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THE Guide-Advocate "Want" column on page four has something in for everybody. Read it every week.

The Squinting Rajah

A Tale of the Far East

By CLARISSA MACKIE

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"This is a story that Ananias Silne told me," warned Captain Barnabas Fish as he skillfully mended a net on the silver sands of Quince harbor; "therefore, ma'am, I'm not responsible for its veracity."

"Never mind," I assured him eagerly. "Of course I know they can't be true. Nevertheless they are interesting if one can separate the truth from the fiction."

"Miss Telham," said the captain, turning his twinkling eye upon me, "fiction ain't no word to use in connection with my old messmate Ananias Silne. He's just a plain and simple liar, but every once in awhile, like most liars, he swings the pendulum so far to leeward that back she comes and runs afoul of the truth. At such times Ananias gets into heaps of trouble."

"Now, the story I have in mind is about the time Ananias got into trouble with the rajah of Raddabar, out in India. You wouldn't think the mate of a peaceful trading ship like the old Indus was would be mixing in such high society as Indian princes, but when Ananias got started on an adventure there was no knowing where he'd stop—not at princes anyway. Likely it would have to be kings or queens or big bugs of some extra high standing."

"Well, we had left Calcutta and was running along down the coast with the Jajpur hills in the background when Ananias came aft and told me that the water butts had sprung a leak and that we would have to put ashore and get another supply of water."

"I won't go into the details of how this happened, ma'am, for it was all most unseamanlike, and it had never happened to me before. Our ship's carpenter repaired the damages, and all we had to do was to tie up at the right place and try and find some pure water, and in India, ma'am, that's no easy matter."

"At last we came to a fair sized village where the natives didn't seem any more than naturally curious at sight of us, and Ananias went ashore with some men to have a powwow with the headman."

"How could you talk to that headman, Ananias? I asked him. 'I didn't know you could speak Hindustani!'"

"I don't wear all my accomplishments on my sleeves, skipper," he says excitedly.

"I suppose you talk a little Hindustani to me," I halted him.

"Then Ananias rattled off a lot of queer gibberish that sounded as if he had swallowed all his teeth and was laughing about it. 'You see?' he ended up just like a Chinese laundryman."

"I understand," I says to him grimly. "I understand from what you say, Ananias Silne, that you're throwing me a game of bluff about talking to the headman. He looks too intelligent to converse in any langwidge like that. Whatever he told you about the water you go and do it. I can stand anything except water from the Ganges. If you're going through the jungle you

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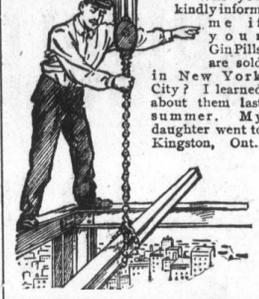
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better take guns."

"Ananias didn't say a word, but he and the men he picked out hustled around and got the water casks and provisions and some guns and ammunition, and away they went in the bullock cart, with the headman of the village lashing a long whip and yelling at the bullocks in a langwidge that didn't sound like the one Ananias made up."

"It was the next morning before Ananias and his party came back, and they were hurrying some, ma'am, I can tell you. Ananias was in the lead, running for his life, and behind him came his four seamen, and back of them were three of the tallest, longest legged Hindus I ever set eyes upon, and I've seen a sight of 'em in my day."

"I had a boat at the jetty to meet 'em, but I declare if the three Hindus didn't get there at the same time, and all tumbled in with our men, and so they were all brought aboard and came before me."

"What's all this? I demanded of Ananias."

"I'll explain, skipper, if you'll send my men below for a bite to eat and a little rest," he says slyly. And so I sent the four seamen below, and that left Ananias standing there, looking scared and mad at the same time, while the three Hindus stood just behind him, staring slyly at me."

"Explain, then," I snapped out.

"Ananias took a chew of tobacco and folded his arms. 'It happened this way, skipper,' he began. And then he launched out in a wonderful tale of how they had reached the shore of the lake where the rajah's palace was situated when the rajah was taking his pleasure in a boat on the lake."

"It seems he didn't understand the dialect that Ananias used. Of course Ananias told me he had a personal interview with the big man, and he ordered Ananias to be brought before him the next morning for examination. So that night the men from the Indus camped on the shore of the lake, and the rajah's servants made a prisoner of Ananias Silne and carried him across the lake to a dungeon in the palace, where they kept him until the next morning."

