Thomson,
3. Parkdale Ro
Quintree
Liverpoo

1921.

SPEARS OF DELIVERANCE

SPEARS OF DELIVERANCE

A TALE OF WHITE MEN AND BROWN WOMEN IN SIAM

BY

ERIC REID

"The million, molten spears of morn,
That shine o'er the house where we were born,
. . . The spears of our deliverance."

Song of the wise children.

LONDON
STANLEY PAUL & CO.
31, Essex Street, Strand, W.C.

NOTE.

The writer wishes it to be clearly understood that the incidents in this novel are entirely fictitious, and that the names and characters in no wise represent persons, living or dead, known or unknown to him.

First published in 1920

TO

MY BROTHER IAN,

IN MEMORY OF THE TIME WHEN WE RENEWED OUR YOUTH TOGETHER, THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

Ceylon, 6th August, 1920.

CONTENTS

SPEARS OF DELIVERANCE

CHAPTER I

MIAS IN DAYLIGHT

SANTALL stopped speaking and followed the direction of his companion's astonished eyes.

"I wish Garstin or someone would tell that girl to keep downstairs in daylight," he muttered with considerable warmth.

Arrayed in the sketchy attire evolved by the Bangkok bachelor in search of comfort, the two men were seated in the porch-verandah of Mess 73 Suriwongse. Santall affected a singlet and a chequered sarong, or Malay kilt, while the new arrival, Philip Harkness, was more elegant in a shirt and a pair of baggy Chinese silk trousers of a delicate purple hue.

Philip had already heard a little about the institution of the *mia* in Siam. In a Siamese household the "mia" is of varying degrees. Polygamy, despite its having been recently discountenanced in high quarters in the land, is still legally recognised and, notwithstanding a slight dash of "civilisation" in many other directions, is still generally practised.

As in the feudal past, even nowadays a Siamese gentleman of wealth still finds his influence and his importance estimated in the vulgar computation to a large extent by the number of women in his household. Harkness had been long enough already in the White Elephant Kingdom

to have noted the feminine entourage of a Siamese noble. This, for example, ranges from his *mia luang* or "royal wife" and consort, the mother of the heir to the family possessions though not to the title (for Siamese titles are democratic, in so far as they do not descend from father to son, but are bestowed for service rendered to the State) down through a numerous sequence of *mia noi* or "little wives" to a horde of female satellites, the majority of the latter, however, being frequently nothing but servants, nurses and needy kinsfolk.

But the European too, in Siam, has generally his *mia*, a woman of the country who shares as much of the white man's lot as he permits her. That participation, in the majority of cases, is little enough, the *mia* of the European filling no larger place in his outward life than, say a favourite pet, a dainty animate plaything.

All of which had already begun to dawn upon Philip Harkness before he had his first glimpse of a tangible *mia* in the vision now witnessed of a Mohn (Peguan) woman in a flamboyant costume flitting swiftly across the verandah round Garstin's room and disappearing down the staircase.

Santall himself had a "girl" (most men call them "girls") somewhere in the background. He being young and human and easy going, that was almost inevitable. Santall was quite an ordinary, somewhat prosaic mortal with an abundance of prejudices; and what wealth of emotion and sentiment he possessed was very efficiently overlaid by a more than Anglo-Saxon impassivity and dislike of "fuss."

Santall treated his own mia kindly enough and accorded her a fidelity rather rare in such unions. He had, however, one principle which he never transgressed—he discussed his "girl" with no one. Giving her plenty of money for the gee-gaws her soul loved and an allowance sufficient to keep her from the temptation to gamble and pawn his and her own possessions and so make good her losses, Santall more conscientiously than the majority of Englishmen kept his *mia* in a separate and well-defined

compartment in the background of his life. What he thought of her and what his feelings were towards her he never shewed. To that hinterland of his spirit the curiosity of none might penetrate.

One of Santall's rules, unshakeably applied to his own connubial arrangements, was that the "girl" should be invisible in his house to every European eye but his own. This Turkish rigidity he felt he had the right, as president of 73 Suriwongse, to enforce on every member of that Mess. In consequence, he resented greatly the furtive appearance of Garstin's Mohn mistress on the verandah of the Mess quarters at that unseemly hour—six o'clock of a sweltering evening.

His heated remark was over-heard by Nempont, another member of Mess 73, who came hurriedly out of his room at the moment.

"I 'ave not seen," cried the little Frenchman. "Vere then is she?"

Jean-Marie Nempont practised the Latin attitude towards the Eternal Feminine. Jean-Marie would turn his head to look at any woman, provided she belonged to another. He had seen Madame Garstin dozens of times before, passing the time of day with her, or flinging her some light-hearted badinage in Siamese; but he had his own reasons for being interested now in the girl who had slipped away on noiseless bare feet just before he joined his messmates on the verandah.

"Garsteen," opined Nempont, burying himself in a long chair. "Garsteen will have trouble soon with Madame, meseems."

Though he spoke English with an undisguisable foreign accent, and had never mastered the sound of "*th*," his command of the language universal in the East was very creditable, and he loved dearly to introduce an occasional obsolete or bookish word.

"Before long too! She is of a clevaireness, that one. She will bleed him even more. She has squeezed him for a trifle of money already."

Santall shrugged his shoulders as an expression of dis-

taste for the topic on which Nempont seemed inclined to embark, but the latter continued talking for the benefit of the "griffin" (fresher).

"Zese Mohn women," he went on to Philip, "zey are ze devil and all! Zey turn us poor men so! *Craque!*"

And he made a nut-squeezing movement with the fingers of his left hand, where he wore an odd little Chinese ring of which he was rather vain.

"But any man who lets these girls get a hold over him——" ventured Harkness, who had not observed Santall's expression. "Well—he must be an absolute fool!"

Santall smiled secretly. Jean-Marie vociferated his point.

"Hold over you?" he cried. "How can you prevent zem gettin' a hold over you? Zey are so infernally caressful. Zey cling—what you say?"

"Don't talk such utter rot, you silly old Froggy!" interjected Santall with a kind of snort. "What you say, besides being absolute rubbish, is not likely to impress our young friend here. Don't you believe a word this silly old fool of a Frenchie tells you, Harkness!"

Nempont, under this douche of discouragement, broke into a falsetto scream.

"It is ze truzth—veritable! Do I not know eet? Have I not lived also? And zen, zis most embarrassing habit of fidelity all zese women have cultivated towards ze European husband. If only zey would deceive us once wiz some ozzer lover, we could—we could let ze horns of a rightful and wrathful indignation burst out on—on ze forehead of our marital felicity!"

He paused, pleased with his metaphorical flight; but no one applauded, unless Philip's amused look of interest might be taken as approval.

"As it is, ven you grow tired and vant to get rid of a girl like zat Mohn of Garsteen's, you have no reason at all to find for sacking her."

"No reasonable excuse anyhow. And these girls don't gamble either," interpolated Santall who, despite his

principles, was being dragged into the discussion by Nempont's vehement eloquence.

Harkness seemed puzzled.

"What has gambling to do with it?" he asked.

"Nothing much," answered his senior gruffly in a pitying tone. "Except that when one gambles, one loses sometimes. And when a Siamese girl loses at gambling, she borrows some of your family heirlooms of value and pawns them. If you catch her, you can turn her off without appearing unreasonable—even to the lady herself."

Like other old residents in the East, Santall had grown tired of answering the often inept queries of newcomers. There were some facts which, from their being stale to him, he was apt to imagine his juniors should know already. He imparted these with an air of weary indulgence.

Philip was not slow to remark the hint of sarcasm latent in the tone of Santall's response to his own somewhat naïve question above chronicled. He made a mental note to think twice in future before asking men older than himself for casual information about Siam. Possibly, he thereby saved his seniors a certain amount of irritation, and acquired a reputation as a sensible youth not overgiven to superfluous questions.

Nempont was talking again.

"*Ma foi*—yes! So indeed in my last affaire was I saved. You must know" (the parenthesis, for Harkness, was given with a smile) "zere was recently a Madame Nempont. But what would you? I got bored with her. Zese Siamese girls! No variety—toujours la même chanson! All is ze same story. Zerefore I desire much to disembarrass myself of Madame Nempont—ouf! But for long I sought ze good pretext.

"It was desolating to have to wound her little heart. I had begun to fear zat she have obtain ze half-Nelson on me zat I might not shake off. Heureusement—fortunately, one day I go to my writing desk! I open ze drawer! Zere is a trifle of fifty ticals* not to be seen! Ah!

* Tical—standard coin of Siam=1/6

Madame 'as taken it—pardon, borrowed it! She has done so often before with perfect assurance and success, I presume. She gamble! What she won, she retain; what she stealed—pardon—borrowed, she replace without my perceiving to-morrow morning. Simple as daylight! Simply perfect and perfectly simple."

The others were rocking with laughter.

Santall burst into an unrestrained roar. As a graphic reciter Nempont was truly *impayable*. His gestures were redoubled. His narrative became more vivid, his voice more and more inflected.

"But ze high finance of Madame—alas, zis time it no marche so smoozly! 'Madame,' I say, 'it is wiz ze mos' profoun' regret of ze worl' zat I find myself unable to agree to a total community of purse. Ve must zerefore part. It desolate me!' She bowed to me, ze reed before ze storrm! But vat a scene! Vat tears! Vat supplication! And *surtout* vat firmness of ze little Jean-Marie!"

CHAPTER II

MADEMOISELLE CAULIFLOWER

THE one who laughed with the keenest appreciation perhaps at this recital was Santall, since he was best acquainted with Nempont's character and career.

He knew better than Philip how susceptible to feminine influence of any sort was this ardent son of La Vendée, how he poetised about Woman as only the Gallic imagination can, and how he fell a victim, no matter what the colour of her skin, to her charm, her caprice, her divinity. Some years previous to his coming to Siam Nempont had been stationed in Tonquin, when in the Colonial Service of Indo-China.

"Tell us about the little Tonquinoise, O Coquelin!" asked Santall, rubbing the tears of merriment from his eyes. "We seem unable to keep off boudoir confidences somehow when you are about."

Jean-Marie's face fell into lines of tragic earnestness, whether assumed or real it was difficult to tell. He twiddled his moustache.

"Ah! but zat was *ze* tragedy! I cannot express it. You are ze so coarse Englishman, Santall, and your experience of Woman has been limited to zese betel-chewing, knickerbockered storks of Siam. You have not comprehend and you never will. You have no depth of feeling, no knowledge of heart."

"No," agreed Santall, "I know I haven't. I am the

sort of fellow Bernard Shaw complains about, and I laugh during a farce when I should weep. But never mind me. Cut the cackle, and come to ze ladye."

Nempont cast a reproachful look at his companion.

In reality, the two men understood each other perfectly well. They had both lived long enough in the East to have attained that sweet reasonableness about others which such residence seems to give, together with that wise tolerance of others' foibles which a warm and lazy climate necessitates. What is the use of quarrelling when the temperature is at a hundred and ten? In point of fact, there was between Santall and Nempont, extremes as they were, a considerable amount of unconfessed and sincere liking.

"But you, *mon petit,*" continued Jean-Marie, turning to Philip. "You have ze speerit more *sympathique.* Zere is a *'je-ne-sais-quoi'*—a somesing about you zat tells me you are capable of a *grande passion* perhaps. But I have ze fear, zat like myself and ozzers of ze same temperament, you are marked for unhappiness in zis country."

"Alas! Yes," responded Philip with a groan. "I feel it already in my bones."

He was in a jesting mood and not inclined to dwell on anything except the ragging of Nempont, and it was not till later that the prophecy of his mess-mate returned to his memory.

"But what was the name of that particular Madame Nempont?" he went on more cheerfully.

"Macchiche?" suggested Santall.

But he was on the wrong tack. "Macchiche" was yet another in Jean-Marie's extensive amatory *répertoire.*

The latter cast his mind back to early days in Tonquin.

"Ah!" he mused. "Her name! Yes! But it was of a sweetness even in ze barbarous Annamite tongue. Translated it meant 'Cauliflower,' so I called her ever 'Mademoiselle Chou-Chou.'

"Zese little Tonquinoises! Little idols of bronze and saffron! Zey are more zan any ozzer women of ze

Orient—more feminine—as my countrymen comprehend. Zey 'ave so well learn from ze example of ze daughters of France zat come to zere country as wives of colonists."

"Learnt what?" asked Santall.

He knew of course that what these girls have cultivated is their instinct to attract, combining with it the art of holding a lover's fancies, however wayward. The sole difference in the Tonquinoise is that she does not, like the true daughter of France, contrive every chance of little economies in the budget of her lord.

Nempont's "Mademoiselle Chou-Chou" had been no exception.

Her French lover had been so captivated by her coquettish and exotic charm that he had become her devoted slave—no less. He had lavished on her all the ardour that usually characterises an amorous episode with his compatriots, and in addition he had literally ruined himself for his little Tonquinoise.

"She had her own *ménage*—her establishment, you say. Her own carriage, and her own servants, Mademoiselle Chou-Chou, *enfin* her own 'At 'ome.' She receive her friends as she listed. And at ze 'hour of ze apéritif' she drove wiz ze best down Avenue Paul Bert, promenading where all fashionable Hanoi promenade, drinking ze sirops and ze evening freshness before returning to dinner. I adored her, I who speak you. She was delicious! She was perfect to her last finger-nail! But alas, at ze end of six months, she had landed me up to ze tip of my nose in debt. Impossible—quite impossible to keep pace wiz her extravagant, her capricious whims."

"Silly ass!"

The growling exclamation came from Garstin, who had just come in unnoticed, and had overheard the last few phrases.

Nempont switched round in the depths of his long chair and, catching sight of the other, became conscious of an antipathy in the air.

His eloquence dried up at its source, and he concluded briefly.

" Zen one fine day Mademoiselle Chou-Chou—she 'ave flitted away from my arms to ze fresh field and new pasture. She left me zis to remember——"

And he pointed to a scar on his temple which Harkness remembered having previously observed.

Garstin waited, standing till the speaker had ceased. He had a sneer on his face and, when Nempont stopped talking, he observed unpleasantly :

" Sorry to interrupt your *tête-à-tête,* but I don't suppose you fellows know it is nearly eight already, and there are several men coming to dinner."

" Ah anozzer banquet of Gargantua ! " remarked Nempont rising, like the others, from his chair in order to go and dress hastily for dinner. " Ze mountains of rosbif and ze abondance of vegetables boiled in pure Menam water."

" Anyhow I don't forget to tell the cook when I have invited some men to dinner," was Garstin's disagreeable rejoinder, the reference being to Jean-Marie's happy-go-lucky method of conducting the Mess catering. . . .

By what strange law of gravitation these four fellows had come to be associated in the common existence of a Bangkok bachelor mess it would be impossible to demonstrate. As a general rule, men of the same " pidgin " (calling) find it convenient to live together in the Capital of Siam ; and of course circumstances or congenial tastes and sympathies play a certain part in assorting the members of a mess.

But, in the case of No. 73 Suriwongse, the causes leading to such an admixture as existed there were wholly inscrutable. Certainly it would have been hard to find a more curious mingling of types than was presented by the members of the first mess that Harkness knew in Bangkok.

Free and easy in all their ways, the most complaisant member of the association usually assumed the invidious task of " running " the household ; that is to say, writing the " chits " to the Stores for orders of groceries necessary ; doling out the market-money to the cook, or fining

the coolie for not sweeping the verandah clean; and—at the end of the month, paying the bills, and subsequently recovering the proportion of the total expenses from each member.

In 73 they took these tiresome duties in turn, each fulfilling them as badly as a mere man might have been expected to do in such un-masculine conditions. Just before Harkness' arrival the Mess bills had been mounting up.

Living is atrociously dear in Bangkok, house-rent so high, and servants are paid such inflated wages that a bachelor as a rule finds it beyond his means to maintain a separate establishment. That being so, the reason of two or three men chumming together in a single house is evident, and the result is a reduction of household budgets to reasonable dimensions.

Owing, however, to the casual methods of Jean-Marie, in whose *insouciant* hands the domestic destinies of this bachelor household had been rashly placed for a time, the final totals were every month increased. At the end of the second month Garstin, on seeing his bill, had expostulated impolitely at the sum of the items therein. To which Nempont had airily replied:

"My dear fellow, if you don't like my régime—run ze blooming Mess yourself!"

Which was the stereotyped ending to all such passages of arms in No. 73, as indeed in every other Mess in Bangkok. Garstin had thereupon taken up the challenge and, at the time Harkness joined it, the Mess in Suriwongsé Road was being run on what Santall described as "certain well-defined and vigorously-expressed Garstinian principles." A penny-wise-pound-foolish system of absurd economy was being insisted on, entertaining cut down to a minimum and regular meal-hours rigidly enforced.

Santall was Philip's senior in the Forests. On his coming out East, at the age of twenty-two, to fill an appointment under the Siamese Government Forest Department, for which a training at Cambridge finished in

Germany fitted him, Harkness had been taken in hand by Santall.

The latter had gone on board the steamer at Windsor's Wharf—landing place of many memories for Bangkok exiles—and he had proposed that, if the new-comer had no definite desires in the matter, he should join No. 73 Suriwongse, of which Mess Santall was president. At that moment there was room for another man.

"No. 73," accordingly, Harkness joined. The members consisted of Santall (already described), Garstin (of the Mines), and the lively little Frenchman, Jean-Marie Nempont, who lent a touch of sprightly colour alike to the Mess and to the Local Sanitary Board, to which he was more or less attached.

These four men in the employ of the Siamese Government, and chosen for various reasons and various qualifications to "advise" a young nation in the way it should go towards the high ideals of European administrative methods, inhabited a large, wooden two-storey and very typical Bangkok house. A mass of pink and white Honolulu creeper did its best to cover and subdue the garish blue with which this edifice was painted; but apart from that, the house possessed compensations of convenience in its nearness to the business centre of the town and to the Clubs, and of airiness derived from a detached situation in a decent sized "compound." . . .

Having made a rapid toilet, Santall, Nempont, and Harkness went downstairs to meet Garstin's guests. The latter that evening was entertaining three boisterous "griffins"; to wit Teviot—a colourless new-comer to the Bombeo-Bornay, one of the teak companies in Siam, Bennett—an obese and dissipated youngster employed on one of the numerous local newspapers, and Watts—a Ministry of Justice probationer, who had not yet recovered from the usual grievance of having been brought out to Siam under alleged false pretences. He eked out existence on what he now considered a "starvation wage," but which previously, viewed from the Inner Temple, had struck him as a "princely emolument."

These three inseparables, perhaps a trifle more harum-scarum than the usual run of "cubs," together with the leaven supplied by the members of No. 73, went to make up a very typical Bangkok bachelor-mess dinner party.

Garstin and the newcomers had already had a considerable amount to drink at the two clubs which formed the milestones in their evening peregrinations prior to the dinner-hour. It must be confessed that Santall and Nempont, by dint of tanking at the self-same clubs, would probably have been in much the same state as their guests, had it not been for the fact that something or other, most probably inertia, had kept them indoors that evening, discussing Womankind.

Though not exactly of Gargantuan proportions as regards the viands, the dinner nevertheless was as heavy as only a Chinese cook knows how to make it when any *tam-boon* (festivity) is on the carpet. The flowing bowl went round, and an astonishingly numerous selection of liquors on the sideboard was duly sampled. The conversation interchanged, though apparently brilliant to brains clouded with the fumes of alcohol, hardly ever rose above the level of stupid verbal horse-play and the bandying of "Stock Exchange" witticisms.

Garstin, catching the infection of the false, forced gaiety that reigned at table, turned to Nempont with a joke he had been thinking out ever since the latter's remark about Gargantua.

"Well, old Pantagruel," he hammered out. "Does the banquet please your fastidious palate?"

"Why yes," answered the little Frenchman. "It is truly Gargantuan, even in its liquids—an apotheosis of Bacchus razther, I should say."

A "Boy" was circulating another round of liqueurs and had reached Garstin's elbow. He did not reply to Nempont, but turned to the others to ask cheerfully:

"Well, what would you like to do? Anyone on for Auction?"

Garstin played well and, on the high points generally

indulged in at Bangkok club-tables, as he generally won, he generally won heavily. Indeed it was his boast that his club never cost him anything. This was due to the fact that in the circles where high play ruled, it was customary for the card winnings and losses to pass through the club accounts, and consequently Garstin's bill nearly always showed a credit.

But the others in the Mess knew of Garstin's skill at cards, and Santall, as the senior man, had more or less tacitly discouraged Bridge or Auction inside the Mess ever since the day Garstin had been heard to remark gleefully of one of Santall's guests :

" Bit of a fool, that chap you had to dinner last night. But anyhow he's paid for his grub, because I took sixty ticals (£4 10s.) off him."

Santall had no objection to winning money from men at the Club. But it revolted him to think that any of his mess-mates could gloat in such a manner when a guest lost money at cards in the Mess.

Thereafter he had always refused to take a hand on any such occasion. Moreover, in the present party, the guests were all youngsters, and therefore in all probability mediocre players—a fact of which Garstin no doubt was well aware when he made his proposal.

" Oh, confound Auction ! " said Santall. " I don't feel in the humour to-night. Besides ' we are seven,' and that means too many sitting out at once."

The others admitted the justice of this contention, though Garstin murmured something about a " dummy " table.

Bennett had a suggestion.

" There's a dam funny fake-film of a Jack Johnson fight at the Cinematograph," he mentioned.

And when Watts added the items, " Twenty thousand feet long too, in five acts and a kidney punch," the proposition was taken up with acclamation.

Followed a scramble for vehicles, en route to the " pictures," and a sorting out of the company in two's and three's. The rain was pouring outside, as it only

knows how to pour in Bangkok at the end of the rainy season which brings to the rice-fields of Siam its damp and mellow fruitfulness.

CHAPTER III

"CHIELS THAT WINNA DING"

THE men had their coats on and were standing on the steps of the porch, waiting for the gharries that should take them to the show. Bennett had made some sally, and the others were howling with laughter, when the sound of an oath came from Garstin, who was standing a little behind the others.

Turning quickly, Philip was just in time to see Garstin swing round and deal a heavy blow at someone beside him. There was a moan. The slight figure went down, and lay on the floor writhing.

The Hainan Boys were clearing the table with more than their usual expedition, for the "foreign devils" had left early that evening. The servants were delighted with the prospect of escaping another of those detested Bridge vigils which a late night at cards punctuated by rounds of "stengahs" (whisky sodas) on the part of their masters meant for them; and they were looking forward to a night at "Fan-tan." But at the sound of the commotion every menial vanished from sight and, from behind the pantry screen, watched with grave appreciation the incidents that followed.

"Damn the woman!"

It was Garstin, a little out of breath, and striving to staunch with his handkerchief the flow of blood from a scratch on his wrist.

"She tried to stab me!" he panted.

Then he stooped down and picked up something which he held out to the embarrassed and silent assemblage—a little Chinese-made knife it was, with a vicious point.

No one moved. The woman whom Garstin had just knocked down lay where she had fallen, face downwards with her arm across her eyes.

In the silence that ensued her sobs could be plainly heard.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Nempont. "It's Mae Champhi. She told me she would kill him."

Garstin gave her a push with his foot.

The effect was instantaneous. The girl leapt to her feet, and faced him, flashing.

Garstin started speaking rapidly in bad Siamese.

"Confound you! You slut! You—you——. Tried to stick a knife in my ribs! Heh? Hardly quick enough by——"

"Yes, you brute, and I'll do for you some day," the girl screamed back at him with madly-staring eyes in a tear-stained, tragic face.

"Oh no! You won't! I'll hand you over to the Police," snarled Garstin, adjusting the handkerchief at his wrist.

Nempont came forward solicitously.

"You are not hurt, are you?" he asked.

But Garstin waved him impatiently out of the way.

"Police! You—you—race of dogs——" And a torrent of abuse flowed from the girl's lips, abuse such as Orientals only know, scarifying maledictions of the vilest that consigned Garstin's female relations, past, present and future, to every manner of shame and dishonour.

"*You* give me over to the Police? It is I who go to-morrow to your Consul, and let him know how you have treated me."

The others had been standing constrainedly apart. Garstin was still adjusting the bandage at his wrist. To do so he had to place between his teeth the knife which had wounded him, leaving his hands free, but not improving the unlovely expression on his distorted features.

He did not seem to mind his guests' being witness of the domestic tragedy going forward. Probably most of them mentally condemned Garstin, not for having exasperated the woman to such a pitch of fury by his ill-treatment and contempt, as much as for being guilty of the incredible bad form of such a scene.

Fortunately, just when everyone was wondering how a period might be put to the disturbance without the use of force, a diversion was caused.

This was the appearance on the scene of another Siamese woman—Santall's *mia* in point of embarrassing fact. She, after some cajolery, succeeded in calming Mae Champhi and finally led her away, still breathing threats and imprecations.

Everyone stood for a moment, not knowing what to say. Condole with Garstin no one could, and any comment on the situation was not readily forthcoming.

"Well, let's get on to the Cinematograph," suggested Santall, with an affectation of *sang froid* which thinly served to veil his displeasure at what had occurred.

"These Mohn women are the devil!"

Garstin saw fit to make an explanation to his frigid companions.

"I sacked my 'girl' a few days ago for gambling and thieving, and now you see how she comes and tries to stick a knife in me."

He laughed uneasily.

"But, I say, you fellows," he added, "I'm beastly sorry—about this—this business. None of my making, I assure you. And I hope it is not going to spoil our evening."

The others found their tongue at last.

"No, no!" they chorussed. "We understand—jolly rotten luck on you, old man—fancy her coming with a knife too—but you're evidently not touched much—didn't think they would have the cheek to do such a thing, these girls!"

"How's your wrist?" asked Harkness. "Better get a proper bandage on it."

However, the wound was a mere surface scratch, and a cursory examination assured Garstin that it was nothing serious, the flow of blood having already stopped. A few minutes later the whole party left for the picture-show.

"Though what anyone wants with cinema-melodrama after the real thing in life, I don't know," was Santall's first remark to Philip when the two were seated in the Mess Cape-cart driving along together.

"Rotten idea altogether!" Harkness ventured the opinion uncertainly. "But I don't suppose a girl like that has really the strength to strike a hard blow."

Santall was still strangely moved.

"I presume you know the facts?" he asked of his young companion. "Anyhow, being a griffin, and having seen what has just passed, you may as well learn the history of this affair now. That girl, Mae Champhi, whom you have just seen, is one of a succession of young chickabiddies who have passed under the wing of friend Garstin. Friend Garstin does these things, like he does most other things, on a very definite principle, having as its base Self and his own personal comfort. . . .

"There's not an atom of feeling or refinement in the man, and his association with such women is of the most callous and matter-of-fact nature. Do you know how he describes his attitude towards his Siamese *mia?*"

Santall asked the question as he grimly negotiated the trap he was driving through a particularly dangerous impasse formed by a tram-car and a rushing automobile.

"No," answered Harkness, after a breathless interval surmounted by Santall's daring. "No! But I should imagine he's fairly blunt on the subject."

"Blunt? I should think so! The man has a mind like a spitoon."

Santall laughed bitterly.

"Yes, but anyhow, Garstin has the merit of being consistent. He never by any chance lets affection or any of that sort of thing enter into his matrimonial excursions. If a 'girl' begins to get importunate, and wants

more than one bracelet per month, he kicks her out, pays her off, and then applies to Mae Mali—his agent in these matters—for a successor."

"Oh, was *that* the old hag who came to me the other day?" Philip asked. "Crawling on her hands and knees? I didn't quite make out what she was after."

"Very probably. At least, I know negotiations were going on recently between her and Garstin for a successor to Mae Champhi. It's quite possible the old virago in passing thought she might do a little traffic in woman-flesh with you. Being a new arrival, you are fair game, as you don't know the prices and can be bled more than most. Old Mae Mali—it's her business. She's got a regular vocation for that sort of thing."

Their dog-cart was careering as fast as a short-stepping Deli pony could rake it along Bangkok's principal thoroughfare, the "New Road," crowded at that hour to all its narrow and none too-well-lit breadth with an extraordinary assortment of vehicles.

Along the edge of the roadway tramcars, crowded fore and aft, went "honking" in dust at breakneck speed past the low vile-smelling coffee-shops and opium dens. Gharries—or rather victorias, in every stage of disrepair and dilapidation, their Malay or Chinese syces urging their sturdy little Siamese ponies with whip and curse—went struggling with an overload of passengers and an insufficiency of harness; rickshaws, large and small, cumbered every inch and corner of the uneven roadway not filled by happy-go-lucky pedestrians of every Asiatic nationality—Chinese, Malays, Sikhs, Burmese, Siamese, Shans, Javanese, Laos, Tamils, Annamites, Mohammedans and Hindus, Cambodians, Cingalese, Japanese, etc.; while, through the whole swarming congestion, road-hogs in motor cars went cleaving their unheeding way. What an extraordinary scene, thought Harkness, was this congeries of every race, religion and caste, what a Babel through which they threaded their way in the rain—and what an extraordinary conversation he was embarked on with his companion!

"Well," Santall began again. "It's a rotten business and a sordid subject we seem to have got on to. But you mustn't imagine it is all as seamy as you have seen to-night. Garstin is a brute, but Garstin is an exception. I hope he will one day pay for his treatment of that girl—and the others he has had. He sacked her—so he told us to-night, because she gambles and steals. He sacked her *really* because she is going to have a child—Garstin's child, *she* swears. But it is not only her. It's the way he treats all his women. It makes my bile rise. Only don't rush away with the idea that we—that all men are the same."

It was the first time that Harkness had found himself solus with Santall in a mood at all expansive. There had, of course, been desultory references already to the "mia" question, and Nempont had convulsed them both before dinner that very evening with a description of his tragic amours in Indo-China.

Philip suddenly remembered that the little Frenchman had been interrupted in the *dénôument* of his Chou-Chou romance by the arrival of Garstin on the verandah. Nempont had the mark of a dreadful wound extending from the temple inwards along the scalp, and he had pointed to it cryptically as a souvenir left him by his capricious Tonquinoise.

"I say, by the way," Harkness blurted out, "how the deuce did Nempont come by that scar—you remember he was just telling us when Garstin came in?"

"That? I am not sure exactly," replied Santall. "But as far as I can gather, some relation of the fair Mademoiselle Chou-Chou got jealous and stove in poor Nempont's head one evening. Done with a hammer. He was nearly killed. I'm not sure of the details. The only thing I know for certain is that Nempont had to leave the French Colonial Service afterwards with a special pension."

"But why?"

"I've never had the story from Nempont myself, but someone told me how Jean-Marie, as soon as he came out

of hospital with a patched-up nut upon him, took a revolver and went after the man who had nearly killed him. Shot the blighter dead, it appears. Not for the love of a lady, but out of sheer cold-blooded calculation. There was a fearful scandal of course, which the Government tried to hush up. I believe they did, as a matter of fact, manage to keep the story out of the papers anyhow. These French Johnnies have some funny ideas about crimes of that sort."

"I know *Crimes passionels,* they call them," interposed Philip. "They give a man the Legion of Honour, or something, if he can prove he shot his wife's lover in the flagrant act."

Santall grinned.

"Nempont does not wear the ribbon of the Legion, but he may have got it for all I know," he said. "Anyhow they gave him the benefit of the doubt and of all the extenuating circumstances and they gave him a special pension as well. That I know for a fact. Then he went to a job in the Chinese Customs, afterwards."

A silence followed.

Philip's mind returned to something Santall had said before dinner about native women keeping themselves invisible in European households. At the time the younger man had inferred, from this expression, that Santall maintained in domestic affairs the usual hypocritical observance of the proprieties common to his kind.

Which, of course, was a correct assumption as far as it went, but supplied no manner of clue as to the light in which Santall regarded the brown woman admitted into *his* life, or how he reconciled such a manner of living and such an acceptance on his part of the easy-going morality of Siam with the stricter notions that govern Western social conditions in these matters.

It would be interesting to know. Santall was in a communicative mood owing to the events of the evening. Harkness was sure an opinion on such a burning question of the hour and of the country in which they found themselves would be well worth having from his com-

panion, whose outlook on Life in general was eminently sane and uncoloured by passion.

He took up the previous remark of Santall.

"Of course," he said, "Garstin and Nempont are exceptions, and I don't think by any manner of means that everyone is like them. I haven't run away with any ideas on the subject. I don't reason from particulars. And I haven't seen enough of Siam."

Santall smiled inwardly at the simple certainty of the youngster by his side in the dog-cart.

"That's right," he assented, without, however, betraying any of the sarcasm he felt as an older man at the cocksureness of an unlicked griffin.

Philip went on with some earnestness.

"But I say—now that we are on the subject—and seeing we have had this exhibition of Garstin's coarseness, I would just like to ask you one thing. You won't mind, I hope—eh—I may seem to be intruding on your—eh—personal privacy and all that. And you may not care to discuss these things with me. You see I am only a new arrival and can't be expected to understand—while you're my senior—in age and in the office too. Only I would be glad if——"

He felt Santall stiffening in his attitude.

"All right, don't make a song and dance about it," was the chilling response that interrupted his apologetic preamble. "Fire ahead! What do you want to know? I am not easily offended."

The coldness of the last words was mitigated by a laugh of forced bonhomie. Philip was conscious of the other's reserve, looming up frigidly against him, like an iceberg in a dark sea. Explanations would be difficult. He was embarked on delicate ground, but he tried to flounder on.

"You'll excuse me, won't you, if I give offence. It's difficult to express——"

"It's all right youngster. Get it off your chest. I'm not thin-skinned."

"Well," Harkness plunged boldly in, "would you

mind telling me why it is, out here, that men—decent fellows too—if they are not married, all keep Siamese girls, seem to, more or less anyhow? You yourself do the same, I believe. That was your 'girl' came and spoke to Mae Champhi, wasn't it? And you have always struck me as a chap with a lot of good sense."

Santall looked sardonically into the night.

"You flatter me," he said. "But by Jove! I must say you *are* pretty cool and direct."

"I didn't mean to be offensively personal," protested Philip.

"Oh, I understand that. The events of the evening suggested your question. I know exactly what you are driving at, and what seems to puzzle you. Let me expound. . . .

"To begin with, the whole thing, from a strict point of view, is entirely wrong, most of us admit. It is a state of things which would be unthinkable in England, for example—but then, we are not in England."

Santall was beginning with his weakest arguments.

"We don't marry these girls. . . . They are just 'kept women,' nothing else, nothing more. Most of us treat them simply as chattels. The best of us regard them as pretty, affectionate animals about the house. The worst of us——"

"Oh, but you're going to extremes—Garstin again," interrupted Philip. "It takes all sorts to make a world."

"I know," concurred the other. "No one of us is either perfectly black or perfectly white. Most of us are a pretty dirty sort of grey. Still, taking the average Englishman at least, you will find, as a rule, that they behave pretty decently to their 'girls.' The 'girls' know the conditions of the game, and they have no illusions about themselves or us.

". . . But why do we do it? Well I daresay there is even a lot of affection, genuine enough in many cases, though that comes later—after the girl has been living with you for some time—generally. We don't fall in love with each other, and there is no wooing. . . . Siamese

women can be very fascinating. But facts are 'chiels that winna ding.'"

"Physical facts, you mean——"

"Exactly! Physical facts!" And Santall gave the pony a cut with the whip. "This, as I have already remarked, is not England. You probably have perceived that fact already. This is not our own country. It is not a cold country anyhow; and the climate—well, I don't know how to put it, but it seems to change most of us—to have an influence—a physical influence somehow. We are not—we need, that is to say,—eh—feminine society, to put it politely, to a greater extent than at Home, I suppose. Life can be pretty lonely for a man out here, even if you are stationed in Bangkok itself."

He was trotting out the usual, well-worn excuses, though without a doubt, what he was saying was essentially, humanly true.

"I know. Yes, yes!" confirmed Harkness eagerly. "But what I do not understand is this—granted that what you say is correct—and I feel that it *is* correct—if you take these girls more or less permanently into your lives, surely there are bound to be all sorts of complications—afterwards——"

"Not so very many after all. The thing has been reduced to a fine art, and nobody need have any fuss, if he follows the rules," observed Santall.

"Yes—but suppose you want to marry an English girl later on—when you can afford it—and suppose there has been a kiddie."

"Of course, there's that trouble sometimes. But it's a remote contingency in most cases. A man doesn't usually want to marry an English girl, after——"

"I'm not preaching any sort of impossible ideals in these matters," pursued Philip like the eager youth he was. "And I hope you will not think me a prig of the first water. . . . But it seems to me also that association with a woman of a different race—different colour—different everything—is bound to affect one in hundreds of ways. Don't you find that? These people are not

your people. You are stooping to them. You know what I mean.

". . . It must be inevitable for a man—a white man, to be altered unconsciously and subtly—I don't say degraded, but his whole character intimately affected, by frequenting these women."

They had reached the Siamese "picture-palace." Some Japanese geishas in rickshaws passed at that moment—poor painted puppets, bedizened with trashy gauds to appeal to the brute in man, wretched victims of the social evil that is as old as the universe, and (as like as not) victims also of the hideous maladies that follow in the train of their traffic.

Santall jumped down and gave the reins to the syce.

"You see those?" He paused at the door to point to the girls. "You know what they are like, and the dangers. . . . Well, if you admit the physical needs engendered by a place like this—the 'facts that winna ding'—it's either these or their like for a man out here—or else the comparative respectability of a decent, little Siamese *mia* of your own."

CHAPTER IV

CLUBS AND COTERIES

When any of the others had not arrived in time for a meal, Garstin had the amiable habit of sitting down to table without waiting. Harkness had not been long in No. 73 before he discovered this. It was a little enough thing in its way, one of those trivial idiosyncracies which are brought out by conditions of existence in an association such as Philip had joined.

Garstin was "running" the Mess at that time and, though Santall was the final arbiter on matters of any importance, Garstin was at liberty to make the rule he had framed of strict regularity in meal hours.

The regulation was simply ignored by Santall and Nempont, who had their breakfasts brought up to their verandahs by their respective "Boys" in the morning—strolled into tiffin somewhere more or less near mid-day, chiefly less—omitting tea altogether, and never leaving the club in the evening till well after eight o'clock, when (if they turned up for dinner in the Mess at all) as likely as not they brought a voracious friend or two to "pot-luck."

A repast in common, begun simultaneously and partaken together throughout its entire course by every member, was therefore a rarity in No. 73; but Garstin, with that obstinacy which was a marked characteristic of his ungracious nature, took pains at this period to arrive,

for his part, consistently every evening for dinner on the stroke of eight, and, if alone, to seat himself martyr-like with a book at table.

It was a few evenings after the Mae Champhi incident when the noise of Garstin arriving back at the Mess, followed by a stentorian shout of "*Yok*" ("Bring up the food") and the whirring of the electric fan, indicated to the newcomer that his boorish companion, according to the churlish rule he set himself, was already seated at table.

Harkness went downstairs from the verandah. He had been sitting writing letters to go by the English mail next morning, and incidentally being chawed alive by the ferocious brand of mosquitoes which swarm in Bangkok.

He found his mess-mate in the dining-room, entrenched behind a zareba of the latest "Tatler," and noisily devouring his soup. Philip's mind was full of Home and of Sylvia Dean, the little girl he had left behind. He had been recording for Sylvia's benefit, with all a boyish lover's glowing sentiment, his first impressions of the East and of picturesque Siam.

"You weren't at the club this evening," growled Garstin, without lifting his head or responding to Philip's "Good evening."

A growing antipathy had been apparent between the two men since the evening when Garstin's *mia* had tried to revenge herself on him for his brutality, with Harkness as witness of the scene. Garstin had noticed how Santall and Philip had gone off together to the Cinematograph afterwards in the Mess dog-cart, and he had been conscious of a subsequent stiffening in the latter's demeanour towards him. This he accounted for correctly enough by the presumption that Santall had opened Harkness' eyes as to their mess-mate's methods towards brown women.

"No, I did not go to the club. I had letters to write. The mail goes out to-morrow," Philip answered.

"Huh!" was the interjection from his companion. "A chap soon gets fed-up with writing letters Home from this beastly place. Nothing ever happens."

Harkness did not see fit to reply to this observation, the truth of which, however, he did not for a moment doubt in Garstin's case.

Garstin thought a moment. He had already mentally summed Harkness up as a milk-sop. He did not really care a farthing what Harkness' opinion of him might be, but he had an uneasy recollection that his own people knew some friends of Philip's father at Home. He thought to himself the little blighter might be capable of recounting for the benefit of his parents the woman's attempt to stab him, and if the story got to the ears of his mater it might prove unpleasant for Garstin.

He returned to the topic of the club, dismissing the possibility of any such piece of news filtering home through a letter from his mess-mate.

"I suppose someone has put you up at the club as a visiting member?" he asked.

Here the "Boy" removed Garstin's empty plate, and his master, finding that he had already perused that particular issue of the "Tatler," threw the periodical with an "Oh, damn!" into a distant corner of the room. Thence the patient Celestial carried it outside. Nothing stamps a man more than his treatment of native servants in the East.

"Oh, yes! I've been put up as a visiting member of all three clubs, for this first month," said Harkness. "But I won't be able to afford to join more than one of them."

And then Santall and Nempont entered the room together and took their places with a breezy greeting.

"Hullo, you men! guzzling nourishment again?"

They, like the majority of male Bangkok every evening, had on that particular day been drinking a lot, first at the Racing Club, where Santall had played a game of tennis, and later at the Cosmopolitan Club, one of the useless excrescences on the face of European social life in the Siamese capital.

Accordingly, they were inclined to be boisterous.

Santall had heard Harkness' last words as he entered,

and being exalted, in a vinous mood he remarked vivaciously—that is, vivaciously for the ordinary phlegmatic Santall.

"There is only one club worth a dam in this place, Harkness, and that's the jolly old Cosmopolitan."

"Rotten pot-house!" grunted Garstin, adding a piece of gratuitous advice for the benefit of the griffin present. "If a youngster joins the Cosmopolitan when he first arrives, he is branded for life. Far too mixed altogether it is, I consider. Dagoes and all that rotten crowd. None of the decent people belong there. If you join the Cosmopolitan you go down and down until——"

"Until *à la fin,* you find yourself stiff and stark in that Morgue, ze Britannique Clob," Nempont helped him out, the accurate description evoking a faint smile from Santall and a ferocious glare from Garstin.

Such a conversation is only typical of what a new-comer may expect to hear during his first days in Siam, when, it is more than probable, his seniors will take in hand the important question of his clubs.

Bangkok has about half-a-dozen half-baked clubs, not to mention a fair sprinkling of learnéd and other societies. There is, for instance, the Racing Club, round which centres the athletic life of Europeans young and old, the former finding there opportunities for indulging in strenuous exercise at any game from football to squash-racquets, and the latter enjoying the milder diversion of a round at golf on a very indifferent course or a flutter at an occasional, very dull, race meeting.

Then, in addition to the French and the German Clubs —the latter an extremely national affair (later defunct) where ardour for "Der Tag" was compensated for by an excellent kitchen—there are the two main centres of social intercourse, the Cosmopolitan and the Britannic.

The two latter clubs cannot be better described than by their titles. The Cosmopolitan is a heterogeneous assembly of units, a very free and easy admixture of the Continental European elements represented in Bangkok, with a leaven of British support. The Britannic is one of

those strongholds of insular snobbery behind which stolid, self-contained Anglo-Saxondom, not only in Bangkok, but unfortunately all over the East, appears always to be barricading itself in smug self-sufficiency.

There is naturally a certain amount of truth in the accepted belief that membership of one or other, or of several of Bangkok's clubs, is a practical necessity to every European resident.

The Racing Club goes without saying, as every sensible young fellow who does not perform a vast amount of brain-work during the day must, and ought to, let off steam in some way or other; and outside of the Racing Club it is difficult to obtain exercise mingled with the pleasure of the open air and the competitive excitement that out-door games afford.

Apropos, Nempont held some rather unorthodox opinions about the value of sport for Europeans in hot climates. These opinions have been shared and are being voiced more frequently nowadays by others. Voiced too by men who are more experienced than Nempont in the influence upon the human tissues of violent exercise as practised by the majority of Englishmen, and latterly by many Continental nations infected of recent years by the fever of "sport."

"Bah! Ze spor'!" was the way in which Jean-Marie was wont contemptuously to dismiss the subject on the rare occasions when he could be induced to discuss it.

"You ozzer English. About ze subject of spor', you are fool. Regard me only! I take exercise nevaire, except perhaps to walk up and down my verandah thinking. I nevaire walk anywhere. At ze worst zere are always rickshaws. . . .

"I 'ave been twelve years in ze East, in far worse climates than Siam. And I 'ave nevaire, no nevaire vonce done violence to my muscles, or bathed myself in transpiration for ze disgust of my lady friends who behold me such a spectacle."

If there was an Englishman present, these heresies would almost certainly be countered by a horrified:

"Oh! but you can't keep fit without exercise, man! Especially out here."

Whereupon Nempont would foam and splutter.

"But regard me only then! I have nevaire had ze illness of ze one day even. I have nevaire called ze doctor. I am perfectly feet. And in all ze probability I shall survive most of ze tennis fanatics and ze cricket-oafs."

To which heroic boast the answer would invariably come:

"Oh, but you've never been accustomed to taking exercise. And anyhow, your liver must be in an appalling state, whatever you say."

"My leever," Nempont would conclude, "may be like unto a Strassbourg goose, but ze valves of my heart are sound. Ze most of you ozzer Englishman, you die of heart disease; you are all sent home ultimately with your heart gone wrong. You have ze crazy idea that a man must take exercise every dam-fool day in a place like this. I hear you fellows, ze older men, passing on ze fallacy to every griffin zat arrives. You have accepted it from ze lips of ze generations before you, accepted it wizout question. . . .

