, and that spring, five mouths later, I got off with a couple of companies on detachment: nominally to look after some friends of ours across the border; actually, of course, to recruit.

It was a bit unfortunate, because an ass of a young Naick carried a frivolous blood-feud he'd inherited from his aunt into those hills, and the local gentry wouldn't volunteer into my corps. Of course, the Naick had taken short leave to manage the business; that was all regular enough; but he'd stalked my pet orderly's uncle. It was an infernal shame, because I knew Harris of the Ghuznees would be covering that ground three months later, and he'd snaffle all the chaps I had my eyes on. Everybody was down on the Naick, because they felt he ought to have had the decency to postpone his--his disgustful amours till our companies were full strength.

"Still the beast had a certain amount of professional feeling left. He sent one of his aunt's clan by night to tell me that, if I'd take safeguard, he'd put me on to a batch of beauties. I nipped over the border like a shot, and about ten miles the other side, in a nullah, my rapparee-in-charge showed me about seventy men variously armed, but standing up like a Queen's company. Then one of 'em stepped out and lugged round an old bugle, just like--who's the man?--Bancroft, ain't it?--feeling for his eye-glass in a farce, and played 'Arrah, Patsy, mind the baby. Arrah, Patsy, mind'--that was as far as he could get."

That, also, was as far as Dick Four could get, because we had to sing the old song through twice, again and once more, and subsequently, in order to repeat it.

"He explained that if I knew the rest of the song he had a note for me from the man the song belonged to. Whereupon, my children, I finished that old tune on that bugle, and this is what I got. I knew you'd like to look at it. Don't grab." (We were all struggling for a sight of the well-known unformed handwriting.) "I'll read it aloud.

"Fort Everett, February 19.

"Dear Dick, or Tertius: The bearer of this is in charge of seventy-five recruits, all pukka devils, but desirous of leading new lives. They have been slightly polished, and after being boiled may shape well. I want you to give thirty of them to my adjutant, who, though God's own ass,

will need men this spring. The rest you can keep. You will be interested to learn that I have extended my road to the end of the Malo't country. All headmen and priests concerned in last September's affair worked one month each, supplying road metal from their own houses. Everett's grave is covered by a forty-foot mound, which should serve well as a base for future triangulations. Rutton Singh sends his best salaams. I am making some treaties, and have given my prisoner--who also sends his salaams--local rank of Khan Bahadur. "A. L. Cockran.'

"Well, that was all," said Dick Four, when the roaring, the shouting, the laughter, and, I think, the tears, had subsided. "I chaperoned the gang across the border as quick as I could. They were rather homesick, but they cheered up when they recognized some of my chaps, who had been in the Khye-Kheen row, and they made a rippin' good lot. It's rather more than three hundred miles from Fort Everett to where I picked 'em up. Now, Pussy, tell 'em the latter end o' Stalky as you saw it."

Abanazar laughed a little nervous, misleading, official laugh.

"Oh, it wasn't much. I was at Simla in the spring, when our Stalky, out of his snows, began corresponding direct with the Government."

"After the manner of a king," suggested Dick Four. "My turn now, Dick. He'd done a whole lot of things he shouldn't have done, and constructively pledged the Government to all sorts of action."

"Pledged the State's ticker, eh?" said McTurk, with a nod to me.

"About that; but the embarrassin' part was that it was all so thunderin' convenient, so well reasoned, don't you know? Came in as pat as if he'd had access to all sorts of information--which he couldn't, of course."

"Pooh!" said Tertius, "I back Stalky against the Foreign Office any day."

"He'd done pretty nearly everything he could think of, except strikin' coins in his own image and superscription, all under cover of buildin' this infernal road and bein' blocked by the snow. His report was simply amazin'. Von Lennaert tore his hair over it at first, and then he gasped, 'Who the dooce is this unknown Warren Hastings? He must be slain. He must be slain officially! The Viceroy'll never stand it. It's unheard of. He must be slain by his Excellency in person. Order him up here and pitch in a stinger.' Well, I sent him no end of an official stinger, and I pitched in an unofficial telegram at the same time."

"You!" This with amazement from the Infant, for Abanazar resembled nothing so much as a fluffy Persian cat.