"Then he says he was brought before the rajah with other prisoners, and examined, and he said it would have made your blood run cold to see the offhand way in which that despot—'desperate despot' was what Ananias called him—would just listen to what the prisoners had to say and then nod carelessly to one or another of the jailers and they would be carried off to be put to death or torture or released."

"Ananias said that the rajah was the most awful looking critter he ever set eyes upon—a giant in size with woolly hair and squint eyes, and it was the squint eyes that caused all the trouble. It seems the rajah was so cross-eyed that the jailers would get all mixed up on the sentences and half the prisoners got the wrong sentences. It was all right for some, but bad for others. So Ananias says when it came his turn to plead he got up and told the rajah all about the Indus, and how her water casks had sprung a leak, and that we wanted fresh water from the everlasting waterfalls, and that we was citizens of the U. S. A. The rajah

just smiled and said it was all right and he could have all the water he wanted as long as the waterfalls lasted, and then he nodded one way and his eyes got so horribly squinty and crossed just then that the executioner made a grab for Ananias saying the rajah had looked at him and the rajah was too busy to interfere, so they hauled Ananias off to put him to death."

"He says he got away and swum ashore and roused our four men, and they all cut and run for the Indus with three of the rajah's men chasing after them, and here was Ananias and here was the three men, starting borrow struck just as if they had understood every word of what my first mate had said, and they didn't believe a word of it."

"Then one of the three Hindus spoke up politely, and what he said would have flabbergasted you, ma'am, for he spoke in English. Says he: 'Sahib captain, this man speaks lies whenever his mouth opens and he has called our prince by evil names and with a false tongue. We have been ordered to bring him back to the palace that our prince may examine him.'"

"Of course I wasn't surprised to hear that Ananias had been drawing the long bow as I could see that he was pretty much chaffalpen to think he'd been wasting all that breath before these Hindus who could speak his langwidge better than he could. I just called the second mate to command the Indus, and, taking a fresh supply of men, I started with the whole lot for the rajah's palace."

"At last we arrived at the palace, and Ananias was right about that part of it. He always did mix a little truth in with his falsifying. It was on an island in the middle of a lake, and I could see waterfalls here and there among the hills."

"We all got into a big barge and were rowed across the lake to the palace and hustled into the audience room where the rajah appeared in all his glory."

"When he smiled at Ananias that cheerful prevaricator just hauled in his tops'ls and looked down at the floor and I don't wonder, for that rajah turned out to be one of the handsomest men I ever saw in all my days, and his eyes were as straight as yours, ma'am. That part about his being squint eyed was all a yarn of my first mate's."

"It seems that the rajah of Raddabar had been educated in England, and he talked with me quite a spell in a free and easy manner. He told me that his men had found Ananias and his four mates stealing fruit from the palace gardens, and for that reason he had arrested him. He escaped all right, and the rajah's servants had given chase and caught him on board the Indus."

"The rajah of Raddabar was a gentleman after all, and he laughed and made a joke of Ananias and his story of the 'squint eyed rajah.' He pretended he wanted to buy Ananias for his chief story teller, kind of a court fool, he explained, with a twinkle in those straight, handsome eyes of his, and poor Ananias hung his head and looked mighty scared, for the rajah pretended to offer me all kinds of rich jewels in exchange for the critter, and I pretended to bargain for him and then put the matter off until the next time Ananias told a big yarn."

"So I insisted on Ananias paying for the fruit he had stolen, and he apologized to the rajah as decently as his kind can apologize to somebody who has done them a good turn, and then as the rajah had made us welcome to all the water we wanted, we all fell to and filled up our casks and away we went back to the Indus with some presents that 'desperate despot' had showered on us."

"Of course I sent a special messenger back to the rajah with some presents from the Indus stores, and then we histed sail and away we went homeward bound."

"And what did Ananias have to say when it was all over?" I asked with interest.

"Why, Ananias recovered his nerve after we got out of sight of the Jaypur hills, and he came to me and told me another yarn about his having sunstroke when he got to the lake and he didn't rightly remember what happened after that."

"I looked him in the eye and says I, 'Ananias Silne, you may not rightly remember what happened, but there's plenty that does, and I want to remind you that there berth is still waiting for the court fool!'"

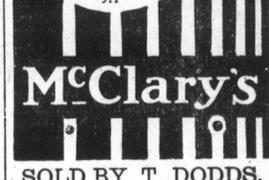
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