"Most of you must admit zat in England, before you 'ave come here, you 'ave play only ze one or two games a week, on Saturday or ze Sunday half-holiday. Zat is, after you 'ave left school. But when you come here, to zis temperature, what do you do? You rush *pêle-mêle* from ze office, *éreinté*—what you say, exhausted. You precipitate yourself wiz ze stick upon some poor little inoffensive ball. You beat it. You posture yourself most undignify. You come over all of a redness. You drop ze blood and ze water out of every pore. You catch ze sunstroke perhaps, if you are lucky, or if not, ze aneurisme. And zen you die, and write a letter to ze 'Times,' saying ze climate, he have killed you. *Zut, alors!*"

That was putting it extremely, of course, though there was a goodly sub-stratum of truth in Nempont's exaggeration. It is to be feared that the majority of young

Englishmen in Siam, as elsewhere over the East, do not keep a golden mean in exercise or in regard to diet or other matters of health.

Fortunately, most young fellows have a fairly easy time in getting through their spell of a day's work in the offices. Consequently, by not consuming mind *and* body alike, they avoid the dangers that men like Nempont encounter in a combination of steady, hard brain-work by day with a surfeit of violent exercise every evening. . . . In Bangkok, however, the generality contrive to be members of the Racing Club; while, as regards the social clubs that abound in that city, membership, in common with things in general, is about as costly as the same luxury in London, say on the scale of the Athæneum, with, however, none of the return for the heavy outlay on membership fees and subscriptions which the latter gives to the Olympians within its august portals.

With the quickness of perception that came from his rather Celtic temperament Harkness had soon remarked that its social clubs are a necessity to Bangkok only because of the utter sterility of intellectual interests there.

This does not mean that a man goes to his club for the sake of the intellectual interest he can derive from such an institution. But it is undoubtedly true that the majority of Bangkok's confirmed "club-men" uphold the club as essential to life because the langour of the climate they live amongst induces the vapidity of a mind which cannot be a kingdom to itself.

It is really strange how men who at Home had, as a matter of course, taken an intelligent part in mental pursuits, following politics, cultivating literature or art perhaps—seem to become incapable, after a few years of Bangkok, of any greater cerebral effort than that involved in Bridge or the laying of odds. Conversation scarcely reaches a higher level than unilluminating remarks on the banalities of the day; reading, of any kind more abstruse than a colonial-edition detective-yarn, becomes an impossibility; while pictures, music and the other ministering angels of the higher human sensibilities

become a yawning bore and are replaced by vacuous Auction or the sensationalism of the cinema-films at one of the more or less comfortable " picture palaces " in the town.

The worst of it is that the deadening influence of the miasma exhaled from the flat surrounding plains of low-lying Bangkok is very seldom resisted. Attempts to keep the mind bright and clear of the rust and corrosion of indifferentism are all too rarely made, being merely sneered at when perceived in others.

Philip had been to the other club also, and though he found in the Cosmopolitan a certain amount of noisy good-fellowship that was in welcome contrast to the portentous stiffness of the gravidly solemn " boiled-shirt-and-tweed-suit " nightly conclave at the Britannic, he only retained one impression. To him the members of the Cosmopolitan seemed, for the most part, too avidly engaged in consuming gin-and-bitters at a cut-throat speed before dinner to permit themselves any conversation whatsoever, save perhaps an objurgation or two against the quality of the liquids rapidly vanishing before them.

A visit to each of these characteristic Bangkok institutions had sufficed to render Harkness indifferent to their attractions. When, moreover, he discovered how much membership and hospitality in them would work out at per mensem, as compared with his total income at that period, he came to the conclusion that he must for a time forego their charms.

" No, I don't think I'll join either," he told his mess-mates and Garstin, when the subject was next broached.

" Too expensive, and not my style. I never belonged to a club at Home, so I won't miss it as much as some other men perhaps. (Nempont sniggered at this, perceiving the innuendo underlying) . . .

" Besides, in all probability, I shall be sent up-country permanently within the next six months. And goodness knows when I may be back again. So what's the use? "

" If you don't join the Britannic," quoth Garstin with a pitying smile, " you'll never meet any decent people,

or be asked out to dinner at any of the good houses, or get any chances of knowing anybody worth knowing."

Philip shrugged his shoulders. Garstin was a social and official "climber" of a common and disagreeable Bangkok type. The youngest member of Mess No. 73 had seen enough of him to guess what Garstin meant by "people worth knowing."

CHAPTER V

THE SELF-SAME OAR

"You're going to Laowieng, I hear," said Morland.

So ingrained has the habit of our acquaintance become with some people that we never can remember when, where and how we first met them. With others it is the first meeting we never can forget. These latter are the spirits from whom, as we encounter them for the first time, a wave of sympathetic appeal flows out in such a fashion that, instantly as we grasp their hands, we know that we are going to be friends.

Of some such impression Harkness was vaguely conscious when first introduced to Morland at the Racing Club a few months after his arrival in Siam. As the other smiled frankly into his eyes some inner voice seemed to whisper to Philip that this man would enter into his remembrances of this country, and that Fate held some tragic experience for both of them to suffer together.

One hears often of love-at-first-sight. Between man and maid the saying is an insufferable commonplace; yet it is often extended to something far finer and rarer—to friendship between man and man.

That sweet flower of a surpassing fragrance, exceeding in refined intensity and strength the love of mother for child even, does not bud into instant bloom however. Friendship at first sight does not happen. It grows more slowly and with a deeper impulse than love. It needs the sprinkling of tears, suffering and time. It is that

single mind and heart common to those who "have tugged at the self-same oar. . . . that austere Love which is proof even against absence and evil conduct." To compass it at least once in a lifetime is given only to those supremely beloved of the gods. Being possessed, it is the veritable Κτημα ἐς αἐι.

"Yes," Philip answered. "I am going very soon, I believe."

"A very jolly station—Laowieng. Decent lot of fellows up there," remarked Morland. "How are you going—overland?"

"That is not decided. But I have been told it is pretty rough going by land in the hot weather."

"It is, by Jove. Rotten at most times, and will be until the railway gets up farther North. The stretch between Phrae and Lampang is hideously monotonous. I had a hell of a time when I came down to go on leave—that was last rainy season. Most of my coolies crocked up pretty badly—one died afterwards. I myself had a go of fever, and Dr. Robbins packed me into the Nursing Home as soon as I arrived in Bangkok——"

"You must have been pretty bad," interposed Philip.

Morland laughed.

"Oh, not as bad as I have often been before and since. But Bangkok doctors are not accustomed to seeing men, as we are up North, with the pucca (genuine) fever on them. And they're a bit scarey. What I minded most was missing the steamer I had booked by from Singapore."

"How are you going up to Laowieng this time?" asked Philip.

Morland's fine head and clear cut silhouette were between him and the fading light of the sky-line at dusk over the Racing Club. They were seated on the lawn enjoying the comparative coolth of evening after an intolerable April day.

A transient smile—altering the ordinarily grave expression of the man's lean face and sensitive mouth, passed across Morland's eyes. He was one of those

people who can not only laugh but smile with their eyes; the expression was a very winning one.

"Well," he answered slowly, "strictly speaking, I should go by Phrae and Lampang again overland. But, by a stroke of luck for me, the Company happens to be sending specie up-country. Carting silver like that is a *pidgin* (business) given generally to a youngster, chiefly because it's such a nuisance to have to remain always near your money and your boats without ever being able to get out and do a bit of shooting along the banks. But I volunteered to take the oof along."

"Really!" exclaimed Philip. "A boat load of money!"

But he had not been long enough in Siam to realise the full extent of a teak company's operations.

"Yes," went on Morland. "And I suppose the 'old man' put a good mark for me in the black book as being willing even at my age to accept a disagreeable duty. In reality I want to dawdle up the river slowly, taking photographs of the rapids principally—which I can do without going out of sight of my boats. I haven't been that way since the first time I went up North, and I wasn't a kodak-maniac then."

"But," Philip was harking back to that boat-load of specie. "Isn't there any danger in taking a lot of money like that along?" he questioned.

Morland brushed the idea aside, speaking from the carelessness of many years' immunity.

"Danger? Lord no!" he asserted. "It's only troublesome because, as I said, you've got to hang near your boats all the time. They've never tried to rob a *farang* (foreigner) travelling on the river with money."

Then someone in the group around the table addressed a remark to Morland, and the conversation dropped as far as concerned Harkness.

That evening in the Mess Philip, by tentative questioning, succeeded in gaining additional details about the man who had made such a pleasant impression on him at the club.

"Morland? Yes," Santall replied. "But I thought he had just gone on leave. Seems just the other day he came down. He is a Bombeo man, stationed up-country. I knew him very well when I was in Lampun. Very decent sort," he concluded, thereby bestowing the highest enconium in male phraseology possible of application to another of the same sex.

"Madame Morland! Ah! But she ees deleecious, so exquisite, and of a *chic!*" was Nempont's characteristic contribution. "But then, she was out here so short a time. It is a peety she cannot stand ze climate of ze terrible jungle."

Garstin guffawed.

"I don't know about standing the climate so much. I fancy she can't stand Morland. Jungle life up North is no catch, even for a man, and much less for a woman who cares for life. Don't blame her for not sticking it and going Home. Only it must come a bit expensive on Morland. Someone told me——"

"Damned rot!" interrupted Santall, moved out of his usual calm. "I knew Morland and Mrs. Morland much better than you do, Garstin. As a matter of fact she was out here for four years, and made a very plucky fight against ill-health all the time she was in the North."

Garstin was not abashed.

"All I know is," he retorted, "that Mrs. M. did not strike me, from what I saw of her, as being cut out exactly for life upcountry. Gay little thing, and she told me herself that she would be glad to see civilisation again."

Santall pursued his refutation, mainly for Philip's benefit, for he knew he would not convince Garstin.

"She has had to go through the struggle every mother has out here, the struggle between her husband and her children—in her case there was only one kiddie. She chose the kiddie, partly because it needed her attention and did not keep well in Laowieng, but principally because the doctors told her she would crock up entirely

if she did not go Home herself. That I know for a fact, so shut up your nasty insinuations, Garstin."

Next day at the *Mahathai* (Siamese Ministry of Interior—the Forest Department being under that Ministry) Philip made casual mention to Santall of the journey up North.

"When does the Minister want me to start for Laowieng?" he asked.

Santall picked a paper off his desk.

"Well," he said, "Van Homrigh has applied for his leave, and it has been granted. Here's the draft of the letter promising it. But there's no hurry. I should wait and see when Van Hom wants to go Home. I don't know myself, but I've a sort of a recollection he mentioned the end of next month."

Harkness was proceeding to Laowieng to act for Van Homrigh during the latter's six months' absence on leave. There were two Forests' men at Laowieng; and Philip, by succeeding Van Homrigh as junior under Eager, was expected to acquire sufficient experience in these six months to fit him more or less for taking over the post of Assistant Conservator at Hminelongyi in the Salween, a lonely but interesting district on the Burma-Siam frontier, for which he had applied.

Philip ventured a suggestion.

"There will be enough water, I suppose, to go up by river next month?" he said casually.

He had been thinking of what Morland had told him respecting the journey to the North, and he had come to the unuttered conclusion that he would go by river to his new post—if possible, in company with Morland.

Santall was not aware that his junior had any preference in the matter. Like every old resident of Siam, Santall could not always remember that there was a railway even, partly connecting the Capital with the Lao country. The railway did not exist in his own up-country days.

"Oh, yes. The rains will have begun by then," he answered to Philip's remark. "Anyhow you should not

have to dig your way up through the sand as I had to do many times going to Laowieng."

The Menam and its Northern branches, the Meping and the Meyome, become so dried up during the hot season that the river boats, flat-bottomed though they be, when making the journey at the end of Siam's annual four months' drought, have actually to dig themselves a passage through the sand of the river shallows.

Philip had already seen some photographs of scenery on the Upper Menam and Meping, their great gorges choked by the swirling flood of waters swollen after the rains. Up these extraordinary rapids the Lao boats go dragging at the end of a painful rope, and down their turgid, tossing waters the great logs of teak come floating to the sea. These scenes of wild beauty with some few incidents of river-travel and its strange hazards in Northern Siam narrated by Santall the same evening served to make Philip's mind up.

He would travel by boat up to Laowieng and see these wild waters and these forbidding mountain fastnesses for himself. The artist in him exulted in anticipation. The pleasure of such a contact with Nature's wild grandeur was not one to be missed, the more so as he was convinced, from something Morland had said, that the opportunity might not arise again, since the railway was rapidly approaching completion.

He was not disappointed.

Inquiries and a little departmental manœuvring affected the arrangements he desired. Within a week he found himself standing on the departure platform of the Northern Line, surrounded by his baggage, his jungle-kit and a year's stores, and laughing at Morland who was discussing the question of special trucks with the traffic employees. This discussion was conducted in several languages, and was a heated one, their stuff having to be carefully stored away for the journey to Paknampoh—one hundred and fifty miles from Bangkok, the town where they would strike the river and take to their boats.

Morland had undoubtedly "cottoned" to Harkness.

In point of fact most men took to Morland at the first, but reciprocity on the part of the Bombeo man was not always so spontaneous and whole-hearted as in the present case.

"We have four boats," he said. "We travel like bloomin' dooks. I had a wire yesterday evening saying the river grey-hounds had arrived at Paknampoh. We'll go to the Bombeo Bornay Rest-House there for the night and start right away to-morrow morning if you like."

"That's good!" Philip smiled back at him. "It's jolly lucky being able to fit things in so well. I am sure I would have made a howling mess of the trip if I had not chanced on the benefit of your experience and your company."

"On the contrary, old man, it is I who ought to be grateful for a pal. Taking specie up alone is something awful," explained the other, with his usual graceful courtesy making himself out the debtor in the arrangement.

And then he went off to see where the other special truck containing the specie had been attached to the train.

CHAPTER VI

THE HEAD OF THE RAPIDS

With double crews of eight in each boat it took them seventeen days up stream.

Even granted congenial comrades, as undoubtedly were these two voyagers, the journey, as a journey, is unutterably tedious when compared with modern and Western methods of propulsion. The *rüa sadao* (scorpion barges) tapering forward to a graceful point, and tilted astern in the semblance of a scorpion's tail, as river craft are undoubtedly picturesque. Philip, like everyone else, was immediately struck by them, and was trying in vain to remember what it was they recalled when his companion supplied the information.

"Just like those boats you see in ancient Egyptian inscriptions, don't you think?" asked Morland.

"Exactly!" exclaimed Philip. "And not unlike the dahabeyeahs on the Nile to this very day."

Of teak, and wide of beam, shallow of draught, yet with an astonishing load-capacity for their size, these quaint barges have a certain gracefulness of line such as is not to be found in similar craft, on the Yangtze for example. They are still the principal means of intercourse between Northern and Southern Siam, and it is doubtful if even railway communication will serve to take their place as carriers of the produce to and from these regions.

Their progress through the difficulties and dangers of a river intersected by rocks, rapids and ravines is a feat of patience and endurance and a triumph of Man over Nature. The Lao method of poling them against the swift currents of the stream is one of the most astonishing sights in the world.

"Of course the usual cargo boats owned by the Laos and the Chinese are not as elaborate as our luxurious liners," explained Morland. "You will see the difference between our roomy cabins de luxe and the *salas* (shelters) in the common or garden barges."

Philip laughed and bent down to peer into the cabin astern.

"Roomy! M'yes, comparatively perhaps," he admitted. "But I am not going to bump my head standing upright in it."

"You're too fastidious altogether," said Morland, ensconsing himself in his camp chair inside the boat. "All aboard! Lie down and stow your long legs away, or you'll rock the bally thing over and wreck us in port."

"*Prawm laeo!*" (all ready) cried the *Nai Hoi*, or steersman, taking up the huge paddle which served as a helm, and bludgeoning the water till the boat reached a fair depth of stream.

The four pole-men, lusty Laos all, stripped to the waist and with magnificent muscles and black tattooed thighs, took up their bamboos and began their river chanty.

The first of them ran forward up the slanting prow, dug his pole in the water, faced round, and with the end of the bamboo wedged firmly against his naked shoulder, bent forward, and stooping nearly double gave a long and steady thrust. As he descended the second man took his place—then the third, and the fourth in regular succession, punting with the shoulder and walking against the boat's direction. They glided off with a gentle, swaying motion.

After a rather monotonous stretch of flat low-lying paddy lands, intersected with innumerable drainage

bunds, and punctuated by an occasional village of squalid, low attap-thatched houses from which the dogs and the naked brown children ran shrieking to witness their passing—the four boats with their house flag flying reached Kamphaeng Petch, whose lustre is an ancient pagoda with its tapering gilt spiral soaring upwards from the horned roofs of the surrounding monastery buildings.

From this point onwards monotony ended, and each morning thereafter found their eyes lifting to the heights that towered before them. The mirror of the stream stretched in a calm but alarming slant upwards before their course. The everlasting hills closed upon their tedious way. All traces of human habitation ceased, save for an occasional fishing encampment at the head of a rapid.

"I gloat! Hear me!" cried Philip in the words of the immortal Stalky, as each fresh scene of this wild nature unfolded before his unaccustomed eyes.

Not a very poetic manner of expression for his feelings moved by this grandeur, but Morland understood and sympathised with the experience. In the confines of the narrow cabin they lay all day in their deck chairs, reading, smoking, playing cards or—most often—simply watching the wondrous vistas of rocky gorges that narrowed in upon them daily, and the stream whose waste of waters grew ever more turgid with the foam in their rocky and precipitous channel.

Sometimes they would get out and stretch their limbs in a walk along a glistering sandbank or a scramble among the rocks beside a rapid. Morland, as has been indicated, could not leave his boat for any length of time or let it out of his sight, but his intention of obtaining photographs of the extraordinary scenes they were traversing was not difficult of fulfilment. Whenever a likely spot offered, the men would be made to halt, and out on shore would sally Morland followed by a boy with his paraphernalia, while he and Philip, both scantily garbed, would fall to arguing about the proper composition of the intended picture.

As evening fell the Nai Hoi would seek a likely sandbank or a backwater in some rapid, and the boat would tie up for the night.

Some of the polemen would light their fire on the bank and cook their rice, while others would go fishing in the river or visit the rare villages they passed in search of fresh vegetables or to buy a piece of pork. The air grew cooler, and the starlit nights within the sound of ever rushing waters were all that was pleasant. The Englishmen would bathe and then dine by the camp fire and sit smoking far into the glorious night.

Shams and conventions fall from a man in such circumstances, and the two discovered bonds of interest and many points of contact which years in Bangkok would not have sufficed to reveal.

It was during this voyage that Morland lifted for Philip a corner of the tragic veil that enveloped the background of his life. An early marriage, a struggle to make ends meet and to present a brave show on exiguous means to the captious snobbery of the greater part of the Bangkok English world, ending in a defeat imposed by a breakdown in health and the necessity of a divided home and a return to England—all this had almost, but not quite embittered Morland's general outlook. These circumstances notwithstanding, the "teak wallah's" sweet sanity of mind and spirit had, to a great extent, prevailed; and he restrained himself generally from judgment upon others who in these days of stress had passed him by without proferring a helping hand.

In these moments of confidence with Philip on some sandbank of the Meping, Morland was able to evoke the gentler memories of that brief happiness he had known in these same scenes with his young bride, now an invalid wife left behind him at Home.

"I don't know," he mused one evening, "whether an early marriage is, after all, the best thing for a man in a country like this. I once thought so."

Philip had already hinted to him of his boyish affections and his half promise to Sylvia Dean, and of the

apparent remoteness of their hopes ever reaching consummation.

"Of course, an early marriage saves one from many things that there may be reason to regret afterwards; and perhaps it enables one to be of those few men who can bring to marriage with a good English girl a purity as unsullied as her own."

"Well, yes," Philip agreed. "That's rather a rarity, but it's a great thing all the same."

Morland went on.

"But—unless you have the wherewithal that can alone help you to look a carping and money-obsessed world in the face, an early marriage for love in Siam brings also a deal of unhappiness."

"Yes, but don't you think also," added Philip, "that your experience was a more than usually unfortunate one —I mean your wife's health breaking down like that, and then the baby—your little Margot also failing to weather the climate."

"God, no! My experience is only the common lot of the majority of married people out here. It was merely unfortunate in that my pay at that time was not enough to keep a wife in comfort, as Siam, or rather Bangkok demands. Not that it is enough even now with two households going——"

Morland broke off and got up, throwing away the stump of his cigar.

"Let's go to bed!" he concluded. "The Nai Hoi wants to reach Ban Müd Ka to-morrow afternoon. That's the top of the last rapid, and we have to buy the boatmen a pig there to celebrate the end of yet another Iliad."

"Oh, yes," said Philip, following him down to the boat. "Then that must have been what they were driving at when they came to me this evening and asked for a pig."

"Yes, it's the custom. And I always let them have a beano. You see, the poor beggars have brought us past the dangers of the rapids with a good deal of trouble, and

saved us from the many dreadful river *phi* (goblins) so they want to sacrifice and celebrate."

True to schedule, Ban Müd Ka was reached next evening, and the boat tied up above the village for the night. It was the thirteenth day of their journey, and they had reached the stretch of calm water that lay between them and Laowieng, having put behind them the mountains and the rapids that divide the plateau of Northern Siam from the plains of the Menam delta.

A jollification was going on among the boatmen, who had duly purchased, and gorged themselves on the traditional pig, with copious libations of arrack to the Spirits of the jungle-haunted river.

"*Nai Khorap*" (please, sir), said Morland's Boy timidly, lingering after he had cleared away the dinner things. "There is Mong Poh Lan who has come from the forest to see you."

"Mong Poh Lan? Poh Lan?" Morland answered. "The Mae Chem contractor."

"*Men*" (the same), replied the boy.

"But why does he come worrying me here and now?"

"He says the Nai (master) will be going on to Laowieng to-morrow, and the opportunity to speak——"

Morland laughed at the native ingenuousness.

"Suppose he wants some more advances. That's the only thing he ever speaks to me about," he said. "Well, let him come. Excuse me, Harkness."

The boy disappeared in the darkness, and presently a man and two women approached the camp-fire. The man came forward.

He was a Shan, that sturdy race that inhabits the regions to the North of Burma where the long arm of the Indian Empire extends the shadow of its protection. There are many Shans in Northern Siam also, settlers there and employed as foresters of teak under the English companies, marrying the women of the country and sometimes attaining considerable substance. Incidentally, it may be well to state here that at this date Poh Lan had neither substance nor standing.

Mong Poh Lan squatted down and bowed in the usual fashion by putting his hands in the attitude of prayer, and bending his body forward in a low obeisance.

"Is the master well!" he asked in cringing tones.

"So! So!" answered Morland curtly. "Is Poh Lan well?"

"Things are mortal bad, Master. Work goes from ill to worse in the forest. I am getting poorer every day."

"Well I am not surprised," was the white man's somewhat unsympathetic rejoinder. "You were never noted for running after hard work, were you Poh Lan? Too much opium and gambling."

The man began a series of fervid protestations, when one of the women came forward and curtsied.

Harkness was at once struck by the wild beauty of her fitful features and her darkling eyes as lit up by the tossing flames of the fire.

"Who is this?" asked Morland, startled at her sudden appearance and defiant attitude.

The other woman, who had now sidled up behind the damsel, answered.

"It is my daughter, Rarouey, Master."

"Well, I don't see what——" began Morland, when the young girl interrupted him with a torrent of words and wild gesticulations.

Philip could make out that she was pleading for something, and at first he tried to follow her. But she used so many words of the Lao dialect, then unknown to him, that he ceased the effort and fell to studying the emotions which swept across her animated face like rain mists around the brow of some sombre hill. Her features were convulsed and her gestures exaggerated, but the pose of her lithe young body and the play of her swift hands had an infinite and tragic grace, the like of which he had never seen among her sisters of the South.

Even by firelight he could discern that she was fair of tint—as fair as many a woman of Palermo or Barcelona. The rich masses of her ebon-black hair were tossed upon

her head in a careless chignon. The tresses were arranged with a certain negligent artistry, crowning her wilful little head and framing her mobile face with quite delightful charm.

It was Harkness' first encounter at close quarters with a woman of the Northern "Buffer State." It bowled him over.

Mong Poh Lan listened impassively to his daughter's outburst. She was pleading his cause far better than he himself could have done, and her arguments gained a cogency from the mere fact that she was a woman and his daughter. Morland was visibly embarrassed at her outpourings, and to get rid of her, he answered with some asperity.

"*Reuang ni boh hu,*" (I know nothing about it) he said a trifle roughly.

Poh Lan saw how the wind was setting, and ordered his unruly daughter into the background, these commands being seconded by the mother in a few low whispers.

Rarouey flushed. In the uncertain light from the wood fire burning near Philip could distinctly note that the red of her shaméd blood flamed into her cheeks and down the delicate contour of her neck—a phenomenon he would never have believed possible in an Oriental.

Mong Poh Lan continued his wheedling catalogue of woes in his own subdued fashion.

"Nai Moh Lan (Morland) has always been kind to me," he insinuated. "I am very glad that Nai Moh Lan has come back to Laowieng."

"No doubt! No doubt!"

Morland was inclined to be sceptical.

"The Master will say a word for me with the Company," persisted the forester. "Things are mortal bad. I can't get a single log more out of the forest if I do not get an advance."

Morland was tiring of Poh Lan.

"Well, all right then. I'll see about it when I get to Laowieng. The company has been very indulgent to you. Your results have not been good—not nearly as

good as many other foresters who have had far fewer chances than you."

The man got up and backed away, discomfited. The two women had disappeared.

"What was all that rigmarole the girl let off?" Philip asked, the scene having greatly intrigued him.

"Blowed if I know exactly," Morland replied with a laugh. "The gist of it was an almighty slating of the Company for having brought (as she seemed to think) her lazy old rascal of a father to beggary."

"Rather pretty I thought," ventured Philip with a show of indifference. "Very fair complexion I mean—I don't think I have ever seen——"

Morland looked hard at his young companion.

"Not bad. The mother is a Lao, but the girl is as handsome as most Shan women. Got a husband and one child."

"What!" Philip was astonished. "But she can't be much more than a child herself."

"Yes. And her husband is just about as bad a 'hat' as the old father is. A pretty pair!"

"In what way?" asked Harkness.

"Oh, just the usual Shan way—lazy and idle and vicious. Smoking opium and gambling when they should be dragging teak. Old Poh Lan has been nabbed twice already for elephant stealing, and the husband of Rarouey is suspected of doing a bit of dacoity when the chance of a quiet gang robbery offers. We'd better be getting back to the boat again."

"Any chance of their trying for your specie?" asked Philip.

Morland grinned.

"Not the slightest," he answered with conviction. "The Bombeo Bornay send specie up the river on an average once every eighteen months—and have done so for the past forty years or thereabouts. And there has never been a single attack made on our boats. Too difficult. They can't get away with it from the river."

"But," asked Philip. "What about Powell? The man you told me was robbed the other day near Raheng?"

"Oh, that was a different thing altogether. Besides, he was thirty miles from Raheng and the river at the time. Powell was dacoited—or rather robbed, sleeping in his tent. He was taking money to the jungle."

The "taking of money to the jungle," it may be explained in passing, is a regular practice of teak firms in Northern Siam. Every six months or so it becomes necessary to send several thousand rupees out to the forest to pay wages, advances, etc., and these sums are taken in silver rupees by the "teak wallahs" to a prearranged spot whence they can be distributed to the foresters and contractors.

"Also, Powell was drugged by his Boy, who was in league with the blighters," added Morland. "They caught the men afterwards with most of the money. It was dam funny in Court, after the case came on, to see old Powell's face when one of the dacoits had the audacity to get up and plead 'guilty,' saying it was no sport robbing a chap like Powell 'who snored like a pig' all the time they were burgling him."

CHAPTER VII

THE LADY OF THE PEDESTAL

It was nearly mid-day when their boats reached Laowieng. The picturesque town straggles along both banks of the river Meping, and over it there hangs the shadow of Doi Saket, the mountain to which those of the European community who can possibly do so flee from the burning heat of sweltering Aprils. A pleasant town, Laowieng, where one has ever in one's ears the deep drone of the slow-moving, double rimmed bamboo water-wheels that line the bank and irrigate the paddy fields.

A long string of Lao women coming from market was filing past the Bombeo landing-stage at which Morland's boats had moored; and Philip's first impression of the place was that of a town full of women—for he could see no sign of men about. Residence confirmed this impression, the Lao woman here, as elsewhere, doing all the work, while their lords and masters approved their energy from the shade, recumbent and smoking a cheroot.

Philip was instantly struck by this train of quaint and dainty brown womenkind that went chattering and laughing past. It was his first sight of these women of the North with their swaying, double baskets full of rice, fruit, and the daily household marketing, their feet twinkling in and out beneath the vari-coloured *sin* (Lao girls' skirt) who cast occasional glances from capricious dark eyes upon the new arrival standing in their path

regarding them thus curiously. They were so unlike the Siamese girls of Bangkok, invested somehow with the attraction of a femininity lacking in any Eve of the South, that— do what he would—Philip could hardly keep his eyes off them.

"Hullo!"

A young Englishman was coming towards them.

"You must be Harkness I suppose."

Philip turned with a blush. Morland was still down in the boat seeing about the boxes full of silver which had to be unchained and unloaded from the hold.

"Yes," he assented. "Are you Van Homrigh, whom I have come to relieve?"

They shook hands.

"That's right! Come along up to the house and have a drink. I'll send my Burmese clerk down later to see about your things being brought up."

"Hullo, Van Hom!" cried Morland, emerging from the boat and scrambling up the bank. "How's how?"

"Pretty quiet up here just now. But there's a few men coming in next week and we should get some polo," answered the Forest man. "Come and have a drink."

"Sorry!" said Morland. "But I have to get this wretched bullion carted up to the office and into the safe. And then I have to see Hayler. Meet you later. Most probably see you at the Club this evening."

So the two Forests men went along to the departmental bungalow together.

"You'll like it up here," Van Homrigh told his successor. "It's a fine life—a dam sight better anyhow than Bangkok—place I wouldn't live in for anything. And you'll find a bunch of decent fellows in the station."

Philip rejoined with enthusiasm:

"I am sure I shall like it immensely."

"Of course," the other went on, "you'll get fed-up with the loneliness and never seeing a white man for months sometimes. But it is a fine life, taken all round. I didn't really want to go on leave at all this year—I am very comfortable, and it suits me. But Santall told me,

if I didn't go this year, I wouldn't be able to get away next—so I thought it better."

Tiffin was laid, and they sat down right away. Van Homrigh told the Boy to lay another place, which rather struck Philip, as there were already two covers on the table.

The other read his thoughts.

"The extra place is for my girl," he mentioned. "I make her sit at table with me and eat European fashion and food. In fact, I believe in trying to make her as much a European as possible."

"Ye-e-s," hesitated Philip.

"You brought a girl up from Bangkok with you?" asked Van Homrigh, and, receiving an answer in the negative, he continued. "Just as well. You'll get a much better selection up here. These Lao girls are a long way nicer than the usual Peguan women from Paklat you have to content yourself with in Bangkok. At least, they are more like *women,* with their skirts instead of the trouser-like *phanung*—and their long hair—not cut short like a boy's."

Philip brightened.

"I think," he remarked enthusiastically, "I think some of them are jolly pretty—at least so far as I have seen. The costume—the colours, and the flowers in the hair—and all that are very fetching."

"Yes—more womanly somehow, I always think," added Van Homrigh. "And then too, these Lao girls have no end of 'savvy,' you know. Can adapt themselves to any society and any circumstances."

"Really!"

"Yes. As a matter of fact, most of them with a little training can hold their own with any English woman, I am convinced——"

"Perhaps," interpolated his hearer not without diffidence. "If prejudice would allow them to take their place alongside white women—possibly they might."

Van Homrigh answered with some heat.

"I am certain of it! You'll meet Mrs. Sarcombe

soon, probably. She's a Lao—married by Siamese law, and she goes everywhere with Sarcombe. And conducts herself perfectly—with a darned sight less 'side' than some of the white Mems out here.

"You'll see my girl presently. She has learnt to speak English, and I have taught her how to behave at table. And now, I assure you, she prefers European fashions of life to those of her own people. Wouldn't change for anything. Here! Bua Phang!"

Van Homrigh turned and called out through the door of the adjacent room, "We're waiting for you!"

A girl came forward. Pretty enough, and dainty in the usual Lao girl's way, she was dressed, with the taste that characterises her sisters, in a muslin and lace blouse and a skirt with the usual green and black stripes running horizontally across the upper part. Her face, however, was spoiled by an expression of permanent discontent, and she wore too much jewellery.

She came up to Harkness and held her hand out with supreme assurance.

"How are you?" she drawled with comical affectation in the best Van Homrigh manner. "Did you have a good trip up-river?"

Her lord and mentor was beaming in the background—beaming with pleasure at seeing his pet go through the paces he had taught.

For a moment Philip was quite flabbergasted. He had seen Bangkok *mias* of many sorts, but none like this girl. The bare idea that she should appear so openly, and even sit at meals with Europeans was certainly in direct contrast to the surreptitious manner in which every Bangkok man of his acquaintance had conducted such household arrangements.

Then Van Homrigh broke out with some angry remark in Lao. The other white man thought he caught the word "shoes." He glanced down at the girl's feet.

She was wearing a pair of silver-embroidered Lao slippers, in entire keeping with the rest of her costume, and though her bare brown feet were visible above the

slippers which did not wholly cover them, her foot-gear struck Philip as suitable, and indeed entirely unexceptionable.

The girl turned and sulkily left the room.

"I object to her appearing in native slippers without any stockings on," was Van Homrigh's explanation.

They waited, and the girl returned after an interval, seating herself at the head of the table.

She walked with evident discomfort in the pair of high-heeled, fashionable, French shoes into which she had changed. Open-work silk stockings were distinctly in evidence, but Philip noticed with an inward chuckle that the stockings had been hastily put on, and one of them was inside out. Van Homrigh, not observing this *'faux bas'* however, was prepared to forget his disappointment at her failure to put her best foot foremost at the first appearance.

The meal went on.

Philip was astounded to see how far his companion had come under the influence of the girl, treating her with an obsequious and even exaggerated politeness that would have made any white woman ridiculous, but now and then being obliged to scold her like a spoilt child for some false step in the elements of table manners. The farce of the scene struck the newcomer acutely, but he simply registered the experience then as yet another example of the absurd manner of some white men towards brown women after a lengthy residence in Siam.

In the evening the two men went together across the river by the ferry and down to the Gymkhana Club, where Harkness was introduced to Lister, the British Consul, and Marlow, Manager of the Brunei Corporation —another of the British teak companies in the North, the rival and competitor of the Bombeo Bornay to which Morland belonged. The latter and Hayler, his chief, had also ridden down to the Club, while presently Parkin of the Survey Department turned up.

Philip was called upon to admire the magnificent stretch of sward on the polo ground and the splendid

situation of the club generally, pronounced by the far-travelled to be the finest East of Calcutta; and then Parkin and Van Homrigh went off to play a game of "squash."

"You'll be busy for a day or two, taking over, I suppose?" suggested Lister to Philip, as they sat down to a drink.

"Yes," agreed the latter. "Van Homrigh tells me he wants to leave on Wednesday, as soon as Eager arrives back."

"You going to live in the big F.D. house?" asked Marlow.

"I don't know," Philip replied. "In fact I did not know there was any other house beyond the one Van Homrigh inhabits. Anyhow that is the one I understand I am to be in."

"Yes, that's the so-called 'big' house," said Lister.

"By the way," quizzed Morland, "have you met 'Galatea' yet?"

Philip looked at him in puzzlement.

"The Lady of the Pedestal," amplified Lister.

They laughed together; and then it dawned on Harkness that the proceedings which had struck him at tiffin in Van Homrigh's house seemed to be a standing source of merriment and banter in the station.

Marlow took up the thread of initiation, and spun on.

"You'll find us all mad here," he said. "Inevitable, you know—in a place like this. Mad! 'Mad as a jungle-wallah,' as they say. Mad on most subjects, but some of us also place an exaggerated halo upon the heads of the ladies who beguile our hours of tedium."

"Not that Van Hom. is the original offender," added Morland. "He took the pedestal business and the European-clothes-and-table-manners idea from Sarcombe."

"Absolute damned rot!" grunted Lister, as if poisoned by the thought. "Any white man who has truck with the women of this half-civilised race lowers his own self-respect for all time, and does Europe a bad turn too."

Harkness learnt later that this vehement opinion of Lister's was acted upon by its possessor to the full.

The Consul had been years in Siam. He was normal on most points, but on the problem now at issue he held the peculiar and fanatical view of complete abstention.

Not that he condemned wholesale, or failed to make human allowances for his fellows. Lister was no Puritan as regards sex morality, and he understood as well as anyone the reasons for mixed unions in certain conditions. But, rightly or wrongly, he considered the Siamese a race so inferior in mentality and development to any nation of the West that he despised them in all the relationships of life.

He refused therefore to mate himself, however temporarily, with a woman from the race he so profoundly contemned, and his remark at the present moment was simply of a piece with his philosophy that intercourse with an Oriental was derogatory to a white man.

It is hardly necessary to add that he was a rare exception in holding such opinions permanently. His attitude naturally made him very intractable officially, and his tenure of the Consulate at Laowieng was chequered by incessant struggles against the laziness and corruption which he found among the local *amphurs* (petty magistrates) and *kha rajakar* (officials of the Siamese Government).

Three days later Van Homrigh departed in the boats by which Harkness had travelled up-river. The latter had been down to the landing-stage to see his predecessor off, and was returning through the Forest Department compound to his house.

Suddenly, from out the window of a native house that lay along his path, an object came hurtling with considerable force, and narrowly missed Philip's head.

He paused, startled.

The next moment a second missile was launched from inside the house. It was now evident that no particular aim was intended, and Philip, before he should proceed to remonstrate with the occupant of the dwelling on the

danger of such indiscriminate jettison, turned aside to see what was being thus cast away.

He picked up a woman's high-heeled shoe. It was almost new, and he noted, to his astonishment, that the leather was excellent and the cut and shape eminently stylish. The shoe seemed familiar.

His mind was stirred by a recollection.

The sound of a woman soliloquising within the attap-roofed shanty came distinctly through the window. Philip approached quietly.

The voice was the voice of Bua Phang.

"There!" muttered the Lady of the Pedestal. "That's the last of these horrid, beastly, uncomfortable, foreign clothes! May they perish of the Plague!"

Another woman in the room was shrieking with laughter.

"Pull off my stockings! Quick! What are you laughing at? Ugh! That's good! What!—no you shan't keep them! It's quite enough that one of our family was made a monkey of. Throw them away—do you hear? (Another laugh.) And now, take all these forks and spoons out of my sight, but you will have to keep these, for he will ask for them when he returns. Here, spread a mat for me on the floor. And bring me a dish of ngapi (Burmese rotten, salted fish). Now, I'll have a proper meal, and a chew of pickled tea afterwards!"

Philip fled. There was a sound of breaking china.

It must have been the pedestal crumbling beneath the petulant feet of a reluctant Lao goddess.

CHAPTER VIII

EDUCATING SYLVIA

"Lor', Missy, 'ow you did frighten me, to be sure!"

The two girls stood for a moment and looked at each other in the cold light of the English winter morning. On hearing the postman's knock, Sylvia Dean, a dressing-gown flung over her shivering shoulders, had scampered excitedly downstairs from her bed-room. She was a rather adorable mignon figure now as she stood there, her great dark eyes glistening with pleased expectancy, and the masses of her curly hair (she wore it short) in tumbled disarray around her head.

Philip never failed to write by every mail, and Sylvia, who had carefully studied the movements of shipping in the daily paper, was certain that letters from the Far East should be delivered in Northampton that morning. Marion, the little housemaid on her knees, looked up startled by the dive her young mistress now made for the solitary letter lying on the door-mat before them.

"It's all right, Marion," explained Sylvia breathlessly, striving to hide her eagerness. "I only came to get the letters."

"Yes—oh yes, Miss. There's one—with a foreign stamp. That must be for you. That's all there is bar the newspaper."

Marion held up the letter in her grimy hand. Sylvia, who had hardly glanced at it, was half way upstairs again

before her expressive lips fells into a mutinous pout of sudden anger.

"No, it's not for me!" she cried, tossing a rebellious curl back on her pretty head. "You stupid thing! Can't you read? It is for *you.*"

She flung the letter down to the maid, and turning to hide her vexation, went back to her room.

This was the first time Philip had missed a mail since he went away! He no longer thought of her. He no longer loved her! So Sylvia reasoned with herself, and saw no other conclusion, but she did not know that Philip's usual letter *had* been written on his knee in a houseboat on the Meping, and the up-country runner had been delayed by swollen rivers that week. The only disappointing fact that lingered in Sylvia's mind was that her lover had not troubled to write to her. The term "lover" in regard to Philip, of course, was never employed by her even in inmost thoughts of him. Their boy-and-girl attachment was too fragile, too indefinite a bond to warrant warm phrases. They were only engaged in a vague, intangible sort of way, and no one knew of it but themselves. She had met Philip Harkness long ago in Birnam. When he came home from Cambridge they got into the habit of playing golf together. Sylvia could give him a stroke; and then they had walked and talked and grown to know a little of each other. And once or twice at parting, in the quiet of a breathless autumn evening, while the westering sun that Turner loved to paint went down in gold and crimson over the sands of the Bristol Channel, Philip had bent down and kissed her.

But Sylvia had not confided in a living soul the trembling troth they had then plighted, the secret promise she had given to wait for him until he should return from Siam to marry her. She treasured the remembrance of his blue eyes and frank smile as something that no one but herself knew. She flattered herself that, though Marion the maid had been in their service for ten years and knew most of the family affairs, even she did not

know of Philip's existence nor guessed that letters came from him to her. It annoyed her now to think that the girl should have dared to presume that a letter with a foreign stamp must be for her mistress.

In thus concealing her engagement Sylvia Dean had been actuated by a varied medley of motives. It was not the first time that she had thought herself in love, but it was the first time that any boy had made love to her. She cherished the warm secret to her heart. She liked to dream of it, to idealise the finer phases of it, and she refused to share it with the outside world. But Sylvia had also a strong strain of practicality in her nature. Philip was poor, and she was poor too. They were both young, very young. He had gone to the East to make good for himself and for her, and his career and prospects there held out much promise of the fulfilment of their hopes. Nevertheless, there were rather too many streams to cross before they could be united on the safe bank of marriage. Sylvia did not delude herself that the current of love might not always flow in the direction she wanted her ship of dreams to take. It was better to say nothing to anyone till she could say everything to everyone.

At breakfast that morning Doctor Dean munched dry toast and scowled over the money article in his paper. He was a man of few words, and his chief efforts as a busy panel doctor were devoted to keeping abreast with his work and irritably foisting off the nearly always unreasonable demands on his time of his exacting patients. Since his wife's death a few years before, Nevill Dean's temper had been gradually frayed and his urbanity reduced to a minimum by a dual struggle, work and money—on the one hand the endeavour to make enough to pay the school bills of his three growing sons, and on the other the attempt to overcome his natural indolence. Never a sanguine man, yet he had been fairly happy as a country practitioner at Birnam, but even that easy existence had hardly failed to suit his naturally highly-strung temperament.

Then money troubles had come. He had sunk most of

his capital in two medical practices in the Midlands. Bad management by the young doctors he had put in to "run" these had been followed by practical failure of both, and he had been obliged a year ago to leave Birnam. He had come to Northampton reluctantly to take over and rescue from utter extinction the more lucrative of these practices. The strenuous work involved in this effort was entirely distasteful to him, and he had attempted to recoup himself by a series of unwise speculations. The money dropped on these had merely added to his other tribulations.

A man of little mental balance or physical stamina, he failed, even at the best of times, to meet with equanimity the ordinary petty annoyances inevitable in a profession that brought him in constant contact with the public; and, worn out by an uphill battle against two successive epidemics of Spanish influenza, he was at the present time on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Sylvia herself had not failed to mark the growing moroseness of a once indulgent and even-tempered parent, and while making allowances for her father's worries, she took to living more and more withdrawn into the shell of her own affairs and never dreamed of making a confidant of him.

The doctor looked up.

"Don't you think?" he said with the terse, sarcastic asperity that he had adopted for every situation, "don't you think you might impress on that feather-brained girl of ours that I require my boots each morning before I go out? She has been with us for years, but she seems——"

Sylvia ran to the kitchen to fetch the boots and scolded the delinquent.

Coughing nervously, the doctor pushed his chair back from the table. His brow wrinkled, and the puffiness under his myopic eyes gave evidence of sleeplessness and strain.

"We shall have to look out for another cook," he grunted.

"Why what's the matter?" asked his daughter.

"The present woman—what's her name——"

"Bella?"

"Yes. She gave me notice yesterday."

"But, father, this is very curious! She has said nothing at all to me about wanting to go. What is the matter? Why is she leaving?"

Her father gave Sylvia a quizzical glance, blinking his dull eyelids, and pulling at his drooping moustache.

"I gathered she was at loggerheads with the other girl."

"I know that," replied Sylvia. "But it does seem extraordinary she should give *you* notice and say nothing to me."

"Oh! I saw this trouble coming."

Sylvia pondered a little. Just a trifle proud of her position as head of the house, she resented the fact that servants should go behind her back in a domestic matter that concerned her alone. . . .

"Of course," she burst out after some reflection, "Marion has lately been growing more and more disinclined for work. Ever since her fellow, Dick Judd, went to India with his battalion. And Bella and she have been quarrelling a good deal lately."

Her father rose to leave.

