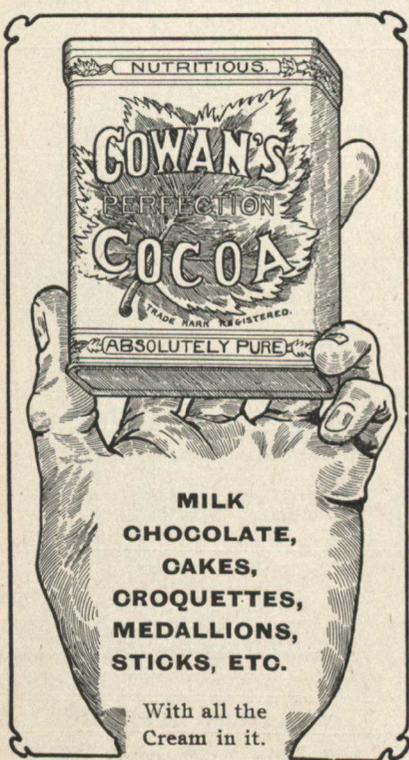


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**The Yellow God**

Continued from page 14)

"Because I have learned that they attacked you in their own country. Vernoon," she answered, "and would have killed you had it not been for Little Bonsa; it is therefore right that they should die as an offering to you."

"I refuse the offering since afterwards they dealt well with me. Set them free, and let them return to their own land, Asika."

"That cannot be," she replied coldly. "Here they are and here they remain. Still, their lives are yours to take or to spare, so keep them as your servants if you will," and bending down she issued a command which was instantly obeyed, for the men dressed like devils cut the bonds of the Ogula, and brought them round to the back of the dais, where they stood blessing Alan loudly in their own tongue.

Then the ceremonies began with a kind of infernal ballet. On the smooth space between them and the water's edge appeared male and female bands of dancers who emerged from the shadows. For the most part they were dressed up like animals, and imitated the cries of the beasts that they represented, although some of them wore no clothing whatsoever. To the sound of wild music of horns and drums these creatures danced a kind of insane quadrille, which seemed to suggest everything that is cruel and vile upon the earth. They danced and danced there in the moonlight till the madness spread from them to the thousands who were gathered upon the farther side of the water, for presently all of these began to dance also. Nor did it stop there, since at length the Asika rose from her chair upon the dais, and joined in the performance with the Mungana, her husband. Even Jeeki began to prance and shout behind, so that at last Alan and the Ogula alone remained still and silent in the midst of a scene and a noise which might have been that of hell let loose.

Leaving go of her husband, the Asika bounded up to Alan, and tried to drag him from his chair, thrusting her gold mask against his mask. He refused to move, and after a while she left him and returned to the Mungana. Louder and louder braved the music and beat the drums, wilder and wilder grew the shrieks. Individuals fell exhausted, and were thrown into the water, where they sank or floated away on the slow moving stream, as part of some inexplicable play that was being enacted.

Then suddenly the Asika stood still and threw up her arms, whereon all the thousands present stood still also. Again she threw up her arms, and they fell upon their faces and lay as though they were dead. A third time she threw up her arms, and they rose and remained so silent that the only sound to be heard was that of their thick breathing. Then she spoke, or rather screamed, saying:

"Little Bonsa has come back again, bringing with her the white man whom she led away," and all the audience answered, "Little Bonsa has come back again. Once more we see her on the head of the Asika as our fathers did. Give her a sacrifice. Give her the white man."

"Nay," she screamed back, "the white man is mine. I name him as the next Mungana."

"Oho!" roared the audience. "Oho! she names him as the next Mungana. Good-bye, old Mungana! Greeting, new Mungana! When will be the marriage feast?"

"Tell us, Mungana, tell us," cried the Asika, patting her wretched hus-

band on the cheek. "Tell us when you mean to die, as you are bound to do."

"On the night of the second full moon from now," he answered, with a terrible groan that seemed to be wrung out of his very heart, "on that night my soul shall be eaten up and my day done. But till then I am lord of the Asika, and if she forgets it death shall be her portion, according to the ancient law."

"Yes, yes," shouted the multitude. "death shall be her portion, and her lover we will sacrifice. Die in honour, Mungana, as all those died that went before you."

"Thank Heaven!" muttered Alan to himself, "I am safe from that witch for the next two months," and through the eye-holes of his mask he contemplated her with loathing and alarm.

At the moment, indeed, she was not a pleasing spectacle, for in the heat and excitement of her mad dance she had cast off her gold breastplate or stomacher, leaving herself naked except for her kirtle and the thin spangled robe upon her shoulders, over which streamed her black, disordered hair. Contrasting strangely in the silver moonlight with her glistening copper-coloured body, the mask of Little Bonsa on her head glared round with its fixed crystal eyes and fiendish smile as she turned her long neck from side to side. Seen thus, she scarcely looked human, and Alan's heart was filled with pity for the poor bedizened wretch she named her husband, who had just been forced to announce the date of his own suicide.

Soon, however, he forgot it, for a new act in the drama had begun. Two priests, clad in horns and tails, leapt on to the dais, and at a signal unlaced the mask of Little Bonsa. Now the Asika lifted it from her streaming face and held it on high, then she lowered it to the level of her breast, and holding it in both hands walked to the edge of the dais, whereon priests disguised as fiends began to leap at it, striving to reach it with their fingers and snatch it from her grasp. One by one they leapt with the most desperate energy, each man being allowed to make three attempts, and Alan noted that this novel jumping competition was watched with the deepest interest by all the audience, at the time he knew not why.

The first two were evidently elderly men, who failed to come anywhere near the mark. Their failure was received with shouts of derision. They sank exhausted to the ground, and from the motion of his body Alan could see that one of them was weeping, while the other remained sullenly silent. Then a younger man advanced, and at the third try almost grasped the fetish. Indeed, he would have grasped it had he not met with foul play, for the Asika, seeing that he was about to succeed, lifted it an inch or two, so that he also missed, and with a groan joined the band of the defeated. Next appeared a fourth priest even more horribly arrayed than those who went before him, but Alan noticed that his mask was of the lightest, and that his garments consisted chiefly of paint, the main idea of his make-up being that of a skeleton. He was a thin, active fellow, and all the watching thousands greeted him with a shout. For a few seconds he stood back gazing at the mask as a wolf might at an unapproachable bone. Then suddenly he ran forward and sprang into the air. Such an amazing jump Alan had never seen before. So high was it, indeed, that his head came level with that of the fetish, which he snatched with both hands, tearing it from the Asika's grasp. Coming to the ground again with a thud, he began to caper to and fro, kissing the

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