"Yes--me," said Abanazar. "'Twasn't much, but after what you've said, Dicky, it was rather a coincidence, because I wired:

"Aladdin now has got his wife,

Your Emperor is appeased.

I think you'd better come to life:

We hope you've all been pleased.'

"Funny how that old song came up in my head. That was fairly non-committal and encouragin'. The only flaw was that his Emperor wasn't appeased by very long chalks. Stalky extricated himself from his mountain fastnesses and leafed up to Simla at his leisure, to be offered up on the horns of the altar."

"But," I began, "surely the Commander-in-Chief is the proper--"

"His Excellency had an idea that if he blew up one single junior captain--same as King used to blow us up--he was holdin' the reins of empire, and, of course, as long as he had that idea, Von Lennaert encouraged him. I'm not sure Von Lennaert didn't put that notion into his head."

"They've changed the breed, then, since my time," I said.

"P'r'aps. Stalky was sent up for his wiggin' like a bad little boy. I've reason to believe that His Excellency's hair stood on end. He walked into Stalky for one hour--Stalky at attention in the middle of the floor, and (so he vowed) Von Lennaert pretending to soothe down His Excellency's topknot in dumb show in the background. Stalky didn't dare to look up, or he'd have laughed."

"Now, wherefore was Stalky not broken publicly?" said the Infant, with a large and luminous leer.

"Ah, wherefore?" said Abanazar. "To give him a chance to retrieve his blasted career, and not to break his father's heart. Stalky hadn't a father, but that didn't matter. He behaved like a--like the Sanawar Orphan Asylum, and His Excellency graciously spared him. Then he came round to my office and sat opposite me for ten minutes, puffing out his nostrils. Then he said, 'Pussy, if I thought that basket-hanger--'"

"Hah! He remembered that," said McTurk.

"That two-anna basket-hanger governed India, I swear I'd become a naturalized Muscovite to-morrow. I'm a femme incomprise. This thing's broken my heart. It'll take six months' shootin'-leave in India to mend it. Do you think I can get it, Pussy?"

"He got it in about three minutes and a half, and seventeen days later he was back in the arms of Rutton Singh--horrid disgraced--with orders to hand over his command, etc., to Cathcart MacMonnie."

"Observe!" said Dick Four. "One colonel of the Political Department in charge of thirty Sikhs, on a hilltop. Observe, my children!"

"Naturally, Cathcart not being a fool, even if he is a Political, let

Stalky do his shooting within fifteen miles of Fort Everett for the next six months, and I always understood they and Rutton Singh and the prisoner were as thick as thieves. Then Stalky loafed back to his regiment, I believe. I've never seen him since."

"I have, though," said McTurk, swelling with pride.

We all turned as one man. "It was at the beginning of this hot weather. I was in camp in the Jullunder doab and stumbled slap on Stalky in a Sikh village; sitting on the one chair of state, with half the population grovelling before him, a dozen Sikh babies on his knees, an old harridan clapping him on the shoulder, and a garland o' flowers round his neck. Told me he was recruitin'. We dined together that night, but he never said a word of the business at the Fort. Told me, though, that if I wanted any supplies I'd better say I was Koran Sahib's bhai; and I did, and the Sikhs wouldn't take my money."

"Ah! That must have been one of Rutton Singh's villages," said Dick Four; and we smoked for some time in silence.

"I say," said McTurk, casting back through the years, "did Stalky ever tell you how Rabbits-Eggs came to rock King that night?"

"No," said Dick Four. Then McTurk told. "I see," said Dick Four, nodding. "Practically he duplicated that trick over again. There's nobody like Stalky."

"That's just where you make the mistake," I said. "India's full of Stalkies--Cheltenham and Haileybury and Marlborough chaps--that we don't know anything about, and the surprises will begin when there is really a big row on."

"Who will be surprised?" said Dick Four.

"The other side. The gentlemen who go to the front in first-class carriages. Just imagine Stalky let loose on the south side of Europe with a sufficiency of Sikhs and a reasonable prospect of loot. Consider it quietly."

"There's something in that, but you're too much of an optimist, Beetle," said the Infant.

"Well, I've a right to be. Ain't I responsible for the whole thing? You needn't laugh. Who wrote 'Aladdin now has got his wife'--eh?"

"What's that got to do with it?" said Tertius.

"Everything," said I.

"Prove it," said the Infant.

And I have.