"If I were you, Sylvia, I should not probe too deeply into the 'casus belli' between these two wenches." He made the utterance significantly as he opened the door. "Get rid of them both. I'll put an advertisement for other servants in the local rag to-day."

Nevill Dean could have—nay he should have told his daughter then and there that Marion would have to leave in order to bring into the world the child which the said Dick Judd had begotten before he sailed with his regiment for India. In many ways Sylvia was shrewdly, worldly wise to the elemental facts of life. It is true she had noticed a change in Marion's condition, but as yet she had formed no deduction. She was twenty years old, but her father, living in a world where such matters are the commonplaces of his profession, had been too busy and too neglectful to enlighten Sylvia's ignorance. He

forgot that Sylvia's mother had died too soon to counteract the baleful effect of the half-knowledge which her daughter had acquired on many such matters from the stealthy whisperings of a Girls' School, with its unwholesome hypocritical suppressions. Nor did he realise that the calibre of Sylvia's unformed mind made her only too receptive of the inconclusive prejudices with which her own middle class overlaid life. Sylvia did not read widely and had few women friends. For her such subjects as birth and unwanted children were simply shelved as being "not nice." Her's was the shrinking innocence of semi-ignorance, that refined ostrich-like refusal to face truth which is now fortunately rare among her sisters.

When the throb of the doctor's light car had died away as her father went forth on his morning rounds, Sylvia rose and went about her house work, witting little of the crude revelations that awaited her.

Marion was singing at her work, a rare enough thing, in all conscience, in the England of these days. Formerly Marion's voice raised in melody had been no uncommon thing as she went about her tasks in the house, but of late she had fallen into a hesitant silence, in her employer's presence especially. She stopped timidly now as Sylvia came upon her.

"You seem happy this morning, Marion," remarked her young mistress when they encountered.

"Yes, ma'am, please, Miss," answered the girl, but she volunteered no reason for her lightness of heart.

"You had a letter from India?" Sylvia went on.

In spite of herself, a jealous tone crept into her words. Her own letter had not come, yet the lover of this common lass had not forgotten mail day.

"Oh, yes. Please, Miss, it was from Richard!"

"Ah! And how does he like India?"

"Oh, very nicely, thank you, Miss. He has been made a company sergeant, he says."

Marion spoke proudly, and referred to her bosom, whence she drew the missive and read aloud from its pages.

"Really! Promoted? I am glad to hear that."

"Yes, and if you please, Miss, we can be married in a year's time 'on the strength,' he says, which means I can go out to him there."

"Oh! And I suppose——"

"Well, Miss—you see, please," ventured the maid, "if you don't mind I should just like to go at the end of the month."

"But, Marion—I don't understand! If you are only going to be married in a year's time—why should you be in such a hurry to leave us now?"

"I'm sorry, Miss, but I'm not feeling strong enough for any more housework just now. It's climbing them stairs that tires me out cruel."

Even then the implication contained in this latter statement did not dawn on Sylvia. The girl who was speaking to her was only four years her senior, but out of her womanly experience and expectant motherhood she was able to despise Sylvia's ignorance. It was useless explaining further. The class to which her employer belonged was invariably hostile to girls in a predicament such as she. Marion was prepared for intolerance, but she saw no reason for forcing Sylvia to face a situation which, she knew, all nice ladies preferred to ignore as long as possible. If she could conceal from her mistress until she had left the house the accident that had befallen her no harm would be done.

Not so, however, Bella, the harassed and hard-featured Scottish cook, who was bubbling over with righteous indignation at her errant sister's lapse. Bella had chanced to overhear Marion's last statement to her mistress, and when Sylvia shortly afterwards went into the kitchen and pleasantly remarked on the good news from India, the woman flared forth vulgarly.

"Oh, indeed!" she said, mincingly repeating Sylvia's words, her breast billowing indignantly upwards like a pigeon. "Oh, and so our little Marion is to be married and go out to India in a year! *Her marrit!* Humph! Mickle good that wull dae her! Impident wretch! I

wonder she has na more shame than come an' tell ye any sic thing."

The bigoted spinster grew more heated, raising her voice that the culprit might not miss her scarifying opinion of her conduct. It had long been a sore point with Bella that her mistress shewed a marked and sisterly interest in the girl who had served in the family for so many years. Marion had come to the Deans in Birnam as a raw girl of fourteen under Sylvia's mother, and in a sense had grown up with Sylvia. Grief in the death of Mrs. Dean and the shouldering of her responsibilities by Sylvia had broken down the barriers of class between the two girls in a multitude of ways, until Marion had gained a footing of familiar intimacy in the family. Bella, coming later, resented this. When the handsome Dick Judd was paying attentions to Marion, the attitude of Bella had been one of covert jealousy, the envy of an ageing virgin who saw a woman younger than herself receiving a tribute that no one had ever offered her—the generous love of a man who was her fitting mate. For Bella the whole bitterness of the situation had been aggravated by the fact that her mistress, Sylvia herself, had been completely captivated by the tinkling spurs and dashing uniform of the young Hussar trooper with such engagingly respectful good manners as Dick Judd possessed. Sylvia Dean had taken a vicarious pleasure in the wooing of the little maid servant, had winked at her absences when Marion stayed out late o' nights, courting, and had wept with her in the sadness of Dick's departure abroad. Through all this sentimentality the inviolate Bella had stood aside, furiously disapproving; but now—*now* her turn had come when the results of Marion's "goings on" could no longer be concealed from a censorious world!

Sylvia listened in appalled silence, quivering under the cascade of scathing invective that fell from the Scottish woman. The terrible Calvinistic scorn with which her race has always lashed a Magdalene barbed every one of her remorseless words. Entrenched in her own unassailed

virtue the woman uttered now many of the thoughts she had lately been brooding, and expressed them at great length with the typically wearisome repetition of the uneducated person.

"Bella! Bella!" Sylvia cried at last, shutting her ears with her hands. "How *can* you say such dreadful things?"

Her prejudices, her reading, her experience and her training had inclined Sylvia at first to condone Marion's slip. The only thing perhaps that hurt her more than anything else was the indubitable fact that the girl had taken advantage of the opportunities Sylvia had created for her to meet Dick Judd alone.

"I can, an' I wull say them!" screamed Bella, beside herself. "It's a burning black affront that decent folk should have to associate with sic a hussy. An' I for one wull stand it no longer. I'm leaving the end of this week. So there!"

Marion walked in at the door. She did not seem greatly abashed, and, sending a withering look towards the cook, she held out a paper slip for Sylvia to read.

"If you please, Miss," she said restraining her triumph. "I'm very sorry you should have had all this annoyance on my account from that woman there. But I can't stand aside and let you listen any longer to all this dreadful nastiness. I should have told you before. Me and Dick were married before he left. There's my lines!"

The other two women looked at her in stark amaze. Marion placed her arms defiantly akimbo on her hips. Bella snorted her bewildered indignation. If this were true, she felt, an entirely different compleixon was placed on the whole matter, and the stones she had thought to cast at an apparent sinner had glanced harmlessly off a respectably married woman. Sylvia's puzzlement increased.

"Then it is true, Marion?" she asked. "You are going to have a baby?"

"Yes—if you please, Miss——"

"But why did you not tell me when you were being married?"

Sylvia shewed by her question that she was more than a little hurt. To think that a love affair in which she had taken so much interest should have culminated without her knowledge in bell, book and candle!

"Well, you see, Miss," explained Marion, blushing for the first time, "there is a rule they have in the Army—but it does not matter now. Dick is a sergeant and he has the Kurnel's permission. I'm very sorry, please, Miss, but Dick asked me not to mention it to anyone in case he got into trouble."

The cook had come to Sylvia's elbow and now tried in vain to read the paper which had been placed in her hand.

Bella, unbelieving Bella, snorted.

"A pack o' lies," she said. "Wull ye let me see your lines?"

Then Marion made a false step.

"It's none of your business ye dirty minded old thing," she cried, turning on her traducer. "But there you are! I'm sure ye'd give your two eyes to have a thing like that paper. No one ever wants to marry you!"

Bella unearthed a pair of spectacles from under her apron, and with great deliberation studied the document for a few minutes. Her eyes lighted with malice and uncharitableness.

"Ay," she croaked. "Juist as I thought! Marrit before some back-street Registry in a hole an' corner fashion!"

Sylvia put her arm protestingly round Marion's shoulder at that.

"Really, really, Bella, what *does* that matter? Marion is either married or she is not. I won't allow you——"

"And what's more," interrupted the servant, holding up her hand in the manner of a Covenanter invoking a curse. "The date on this paper is July 14th—juist three months ago. An' ye said yer bairn was coming next month, did you no? Eh? Weel?"

The insinuation was patent even to Sylvia.

Marion flared up in a storm of wordy indignation that overwhelmed all her mistress' efforts to keep the peace. The bickering continued for hours. Now one of the women, convinced that she had said the last unanswerable word, would break away from the argument and begin some work in another room, but the other would pursue her with some fresh taunts and the vociferous battle would blaze forth again. Sylvia tried to separate them, pacify them, order them back to their duties. But in vain. They insisted in threshing the subject out in all its details before her. . . .

Until the doctor returned wearied and listless from his work to lunch, when, for the first time in the history of Sylvia's reign, he learnt that the cooking of food had been entirely neglected that morning in the house. There was not a morsel to eat.

What made matters worse was that, to-day of all days, her father had brought a colleague in from a consultation to take pot luck. Sylvia tried to explain, to give reasons, to temporise. Her father looked at the bare table, sneeringly. She manœuvred to draw him out of the room in which the embarrassed stranger sat, that she might explain at greater length the delicate matters which had so distracted the womenfolk of his house this morning. She succeeded in getting the doctor into the passage and whispered incoherently to him, but he was in too great a hurry and too violent a rage to be impressed by Marion's dramatic revelations or Bella's bad temper.

"Oh, damn it all, Sylvia!" he cried impatiently, "I don't care a Continental whether all the servants in the house have made secret marriages or are going to reproduce their species. If they can't have lunch ready at the usual time, I'll sack them both."

Which he promptly did. In the hearing of his guest too, and then went out to lunch at the hotel.

Sylvia's cup of unhappiness overflowed. It was not the first time her father had spoken harshly to her of late, but it was the first occasion on which he had forgotten the elementary rule of family rows, and he had scolded

her before a stranger like a naughty child or a careless servant.

Sylvia that day had been brought face to face in a disagreeable fashion with certain raw problems of life that had hitherto been glossed over for her by her elders. She had liked Marion and been inclined to forgive her, but in her own inexperience of love she could not quite forgive the girl for yielding to the currents of sex so easily. She blamed the man of course, completely; and though in the eyes of the world his marriage with Marion had condoned his fault, Sylvia was prone to endorse the harsh stigma with which the uncompromising Scottish woman branded a child born in such circumstances.

Sylvia retired to her own room after her father had gone, and with a splitting headache she floundered to her own conclusions on different aspects of the subject. She had not the refuge of a mother's arms, wherein she might have adjusted such problems to their proper focus.

Philip too had forgotten to write! Philip had ceased to love her. Both the servants had packed and left. She was unbearably alone in the house.

Not for the first time, her thoughts in trouble turned to Madge Ridgeway. Madge was a nurse at the Hospital and was almost the only girl friend she possessed in the town. Sylvia did not cultivate Madge's acquaintance with any enthusiasm, and the latter was too busy to see her often. It was her father who had introduced Sylvia to Madge. She was a capable girl, with a deal of calm common-sense. He liked her, he said, and she was his favourite assistant "for operations."

It was Tuesday, the one free afternoon that Madge had in the week. Sylvia took down the telephone and asked for her.

"I say, Madge," she said, trying to speak collectedly. "Are you doing anything special this afternoon? No? Well, be a dear and come over to the house and have tea with me. No, I don't want to go out. I'm feeling too upset—what? Oh, I'll tell you all about it when you come."

Madge smiled to herself. Like many women with large mouths smiling became her. She had been pretty frequently to the Deans' house of late, and she had just been wondering if she could frame any excuse to Sylvia for going again that afternoon. Sylvia had rung her up and solved the question.

Of course she would go. She dressed carefully, with even a trace of coquetry, and she looked a little disappointed when she learnt that the Doctor would not be in to tea. Sylvia, in her unhappiness, was more gracious to Madge than she had ever been before. She faltered out the story of her troubles with the servants and related even how furious the doctor had been when he came home and found no food ready in the house at lunch time.

Madge listened pityingly, encouraging her to talk.

"You poor thing!" she said, summing up. "You must try and look after your father better than that. But don't worry. I can get you a splendid cook and a housemaid from the hospital. We are reducing the establishment there you know. I'll send them round in the morning." (That was so like Madge. She had always a remedy for every disaster and the more flustered others became the more calmly and surely she devised a way out.)

"And as for this girl Marion, it is all right. The great thing in her favour is that the man has made an honest woman of her and legitimized her child. That is all that matters in cases like these. People of that class often have these—little accidents, but they don't always put them right in time."

CHAPTER IX

"JUNGLE WALLAHS"

FOR the male portion of European mankind in a place like Laowieng life became interesting only when a sufficient number of men had returned from the jungle to permit of two sides for polo being formed in the station.

These "teak wallahs" or "jungle wallopers" as they dubbed one another in mutual semi-disparagement, were wont to spend a couple of months or so in the jungle at a stretch, "girdling" trees, and generally supervising the extract of teak from the once abundant forests of Siam, now somewhat exhausted through a belated realisation of the necessities for State conservation.

As Morland pithily put it to Philip:

"After ten weeks or so of a solitary furrow in the Mae Chem, you generally come back to Laowieng in the hope that there will be polo going every day of the ten you spend in the station, while you're getting stores and so on for another spell in the jungle."

"And," surmised Philip, "I suppose you manage to arrange that you are all 'in' at the same time pretty well."

"You bet! And after polo, we do a 'gin-crawl' from the Club to your house, where you finish up with more booze, and in this way most of us succeed in never going to bed sober while in station. Oh yes! It's a good life!"

"But," Harkness expostulated, "it doesn't seem to me so very unnatural that, after the solitude of the

jungle, the relaxation to even the demi-semi-hemi-civilisation of the station makes one apt to——"

"Let fly!" Morland found the phrase. "Quite so! Quite so! I don't deny it. But it's not until the Christmas meeting that we let fly at anything like a venture. And then it is a very long bow."

"Anyhow, there can't be much to spend your money on in the jungle, and I suppose in the working intervals one saves a lot."

Notwithstanding the paucity of Englishmen in Northern Siam (Laowieng is the largest station with an English population of some thirty souls only) polo is indulged in fairly frequently throughout the year. Every man, hardly without exception, plays; and the healthy rivalry existing—in the first place between the members of the teak companies, and in the second between the different stations—creates a standard of play that is, comparatively speaking, high.

Every youngster who arrives in the North finds himself obliged primarily by the necessities of his work to learn to ride, and thereafter by the force of male public opinion to learn to play polo.

Marlow made no bones about it. He simply *compelled* all his men to play, and until he grew too heavy for the game himself, led his Company-team through an unbroken succession of victories over other teams. In addition he obliged his Directors in London, in his own inimitably autocratic fashion, to grant allowances to his men for extra ponies chosen as suitable for polo purposes.

But then Marlow was the Uncrowned of Laowieng. A one-time All-England cricketer and a fine all-round sportsman, he was the oldest white resident in the North. So well had he developed the resources of his Company, obtaining such excellent results from his timber workings for so many years, that the Brunei Board had come to rely on his judgment in every particular.

Marlow it was who selected amongst the candidates for new posts in the Company—or at least those youngsters destined to serve under himself up-country. Marlow

seldom made a mistake, for his judgment of human nature was unerring almost: but if it turned out that a man under him *did* differ from him on any of the essential points which he exacted—that man had to go, whatever his other merits.

While fearing him, the whole station could not but admire Marlow. He domineered over Laowieng in the same irresistibly charming manner as that in which he compelled his juniors to fall into line with his own ideas of what constituted "a varie parfit, gentle" teak-wallah.

He dictated to the Gymkhana Club Committee as to how that institution should be run, and in much the same way he dictated to Laowieng society generally how it should conduct its affairs.

To Siamese Laowieng he laid down what improvements in the shape of road-repairs and bridge-building he deemed advisable for his own comfort and the public weal: while by English Laowieng he was perforce accepted as the mentor on every subject, from the colour of puttees to the management of the one great annual social function in the North—the "Christmas Meet."

Occasionally, of course, Marlow met opponents who sometimes proved his match.

Sarcombe, the Consul previous to Lister, had enough strength of will, supported by a sufficiently powerful official position, to be able to oppose this self-constituted but not too arrogant autocrat.

He was an exception. As a rule people simply took Marlow for granted and allowed him to retain the position which he had merited by length of residence. It is fair to add that he never, on the whole, over-abused his position.

Harkness had an early opportunity of seeing Marlow's "moulding process" in train as applied to the young idea of little Rashleigh, recently arrived for the Brunei. Rashleigh had reached Laowieng a couple of weeks before Harkness, and he invited the young Forests' man to dine with him one evening.

"Of course," he confessed ruefully to Philip in the

interchange of confidences to which the young are prone after the liqueurs have gone round once. "Yes, of course, I am in debt already. But then we are all in the same box, downwards from Marlow himself, so it doesn't matter much."

Philip could not hide his astonishment.

"But I thought!" He stammered a trifle. "I thought a man could save money up here—I mean out of his field-allowances—and having really nothing to spend it on for threequarters of the year."

"So you'd have thought," replied little Rashleigh. "And so I thought myself, till I reached here. Everyone called me lucky to get up-country. Now I am a thousand down."

"But good lord——"

"The only man actually not in debt is Hayler—but he is not in our Company. He drew a 'starter' in the Calcutta Sweep last year. That put him just square——"

Philip made a little calculation.

"Say about ten thousand rupees," he mused. "But how the devil can that be?"

Sylvia Dean and marriage seemed to float away in the whirl of the smoke from the cigar he was puffing. Rashleigh's revelation rudely upset some of his pre-conceived notions and several fond calculations. The matter needed investigating.

"How does that come about?" he asked again.

"Well," observed Rashleigh, "as far as I can judge, it is due to this system of advances that runs through this country from head to heel like a pernicious canker. That is, as far as I have been able to judge up to date. You get a carpenter, for instance, to build you a house or a chest of drawers. He has to have an advance before he thinks of commencing to begin—to think of starting."

They laughed together.

"I know," said Philip. "*Manana*. 'To-morrow, can do.'"

"And it's advances and delays at every stage of the house—You get a new Boy: he is not two days with you

before he asks for an advance. It's exactly the same thing with Europeans—at least in the *hangs* (business firms) up here. Every man who comes to a billet gets advances—advances for his outfit, advances for his ponies—advances all the time. He gets an advance to go Home on leave—advances for this and that, and finally his funeral expenses have to be—advanced on a chit payable by St. Peter——"

"Lucifer's signature wouldn't be honoured by a jungle wallah, I suppose," capped Philip.

"I remember speaking to a man in Bangkok in our office there," Rashleigh went on. "I mentioned the word 'bank-balance.' He corrected me. 'The technical term is over-draft,' he said. And he was not pedantic. We're all in debt more or less."

Rashleigh re-lit the cigar which had gone out during this tirade. He cocked his legs, devil-may-care, over the rests of his Bombay chair.

"But what the deuce?" Philip persisted. "You've not been here a month yet. What have you been doing to get into the soup like this?"

"Nothing," protested the other with conviction. "It's what has been done for me. First it was ponies. The Autocrat had a couple of ripping animals chosen from the last batch that the Shans brought down from Kengtung. I took them over. The grey—and the red with the white hocks, you know—those I was riding to-day in the first three chukkers."

Philip remembered. They certainly *were* excellent polo ponies, clever and fast, and nippy in turning, and he had envied Rashleigh the possession of them.

"Then there was all my polo kit, you know, and general sports outfit, the greater part of which has not yet arrived from Singapore and Bangkok, where I was told to order them. That ran away with a tidy bit. And finally there was *the missus.*"

"Already!" Philip was astonished again. "Well, of course if you launch out in the sea of matrimony like that, you can hardly expect——"

"My dear chap," said his companion. "There was no active launching out on my part, I assure you. I simply found the stocks ready laid for me to take the water."

"But dash it——"

"It was the day after I arrived. The *Mae Nok,* mother-birds—sundry 'old dames of the villiage,' arrived round at this house with a jolly pretty, little Lao girl. They didn't say who had sent them, but they implied a lot. The negotiations went on through Myatt Tha, the Burmese clerk in our office. I jibbed ferociously at the price at first. But the next day they happened along again—and the next.

"And then one morning Marlow asked me to come and have pot-luck tiffin at his house. There he unfolded his views for my benefit. He pointed out that the only reasonable solution of the problem was domesticity of the sort which is so easy and so common up here, and he ended by hinting that an advance could be made to me to pay the trousseau expenses and for a house for the girl to live in near this."

Rashleigh smoked furiously. Philip was silent, astounded.

"That is what is done in most every case," Rashleigh said in conclusion. "Older men have told me that they also resented it at first, but in the long run they found Marlow's contentions to be sound. We all have our 'girls.' And all the girls have their little house and paddy patch. It's been reduced to a systematic art. And for the rest, the girls know and understand exactly how far 'olo' custom' and up-country usage will sanction their bleeding us for jewellery and frou-frous."

Next day Harkness tackled Morland on the matter.

"My dear young fool!" replied his friend. "Don't be so ingenuous and middle-class. Remember too that Marlow is my contemporary almost. I cannot answer your question except to say that, as far as I know, the system does not exist in the Forest Department. So it will not affect you."

"But do you agree with what Rashleigh says?" Philip questioned.

"I have not heard what Rashleigh says. But, in point of fact, my views are bound to be a trifle different from those of most other men. You must remember I married shortly after I came out. My experience is only hearsay and deduction from what I have witnessed round me."

"I would like your detached opinion though."

"Well, my detached opinion, whatever that may be worth, is that the prevailing attitude is, on the whole, correct. It's a confoundedly lonely life—is the jungle-life. A jungle-wallah somehow is not normal; there's no getting away from it. As a rule, he is a much more generous and broad-minded specimen than you will find on the average amid the cradled comfort of cities like Bangkok. But he is *not* normal. It was Kipling who said that no one can live alone in the jungle for three months—or did he give him six months, I forget—without being radically changed. Something like that. And Kipling was by way of being an observer."

"Changed? In what way?" queried Harkness.

"Well, it's hard to define exactly. The daily contact with wild nature, the free movement in the open air is bound to mellow a fellow's pet convictions and modify a considerable lot of his conventions. The spice of danger always there makes one charitable, and somewhat impatient of shams and snobs.

"But the solitude tries the mettle of a man's pasture, and by testing his morale daily, breeds a different type and stature of Mankind. Yet, all the time, this eternal and oppressive loneliness weighs upon a fellow, weighs him down in the long run. He *must* have companionship. He must be a fairly healthy specimen ever to come here or to survive this life. And so—I suppose he turns to the nearest, with the result——"

"Well——" repeated Philip.

Morland looked teasingly at his friend.

"Well! It's not so long ago since I heard someone

rhapsodising about the fascination of the Lao costume."

Philip took the innuendo in good part.

"Oh, that! That was spoken from a detached, artistic view-point."

"I see! A mere matter of æsthetics! But Art presupposes Humanity."

"You may find the loneliness weighing upon you some day," concluded Morland with a wise twinkle. "And the dear little girl at Home may grow a bit misty with time. But don't worry too much about these things. It is too hot in the East to worry about anything much."

"Perhaps," suggested Philip, "you think I am obsessed with the subject."

"Candidly, I do. Just a bit. Still, if you are ever in doubt, I might perhaps help you—not to make up your mind, but to avoid the consequences of circumstances that may overcome you in spite of yourself. Life, I have found, is one long struggle for a compromise with the results of circumstances beyond oneself."

CHAPTER X

HLONG

A COUPLE of years passed. Philip, after a little tutelage in the Laowieng district, soon became proficient in the language, or rather the dialect. Having "tumbled" to the practical side of his work as a Forest Conservator, he was ultimately sent by his chief, Eager, to take over Hminelogyi, the forest region of the Salween river-frontier between Siam and Burma.

Apart from the genuine interest he took in his job, Harkness had that inestimable faculty-for-solitude which alone renders life supportable among the teak-jungles of Siam. The mountain grandeurs of his surroundings never ceased to appeal to his sensitive and dreamy nature. His health, he also found, was now much better than in Bangkok. The air and the rare coolness of the hills over which he went daily tramping kept him fitter than he had ever felt when in the low country. Malaria, of course, laid its shivering hold on him before long. But then, fever is the portion of every man obliged to be in the forests during the rains.

He missed Morland.

As usually happens in the East, a ripening friendship had here been nipped in the bud just as it gave promise of blossoming pleasure to both. Separated by the exigencies of time and circumstance, they wrote occasionally at first and latterly but seldom.

The feeling of monotonous animal well-being that invades every mind amid these conditions supervened in Philip's case and affected the enthusiastic energy of the correspondence, as indeed of most other things.

His letters to Sylvia too, from being long glowing pæans of the emotions and packed diaries of his doings, slackened into rather perfunctory sheets of a scanty record. This was the more curious, inasmuch as Philip tried not to permit himself to drift into the spirit of "sufficient unto the day." He struggled conscientiously against that form of laissez-aller which is induced in the jungle-wallah by an existence approximating to that of natural Man, the primitive, the hunter.

Trying to maintain his interest in the subjects which had formerly attracted his curiosity and widened his culture, Philip read voraciously. His mind often protested, naturally. The brain can never apply itself when the body, pleasantly fatigued by a day in open altitudes, makes great demands upon the blood's best play.

But Philip stuck to it. He ordered shipment after shipment of pocket editions, finding them handy for stowing away among his jungle kit. Every day he read, and every day he thought of what he had read: he built himself an inner shrine of the mind: and every night he wrote a little of his thoughts and captured as many of his fugitive impressions as he found possible.

But these jottings now never strayed into his letters to Sylvia. Somehow he had always been shy of full expression to the girl he thought he loved. She thought rhapsodies only "queer," paradoxes absurd and reflections boring. Sylvia's own letters to him were mere chronicles of her uneventful days in a provincial town, filled with no alarming thoughts, no soarings of the imagination.

Sylvia, he felt, had few ideas more modern than 1840, and her greatest possible anxiety was lest the dressmaker should not have her frock ready for the next garden party at the Vicarage or lest a holiday summer-trip to Switzerland with the latest girl-friend should not materialise.

Shortly after Philip reached Hminelongyi he received a

letter in which Sylvia mentioned casually a certain Mrs. Garstin. Mrs. Garstin had a son in Bangkok of whom she was very proud. She did not like Mrs. Garstin, Sylvia added, as she was always chaffing about her engagement to Philip, and having to go away abroad after she was married amongst a lot of horrid black people. She was horrid, and frightened her sometimes. Did Philip know her son?

But Philip never answered that query. . . .

Hminelongyi, although in Siamese territory and possessed of a Siamese name—Muang Yuom—was more Burmese than Siamese in character. The five or six Europeans stationed there depended upon Burma for almost everything, their headquarters being Moulmein, and their stores and forest supplies for timber-dragging, etc., came to them up the wonderful Salween river, instead of from Bangkok and by the Menam.

The only other European official in the service of the Siamese Government there, apart from Harkness, was Larsen, the Dane, a Captain of the Provincial Gendarmerie. Larsen, despite his adipose, spent his time in energetically training up a body of Siamese and Laos to the efficient pursuit of the criminals who abound on every frontier and profit by their local knowledge to do much smuggling. In the Hminelongyi region the chief opportunities for contraband lay in opium. The frontier was handy also for elephant stealing (until Larsen was thoughtless enough to discover an indelible acid brand for these animals). It also served very well for the disposing of booty gained by dacoities committed on the caravans that pass overland through Siam into Burma in the cool season with their long strings of pack-animals laden with products from the mountain fastnesses of Yunnan.

There was very little "station-life" possible in Hminelongyi, and even when everyone was "in," the total was not sufficient to make two polo sides. This was the more aggravating, as there were some exceedingly keen players among the Bombeo men.

Hminelongyi was considered one of the worst stations—or rather one of the most unfortunate stations—in the North. Philip had wondered why the Laowieng men regarded him as taking his life in his hands when he started for the Salween, but the reason was brought home to him the first time he dined in the Bombeo mess at Hminelongyi.

On the wall of the bungalow hung a sheet with the names of previous and present Bombeo members. Harkness had gone up to this list and was scanning the names inscribed thereon to see if he knew any of the men. Soveral, his host, joined him.

"Know any of those fellows?" he asked.

"I don't think I do," replied Philip. "Jackson—Jackson? Is he in Bangkok now? I seem to remember meeting a Jackson there."

"That must be his brother—Fred Jackson. This man, Charlie Jackson, died of dysentery three years ago while up in Karenni."

"And Harcourt?" went on Philip. "He is in Lampang, is he not? I remember hearing the name. Great 'fives' player."

"Yes, that's the chap," confirmed Soveral. "The next one is Simpson—he went Home, couldn't stand it. And after him, Broadley, who went off his dot with fever and whisky—and Cartwright—he was drowned in the Salween below Dagwin Ferry. And Harvey—transferred to Karenni—and Thomas—committed suicide in this bungalow—and Paley—I don't remember exactly, but I think he's now at Home——"

"A bit macabre, your list," said Harkness.

Soveral burst out laughing.

"Yes," he answered. "We always catch the new men with it. Quite cheering for a new arrival to the Salween to go through that catalogue."

It was a matter of fact and fate that so many Bombeo men in the Salween had ended tragically.

But certainly the district is a difficult and unsettled one. Teak there is hard to extract, the going everywhere is

extremely hilly and dangerous, and the native population contains a large percentage of "bad hats." Two years of life in these regions proved Philip's mettle sufficiently well. It made a man of him, and ultimately, despite his bookish proclivities, he was admitted by tacit consent to the fellowship of the jungle.

As his third Christmas in Siam approached he began to think of a holiday.

Soveral and three other Salween men had chanced to find themselves in Moulmein together a few months before. There they had challenged the regimental polo team, and on borrowed mounts, had succeeded in beating them satisfactorily. The feat was noised abroad through Northern Siam, and gave a great fillip to polo in Hminelongyi.

Soveral ended by bringing some ponies from Burma back with him, and they had a piece of ground cleared for practice. The matter was taken up enthusiastically, and the project immediately formed of sending a Hminelongyi team, for the first time in history, over to Laowieng to play for the Inter-Station trophy at the next Christmas Meeting.

These "Christmas Meetings" were the one occasion in the year when the "jungle-wallahs" of the North contrived to assemble socially in any number. With their friendly rivalry and lavish entertainment the Meets constituted a brilliant oasis in the drab existence of these exiles. Every station sent its contingent and, as is usual when Englishmen are gathered together, the men matched themselves in trials of strength and skill at outdoor games.

The Northern Siam Christmas Meeting that year was to last ten days, and had a programme containing one cricket match, one football match, competitions at golf, tennis, fives, squash rackets, and a gymkhana ending with the time-honoured bumble-puppy—together with polo—polo every evening. Juniors v. Seniors at polo, Dark v. Fair at polo, Moustaches v. Clean Shaven at polo—every possible and impossible combination was made. Besides

these friendly games, the Bombeo, Brunei and other teak companies were to struggle strenuously as usual for various cups : while last of all, the different Stations were to vie with each other in a tremendous tussle for the blue riband of the North, the Inter-Station Polo Trophy.

Philip applied for leave.

It was granted, and he made the nine days' journey over the hills to Laowieng in company with the team which Hminelongyi was sending that year—a team composed of some of the most useful players in Siam, with a few first-class mounts from Burma, tried, selected and purchased by Soveral. Of this team Philip was only reserve, his experience of the game not being very extensive.

The Inter-Station final was played on the last day of the Meet. To the surprise of most, Hminelongyi (despite lack of practice and knowledge of each other's play, and notwithstanding a heavy handicap put on them for the fact that their mounts slightly exceeded the normal height of the Shan ponies used by the other teams) won their way into the final against Lampang.

One of the Hminelongyi men crocked himself up, and Philip was called upon to fill his place. There was great enthusiasm when the distant and unlucky Salween station, by good play and superb horsemanship, carried off the Trophy—a victory to which Philip contributed his proper share at No. 1.

That evening, in accordance with invariable custom, the entire Station gathered for dinner at the Brunei senior mess. The " Autocrat " had from time immemorial considered and constituted himself chief host of Meetings when held in Laowieng, and Marlow took good care that *his* dinner should form the principal entertainment on these occasions, outdoing in brilliance anything his compeers should be able to achieve.

This year the whole Meeting had been on such a scale, and men had spread themselves so lavishly that Marlow was hard pressed to think of some means to eclipse everyone else.

He knew, of course, that the fare at his dinner would be most abundant and the liquid cheer would flow most copiously. He knew too that, as usual, the guests, later on, led by himself, would set to with a will and smash all the crockery in the place—this being a traditional feature of the wind-up to every Meeting.

But these things had grown just a little banal. Marlow had even heard Consul Lister say that he and some of the senior men intended to leave before the dish-breaking and scrimmaging began, showing that this rather infantile form of ebullience had already begun to pall upon Laowieng. Nowadays, indeed, it has entirely dropped out of the programme of Christmas celebrations in the North.

Fortunately, during the course of the Meeting, a troupe of strolling Burmese actors and dancers came along to Laowieng.

Marlow instantly engaged them to perform during and after his last-night dinner. The idea proved a most happy one, and Marlow was delighted to see that his entertainment constituted the crown of the Meeting, while the tom-toms of the troupe had charms even to save his crockery from destruction.

The troupe contained a star, an exceedingly pretty though rather passée Burmese dancer. The show was held on the tennis court in front of Marlow's house, and was a most picturesque affair.

"Golden Star," the leading lady, captivated all present, Europeans and Siamese alike, by her grace and prettiness. The Englishmen admired her handsome face and slender figure, approximating as it did very nearly to Western standards of taste; while even the Siamese present had to admit that this star from Burma could bend her fingers and her taper hand back a good deal farther than even their own expert *danseuses*. The bending of the hands into dramatic gesture (it may be here explained) constitutes practically the chief attraction of Siamese, as indeed of most Oriental, dancing.

Philip and Morland had foregathered.

The two friends had been inseparable throughout the Meeting, and had ended by arranging to go "out" together to the Mae Chem on the following day.

The Mae Chem was the teak forest which formed the elder man's chief charge, and though it did not lie exactly in Harkness' conservancy, an offer by the latter to visit it on the way back to Hminelongyi had been accepted by his chief. Plans were laid accordingly.

The two friends were sitting by the landing stage on the Meping, which formed the river boundary of the Brunei compound in Laowieng. They were both pleasantly tired out with the day's exercise and likewise pleasantly filled with Marlow's good cheer.

"Let's sit here," Morland had suggested.

They had drifted some distance away from the caterwauling of Golden Star, who still held the main bunch of the jolly gathering in thrall with her charm.

"We can see any new stunts going forward from this place, and we can talk if we feel so moved," he added.

To tell the truth, neither was inclined for talking. They both soon fell silent on the seat by the landing stage. A boat lay moored downstream a little way.

Voices raised in dispute presently came floating up from it.

"Hussy!" a woman was saying. "Is it not enough that thy father is a ne'er-do-well, but thou must fall into this foolishness?"

Philip's knowledge of Lao had improved since coming to the North. The tones of the words used were distinct, and no attempt was made by the speakers to lower their voices. Philip listened—passively at first, but afterwards with interest, as the import of what was being said filtered unwittingly into his consciousness.

Morland's head bobbed forward in sleepiness. The sound of a girl's sobbing began.

"We are undone!" went on the first speaker, shrilling more harshly. "When that good-for-nothing nakleng Ai Seng abandoned thee and thy babe, it was shame enough. But this——"

"Who can struggle against these things? It is Fate!" protested another voice.

"Fate? Fudge! They call it *Hlong!* What shall one say of a girl of our race who *hlong* (wanders) after a farang?"

"Mother. It is some goblin (*phi*) who has laid a spell on me. I have done some wickedness in a previous incarnation."

"Stuff and nonsense, child!" exclaimed the elder woman.

Philip, by straining his eyes into the dim star-light, could just make out the figure of the speaker, crouched in the stern of her boat. The companion with whom she was expostulating was hidden from view by the attap-shelter over the hold.

"Who believes such things nowadays?"

"All our people know it. The *phi* puts a spell on us women. We are led astray after some man unworthy of us, because of the wickedness in our Karma. Look at Alaïye! And before her Sawi, the daughter of the head-man."

"That was *hlong* after a man of their own race and colour," came the retort. "There is nothing so very shameful in that. But *hlong* for a foreigner—pah!—it is disgusting! It is complete loss of face. Thou shouldst have resisted, Rarouey! Thou shalt resist it! To-morrow morning I take thee away from here back to the Huey Toh."

A burst of merriment from the spectators on the lawn woke Morland up.

"Here!" he cried. "I shall be dropping into the river in a moment. I'm dead with sleep. I was nearly off."

"Nearly?" laughed Philip. "You've only been sound asleep for fifteen minutes."

"Well, come on! Let's walk about and shake it off. Old Marlow will be offended if I went off home now, though I'd be jolly glad to turn in for the night."

The two men rose and started pacing the path along the river bank.

Harkness was turning over the conversation he had just overheard.

"I say, Morley," he began. "While you were snoring on that bench, there were two Laos talking in a boat about six feet off, and I could hear every word they were saying."

"Well?" answered Morland, yawning.

"Most peculiar conversation it was too. One of them seemed to be remonstrating with the other not to be a fool about a *farang*. I couldn't quite make out what she was driving at. What was the word—yes—*hlong!* What does *hlong* mean, I say? I've never met it."

"What—*hlong*—oh, I don't know. To lose the way, I think, but don't ask me," responded Morland, who was still drowsy. "*Hlong, hlong*—oh yes—to wander—to be infatuated. What the devil do you want to tackle me for at this time of the night with your beastly Lao words?"

Harkness laughed a little.

"Oh, nothing! Don't get so hostile about it. Only these Lao women seemed darned excited about someone who had *hlonged* a farang or something like that."

"*Hlonged a farang?*" Morland still spoke peevishly. "Made a *farang* lose his way? Oh, yes—no—I see it now. They probably meant someone was infatuated with a foreigner. But don't you believe it. These Lao women never allow themselves to be made a conquest of by a European's beauty spots. You must have been dozing as well as me. Are you sure you didn't dream all that *hlong* business?"

"I dunno!" said Harkness. "Possibly I did. Anyhow let's go back to the crowd and have yet another drink."

They collided with Lister at the outskirts of the spectators.

"Place is getting rowdy," remarked the latter in his dry way. "I've a good mind to clear out."

"I wish you would," added Morland with fervour.

"Then I'd also have an excuse to go because the Consul had gone. I'm most infernally sleepy, and would be glad of any excuse to slip out without offending Marlow's morbid Scotch hospitality."

They went up to Marlow together and made their several excuses.

"I see the stengah glasses are beginning to get bashed about, Marlow," said the Consul caustically. "I'm too old for the Aunt Sally game. I'll seek my virtuous."

"And if you don't mind," added Morland. "I'm dog tired."

"And I have to be off to the Mae Chem to-morrow morning," said Philip.

Marlow protested, but ultimately they got away after a "deoch an doris" stirrup cup.

"Come and have a pipe before you turn in," proposed Lister when they had reached the Consulate gate.

Morland's sleepiness seemed to have evaporated, and he consented. They turned their ponies in past the statuette of Queen Victoria at the entrance. It did not strike them that they must have presented a rather peculiar spectacle as they rode in, but they had all grown accustomed to seeing Europeans in the North mounted in every sort of *tenue*. It did not matter that that evening they were arrayed in full dinner clothes—ponies had been brought round and they rode just the same.

"Both going to the Mae Chem, aren't you?" asked Lister, when the two others were seated before him on the verandah of the Consul's house.

"Yes," replied Harkness. "Eager asked me to call there on the way back to Hminelongyi."

"And I've cash to take out to the foresters," explained Morland for his part.

"You always seem to be lugging money about this blessèd country, Morland," laughed Philip. "The first time when we came up river you were bringing specie, you remember."

"Better take an escort," suggested Lister gravely. "The rice crop has been a failure down that way this

year, and there's a lot of distress, which always leads to a lot of crime. The dacoits are fairly rampant, the Siamese Commissioner was telling me. He's just come back from a tour in that region."

"Oh, chuck it, Lister, you old red-tape worm!" cried Morland. "That sort of thing may impress our young friend from the Salween here, but you don't come the heavy uncle over me."

"All right. Please yourself!" the Consul said, and the subject dropped between them.

"Lister," complained Morland to Philip afterwards, "Lister is a bit grandmotherly. It's funny when you remember what he has done himself. But when a plucky little beggar like him tries to raise a scare, he just succeeds in being amusing."

"But there's a certain risk all the same," added Philip.

"Lister, you know," pursued his friend, not heeding the interruption, "was the man who virtually crushed the Shan Rising a few years ago. The Shans revolted against the Siamese, and started raiding. They sacked the town of Phrae and were advancing on Lampang. Then Lister walked into their camp one fine evening. He was quite unarmed, but he threw round him the mantle of the British *raj,* and he asked to see the rebel leader.

"'Here,' he said, 'what's all this bobbery?' The beggars told him with glee that they were on their way to cut the throats of every Siamese in the North. 'But what's the reason?' their Consul asked them. 'Oh, too many taxes and too much repression! We've had enough of it.'"

"They were all British subjects—these Shans, of course," said Philip.

"Yes, but they were all fighting mad and had murdered a lot of people just before that. They might easily have laid Lister out also, simply to encourage the others. But he sat down for an hour or two and talked to them like a Dutch uncle. And before he left he had got a list of their grievances. He gave them his word as their

Consul that he would have them redressed. Only they must go back home again. Would you believe it, the band dispersed then and there."

"Triumph of five feet nothing of personality," commented Philip. "But don't you think then he ought to know what he was talking about when he spoke of the Mae Chem dacoits. Larsen told me there was a perfect nest of elephant-thieves in that forest, and he is trying to organise a concerted raid."

"Rot!" was Morland's decisive answer. "I've travelled about this country for years with thousands of rupees, alone and unguarded—often even unarmed. If I begin now taking an escort of Siamese gendarmes, think of my loss of 'face.'"

"What sort of an escort did Lister mean?"

"The Siamese Government gives an escort on application to anyone who is carting money about with him. But no man in any of the teak companies has ever asked for such a thing. Why it's simply inviting attack."

CHAPTER XI

THE DRAM-SHOP IN THE HUEY TOH

Mong Poh Lan walked into the dram-shop at the Huey Toh and, as he had anticipated, found his friends Mong Pannya and Ai Seng seated already therein. They were drinking with Ai Chawk, the owner of the boutique—a goodly company of scoundrels to meet in a day's march. Poh Lan joined the group.

"Tem thi!" (bad times!) he remarked by way of a conversational gambit.

The others held their cups to be replenished with rice spirit by Ai Chawk, but no one asked Poh Lan to be more explicit.

"Nothing more to be done," continued the latter, wiping his mouth after a full draught of the fiery liquor.

"Rice and everything else is very dear," concurred Ai Chawk. "A very bad year indeed!"

Ai Seng turned to Poh Lan.

"How many elephants hast thou working now in the Huey Toh?" he asked. "I've been away for two years."

"Only two. The Sidaw Luang, and a baby—no good for dragging yet."

"I saw the machine the *Nai Hang* (teak Company men) have set up at Muang Pai," quoth Ai Seng, who plumed himself on having travelled much, mostly for his health's sake. "It hauls the biggest log up the hill and down the other side plump into the stream. Very cute! Don't

need any elephants at all. The work is done by buffaloes."

Poh Lan spat derisively.

"They say the Company mean to bring one of these things to the Mae Chem," added Pannya meditatively. "Myself, I think I'll try Karenni next year. There's positively nothing to be done over this side now."

"Nothing!" Poh Lan flamed out. "Absolutely nothing left for us poor foresters! It's not that the teak is worked out either. But the *Nai Hang* simply wont give proper advances for the workings. And now they're going to bring a hauling machine over here! Pah!"

He took a half-smoked cigarette from behind his ear, and called for more liquor.

"The Nai has come from Laowieng, hasn't he?" asked Mong Pannya after a pause, hoping the question might touch the spring of his companion's eloquence.

Ai Seng grinned at his father-in-law, but Poh Lan, after a rapid glance at the inn-keeper, only spat again. Restraining himself with an effort, he replied monosyllabically.

"So!"

"Didst see him?" was the next question.

Ai Seng could not contain himself, and laughed outright.

"Yes. He spoke. This morning it was," the old forester answered.

"Curse him! May he die a violent death," he added sotto voce, but with no particular vehemence.

Pannya turned his eyes discreetly in the direction of the speaker.

"Where are the cowrie shells?" Ai Seng suddenly demanded. "I haven't had a flutter for ages."

The simple gambling implements were brought by the obsequious Ai Chawk, and the four men settled down to a primitive form of "fan tan."

No cup remained empty. Chawk knew well enough that this meeting was by no means a fortuitous one. It

was not every day that the four "bad hats" of the Mae Chem gathered under his roof to play "fan tan."

Poh Lan kept up a running soliloquy as the game went on.

"Came this morning—they did. Two of them. And camped in the Huey Toh. One is a farang I never saw before—from the Salween side they say. Quite a beardless one, that one!"

"On this bank of the Huey—their camp?" queried Pannya indifferently.

"No. The far bank. I got a message asking me to bring my tusker into the camp. My last it is! My Sidaw Luang (big tusker). I went. I asked the Mohlan (Morland) master for pity. Prayed him, for the sake of my wife and children, to grant just one more advance to tide over this bad year. If only I——"

Ai Chawk interrupted with a titter.

