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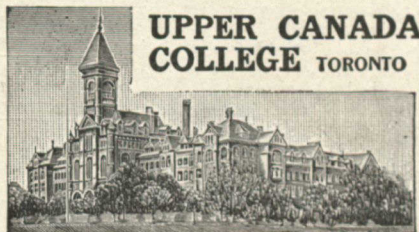
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THE STOLEN KASABA

(Continued from page 20)

the creak of hinges as the heavy gate was
swung to a crack; a lean black arm was
thrust through, and a voice said: "Give me
the purse, brother—I will give it to the
Sahib."

"Call the Sahib," Runjeet answered,
"that I may give it into his hands. How
do I know that thou are not a thief?—all
durwans are of the robber caste," and he
jingled the rupees seductively in his hand.

"Give it to me, brother," the gatekeeper
answered, "and thou mayest keep a rupee
for thine honesty in bringing it; the Sahib
will not mind." The gate opened a little
wider, and the speaker, in his eagerness
for the money, thrust his shoulder and one
leg through.

"Ah, brother, thou art indeed the dur-
wan," Runjeet exclaimed; "here are the
rupees, and give me the one that is my
dustoor."

Teck heard a rustle, a gurgling, stifled
cry, and at their feet on the ground lay the
gatekeeper, his voice strangled in his throat
by the twist of the policeman's kummer-
bund.

Teck clicked a pair of handcuffs on the
durwan's wrists, saying to Runjeet, "Easy
bhai (brother), don't choke him."

"Now, durwan," he added in a low voice,
"we are police sahibs. Whose bungalow
is this?"

"Baboo Ram Chunder's," the durwan
gasped when the cloth was taken from his
throat.

"All right. And in there are two thief
sahibs, and unless you lead us to them
quietly, you will be sent to jail; also, in
the meantime, this little gun which I have
here will kill you if you make a noise."

Teck drew a strong cord through the
handcuffs, passed the end to Runjeet, and
added: "If the durwan gives a warning to
the thief sahibs you are to kill him."

"Huzoor, I will lead you to the little
room wherein are the two sahibs with
Baboo Ram Chunder. Huzoor, have pity
upon Ramatha, for I am a man of a large
family."

They slipped through the gate and Teck
shot the bolts behind them. Then, led by
the captive, they passed through a little
courtyard in which a fountain played
amongst crotons and aloes. It was per-
fectly dark. The heavy walls of a pucca
building rose a gloomy blur against the
night sky. They circled this on a cement
path, coming to a set of steps at the back.
Up the steps and across a broad verandah
they passed, and leading, the durwan
brought them to a spiral stairway that
wound up a corner tower of the building.

As they passed, a servant called sleepily
from a charpoy on the verandah: "Kuhn
hai?"

"It is I, Ramatha, the durwan, brother—
I go to the Baboo Sahib," he answered, as
they stood silent in the darkness.

"Salaam, Ramatha, thou old fool!" the
servant replied.

At the top of the winding stairway, they
stood on a landing, and from a latticed
door little blades of light crept weakly into
the darkness of the hall. Ramatha touched
Teck on the arm, and with his manacled
hands pushed him gently toward the door.

Through a chink Teck surveyed the in-
terior. Four or five brass lamps held
coconut oil, in which floated lighted dips,
their soft glow showing the detective, at
one end of the room squatted on a silken
cushion, a fat Bengali Baboo. Beside him
stood a huge, gaunt Punjabi leaning on a
tulwar (curved sword). In front of the
Baboo, seated on the floor, tailor fashion,
were Straddles and Ives Holborn. And in
the centre of this group upon a square of
black cloth rested the pearl-studded gold
kasaba.

The inmates of the room were evidently
bargaining. Teck saw the Baboo reach be-
hind him and take from a small iron box
a sheaf of Bank of England notes. He
held them in his lap. Ives Holborn said
something and the Baboo threw the notes
back into the box angrily, grasped the
snake-like stem of his hookah and puffed,
then blew the smoke through his nostrils
as if in disdain.

Teck touched the Chief and drew him

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