

it there, and as he would be accused of stealing it anyway he meant to get the ruby back.

Slipping away from the others as they came out of Moung Ouray's house, he quickly sped away to San Shwo's bungalow.

As he approached cautiously he could see Mi Mra and her mother and father sitting on the bamboo floor earnestly discussing something. "They will decide. I will wait," he muttered, squatting on his heels at the side of the road.

Then Mi Mra came out and started off across the dried maidan toward the superintendent's bungalow.

That was Hpo Thit's chance.

"If you tell about it," he said, as he left her, "I will swear that you and Moung Ouray stole it and gave it to me. Then the judge thakine will ask how you should know that I had it if you had not given it to me."

Mi Mra went back to her father's house. She wanted to think, wanted to do that which was the least trouble.

In the morning she told Valentyne Thankyne about it, and in an hour he and the sergeant and a file of police were chasing after Hpo Thit. But Hpo Thit had gone. One more dacoit had been created. His brother the thug-gie's gun had gone with him. The thuggie didn't know that, for Hpo Thit had stolen it. It was an old fashioned muzzle loading musket.

It is difficult to run down a Burman in the jungle, and it was the next day before they came up with their quarry.

He had a couple of shots at them in a blundering sort of way with the old musket without hitting anybody, but just as Valentyne charged in on him at the head of his police Hpo Thit fired again at close quarters, and the superintendent went down, shot in the shoulder.

Only for the sergeant Hpo Thit would have been carved up into regulation slices—only for the sergeant and Valentyne, too—for he bellowed out: "Don't kill him. Take the beast alive."

"Bring him here and search him at once," said Valentyne, who was sitting up now, though feeling dazed and groggy, and while the sergeant bound up his wound they stripped Hpo Thit clean as a whistle. But there was no ruby—nothing but much tattooing discovered.

"What have you done with the ruby?" asked the superintendent, but Hpo Thit wouldn't answer.

Then they got back to Thayetmyo as quickly as they could, carrying Valentyne on an improvised dhooly in the shape of a charpoy, which they got from the woon of a neighboring village by the gentle art of zabar-dasti.

When Hpo Thit was brought back by the police, he was met by a reception committee composed of orthodox Buddhists, who were gathered together with the avowed object of honoring him with the crucifixion.

To guard against his attaining Nirvana by a fluke, as it were, he was to be crucified head downward.

Valentyne, who was very weak by this time, had great difficulty in explaining to them that the government could not allow such a thing to take place.

"Have patience, good friends," he said. "We must be merciful," and he talked cheerfully of the lifelong years of living hell Hpo Thit would surely get on the Andaman islands for his part in the little circus.

In a general sort of way the sergeant explained to them that they, who know little about such things, could only make Hpo Thit wish he had not done this thing for a very few minutes at the outside, but the thakine, who was

the government, could cause Hpo Thit to revile the day he was projected into the world by a thief of a jackal for years and years.

So Valentyne was taken to the hospital and Hpo Thit was put in a cage behind iron bars, just like the mangy tiger they had seen down at Raungoon.

"I'll have the bullet out of you in a jiffy," said the civil surgeon to Valentyne, as he rolled up his sleeves and opened his case of shining instruments.

"D—d ! I can understand it, though," he said, as he probed away, for the jiffy time had gone by and he hadn't even touched the bullet yet. "It must be one of those infernal skewgee slugs of theirs that he has pumped into you. It seems to have struck you under the arm as you were flourishing that sword of yours, and then traveled on down along your ribs. God knows where it is now, for I can't find it. You've lost enough blood over it for just now, anyway, but if there seems to be any complication setting in I'll have another try for it."

The surgeon saw it was about time to desist, for Valentyne was looking pretty well used up.

Then Hpo Thit was brought up before the deputy commissioner for a committal hearing, as it were, charged with stealing the sacred ruby, and with attempted murder of the superintendent.

But the priests were clamorous for the ruby eye of their Buddha, for the matter of Valentyne dying or not they did not bother their heads—even they would let Hpo Thit go free, so be it they could come by the sacred gem again. The Burmese archbishop, the Thathanabaing, had come down from Ava to see about the recovery of the stone.

They begged the deputy commissioner to give Hpo Thit promise of pardon if he would only disclose where he had hidden the Bada.

"I can't do that," he said, "for the wounded sahib may die. The doctor has fished for the bullet and can't get it, and it looks id for the superintendent's life. If he dies, Hpo Thit will have to swing."

But if the Bada might be recovered they would pay to Valentyne's family his full value in good English sovereigns.

The deputy commissioner was as anxious to recover the jewel as they were, as he promised Hpo Thit that if he would tell where it was it would help him much when the time of his sentence came.

"I will tell," said Hpo Thit, "because it will be easy for the thakine to get it, and then the thakine will remember at the time of the sentence."

The priests craned their thin, shaven, buzzardlike heads eagerly forward. Even the deputy commissioner was intensely excited, for if he should recover this sacred Bada it would be well; if not, the papers all through India would have their fling at it and his life would be made miserable answering inquiries from the government.

The court was as silent as the graven image of Buddha itself as they waited for Hpo Thit to speak.