"But now, Ai Seng, the husband of Rarouey is supposed to be in Prayao. No one knows he is here again. He is said to be a syce to the Gendarmerie officer, and has got another wife."

Ai Seng, who was referred to, scowled, but did not look up from his game.

"Well," said Poh Lan, after an interval, "that's no affair of thine, is it? Thou babbling Lao! Thou!"

"Tee-hee!" sniggered Chawk. "Of course! Of course! No offence, I'm sure. I was only wondering if——"

"Thou son of an accursed race of liars and dogs!" Ai Seng interrupted him fiercely.

Poh Lan, who had been winning, swept in his pile of cowries. The liquor-seller turned to him.

"Yes but——" he continued rogishly. "Well. She is still a personable wench, is Rarouey."

"Fool!" chided Pannya. "Farangs will not mate with our women who have already had one husband."

"Oh, but they do—sometimes," argued Chawk. "There was that one—up in Chiengrai. Took Thong Dee to wife, he did. And Thong Dee was not——"

Poh Lan flung himself out of his seat. The turn the conversation was taking had evidently incensed him beyond bearing.

"May you perish of the plague!" he shouted, striding to the door. "My daughter is not a block of wood to be sold by the *pikat* (a teak measure) to these accursed farangs."

The three others did not look up after Poh Lan had left.

"You know," stated Ai Chawk, with a great air of confidence, "the fact of the matter is that Rarouey is mad for this farang. My wife had it from Mae Noi, the girl's mother. Poh Lan is lying. He wanted to sell the girl. Mae Noi was ready to go to the Huey Toh yesterday and begin overtures. But Rarouey is so queer—so *hlong* about this *Nai Hang* that they couldn't. The girl turned quite nasty. Said she would split on them."

Ai Seng continued to play impassively, notwithstanding that the news of his former wife, and particularly of her infatuation, affected him disagreeably. Not that he had ever had any particular fondness for Rarouey, and he had abandoned her without scruple when it suited him. But, like every Oriental, he resented the girl's throwing herself at the head of a foreigner for any reason except that of gain.

Pannya was losing patience.

"Peace, thou garrulous Lao!" he snapped at the tavern-keeper. "Thy tongue runs on worse than a talking mynah bird."

"Yes," agreed Ai Seng, getting up to go. "I am tired of this woman's chatter."

Pannya followed him out of doors, and the two went off in the direction of the Huey Toh.

This was the creek where Morland and Harkness had camped the day before, seven days out from Laowieng. The *huey* was an affluent of the Meping. A short distance from its banks the ground rose gently upwards to the first shoulder of Doi Intapalam, one of the highest mountains in the region. The slopes had formerly been covered with teak, but owing to the carelessness of the

original native owners, the old Lao Chiefs of Lampang, the trees had been felled most indiscriminately. In consequence, the lease, which the Bombeo had acquired (against Morland's advice, it may be stated) some ten years before, had never been a favourable proposition.

"These contractors here," complained Morland to Philip shortly after their arrival into camp, "are about the worst possible combination of laziness and vice one could meet anywhere. The forest was doubtful when we took it over, but with care, it could have been made to pay a fair margin. Instead of which, it has been a dead loss to us all this time."

"Well," said Harkness, "Eager told me the Ministry of Interior in Bangkok had written up to him for a report on the place with a view to closing the whole forest area down entirely."

"I only wish they would. I'm perfectly sick of it. If the Company ask my opinion, I'll recommend it be given up without a struggle. It can never be made to pay as long as scoundrels like Poh Lan and Mong Pannya are working it. We'd better just write our loss off."

"Eager," said Philip, "has asked me to have a look at the teak on my way back to the Salween. He wants me to make a sort of preliminary report on the place. It might simplify matters if I could mention unofficially that you are not inclined to be obstructive about shutting it down."

"Yes, but only unofficially, mind!" exclaimed his companion. "I opposed the acquisition of the lease in the first place. I don't know what view the Bangkok office will take of the matter now. They sometimes find a contrairy pleasure in going against proposals from up-country. I had a fearful row with Poh Lan this morning. Never seen a man so nasty."

"That old Shan who brought the elephant?" asked Harkness.

"Yes. The man is an absolute out-and-outer. We've had no end of trouble. The blighter has had nearly half a lakh of rupees in advances from the Company for forest

work he has never done, and never will do. Now we have decided to call a halt. I had instructions to seize his elephant, mortgaged as security for these advances."

"Infernal nuisance, these foresters can be," agreed Philip, getting up and raising the flap of the tent to look out.

CHAPTER XII

DACOITY

THE moon had not yet risen, and the jungle around them was plunged in the mystery of its deep gloom. They had had the table brought out after dinner into the radius of the cheerful camp-fire which the coldness of the night rendered necessary and grateful. There Morland and Philip sat silently smoking with a "peg" before them on the table. The steadily whirring spring of a Hitchcock lamp added a gurgling undertone to the buzz of myriad insects in the night air.

The success of the previous evening's fishing had attracted all the men of the camp down to the creek again that night, and even the Boys, having cleared away the dinner, had asked permission and gone to join the others.

"These people have no conception of time," remarked Morland suddenly.

"Time was made for slaves," was Harkness' reply.

"Confounded nuisance all the same," his companion went on. "Here have I wasted a whole two days because none of the contractors whom I want to pay off have yet turned up. I purposely fixed a date a week in advance of the proper time, so that they might be certain to be here."

Philip laughed.

"*Prung ni kó dai*" (to-morrow will do), he quoted. "It's the motto of the East. The first Boy I ever had only knew one word of English, and that was 'to-mollow.'"

"And then that confounded elephant of Mong Poh Lan!" continued Morland. "The lord only knows when I'll get that business finished! The old ruffian knows quite well that his identification paper is needed before we can take the brute over. And he keeps away on purpose, sending his old beldame of a wife to try and sell off their daughter in liquidation of the debt."

Harkness laughed uncomfortably. He had seen Rarouey again the previous day for the first time since the night when, two years ago, she had come to Ban Müd Ka and made such an impression on him. But that was merely because she represented a type of Oriental beauty he had never met before, and had then seen for the first time.

He could not remember having ever given her a thought subsequently. . . .

Her coming on the day before had struck him as rather pathetic. She had squatted down in the sunlight before Morland's tent, and hung her head—a hostage proferred by her sordid parents to ill-fortune, while Mae Noi, her mother, insinuated the object of her mission.

Morland had curtly given them to understand that no matrimonial arrangement could be allowed to prevent him from the duty laid upon him, and their expostulations of impending ruin failed to move him. Rarouey, this time, had not spoken a word. But when she rose to go Philip was conscious of a glance of entreaty from two liquid eyes under the masses of her piled-up hair, lit by a patch of sunbeams.

There was a sharp report!

Harkness looked towards the fire. For a moment he thought it must be the sound of a bamboo amongst the firewood, bursting with the sharp and curious explosion familiar to all jungle men.

Then a queer sound came from Morland, and as Philip turned, the head of the man at his side fell forward on his chest.

"I say!" Harkness jumped to his feet. "What——"

Morland's hand moved feebly upwards towards his throat. The night air was rent by a perfect fusillade—reports, reports unmistakably of revolver shots.

Crash! The lamp on the table was hit and overturned.

In the darkness and confusion after it was extinguished Philip knocked his knee against the table. Strange to say, he was more conscious then of the pain from the bump thus caused than of the bullet wound received in his arm at the moment he rose to go to Morland's assistance.

"Oh, damn!" he cried, making a bewildered effort to lift the other's head and ascertain how badly he was wounded.

The shooting ceased.

Philip peered through the flame of the fire into the gloom beyond, and thought he could just make out a couple of figures flitting amongst the trees to the left of the tent.

He ran into the tent for his revolver and then stopped, suddenly recollecting that it was out of repair. As for Morland, he was a man who never carried weapons.

He thought he heard whispering quite near.

A hand or a branch clawed against the back of the tent. Harkness bethought himself of assistance. He lifted up his voice and shouted for his servant. There was no reply.

The whispering continued.

"Must get a light anyhow," he muttered, and he started off running towards the creek.

"Some water, too, for Morland!" he gasped as he stumbled on.

He was just in time to see the last of the panic-stricken camp servants disappearing up the other bank of the stream where they had been fishing.

"Good God! The brutes are bolting!"

He ran panting along the bank a little way, and then paused irresolute.

"This won't do," he told himself; "must get back to Morland."

He picked up a torch which one of the elephant men had thrown away. Then, taking a bucket which he found near by, and emptying it of the fish abandoned by the cowardly rabble, he filled it with water and staggered back to the tent.

Morland was lying face downwards.

Harkness lifted his head with one hand, and with the other brought the torch near enough to look into the wounded man's face. The hand he had slipped under his friend's neck was sticky. He withdrew it, and noticed that it was slippery with blood. Blood was also running down his own left arm, where, through his stupor, he was now beginning to be conscious of excruciating pain.

He went into the tent again. Having found matches, he managed to re-light the lamp, of which apparently only the globe had been damaged. He hunted about and found a medicine chest.

He lifted Morland painfully up and propped him somehow against the chair. Several deep gashes covered his friend's pale face and neck.

Pushing open the shirt he felt for Morland's heart; then stooping, listened frantically at the other's mouth for the slightest breath.

Harkness must have fainted for a few minutes.

When he came round again he was lying on the ground, and his dead companion had fallen forward on his face again. He picked himself up. The excruciating pain in his left arm caused him fresh agony.

He pulled up his sleeve, and had a look. Above the elbow was a great clot of congealed blood. This he managed to wash away and the bleeding started again.

A whisky bottle lay where it had fallen undamaged when Philip had knocked against the table. He pulled the cork, and took a long straight draught of raw spirit.

He felt better and had another look at his arm.

"The bullet must be in there," he concluded, and he ran his other hand over the flesh and felt a hard protuberance on the underside.

His brain began to act clearly.

"My God!" he muttered. "Another couple of inches, and that would have been my heart!"

He remembered now! Just at the psychological instant when he had first risen to go to Morland's aid as the latter fell, his arm had been raised across his body covering his heart. The bullet was a small one, and it had evidently been deflected by the bone.

He paused with a sense of shame that he could think of his own trifling wound before ministering to the parlous state of his comrade. He did not know yet whether Morland was beyond all aid. But a look convinced him.

The face was setting in a ghastly hue, and on the skin's pallor great globules of perspiration stood out horribly. The body was already colder than normal.

Their first shot had killed Morland.

The brutes! Firing point blank from behind the shelter of the tent at the perfect target offered by the figures silhouetted against the fire and the lamp light.

As for the ensuing shots, of which Philip could now remember hearing at least half a dozen, some of them had hit the lamp, one had smashed a glass and another had come miraculously near cutting short the span of his own life.

Philip fell to piecing out the happenings of the last half hour, his mind working quickly and excitedly. He noticed that the tent was in some disarray.

He fetched the lamp and examined the interior. The chests of money, chained—as usual in the jungle—to the camp bed, had been dragged out to the full length of their fastenings. Apparently someone had been interrupted in the attempt to carry them off.

That much he noticed with a grim satisfaction, and then of a sudden a chill fear went over him. He went out and sat down to think as clearly and as decisively as he could.

Obviously they had been attacked by dacoits who had known of the money Morland possessed in his tent.

Bold and desperate men they must be, for in all such robberies—so far as Harkness had heard—blood had never been shed for the sake of loot. Occasionally, if the marauders found themselves confronted by zealous guardians of a caravan's treasure, murder *had* been committed, but never had Europeans been attacked in this fashion before.

And then those gashes on Morland's face and neck.

Philip saw the reason now. It was when he had run down to the creek for assistance that the dacoits had rushed into the tent. There, apparently, they had found the chests of money too secure to carry off and, hearing the Englishman return with assistance as they thought, they had decamped, slashing (in the foul rage of their foiled disappointment) at the prone figure in their path as they fled from Philip's approach.

Something stirred.

Harkness jumped to his feet in a tremor of nerves.

"Damn you, you brutes!" he cried. "I suppose you are coming to finish me off next."

In sober truth a fresh attack might come at any moment. The situation might have appalled the bravest. Philip was alone, for it was certain their servants had bolted at the first shot fired. He was wounded and, save for a revolver out of repair, unarmed.

Worst of all, he was still seated in the full light of the lamp and the fire which had illuminated the dacoits' first target. How numerous they were he could not tell. He put the lamp out, and replenishing the fire, went to see if he could find any weapon in the servants' quarters. He was fortunate enough to come across an ancient fowling-piece and a *Lao dah* (short sword).

He stumbled over his dog lying some distance from the fire. Dead too, poor brute, he thought.

This left him quite alone!

With something like a sob he seated himself in the shadow. The native sword across his knees, and his ears and eyes straining to catch the slightest sound or movement, he prepared to pass the night watching. . . .

Watching! . . .

Followed a long vigil, a nightmare that Harkness never forgot in after life. His head dropping with exhaustion caused by loss of blood and his eyes closing always in weariness, he sat there with the *dah* across his knees—sat and waited, every instant expectant that the crackling fusillade of Brownings would be renewed.

Once he got up, and searched in the medicine chest for a small lancet. Then, in the uncertain light of the fire's flicker he set to work on his arm.

By dint of slicing at the fleshy underpart he was able to extract the bullet. It was a small one and he placed it with whimsical care in the lid of the medicine chest. For future reference, he told himself, as he adjusted a rough bandage with some disinfectant over the wound.

Once a bamboo burst in the fire.

He started up. He had been almost asleep. Minutes dripped away into oblivion, and through his drowsy brain the hideous phantasmagoria bred of his terrible situation went careering madly. Along the corridors of memory there came and went the haunting dread of Death's legions. . . .

And once a cold, friendly muzzle was thrust into his hand. He looked down to find that it was his dog had crept up beside him. Philip tried to remember, to account for its presence after having previously found it lying apparently dead.

It was piteously ill. It must have been given some poisoned meat which had just failed to kill it. It whimpered for sympathy. . . .

But nothing could wake him for any length of time. Presently the *dah* dropped to the ground. His head went down on his knees as Night ran paling up the sky before the beams of Dawn.

CHAPTER XIII

SOFT HANDS

Soft hands were bandaging his arm. The process, if done somewhat unskilfully, was entirely agreeable. He half opened his eyes, but they closed again in spite of himself. Through the weariness of his delirium he was conscious that it was daylight. The bright sunshine hurt him, and he turned away his head.

He babbled some incoherency.

The soft hands were withdrawn, and a slight exclamation in Lao followed. Harkness was aware that he was lying in a camp-bed. In an interlude of clearness he began furiously to think; and, with all the added horrors of things remembered after the event, the incidents of the previous night recurred to him.

Another tale of muttered words came from his lips. He gave a restless toss on the bed.

A further exclamation followed—this time of impatience. Philip opened his eyes to their fullest, smarting extent, and found himself gazing up at the face of Rarouey. The apparition did not astonish him at all, nor did the personality of his nurse surprise him one whit.

It was the daughter of Poh Lan, the girl who had been brought twice by her mother to Morland to be sold in liquidation of paternal debts and misdoings. She was seated in a patch of sunlight near his bed with exactly the same glance of entreaty as he remembered in her

liquid eyes under the piled-up masses of her dusky hair. It was perfectly all right somehow. She was there.

It was her place.

The Englishman put out his hand and grasped her slender arm. Something in her look made him draw it towards him, made him kiss its dewy, naked coolness. She shivered between pain and pleasure; and then started away, frightened.

In a moment, however, she was back again, frowning austerely with all the authority of the nurse and scolding softly at the bandage having rolled off his wounded arm. Philip wanted to speak, but she stopped his questions gently with a cool drink.

"Morley! Morley! don't sit in the light of that fire!" he cried, as his mind went drifting back into the haunted sea of his blind terrors.

But the little fingers of the deft, brown hands, that had staunched his wound, went straying till they covered his eyes with a peculiarly soothing movement. . . .

Many days it took to unravel the threads of the mystery enveloping Morland's death. Never before had a European been slain in the teak forests of the North, and the sensation of such a happening was profound, not only in Laowieng, but throughout the whole country.

It was two days after the attack on the camp in the Huey Toh that Lister received a telegram announcing the fact. The station doctor at once set out for the scene of the murder, and with him went Hayler and Eager.

By forced marches the party reached the Huey five days after the dacoity and found Philip alone in his tent, somewhat recovered, but still grievously affected by the delirium of fever aggravated with the hysteria engendered by what he had suffered. The camp was deserted, and even the inhabitants of the nearest village had disappeared in a body, fearing possibly that suspicion might fall on them.

Near the embers of a camp fire the corpse of Morland still lay, prone on its face as it had fallen on the night of the attack.

There was a short debate.

It was obviously impossible to bring the dead man in his then state back to Laowieng for burial. It was equally impossible to bury him in the jungle where wild beasts might desecrate his grave.

The three rescuers arrived at a decision, and a terrible scene had to be enacted. The tent outside which Morland had been killed was pulled down over him into a pyre, and the whole consumed by fire. . . .

Philip was brought back to Laowieng, but the night of awful, vigilant horrors passed beside his dead friend had not left him mentally unscathed. His wound healed rapidly, but after writing a report of the whole affair to headquarters, he received orders from Bangkok to return to the Capital and undergo a medical examination with a view to sick leave.

"Tommy rot!" he answered to all solicitous enquiries. "I am perfectly all right! The beggars plugged me, but fortunately I had my left arm stretched over my heart at that instant."

In reality, if his physical condition was fairly sound, his mind had been so jangled by the incident that he was quite "jumpy" for long after.

As dusk came on every evening his imagination, a sort of palimpsest from which no recollection of suffering could ever be erased, retentive with an indelible impress of his horrible experience, would recur at queer moments to remembrances of the night in the Huey Toh and his vigil in the forest after the attack of the dacoits had been delivered.

Once his nervousness, startled at a shadow in a dark part of the road, communicated itself to his pony as he was riding back from the Club after night had fallen, and the animal, bolting, had come near to giving him a nasty spill.

One thing he refused to do was to proceed to Bangkok

before the enquiries set on foot had succeeded in laying the murderers of his friend by the heels.

"All right," Eager had said. "But anyhow, you can't go back to the Salween in your present state. I've no objection to your stopping here till Larsen has rounded up the dacoits."

Lister had taken the promptest possible measures to trace the miscreants, and Larsen (fortunately in Laowieng at the time of the meeting) had sallied out immediately with picked gendarmes in pursuit of information.

One thing was quite evident. Loot had formed the motive of the attack on the two Englishmen. In this hypothesis Philip himself concurred, since he was unaware of the rankling sense of injustice under which Poh Lan had laboured at the seizure of his elephant by Morland on behalf of the Company. He never for a moment imagined that there might have been an element of revenge in the attack which had led to his friend's death.

What made it harder was that the Bombeo man's murder was, in a sense, due to his own foolhardiness.

Morland had gone so often to the jungles with large sums of money in silver and, like others, had never been molested, that he had become reckless and travelled totally unarmed, refusing even the gendarmerie escort he might have had. This, if relieving the local authorities of some responsibility, was scant consolation for his widow and child at Home.

Philip had some very bad half hours before he could bring himself to compose a letter to Mrs. Morland which should smooth down the ghastly circumstances of her husband's death—a letter which, as Morland's best friend in the North and his nearest companion at the end, he felt it incumbent on him to indite.

He began too to suffer from insomnia, his rest being troubled by gruesome recollections of the agonies he had gone through, while his waking moments were tortured by fancies of similar dangers and by remorse at not having done anything to save his friend.

There are some (mayhap fortunate) persons who literally possess no nerves, but Harkness on the contrary was lacerated by a super-abundance of high-tension, almost feminine imaginative power. As a matter of fact he had, in the circumstances, given a display of courage which merited the greater praise because of the greater struggle, mental and moral, which had in his case preceded the sticking point.

Another torment was the silence he imposed on himself as to the girl who had so mysteriously come to his side when wounded, and nursed him back to something like vigour before disappearing again.

She was never far in his thoughts, and her face and figure, flitting in and out of the web of his memories, wove a golden thread amid the blood-red warp of other recollections. He knew who she was, but why she should have nursed him back to life (as he thought) was not at all clear.

Poh Lan and the mother of Rarouey had, of course, vanished with the other villagers in the Huey Toh on the night after the dacoity. Remembering how the girl had flared up against Morland on the first occasion on which Philip had seen her, the latter found it all the more remarkable that she could have been willing to come to his own rescue—he, the friend of the *farang* with whom the misfortunes and poverty of her family were associated.

Indeed, so enhanced had Philip's appreciation of, and gratitude for Rarouey's act become ere he returned to Laowieng, and so inextricably with that emotion of gratitude had the nascent attraction of the girl's beauty become mingled, that it is to be feared he was guilty of a suppression of the truth in making his deposition to Larsen before the Consul.

As regards Poh Lan's being implicated in the crime, Philip had readily enough admitted the possibility. The man was a notorious character, and Rarouey was not responsible for her parent.

Philip had told the authorities frankly enough of the trouble over the elephant, but he himself could not realise

the effect of that transaction upon Poh Lan's mind, nor did he dream that a forester was capable of murder on such an account. Murder, in fact, would have availed nothing to delay the seizure of the mortgaged animal.

"Whoever did it," he concluded, "was actuated by motives of robbery, I am convinced."

But he had said nothing about the proposal to sell Rarouey to himself or Morland in liquidation of the debt.

Overtures of the same nature, if not exactly by the same persons in the same connection, had been frequently made to him before, and he saw no importance in mentioning the fact; besides which, the romance with which he was beginning to idealise the girl inclined him to gloss over such sordid and shameful details. So he did not mention to anyone the little nurse who had stolen to his side while he lay raving in delirium, the girl whose fingers had so defty bandaged his wound. . . .

In extenuation of this passive perjury it must be allowed that the whole episode had passed while Philip was somewhat beside himself and, as time went on, both the episode and the principal actress in it became more and more unreal and dreamlike.

Philip hugged his dream.

He stayed on a month in Laowieng, during which time Captain Larsen succeeded in making half a dozen arrests in the Huey Toh district, and seemed in a fair way to bringing the criminals to justice. Thereafter Philip could not reasonably delay reporting himself in Bangkok, and he proceeded with his preparations for the journey down river.

He was somewhat astonished to find that he had, in the meanwhile, been elevated to the rank of hero in the station; and in consideration of his experience, his friends in Laowieng had determined to make his departure an occason for fresh festivity. Much against his will he found himself fêted right and left.

With his own kind it was not so obnoxious, but receptions and gala dinners *à l' Européenne* at the Siamese High Commissioner's and at the quarters of the General

Commanding the Siamese troops in the town, however well-meant and cleverly-organised they might be, began to pall somewhat. He was not sorry when the old *Nai Hoi* (steersmen) from Raheng reported that his boats for the journey down had arrived.

It was the night before Harkness was to leave Laowieng. He was dressing for a farewell dinner which Marlow had insisted on giving in his honour prior to his departure.

His pony stood ready saddled. From his window, as he adjusted his white tie by the light of a none too well-trimmed oil-lamp, Philip could see the syces, one of them at the pony's head, and the other squatting on the ground beside the hurricane-lamp which always precedes such night expeditions through the streets of Laowieng, with their ruts and pitfalls for the feet of a stumbling horse.

He started at a sound behind him.

He noted with annoyance that his heart thumped violently. It was only his Boy, Ai Chan, but evidently with something out of the way to impart, for, before handing him a letter, the servant went to the unusual length of *kho thot* (begging pardon) beforehand.

"Who brought this?"

The boy grinned in sheepish apology.

"A man I don't know, master," he answered.

Harkness opened the crumpled note.

The message was written in Siamese on a not-entirely clean sheet of paper and in an uneducated hand. He took it over to the lamp, and spent some time in an attempt to decipher it.

After compliments the letter went on:

. . . "*If the Nai Krom Pa Mai* (Forest Department gentleman) *on his way down river will stop below the Gendarmerie Station at Ban Müd Ka, he will perhaps hear something of interest and even of advantage.*"

He was puzzled but, as he was already late for dinner, there remained no time to make enquiries. The Boy had vanished, and did not appear again, despite frequent

summonses, clearly proving that he knew the source of the letter.

Philip stuck the dirty note in his pocket and, as he rode along to the Brunei Compound, the first idea that came to him was that someone wishful to give information about the dacoity at the Huey Toh had written it with an eye to the large reward which had been offered. He made up his mind to show it to Lister, and ask his opinion about it, but, on his arrival at the festivity which Marlow had planned, it slipped his memory for the time.

And then some jesting remark which Hayler let fall about Mong Poh Lan's elephants set a train of thought working in Philip's brain.

His mind at once reverted to Rarouey, the Lao girl who had nursed him when wounded, mysteriously appearing in his hour of need, only to disappear as mysteriously on the arrival of the rescue party from Laowieng.

Ban Müd Ka, he remembered, was the town, or rather fair-sized village, on the river at the head of the rapids. There he had first seen Rarouey. It was, moreover, the nearest point to the Me Chem forest, on the route to the Huey Toh. It was at Ban Müd Ka, he remembered also, that he and Morland had struck inland on their last journey together, after coming by water from Laowieng.

He wondered. . . .

Finally he resolved to say nothing to Lister about the letter.

CHAPTER XIV

RAROUEY

Slowly the boat slipped down-stream.

Philip's arm had by this time quite mended, and only an occasional twinge served to recall how near he had gone to death in the Huey Toh, reminding him too of the many things in life that still remained.

Monotonous at the best of times, the journey on that occasion was filled for him with long, lonely thoughts, thoughts almost wholly of his dead friend.

. . . Morland was dead!

During the tedious, slow moving hours of the day in his boat, the words hammered themselves into Philip's tired brain, their abiding undertone the creaking of the row-locks or the light drip of the oars suspended in the haze over the river.

Reading could not distract him. As each misty evening descended on the broad waste of waters, and they pulled in to tie up to the bank, he would remain seated for hours brooding by his boat, or would go pacing the jungle into the deep night closing down on his melancholy. Thoughts of his dead friend haunted him, memories of Morland's kindly whimsicality, his shrewd tolerance, his courageous facing of the blows dealt him by fate and hard circumstance. How much Morland had been to him he only then began to realise.

And "Morley" was dead.

Dead, through his own rashness—which made it all

the harder to bear—slain grievously by some dastard hand, shot down like a dog, from behind, as he sat, meditating no man ill, by the light of his own peaceful camp fire. Morland had been the one real friend he had made in a country of rare friendships, dear to his mind and heart, the man he had grown to respect and love more and more with every fresh revelation of sterling qualities.

Philip thought again of the letter he had tried to write to Morland's invalid wife at Home, a piteous epistle, so inadequately expressed, so full of omissions and suppressions aimed at concealing the more horrible details of Morland's end. He wondered how much he had succeeded in hiding from the woman who had loved his friend, who knew the country in which he had died, who had battled with him against odds until the cruel East had forced her from the side of the man who loved her.

He thought of little Margot, their only child. Morland, he remembered, had been so full of little Margot six weeks before, during the Christmas Meeting at Laowieng. New photographs of the child had arrived.

"Listen to this!" Morland had said, and he had read aloud to Philip the letters of her mother, recounting frolicsome stories of little Margot, of her intelligent vivacity of speech and manner.

"Life, I have found, is one long struggle to arrive at a compromise with the results of circumstances beyond oneself."

Morland had told him that once. It was a facet of thought cut by the hard diamond of a man's experience.

A mental picture came to Philip of the speaker's fine head, with the hair graying towards the temples, the firm lean face, with the salient cheek bones and the sensitive mouth and tender eyes lit up by the smile he had admired so often in life. And then he saw again the features of his friend as he had looked upon them after the dacoits had wreaked their baffled spite, the staring eyes of horror, their smile gone, the ghastly cut running from chin to ear. . . .

Yes! Death was the supreme "circumstance beyond

oneself," and particularly the death of such a friend. In that loss, Philip felt acutely, there would be for him yet another of those truces to make with necessity whereby, Carlyle assures us, we alone attain to the full stature of Manhood. And other truces there would be, truces within truces, that Philip knew he would yet have to devise, lacking the help and manful advice of this "teak-wallah" to whom he had been wont unconsciously to turn in doubt for assistance.

Morland was dead!

He thought of Sylvia Dean, the English girl who held his pure-souled boyish troth. How distant her figure had grown on the horizon of Memory! She was a very nebulous shadow indeed on the confines of his spirit. But she was waiting—of that he was certain, waiting, as he had asked her to wait, for him in the Somersetshire village by the Bristol Channel where their childish liking had matured into a childish promise.

He had changed since he had left England, much within the last three years, but most of all and greatly in the period since the dacoity in the Mae Chem. There was something in his life now, something added, a responsibility, a decision to take, a truce to make with Necessity.

But she—Sylvia had remained the same. He was certain of it.

And Morland—Morland was dead!

His heart reproached him for not having written more often or more fully to Sylvia since his coming to the North. He tried now to settle down to give her a long letter making up for past remissness.

Women set such store on letters. He would strive to imbue it with as much as he could recapture of the old loving spirit, the affection of those early days, shadowy and untroubled, before he had even known of the existence of teak forests in the Salween.

The letter was not very fluent. Somehow he could not envisage the little girl to whom he was penning these fervently insincere words of love.

She had grown intangible. He had outdistanced her

in life, in living, and he could not now stretch out a hand to her back along the road of the past that he had travelled away from her. He could not forge a community between their unequal minds. . . .

He broke off writing to wonder what Santall would say when he reached Bangkok.

It was simply absurd making him come down and report himself. There was nothing the matter with him. On one thing he was fully determined. He would *not* go Home on sick leave. He would stay as short a time as possible in Bangkok and make every excuse and use every effort to get back to the Salween without delay. Two years of that ampler ether had invested these purple mountains with a lasting, distant glamour for his eyes.

Bangkok, the very thought of Bangkok, after these great forests and that gracious stream—had become very distasteful to him. He simply could not resume that soul-less, sophisticated existence of vapid bickerings over bagatelles, of clubs and cliques, of *stengahs* and snobbery. . . .

Lister, comformably to his settled policy, had wanted to make a "dust," to demand compensation for Morland's death, to create a diplomatic incident, if possible, out of the murder of a British subject in Siam in such circumstances.

Lister was wrong. It is true the country was unsettled, but in this particular instance, the administration was not specifically at fault.

Philip saw clearly that the only demand one could in reason make was that Morland's murderers be hunted down and punished. That was being done. Morland had declined a Gendarmerie escort. Ever since Philip had known him, Morland had always and openly scoffed at the bare idea of his ever being attacked while travelling in the jungles with money, and Morland had gone unarmed to his death.

Philip had done what he could to see that the Bombeo realised their obligations, but there was nothing to com-

plain of in the Company's generosity towards Morland's widow and child.

And Morland was dead. . . .

These and many other things held the thoughts of Harkness at moments on that journey to Ban Müd Ka.

But always—between his strivings to concentrate on other matters, there would come gliding one constant memory. There was one thought that would not be denied its place in the medley of his impressions, one ineffaceable and distracting vision—that of the Lao girl who had come to his side as he lay wounded in the Huey Toh.

Seated in the golden patch of sunlight at the door of his tent, whenas her parents had brought her, a hostage for their own ill-doing, the red of shame mantling her delicate cheek and diffused along the graceful lines of her neck—he saw her again and again—this woman of another race. At every moment and at all times she flickered unsummoned into his wakeful musings, and as vaguely faded back again, only to reappear afresh in dreams.

He had first seen her two years ago, and then had never given her a further thought.

Why had she crossed his path again? He could not remember exchanging a single word with her during that period of delirium in the tent. He was conscious only of soft dream-hands, like petals from blown roses, pressing gently on his fevered eyes. And he remembered kisses . . . a cool bare arm . . . a pleased trembling flutter. He never pronounced it aloud, but the liquid melody of her name sang in his ears. . . . Rarouey!

"Chan!" he had called to his Boy. "Tell me who brought that letter on the night I left Laowieng."

"Master," the invariable response had been, "how should I know?"

And the servant had hardened his face into inscrutability.

Philip wondered—he hoped it was so—that letter—was

it from her? He read and re-read the short message, hanging for hours over the sprawling Lao characters, and the childishly simulated mystery of the invitation.

Was not this the woman to whom he owed his preservation from death? Even Morland would admit that. But why had she asked him to meet her?

Perhaps, after all, the letter was only from one of the villagers of the Huey Toh, anxious to earn the thousand rupees' reward and denounce the assassins of Morland? Perhaps Rarouey even meant only to denounce someone. But whom? Her father? It was incredible! Yet, as like as not, Poh Lan was guilty. His reputation, his knowledge that Morland had brought specie to the jungle on that last trip—all bore out the supposition.

But, on the other hand, the girl had come to the aid of the farangs her father had tried to kill. Surely she had used her utmost endeavours to expiate her father's fault, if fault there were, by nursing the wounded victim of his cowardly attack. Was she now going to hand him over to justice, and earn the reward offered for his punishment?

In itself this turmoil of the spirit, this questioning and self-searching was a symptom disquieting enough in one of Philip's mentality. For, besides his retiring temperament naturally, Philip's hermit habit of life in the Salween had warped his sensibilities and now placed him at a disadvantage in the battle of sex.

During the journey from Laowieng to Ban Müd Ka he turned things over in his mind until his imagination —volatile at all times, but restive and uncontrolled since his wound, stirred by the romance of his deliverance by the appearance of this beautiful woman at his side and unsettled by the horrors of that dreadful night by the creek—his mind simply ran riot over Rarouey's act in coming to their camp after Morland's death.

How could one ever repay such a service? Slowly he disembarrassed himself of all prudential considerations; gradually he battered himself into that exalted mood in which men give way to quixotic acts from a distorted sense of values and an unreal ethical impulse.

The girl was his saviour!

She had rescued him from death, or at least from grave danger. The obligations imposed by his febrile sense of gratitude for that act became exaggerated utterly, until they dwarfed all else.

Did he love her then?

He examined himself and thought of his first repugnances at the idea of mating with Siamese women. He thought of what Morland once had said to him.

But Morland was dead. . . .

They came to Müd Ka at evening of the third day out. It had been insufferably hot all day. As they approached the gorges at the head of the rapids towards dusk, the live thunder began to leap far along the rattling crags. Some elephants were being bathed in the stream, nothing visible of their huge bulk save their heads on which the mahouts crouched, while their arched trunks delicately felt along the water's surface.

The rises in the river level following a somewhat late rainy season had not yet subsided, and the great teak logs were floating out of the creeks and lumbering down the flood to the sea.

"We can row for an hour more, master," the Nai Hoi had told Harkness.

"No. We will tie up here. Below the town."

And the order was obeyed.

Most of the boatmen went off into the village foraging. Harkness had a swim, and then as the fast tropic night was visibly closing down, he stepped from the boat on to the sand of the bank still warm from the heat of day.

Whistling to his dog, he set off strolling towards the lights of the village, which were already beginning to flicker from amongst the low-roofed, brown houses amid the betel-nut palms.

The dog went barking joyously before him, chivvying the lean, snarling pariahs that skulked across his path or dashed from the houses near at hand. It was from here, Philip remembered, that he had struck inland with Morland on that last journey to the Mae Chem. . . .

Philip had gone perhaps two hundred yards when he began to have the eerie impression of being followed. How quickly darkness was closing down!

The letter had said "below the Gendarmerie station."

He felt the paper that lay crumpled in the breast of his coat. Some children were still plashing at play in the river's shallows, dodging the mothers who sought to drive them bedwards.

A couple of men, laden with firewood from the jungle, passed and gave Philip an indifferent glance. A herd of buffaloes obedient to one single naked child came lumpishly along the path, the mud of their day-long wallow still matted upon their grey hides.

He felt he must be near the Gendarmerie station, and with the thought came assurance of his feelings in the shape of a sharp military order rapped out in the still air. The uplifting of men's voices began in the chant of the *Sanrasoen Phrabarami* (Siamese national anthem), which the gendarmes in barracks throughout the greater part of Siam sing each evening after sundown. The quaint but not unpleasing hymn rose lustily in the darkling air.

Harkness stopped a moment, listening. The dog growled.

He whipped round suddenly at a sound by his side.

Rarouey was coming towards him. She bobbed down in the funny little curtsey which Siamese women make, raising her hands and placing them together to her forehead. She looked tired. She was dusty, as from a long journey.

She said the one word.

"Master!"

Before more could be spoken Philip had stooped and, without explanations, had lifted her to her feet—to the level of his own eyes. He kept his hands beneath her arms as he had placed them to raise her up. He could feel the warm throbbing of her heart.

They looked at each other in a wild surmise.

CHAPTER XV

WISDOM AND STATURE

"When you first went away from me, dearest darling (it was Sylvia writing to Philip some six months after the events in Northampton previously chronicled), we promised each other, didn't we, that we should write every week. Do you remember how dreadfully down in the dumps I was one week when, for the first time, your letter did not come? I thought we could manage to remember each other at least once in every seven days. Not that I am blaming you, Philip, mine Philip. I know now how easily a mail may be missed if your runner encounters a hooge flooded river or if a nasty ole tiger takes it into his head to chaw the mail man up and his mail bag too!

"But there is absolutely no excuse for me if I miss a mail. And, oh dear, I have tried hard not to! When there was nothing particular happening I did not find it difficult to write, though I should think you must have been dreffful bored with my humdrum accounts of all the trifling things that interested me in a potty little hole like Northampton. Please forgive me, darlingest Phil.

"But now really so many things have happened to me all at once that the time has slipped by and before I quite realised it I quite forgot mail day. I hardly know even now where to begin. First there was all the fuss about Marion: you remember she was our maid when you first knew me in Birnam, but she went and got

secretly married to a young fellow who went away to India. And oh—it was horrid—there was such a lot of trouble about a baby she was going to have. I was so sorry for her when Dad insisted on dismissing her from our service after all the years she had been with us. And it was such a small baby too when it did come. The poor thing is dead now—it was too much for her—and wasn't it sad? I can't help feeling sorry for her.

"Well, I was dreadfully upset over that—and afterwards b'luvved, several things all happened at once. Things that worried me you know dreffuł bad, that drew me out of my little shell and made me take decisions for myself.

"First, you know, b'luvved, I had a birthday not long ago and I came of age! I had been so looking forward to it, but the only present I got on the day itself was yours, dear. I was so disappointed, 'cos for the first time in my great long life, umpteen years of indiscretion, the most important birthday I ever had too—Daddy quite forgot it! Well, I really must not grumble, as he made up for it after by giving me the most scrummy bracelet you ever saw—and a cheque book, so that I could use exactly as I like the money my darling little Mumsie left for me. And then, Dad read me a long lecture about having to think for my little ownself. Ooh, it was exciting and I tried so hard to feel awfully sedate and grown up! . . .

"That is partly why, for three weeks I did not write to my bonny blue-eyed boy. I am sorry. But perhaps it is just as well I did not write you during that time, for really, Phil, I was most fearfully worried for a bit, and you were too far away to help me, and have enough worries and troubles of your own, I am sure. What was the use of making you unhappy?"

(Candidly, Sylvia had already begun to fade so far into the background of Philip's thoughts that he had hardly remarked the fact to which she now referred. He received his mails rather irregularly, and only when a batch of other letters from England reached him did

he notice there was not one from her as usual amongst them.)

"Well, anyhow, darling, it is all over now, and if you have noticed the address at the head of this letter you will see that I have left Northampton. Isn't that exciting news? Now comes a piece of semi-horrid news. What do you think? Daddy has married again! And I am living all alone in London, launched on the great big cruel world—paddling my own canoe, and doing it very nicely, thank you—oh I have so much to tell you I must go back to the beginning——

"If you are blaming me, Phil, for not having written for three weeks you will forgive me now—won't you, sweet? For this time—you will get SUCH a letter, chock full of news and such exciting news, such a long letter.

"But let me think! (That's a good phase, isn't it? All great minds use it, don't they?) The last time I put pen to paper (bow wow! the great brain creaketh!) I think I told you Dad was ill. He had really been working far too hard, poor old dear, out all day long, with hardly time for proper meals, and often out all night too. It was terrible! So many people we knew quite well died of Spanish 'flue, and dozens had it. Mrs. Maresfield, and Dora Cubbitt died—and then Dr. Armour, which left Daddy almost single handed in the district. Poor Dad! I tried disconnecting his night bell, so that he could sleep, but he found out and was angry with me. And his business affairs went all wrong and altogether he was most awfully worried and depressed. No wonder he got ill! He had been sickening for something for some time—worried, you know, and queer and harassed and short tempered—not a bit like he was when you knew him in Birnam—and I am afraid I did not make sufficient allowances for him and did not see what was coming. . . .

"They insisted on taking him straight to the hospital. Madge said it was impossible to nurse him properly at home. Oh, I haven't told you yet about Madge! Madge Ridgeway, you remember, the Canadian nurse—

I think I mentioned her before in my letters—well, she is my *step-mother* now! Isn't that funny? She is only five years older than me—and I must say she has been a brick in many ways. But she is so beastly efficient and methodical and despises my muddling-through way of running a house. I did not so much mind her taking me to task about the management of servants—she said I did not keep Marion enough in her place—but when she started dictating to me about other things—ordering little Me about à la heavy Mother, you know—well—that is one of the reasons why I 'lit out' and came 'right away' to London. I left before the rows began. Don't you think I was right, darling? So many girls can't get on with their step-mothers. Not that I have fallen out with Madge. We are great pals, and of course I am very glad and so relieved to think that Daddy has found someone to look after him who is so capable and so unruffled as Madge.

"Of course we had a 'breeze' or two before we settled down—Madge and I. Nothing much but it showed which way the wind was blowing. I did not like the way she behaved when Daddy was in hospital. She used to lie in wait and watch for me coming, from behind the window of the nurses' duty room, which overlooks the front entrance. And she hinted that I had better not come except at the regular visiting hours. She simply took Daddy in hand, like a case, and she regulated him, body and soul. You see, she could say it was medical orders, but to tell the truth, darling, between you and me and the bed-post, it was just jealousy of Daddy and me. At first when he got ill he used always to turn to me, because I knew his ways and could cook the dishes he liked in the way he preferred. Well, one day Madge pounced on me when I was bringing Daddy some Effendi cigarettes—I had bought them out of my own money—but she simply grabbed them and said the doctor had forbidden Dad to have any tobacco that would irritate his throat. I told her that was a lie. I had asked the doctor the day before and had his per-

mission. She wouldn't listen. He was not to have them! I had even taken the precaution of asking what particular brand I might bring, and Dr. Williamson (he is the hospital doctor, a nice old Irishman) had said Effendis would be all right. Well, we had a bit of a bust up. Madge was furious. Said I was going behind her back and she would throw the case up. She was rather horrid for a time, but I must say she was very decent afterwards, and apologised. . . .

"I don't want you to think, dearest heart, that I dislike Madge or don't appreciate her good points. I am very content that Dad is happy, and am getting gradually used to the idea of having a new mother. Though I must admit, at first I didn't a bit like the idea of Daddy marrying anybody after Mumsie, and I cried sometimes over the memories of Birnam and how happy we all were there, Daddy and Mummie and the three boys and me before my darling little Mums died. You must remember her too a little, Phil, and what a little dear she always was!

"But I have thought it all out, and though I am sure that nothing would ever make *me* marry anyone but my darling Phil, I can see that in Daddy's case it is different. He never was strong, and Madge is just the sort of woman on whom everyone wants to lean. She is a tower of strength. Really, physically she is. Five feet ten, played full back at hockey for her school team in Canada, always hustling along and go-ahead, do-it-now, and nothing tires her. I am sure she is very fond of Dad, and he loves her dearly (not love like ours, of course, old boy. There's other things beside love mixed up with Dad and Madge, pity and motherliness and so on.)

"She told me such a funny thing once. She was engaged before. To a man in the States, and she was very fond of him. He was an engineer, and an inventor, a genius at his own line of work. But he drank too much! And do you know Madge told me how she gave him one chance after another to reform, and when at last she found he could not shake it off, she broke off her

engagement. She said it did not make any difference to her love but that the affection she brought to Daddy would never equal the first fresh love she gave to the younger man. Wasn't that a queer thing to say? To me, of all people!

"Anyway it has made a great difference to Daddy. He wrote me the other day—from Ilfracombe—where they are spending a honeymoon, and said he was ever so much more cheerful and better. One can see the difference in his letters even.

"Daddy wanted at first that I should go on living with them after they were married. He has given up the Northampton practice, you know. Madge found a young Welsh doctor to take it over, and she says there will be no more nonsense like the last man and the practice will be properly run. She maintains it is absurd Daddy doing the ordinary grind of an industrial practitioner, but should go on with his surgical research as he used to before. There is a possibility of him returning to Birnam. He is in treaty with Dr. Lovejoy, the man who bought his practice there when we left the place. Lovejoy does not like it—says he feels cramped and wants a bigger place—and he will be glad if Dad will take the Birnam practice off his hands again, cheap. But I don't think it would do at all—I mean me living with Madge and Daddy in the old house at Birnam. I am tired of Birnam. It is such a tiny sleepy little hollow. I positively could not bear to go back there and live—and see Madge in the house by the sea shore where Mummy used to be. Madge filling Mummie's place, and all the people pitying me whom I know, and the stupid talk there would be and the nasty digs I would get at all the tea fights, with everybody discussing our altered positions and the women worrying our family affairs to tatters like a lot of elderly tabbies with a ball of worsted! No, it's quite impossible, isn't it?

