

He got up and realized then for the first time that he had not undressed himself the night before. His head felt heavy, and although he did not believe he had been drugged, there was a scent he half-recognized that permeated the cave, and even overcame the dreadful atmosphere that the sick of yesterday had left behind. He decided to go to the cave mouth, summon his men, who were no doubt sleeping as he had done, sniff the fresh air outside and come back to try the scent again; he would know then whether his nose were deceiving him.

But there was no Ismail near the entrance—no Darya Khan—nor any of the other men. The horse was gone. So was the mule. So was the harness, and everything he had, except the drugs and instruments and the presents the sick had given him; he had noticed all those still lying about in confusion when he woke.

"Ismail!" he shouted at the top of his lungs, thinking they might all be outside.

He heard a man hawk and spit, close to the entrance, and went out to see. A man whom he had never seen before leaned on a magazine rifle and eyed him as a tiger eyes its prey.

"No farther!" he growled, bringing his rifle to the port.

"Why not?" King asked him.

"Allah! When a camel dies in the Khyber do the kites ask why? Go in!"

He thought then of Yasmini's bracelet, that had always gained him at least civility from every man who saw it. He held up his left wrist and knew that instant why it felt uncomfortable. The bracelet had disappeared!

He turned back into the cave to hunt for it, and the strange scent greeted him again. In spite of the surrounding stench of drugs and filthy wounds, there was no mistaking it. If it had been her special scent in Delhi, as Saunders swore it was, and her special scent on the note Darya Khan had carried down the Khyber, then it was hers now, and she had been in the cave.

He hunted high and low and found no bracelet. His pistol was gone, too, and his cartridges, but not the dagger, wrapped in a handkerchief, under his shirt. The money, that his patients had brought him, lay on the floor untouched. It was an unusual robber who had robbed him.

At least once in his life (or he were not human, but an angel) it dawns on a man that he has done the unforgivable. It dawns on most men oftener than once a week. So men learn sympathy.

"I should have been awake to change

the guard every two hours!" he admitted, sitting on the bed. "I wouldn't hesitate to shoot another man for that—or for less!"

He let the thought sink in, until the very lees of shame tasted like ashes in his mouth. Then, being what he was,—and there are not very many men good enough to shoulder what lay ahead of him—he set the whole affair behind him as part of the past and looked forward.

"Who's 'Bull-with-a-beard'?" he wondered. "Nobody interfered with me until I doctored his men. He's in opposition. That's a fair guess. Now, who in thunder—by the fat lord Harry—can 'Bull-with-a-beard' be? And why fighting in the Khyber so early as all this? And why does 'Bull-with-a-beard,' whoever he is, hang back?"

CHAPTER X.

THEY came and changed the guard two hours after dawn, to the accompaniment of a lot of hawking and spitting, orders growled through the mist, and the crash of rifle-butts grounding on the rock-path. King went to the cave entrance, to look the new man over; but because he was in Khinjan, and Khinjan in the "Hills," where indirectness is the key to information, he stood for a while at gaze, listening to the thunder of tum-

bling water and looking at the cliff-edge six feet away that was laid like a knife in the ascending mist.

Out of the corner of his eye he noticed that the new man was a Mahsudi—no sweeter to look at and no less treacherous for the fact. Also, that he had boils all over the back of his neck. He was not likely to be better tempered because of that fact, either. But it is an ill wind that blows no good to the Secret Service.

"There is an end to everything," he remarked presently, addressing the world at large, or as much as he could see of it through the cave mouth. "A hill is so high, a pool so deep, a river so wide. How long, for instance, must thy watch be?"

"What is that to thee?" the fellow growled.

"There is an end to pain!" said King, adjusting his horn-rimmed spectacles. "I lanced a man's boils last night, and it hurt him, but he must be well to-day."

"Get in!" growled the guard. "She says it is sorcery! She says none are to let thee touch them!"

Plainly, he was in no receptive mood; orders had been spat into his hairy ear too recently.

"Get in!" he growled, lifting his rifle-butt as if to enforce the order.

"I can heal boils!" said King, retiring into the cave. Then, from a safe distance down the passage, he added a word or two to sink in as the hours went by.

"It is good to be able to bend the neck without pain and to rest easily at night! It is good not to flinch at another's touch. Boils are bad! Healing is easy and good!"

THEN, since a quarrel was the very last thing he was looking for, he retired into his own gloomy quarters at the rear, taking care to sit so that he could see and overhear what passed at the entrance. Among other things in the course of the day he noticed that the watch was changed every four hours and that there were only three men in the guard, for the same man was back again that evening.

At intervals throughout the day Yasmini sent him fool by silent messengers; so he ate, for "the thing to do," says Cocker, "is the first that comes to hand, and the thing not to do is worry." It is not easy to worry and eat heartily at one and the same time. Having eaten, he rolled up his sleeves and native-made cotton trousers and proceeded to clean the cave. After that he overhauled his stock of drugs and instruments, repacking them and making ready against opportunity.

"As I told that heathen with a gun there, there's an end to everything!" he reflected. "May this come soon!"

When they changed the guard that afternoon he had grown weary of his own company and of fruitless speculation and was pacing up and down. The second guard proved even less communicative than the first, up to the point when, to lessen his ennui, King began to whistle. Because a Secret Service man must be consistent, the tune was not English, but a weird minor one to which the "Hills" have set their favourite love song (that is, all about hate in the concrete!)

(To be continued.)

No Time For a Loaf.

Some time ago, when a local corps was reviewed by Sir Ian Hamilton, one officer was mounted on a horse that had previously distinguished itself in a bakery business. Somebody recognized the horse, and shouted, "Baker!" The horse promptly stopped dead, and nothing could urge it on.

The situation was getting painful when the officer was struck with a brilliant idea, and remarked, "Not to-day, thank you." The procession then moved on.—Weekly Telegraph.



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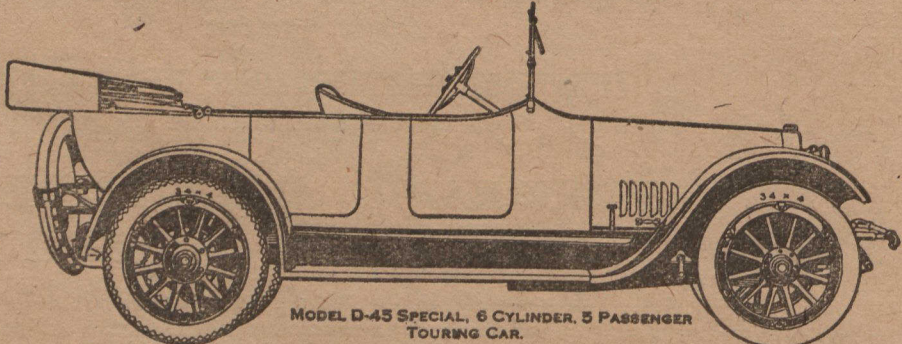
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