Putting the palms of his hands together in front of his face in the form of supplication, Hpo Thit said: "The red stone which I took from the Kyoung, even from the forehead of the Buddha, is in the police thakine's body. I fired it from my gun the last time because I had no bullets and because, if it could work a miracle, it would stop the police that I might get away."

This statement took away the breath of the court. The silence was unbroken

for a full minute. Then the chief Phoongye said: "Hpo Thit is telling lies. He has hid it. We must swear him."

"Yes," said the deputy commissioner, "he must make oath to that," for things were better done judicially.

He ordered the clerk to swear him on the palm leaf Burmese bible.

"No, thakine," said the priest, interrupting, "he is not a disciple of Buddha. He is a jungle man, and we must swear him on a branch of the lop-pan."

But after the oath it was the same—the red stone was in the police thakine's body.

"I think it is the truth," said the deputy commissioner.

"It is true," said the priests, "and the police thakine must give up the Bada."

"Well, we'll see what can be done in the matter," answered the deputy commissioner, and Hpo Thit was remanded to await developments.

"By Jove," said the surgeon, when he heard about it, "that accounts for the infernal thing taking that cork-screw course."

"You'll have to get it out of him some way," said the deputy commissioner, "for it's worth about two lakhs of rupees, and, besides, it won't be healthy for Valentyne to live in Burma with the eye of a Buddhist god in him."

"Look here, Grey," said the surgeon, "I am jiggered if I probe for the cursed thing again. I nearly let Valentyne's life out of him the other day for fear of poisonous consequences, for I thought it was a slug. But if it's a good, clean out ruby it will probably never hurt him, and I'm not going to take any chances."

The deputy commissioner was in despair. The Phoongyes, headed by their archbishop, haunted his office and his bungalow night and day, clamoring for the ruby, for their sacred Bada, for the eye of their Buddhist god.

But the surgeon was obdurate.

"Valentyne is a friend of mine," he said, "and I'm not going to murder him to please any yellow robed Phoongye. I wouldn't do it even if he were an enemy. I'd leave the service first."

Of course the deputy commissioner had to report it to the commissioner, and he to the chief commissioner.

The report read that the sacred Bada, the famous ruby, had been stolen from the forehead of the image of Buddha in the pagoda there by a hill man, Hpo Thit; Hpo Thit had been captured and the ruby traced to the possession of the superintendent of police, Mr Valentyne; that it appeared from Hpo Thit's evidence that he had fired it from a musket into the superintendent's body, but as to whether Hpo Thit's evidence could be accepted and the superintendent held to be an innocent possessor of the stolen goods or not or whether he should be arrested as receiver of the stolen goods he was not prepared to say. That must rest with the higher authorities to decide. He suggested that it might be better to refer it to the judicial commissioner.

Valentyne in the meantime had to be guarded at the hospital, for Mi Mra discovered that the Phoongyes had set a scheme on foot to kidnap him and incidentally carve him up to find the sacred stone.

There were many reasons why they should recover it as soon as possible. Their Buddha had lost all prestige since his maltreatment, and no pilgrims came now to lay their generous offerings at his great square feet. The pagoda had ceased to do a paying business, for Uz-zana's ruby had been a drawing card.

It had been a good investment that for 12 centuries had gone on making money for the priests.

Valentyne applied for and obtained sick leave, handicapped with an order that he must not take the ruby out of the jurisdiction of the Burmese courts.

It was a splendid bit of judicial ruling that, and the deputy commissioner smiled grimly when it passed through his hands.

The surgeon swore like a trooper when he heard about it, for he had ordered Valentyne off to Darjeeling for a change. "You can't stop here," he said, "because if you don't die of fever they'll murder you sure. By Jove! your body will be worth something for dissecting purposes, though, if they don't get the first slash at you."

But Valentyne steadily improved. The wound was healing up nicely, the ruby seemingly giving him no trouble whatever.

As soon as he was able to sit up and move about he discovered a new source of annoyance. Devout Burmans were constantly coming and prostrating themselves at his feet, touching their foreheads to the ground and muttering their prayers.



Devout Burmans were prostrating themselves at his feet.

"What does it all mean?" he asked Moung Ouray.

"Sar, they are worshipping the Bada which you, by the grace of God and that wicked Hpo Thit, have got."

"This is intolerable," thought Valentyne. "I am a ruby mine and a Burmese god and a receiver of stolen goods all in one."

As he got better the beauty of his new life was further enhanced by the deluge of official correspondence that commenced to pour in upon him.

By order of the chief commissioner he was asked to explain how he meant to make good to the pagoda the value of the ruby he was still retaining on his person. It was cheerfully pointed out that if half his salary was escheated for this purpose it would take at least 40 years to make up the value of the jewel.

A delay of this sort would hardly be fair to the Phoongyes. Besides, in that uncertain climate his salary might cease at any moment. At any rate, under the 55 years' service rule, he could not retain his position in service for that length of time, and his pension would be barely enough to live upon.

The civil surgeon was raked over the coals for not acting upon the deputy commissioner's suggestion and probing the matter to the bottom, as it were—for not making another effort to recover the jewel.