"I did not like to tell Daddy this. He was only convalessing at the time. I know that's not the way to spell it, but never mind, Philip. But I spoke to Madge and

she quite saw my point of view. She said I was a great silly to mind what anybody said. *She* never worries a scrap of course. Some people in Northampton tried to be spiteful about her marrying Dad, but she soon sent them packing, with ' a flea in their lug ' as she called it ! But I am not like that you know. And besides I think Madge realised that though we had found a way of pulling together, neither she nor I knew if we could stand the strain of living together for any length of time. In any case I was determined not to go back to Birnam. I should have hated it. She was very sympathetic and decent about it all. And I pointed out that it would be an extra burden for Dad to have me idle at home. I ought to be earning at least a part of my own living and I had often wanted to be a nurse. In fact if it had not been that Daddy wanted me at home after Mummy's death, I should have gone for my training long before. He does not need me now, of course—well not in the way he did before, as he has Madge, and she will keep his house for him far better than poor woolly witted little me ever could. (Now don't raise your eyebrows, Phil, at my bad grammar. It's just me writing to *you* and it does not matter.)

" Madge trained at the London, and she knows the ropes and we talked it over, and I left her to break the news to Dad. She knows how to humour him, and he has a belief in Madge's judgment that is pathetically sublime you know. Being a doctor's daughter I was able to get reduced fees and other concessions, and after my first year I shall be earning something. Dad was much more amenable and easily persuaded than I expected. I pointed out that I had now a little money from my mother which I could use for this purpose. And so they were married quietly and went off, and I came up here.

" I do hope my Philip approves of what I have done. There was no time to write you, dear, to ask your opinion, and get an answer by letter. I am sure you will agree I could not do otherwise. And you need not worry about me being all alone in London. I'm not really. I

was only joking about that when I wrote it at the beginning of this letter. There is brother Jack, at Westminster School here, and I have so much to do that I haven't time to be lonely. Jack came to see me the other day and we went to a football match and went to see George Robey afterwards. He was a scream! I had such a ripping time.

"There are about three hundred girls here training, most of them very nice and jolly. I am in the Wellington Ward, and our Matron is a nice old thing with a face like a badly fried egg, but a perfect dear all the same. The rules are very strict. And the work at the beginning used to tire me out so, especially my poor little feet. I loathed the scrubbing too, and the emptying of buckets, but everyone has to go through the same mill, and think, my darling, how nice it will be when we are married! I shall be able to look after you if you ever get a pain. If I had been married to you knowing what I did a year ago, what a useless wife I should have been. When I think of the mistakes I used to make in the house at Northampton, and what a die-away lame duck I was, why I am perfectly ashamed! . . ."

Philip read on to the end and then abstractedly laid the letter down and turned to his work. As a counsel of perfection he had told Sylvia once how Napoleon during his first passion for Josephine, even while hastening on his way to the campaign in Italy, had yet found time to write to his bride from every inn every few hours where he changed horses.

Though they had tried hard to keep their love alive by frequent and regular letters, it is to be feared that both sides had grown a trifle weary of the effort. It was a pity, too, that neither Philip's limitations nor his leisure at the moment when this particular letter reached him permitted him to consider a little what this crisis in Sylvia's life had meant to the development of her character. He realised, of course, that his little sweetheart in England must be now re-acting to circumstances vastly different from those in which he had first known

her, but he was unable to project his imaginative vision into the new vistas that lay before her. Sylvia a nurse! Sylvia training in a large London Hospital; schooling herself to do useful woman's work; to be economically independent of a parent for her living. Sylvia scrubbing floors; or handing swabs at an operating table; Sylvia being made love to perhaps by other men; brought face to face, in short, with a whole great unknown new world of living, dying, loving, hating, sinning and suffering men and women; Sylvia, cut off abruptly from her father's house by his re-marriage, and forced to learn, even at second hand, in the person of foolish, weak and tragic Marion, or phlegmatic, thorough-going Madge, some new lessons from the great nexus called Life and of the different manner in which different temperaments are moulded by the fingers of fate.

But no. Philip Harkness preferred to retain only his memories of the somewhat helpless, clinging, little girlie he had first known, petite, and with rounded cheeks and the most provoking red lips; the Sylvia of the short curly hair scattered round her darkling eyes by the fresh winds of the sea, or escaping from the scarlet tam o' shanter in which she played golf with him. Existence for Sylvia at Birnam had been a smooth and easy matter, and with some of the indolence she inherited from her father's nature, she had been accustomed to know that there was always someone stronger than herself, usually a male, to whom she could turn in her little social and domestic difficulties. There had been her father, and her favourite brother Kit, and latterly Philip. Madge Ridgeway even —now her step-mother—so sure was she of what she wanted, and so undeviatingly single-mindedly did she walk alone towards her desires—had attracted Sylvia by force of contrast. Until, in wanting Sylvia's father to look after, Madge had naturally made herself incompatible with Sylvia's little scheme of things.

As life became more complex for her, however, Sylvia had abandoned that habit of trustfulness, not of choice but of necessity. At this date she had already begun

to falter forward unaided and alone, to face the world with a stiff, albeit trembling upper lip; and it was just this new Sylvia that Philip could not, would not envisage. His protective instinct demanded that she should always remain, childish, looking primitively upwards into his eyes for guidance.

Curiously enough, it was much the same trick of pitying protectiveness that endeared Philip most of all to Sylvia from the beginning. That instinct she too preferred to retain while ignoring the interplay between his character and his fuller life in Siam. Yet Sylvia had even less right than he to deem herself essential or even complementary to the stronger qualities of her chosen man.

Philip, of course, was a slovenly boy in many ways, that is to say he absent-mindedly neglected many details that women cannot bear to leave incomplete. Sylvia could laugh, but she liked to remember how, one evening, they had met at the gate of the vicarage where she and her father were dining. Canon Harkness had preceded them with her father, and Phil had taken Sylvia's arm suddenly and pulled her back. With a comical air of despair he had held up his face to her in the warm darkness surrounding them.

"I say, Sylvia," he had said. "Just a minute. I'm an awful duffer—I have never been able to tie a bow in all my life—and the mater is busy—do you mind—I wish you would fix this dress tie for me."

And the service had been completed by a sweet hurried kiss.

Philip often mislaid his belongings also. Sylvia had bought him a chain to keep his keys safe, and a loose leaf diary at Christmas for noting addresses and appointments which he was always forgetting. She loved to use such forethought for him. In small matters Philip had acquiesced gratefully and for a time adopted the habit of consulting her when she was available, from the choice of a golf driver to the wording of a telegram.

But in the more important affairs of his life Philip

knew how to keep his own counsel and always elected to arrive at his own judgments and his own decisions unaided by a woman. Thus, for instance, neither his mother nor Sylvia had any inkling that the offer had even been made to him, when he announced his intention of accepting a billet in the Forests of Siam. Sylvia's attempt to discuss the question in its various bearings he had listened to with the weary air of one who had already turned the matter over fully and had reached an immutable conclusion. This had given Sylvia rather a shock. She found she was not admitted to the inner precincts of his thoughts. Also, she could remember how he had come out sometimes with pronouncements to her father on such subjects as vivisection, which shewed that his agile brain was working in confines where he never dreamed of admitting her to follow him, and that he had reached certain conclusions at variance with those accepted without comment from their seniors by the generality of young people.

However Sylvia had soon discovered the conditions in which helpless unmarried menfolk lived in Siam, and in so doing had regained the delightful knowledge that she could be useful to him in some things at least. A parcel of bachelor buttons, a manicure set and other labour saving "gadgets" which she had sent him had earned his unstinted praise. . . .

What these two young people who had fallen genuinely in love with each other did not appreciate, until they met again and clashed long afterwards, was that experience of men and affairs had widened their outlook during the most formative years of life which they spent separated one from the other. In spite of the fact that they loved each other, they did not trouble to understand that the character of neither of them remained entirely at the same stage of development. They kept their moonlit dreams of girl and boy. It was in a sense a beautiful thing that they were able to do so, but all the time they were both ranging down the roads of life in different directions and under different environments. They both

grew to the full stature of man and womanhood without impinging on each other.

On his part, Philip realised little of the effect on Sylvia of altered family relationships, and the necessary re-adjustments called for by her departure from the shelter of her father's home into the palpitating interest of a large hospital in a large city. And on Sylvia's side, it was well-nigh impossible to visualise the change that was at the same time taking place in the quality of Philip's mind through contact with the oddly cosmopolitan world of his first years in Siam, the insistent curiosity of his eager youth, above all, the turmoil of sex with its repercussion on his typically English culture and traditions.

You see, neither of them ever wrote fully to the other of the things that vitally interested them. While all the time they were solving or shelving, each in a personal fashion, the problems that thinking men and women are obliged to face and handle, this particular man and woman continued a correspondence permeated with false sentimentality. By far the most impressive event in Sylvia's life so far had been, not so much her father's re-marriage nor her entry into the callous world of hospital life, but the somewhat abject tragedy of little Marion. Sylvia conserved and applied to all men, thereafter, the condemnation which she had meted out in this case to Dick Judd, the man who, too late, had made "an honest woman" of her little maid, but had left her in pathetic solitude to give life to a child that the whole world branded as illegitimate. Yet Sylvia gave Philip but the barest outlines of the story, and he only appreciated long afterwards the depth of feelings created in her by the situation.

CHAPTER XVI

LETTERS HOME

Rarouey jumped hastily down from the arm of the chair on which she had been sitting and fled from the room.

"Here! What the deuce?" Philip began, astonished at her manner of exit.

And then Garstin walked upstairs, unannounced, and into the room.

"Hullo, Harkness," he asked cordially enough, holding his hand out. "How goes it?"

Philip rose and made his guest welcome.

"You are the first caller since I came back," he said.

Some desultory talk followed, the small change of conversational habit such as men employ to resume an acquaintance after a broken period.

The return to Bangkok life and Bangkok office-wallahdom (as Morland had been wont to dub existence down-country) had proved even more distasteful than Harkness had foreseen. Santall had written inviting him to rejoin the Mess at 73 Suriwongse, but Philip had already arranged to take a separate house.

His action in so doing, if it did not offend his senior and the president of the noisy republic of which Harkness had formerly been a member, certainly astonished Santall rather, especially in view of the temporary nature of Philip's visit to the Capital.

"But what the devil do you want with a house like this, all to yourself?" was one of Garstin's first questions. "You are not down for good, are you?"

Garstin had an inquisitive hobby of calling on most newcomers in his own set, just to find out what they were like. It was mere, sheer curiosity that now prompted this visit to Philip the day after the latter's return from the North, for the two men had never been sympathetic to each other when they had jointly inhabited 73 Suriwongse.

"Oh, I don't know," his host tried to turn the query off as lightly as he could. "You see, we all have our own houses up North—no Messes there. And I suppose I have got so accustomed to my own roof-tree—that I thought I would prefer—living alone. And I heard of this house in Laowieng. It belongs to Marlow of the Brunei."

"Umph!" His former mess-mate was not convinced.

There was a pause of constraint.

"I say," began Garstin with a grin, "Nempont tells me you have gone the way of all flesh. You that used not to hold with such things."

"What do you mean?" asked Philip, frankly puzzled.

"Taken on a girl—a jolly fine little Shan piece, Nempont swears."

. . . So they knew about Rarouey already!

Philip coloured up. Then he stiffened himself, and answered with an artificial laugh, wondering the while if Garstin had caught sight of Rarouey as he entered.

"Trust Nempont to know first of the arrival of any new girl to Bangkok."

He said it lightly, but with an intonation that led Mr. Garstin to realise he had started the topic too abruptly.

Philip had grown to detest Garstin very thoroughly during the time when daily association had shown him the unlovely traits of callous character in the man and his stupid narrowness of outlook. He liked him even less now that he could compare his nature with the more generous characteristics of good fellows he had met and known up North.

The Boy arrived with drinks, and the conversation turned upon the dacoity. Garstin asked for details, and got a few.

"Well, anyhow I'm jolly glad I don't have to go up-country," was his conclusion. "That sort of thing wouldn't suit me at all."

"But I thought in the Mines you would have a certain amount of travelling to do in the provinces," said Philip.

His visitor gave a gurgle of self-approbation, and explained.

"That's so. The common or garden Mines' man *has* to do a lot of foot-slogging. I once went as far as Puket myself, on the other side of the Peninsula. For my sins, that was. But I was transferred from the Mines to the Records over a year ago. I'm more use in Bangkok."

Then Philip remembered and said "Oh!"

Of course! Santall had been telling him that very morning how Garstin, by devious methods, had succeeded in engineering himself into an office job sinecure in Bangkok.

"Disgusting it was!" So Santall had described it. "A strategy of flattery that even Orientals would not stoop to, ignoble kow-towing to his superiors in office, eating of dirt and concentrated tactics of ingratiation with his seniors and the 'people that matter'—the-thousand-tical-a-month-people, you know."

Thus it was that Garstin had been relieved of duties he disliked and permanently retained among the flesh-pots of Bangkok. And it was not so much the rank favouritism of the thing that had incensed Santall as the thought that any of his compatriots could stoop to such lick-spittle methods.

"Going to naturalise himself a Siamese too, I'm told," Santall had added. "All for the sake of another five hundred chips a month. A birth-right for a mess of pottage, I call it."

And he had expressed in an unrestrained manner which

had astonished Philip his own wrath at Garstin's conduct and the disgust of every decent-minded man thereat. . . .

Garstin remained about half an hour.

Philip wondered why the man should have taken the trouble to find out where he was quartered. He was certain it was not an interest in the Mae Chem dacoity that had brought this obnoxious fellow to his house, so much as the hope of catching sight of Rarouey.

As a matter of fact, that evening, before leaving No. 73, Garstin had said openly to Nempont:

"I'm going along to rout out Harkness. I don't mind cutting Mrs. Parlett's At Home to-day, if I can spot that Shan girl he has brought down with him."

Philip's first cold snub had not sufficed to divert Garstin entirely from this purpose. He adroitly led the conversation.

"Heard the latest?" he asked casually. "Nempont and the Princess. Dam funny! But he will get into trouble before long. He is too open in the way he goes about things altogether."

"No," said Philip, hardly restraining himself from adding that he had no desire to hear of Nempont's amorous indiscretions as related by Garstin.

"Yes. It appears he knew the girl's father in Paris. The Prince was Siamese Minister there about a dozen years ago. Must be a man of pretty good birth—old Nempont, to have moved in that swim.

"There are two girls. I don't think much of their looks myself. Not my style a bit. But they've been well educated in Europe—speak about half a dozen languages, and have all the usual polite parlour tricks and ladylike stunts. Nempont goes to call on the old boy pretty frequently, and sings French ballades to the girls' accompaniment. One of the *familee,* in fact. What! He even went driving alone with his particular fancy once, and at all the shows and receptions he is always dangling round. It's a bit thick!"

"But a Princess?" ejaculated Philip. "I thought all the Siamese Princesses were locked up in the Palaces."

"That's the old style. But this chap is quite advanced. He has been Siamese Minister in most of the European capitals, and is a bit of a suffragette. The girls are given a lot of freedom and mix with Europeans quite a lot. Nempont's fancy is a teacher in one of the ladies' High Schools. Oh, I tell you—hot stuff. But you'll probably see her soon."

The man's coarseness threw a Silenus leer over any subject he talked of, and though Philip had a distinct and sinking fear that Nempont probably had been making advances in his usual style, he could not really believe the shameful innuendoes implied by his visitor.

He betrayed a slackening of interest in Nempont and the Princess, and tried to talk of Bangkok mutual acquaintances.

But Garstin, thinking perhaps that he had by now sufficiently paved the way, led up to one of the objects of his visit.

"I say Harkness! You know I'm very anxious to get hold of a Lao girl. How did you—acquire yours? Do you think you could—well—help me to arrange for one to be sent down from Laowieng? I'd pay all expenses of course."

Philip rose.

The one disgusted look he gave at his companion was like a blow in the face. Then he walked over to the window, and had to whistle a bar or two of a song before he could calm himself sufficiently to reply.

"Really, Garstin," he said. "What do you take me for? I'm afraid that sort of thing is quite out of my line."

His words became more and more cuttingly decisive as he went on.

"Why don't you break your rule for once, and go up-country yourself? Then you could see and conquer on the spot. Or what has become of your old familiar—Mae Whatshername—the virago you used to employ on missions of indelicate confidence?"

There was no mistaking the sarcasm.

Garstin was about as much discountenanced as one of his type could be. He saw he had made a false step in the proposition. He saw too that no further prolongation or future repetition of his visit would avail to bring "that young prig" Harkness' Shan girl out of the obscurity in which she seemed bent on remaining. He had wasted a whole afternoon, and missed Mrs. Parlett's At Home too—all for nothing. He might have remembered what Harkness was like.

He rose to take his leave.

"Oh, by the way," he said, infecting his tone with the nasty archness of a flapper who has a most lovely secret to impart, "I had a letter from the Mater the other day. She is down in the West of England at present, you know, staying with some people at Birnam. That is your native place, isn't it?"

"Oh, indeed!" parried Philip, facing him with wearied disgust.

"She met a girl called Dean there, she said, a sort of probationer hospital nurse, a nice young thing she said—who asked my old Ma to send you her salaams and all that sort of thing. Better look out, or the Mater will be matchmaking for you. She excels at the job."

He gave a crudely pungent laugh, as he noticed how well his shot had gone home. Philip stammered in embarrassment.

"Oh, yes—I know Miss Dean—quite well, in fact," was all he could reply for the moment, his loathing barely concealed at the thought of Sylvia's name even on the fellow's lips; but before he could make any more telling counter, Garstin had discreetly slipped away downstairs.

The truth of the matter was that, when she had first met Mrs. Garstin and before she realised that lady's busy propensity for idle scandal, Sylvia had—more as a commonplace of conversation and as a point of mutual interest—admitted that she, too, knew someone in Siam. Mrs. Garstin, interested on account of having a son in the country mentioned, had adroitly set about question-

ing Sylvia as to the name and station of her friend. The girl, frightened to find that she had given the hateful old woman a handle on which to hang her curiosity, had drawn back and closed up like a mussel. But it was too late. Though Sylvia would not even divulge his name, Mrs. Garstin was certain that Philip was more than a mere acquaintance. Her further efforts at pumping Sylvia having been baffled by the barrier of evasion raised against her, she had written to her son George to find if there was anything in her own conclusions. The message from Sylvia Dean which the odious Garstin had thrown out as a feeler to Harkness was entirely unauthorised by its sender, but Garstin had found in his victim's discomfiture sufficient cruel amusement to be pleased with the success of his ruse.

After his caller had gone, Philip recalled his last remarks. Rarouey came creeping back into the room and poised herself in her favourite attitude near his arm on the chair.

"Why is my master so silent?" she questioned, after an interval.

But Philip pushed her away. He was thinking of Sylvia.

Well, thank Heaven, the letter had gone. It had been difficult to write but he had posted it some three days before. He had felt an unutterable brute as he had told Sylvia in broken and stupid phrases, told her that he felt they had made a mistake—or rather that *he* had made a mistake. They had been too precipitate in becoming engaged until——

"I feel," he had written, "I feel that, all things considered I am entirely to blame for asking you to wait for me. Living is so expensive out here, and the climate is so bad that ladies—English ladies cannot generally stand it for long. And then promotion is so slow in the Forests. I don't see how we can afford to marry for years to come. So I have come to the conclusion, Sylvia, that—if you like—I mean—you need not consider yourself as irrevocably bound to me. I am still very fond of you

and shall never forget you. But forgive me. A fellow situated like me. . . . And if you meet anyone who is in a better position than I to give you . . . Long engagements are a mistake. One has to think of practical things. . . ."

A halting letter. A stupid letter, with concealments in every line that the woman who loved him could decipher.

Sylvia took it, unopened, with her along to the sands at Birnam where they had sometimes walked together. She was down spending a holiday from the hospital with her father and Madge when the letter arrived, and she read it, sitting on a dune, and brooded tearfully over its meaning. Almost on the very spot where she now read it, Philip had told her he loved her, but where had all the old glowing phrases flown?

"I will wait for my love all my life if need be. . . . Love like ours, dear, is eternal, and nothing can ever change it. . . ."

And had not Philip said to her when he left for Siam, "We shall always remember, darling," and had she not answered "Always!" . . .

"He does not care for me any longer," Sylvia moaned to herself, and she looked round carefully to see if anyone could see her before she turned and buried her face in the grass. "He has changed. He has seen some other girl whom he prefers and he wants to be rid of me. Well, let him! I don't care! He can throw me over for good and all if he wants. I shall never let him know I care a single bit!"

A few days later, she had sat down and indited as indifferent and as rigidly calculating a letter to Philip as her distracted feelings could dictate, and it had completely deceived Philip who had been steeling himself for heart broken appeals or frantic recriminations, instead of this easy acceptance of the freedom he had offered.

It was Mrs. Garstin who was the first to remark that "dear Sylvia" was not her "usual bright self." Mrs. Garstin had been now for several weeks a paying host ("they preferred to put it that way, poor things,"

she said) of the Suttons in Birnam. In that time she had thrown herself ostentatiously and whole heartedly into the life of the village, had been an untiring attender at the best church and a tiresomely fervent helper of the dear vicar in various charitable activities. The "dear vicar" in question was Philip's father, though Mrs. Garstin never learnt it, any more than she ever learnt that the vicar had nicknamed her Mrs. "Gorgon," and the name had stuck. She flattered herself that in a short period she had become acquainted with every person in the place, particularly those who possessed anything like a skeleton in the family cupboard. But Sylvia Dean eluded her.

No, she could not make Miss Dean out at all. Beyond the first outburst of confidence that she knew a young man in Siam and the fact that Sylvia's manner betrayed an unusual interest in the said young man, Mrs. Garstin could discover no more. Her flair for unhappy love affairs in her neighbours was unerring, and she took it as a personal insult that this girl would not confide to her the true nature of her relations to Philip Harkness. She felt sure she could have given a great deal of useful advice to her on the matter. If even she knew the name of the young man! She did not make much progress either in her tentative inquiries of the downright Madge, and she concluded—rightly—that the second Mrs. Dean was just as much in the dark as herself. She was convinced that only an armed neutrality existed between the girl and her stepmother. It was very tantalising. Always reserved, Sylvia had acquired enough experience in London to know at least the value of being guarded with strangers. The "Gorgon's" blatant methods were hardly qualified of course to cause any girl to unbosom herself to her, but she felt it was ridiculous of Sylvia to keep her at arm's length when she might be able to help her and comfort her.

The widow of an Indian Army Officer, Mrs. Garstin had two standing grudges against Providence, and the Army authorities, in that her husband had not been per-

mitted to live long enough to qualify for his "full pension" which might have enabled them to hold their heads up (that was how Mrs. Garstin phrased it) in Cheltenham or Bournemouth among people whom she had been accustomed to mixing with (this was how she described her socially pretentious fellows).

She had come down to Birnam *en retraite,* primarily to reduce expenses, and she had foisted herself and her daughter upon the Deans who, as being "professional people" were, for lack of better, almost the only fit associates for her. Madge jeered openly at the Gorgon's prinking and pruning of ruffled feathers and at her insufferable and hectoring manner on points of social etiquette, but as the doctor's wife, she could not shake the woman off, and was obliged to meet her and tolerate her visits to the house.

"I cannot make out what is the matter with our little Sylvia at all!" she had said with a forlorn sigh, turning to Sylvia's stepmother. "She seems quite pale and upset these days. Poor thing. Not pining for someone, I hope."

Her archness was quite wasted on her hearers, however.

"Oh rot, mater," answered her daughter May, who had overheard the remark. May was a gaunt hobbledehoy of a girl, with curious prematurely white hair—but a good-natured sort on the whole, as long as she had enough outdoor violent exercise. She spoke now with her mouth full of cake. "Sylvia is all right. Just a bit off her drive at golf."

Madge turned her candid brown eyes in the direction of the speaker and looked penetratingly at both Mrs. Garstin and her daughter before she replied.

"Sylvia was working too hard at the hospital, that's all. And she has been too long without a break. I know what it's like."

The lady addressed was conscious of the hostile "hands-off-and-mind-your-own-business" tone that Madge had used. She knew that Sylvia and her step-

mother pulled along together no better than most women of their age in a similar position, but she felt that Madge anyhow would protect Sylvia from idle curious prying. But Mrs. Garstin would not rest content until a few days later she had cornered Sylvia for another last "heart-to-heart" talk before her holiday ended and she went back to Town. Feminine judgment is a trifle apt to imagine that everything can be cleared up by such "lay-your-head-on-mother's-shoulder" confessions, but in reality these boudoir exchanges more generally end by upsetting everyone concerned. Mrs. Garstin excelled at such "talks" and the result of the present conversation with Sylvia was no exception to the rule. It rubbed Sylvia the wrong way, and it made Madge so furious that she was positively rude to the Gorgon.

The woman watched for her opportunity and waylaid Sylvia in the street where she met her shopping one morning. She insisted on accompanying her home, and had considerable difficulty in making the girl tearfully malleable. Sylvia's vitality must have been at a low ebb, and Mrs. Garstin's inspired guesses at a love promise between her and Philip and a romance inexplicably broken must have reached a high level of accuracy, for the younger woman did not take the trouble to deny them or to rebuff the insinuations of the old wretch.

To do the Gorgon justice, it was Sylvia's stepmother and not Sylvia herself that she told what her son had written of Philip. There was a considerable degree of moral hardihood required for this, but as Sylvia had by this time gone back to Town and was not available for the purpose, it had to be Madge or nobody.

During a crowded "bun worry" at the vicarage some little time later, the Gorgon edged her way through the throng towards Madge's side.

"My *dear* Mrs. Dean," she mouthed. "There is something that I think it is my duty to tell you."

Her whole manner exuded that triumphant pleasure at the misfortunes of others which can best be expressed by the German word "schadenfreude." She dropped her

voice and drew the reluctant Madge into the corner to tell the story of Sylvia and the Vicar's son, as she had relentlessly pieced it together from inquiries here and there. It was not the first time the Gorgon had annoyed Madge by similar buttonholings, but in previous cases these had been aimed at discovering how much Madge would tell about her husband's patients. She tried to stop her interlocutor.

"All this is very interesting, Mrs. Garstin, and you seem to know a great deal more about Sylvia's affairs than I do, or than herself even. But if, as you say, it was only a boy and girl engagement, why worry any more about it?"

"Oh, of course, my dear, if you would rather not, I'll say no more."

She had no such intention of course. The exclusive news she possessed was far too toothsome to remain half told. Madge tried more sarcasm.

"It is very good of you to take such a motherly interest in Sylvia," she began.

"Then I won't repeat what Georgie told me. However, as Sylvia's affections are being played fast and loose with, and you seem to know nothing of what is going on, I thought it might help you to make up your mind how to act."

Thereupon out comes Georgie's letter from the crinkling bodice of his mother. Madge was still at a loss how to handle the situation. She had already been as rude to the Gorgon as she knew how to be. With the exception of Harold Jersey, a nice medical student at the hospital of whom Sylvia had written and spoken once or twice recently, she had always imagined her husband's daughter to be entirely heart-free. It piqued her that Sylvia should have been engaged all this time to a man—the Vicar's son, to boot—and said nothing to her.

She half capitulated and listened.

Mrs. Garstin read aloud from the letter:

"That man Harkness, whose people you say you know in Birnam, has just been down in Bangkok. He

got wounded up-country, hit in the arm he was, and the chap who was with him was killed outright. Burmese dacoits. You must have seen it in the papers. The other man's name was Morland. He was in the Bombeo Bornay Company. Harkness has been quite queer since his accident. When I saw him last he struck me as being a bit changed. Not that he ever was an average normal sort of chap at the best of times even."

She folded up the letter triumphantly.

"But I don't want this to go any further," she added. "The Harknesses know nothing about this yet, and it has not been in any Home paper."

Madge said nothing for a moment. Then she gave a little matter of fact sigh and a shrug.

"Poor fellow! An experience like that is enough to turn anybody's brain."

"Just what my Georgie says, my dear. I quite agree with you," remarked Mrs. Garstin, gratified that she had at last pierced Mrs. Dean's indifference.

"It may be that this dreadful accident has turned the poor boy's brain and he is not responsible for breaking off with Sylvia."

"In any case," concluded Madge, "Sylvia is much too young to be thinking of marriage yet. I hope young Harkness will soon get over the trouble and they will patch things up."

"Oh, yes, I do sincerely hope so," gushed Mrs. Garstin.

But Madge had recovered her presence of mind.

"And now, Mrs. Garstin, I want to tell *you* something. You have been poking your nose into everybody's affairs ever since you came here. You have told me something about Sylvia I did not know and did not want to know until she thought fit to tell me herself. I suppose you think I ought to be grateful to you, but I am not. Not a bit! I suppose you will now jolly well embroider this malicious story of Sylvia's having been jilted by the Vicar's son, and spread it all over Birnam. I can't stop you doing that. But there is one thing I

can do. I can tell my servants not to admit you to my house in future. And what is more, I am going to give these orders as soon as I can get home again. Let me out of this awful scrum!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE IDYLL OF A SIAMESE PRINCESS

About a week after Garstin's disagreeable visit Philip went, at Santall's invitation, to dine at Mess 73.

"Where's Nempont to-night?" was his first question as he looked around the familiar surroundings of the Mess dining-room.

"Oh, Nempont! He's always out," replied Santall. "Never comes to a single meal in Mess nowadays. Affairs of heart, I suppose."

"He's a terror," assented Philip.

"I asked you to-night," went on Santall, "partly out of selfishness, because I knew I would be alone. Garstin is dining out at one 'of the best houses'—and I know you and Garstin don't hit it off very well."

They fell to talking of many things, of their work and their pay and prospects, of the people then in Bangkok, of the comings and goings in the colony, of the surprising number of changes since Philip's spell in the Salween, of the expense and steaminess and alcoholism of life in the Capital, of the difficulties with servants and with natives generally, of sport, of botany, and one or two other intellectual subjects they had in common, notably a wholesome and wholesale admiration of the writings of R. L. Stevenson.

"Take a pew," suggested Santall after dinner.

Thence, installed each in a long chair, they had quietly drifted to confidences of the folks at home. These,

curiously enough, were for the most part on Santall's side.

"You engaged?" the latter inquired of Harkness in the off-hand, broken form of phrasing affected by one Englishman to another, especially when skirting the fringe of subjects more sacred than ordinary.

As here recorded the question sounds abrupt, but it wove itself naturally enough into the conversation then proceeding between the two men.

Yet somehow it startled Philip.

He looked hard at his companion. It was only after having assured himself from the expression on the other's face that there was no evident *arrière pensée* in the query that he was able to reply with any equanimity.

"No," he said.

He would have added, "I *was* engaged once, but that is all off."

But a queer sense of delicacy towards the girl at Home restrained him. He had told no one but Morland about Sylvia Dean, and he did not see the necessity of reviving unprofitable ghosts at the present moment while remembrance was still raw.

"Jolly good thing for a young fellow—to be engaged—in many ways," his elder reflected. "Helps to keep him straight."

"I suppose it does," Philip replied in evident discomfort.

He was beginning to wonder if, after all, Santall were not talking at him.

"There are some men," Santall went on. "Somehow—it may be temperament, or early training—I don't know what. But they seem to find strict continence possible in this climate."

"Not many," interpolated Philip.

"And there are others who are enabled, through a boyish promise to some nice girl at Home—who seem to avoid drifting into the free and easy alliances with Siamese women which are so frequent out here. We

accept these things—we fellows—assuming, on the whole, that they are the only possible escape from physical solitude."

Philip was every moment growing more and more bewildered.

This sort of talk was so utterly unlike the Santall he had known of old. He remembered Santall's reluctance to discuss with his junior the many questions which had agitated Philip. That was at his first arrival, when Harkness had heard the call of impatient blood, warmed and harassed by the sun, and with the way to gratification smoothed and pandered to by the facility of opportunity and by the easy-going morality of the Siamese.

He laughed uneasily.

"You may remember my discussing this subject with you once. One evening it was—going to the Bioscope," he said. "It was I who started the topic on that occasion, for I had just been revolted by an example of sordid sensuality."

Santall nodded his remembrance of the Mae Champhi incident.

"I have thought things over since I went North," Philip went on. "I have seen so many white men and brown women. I have seen many unions, lightly undertaken and as lightly dissolved. For myself, my first predominant impression at the outset was, curiously enough, one of simple repugnance."

"Oh that!" exclaimed Santall. "That's merely the instinctive revulsion which differences of colour arouse, no matter what race."

"Now I can see that the 'mia' is simply a way, *faute de mieux* out of difficulty."

"You mean——"

"I mean, this is no country to bring a white woman to. Happiness in a place like this depends almost entirely on how you keep your health. And very few white women can stand the climate of Bangkok or the hardship of up-country. Besides the expense of living——"

"Oh, but things have very much improved lately," Santall countered his statement. "Not so much as regards expense of living but ill-health. Bangkok has not really got a bad climate. It is not a health resort, of course, but nearly all the sickness in the past was due to bad *bandobast* (arrangements), principally bad water. But now we have a pure water supply. And look at the number of men who have got married lately. Think—among your own acquaintances even."

Philip cast his mind over the fresh faces he had noticed since his return from up-country. He had to admit that most of the newcomers were English girls, newly married to men who, two years before, he had know as bachelors—men who, two years ago, had maintained as stoutly what he himself was repeating now about the impossibility of bringing a white wife to Siam.

"Yes. There seems to have been an epidemic of Benedicts round these parts lately," he had to confess.

"And do you know why?" Santall went on triumphantly. "Do you think all these men would have rushed and got married if they had still thought there was no chance of their wives' remaining well in this climate?"

Philip's mind went back to Morland's married life.

He thought of the tragedies he had witnessed or heard of around him in former days, and those he had skirted among the few married households he had come to know—the sickly European women, bearing pale, white-faced children, sometimes only to lay their little ones under the sod for ever in the dismal Protestant Cemetery at Bantawai; husbands and wives, like Morland and his bride, after a few years of happiness snatched desperately from Fate, separated inevitably by the exigencies of the climate and their children's up-bringing; the strain of maintaining two households, one in England and one in Siam—while, at the back of all, the eternal dread, haunting and ever present, of being invalided Home themselves perhaps, and falling sick before they had been able to scrape enough to retire on and provide for their family—all these early misgivings which he himself had voiced to

Sylvia and experience had hardened into settled convictions.

"Too early yet to judge," he summed up. "Bangkok may have changed vastly. It may be healthier than it used to be with all these water and drains improvements——"

"Anyhow," said Santall, "I'm going to give it two more years' trial, and then I'm going to get married myself on my next leave Home."

"Really!" Philip's cup of astonishment was full.

His idea had been that Santall, in broaching the subject of engagements, had been hinting at himself and Sylvia and the change which Rarouey had wrought in the spirit of that dream. He was quite mistaken then!

Santall had been merely leading up to this momentous announcement.

"I say, old man. I congratulate you! I hope you will be very happy, I'm sure."

"Thanks very much," said Santall, blushing like any flapper, and running his hand with a characteristic gesture through the few scanty hairs he still had on top.

"I've paid off my Siamese girl," he added.

There was a pause.

Love conquers all things, thought Philip, and here was Santall—changed entirely, and speaking spontaneously of the one subject he had formerly been wont to keep in the outermost background of his life.

Harkness did not know what remark would be apposite in reply to this last piece of information. He might have said, "Of course," but he did not.

To cover his confusion he started on a curious tack.

"Siamese women—the Bangkok ones I mean——" he said hurriedly. "They never made any appeal to me whatever. Somehow, they do not possess any of the disturbing elements of sex which women, in other ages and other circumstances, have known how to utilise for the pursuit and domination of the partner that Nature is ever urging her to capture."

"You talk like John Tanner of 'Superman,'" remarked

Santall, laughing at Philip's diatribe. "But go on! Let's hear what you've got against Siamese women. Only chuck the tin of cigarettes over here first."

Philip threw the cigarettes across the room. Santall, like so many men one meets in the East, was a cigarette fiend, intoxicating himself mildly all day on a long and steady succession of weeds.

"Siamese women?" Philip pursued his theme. "I've nothing particular against them except that they have nothing distinctly feminine about them."

This is true. With their short-cropped hair, and their hideously betel-stained teeth, and garbed in their national and peculiar dress, the *phanung*—a species of knicker-bocker all in one piece, worn by both sexes—Siamese women are to most newcomers almost indistinguishable from the men.

"Oh, you've been casting invidious eyes, after seeing Lao girls," said Santall. "These Northern women are far prettier than the Siamese of the South, in a womanly kind of way, of course. But habits are changing amongst the Siamese. The present custom of wearing the hair long has grown out of a fashion set in the Palace. And every Siamese lady cleans her teeth after chewing betel now. . . ."

He broke off and smiled at himself.

His mind returned to the girl in England of whom he was so full that evening.

"But here! This won't do. If my fiancée heard me going on like this about ideals of feminine beauty—my, wouldn't she just tear my hair!"

A caller was announced.

"Who is it?" asked Santall, turning to the domestic.

The Boy was mumbling something about the "Consul *Farrangset*" when the visitor whom he was trying to describe entered. The two men in the room could hear the throbbing of more than one motor car outside.

"You excuse ze libertee," said the newcomer, looking round as if he had expected to find someone, but could not see him present in the room.

"Certainly," said Santall rising from his chair.

"I call at an unseemingly hour, but my beesness is ver' importan'."

"Hello! It's you, Blondel," cried Santall, recognising the speaker. "Come in! Sit down. What will you have to drink?"

Philip did not know the Frenchman, who, having caught sight of him, now stood waiting to be introduced.

"Oh! Sorry!" said Santall. "I didn't remember that you two men did not know each other. Harkness of the Forests—Mossoo Blondel, the French Vice-consul."

Blondel thereupon sat down, and immediately plunged into the reason of his visit. He was as embarrassed as it was possible for him to be. He stared round the room at frequent intervals, and he played nervously with an unlighted cigarette.

"Monsieur Nempont? He is at home zis evenin'—yes?"

"No," replied Santall. "Did you want to see him?"

"We-el, ye-es, I did," stammered Blondel.

"Won't you wait? Perhaps he'll be along presently. He's dining out somewhere."

Blondel sprang to his feet.

"Are you sure?" he asked. "He may be in his rooms."

Santall was growing astonished at the man's impatient nervousness.

"I don't think so," he said. "I saw him go out at four, and he hasn't come back, to my knowledge. But if you like I'll send the Boy to look."

"You will excuse," broke in Blondel. "But may I—you permit—zat I look myself."

"Well, I'm damned!"

The exclamation came from Santall, who jumped out of his chair to follow Blondel. The latter had not waited for permission to search Nempont's rooms, but was already on his way upstairs.

Philip did not accompany the two other men, but lay in

his chair wondering what the dickens Nempont had been up to now. His vice-consul would not have disturbed the Mess at that hour to seek his amorous compatriot had nót something out of the ordinary been forward.

Santall and Blondel a few moments later came downstairs, the latter talking excitably. They had evidently not found Nempont.

"Zen I go on board ze 'Donai!'" ejaculated Blondel.

"But you haven't told me yet what's up," Santall protested, looking more and more bewildered.

Blondel waved his hand as if to signify that there was no time to be lost at the moment in explanations.

He turned to Santall.

"Vill you do me ze favour, and come wiz me to ze steamer?" he asked. "You are ze friend, ze Mess friend of Monsieur Nempont."

"Why, yes!" agreed Santall after a pause. "I will, if you want me. But——"

"I have a car," Blondel interrupted him. "I will tell you as we go along. Mistaire—your—guest—he will excuse——"

Philip had begun to have an inkling of what the chase meant. He remembered what Garstin had told him some days before about Nempont.

"Do you mind if I come along too?" he asked Blondel. "I know Mr. Nempont well," he added.

So they went out together.

At the step they found two cars waiting. In one of these were seated Prince Rajapreuk and his wife—names which they learnt afterwards indirectly, for Blondel either forgot, or purposely omitted, to introduce the Europeans to his Siamese companions.

Blondel went up and said something in Siamese to the two figures in the car, and Harkness thought he caught the words:

"He is not here! These are two friends of his who live in the same house. They may be of some use in talking him round."

The three Europeans then entered the other car, and on the way to the wharf the excited Frenchman gave an outline of what his nocturnal errand betokened.

"It is a razzer difficult, a delicate matter. I tried to prevent ze possible scandale. Monsieur Nempont—but perhaps you know already—he has formed ze intimacy wiz Mom Ying Utha Sakdi—ze daughter of ze formaire Siamese Ambassador in Paris."

Santall whistled, and then laughed awkwardly.

"Yes. I had heard about it. What's happened now?" he asked.

"Zis evenin' ze parents—zey come to me and tell me ze princess 'ave disappear. Zey 'ave learn from the gharry driver who tells zat he drove ze young lady here to your Mess——"

"Good lord!" Philip and Santall came out with the simultaneous expression of amazement.

"But, as you see, she is not zere, nor is Nempont."

"And you think——"

"I zink zey 'ave gone on board ze 'Donai.' She will be sailing to-night."

Santall was not so surprised now that he had the details and could fill in the method of Blondel's apparent madness.

When they reached the wharf of the company to which the steamer belonged, they were able, after considerable delay, to hail sampans in which they put out on the dark waters of the Menam, choppy under a freshening breeze.

The distracted parents had not said a word, and they now sat in a sampan looking out into the darkness for the vessel's hull. While they were being poled along in the flat-bottomed gondola, Blondel added the information that it was essential the lady should be persuaded to return to her parents before the next morning, when the King was expected back from a trip down the coast.

Should the news come to the ear of his Majesty, there would be indignation and censure, if not disgrace, for the father of the erring daughter. Santall and Philip, know-

ing how strongly the Siamese upper classes feel on the subject of mixed marriages from their ranks with Europeans, could realise how highly important it was that Nempont and his lady be made to listen to reason.

In the sampan Philip started trying to recall any previous instance of a European having become implicated in a similar sense with a Siamese lady of high degree. But, though he could remember several cases of Siamese Royalties having inter-married with German, Russian, and even English ladies, he could not find a single instance parallel with the intrigue now at issue.

As they neared the ship they could see that steam was up, and most of the lighters had already cleared from its side.

The lovers had chosen their time well, and had they arrived a few moments later, the pursuers would have been too late to affect the elopement.

Once on deck they could see that some excitement prevailed. Raised voices came from the bridge, and thither Blondel made his way.

Under the light stood Nempont in excited conversation with an officer, the Captain, and beside them a slight figure shrouded in a cloak, whom Philip instantly guessed must be the truant Princess.

The lady turned as if to flee.

Nempont put out a hand and restrained her, and during the ensuing passages he remained with one hand protectingly on her shoulder.

Blondel started speaking rapidly in French.

"Bon soir, Messieurs——" And then he added, "Et Mademoiselle!"

He did not forget the courtesy of his race, but his voice had a ring of stern authority. It was clear he was addressing Nempont and the Captain of the "Donai" as a Consul his nationals.

"You will pardon this intrusion," he began. "But the parents of this lady here have invoked my assistance. You—Captain know who she is, and I presume Monsieur

Nempont has been trying to persuade you to give them a passage."

The Captain bowed.

"That is so," he answered curtly.

"Well, I am here now as your Consul to ask you both not to commit such a *bêtise*. You—Captain must know that this lady is of high birth, indeed a niece of the King. You—Monsieur Nempont know that the step you propose taking is quite out of the question, for——"

Nempont interposed smoothly.

"Eh bien, mon cher," he said. "Since you are so well aware of my intentions, would you be good enough to state what you imagine I mean to do?"

"Now, Nempont, don't be silly!" Blondel cried, rapidly losing patience.

He lowered his voice so as to be heard by Nempont alone.

"You know perfectly well there will be the deuce of a rumpus if you go off with the girl. She is not of your nation. What is more, she is of royal birth, and closely related to the King of this country—and—and——"

"And if we married it would be damned awkward for lots of people," Nempont helped him out.

"Exactly!"

There was a pause.

Blondel was scrutinising his compatriot's face to discover whether he meant to listen to reason or not. Philip had followed the sense of most that had been said.

Suddenly Nempont turned on him.

"Ah!" he cried in English. "What have we here? My old Mess mates have done me ze honour of coming to see me off—to wish me bon voyage."

"Not a bit of it!" was Santall's heated retort. "We have come here from the bosom of our family to ask you not to be a blamed idiot. You surely know you can't do this sort of thing, Nempont——"

"And you? Mon cher Phillippe?" Nempont turned away from Santall to his companion. "Vat do you here?"

"I am jiggered if I know," replied Philip. "But if my opinion has any weight with you, I would like to ask you not to be a fool over a woman, as you seem bent on being——"

Nempont broke out laughing.

"Fool about a woman, eh?" he repeated. "So you ask me not to be as you yourself have been."

Philip coloured up hotly under the insinuation. Nempont laughed again.

"Ah, well, never mind!" he went on. "We are both —what you say—in ze same box. We are both ze victims of *hlong*. You take me?"

"I don't see what that has got to do——"

"Don't you, my friend? Well, I will tell you. I am escaping now the pursuit of a woman who love me to distraction. Malheureusement, unfortunately I do not—what you call—reciprocate. I prefer my little Princess here. Wiz her at least zere is some semblance of mutual affection, is it not so——" and he squeezed the arm of the girl by his side.

"But, my dear chap, it's all nonsense——" Santall broke in.

"And," Nempont went on, waving the interruption aside with a gesture. "I take her now to Hong Kong—and afterwards to America. Zere we will be receive wiz ze open arms by all society. Moi, Jean Marie Nempont, who speak to you here and now—I shall be ze first European zat 'ave married into ze Royal Familee of Siam. Regard me!"

The Captain and Blondel, who, in the meanwhile, had been talking rapidly together at some distance from the others, now broke off and came towards them. Blondel was manifestly out of temper.

