

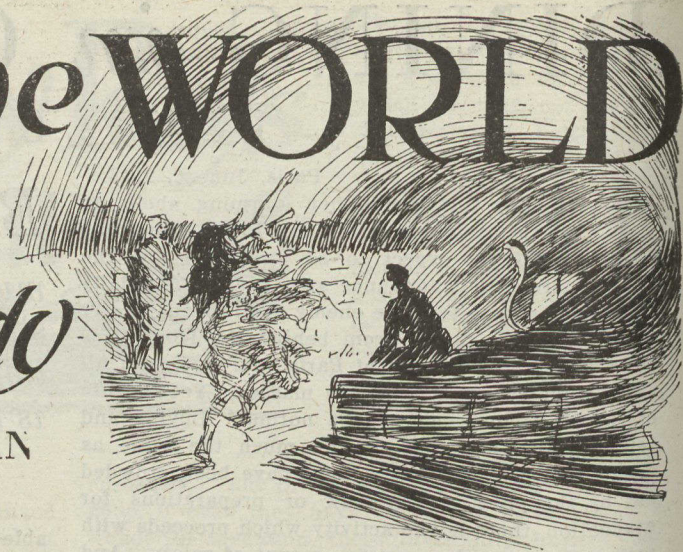
# The WINDS of the WORLD

## PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

RANJOOR SINGH, major of a Sikh squadron, goes to visit Yasmini, the extraordinary woman who learned all the secrets of India from the winds of the world. There he meets three Germans one of whom offers him, in the name of Germany, the freedom of the earth if only the Sikhs would fail England when the time came. Ranjoor Singh refuses his answer until that time should come. Colonel Kirby, of the Sikh squadron is told that his best native officer has called on Yasmini; but refuses to believe that he is anything but a loyal officer. As an act of revenge for the contempt shown him in Yasmini's house, an Afridi murders one of the troopers in Ranjoor Singh's squadron. He is taken up as a witness, and Ranjoor Singh tries to bribe the truth from him. He escapes, and is followed into a house by Ranjoor Singh. When Colonel Kirby and one of his officers find that he has disappeared, and trace him here, they find to their horror that the house has been burned to the ground, leaving only the walls standing. The Colonel continues his search by going to Yasmini's house. Here the two British officers are forced by the mischievous Yasmini to beg on their knees for the missing man, before she will give them any information.

## by Talbot Mundy

Illustrated by T. W. McLEAN



being his property, gave it into my hand."

"When?" Both men demanded to know that in one voice.

"Sahibs, having no means of telling time, how can I guess?"

"How long ago? About how long ago?"

"Being elderly person of advancing years and much adipose tissue, I am not able to observe more than one thing at a time. And yet many things have been forced on my attention. I do not know how long ago."

"Since I saw you outside the barrack gate?" demanded Warrington.

"Oh, yes. Oh, certainly. By all means!"

"Less than two hours ago, then, sir!" said Warrington, looking at his watch.

"Then he isn't burned to death!" said Kirby, with more satisfaction than he had expressed before.

"Oh, no, sir! Positivelee not, sahib! The risaldar-major is all vitalitee!"

"Where did he give you the ring?"

"Into the palm of my hand, sahib."

"Where—in what place—in what street—at whose house?"

at all in finding him. When you have given the ring to him he will ask you questions, and you will say Ranjoor Singh said, "All will presently be made clear"; and should you forget the message, babuji, or should you fail to find him soon, there are those who will fail to find him soon, there are those who will make it their urgent business, babuji, to open that belly of thine and see what is in it!" So, my God, gentlemen! I am verree timid man! I have given the ring and the message, but how will they know that I have given it? I did not think of that! Moreover, I am unrewarded—I have no emolument—as yet!"

"How will you know?" demanded Warrington.

"They, sahib."

"Who are they?" asked Kirby.

"The men who will investigate the inside of my belly, sahib. Oh, a belly is so sensitive! I am afraid!"

"Did he tell you who 'they' were?"

"No, sahib. Had he done so, I would at once have sought police protection. Not knowing names of individuals, what was use of going to police, who would laugh at me? I went to Yasmini, who understands all things. She laughed, too; but she told me where is Colonel Kirby sahib."

