

sitting by, could hear him, "here is a huckster among them who, I think, knows something, and might be brought to tell it if you see him alone."

"What makes you think that, Rivers?" inquired his captain.  
 "Why, when the interpreter had got them all together, and was cross-questioning them, this fellow's little eyes twinkled when he heard that many rupees would be given for any information leading to the capture of Shere Ali. Like the rest of them, he swore he knew nothing about him, but he hung about the doorway, and as I came out of the khotwal's house he said in a low tone, 'What would the Sahib give to catch the dacoit chief?' I answered at once, one thousand rupees; but he shook his head and muttered, 'Not enough, it is too dangerous,' so I said to myself, 'I'll just bring you along with me, my man.'"

"Quite right," rejoined Hobson, "I'll see him in a few minutes."  
 "Smart fellow that sergeant!" remarked Slade. "Do you think he is right in his conjecture?"  
 "Quite likely, he is a shrewd fellow; he has been for many years in this country and understands the natives thoroughly—he speaks their tongue, too, a bit."

The villagers were now brought one by one before Hobson, beginning with their headman, who was sternly informed that Shere Ali had been traced to their immediate vicinity, that there was a thousand rupees for the man whose information led to his capture, that it was useless to pretend that they had no knowledge of him, that the Government had resolved to make a severe example of the first village found sheltering or assisting him, and that he had little doubt they had at all events been guilty of this latter.

One by one they protested by all their gods that they had no knowledge of this Shere Ali, that they loathed his very name, that he spread desolation on all the country round, and that they only hoped His Excellency would speedily deliver them from this wild beast who devoured them. One by one they were dismissed with a recommendation to make their way back to their village, and a menace that they would live to pay the penalty of their obstinate silence.

"Dogs ye are, and dogs' death ye shall die," thundered Hobson in Eastern hyperbole. "Your tongues have defiled the truth, and you know that you have lied in your beards. Away, back to your village, and pray that I burn it not over your heads ere the week be past."

"I say," said Gilbert, as the discomfited villagers, having now permission to depart, slunk down the hill, "you are giving full play to your imagination, aren't you?"

"Yes," rejoined Hobson, laughing, "it's the only way to talk to these beggars. I have no doubt they know perfectly well where Shere Ali has betaken himself, but they are afraid to tell. Their own rulers would not only threaten all I have done, but thoroughly mean it. And I fancy in the early days of the century our own people would have done the same."

"Still," said Gilbert Slade, "you haven't got a bit of information out of them yet. What are you going to do with this last man?"

"Why, to tell you the truth," replied Hobson, "a good deal of all this bombast has been for his special benefit. You see he has been within earshot all the time, and has been purposely given the opportunity of speaking to his fellows after I have talked to them. We'll have him up now, and if I don't wring something out of him I must fairly own I'm beat, and the following of Shere Ali will become a mere matter of chance; and yet," he continued, lowering his voice, "there never was such reason that we should follow fast upon his track."

The Bunnea, or petty trader, was now brought before Hobson, and replied to the latter's exordium by the same protestations of ignorance as his fellows, except that he was, if possible, even more profuse in such utterances. Hobson listened unmoved until he had finished, and then said, "Your lies are useless. You have asked what I will give to know where I can lay hands on Shere Ali. Men don't ask what you will give unless they have something to sell. You haggled at the price, and say it is too dangerous."

"My lord has been misinformed," exclaimed the Bunnea trembling with error.

"I think not; unlucky for you if it is so. You had better listen attentively to what I say. I shall take you into the jungle with me. If I find Shere Ali you shall have two thousand rupees, and I can safely promise you I shall never dread his vengeance. If I don't," said Hobson, sternly, "I'll leave you in the jungle for the crows to feed upon."

In vain the wretched Bunnea prostrated himself at Hobson's feet, while sweat streamed down his brow from absolute terror.

"Take him away," said the latter sternly, "and let him be closely guarded. We'll march in an hour."

CHAPTER XLV.

FURZEDON LEAVES ENGLAND.

Norman Slade was by no means the man to let the grass grow under his feet in any matter of business, more especially when it came to bringing a criminal to justice, and that criminal one who had cost him a considerable sum of money. No sooner had he got a case against Furzedon complete than he exerted all the interest he possessed amongst the leading men of the law to induce them to make the Jockey Club take the matter up; though the august body were averse to taking cognizance of an affair that had happened so many months ago, and about which their verdict—whatever it might be—could in reality make now no difference. The thing was done, the bets had all been paid, and nothing they could possibly do could alter the transaction. Let it be never so great a fraud, let it be never so successful a robbery, nevertheless it was a thing accomplished, it was a fact of the past; and those who had profited by it must keep their gains, and those that had lost by it must abide by their losses.

(To be continued.)

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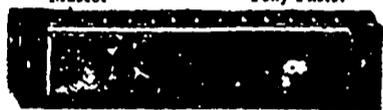
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