"Messieurs," said the Captain, saluting. "Do you desire, any of you gentlemen—to go to Hong Kong on my ship? Otherwise, I must ask you to descend on land. We sail immediately."

Blondel broke in with an angry exclamation.

"I will telegraph to Paknam, and have you stopped!" he threatened.

"You know you cannot," answered the Captain, smiling at the discomforture of the Consul. "My papers are all in order."

"I will wireless to the flagship at Hanoi, and have you intercepted in mid-ocean. You will have cause to repent disobeying me!"

"Perhaps!" the Captain retorted, turning his back on the party.

He seemed to have the situation well in hand.

A whistle was blown and answered forrard.

The whizz of steam in the winch raising the anchor could be heard. The Captain pulled the handle of the engine-room telegraph over, and the answering bell rang. He turned and came back to the people on the bridge.

"Those for the shore please descend!" he commanded briefly.

And before they knew almost what was happening, Blondel, Santall, Harkness, and the Prince and his wife were bundled downstairs into their sampans, and found themselves bobbing in the wake of the "Donai" which was turning in mid-stream.. . . The truants escaped, and ultimately did reach America. Their going caused a nine days' sensation in Bangkok. As everyone had anticipated, the Royal displeasure was visited on the parents of Mom Ying Utha Sakdi, but nothing could avail to bring her back to the charmed circle which she had quitted for the sake of Nempont.

Blondel was flouted and furious, gnashing his teeth at the foolishness he had been unable to prevent by all the majesty of the law, even when aided by a frantic message to the French Admiral on the China station.

Philip had wondered at Nempont's reference to himself as the victim of unrequited affection on the part of a Siamese lady other than the one he had so daringly carried off. Some discreet inquiries, however, showed that little Jean-Marie had not been romancing, and there was actually a lady (the wife of a well-known Siamese judge)

who regretted the departure of the Provençal, and lived in dread of the vengeance of the *phi* that had bewitched her.

The case made an extraordinary impression on Rarouey.

CHAPTER XVIII

GOLD AND INCENSE

Now, although Rarouey had thus come and laid, unasked, the gold and incense of her beautiful body (if not the casket of her wayward heart) at Philip's feet for him to leave or take—there were two things which, in the years of their life together, she never confessed to the European.

One was the belief that some evil spirit had laid a spell upon her, and that she was obliged to follow this man of an alien race wherever he went, or face the awful death which awaits a disobedient woman so bewitched.

This she knew and never doubted.

But she never once admitted the fears that possessed her, so long as she kept Philip by her side. In Siam, the woman, in such conditions, will hardly ever openly avow to her man the fact that she is the victim of a supernatural infatuation, partly from shame at her position as the petitioner, but most of all from a dread of angering the *phi* that has caught her.

This extraordinary belief may strike a European reader as incredible and easily broken down, but to this day it is not infrequently met with among the Siamese. It seems possible that a woman, in such circumstances, by taking the physical and natural attraction which the man of her choice exerts over her, hysterically magnifies it to such an extent that, to her mind, it assumes the character of an impulse beyond herself.

Whatever its origin, however, such a passion, mingling as it does the glory of love with the halo of sacrifice, that some Being of the spiritual world has impressed on her affections, is wholly over-mastering in any woman.

In some cases, the woman concerned gives up much beyond her reputation to follow a good-for-nothing scamp —very often an actor—who treats her like a dog ; but in the generality of such afflictions, the man also has an appreciation of the other's position as the prey of ghostly machinations, and returns an embarrassed gratitude at least for the unbidden love cast before him.

In the union of Philip and Rarouey, we have seen what influences and forces impelled the Englishman for his part. But Philip had no inkling of the strange processes fermenting in the psychology of this girl by reason of the " spell " she imagined had been cast upon her. Philip, even less than other Europeans with brown wives, never understood Rarouey at all.

Had he been able to penetrate the recesses of her queer tangle of feelings, he might not have been flattered.

He was after all merely necessary to her to avoid the consequences of the philtre she believed had been given, she knew not by whom. Philip did not know that fact, and he might have been disillusioned also to learn that Rarouey simply followed the foreigner and became his slave lest she should anger the spirit who had so ordained her devotion.

A pure child of nature, with a certain wild kink, Rarouey, when she had first seen Philip in company with Morland on the Meping river, had been conscious of nothing but a faint aversion. To her, at that moment, Philip Harkness was merely a *farang*, a man of different colour, travelling in company with the man whom Mong Poh Lan, her father, accused as accountable for his poverty.

Philip's *beaux yeux* had made absolutely no appeal to her on that first occasion. At the time her energies had been too set upon the task of giving Morland a piece of

her mind, and her mind too concentrated on expressing its own vehemence in that fiery but fruitless outburst, to take much stock of Morland's youthful companion.

At that date too, Ai Seng had not yet deserted her, and for all her twenty years, Rarouey was already a mature woman and a mother and beyond the stage of falling in love with anyone of her own people at first sight, much less a European.

To trace the change that had supervened in her regard for Philip subsequently would be difficult, and to demonstrate the causes thereof would be well nigh impossible. If reasons were as plenteous as blackberries one would give no woman a reason on compulsion.

It is said that no one can follow the workings of an Eastern mind. As a rule, and from a conventional belief, most people are prone to give an Oriental credit for a great deal more subtlety than really exists in his reasonings. With an Oriental woman it is perhaps simpler, for there the apparently inexplicable can be put down always in the last resort to the wayward vagaries of caprice and unthinking feminine impulse.

In any event, the fact remains that Rarouey's feelings towards Philip changed and softened.

After Ai Seng had abandoned her, and by the time her mother had brought her to the tent in the Huey Toh, she could at least tolerate the friend of her father's most bitter enemy. Her infatuation had then already commenced. It had come to her one night—from nowhere; and it had laid hold of her with all the terror a "spell" can create in her primitive and fatalistic race.

Paramount in her emotions thereafter had been the idea of atonement for some offence in a previous Karma. This expiation was to be fulfilled through herself. It was dictated by the spirit of some person she believed she had previously wronged; and in her own body alone and by the surrender of her self was forgiveness to be accomplished. In that the *hlong* in her case was directed upon a European and towards Philip in particular she had guessed the sin must be a grievous one. . . .

Then she had seen the dacoity committed.

She had followed her father from their house on the night in question, and had watched the shot fired which had pierced Morland's throat with such instant effect.

Morland, she felt, had had his deserts. She had no intention of rounding on her father, though she was hardly savage enough to escape the feeling that it was incumbent upon her to mitigate the effect of his violence as far as regarded Philip.

And now (though the idea of vicarious sacrifice is contrary to all that Buddhism teaches and the spirit of her race maintains) Rarouey nevertheless became convinced that a double duty lay upon her.

The first was to win forgiveness for her own sins in a previous incarnation, and the other was to atone for the fault of her father in slaying Morland. Both would be attained by wifely devotion to Morland's friend. That was why she came to Philip's aid and nursed him in the tent at the Huey.

Physically, it is true, Philip the youth with the clear blue eyes and short-cropped curling hair, was not unattractive to her. She knew too that his life so far had held no complications in Siam through another woman's presence. Not that that would have made any difference to her, but it invested him with a certain charm.

Through her, in short, there ran a strain of that mystical sensuousness which one associates with the Celt and the Slav in Europe. Some observers have noticed the trait in natives of the Far East. Rarouey possibly inherited it from her Shan forbears, those men of the Northerly mountain uplands that lie beyond Upper Burma.

Her attitude was, therefore, not wholly that of the woman-huntress in nature.

She had no need of the love that, mating, satisfies ; and, to do her justice in one particular at least, she did not seek out this Englishman from the ordinary motives of gain which animate most of her sisters in allying themselves with a European. She never harassed Philip with

demands for money and jewellery. She did not seek to feather her nest with foreign gold.

Love sought is good, but love unsought is misfortune. The psychology of this Oriental woman and the degrees by which she arrived at her self-abandonment were hardly parallel to the seasonal hysteria one sees sometimes in her white sisters : yet, in some senses, it was not dissimilar to the delusion of an impulse beyond oneself (religious even) which one frequently hears expressed in the passion of highly nervous Western Women. . . .

On the last evening of the Christmas Meeting at Laowieng when Morland had fallen asleep on the seat by the Brunei landing stage, the colloquy overheard by Philip between two women in the boat near by—in which the mention of the word *hlong* had puzzled him—had been a conversation held between Rarouey and her mother, Mae Noi. But, so well did she conceal from her foreign lover all idea of an infatuation forced upon her that Philip, to the end, never lit upon the possibility of Rarouey's having been one of the women in the boat that night.

Once indeed she almost betrayed herself.

" When I saw the Nai playing polo in Laowieng," she mentioned, explaining some incident she had set out to relate.

(In talking to Philip Rarouey, like every Siamese in addressing her husband, used the respectful form of reference in the third person. Philip, for his part, after a little, acquired the habit of employing the idiomatic " thee " and " thou " of address to a wife in Siam.)

" But dear one, when was that? " Philip asked, idly stroking her hair. " I don't remember."

" No. My lord was too busy, but I saw him all the same, then and many other times."

" That must have been when I first went to Laowieng. Why camest thou to the town then? Or was it last cold season when I came over for the Meeting? "

And then she lied to him.

In point of fact, she had seen Philip many times in Laowieng without his perceiving her. She had seen him

that evening too after the meeting when her mother's expostulations had reduced her to tears in the boat. Morland's exclamation on stirring from his drowse had revealed the presence of the two Europeans on the river bank. Her mother had been convinced that they had overheard. How much did Philip know?

She was on dangerous ground, if she was to keep her secret. He must not know. He must not suspect. She lied.

"Yes, that was when the *Nai* first came to Laowieng. I went up with my father. He had business with the Company."

. . . And one other secret she held from him. She had heard Poh Lan and his confederates planning the dacoity. Philip often tried to make her explain why she had come so promptly to the tent after the attack.

"Did'st see the shooting, Rarouey?" he asked, not once but many times.

And she invariably gave the same reply.

"Nay. I heard it only. And then I saw the *Nai's* servants, the chicken-hearted ones, stricken with fear, come running through the village saying: 'The dacoits are upon us.' So I came out of my house at night and went towards the Huey Toh."

"And then?"

"There I saw the light of the camp-fire burning, and the Nai seated asleep, with a *dah* across his knees. The dog would hardly let me approach the Nai. But the dog was very sick and had been poisoned."

"But then, thou must have carried me into the tent?"

"Yes," she said without a blush. "And undressed the Nai, and put him to bed like a very child. But it is nothing. Let us not talk of that bad time. The Nai is now safe."

In this, however, Philip was not so easily deluded as in the matter of the *hlong*. He had a suspicion amounting to a certainty that Poh Lan had been implicated in the

dacoity, but whether he actually took part in the firing was not so clear.

After a few months' search Larsen had arrested Poh Lan, Pannya and Ai Seng, together with several other notorious characters in the Mae Chem. A little torture such as Orientals alone know how to apply to recalcitrant witnesses had sufficed to break down Ai Chawk's bluster of complete ignorance. The malicious inn-keeper had turned King's evidence.

"Yes! Yes! I will tell all," he had cried, foreseeing release in the Gendarmes' approving nod.

"I saw it all," he related. "They came—Pannya, and Ai Seng to the camp of the *farangs*. In the darkness. They crawled up behind the tent. First one fired one shot. Then many shots were fired. . . .

"One of the *farangs* fell—Poh Lan kept watch. He was down by the creek all the time. He had no gun. The others had pistols—Brownings.

"Then they rushed in to loot. There was much money in the tent. They got in by the back of the tent. They dragged the money boxes from under the bed.

"But they could not get the boxes quickly loose. Then suddenly the servants of the Nai were seen coming up with lights." (In reality they mistook Philip returning alone from the creek with the torch and the bucket of water.)

"And then?"

"Well that settled them! They dropped the boxes. They ran cursing out of the hut. I saw it all. I was hiding. I heard them planning the robbery, in the afternoon. I crawled up behind them when they went to shoot."

There was certainly an uncomfortable ten minutes during the trial at which Philip had to be present. Ai Seng, in the course of his statement, had pointed to the man he had tried to kill.

"Rarouey was my wife. That farang took her away from me."

Then content with seeing Philip's embarrassment, and

pleased with the sensation he had caused in Court, he had continued :

"But he's welcome to her! She will bring him trouble—the little vixen! She is no longer of our race. She has disgraced herself, going after a European as she has done."

Philip jumped to his feet.

"May it please the Court, I am ready to produce the woman Rarouey as a witness at any moment. She will testify that the man is lying, and that he abandoned her."

There was a slight titter in Court as Philip sat down, blushing.

He felt bound to make the disagreeable offer after the sensational reference to Rarouey.

There was a short consultation.

The Prosecution declined the proposal, they having abundant evidence to cite. Ai Seng too declined the offer, and finally the Court ruled his statement as irrelevant, and the proceedings went on.

The upshot was that Ai Seng, who after Ai Chawk's evidence, had openly boasted in Court that he had killed Morland, was condemned and executed. Pannya received a life sentence, while Poh Lan, chiefly because it was impossible to prove his possession of a Browning pistol similar to those which had been used in the shooting, or indeed of any weapon whatever, received two years.

Morland was thus avenged, as far as human justice could avenge. But Philip was not satisfied. Morland was dead and he was conscious that in taking Rarouey, as he had, into his life he had committed an act from which the other might have saved him. But it was done now. There was no going back on it. Sometimes, at night when Philip remembered that the woman who now lay sleeping peacefully by his side and who was sharing his life in those days had once been mated with a murderer and the slayer of his own dearest friend he would experience a shudder. But even that feeling passed with time.

CHAPTER XIX

LITTLE DAYLIGHT

THEIRS was a curious relationship. At this stage Harkness seldom paused to divine the trend of his innermost feelings in regard to the woman who had entered his life. His love was essentially the child of loneliness. Affection there certainly was at the outset, and this deepened, as it nearly always deepens, with the habit of matrimony.

On the man's side, as has been seen, love was strongly tinged with a sense of gratitude, but even that feeling could not always still a sub-conscious prompting in Philip (perhaps a relic of Lister's influence) that he had demeaned himself and the traditions of his colour by union with this child of a primitive race, inferior to his own.

They had gone back to Hminelongyi. The Department, when they had found Harkness ill-disposed to take a trip Home on sick leave, had agreed to his returning to that post, congratulating themselves on thereby saving money which they had quite anticipated having to spend.

At times, for all the mirage that deluded his eyes, Philip would be subject to unexpected revulsions at some trait exhibited by Rarouey. At almost every turn she could shock and astonish him by the combination of childishness and subtlety which she revealed in complex variety.

He wearied too of the effort to find an intellectual bond with her. It is true that for a spell her cajolery and

playful tenderness could charm his weaker moments, but he never came near to realising that intimate contact of the spirit which he dreamt of finding in love.

Philip was no intellectual. He had, however, a certain taste for the refined pleasure of human artistry and expression. He had read much in a desultory manner, and with men like Morland he had been able to discuss a variety of subjects in a manner widened by his own intelligent observation and memory. (The other jungle-wallahs he had met, of course, were more limited, and their interest seemed seldom to stray outside teak and polo.)

But to interest Rarouey, even superficially, in the things that pleased him most, would have meant years of training and an environment totally dissimilar to that amid which she had passed her life before meeting him.

He gave up the attempt.

Then he remembered being struck by a scene witnessed in the Sarcombe *ménage*. Sarcombe, it will be remembered, was Lister's predecessor at the Consulate in Laowieng and Philip spent some days with him at Lampang.

There, once in a casual leisure hour, he had come upon Sarcombe, seated in a long chair and with his exceedingly pretty Lao wife by his side.

The two were idly turning over the pages of an Oxford Street jeweller's catalogue, and picking out the gauds they each preferred, finding infinite pleasure in the pastime. Recalling this, Philip, after he had wearied of finding any more complex topics, had on one occasion attempted to interest Rarouey in a similar manner.

But even this failed. To his disconcertment, his efforts provoked no enthusiasm whatever. The "girl" was not like other *mias,* and all his offers to write and order any of the articles she would like only met with coy but quite indifferent response.

"*Sut thae tae Nai*" (just as my lord pleases), Rarouey would say.

One thing interested her always however. Before the child came her aim and pleasure had been the consulting

of Harkness' physical comforts. She quickly learnt his habits and his preferences, and she gradually ousted the Boy from many of the domestic functions he had been used to perform, such as laying out clean clothes in the morning or putting in the studs of his dress shirt on the rare occasions when Philip dined out.

Gradually, too, she took over the supervision of the household and brought it from bachelor haphazard into something of the regularity which feminine control always ensures.

Harkness would find her knitting her pretty brows in the effort to learn sewing, or burning her little fingers in the wielding of an iron on his linen. Later on, when he saw that it furnished Rarouey's somewhat vacant hours with occupation, the English husband let his Siamese bride assume the whole responsibility of domestic arrangement both up and down stairs.

There ensued some breezes with the Chinese cook and a series of resignations by a quick succession of offended Boys who found their prerogatives of "squeeze" being thus ruthlessly invaded and curtailed; but the resultant economy in the daily marketing expenses and the comfort of his table shewed Harkness that Rarouey possessed that genius for housekeeping which is the primordial instinct of the feminine heart.

He found, moreover, that his appreciation of these services, even if only expressed by the reward of a tap on her soft cheek and a light jesting word or two could bring a flush of pleasure to Rarouey's face which delighted and surprised him. For all this faithfulness and every-day service Harkness was grateful without ever letting it become an accepted habit, a matter of course, to be disregarded and unthanked.

Man is mostly an animal, when all is said and done. And the woman who can minister to a man's daily wants and at the same time charm him with a dainty grace of manner, if with nothing else, has taken a considerable step, albeit on a lowly plane, towards the marriage of true minds.

But there were impediments in the present case.

Life, to civilised man with some pretensions to culture, is not wholly a matter of comfort or of satisfaction in the daily, natural wants, with an added casual pleasure in the grace of some soft, playful household pet beguiling leisure moments. So Philip Harkness soon realised that the companionship, the sympathy, and all the bonds of union which the man from the West demands of the partner by his side could never come from the woman who had elected so romantically to throw in her lot with his.

It was a dismal night when little *Sawang* (daylight) came to this world, a funny little being with the dark hair of his mother, and a lighter skin than most Laos, but still not quite the same tint as even the Southern European.

The night he was born Harkness had a bad attack of the "blues," that malady which the white dweller in the tropics experiences to a different degree, and to which he is more prone than under familiar skies.

A bagatelle can induce a violent fit of the doldrums in a European amid Eastern surroundings. A touch of fever, the slightest malaise of body will send the spirits down to zero, and then all the goblins of dark thoughts begin to flutter about the chambers of the mind.

Rain had fallen without intermission as rain can fall only in Siam, for hours and hours, beginning in the late afternoon just at the moment when the jaded town-dweller, back from a listless day in his office, would fain sally out to exercise his flaccid muscles in the open air—and cannot for stress of weather. Penned in the house all evening Harkness tried in vain to distract his mind from the sound that betokened how this strange woman was fighting her battle against pain in order that she might bring into being the little life that should perpetuate their love.

The rain had ceased at last, and the bull-frogs in the marshes took up their chorus of "Euang-ang"—that

rainy season dirge like the creaking and groaning of a hundred rusted wheels set in motion against their will.

Philip lay stretched in a long chair, oozing perspiration at every pore and his scanty clothing wringing wet with the humidity of the air around him. His mind was a turmoil of fears and doubts and of an awful sense of responsibility bred of the significance of the act which was consummated under his roof that night.

This man child which had been born, he thought, would, if it lived, be always handicapped. Across its existence there ran an invidious bar which stood in the way of neither of its parents—the bar of its mixed race.

When it is a clear-cut matter of black or brown or yellow against a predominant white, the colour question is bad enough, but between the conflicts of all these there comes the unhappy lot of the half-caste, despised by Europeans and looked down upon by the Asiatic, always striving to qualify for the grade of his white parent, and always dragged back to the lower standard of his Oriental mother. Any such person finds a vast difference in the attitude of the European in Europe and the European in Asia towards his kind. In the former people are apt to be tolerant of, and indifferent to any mixture of race, but in the other fiercely antagonistic and contemptuous of anyone unfortunate enough to be unable to keep his blood pure.

Nothing matures certain natures more quickly than parenthood, and Harkness was one of these.

As he lay in his long chair that evening, his every limb aching in the grip of fever that had again laid its clutches upon him, listening first to the torrential boom and thunder of the tropic downpour and later to the diapason, irritating, monotonous and unceasing, of the bull-frogs, with the sub-motif of myriad, strident insects shrilling in the night—Philip, revolving many things in his mind, must have grown twelve years older in half as many hours.

Conscious, as most men are in such crises of enlightenment, that he was a powerless puppet in the hands of

some Fate which he could not control, driving him he knew not whither, he fell to re-calling the trifling circumstances which had altered the course of his life and sent him to the East. He tried to imagine what he might have become had he stayed at Home and escaped the influences which had brought him the love of Rarouey and the fatherhood of her child.

> "The little more, and how much it is;
> And the little less—and what worlds away!"

he quoted softly to himself.

But anyhow he would look after the little beggar to the best of his ability.

"I am glad it is a boy," he said to himself.

It would simplify matters considerably. He had seen what other men, similarly circumstanced, had done; and he was determined he would not send the child to Europe to be educated, to acquire a veneer of Western ideas and foreign polish, only to return again, disenchanted and disillusioned, cursing the misdirected preparation which had been given him for an all too difficult future.

And then the Danish captain Larsen came in breezily from a night patrol.

"Vell, my boy it is all goot finished, and you haf become the what you call son-and-heir."

Harkness uttered some words of thanks and poured out a whisky-soda for the bluff Larsen.

"Sit down, Larsen," he invited him. "And have a stengah. There are some cigars in that box. You must be tired having to go out in such a rotten night."

"Got bless you, no! Ach, but it is easy in dis country. No need of a doctor really, eggscept to prevent de old women from roasting de poor girl over a fire."

"Yes," said Philip with a smile. "I have heard of that barbarous Siamese custom on occasions like this, and there was an old hag around the other day wanting to sell me some new fangled Japanese fuel for the torture chamber. But I drove her away."

The Siamese, however, Larsen explained, are gradually giving up the habit of slowly roasting over a hot fire

a new made mother and her new born child, a practice which their forefathers considered absolutely essential to dispel the noxious *lom* (elements) and *phi* (evil spirits) concomitant with such occurrences.

After a few kindly words of counsel to the young fellow the Dane returned home and Philip, his trying vigil ended, crept upstairs to find a pathetic Rarouey lying, weak and half sleeping.

A lump came into his throat as he looked on the tiny morsel for whose immortal soul he was most seriously responsible.

He wondered what the poor little chap's life was going to be, the heritor of all the complexities in Occidental civilisation and imbued with all the instincts of an Oriental race near to Nature, yet with its quota of ethics, superstition and belief—the whole conflicting together in this tiny person.

The thought was too overwhelming and to Rarouey's "*Souey! Muean phaw!*" (a pretty child, just like its father) he found himself unable to return a single word of answer.

"He has blue eyes—see!" she added proudly. "And we will call him Sawang" (little Daylight).

He returned to his long chair, and lay there dozing and dreaming of what had happened.

The consciousness was increasing in his mind that the coming of this child had now forged an infrangible link in the chain that bound him to this country. The weariness of bewilderment sealed his eyes, and he dropped off to sleep as the dawn of another tropic morning broke mistily across the paddy flats between his house and the purple hills round Hminelongyi.

CHAPTER XX

HOME FOR GOOD

" My Dear Philip,

" You will have had the lawyer's letter telling you that cousin Jim has left you his place down here. It was most unexpected—both his death and his leaving you his property. We had not seen Jim much of recent years as he was always abroad, and you will hardly remember him. But, when you were quite a child he took a great fancy to you. I have never told you but he wanted very much at one time to marry me, and so he perhaps looked upon you as his own child. He never could bear to live in Birnam after I married your father, and that was the reason why he went abroad and was always travelling.

" Now, dear boy, you really must *come home——"*

Philip laid his mother's letter down.

From one high-ceiled room to another of the house in Hminelongyi that he was leaving for good on the morrow he began wandering to and fro, his mind beset by a confusion of recollections, impressions, hopes, regrets. His first feeling on receiving the letter from the family lawyer, telling him of the inheritance that had come to him so unexpectedly from a cousin of his mother's, had been one of resentment.

He did not want to go home. He had become so used to his present way of life that he was sure he could not settle down in England again even as a country gentleman on the small estate thus left to him.

He was perfectly fit and he liked his work. He was really quite happy where he was, and there was the child too, arrived now at an interesting stage of chubby playful babyhood.

"Hullo! anything I can do for you, Harkness?"

Larsen came up the steps and entered the bungalow whistling.

"Oh! come in, Larsen," said Philip, turning. "I was just beginning to think of packing. Sit down and have a peg."

"You lucky beggar—going Home for good. I suppose you will now forget your humble pals in Hminelongyi, here at de back of beyond. You are de Lord of de English Manor now."

Home for good!

One despairs of conveying to the ordinary reader the full sense which that phrase expresses to a European East of Suez. One must have known what years of exile "out there" mean. One must have seen the sunshine in these climes that casts such bright high lights and such abrupt dark shadows. Then, and then only, can a man appreciate fully what it signifies to return to the slippered ease of comfort on a pension or a competency in his native land.

"Home for good! Yes," returned Harkness. "But in one respect I feel something of an imposter, you know. Indeed I have no real claim to the luxury of the veritable Home-for-good feeling."

"Well I'm blowed!" Larsen was astonished. "Ungrateful brute you are. Why not?"

"Well, you see, I have only spent five years in Siam. To tell the truth, I did not want to go Home very much. But all my people wrote and beseeched me to come—and enjoy the legacy I never expected and never deserved——"

"Well, what den?" added Larsen smiling.

Philip went on, somewhat more dismally than the occasion warranted.

"And, though I am quitting this horrible country now

for ever, it was merely a fortuitous windfall which supplied the opportunity for so doing. It was not the accumulation of hard years of service, toil or saving."

Yet a lustrum is long enough perhaps, thought Philip as he spoke, for any man to distil the essence of the mental pleasure in the prospect of returning to one's own people, of finding one's self again in the old familiar places, surrounded once again by white familiar faces, of "going Home" in fact.

Larsen smiled again.

"Well, cheer up! If you have not fulfilled de measure of de years dat generally promote de Anglo-Indian to de dignity of Home going for goot properly speaking, you have——"

"You mean," rejoined Harkness, "you mean that I have escaped that weariness of the flesh and that languor of the spirit which together detract so much from the older resident's return."

He could not realise yet that he was really going Home. A word which is the despair of translators, "Home," with all its inwardness of meaning to the English ear, defies complete expression in any European equivalent. And out East, in the speech of the Anglo-Saxon, this word has acquired a connotation that only those can comprehend who have sojourned in the tropics and known something of what it is even simply to go "on leave!"

To such as these Home has a deeper import and a feeling than all it derives of tenderness from the complex association which twine and cling about an English hearth.

Home to these represents everything of sweetness and of light that it can express to such as (more fortunately perhaps) only England know. But, in addition, Home has been extended and magnified a hundred thousandfold until it shines for them an imperishable ideal and goal, a Heavenly City.

Irradiated by the colour and the glow that nostalgia, amid the contrasts of tropical existence, sheds upon things unforgotten—Home has collected an ineffable con-

tent for the Anglo-Oriental. By his pen it is writ ever with a capital large; on his lips it is ever frequent; on his heart it is indelibly, ineffaceably graven.

Home is all those things from which exile sunders an Englishman; friends of early days, parents, and later, wife and children perhaps; the sights, the sounds, the movement of busy city streets; the pleasure of the intellect that constitute the inner life, books and music, pictures, theatres, and conversation; the mere sound of "hansoms slurring through London mud," or the click of bat meeting ball amid the calm of English summer sunbeams on quiet English turf; the invigorating joy of biting Spring winds or all the endearingness of the Motherland with her lush meadows traversed by slow-moving waters poplar-fringed; and above everything else, the recollections of Youth with its visions splendid that circle back like wearied birds at evening round some gray village spire.

To such fugitive impressions Philip Harkness was now a sensitive prey as he walked the polished teak floors of his house in Hminelongyi on the eve of final departure for England. Some halting idea of these impressions he tried to convey to Larsen, and then broke off, feeling he was expressing himself badly.

There are many Danes in Siam, good fellows all, and more English than many Englishmen. Philip had never met a Dane whom he did not like and find sympathetic, but he felt now that Larsen somehow thought his rhapsodies about Home rather queer—as indeed was the case, for the Norseman was wholly prosaic.

Metaphorically Harkness shook himself, summoning resolution and his Boy. Booked to leave on the following day, he had had his trunks brought out but, like the mere bachelor man, had so far not packed a single item.

"I'm going to pack, Larsen. You can either clear out or sit and watch me."

And pack he did, as the process is understood in the East.

To wit, he first became recumbent on a long chair with

something liquid in the elbow rest, and with something narcotic in the form of tobacco between his lips.

"My belongings," he pointed out to Larsen, "you will observe, have now been rapidly precipitated from cabin trunk and suit case, almirah and chest of drawers, until they lie scattered in much admired profusion on the floor at my feet."

All around the room shelves had been rapidly swept clean of their contents by the servants, drawers and trunks and divers repositories strewn everywhere, while three wardrobes, expeditiously ransacked, were standing with open doors agape as if in astonishment at the sudden clearance thus made of their latent accumulations.

"My method, Larsen," continued Harkness, "my method will be to indicate—more often than not with the point of my exalted toe—the articles I desire to retain. These my henchmen will duly set aside; whereas things meant to be discarded he will carefully detach in an ever growing heap in another part of the room."

These grandiloquent instructions were not part of Harkness' habit in addressing his domestics. The latter being a Siamese (Philip could never tolerate a Chinese servant about him since his experiences of Bangkok life) missed the major part of this flowery rhetoric, but nevertheless contrived to catch an astonishing amount of its essential meaning.

"*Khorap*" (as the master pleases), rumbled Ai Seng.

He knew that, when the master was pleased to address him in fluent English instead of in the master's usual bad Siamese, then the master was in a good temper. He knew too, full well, that the master was going Home, and his rapid deduction that some packing was forward was, on the whole, none too astonishing.

"Beastly nuisance, all dis packing business," Larsen remarked as he took another pull at his whisky-soda peg. "It is the only thing that keeps me from going Home myself."

Philip concurred, though he knew as a matter of fact that it was debt and not the trouble of packing which had

obliged Larsen to resign from the Danish army and stop several years in Siam without taking Home-leave.

"*Mae woi! Lumbak ching!*" (there's any amount to do; it will be a lot of trouble) the body servant respectfully murmured.

"It is not as if I had not packed before," said Philip. "But on the occasion of other trips it was different."

"I know," replied Larsen. "Ordinarily it is sufficient to tell de Boy, 'to-morrow we go to the jungle' *(Prung-ni, pai pa)*, and on the morrow you will find stores and provisionings packed in all neat cases, saddles, tents and your gun laid out together wid a khaki suit and putties inviting wear."

To pack for Home-going, however, had not yet come within the range of Harkness' experience.

"With such an object in view," Philip began again, "there come into full play those judicial powers of selection upon possessing which I rather pique myself—whereas thou Ai Seng," he continued turning to the Boy, and breaking into Siamese, "having no precedent, thou art entirely adrift, rudderless, in a sea of confusion."

It was really extraordinary what an accumulation a man could acquire of possessions during even five short years in the East. Harkness found himself marvelling at their variety and their number, and then, recollecting that astonishment would not pack his things for him, he descended by swift gradations to despair at the almost hopeless task.

The Boy laid forth for weeding out the master's complete stock of boots. Of white canvas footwear alone there were nineteen good pairs and true.

Harkness turned on the Boy.

"Good lord! I see it now. You—you—infernal rascal! Some of these boots have never even been put on."

Ai Seng protested gruffly.

"Yes! yes! Every time I wore a hole in *one* pair of boots, you came and told me I would have to order six

pairs more." The master was wroth. "What in heaven's name am I to do with them in England?"

The boy insinuated something.

"Well, I suppose there is nothing else for it. Here, take them away and pawn them."

And so on it went with the other things also. A dozen white suits, a shooting topee, some score of cotton singlets —all went to join the goodly company of the "goats," as Philip styled the rapidly-swelling heap of the rejected, to distinguish them from the exiguous flock of the "sheep," designed to accompany him back to England.

Every article thus subjected to the elimination process had for Harkness some association, however commonplace, recalling some period or some incident of his stay in Siam.

Here, for example, was the Tabloid medicine chest, every bottle, box and pill a fertile begetter of memories, recalling times and seasons of sickness; the murder of Morland and his own wound, fever in the malaria-haunted teak forests of the North, dysentry during a voyage in dug-outs down the Mae Yome river, and one or two of the other ills to which all European flesh is subject in the none too salubrious climate of Siam. These Harkness had not entirely escaped, and with such defences against disease he now parted readily enough, for the medicine chest only conjured up unhappy visions of pain and rack. He knew Ai Seng coveted the tabloids greatly, having had first hand experience of their efficacy. With such a stock of quinine and calomel the Boy, Harkness knew, would be able to gain an immense prestige amongst his fellows.

The medicine chest, therefore, was duly ranged with the "goats."

"Ah!" And Harkness stooped to pick up a pair of well worn riding-breeches, made, it is true, by a Chinese tailor, but still serviceable, strong and remarkably well cut. The latter quality was not so amazing when one knows that Harkness had supplied the Chinese with a London-made pair of old Bedford cords as a pattern.

These, with the faithful imitativeness characteristic of his race, the Celestial had copied exactly, not even omitting the tiny patch on the knee.

How many fine games of polo in Laowieng did these breeches recall! How they brought back the thud of the scurrying ponies' hoofs on the turf of the beautiful Gymkhana ground, a noble stretch of sward which, with the great trees surrounding it, always recalled the park of some old English manor.

"Yes, Boy!" said Harkness. "These must go Home with me, if only for association's sake. Anyhow, I've seen men at a Cotswold Meet wearing a far worse cut pair of bags than these."

Ai Seng held up a pair of dilapidated top-boots.

Harkness looked at them, and there swept over him, as it had done so often before, the sickening sensation of being "dragged" one day at polo, while wearing these self-same boots. The pony's frantic career towards the rails had been cut short only in time to save its rider from a broken neck.

Reluctantly the master signalled to the servant that he might account these boots also amongst his perquisites. The Boy's eyes glistened with cupidity. Ai Seng admitted to himself that such packing as this, though without doubt *lumbàk* (a bother), had certainly compensations.

"Bad joss, these boots," quoth Harkness, shaking his head with portentous gravity. "*Mai mi boon* (no 'merit') about these boots, Boy. Nearly broke my devoted neck. Take them away."

"I suppose he can get the price of a few cases of Beehive brandy out of them," added Larsen. "That is, if he catches his 'Uncle' in a propitious mood, and if his patience in bargaining will equal the avarice of the 'Uncle.'"

The head of an old polo stick tumbled out from somewhere with a thud on the floor.

Ah! This sang of good, manly blood that coursed in healthy veins and nourished strong muscles! Its every dent recalled the swish of mallet meeting ball in some

good game! . . . "What's that?" Harkness was always trying to cure himself of his imaginative sense which led him far too often into these *musardises*.

"What's that? The camera? Yes, of course. Pack that too. And look here, where's the album?"

The Boy began to grow flustered at this sudden access of practicality on the part of his ordinarily dreamy and absent-minded master.

"Oh, well, never mind! Get on with the rest, and we may come across it. Chuck me a cigarette, Larsen. And here, Boy, throw all these rotten ties and socks away. I wouldn't be seen wearing them in England even at my worst enemy's funeral."

Ai Seng grinned and bestirred himself. He comprehended the sarcasm in the tone of the speaker's voice.

All three moved into the next room.

But here there was no packing to be done, for the contents of this room had consisted of a fairly decent collection of curios, Siamese porcelain and Sawankaloke pottery, Malay krises, a fine silver-handled Shan sword, Burmese beaten silver boxes and bowls and, above all, the collection of Buddhas, some of them really good and old —and arrangements had already been made for most of these.

Harkness had been collecting steadily during the period of his sojourn in Siam. He had given instructions to a local carpenter who made a speciality of packing curios for Europeans, and he thought with pleasure of how he should take all these beautiful and interesting objects Home as presents to his people.

But this thought alone would have sufficed to show that the present was Philip's first experience of Home-going. Later, like so many others, he was to have the irritation of seeing these beautiful and costly Burmese hand-made silver trinket-boxes despised by the insularity of his stay-at-home English friends.

"None of my Buddhas have been subjected to the ignominy of polish," he told Larsen. "The finest of them are some old specimens which, by pure good for-

tune, I had the chance of digging out of the ancient city of Muang Fang" (far away up in the North-west corner of Siam on the frontiers of Burma and of the White Elephant Kingdom).

The heavier furniture of this room, whose gaunt walls of wood had been alleviated by these bibelots, was still in position, and was to be taken over by Philip's successor when he arrived.

"If you had been in Bangkok," said Larsen laughing, "you would have had to call in Tan Keng Huey, the Chinese auctioneer—you remember the man, a well-known character."

On Tan Keng Huey's services and raucous persuasiveness every European in Bangkok has sooner or later to rely at Home-going for the disposal of his household gods. Harkness had been present at auctions on the furniture of one or two of his friends as conducted by this Celestial.

"Yes," replied Philip. "I suppose I would, and my goods and chattels would have been knocked down to the highest bidder before a heterogeneous crowd of all nations and of every colour——"

Larsen started chanting the comical formula of Tan Keng Huey, which was proper to these occasions.

"Naow then, genlemans! Make me 'noffer for this piece. The sidebore only—not including what contains. *Ning! Song!* One! Two! The last prize (price). Going for thirty ticals. Gone! Sold and finished! The genlemans over dare!" . . .

"Nothing else for me to do here," Philip remarked, looking round the room.

There was a small litter of shavings in one corner, and as he passed it by, Larsen with his foot unwittingly disturbed a shallow little cardboard box.

A cheap, little box, with the name of a Bombay merchant of Bangkok on it, and without thinking Harkness tilted off the lid with his foot. Inside lay a scarf.

Larsen smiled.

It was a filmy trifle that he remembered Rarouey used to wear.

Rarouey, too, had been discarded. But she—she had packed already, and had gone.

Philip picked up the scarf and let it run through his fingers, listlessly conscious of the perfume that seemed to drip from it.

It was the perfume of her hair, with something of a faint odour of sandal and frangipanni, the scent of herself. Oriental, exotic, mysterious even it was, and so different from anything known in the West.

In the evocation of vivid remembrance it is scents that play the major part. An odour can conjure up memories as nothing else can, and that with all the intensity of realism. A breath, a whiff of something can stir the dust of the Past into life in the mind of the Present. Scents are the fuse of Time that start quick trains of reminiscence and set ablaze the magazine where lies latent the passionate flame of other days.

So now Harkness, standing with the cheap little silk scarf of his Siamese mistress in his hand, not only was aware of the emotions it evoked by sensuous thoughts of herself, but also began pursuing through the dim glades in the forest of his memories a thousand fleeting recollections of their life together, with its crown, their child.

CHAPTER XXI

MALAISE

PHILIP opened the window of his room at Hawthorne, and looked out into the stillness of the English spring morning. It was the bedroom he had occupied as a boy. The pictures and all the trophies of those early days had been left unchanged by his mother, and he now saw them again on the first day of his return from the East.

Peaceful the landscape looked with the mist rising from the meadows and the sunlight glinting through the willow trees by the stream at the foot of the garden. What an air of ancientry everything wore—the meadows, and the willows and the water, as if they had been there for æons and would be there for æons more! Centuries had given them a look of (what was the word he wanted?) Smugness—yes, that was it—smugness, and had cast over them the placidity of all immovable and unmoving things.

Philip lit a cheroot and leaned farther out of the window to rest his eyes upon the scene to which he had returned—returned, he hoped, never to leave it again.

He had been Home for two days, and had come down to his mother's house at Birnam. Silverdene, his new inheritance, was still shut up since his Uncle Jim's death, and he was not to move in yet awhile.

Every thing was good that he looked upon that morning. Better then he had ever expected it to be. It was

good even to be able to stand thus, his head bare to a gentle sun without the ungainly shield of a *topi*. Good, too, to look on flowers that had some scent and some variety of colour after the eternal scarlets and saffrons of the tropics—good to see grass that was truly green. Sweet were the early morning sounds of birds unseen in deep hedges. And fresh, how fresh and pleasant this breeze that blew from the sea across these English shores!

In his veins there seemed to be that morning the ichor of Home-life, and never had he slept so well.

These last two mornings when he had waked in England he had renewed the sense of waking truly to another day; not, as in Siam, waking but to continue in daylight the short, uneasy night. Food and drink had a taste in this delightful air. Even breathing was a pure physical pleasure, the like of which he had never savoured in the East.

The spell of the East—what was it after all save a contrast to the joy of a return Home? Some Englishmen have the wander-fever strong in them, and some can even dispense with the old country altogether, but they are primitive of nature.

Philip had rolled by many roads, he had tasted the pleasure of travel and knew the fascination of foreign lands, but now from the bosom of his "own countree" he could most justly appraise the slender delight of wild lands and the impermanent pleasure of strange peoples and sojournings.

Then he remembered Rarouey!

The last time he had seen her had also been in the freshness of the dawn—a tropic dawn. She had come into his room, and crouched on the floor making obeisance to him—before going out of his life altogether.

He wondered how she was getting along. And the child? Jolly little nipper!

He had a moment of regret, of remorse especially for the lot of the child. His little Daylight! He would not see him again.

"But he will grow up as a Siamese," he spoke his

thoughts aloud. "And it will be better for him than if he had known his *farang* father."

He mused with himself.

He supposed Rarouey would sooner or later marry again, some one of her own people. At any rate she had enough to keep her going comfortably for the rest of her life, and he had taken care that she should not have access to her allowance. She was being paid regularly by the bank every month, and could not gamble it, or run into debt.

Little Daylight also had been provided for. He would be all right. . . .

One thing for which his heart misgave him. He had told a falsehood to Rarouey at his going. He simply could not have faced the torment and the tears of a scene, and a scene there certainly would have been had he told her the truth. He would write to her later and break it gently to her that he was not coming back to Hmine-longyi, as he had said, after six months leave, but was going to settle down in his own country and amongst his own people.

In this feeling he had a sense of being more guilty towards the child in telling that particular lie—the little fellow's great, blue, serious eyes had looked at him so resentfully as he had spoken the falsehood.

"Good morning, Philip!"

It was his mother calling from the garden below where she was walking and reading a little book. Philip was certain it was a prayer book.

"Morning, mater. What a jolly day! I was just thinking of the chance of some rabbit shooting."

"Oh, Philip! surely you are forgetting. It is Sunday."

"Damn!" he swore under his breath, and then added, "So it is. Sorry, mater! Quite forgot. Such perfect weather too."

He puffed a great draught from his cheroot.

"Philip dear, it must be very bad for you to smoke

before you have had breakfast. And those dreadful black cigars too."

"Oh, it's all right, mater," he answered. "I have got into the habit, and it does not hurt me."

He spoke airily, but he threw his stump away out of deference.

"Yes, I am afraid you have," said his mother with playful sadness. "You must have got into a lot of bad habits in Siam. But you will soon lose them again, now that we have you at Home with us again. And now hurry up and dress, dear. Breakfast is almost ready, and your father will be back from early Communion."

Philip closed the window and went to collect the towels for his tub. He began a few bars of "La petite Tonquinoise," and then, again remembering what day it was, stopped this flippant tune he was whistling. The associations of other younger times were strong upon him.

After his bath he opened his wardrobe and mechanically began putting on a pair of flannels. Then he again remembered.

"Morning church, I suppose," he told himself. And he put the flannels back.

"Rather a bore they can't have church in the evening as they have in Bangkok. Then one could get in a game of golf or something."

He chose a dark suit and hunted out a collar and a tie.

Confound it, how the collar seemed to choke him!

But he supposed he would have to grow used to it again in time.

"Can't run about in a singlet and a pair of Shan bags in England, you know, old man," he told himself.

That reminded him of something else. He took the Chinese silk trousers in which he had slept the previous night and threw them into the clothes' basket.

"Mustn't scandalise the local housemaid at any cost," he murmured.

He sighed, regretting the old easy freedom.

"I wish I had my own Boy Seng to look after me," he said, and with that went down to breakfast.

On the way to church his heart leapt up as they passed the fields and hedgerows, the brooks and swaying poplars in the day's calm—all exactly as he remembered them.

But all so different too. For to him had now come the capacity to view these scenes lit by a different light and to read into them a deeper significance. He sought all day to analyse his emotions and to grasp the meaning of this return, this up-welling love of country, this rapturous consciousness of nationality.

. . . However, as the weeks went on, this first particular feeling of content passed and a perverse malaise took its place. Philip had imagined, when he came Home, that he was done with the East for ever, and he had never reckoned on experiencing any difficulty in settling down on his own little cabbage-patch—as he called the tidy little estate left to him by his Uncle Jim.

But those five years in Siam, which on any ordinary nature would indubitably have left certain ineradicable impressions, in Harkness' case had done much more, had indeed had the effect of upsetting his spiritual equilibrium entirely.

At his club in Town he met other men from the East. On comparing notes he found that they one and all had retained a species of hankering for the exotic life they had been used to—a hankering not always confessed but more or less strong according to the length and freedom of their residence abroad.