COLONEL KIRBY became possessed of a bright idea, his first since Yasmini had thrown her spell over him.

"Could you find the way," he asked, "from here to wherever it was that Risaldar-Major Ranjoor Singh gave you that ring?"

The babu thrust his head out of the carriage window and gazed into the dark for several minutes.

"Conceivablee yes, sahib."

"Then tell the driver where to turn!"

"I could direct with more discernment from box-seat," said the babu, with a hand on the door.

"No, you don't!" commanded Warrington. "Let go that handle! What I want to know is why were you so afraid at Yasmini's?"

"I, sahib?"

"Yes, you! I saw your face in a mirror, and you were scared nearly to death. Of what?"

"Who is not afraid of Yasmini? Were the sahibs not also afraid?"

"Of what besides Yasmini were

you afraid? Of what in particular?"

"Of her cobras, sahib!"

"What of them?" demanded Warrington, with a reminiscent shudder.

"Certain of her women showed them to me."

"Why?"

"To further convince me, sahib, had that been necessary. Oh, but I was already quite convinced. Bravely is not my vade mecum!"

"Confound the man! To convince you of what?"

"That if I tell too much one of those snakes will shortlee be my bedmate. Ah! To think of it causes me to perspire with sweat. Sahibs, that is a—"

"You shall go to jail if you don't tell me what I

"THAT'S the man whose face was in the mirror!" said Warrington suddenly, reaching out to seize the babu's collar.

"He's the man who wanted to be regimental clerk. He's the man who was offering to eat a German a day! . . . No—stand still, and I won't hurt you!"

"Bring him out into the fresh air!" ordered Kirby.

The illimitable sky did not seem big enough just then; four walls could not hold him. Kirby, colonel of light cavalry, and considered by many the soundest man in his profession, was in revolt against himself; and his collar was a beastly mess.

"Hurry out of this hole, for heaven's sake!" he exclaimed.

So Warrington applied a little science to the babu, and that gentleman went out through a narrow door backward at a speed and at an angle that were new to him—so new that he could not express his sensations in the form of speech. The door shut behind them with a slam, and where they looked for it they could see no more than a mark in the wall about fifty yards from the bigger door by which they had originally entered.

"There's the carriage waiting, sir!" said Warrington, and with a glance toward it to reassure himself, Kirby opened his mouth wide and filled his lungs three times with the fresh, rain-sweetened air.

There were splashes of rain falling, and he stood with bared head, face upward, as if the rain would wash Yasmini's musk from him. It was nearly pitch-dark, but Warrington could just see that the risaldar on the box seat raised his whip to them in token of recognition.

"Now, then! Speak, my friend! What were you doing in there?" demanded Warrington.

"No, not here!" said Kirby. "We might be recognized. Bring him into the shay."

The babu uttered no complaint, but allowed himself to be pushed along at a trot ahead of the adjutant, and bundled head-foremost through the carriage door.

"Drive slowly!" ordered Kirby, clambering in last; and the risaldar sent the horses forward at a steady trot.

"Now!" said Warrington.

"H-r-r-ump!" said Kirby.

"My God, gentlemen!" said the babu. "Sahibs, I am innocent of all complicittee in this or any other eventualitee. I am married man, having family responsibility and other handicaps. Therefore—"

"Where did you get this ring," demanded Kirby.

"That? Oh, that!" said the babu. "That is verree simplee told. That is simple little matter. There is nothing untoward in that connection. Risaldar-Major Ranjoor Singh, who is legal owner of ring, same



"—Knocking him down again, and departed for the temple shadows, screaming."

"At nobody's house, sahib. It was in the dark, and the dark is very big."

"Did he give it you at Yasmini's?"

"Oh, no, sahib! Positivelee not!"

"Where is he now?"

"Sahib, how should I know, who am but elderly person of no metaphysical attainments, only failed B.A.?"

"What did he say when he gave it to you?"

"Sahib, he threatened me!"

"Confound you, what did he say?"

"He said, 'Babuji, present this ring to Colonel Kirby sahib. You will find him, babuji, where you will find him, but in any case you will lose no time