When on furlough, of course, occupied as they were in a hurried round of gaieties and visits, and engrossed by the feverish necessity of making the most of their few brief months of leave and of the opportunity available for golf, shooting or other diversions, picking up the threads of old friendships and enjoying the chance of seeing theatres and hearing music that was denied them in the East, most men had not so much time to give way to reminiscent regret for the life they had left and would return to again. But not one, he found, could escape the comparisons that would often thrust themselves forward. The contrast between the untrammelled existence

known in India, China or other countries, and the absolutely different life now led at Home was ever present.

It was a particularly warm summer too that year, and on every hand one saw how uncomfortable it was possible to be in England when the temperature rose to degrees that abroad would have been considered merely pleasant.

"Dash it!" grumbled Harkness to his brother Harry one morning as they lay panting and lolling in the former's "den."

"It's not really hot, you know. Look at that thermometer over there. Not much over eighty after all. And yet, here I am oozing like a stuck pig and suffering agonies which I have never known in Bangkok even in the grilling heat of a hundred or more in the shade. What a beastly country!"

Harry, the youngest, had always been the most sympathetic of Philip's three brothers. He had now just left Rugby, and the boyish comradeship which had marked the relations of the two in earlier days had been renewed after the elder's return from Siam.

Harry had come to spend a part of his holidays with Philip. Their days were mostly passed together, engaged in the open-air pursuits of a country life so dear to young English hearts. Silverdene, Philip's place, furnished these pursuits in abundance. Long hours of fishing in the placid, gently-winding stream that meandered through the park, breezy morning gallops along English lanes bowered in foliage and with the mists of dawn still lingering on them, hot setts of afternoon tennis on the sunshiny lawn of the house, or the lingering *dolce far niente* of a slow-moving boat among the backwater on shadowy evenings—all these had drawn the two together in the spiritual contentment of silent companionship.

Harry seemed never to tire of hearing about Siam.

It had been intended that he should go up to King's College, London, in the autumn, and he had acquiesced more or less in the idea. But he was at that stage which revolts at further book "mugging," and already his thoughts were turning to the possibility of a career

abroad. His imagination was slowly being fired by the reminiscences which he extracted from his elder brother and drank in with avid eagerness.

"But I say," he now lazily answered to Philip's grumble. "It must really be hotter than this in Siam. It's all rot pretending you feel the heat more in England than you used to out there."

"But I do. I am not pretending."

"And, besides, out there I suppose you had some work to do, whereas now——"

He waved a comprehensive hand to include his brother's negligent attitude and to signify his permanent idleness.

"Yes, but my dear young fool, in Siam you are prepared for heat," retorted Philip. "You wear white clothes in the day time, and not beastly, frowsty tweeds and stiff collars and boiled shirts."

They both laughed. English clothes had soon wrought on Philip's nerves.

"And you have ice. And cold drinks. And fans. And the houses are open to any air that is agoing, not closed in by rotten bricks and plaster and glass windows that absorb the heat. Oh lord!"

Philip had jumped to his feet, and was pursuing his diatribe.

"And look at this darned chair—stuffed horse hide! A salamander would sweat blood if he was penned in such a thing. I must order some wicker chairs for the house. We've only got these garden things."

Harry helped himself to a cigarette and tossed the box over to his brother. Then, languidly stretching out his legs on the Chesterfield on which he found himself, he spoke again, his face turned up to the ceiling and his mind and mouth engrossed in blowing smoke rings.

"I say, old chap, I thought you were looking forward awfully to getting Home."

"So I was," asserted Philip, pacing up and down the floor.

"Well then, all I can say is, you are a discontented brute," Harry went on. "Here you have come Home

from what you have always led us to believe was a God-forsaken country to the finest summer we have had in England for years."

"H'm!" Philip was not impressed. "It may be the finest summer for years. It's too blamed like a Bangkok hot season with the coolies dying of cholera in Sampeng."

"And you've got Silverdene, a spiffing little place of your own, with top-hole fishing and boating, and later on you'll have shooting and you can go over and hunt with the Cotswolds from Tom's place at Leckhampton. You've got sufficient to live on and need not do another stroke of work for the rest of your bally natural. And here you are grousing like this. I do believe you'd rather be back grilling in Bangkok under a punkah. Perverse beggar that you are!"

"There are more things than punkahs in Bangkok," replied Philip, contrairy still.

And then decisively changing the subject he added:

"I say, you know, the mater asked us to come over this afternoon. You'd better go and see about getting ready. And I'll tell the syce—er—I mean the groom to get out the dogcart. Bring my racket down, will you, when you go upstairs?"

Harry heaved his long length out of the chair and went off muttering about "some rotten muffin-worry at the mater's." And, as Philip got ready to shy something at him, he ended by grunting a preference to "slack off all afternoon and take the boat out."

Sylvia was to be present that afternoon, though Philip did not know it. He had not met her yet since he had come home, did not want to in fact; but his mother was already preparing a ruse to reconcile them.

CHAPTER XXII

OLD FIRES

When the two brothers arrived at Hawthorne they found some vigorous young people heatedly contesting on the vicarage lawn disputatious games of tennis and croquet. Philip's mother came up to him with a "dear boy, how much better you are looking," and at once led him off to a corner seat under the tall elm.

A little figure in cool-looking white tennis kit rose as they drew near and stood stiffly awaiting their approach.

Philip wanted to draw back. He had no idea Sylvia Dean was in the neighbourhood. He had heard she was in London still.

"Oh, mater, I can't really!" he cried. "It would be too painful for both of us."

Seeing his agitated hesitation, Sylvia came forward of her own accord. She was much better versed in local comings and going than he was, and though she had only arrived a couple of days before to spend her annual holiday with her father, she had more than inkling that she would meet Phil again that afternoon. She held an advantage therefore.

"Here is Philip, dear," said Mrs. Harkness, pleased with the success of her attempt to bring them together. "You two will have a lot to say to each other I'm sure. It is five years since you met, so I will leave you. I must go and see about the tea cakes."

Philip stood, absolutely tongue-tied. He knew he had

lost the trick of talking easily to white women of any sort, and so far he had shunned and successfully dodged them. But the prospect of some decent tennis had induced him to come to Hawthorne this afternoon, and he had hoped to be able to rush through a men's sett or two without being "landed" for light conversation of any sort. His gauche awkwardness on the present occasion and with this particular white woman was indescribably pitiful.

Sylvia, simulating a self possession she did not feel, fixed her dark eyes on his face and held out her hand. He took it and held it unconsciously. For the life of him, he could think of nothing to say.

At last, "Did you know I was coming here this afternoon?" he asked.

Sylvia, the little monkey, broke into a peal of forced laughter. This was not the girl Philip had known. She was not the girl of five years ago. There was something provoking, something challenging in her mature audacity. She began unscrewing her racquet from its press.

"Why, you don't think I am afraid to meet you again?" she replied.

"No. But you must have known it would be difficult for us to meet again—after what has passed."

How self-assured she was, thought Philip. How she had developed since he last saw her! Well, dash it all, if she could take it so coolly, after all, what was the use of making a song and dance about a trifle like a broken engagement.

He took a long pull at himself, sat down beside her, and began to talk as calmly and rationally as he knew.

Madge, not far away, uncomfortably standing in the approved afternoon-tea fashion of her species, was absorbing large quantities of tea and cakes. She nodded when she caught Philip's eye. In addition to being perfectly convinced in her own mind that Sylvia was still in love with young Harkness and wanted him back, she had talked to the girl and pointed out the distinct advantage her step-daughter held with the most eligible young man of the district.

Mrs. Harkness was entrenched some distance off adroitly heading off anyone who shewed an inclination to break the tête-à-tête. At intervals she beamed in their direction. But then the Canon's wife beamed, and beamed expansively at everyone and everything she met in life. At present one would have imagined perhaps that her beaming was due to the grateful and comforting effects of the hot liquid she was swallowing in the pleasant surroundings of sunshine on a perfect summer afternoon, surrounded by a host of people who loved her. Her cheerfulness in point of fact was mostly due to the vision conjured up by the sight of two young things seated together some distance from her and quite evidently picking up the threads of their old romance again. One of the young people was her own son Philip, and the other, Sylvia Dean, was a dear girl: she had known her people for many years.

If his mother had ever been blind to the true feelings that Philip held for the doctor's daughter, several insinuations on the part of Mrs. Garstin would have enlightened her. Mrs. Harkness was very glad now that her son had acted so properly in not binding himself or Sylvia to a definite engagement. It would never have done for Philip to take a wife out to the wilds of Siam, but the dire necessity no longer existed. She liked the Deans, and Sylvia was a charming girl and had grown up into a capable little woman. She did not stop to think, as other mothers in her place might have done, that Philip with a nice little property of his own and an income more than sufficient for bachelor needs, might have had his pick of richer women of higher birth perhaps than Sylvia.

The Canon's wife sometimes reflected that she herself was growing middle-aged, and it would be rather nice to be a grandmother. Philip was the first of her sons to shew any definite preference for any definite girl: and Mrs. Harkness, in the sight now before her eyes, was able to re-live her own youth and courtship.

Hence these beams.

What Philip said to Sylvia that afternoon before she

was ultimately swept away from him to play tennis, he never quite remembered. The one impression he carried away from that uncomfortable half hour was that Miss Dean was quite right in refusing to treat their position as tragic or difficult.

"Surely," she had told him, as if repeating a lesson (which indeed she was—Madge's lesson), "surely there is no reason why we should not be friends. No calf-love nonsense of course like the time when I was just a flapper and you were only a boy. No one but ourselves knows we were ever engaged in any sort of way. Let byegones be byegones."

She never looked directly at Philip but she was observing him closely and she was quick at noting that the strain of melancholy which had always been a feature of his rather serious nature had been intensified in the five years of his absence from her. She loved him still, and though she was not a skilled coquette she had acquired an air of knowledge, audacity, even saucy domination that were exemplified in her dress, her attitude, her gestures, her words.

Later Philip had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Garstin. Of late that lady had become rather subdued as the result of one or two snubs. She did not bore him so much as he had expected—but then the Gorgon had the ability of adapting herself to different persons that often mystified people when they spoke to her for the first time. She was acute enough to know that it was no use telling Philip how difficult it was to find in Birnam "the sort of people she was accustomed mixing with!" A piece of grave news regarding George which she had received by cable that week had touched and mellowed her moreover. She loved her son and she talked of Siam with unconcealed anxiety.

"Do you know, Mr. Harkness," she told him. "I think you are very fortunate to be finished with Siam. It must be a dreadful place, with an appalling climate, worse than West Africa, they tell me. My poor George has been very ill. You know of course?"

"Yes," said Philip. "I was sorry to hear it. We lived together in the same Mess at one time. But really the climate is not so bad. It is only that men won't take care of themselves."

The very mention of George Garstin and Siam set an unpleasant train of recollection working in Philip's mind, and he gave but scant attention to Mrs. Garstin's subsequent remarks. Also he was distractedly watching Sylvia Dean. She was very graceful, lithe like a young boy as she pounced on the tennis balls and drove them back across the court to her opponent. His feeling for Sylvia had been somewhat tarnished however. She had altered so unexpectedly too. He made comparisons. He thought of Rarouey.

The latter, it is true, had been merely the child of a savage race, mated with a robber and the daughter of a murderer on whose head lay the blood of his best friend, Morland. Sylvia was white. Rarouey was not. There was more in it than that. Rarouey had saved his life and—supreme fact of all to Philip—she was the mother of his child. He could not but admit that while he still admired Sylvia, he still hungered for Rarouey. How horrified everyone in that decorous assembly of worthy English people would have been had they known of his ignoble passion for such a woman. They could not understand of course. . . .

The occasion was a family reunion of the Harknesses, for Harold and Jerry the Canon's two elder sons were present also at the vicarage garden party that day. The former was at Woolwich and the latter was down spending the fortnight which his firm in London allowed him each summer.

"It is the first time," observed Mrs. Harkness to Madge, "the first time for several years that the whole family has been united under one roof."

Her four sons were around her as in the days when they were boys together. She fluttered with pleasure like a little thrush that has unexpectedly found its nest tenanted again.

"How delightful for you!" assented Madge.

Of late Mrs. Harkness and the doctor's wife had been brought together by several fortuitous events, and though they would not have admitted any ulterior motives, they nevertheless now gravitated together at the end of the lawn.

With the air of unavowed conspirators, they both looked towards Sylvia who was talking vivaciously in a group formed of the Canon, Philip and Harold. The guests had almost all left.

Dr. Dean drove up in his car. He had come to fetch his wife, but Mrs. Harkness could not hear of his leaving.

"Now you must not run away, doctor, like this. Come back again and sit down Mrs. Dean, en famille."

They joined the others. Harold was making a statement about the French "seventy-fives."

"I tell you, Dad," he said, raising his voice, "you and people like you are living in a fools' paradise. I met the Beetle the other day. He has just come back from a stunt at the German manœuvres where he went with false passports and under a false name and he says——"

The Canon wiped the benignant effusion from the glass of his pince-nez, and looked with paternal emotion and astonishment on the son who had so flatly contradicted him. Except for parochial visits and attendance at church, Harkness senior hardly ever left his study. On his own father's death, fifteen years before, the stoppage of his allowance and delicate health had cut short Nigel Harkness' career in the diplomatic service. He had resigned while Second Secretary at Petersburg, had taken Orders and had accepted the living of Birnam. But mole-like he still retained an absorbing, if academic interest in the unprincipled game of High Diplomacy which he had once helped his country to play at a foreign Capital. This was his one real interest in life and he spent most of his leisure in following closely foreign politics, contributing pregnant articles at times on "The Balance of Power" and the "Balkan Melting Pot" to some of the more serious reviews.

It sometimes dawned upon him that he was married and the father of four strapping youths. At the present moment, when one of his own family ventured to challenge him on ground which he considered peculiarly his own, he could not fail to be astonished. He read and wrote much but he seldom found anyone to discuss international relations with him.

Harold had made some declaration regarding the seeds of war contained in the murder of the Archduke of Austria.

Jerry nudged Philip, who had been drawn into the circle by his mother.

"Look out," he whispered flippantly. "The old man's grey matter is beginning to function."

"Bless my soul, Harold boy!" snapped the Canon. "Wars are not decided at Continental manœuvres let me tell you, but in the seclusion of the Chanceries. Besides what can *you* know of such matters. You have hardly left school yet."

The young men guffawed and then, out of consideration for their mother's pained expression desisted. The forgetfulness of their father, immersed in the problems of diplomacy, had been an endless source of merriment to the Harkness boys from the earliest times. Jerry a half-fledged solicitor, could not forbear a "leg pull" at his parent's expense.

"Quite right, dad. Harold knows nothing of what he is talking about. We shall have to send him back to a strict school," he said gravely.

Harold was rising thirty, a full Sapper Lieutenant, and had been doing an extra course in demolitions at the "Shop," but to his father he was still a beardless schoolboy. Everyone roared at Jerry's feeble hoary joke. Such jests, like a private vocabulary and a set of particular catch-words, are common to all families. An outsider can rarely appreciate their flavour if he does not know the associations that have endeared them and rendered them doubly ludicrous to the persons whose cherished possessions they are.

That evening the Harkness boys were revelling in the chaff and banter of early days. A word or a jape such as Jerry now perpetrated in the hallowed process of elongating his parent's leg, recalled their youth as nothing else could.

Philip felt a mist come over his eyes. How far he had grown away from his kith and kind! In what a lonely demesne of the spirit he now lived, enisléd, alone! He could not recapture his boyhood by any such means as sufficed for his brothers. The nostalgia of the East overmastered him. Would he never be able to re-assemble the threads of his past life and draw near again to his own folk in England?

With a smile at her exuberant offspring, Mrs. Harkness was coming, as usual, to the rescue of her husband's erratic memory, when Sylvia took up the topic where the Canon had been interrupted.

"I think Harold is quite right, Canon," she said. "Everyone you meet in London who knows anything about Germany believes that a European war cannot be averted. Sir Arthur Laidlaw is convinced of it."

She was talking in the early summer of 1914 remember, and Sir Arthur must have been well informed—whoever he was. Sylvia made her statement confidently.

"My dear young lady," retorted the Canon, quoting from an article for the "Cosmopolitan" on which he had been working that morning. "The world is too sensible for such a war to come to pass nowadays. When I was at Vienna and Petersburg I saw with my own eyes how easy it was for bad feeling between nations to be engineered by an irresponsible Press or by plutocrats with dividends to declare. But again and again, when one of the Powers was on the brink of war with another, I saw times without number also how differences were smoothed over by a spirit of compromise and moderation. Serbia has grossly provoked Austrian feelings of course, and it is intolerable that a great nation like Austria should permit with impunity the assassination of an Archduke in the territories of a turbulent people on her borders. But all

such matters are capable of peaceful arrangement and good sense that has always prevailed among the Great Powers will find a middle way. The imbroglio that existed after the last two Balkan wars contained sufficient material to plunge Europe into war and embroil all the Powers, but those who have studied diplomacy cannot believe that the masterly tact of Sir Edward Grey and Kiderlen Waechter which pulled us through that period is now unequal to these difficulties, is unequal to the task of averting war over this Serbian trouble."

He was perfectly sincere in what he said. He and many others well versed in European politics did not believe that any war could not be averted by diplomacy. The Canon's opinion was far more valuable than the hearsay of Sylvia or the thoughts that were the child of Harold's soldierly wish for a scrap, with its chances of promotion. But the Canon was wrong, because his experience was drawn from the trustful English school of diplomacy that, hoodwinked for years by well-meant and undoubtedly sincere protestations of friendship from his German colleagues, failed to allow sufficiently for factors such as human passion, vaulting ambition and unbridled monarchies.

Philip was very silent later as he and Harry drove back together that evening to Silverdene. He had been vaguely conscious of the tension in Europe that was then increasing. He remembered a visit of the " Scharnhorst " to Bangkok shortly after the Agadir crisis. It was curious how all fighting men were convinced that a war between his own country and Germany was inevitable. The Germans from the flagship which he had seen three years before in the Gulf of Siam seemingly accepted friction as all in the day's work, and smilingly chaffed their English friends as to the upshot. And here was Harold now, his brother quoting a secret service man who had recently visited Germany, and fixedly convinced that fighting must come this summer. Against that he felt he ought to set the considered conviction of older men like his father. He did not know. He himself was always

bored by English newspapers, and seldom read the Continental correspondence, but even Sylvia had acquired opinions on the subject. He had lost touch with these things. In any case Philip could not see how it would affect himself. He fell to considering his own position from a new standpoint. It was a standpoint that some words of his mother that day had given him.

"After all, I suppose the mater is right," he said at last.

"What's that?" asked Harry who had been thinking his own thoughts.

"I ought to marry. My Ishmael days are over."

Philip had confided to no one, not even his favourite brother, regarding Rarouey; and the force he meant to convey by the last phrase was somewhat lost on Harry who thought it merely another of his brother's cryptic, meaningless turns of speech.

"Yes," Harry assented. "I suppose so. You are a man of property now. You have Uncle Jim's estate, and should settle down and carry on the family name."

"What's more," added Philip, "if I do not marry now, I feel I won't be able to hold myself back from going East again."

The healing balm of the quiet English landscape, lit by an effulgent summer moon, through which their homeward way was being taken had begun to lay its emollient peace upon his soul.

"England isn't such a dusty place, after all Harry," he said, touching up the horse. "You are quite right. I am an ungrateful beggar. Most men from the East would give their ears to be in my present position."

"I should jolly well think so! Home for good, with plenty of money and a few acres of goodly land of your own in the West country."

"Yes. It's mere cussedness of me to be always harking back to Siam—a land where I have never really been happy. It's simply a disease. The Americans call it 'cold feet.' It's a wander-malady and besets some

natures when one has tasted the fascination of strange scenes. Like love, it grows with what it feeds upon."

"Oh! Ho! Love is it?" exclaimed Harry. "So that's how you feel? Well! Better marry the girl out of hand then."

But Philip was not listening.

The dog-cart bowled along the open road with meadows stretching on either side. The river, a glittering ribbon of silver under the moon, went winding its indolent, ancient course. The landscape was redolent of ancestral peace.

Within a week Philip had proposed to Sylvia and had been accepted in set form. His mother was radiant and beamed Mrs. Dean almost out of countenance, but Sylvia did not seem so interested as she might have been in the event.

When Philip brought her a ring she turned it over on the finger where he had placed it and seemed about to say something.

"Don't you like it?" her lover asked, "What's the matter dear?"

"Oh nothing——" she said, turning her pouting face to escape his kiss.

CHAPTER XXIII

SPEARS OF MORN

With her infant son, a tiny brown bunch of soft sleepiness, astride her hip in the posture assumed by all Oriental babyhood in arms, Rarouey went treading softly down the steps of Philip's house which had been her dwelling for two short years.

She paused in the long morning shadow cast by the building.

Looking round the compound at that moment she was a prey to a medley of feelings. Her mind, awakened to the significance of this hour of departure, began tremulously busying itself with recalling impressions of the familiar place.

Pure child of nature that she was, ingenuous and—for all the sufferings of her passionate motherhood—still wholly immature in the spiritual sense of the West, Rarouey had never been given to introspection. Yet the brief sojourn in a foreign atmosphere and her contact with a nature like that of Philip Harkness had not been without their effect on her mental development. The processes of reflection, therefore, that agitated her now even if almost unconscious and practically inarticulate, were perhaps a trifle more complicated than the ordinary aimless musings of her primitive kind.

The langour of the day's first hours steeped the scene in peace.

She moved slowly towards the lotus garden with its

miniature bridge and pond that her foreign master had been persuaded to lay out for her amusement, doing so (she remembered) with many jests and misgivings as to its furnishing an ideal haunt for the noxious mosquito. The coolness and the shade were in contrast to the marked energy of the dust-laden street which she could see in the distance through the gate of the compound and already a-buzz with the crowds threading their way to market.

Flower and foliage sparkled in the garden with a translucent sheen that all too soon would wilt and vanish beneath the cruel heat of the coming hours of day. Under the mischievous caress of the spasmodic breeze every tree seemed to stretch forth its branches drowsily in an awakening quiver and all its leaves to nod in palpitating welcome to the growing light.

The petals of the frangipanni flower spun in little white whorls from the leafless tree, dripping to the ground below. Somewhere a gold-beater bird was hammering out with unceasing persistence its mechanic but not unpleasant note, and among the mangoes a few gaunt crows shrilled in vulgar brawl.

Towering over the house itself the huge "flame-of-the-forest" tree stood a fiery and flamboyant sentinel, the screaming scarlet of its blossoms and the rich hue of its leaves relieved against the limpid blue of the early morning sky.

Rarouey seated herself on a rustic bench by the landing stage on the river, noting with some dissatisfaction that her pretty Laotian slippers, which she had embroidered herself and wore for the first time that morning, were already covered with the dust of the garden path thither.

The river was in flood, and in the muddy waters of its full tide were reflected purple gleams from the bougainvillea that twined around the shelter over the girl's head.

Rarouey, of course, was quite unaware of the picture she made sitting there with her infant on her lap. So fair she was that one might almost see the pink under her dimpled, olive cheek. That morning she was wearing her prettiest *pha sin* (skirt) of blue and gold, this ostentation

being counter-balanced, however, by her blouse which was merely a plain white cotton one with some simple lace at the neck.

Her head was bare. In the rolls of her dark hair innocent of oil—in this respect unlike her country-women by the way, and a fact due to Philip's fads—there shone a red hibiscus just plucked from the garden and stuck at a coquettish angle in the one of the wavy tresses near her ear. The whole riot of colour-contrasts, here described in the inadequacy of black and white, might seem in European eyes to be too garish and striking not to clash. Yet, under the sky of Siam with its hard, eternal sunshine, these voyante hues combined in a commonplace harmony.

As she sat there, holding the sleeping child upon her knees, Rarouey's little face fell into repose and her dark eyes took on the intensity of some sorrow behind them.

For a moment her ripe lips parted, showing her beautiful white teeth, regular and unstained by betel, then closed again in a flutter of repression against an involuntary sob.

Often before had Rarouey looked upon this house and this compound. She had loved to walk in the garden at all hours, especially in the freshness of the dawn.

But this morning the familiar scenes gained in her eyes an unwonted finality. Over every detail her tardy realisation of these surroundings that she was now quitting cast a strange, clear light.

"The *Nai* has said six months among his own people, and then he will come back to us."

She was speaking to the child beside her.

She bent over and kissed her son passionately on the forehead.

"I do not know, little mouse," she went on. "But he is a man of his word. He does not love me as I do him, but I think he will come back. At least for the present he must go—go far away many days in the big fire-ship from Singapore. And we—you and I, little mouse, must go too—back again to the Lao country. For you it is well.

You will be happy and grow big, and you will see your elder brother in the old house, and my mother will be proud, very proud of you. You will grow up a beautiful man, and the other mothers will be jealous when they see your fair skin and pale hair. But for me—*mae woey, tai ching* (alas, I am undone)."

The child stirred uneasily and brushed its pudgy fist across one eyelid.

Rarouey moved her position so as to shift little Sawang's face out of the sunlight that streamed aslant it. Some of the fragments of association were stirring her mind through an illogical train of ideas; and the scene of the garden, as it graved itself that morning for ever upon her remembrance, stirred her to numberless vague regrets.

In her musings foremost was the thought of how happy she had been here. When she had left her kindred and her village in the North, abandoning all, even her first child, under the overmastering, irresistible and passionate impulse to follow a *farang* master, she had been, as it were, in a state of trance, of which nevertheless she had all along been ashamed. Now at last, dimly as she perceived the meaning of the present moment, she began to apprehend that this was the crisis denoting the end of a period of unruffled existence.

For the first time her presence in the garden of this strange white man who had so dominated her horizon began to strike her vaguely as incongruous, as impermanent.

Undoubtedly she was sad to leave the spot: and grieving as she had never grieved before. Her mind and heart were moved by unaccountable perplexities, yet to bewail the event she was satisfied with the poignantly simple expression that serves a Siamese in so many connections —the conventional and hackneyed:

"*Mae! Sia chai thae thae!*" (Mother! But my heart is broken).

"*Sia chai thae thae,*" she breathed again, and rising from the seat, she moved away across the garden.

Then she halted and stood watching, with eyes filmed over by tears.

It was at this moment that the great Dread that was to haunt her in after days first began to take possession of her. She had often reasoned with herself before this about her infatuation for Philip.

"Why have you made me love you so?" was one of her frequent apostrophes to her foreign husband when his arms were around her. "What have I done that you should have cast this spell upon me? Surely it is a madness for which some evil fate has singled me out."

Yet, when heart was beating to heart and lips pressed close to face, such questionings were soon stilled in the mere satisfaction of beloved physical presence.

She had seen one or two rare examples of "hlong" amongst her own people.

She remembered the case of one girl who had become so infatuated with a "lakhon" (theatrical) player that she had followed the man all through Siam and into Burma.

As she stood in the lotus garden that morning, fragmentary recollections of her meeting with Bua Phan, the girl in question, rose to the surface of her thoughts. The troupe of strolling players, she remembered, had come to Laowieng and were giving a series of performances at the Chao Luang's palace, when Bua Phan had become violently enamoured of one of the actors.

Rarouey had been amongst the crowd that assembled to see the troupe off on its departure from the town, and by chance had found herself standing near Bua Phan and the debonair young Burman on whom the girl's vehement fancy had become fixed.

Near by, the mother of Bua Phan was silently weeping.

Her daughter was dressed for a journey and calmly giving orders about her baggage. The young Burmese actor was smoking an enormous cheroot, ignoring entirely the devotion of the pretty damsel whose bright eyes followed his every movement with pathetic concentration. (He treated her then, as afterwards, with the utmost indifference.)

"You are going too, little one?" Rarouey had asked of her former playmate.

And the answer had been calmly given.

"Yes, I am going too. I must, you see. There is a *phi* (goblin, demon) in this business. It's a bad thing for a girl to be taken this way."

"It's a great misfortune," her mother had interjected, wailing.

"But it can't be helped," pursued Bua Phan fatalistically. "If I lose sight of him the *phi* will most assuredly come and kill me in revenge."

"But does he love you in return?" asked the incredulous Rarouey.

It shocked and horrified her to think that the girl she had known for years, ever since they had played together as children, was then being rapt away from the village and from the bosom of her family by a good-for-nothing stroller.

"No. But that will come, I hope, when he sees my devotion. Anyhow it can't be helped," Bua Phan went on in a monotonous level tone. "I simply *must* follow him or I die."

Impatiently Rarouey had turned away, murmuring with all the confidence of youth:

"Faugh! There must be some black art in this. The fellow is in league with the powers of Darkness!"

And someone who had heard her had answered:

"You're right, little one. It is uncanny. But take care that no one plays you the same trick yourself some day and you come under the *hlong*, the spell of a man not of your own race."

The incident had been alluded to several times in the village after Bua Phan's departure. Seemingly all acquiesced in the inevitability of such an occurrence, admitting that the girl could do nothing else, though it was a bad thing to happen to her and to her family who alone were tainted with the slight disgrace attaching to such a complete abandonment of passion.

The story, however, ran in the vulgar mouth that Mae

Bua Phan had finally fallen a victim to the *phi* which had possessed her and had died soon afterwards, her heart, by an elaboration of popular imagination, having been found to be literally broken.

Rarouey shuddered as if a cold wind had passed through her marrow.

She, of course, unhesitatingly accepted the popular version of Bua Phan's fate. She had never thought of such things before, but the imminent departure of the man—a foreigner too—whom she had loved so passionately and abandoned her home and child to follow, brought these terrors surging to the surface.

Was that to be her fate also? . . .

CHAPTER XXIV

RAROUEY REMEMBERS

THE child stirred uneasily, affected by some of the terror and uncertainty of his mother communicated to him through her trembling body. Now the *nai* could be heard shouting "Bo-oy!" and the servant answered sleepily from his quarters. The cook, just back from market, ceased uncoiling his top-knot and tucked it up temporarily to begin his morning clatter of pans in the kitchen, while the house coolie passed with his old kerosene tins on his way to the rain water tank for the day's supply.

Once again Rarouey looked up at the big white house. Her thoughts went wandering through the cool, lofty rooms with their polished, dark teak floors strewn with rugs, and thence out to the verandah at the back, shaded by green persiennes, where had been part of her own particular quarters and latterly also the nursery playroom of her child.

At this moment Philip—who seemed to her now to have lost the dear familiarity of intimacy and to be merely her foreign lord, the white *nai* with the curly hair and the fierce eyes—Philip would be stretched on his long chair as she had so often seen him in the past, awaiting the advent of early tea, smoking a cigarette perhaps, and reading, yes certainly reading, for he seemed always to be reading.

She recalled the chairs and the tables of the verandah

and the houserooms, a litter of books and cigarette tins, the deer horns and trophies, the rows of polished Buddhas on the shelves in strong contrast to the brightly coloured sporting and hunting prints decorating the walls, and all the furniture of the various rooms in the dwelling where the last few, brief years had been passed.

Farangs had always too much furniture in their rooms, she had long since concluded. Such an accumulation, in contradistinction to the bare simplicity of Siamese furnishing, she had regarded at first as odd and unnecessary, but accepted afterwards with a comic air of resigned co-proprietorship.

And she was leaving this! Leaving the foreign husband with whom she had lived for the past two years.

Never at any time had she pictured what the ending to their relationship should be, nor had she even regarded it as other than permanent and immutable.

Yet, somehow, already she had become so used to the idea of a temporary return to the old ways, to the threads of life and the bonds of old custom amongst her own people that, for a moment, she would have almost resented any change in that intention. Envisaged ever since her *nai* had announced his approaching departure to Europe, the prospect of returning to her foolish old mother and the home in the Huey had grown more imminent till it excluded almost all else.

How kind the *nai* had invariably been to her, and how many pretty presents he had given her! These latter, she remembered with some pardonable pride, had come to her unasked. Unlike most girls who had gone with farang husbands, Rarouey was not mercenary, and her early removal from the sphere of her relations' influence had prevented her from learning to look upon the alliance as most of her people did, namely as a silver mine from which to extract the greatest possible number of ticals.

"Yes," she told herself, "the *nai* has been kind, nay generous—and that too without requesting."

And then her heart within her asked what she, on her part, had returned for that kindness and that generosity.

Examining herself, she could avow with sincerity that, besides the affection she had given unsought to one of an alien race, she had also ministered unremittingly and lent assiduous thought to her lover's material needs. That reflection, above all, warmed and comforted her child-like heart.

It was pain and suffering too that had first taught her to love the *nai*.

She recalled again the anxious time of that terrible vigil in the Mae Chem forest when she had nursed Philip after he lay wounded by the shots of her father and his gang of dacoits. Again her heart filled with the emotions that woman-nature, under white skin or black, brown or yellow, experiences when its Man is suffering and laid low, dependant on womanly attentions, the strong frame shaken by pain and wounds, lying as it were a helpless infant in its hands.

"Always he has said that he owes life and safety to me as to no other. Often, often has he called me his 'little saviour-mother.'"

She was speaking now aloud to her child in wistful tones. The scene of the garden dimmed before her unseeing eyes filmed over with tears from the depth of some divine despair.

Then, as now, the strongest recollection of that terrible time in the Huey Toh was of the gratitude with which her attentions had been requited. That remembrance softened her more than any other, for somehow gratitude was an emotion which, in her experience and amongst her own people, was but vaguely known and seldom displayed in any articulate or tangible fashion.

In the Buddhist monastery across the road the great gong had already begun to boom the usual signal for the morning orisons of the priests who had now returned from their early round with the begging-bowl. The pariah dogs, lifting dismal voices, punctuated every stroke with a melancholy howling that waxed crescendo with the shortening beats of the tocsin.

Rarouey smiled, remembering the *nai's* daily anguish

and deep objurgations during this hideous chorus. Many had been his vain appeals to the Abbot of the *Wat* for respite from the nerve-shattering noise, one and all met by the same imperturbable rejoinder.

"*Pen thamnien yangan khorap*" (it is the custom so).

Ah well! the *nai* would soon be far away from the sound he hated so, for to-day he was going back, back in the big fireboat, back to his own people across the sundering leagues of sea.

And she—she too was going back, back to her own people. Of course it was only for six months, and he would come again and take her. But six months was a long time, a weary, long time.

The child upon her hip awoke and began to add a vigorous treble to the din around them. He was called *Sawang* (Daylight) though he was a dark-skinned little chap, considering his white father. But that was partly due to the fact that Philip had insisted on little Sawang running naked at play like most other children in that country. It was certainly more comfortable for the child, but the sun soon burned the little body brown, and that too despite Rarouey's surreptitious habit of slipping a little garment on him whenever possible in the absence of the *nai*.

To any other than Rarouey in whose eyes naturally he was of course never anything but beautiful, Sawang at that age would not have appeared a singularly pretty child.

He was not even as pretty as the generality of Siamese children. He had a large head and a large mouth—both features discounting him considerably according to the canons of Oriental beauty, but these were redeemed by a singularly expressive, mobile and intelligent pair of eyes.

Rarouey stilled his dissatisfied roar with a "Oh—*khon di. Khrai tham!*" (There there! Good little fellow!)

He cried much, did little Sawang, more than other children, like his father impatient of all noise.

A man stood at her side. It was Ai Dee, her brother.

"You are late, sister," he said.

"I am coming," she answered simply, and followed him.

As they turned to go the chanting of the priests came floating across the river to the garden.

CHAPTER XXV

"THE HOUSE WHERE WE WERE BORN"

"MAE RAROUEY was always a proud one," said Ai Some, the Lao. "And the farang has not changed her."

"No," agreed Ta Khieo, the leader of the caravan. "Now, if it had been *you,* my son, you would have had her properly cowed by this time, wouldn't you? But cheer up, you can go in and win now. A young widow with plenty of money!"

The others laughed. Ai Some had once been a perfervid suitor for Rarouey's hand, but had been incontinently repulsed by her parents when he went a-wooing.

The men had just left Rarouey and her child at the door of her mother's house.

She had been in their company for five days, having joined the caravan at Hminelongyi and travelled overland to the Huey Toh. Though they understood modesty and appreciated it, they had not altogether relished her silence during the journey, nor the coldness with which she had left them when she had reached her home.

"But she was a good girl always," broke in her brother Ai Dee. "She sent money often to the old ones. To tell the truth, she was always like this. Her heart has not changed."

"Yes. Yes. Yet the farang has assuredly taught her the *chong hong* (haughty) ways of his people. I have seen lots of them, our girls that went with farangs,

and it is always the same thing. Love never came of such matings. The only good thing about them is that the girls get heaps of money. Farangs are always rich, and when they go, they always pay their girls off well."

Thus Ta Khieo, the caravaneer, and his words bore weight, being those of an old man who had seen the changes of full fifty years upon his country, and one who had marked the influence of the farang in many directions.

The men went off to unload their pack-bullocks. Rarouey came out and stood looking at the village from the door of her mother's humble house. It had not changed in the slightest, but everything seemed small, so very small—the houses and the single street, and the boats and dug-outs along the creek.

All the same it was good to be back amongst her own people.

It was good to see again the paddy fields and the jungle coming down to the creek on the opposite bank. It was good to see the slow going bullock-carts that went creaking across the ricketty wooden bridge by the Amphur's court (District Magistrate) and then returning from the fields and the jungle. She listened to the crowing of the cocks and thought how pleasant it was to hear the evening sounds from the village, the pounding of rice, the hum-hum of insects, the call of some sleepy bird.

Now the lights began to flicker here and there in the houses, and the sound of childish voices chanting in the *wat* near by rose on the stillness of the air.

She turned and went into the house, barring the door as she went. Her mother was squatted on the floor contentedly chewing betel and pulling the cord of the cradle in which her daughter's child lay sleeping.

He was her daughter's child after all. The farang did not count to Mae Noi.

"I bathed him and gave him his rice," said Mae Noi, with all the pride of a grandmother. "What a pretty cradle you have got for him!"

"Yes," said Rarouey somewhat listlessly. "The Nai gave him that!"

"It is a far better cradle than Ai Tee, thy first little one ever had," remarked her mother.

Rarouey did not answer, but she was aware of the shade of envy which these last words contained. The jealousy of her mother for her child by Ai Seng, as contrasted with the other child she was nursing now, was already evident.

Mae Noi went on crooning.

"The Nai was very rich, eh?" she said. "They are all rich, these farangs. I often wonder where they get all the money, for they never seem to do any work. Old Luang Thien used to say that silver grew on the trees in the farangs' country. Did the Nai ever tell thee about it?"

"No. Don't be silly mother!" Rarouey answered, smiling for all her impatience.

She remembered the day when she too used to think so.

"Farangs are not all rich," she explained. "I once saw one who was glad enough to beg for a little rice from us Siamese. But the Nai Consul gave him money and sent him away to save the face of his own people. He had come from Rangoon."

"How many days to go to the farangs' country from Rangoon?"

"Thirty in the big fire-ship, but one of our boats would take a year to reach it."

"There must be a devil in those big fire-ships," opined the elder woman. "I am glad I never saw one. The devil would have killed me I am sure."

Rarouey lit a cigarette and took down her little steel box from the rafters where she had placed it on her first arrival.

It contained her jewellery and her clothes, cherished fallalls, presents from her white master. She took the articles out one by one and looked at them. The jewellery she tried on her fingers and her neck or arms. The silks her mother fingered avariciously.

Rarouey liked to look at and handle their beauty as a

child would, lovingly; but they were already ceasing to be tokens of affection, since the white man who had bewitched her had gone from her side.

"We are very poor now," Mae Noi was bewailing. "Ever since thy father got himself mixed up in that dacoity. This house is so small, not like the old place; and all the fields were mortgaged—after thy father ruined himself with the forest work. What a soft he was! And now thy elder brother has been taken for the army as a conscript. I have to make what money I can by keeping a stall in the market. The profit on betel is very small. It is hard to be poor when one has once known what riches mean!"

"All right mother," comforted the daughter. "I have enough now for both of us, and thou needst not work any more. We will get a larger house. My brother was saying that the house of Ai Make, the one beyond the *wat*, is vacant now. It would do very well."

She was brushing her hair. She had learned to adorn it coquettishly with pins and flowers and to twist it into an elaborate knot such as pleased her Nai.

It did not strike her that to comb and pleat it now as the Nai liked it was not much good since the Nai was not there to see it. But she went on doing it until Ai Dee came back from gossiping with the other men in the market. Then she went to the fire and lifted the rice pot to prepare the evening meal.

After they had eaten, Dee offered her some betel, but she asked for pickled tea rather.

Her brother laughed scornfully.

"The Nai said betel nut made the teeth ugly," said Rarouey.

In reality she had lost the taste through long disuse.

On the following day, and for the first few weeks after her return to the Huey, Rarouey refused to go to the market, or in fact to any of the rendezvous of the village. She was diffident of herself, and she feared with undue sensitiveness the neighbours' opinion of her.

She had not been the only girl of that village to take a

farang husband, but she had been the only one who had been so "infatuated" with a farang that she had followed him from other than mercenary motives. She thought her action must involve a certain amount of curiosity and criticism, if not indeed of actual loss of face, and she refrained from appearing out of doors.

The fear of the *phi* (goblin) whom she thought responsible for her infatuation was also strong upon her in these early days.

She would sometimes catch herself trembling at the slightest sound and wondering when her evil erotic genius would descend upon her to take the vengeance which was his now that the protecting arms of her lover were withdrawn. She erected a little tree shrine to the *phi* and placed offerings on it daily, praying the while to be spared from evil until her husband should return to her in six months' time. . . .

When it became rumoured about the village that Mae Rarouey was now a woman of means, several suitors soon appeared to try their luck and crave the honour of her hand, and, principally, of her purse.

This pleasurably agitated her poor old mother. Mae Noi delighted in the reflected glory of her own position as the mother of such a distinguished, such an out-of-the-way daughter.

Unfortunately, she failed to keep a level head, and before long had as good as betrothed Rarouey to Ai Chem, the greatest *nakleng* (good for nothing) in the village, merely on the strength of an old acquaintance with Ai Chem's mother and a shadowy debt due to Ai Chem's family.

Rarouey was much incensed.

"Foolish beldame that thou art," she cried in her hurt. "Canst thou not see he is but the fly that hovers round the *khanom* (sweetmeat)!"

And she forbade her mother to arrange any further matches on her behalf.

Life in her mother's house Rarouey soon found narrow and monotonous. The "spears of her deliverance" that

had shone so brightly over "the house where she was born" on the first morning of her return soon vanished into nothingness and illusion.

Like Philip amongst his own people, she too was early subject to a queer, discontented malaise of the spirit; but in her case there was a distinction.

The early pleasure at having returned to her own place and her own people did not outlast the first few days. She found herself all the time and all day long listening for the Nai's step, an expectancy that had become a habit during the time she had spent in the white man's house.

Although that step generally meant nothing more than a simple indication of the master's arrival and she had never, in all the years lived under the same roof with him, taken it to mean that she was to go to him until called for, yet the expectancy had deepened into a settled usage. Now, in his absence, it had all the keenness of a pleasure wanting.

There was no gambling house in the Huey Toh either and no play possible, save of a surreptitious and unexciting kind. Rarouey loved gambling with all the passion of the Oriental, and she missed the opportunities that life in Hminelongyi had given her to indulge that passion.

There never seemed to be anything at all happening in Huey Toh; not even the mild distraction always possible in Philip's house of a wrangle with the cook over his marketing "squeeze" (commission).

In short, now that the man of an alien race who had taken her to wife had passed beyond her radius, taking with him all the novelty of his influence and his strange ways, she began to find life very dull indeed. When the ejaculations of the neighbours at her descriptions of quaint farang ideas and habits began to pall, when the admiration of her women friends for her child had ceased to please, and even the excitement of outdoing the other girls at the *wat* on *wan phra* (Buddhist Sunday) had lost its first keenness—she began to find time hang very heavily.

Her mother had taken the care of the child entirely out

of her hands, and nothing contented the old woman more than to sit for hours on the floor training the little Daylight to put one pudgy foot before the other, while nothing distressed her more than to have the infant taken from her.

One morning Ai Dee arrived in a state of suppressed excitement from the early market.

His manner was of one who had news of the greatest moment to divulge and only needed gentle pressing to give it with a gush.

Rarouey remarked this at once, but she herself was never given to garrulousness and did not encourage it in others.

When they were seated round the rice-pot, Rarouey feeding the child with great spoonfuls of sticky rice and morsels of dried saltfish, Dee burst out.

"Do you know what I hear to-day from Mong Pannya, the pork-seller?"

"I could not tell," said Rarouey indifferently, as she took a bunch of chillies from the child who was about to cram them into its catholic mouth.

"Perhaps Ai Lan is to sue you in the Amphur's Court for the hire of those bullocks," suggested Mae Noi with a titter.

"No! Nothing of the sort," answered Ai Dee. "Something far more important. Something that will please my little sister."

"Don't eat with a double fork my son," querulously broke in the old mother, using a common Siamese expression to convey by figure of speech the sense of a double meaning. "What is it Mong Pannya said?"

"Mae Phan is coming to sue for little sister in marriage to the Chao (chief)."

Rarouey flushed angrily.

Mae Phan was an old dame known as the "mother bird," who acted as mediatrix in most of the numerous affairs of heart that occupied the time of the dissolute Chief of the district. If the woman were coming to see her mother, it could only mean one thing—and that was

Rarouey's inevitable absorption into the harem of the Chao.

For once she came to a quick decision.

Some words of the *farang* came back to her. She recalled how the white Nai had inveighed against the odious system of polygamy which her race accepted as an honourable custom. It had always seemed to her a natural thing that a rich man should have as many wives as he could comfortably afford, and the more he had, the higher the esteem he merited, for it was a symbol of his riches.

Had the Chao sent Mae Phan to ask her mother for her in the days before she had known the *farang*, she would have accepted without demur.

Now however, after a contact with European ways and ideas, the honour struck her in a different light.

She did not reason the ethics of the question. She merely accepted as true the teaching of (what seemed to her) a superior race, viz., that it was shameful to become the chattel, the plaything of a corrupt princeling, and that it was more fitting a woman should be the single wife of an honest man, who gained by the sweat of his brow the rice of their subsistence.

So much had civilisation done for Rarouey.

Had one told her so, she would of course have denied at once. She would have said, with all the illogicality of the feminine, that she did what she did because she wanted to, and not because anyone had taught her.

She was still a child in most things, and her *farang* marriage had not taught her to search into the reasons of things, even to question the claims of the *thamniem* (custom) she had formally acceded to unthinkingly, unwaveringly.

Vaguely, she resented the scruples, the differences in standpoint with which her connection with foreign ways, customs and ideas had imbued her immature mind, without for a moment being consciously aware of these scruples or altered standpoints. Yet she could in no wise have resisted these conclusions or escaped the decision to which her change of attitude led her.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHEN DAYLIGHT DIED

About the time that Rarouey first began to be subjected to overtures from the harem of the Chao of Lampang, Nai Khao returned to the Huey Toh, having completed his term of military service in Laowieng. In Rarouey's family Khao was what is vaguely known in Siam as a *phi nawng*—a term which may be extended to include the most proximate of blood relationships or the most remote of nodding acquaintanceships.

By their reprehensible system of inter-marriage, and from a wide Buddhistic religious sense of filial piety, the Siamese have aquired a ramified series of human relationships which polygamist nations alone recognise and alone can furnish.

Thus, a well-to-do-son will have living under his roof his "royal" wife and various "little" wives, with their children, his aged mother and father and perhaps a trifle of aunts, nephews, cousins, nieces, children by marriage and children by adoption. The whole family coterie are *phi nawng* one to another, though any individual member of the tangled circle of relations might find himself hard pressed if asked the degree of consanguinity between himself and the others. The exact status of any one of this interrelated congeries is to a Siamese mind sufficiently well described by the all-embracing word *phi nawng*.

"My word!" remarked Rarouey's mother, "But Ai Khao has been smartened up no end by his service."

"Yes," agreed her daughter, looking at Ai Khao as he strode down the village street. "He is not the hobbledehoy of a boy that used to bake mud pies and fly kites with me when we were children together."

Ai Khao indeed had devoloped into a self-possessed scamp, with an artistic eye to the colour of his silk pantaloons or the drapery of the scarf he wore round his neck, while life in cantonments had added to his appreciation of his own charms in feminine eyes.

"But, I suppose," Rarouey went on, "he is far too fine a gentleman to return to the hard work of the field now. He is like all the men. After their period of military service, they scorn the labour that has supported their ancestors for generations."

Mae Noi, however, was ever ready in her easy going way to make allowances for Youth and the circumstances of the case.

"Oh no," she would say. "He is a good lad. He needs a rest now after the trouble of soldiering."

So Ai Khao returned and took up his abode under the shelter of his *phi nawng*, Rarouey.

He idled away the long warm days in the compound, which already, a few months after Rarouey came back from Hminelongyi, contained a numerous retinue of hangers on. It was wonderful how the *phi nawng* appeared from all directions to batten on the windfall of their wealthy relative, who had the good fortune to find herself in possession of a house and a piece of land and in receipt of a regular monthly income from her late *farang* husband.

Rarouey never remonstrated. In point of fact she looked upon these sponging relatives as so many hostages to fate, considering that every grain of rice they consumed was so much more "merit" to her credit. She set her *phi nawng's* entertainment against the possible vengeance of the *phi* to whose dire influence her love for Philip was due.

The days passed, as days pass in Siam, with rapid monotony. Rarouey hardly marked their going. She was passively content to wait. Of late also the Chao had somewhat abated his efforts to enrol the girl in the number of his concubines. Rarouey had silenced, as she thought, her mother and Mae Phan from further hints, her independent position enabling her to take up a strong stand in the matter and keep the subject in abeyance.

The steamy rains of the season had given place to the pleasant touch of chilly weather which serves the North of Siam as a winter. And now the hot months were coming round again, and it seemed a long time since the white Nai had sailed away across the ocean in the big fire-ship.

"The flame of the forest is still in flower, mother," remarked Rarouey one morning.

She was thinking of the memorable morning when she had last quitted her home in Hminelongyi and her foreign husband. Siamese are not given, as a rule, to remarking on or even noticing the beauties of nature, and Rarouey's mother only grunted in reply.

"Huh! it is the season for it."

Rarouey did not know it, but her association with Philip who delighted in all natural scenic loveliness was responsible for her noting the glory of the scarlet-blossomed tree in the compound. She was unconscious of the fact, but the impressionistic effect of her union with the white man was in this, as in many other things, very evident upon her outlook.

Her whole psychology had changed indeed. Even yet she found herself revolted many times a day by some idea or some usage common to her own people which formerly she had accepted as a part of the general scheme of things, but which farang life had taught her were not to be tolerated.

She kept her house spotlessly tidy for one thing, and many were her tantrums at her mother or her relations whose negligent habits upset the spick-and-span of her own arrangements.

"Too proud to eat off the floor, art thou?" sneered her

mother once, when she had insisted on a low table and a Lao mat beneath the array of dishes.

"Yes," said Rarouey with decision. "No nice person ever does such a thing."

"Oh, ho! We are very fine nowadays since we have learned the proud farang ways aren't we?" grumbled the old woman as she obeyed.

In every detail and care of the child's upbringing she evidenced a particularity which made her the bane of all with whom she was brought into contact. She saw to the boiling of the water and the bathing of the little body, she washed and ironed the little garments made with her own hands, and she insisted that all around her should follow her newly-acquired notions in these and other respects.

Ai Khao early grasped the situation and took care not to offend the novel susceptibilities of his relative. He tried to show that he likewise had known the refinement of a class above his own.

"No. I don't chew any longer," he astonished everyone by saying one evening when a quid of betel was offered him.

"What is the matter, lad? Art thou sick?" he had been asked, and his obstinacy had been followed by many jibes and jeers. "As bad as Rarouey now. Thou wilt soon have teeth as white as any pariah dog."

But he had stuck to his guns and he had been rewarded by the smile of pleasure which had come to him from his kinswoman. He went on trying to show (at least in the majority of things and at moments when he knew Rarouey could overlook him) that he sympathised with her strivings towards a more cultured mode of life and a higher habit of thinking than was common to his race and his station.

He had, in short that instinct which some men possess of divining wherein to please a woman of sensibility. He flattered Rarouey by approximating to her own standard. Though the alteration was but a veneer of false polish streaked across his inherently coarse nature, he succeeded

in deluding Rarouey and in winning his way gradually to her good graces.

He took the side of little Daylight frequently on the many occasions when distinction was made by the jealous grandmother between the two children.

This jealousy increased with time and was aggravated by the child's marked superiority to his step-brother in beauty of form, grace of feature and quickness of intelligence. Rarouey had often to intervene to see that little Sawang got his rights, and in his support of her Ai Khao added yet another to the growing attractions which he had in her eyes.

Then an incident happened which ultimately brought Rarouey and the man closer together than ever before.

One morning Sawang fell ill. Ai Khao inspected the child tossing in his cradle suspended from the roof-beams of the house.

"Little *Nu* (*Nu*—a generic term of endearment for Siamese children, literally meaning a mouse). Little nu, someone has given thee an unripe mango to eat," he opined.

Rarouey was wringing her hands and wrinkling her brows over the state of her infant.

"You are right," she said. "Never has he been ill like this before. So many times I have told them not to feed the child with rubbish."

"Yes indeed!"

"One has to be very careful with a little child's stomach," went on Rarouey. (There spake the farang.)

"I expect it was a mango," said Ai Khao, shaking his head. "May he that gave it perish of the plague!"

Rarouey wiped a tear from her eye. She stooped and readjusted the little blanket which Sawang had tossed from off his body in the convulsions of the colic which racked his little frame.

"He is more delicate than other children. Only natural, having a *farang* father."

The latter was the grumbling comment of Rarouey's mother from the mill outside the door where she now stood

threshing paddy by the primitive method of her forefathers. That is to say, she was jumping on and off the bar of a cumbrous wooden pestle which, actuated by foot, pounds the rice in a deep wooden basin.

The sound of these paddy-mills is characteristic of all Lao villages, and may be heard at any time of the night or day, an under-running accompaniment to every other sound. It formed the burden now to little Daylight's pained whimpers and Rarouey's whispered conversation with Ai Khao.

"He is *not* more delicate than other children," protested Rarouey in answer to her mother's invidious reference to the child's parentage. "He is just as strong as any other child—and far more beautiful. But stupid, wicked people keep on giving him dirt to eat that would make a dog sick."

She administered some homely remedies, but the child became no better.

The members of the household and one or two gossipy neighbours dawdled into the room, but finding their sage advice and loud condolences despised and rejected by the mother of the sick child, they took themselves off to squat in the shade of the flame-of-the-forest tree which formed the salient feature of the magnificent vegetation in the compound.

In this assemblage comments were not wanting on Rarouey's behaviour.

"She was always *chong hong* (stuck up). But lately she has become worse, I think," muttered one of the gossips.

"All these new-fangled notions about food and water!" was the snarl of another.

"What is the good of aping farang ways? Our fathers drank the river water. But she—she must have it filtered and boiled and strained forsooth, and goodness knows what all!"

Mae Phan, the wizened beldame who had once endeavoured to act as matrimonial go-between for the Chao, now joined the circle. She came from a brief

inspection of little Sawang and an ungracious rebuff from Rarouey to whom she had offered her services.

"That child is very ill," she croaked. "It is a bad hot season, and there is no *boon* (merit or luck) this year in our country."

Rarouey's mother rose to her feet. Detaching herself from the circle of advisers, she moved slowly up towards the gate of the compound.

Ai Khao shouted after her.

"Where are you off to mother?"

"I am going for a stroll," was the answer.

"I'll wager she is off to see if she can find her beloved Phra Aroon," said Ai Dee with a titter.

This was the Abbot of Wat Theparak, the monastery of the Huey Toh. To Phra Aroon at all crises the women of the village rushed frantically for ghostly comfort.

He combined a reputation for holiness and learning in the Law with a fame as medical adviser which none of his Order could rival. Though the younger generation of sceptics contemned his knowledge of Buddha's precepts as a worthless accomplishment, all joined in praising his skill as a healer, and few failed to have recourse to his ministrations when fever wrung the brow or some neglected wound refused to heal.

It was towards the monastery therefore that Mae Noi now made her way. There she knew she would find the good old monk.

Unfortunately, her path lay through the market, and she was constrained to stop so often just to pass the time of day with friends encountered seated at their doors, and to recount with a varying wealth of detail the situation in her daughter's house and the object of her present mission, that it was well past noon before she reached the monastery.

She sought out the good priest in the temple school. There, amid the clamour of the children around him engaged in reciting texts at the top of their voices, she related to him what had befallen the child at her home.

Phra Aroon was all sympathy.

"Pray come and see the little one," she besought him. But he gently declined.

"See!" he said, pointing out of doors. "Yon sun has passed its meridian, and I cannot."

A strict observer of monastical regulations, the good monk had added to his reputation amongst the villagers, and incidentally laid up a great store of "merit" for his next incarnation, by always abstaining from food after mid-day, by never sleeping on a bed raised above the level of the ground and the like.

As Mae Noi talked to him now he kept his eyes averted on the ground, thus following yet another rule of his Order which forbade him to look on the face or figure of a woman.

"It is a strict rule," he added. "And I must not break bread or even make a visit of necessity after mid-day. I cannot come to-day to see the child."

All he could do was to give the old lady some medicine and advice, together with a promise to call next morning.

"Have nothing to do with the mad foreign *maw* (Doctor)," was his parting injunction to Mae Noi as she took her way dolefully homeward again. "All his medicines are poisons. And when little children die he cooks and eats them."

In this belief Phra Aroon was an exception as a Buddhist priest. But it must be remembered that he was of the old school and clung to the prejudices and superstitions which date from the first appearance in Siam of medical missionaries. To-day the benign operations of the latter are one of the most praiseworthy features of European charity and Christian love in the East, and have gone far to dissipate the native's former unenlightened terrors at their intentions.

Unfortunately, next day at dawn, when the reverend Brother left his begging-bowl on the morning round to fulfil his promise to Mae Noi, he arrived to find a little crowd of women sitting round the cradle and rocking themselves in raucous lamentations beside the tiny limbs of

Sawang stretched stark and stiff on his mat and far beyond the reach either of priestly remedies or of Pali incantations.

"Oh dear!" cried Mae Noi, catching sight of her favourite priest. "What will Phra Aroon say to thee now, Rarouey?"

"I don't care!" cried Rarouey, looking up with tearless eyes in a haggard face. "I am quite sure none of his beastly herbs and dirty potions could have saved the child."

To his horror it began to dawn on the Abbot that Rarouey had flatly declined to administer the remedies he had supplied the day before. That horror was increased when he learned that, late on the previous night, Ai Khao had gone to fetch Dr. Watson from the Mission Dispensary, and that the latter, though arriving to find the infant in extremis, had done all that European skill could devise to alleviate the last agonies of little Daylight.

Finding himself in an unsympathetic atmosphere, the popular monk did not linger long after these facts had been broken to him.

"And the cremation?" he asked. "Wouldst thou have it at the wat, my child?"

But even this attempt to bring Rarouey back into the influence of her fathers' religion failed also.

"Nay," she answered bitterly. "Thou couldst not save him, and the missionaries have baptised him. He shall be buried after the fashion of his father."

Phra Aroon shrugged his shoulders and departed leaving a household divided against itself.

On the one hand, there was Mae Noi and her cronies who, in the intervals of their wailing, gave vent to long jeremiads regarding Rarouey's folly.

"Refusing to give the child the *ya* (medicaments) of the good Phra——"

"A priest-doctor of renown too in our land——"

"Medicines possessed of holy virtues which would undoubtedly have cured the child if partaken of in time——"

"A sheer flying in the face of Providence I call it," wound up Mae Noi.

On the other hand there was Rarouey. But for the present she was too prostrate with poignant sorrow at the loss of her little one to be able to do much more than moan her stricken grief. To her side came her kinsman Khao who, taking his cue from Rarouey, went to the root of the matter respecting the child's death.

"What I say," he stoutly maintained, "is that, if some interfering old person had not given the child unsuitable food, it would never have fallen ill."

Wordy recriminations went on all day among the old women mumbling around the cradle of the dead child. The division of opinion served only to range Ai Khao more than ever on the side of Rarouey.

In the days of grief that followed the young fellow was conspicuous not only with words of condolence but also with many acts of practical help.

He saw to the funeral and in various quiet ways showed sympathy and remorse, and in fact proved himself a veritable friend in need. Cunning youth!

CHAPTER XXVII

SIAM IN LONDON

ALONG the edge of the Park the taxi-cab slipped smoothly on its path. Philip sat remarking the dusty drabness of the London greens and the soot-blackened stems of the trees on either hand, so different from the freshness and the foliage he had left a few hours ago at Silverdene.

He took from his pocket the letter he had received from Santall before starting.

In this the latter had breathlessly supplicated him thus :

" Dear old stick-in-the-mud,

" If you value your life and want to meet the most stunning creature that God ever thought of, meet me at Jimmy's on Friday for tiffin. I'm off to Ireland immediately and can't be in Town for the Siam Dinner.

" Thine as never before,

" Santall of the ilk."

Harkness squirmed with laughter on the seat.

" The finest creature God ever thought of," he repeated to himself. " Perhaps it is a white rat—or a white elephant. Anyhow, Santall seems to have gone quite demented, and in need of a saviour."

So he had come up to Town to keep the tiffin appointment, intending to put in a couple of days afterwards at his Club until the date of the Siam Dinner—that annual

assembly of men from Siam at Home on leave which is held in London.

The taxi turned sharply along the edge of the path, and Philip was conscious of losing his balance and sliding down the slippery leather seat, a sensation familiar to passengers in these convenient vehicles.

He had gone rolling from right to left and was about to put his hand against the window to support himself, when crash!

The next moment he found himself on his back, staring up into the brown eyes of a good natured London policeman, the constable on duty at the spot where the accident occurred.

The inevitable Cockney crowd, loquacious but well-behaved, was rapidly swelling to immense dimensions around the débris. The wheels of the taxi which Harkness had so precipitately quitted and which, having cannoned into a motor-bus, now lay on its side, were still absurdly spinning in the air for all the world like some indignant cow, upset and kicking its legs to heaven.

Aloft on the motor-bus, a thundering Zeus, the driver stood by his steering wheel hurling oaths at the unfortunate taxi-man, and the latter was not too much hurt to return the epithets and classic allusions with interest.

Philip rose to his feet and, having recovered his hat and dusted his clothes, surveyed the disaster for a moment. It was evident that the damage done, if any, was to the hired Fiat which had been taking him from Paddington.

Then, with all an Englishman's dislike of a scene, he hurriedly turned to get out of the crowd at once.

He tossed the driver half-a-crown, and was fumbling in his cigarette case for a card to give the bobby—when a man came pattering down the steps of the motor-bus, and with one spring was by his side and slapping him on the back.

"Hurt, old man? Gosh! But that *was* a purler! No mistake but your taxi jumped the rails that time."

Harkness turned round and dazedly tried to recollect the smiling features of the man at his side.

"It's me, Santall, you silly old owl," said the impetuous stranger jabbing him in the ribs again.

A moment later they had edged away together out of the crowd and hailed another taxi scouting along near by. Inside they turned and looked at each other, and then burst into shrieks of laughter.

"Good lord!" said Santall. "I have heard that if a man goes into the stalls at Daly's any night, he is sure to meet some blighter from Siam. But now——"

"The most likely place to look for them is under a taxi-cab which has been run into by a motor-bus." Philip completed his sentence, and they both laughed again.

"When did you come up?" Santall ran on. "Oh, I forgot, you're coming to tiffin with me to-day of course. I'll introduce you. Jove! you're looking fit. Tell me all the news of Bangkok. How is old Judge Jenkins? And is Mrs. Tom Noddy as *chong hong* as ever?——"

"It's you who ought to give me the news of Bangkok. I've been Home nearly four months, and you've just arrived."

"Well, I'm blest! you're right. I had forgotten. Well, well! This is truly what you might call running across old friends."

The excited Santall could scarcely wait for an answer, and Harkness, recovering from his recent shaking, and becoming infected with some of his friend's excitement, was soon also talking twenty to the dozen.

"We'll just have a gin and bitters, and then we can stroll along and meet her as she comes out for tiffin," said Santall.

"Who the devil——" queried his friend.

Santall drew himself up with an assertion of grossly outraged dignity.

"Look here, young fellah me lad, that's not suitable language to use about my fiancée."

"Who the—how the—why the—you never said anything about your fiancée," spluttered Philip, absolutely floored.

"Didn't I?" asked Santall, grinning. "Don't you remember the evening when Nempont eloped with the Princess What's-her-name?"

"Oh, yes! You *did* rave about some girl a bit that evening. Is she what you meant by 'the finest creature God ever thought of?'"

Santall expounded and rhapsodised all the way down the Strand, until they came to a block of offices, when he stopped at a building and pointed to a brass plate. Among the names thereon stood that of "The Elite Typewriting Co.," and, within brackets, "Prop. Miss Trafford—Third Floor."

A little later Harkness found himself mumbling awkwardly some incoherencies of presentation at the clear-eyed, self-assured girl whom Santall now introduced as his fiancée.

From the rapid rush of Santall's explanatory remarks his friend gathered that Hilda Trafford, head of a typewriting firm which employed a dozen or so of very capable girl-operators, had inexplicably promised (more or less) to marry his friend. They were to sail for Siam in the autumn.

Of the intensity of Santall's devotion there could be no possible doubt. It had changed him entirely.

Philip remembered how, already in Bangkok on the last occasion when he had seen Santall, his formerly reserved and reticent senior had unburdened himself so freely about this girl. Old fashioned enough to love with all his heart, Santall, it was evident, did not mind wearing his heart upon his sleeve.

Amid the chaff that went on at lunch Philip was studying Hilda Trafford. The conversation skipped lightly from one indifferent subject to another, but war was never mentioned, though all day screaming placards had met them at every turn.

"I am glad I have met you, Mr. Harkness," said Hilda. "You can help me to revise the glowing estimate of Siam which Geoff has submitted for my consumption."

Philip answered slowly.

"No. It's not all lavender, out there—for a woman. But, as Santall says, it has improved very much of late. Undoubtedly it has, and one can be happy though married there. I am sure I wish you both all happiness."

Miss Trafford's struggle in the maelström of London business life had left an impression of weariness on her pretty features, and at times, despite her gaiety with Santall, she wore an air of sadness in a sorrowful hard battle.

What however struck Philip most about this love affair was that Santall's unhesitating homage was met, on Hilda's side, by a certain bluffness of criticism which was far from the idealisation of her future husband one generally expects from a woman deeply in love. Indeed Santall on his side was obliged to suppress his abundance of sentiment in order to keep in countenance with Hilda's cool prose.

Philip was inclined to be pessimistic as to the success of such a mating. But that was just Hilda's way. She gave and expected nothing more than a tolerant comradeship such as one finds between two men. This pose of mannish directness—for pose it was—Philip attributed to the "bachelor girl" standards which Hilda deemed it necessary to subscribe.

All the same, he could not help contrasting her matter-of-fact, modern and efficient outlook with the sentimentality of Sylvia Dean.

Hilda drew him out cleverly, learnt something of his malaise and his long, half-conquered hankering for Siam. When she left the two men to go back to her office, her parting words served to correct Philip's earlier impression of her cool indifference, and to leave him with an uncanny feeling that she had read his mind correctly.

"Mr. Harkness," she said, buttoning her gloves, "if love comes into your life, seize it. It is a very precious thing, even if it is only personified in an old fogey like my Geoff."

"Isn't she a nailer?" cried Santall after she had gone.

And then he proposed, "Come along to the Sports' Club with me, and help me to put in the afternoon."

Santall was leaving for Dublin that evening to see his people. Philip readily agreed to keep him company till the time for his train for Fishguard.

"A nailer, that's what she is!" Santall went on. "That's why I wanted you to meet her on her native heath, so to speak. The wedding's next week, and then she's done with all this rushing back and forth to business."

They went into the Club.

Here Harkness supposed he would be subjected to further ravings from his deep-in-love friend, but for some reason or other, once they were inside, Santall fell silent. He declined a game of billiards, and rather unsociably picked up a paper.

The day was hot, and Philip was sleepy.

"I'll have forty winks," he said.

Santall assented and went on reading. It may have been something he saw in "Town Topics," the paper he had picked up, or it may have been his own inscrutable train of thought, but presently he burst out.

"Well, all I say is, that any man who has had any entanglement in the days of his youth, and doesn't tell the girl he is going to marry—he's a darned fool looking for trouble."

Philip gave a sleepy grunt, and then the sense of what the other had said, sinking into his somnolence, awakened him again.

He glanced across at Santall. What a look of health and contentment of mind there was on his friend's face. Why was it that the words just uttered chimed so exactly with something he himself had been thinking all day?

Philip spoke.

"I suppose you—yourself, when you got—engaged, I mean—you told her something about—Siam."

"Everything," chuckled Santall. "Every blamed thing. About the *mia* and the kiddie and the rest. She is not a prude who sets up a standard of hypocrisy and

concealment for her men-folk. When the men-folk break the eleventh commandment and are found out, that sort of thing only leads to trouble and tears."

"I knew——" began Harkness.

"Knew she would——" Santall tried to help his hesitation out.

"I knew she would take it that way. But wasn't it difficult to explain?"

"It was, rather. Broaching the subject was the worst part. But, bless your soul, it would have been a jolly sight harder to explain after she got out to Siam."

"And she didn't mind?"

"No. She made it easy with her infinite, quiet sense. I never——"

"Yes, she has plenty of quiet sense—a fine quality."

"I never realised," Santall went on. "I never realised till then what a brutal fibre goes to the constitution of a man. I mean as compared with the refined yet strong composition in the being of a woman who, like Hilda, has suffered and kept herself in the battle."

"Counsels of perfection again," murmured Philip.

"Perhaps."

"But why—why can't we too—we men—have the same fine fibre as the women who marry us?"

The younger asked the question, despairingly, ignoring the facts of life.

"That's not my present point," answered Santall. "What I am saying is that, if a man is going to marry an English girl, and if he has lived in the tropics after the fashion of most of us, he should put the girl wise beforehand."

Harkness felt the man before him knew something of his present uncertainty of mind, of the doubts that tormented him.

Sylvia had been casually and lightly mentioned at lunch, and Santall seemed to have sensed some of the possibilities which that young lady held to alter Philip's life and to bring him peace.

Formerly Santall would have been incapable of such a

tour de force of intuition, and it did not strike Harkness at once that it was his love for Hilda and his contact with her which had given Santall his present penetrativeness of vision. Little more was said on the subject. They parted that evening promising to meet again if possible.

Two days later Philip attended the Siam dinner.

At that function he met many old Siam acquaintances, either on leave or resident at Home. He was seated at table between Rashleigh, whom he had known in the Brunei at Laowieng, and Parkin of the Survey. The three whilom jungle-wallahs foregathered with reminiscences.

"How long am I Home for?" Rashleigh repeated. "I don't quite know, to tell the truth. You know I never did hit it off remarkably well with Marlow, and I am about fed up with his autocratic ways. I have a chance of going on the stage, and I think I'll take it."

Later in the evening he talked with Sarcombe, who was a veritable mine of information. He was one of the Stewards of the Dinner, and from him Philip gleaned details regarding the whereabouts and welfare of many former friends.

"Garstin," said Sarcombe. "Yes. He died about two months ago in Singapore."

Philip paused and put the next question.

"The matter with Garstin? Just 'love o' women' as Kipling calls it. Never cared for the man myself, but he died a horrible death, I'm told. And Watts? Oh yes. He chucked up the Ministry of Justice after bringing old Judge Jenkins to his knees. He is in the Service again."

Finally they touched on Nempont. Parkin seemed to remember reading about him in some American paper.

"He was the lion of Newport Society as far as I could make out. All the Yankee men went crazy over his Siamese princess, and he seemed to have plenty of money. I'm jolly glad. He deserved it for his pluck in carrying the girl off and marrying her in Manila as he did."

When Philip went back to Silverdene the next morning his mind was fuller than ever of Siam. These meetings

with men he had formerly known out East had served to resuscitate his nostalgia, and his dissatisfaction with hum-drum English life was now intense.

The afternoon spent with Santall in the Sports' Club recurred vividly to memory. He would speak to Sylvia, whatever it cost, he thought.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A CLEAN BREAST

HARRY had come to the station to meet him.

"Hello, old bird!" were his first words to Philip.

He was bubbling with excitement and found evident difficulty in containing himself. Philip had been dreaming in the train all the way down from Town. His thoughts were still of the hot air in some Lao market place, the strings of brown bare-footed women with their baskets jogging on their shoulders, and the sound of children chanting their lessons in some Buddhist monastery.

"Hello, Harry!" he answered. "It was decent of you to come over."

His voice was harsh and strained.

"I might have telegraphed or I might have written," said Harry. "But I thought I would drive the pony over to meet you, and tell you the news in person. What do you think?"

"I don't think," said Philip sarcastically, to damp the juvenile enthusiasm of his younger brother which grated on his present pensiveness. "Not in these braces. Too hot to think."

"No! But seriously, Phil," protested Harry. "It's the greatest stunt you ever heard. I'm going to Bangkok."

"Bangkok? Why Bangkok?"

Philip was puzzled for a moment, forgetting the negotiations he himself had been instrumental in beginning

with a view to getting his brother a billet in the Hankow Bank. A few vague promises had been made. He had written a director he knew, but of late nothing much had been heard of the project.

"Oh, I see. The Bank. Yes! Yes!" he replied at last.

"I knew I would get East sooner or later," went on Harry. "But not straight away, and certainly not to Bang-bally-kok-a-doodle-doo! You must help me with my outfit, and give me few wrinkles."

"Yes. All right," agreed his brother. "I will. I may be of some use to you when you go."

And then he reverted to a thought he had had on his mind on leaving Santall in Town.

"I want to go over after lunch and see Sylvia," he said.

Harry's enthusiasm was damped at this cool reception of his great news, but he put it down to the nearest reason.

"Spooning again?" he replied. "All right I won't keep you."

Philip walked through the village and entered the garden of Dr. Dean's house. He found May Garstin and Sylvia in hammocks under the trees and grumbling at the heat. May was in black.

She got up as he approached.

"I'm going to mend my niblick," she said, with a scornful toss of her head at Philip.

"Don't go, May!" cried Sylvia. "Stop and we'll have tea out here in a little."

But the other girl declined.

"Poor thing!" went on Sylvia to Philip, watching May depart. "She is still heart-broken at the death of her brother. It's a pity you drove her away."

"My dear, don't be unreasonable," cried Philip. "I didn't drive her away. She always leaves us together when I come to see you. Says she can't stand the mooning of two engaged people."

If Philip had been wise, he would have deferred the confession he had come to make that afternoon. Sylvia

was in a "contrairy" mood, and though Philip begged her after May had fled to remain stretched in the hammock, she refused.

Her fiancé had arrived unexpectedly when May Garstin and she had been discussing him. The dress that she was wearing of some soft pale yellow crepe became her excellently, but it was an old dress which she had outgrown, and Sylvia elected also to find a grievance in the fact. She rose from the hammock, and smoothing her frock as far over her knees as it would stretch, sat down in a deck chair. Philip, with an honesty of purpose, floundered straight to the painful interview.

"I met Santall up in Town," he began. "He was my chief in the Forests at Bangkok, you know. He has just become engaged to a ripping girl."

"Oh, really!" Sylvia shrugged in reply.

To begin talking about a "ripping girl" whom he has just met up in London is not the best preamble for a man when he returns to his intended, even though the "ripping girl" be only the fiancée of his friend. Sylvia's tone therefore was not unnatural perhaps.

"I had a talk with Santall, and it led me to a decision," pursued Philip.

"You are very easily influenced by the people you care for, aren't you, Phil?" remarked Sylvia, looking at him judicially.

"Well, people whose opinion I respect—yes," he answered earnestly. "Santall told me he considered a man a fool who did not make a clean breast to the girl he was going to marry."

"Clean breast? What did he mean?" asked Sylvia, without looking at Philip.

"Well—you know—a man has sometimes—some things—of which he is—ashamed—of having done—in his life—which he might——"

"I don't understand," she faltered, turning her eyes towards him and raising one eyebrow, a delicious trick she had when puzzled. "I wish you would not be so—so oracular."

"Sylvie dearest, don't make it harder for me," he cried.

And then, in broken words and ragged phrases he tried to tell her all, to make her understand something of what had happened to him in Siam. He shewed how, as he lay wounded in the Huey Toh, Rarouey had crept to his side and finally had crept into his heart. He told her of some of the complexity of emotion which had led to that brief episode; but as he went on he was more and more distressed by the horrified expression that crept over the face of the English girl before whom he was trying to clear himself. When he mentioned the name of Rarouey he was astonished to see the flash of acrimonious hatred that convulsed Sylvia's features.

"And then there came a child, a darling little fellow," he pleaded, his voice softening with the remembrance.

"Stop!" she cried in tones of malevolent intensity. "Stop! I don't want to know any more. I think you are just—horrid. What do I want to know about these abominable black women and the dreadful way you treat them. May Garstin was quite right. I did not believe her at first, but now——"

"May—who—what does she say?" he asked.

"May—yes, May Garstin, who was here just now," she replied. "She had letters from her brother, telling what you had done. When you wrote to me that time and said you thought we had made a mistake in becoming engaged——"

Philip started and leaned forward in his chair.

"Ah, yes—when I wrote you two years ago——"

"Yes," she exclaimed. "You made all sorts of lame excuses, and people said that it was just your wound that had made you funny and queer in the head."

"Good Lord!"

"But Mrs. Garstin told Madge what the real reason must be. And now I see she was right. Oh, Philip, why—why did you tell me this? There was no reason why you should have spoiled everything—oh, go away—I don't want to see you again."

Sylvia, rapidly losing control of her voice and her senses, turned away and looked down the garden. Philip gazed at her averted head, with the dark hair that waved so lightly round the softness of the white nape.

All the love he had ever felt for her, all the memories of their childish affection and all the hopes of the future which she represented—a future in which she could save himself from himself, everything wilted grievously at her words. He had made a difficult avowal from lofty motives and this was its reception.

"My dear," he whispered, catching her hand, "you don't mean it."

Sylvia drew her fingers gently away.

"I do! Go away!" she whimpered.

"But, darling, you don't understand. I could not make you my wife without in fairness telling you of this buried incident in my past."

"What did I care? It's sickening! I thought you were a gentleman!"

Philip flinched at this typically bourgeois aspect of the matter. He collected his thoughts again with an effort.

"Yes," he went on, "but did you ever think I might be a man also. With—a man's weaknesses. What does it matter if there *was* another woman in my life once? That is done with and forgotten. (Poor fool how he lied to himself!) She is ten thousand miles away. She won't trouble us ever, and I need never see her again. I thought——"

"Well, why did you want to tell me about her?"

"My dear, I simply had to. I thought you would take it sensibly like Hilda Trafford when Santall——"

But that was a clumsy break.

"I don't care a straw about any Hilda Trafford. You should have married her if you care for her better than me. She must be a girl with no self respect."

"I imagined you would understand a little—appreciate perhaps my motives in putting things clearly to you."

Sylvia leant her face on her hand and looked hard into his eyes. She did not speak for a moment, nor did she

try to help him out. She was thinking. Oh the pity of it! Philip had spoiled everything now! She loved him more than ever in that moment, and she was certain he loved her. She did not care a scrap about Rarouey, but Philip had missed a factor that counted greatly with her.

"Philip, you are forgetting one thing, aren't you?"

"What's that?"

"The child!"

"Well, but——"

"Don't you see, dear? The only thing that matters is this child. It will always stand between us. If it had only been the woman—but the child—your child—will always stand between us. I can forgive you. I am not so ignorant of life as you think perhaps. London and the hospital have taught me many things about men."

"You mean——"

"Yes. I think your duty towards the child has not been done. You forget that you are now responsible for a little life, a baby whom you never asked if it wanted to be born."

"But in Siam, they never expect—they have such totally different ideas——"

"There can be no different ideas on this subject, Phil, whether in Siam or in England."

Philip stood speechless, crushed by the sense of what she had half uttered. It was such a novel view for her to take. It had never occurred to him! But Sylvia had never forgotten the tragedy of little Marion, her maid of years ago.

The sound of a voice came from the French window near the honeysuckle. It was May Garstin coming back.

"Yes, I'll go and see, Mrs. Dean." She was calling back over her shoulder to Sylvia's step-mother. "They are both in the garden. The love birds! I expect they will like to have tea out there."

"Sylvia!" whispered Philip, hastily trying to take her hand again. "You don't understand. You can't mean it. Give me a chance to explain. Think a little——"

She whisked round. She faced him. God, he thought,

how adorable she looked then! There was none of the fierce fury of a woman scorned in her eyes, but only the pitying resentment of a shallow nature brought face to face with deep realities.

May Garstin stood behind them, but though she was witness to all that was said, Sylvia went on speaking.

"There is your ring, Phil," faltered the girl, struggling to tug it from her finger. "I have no right to wear it any longer. And I think you ought to put a wedding ring on the finger of the mother of your child."

Philip, as he turned to go, caught sight of the face of May Garstin, who stood in his path, smiling a crooked smile at the melodramatic scene. He paused a moment as if to speak, and then changing his intention, went quickly out of the garden gate.

That night he sat up late to write a letter to Sylvia. What a mess he had made of things! But he had not had time to explain things fully. He had chosen his moment badly.

Sucking a furious pipe, he wrote several pages and tore them impatiently up again. He supposed Sylvia was one of those natures whom the first revelation of human weakness and evil totally unbalance. Like Hamlet, he thought. What he had done was forgivable by all the canons of civilised toleration, yet to this girl whose existence had hitherto been a sheltered ignorance of the facts of life, he must seem a monster.

But what had she said? She forgave him. She had learnt much about men and the world in London. The child stood between them. He ought to place a wedding ring on the finger of the Siamese mother of his child. What an extraordinary attitude to adopt!

His mother came over next day, heard everything and then went on to Sylvia to try her persuasions. But even Mrs. Harkness had to admit defeat. The rupture was final this time. Sylvia refused to see her. At least that was what May Garstin told her with studied insolence. Sylvia was leaving for London in an hour, May said. She was going back hurriedly to join some Voluntary Aid

Detachment which was being formed for the war. Sir Arthur had received permission to take a motor convoy over to the Continent. What utter nonsense, cried Mrs. Harkness in anguish. War was out of the question! Diplomacy could avert it yet, she asserted, though even at the moment, hordes of grey-clad men were massing on the Belgian frontier.

Harry was told about the rupture, but Harry was more concerned about his impending departure that day. Harold had written from the "Shop," chuckling exultantly over the prospect that awaited him of active service at last after wearisome years of preparation in peace time. He advised Harry to chuck up his job in Bangkok and wait for the "fun."

"All tommy rot, Phil!" was the consolation Harry voiced—and Philip believed him. "England can't be drawn into this scrap. We have our Navy. Let the Froggies and the Sauerkrauts fight it out. And as for Sylvia, there are other sprats in the sea. Come and help me label my luggage for Bangkok."

Philip did not answer. His brother did not observe the lines of suffering that were forming along the elder man's mouth. He did not know of the sudden resolves that were fermenting in that distracted mind.

"Right ho, Harry," said Philip at last, with a show of cheery enthusiasm. "Just wait a moment. I want to send a telegram."

He sat down at a desk and pulled out a form and a pen. Harry was looking over his shoulder.

"Here, you're balmy!" he cried. "I *have* my passage booked already——"

"I know," answered Philip. "What did you say the name and date of your boat were?"

"The Nile on the 3rd of August. But what are you doing?"

"Oh, I'm just wiring to see if the shipping people can squeeze me into the same boat. Yes. To Bangkok! I have had enough of England."

CHAPTER XXIX

BANGKOK AGAIN

"HULLO, Harkness, what blew you in?"

The party of golfers had come rushing and clattering up the steps of the Racing Club pavilion on their way back from their game to the dressing-room for ablutions and sweaters, and they had passed Philip and his brother Harry seated on the verandah. The speaker of the words was Ransome, and the Englishmen who followed all stopped to ejaculate their varying surprise.

"How do? You're looking fit."

"Had a good time at Home?"

And then they broke off to turn to the notice board where some late Reuter war telegrams were pasted up.

Last of the party came Dr. Baker, to whom Harry was introduced.

"But bless my soul, Philip," and the doctor lingered as he spoke, "I thought you had gone Home for good!"

Philip smiled, with the tired, dissatisfied air that lately seemed to have settled on him.

"So I did," he replied. "But I could not keep away, you see. Funny thing—but somehow—well, there you are. And then this beastly war to add to it all. I suppose you all think I'm an extraordinary bird not to have remained in England when the fighting began. I might have been in the thick of it now if I had."

"Yes," assented the doctor. "You might. Heaps of fellows have left here, you know, chucking up jobs and

so on, like a lot of fools. The French and the Belgians were the first to go, but then they were conscripts and had to answer the summons of mobilisation. And Siam has declared her neutrality, which makes it more difficult or easy for those left, just as you look at it."

"The tide has turned now, though," remarked Philip. "I see they have pushed the Germans back across the Marne with enormous losses."

"Yes. It is always with gigantic losses. Isn't it all a piece of monstrous idiocy?"

"I don't think it will last over Christmas, sir—do you?" ventured Harry.

Many things said to him or about him on board ship had of late made Harry uncomfortable. Even in Siam, this backwater of the East, people turned their eyebrows up on learning he had left England on the declaration of war. The brothers had both been witness of the armada that passed through the Suez Canal carrying the first Indian Expeditionary Force, and Harry's conscience pricked him often as he noticed that the majority of young fellows who were travelling by sea were hurrying Westwards.

"Oh quite!" agreed the doctor. "I don't think you need worry. You won't be needed as cannon fodder. But what a monstrous piece of butchery it all is! Thousands of the best young lives in Europe thrown away to gratify a blood-thirsty set of absolute monarchs. I saw the Russo-Japanese war, and I have always thought war was idiotic, but this war is the biggest piece of idiocy that mankind ever indulged in."

"I'm afraid I'm not a bit of a flag-wagging patriot," said Philip. "I somehow cannot catch the infection. The call of the East has brought me back to Siam and I don't think any war can take me away from it now I'm here."

"Oh! ho!" whistled Baker. "So that's your trouble, is it?"

He looked hard at Philip, something of pity, something of amaze in his glance. He had seen other cases before,

had this bluff doctor, of men curtailing their leave to return to Siam, discontented as long as they were in the country, and nevertheless unhappy as long as they were out of it.

"Why, it is only the other day that I won a bet off Wroughton on the same subject."

"Oh, yes, Wroughton—in the Finance. What's happened to him?" Philip asked.

"Well, six months ago Wroughton got a job at Home, and I went to see him off at the steamer for Singapore. He told me with intense fervour how glad he was, how he thanked God he was 'shaking the dust of this accurséd country off the soles of his feet.' I bet him a hundred ticals that he would return sooner or later to Siam. He came up to me in the Cosmopolitan last week and handed the hundred over. I was very reluctant to take it. A bet is not a bet when you cannot win where you cannot lose. I know the symptoms too well."

He nodded his head in self-confirmation of his diagnosis.

Then he excused himself and went into the dressing room, returning a few minutes later to seat himself at Harkness' table, the circle of which had now widened to six. The men were introduced to Harry, and before each member there rapidly appeared a glass of the "poison" respectively fancied.

Talk became general—the usual "gup" of So-and-So having been promoted, and Such-and-Such having left the Company, or gone to the war, and all the exchange of smoke-room or mess-table items that is dished up over a *stengah* by his fellows to a man just back from Home.

Harkness was not sorry that his brother should meet these fellows; and fortunately, none of them, with the exception of Baker, had been intimate with him in former days.

Consequently they had, if anything, only a vague recollection of his circumstances. So Philip was saved for that evening at least the curious questioning of others more *au fait* with his affairs, who naturally wondered why the

deuce a man who had come into money and had gone back to England to settle down on his own estate should have returned shortly after to a place like Siam on the outbreak of war.

Their drinks finished, the other men drifted away to drive down to some other club for a hand at Bridge.

Baker lingered on. Evening fell. The Boys, in place of the long tumblers which they had been serving to thirsty golfers, now began to circulate with trays full of amber-coloured liquid in small glasses—the *gin pahits* (bitters) without which the majority of club-going Bankkok cannot raise an appetite for dinner.

The doctor was looking out into the fast falling night towards the wireless station at Klong Toi. A moment of insight seemed to haunt the look in his eyes.

Harry had been yapping away, as every griffin does, marvelling mostly at the amount of liquor everyone in Bangkok seemed capable of consuming. The youngster's ingenuous inquiries enabled Baker to turn the conversation adroitly into a channel he imagined held some force and point for Harkness the elder.

"That fellow Sarcombe now! You knew him, didn't you?"

"Yes. Most amusing devil." This from Philip. "Extraordinary mimic, and very good company. Tremendous fund of stories he always had."

"Yes, that's the fellow," pursued Baker, as if to himself. "Went and married a Siamese. Married her *pukka* (properly) at the Consulate and in church afterwards."

"I know," said Philip. "I met him at Home at the Siam Dinner."

"Yes!" Baker went on. "Married her *pukka*. Of course he's absolutely done for himself! Been sent away up-country, out of the way, and all his chances of promotion ruined."

"He told me he didn't care," interposed Philip. "He was so gone on her."

"And the silly ass tried to introduce the girl to society

here—a pretty enough little thing, but he had had two children before it occurred to him that there was such a thing as a marriage service. Well, he tried to thrust her down the throats of the good dames of Bangkok. Dam funny that was!"

"It must have been. What happened?" asked Philip.

"Oh—well, old Mother Hubbard, after some heart-searching, came to the conclusion that it was her moral, if unpleasant, duty 'to be good to' Mrs. Sarcombe. She had her intention conveyed to Sarcombe!"

"And what did old Sarky say to that?"

The doctor chuckled in anticipation.

"Sarky said, 'Good lord preserve us from the cathedral close. I suppose the woman will be wanting next to send us coal and blankets at Christmas.'"

The three roared with laughter, but Baker and Philip more heartily, as knowing the pretentious and sanctimonious airs and graces of Mrs. Hubbard, the daughter of a minor Dean of a west country cathedral town.

After a slight silence they all rose to go home to dinner, Baker offering Philip and Harry a lift in his gorgeous and enormously powerful Mercedes car and dismissing their humble gharry.

"I'm glad we didn't have to go back in that thing," remarked Harry. "We got it from an Indian livery stable, and I thought every minute the ramshackle outfit would lose a wheel."

"Your first experience, I suppose, of these vehicles," said Doctor Baker, "with their harness of unconsidered trifles of string, etc."

In the car they started speaking again about Wroughton, and that naturally led the doctor to remark on Philip's return to Siam without compulsion.

"It may rain daggers and spears, the Malays say," was the doctor's next remark, "but it is our own country. It may rain gold and silver, but it is a foreign land."

Philip assented. He knew the proverb.

"But has it ever struck you," he asked, "what a veritable step in the dark a fellow makes when he first comes East? He does not know whether the country or the life will suit him, and yet he makes by coming abroad a decision which is to all intents and purposes irrevocable. I did not know it at the time——"

"As for you," interrupted the doctor, turning to Harry who was listening dissentiently, "I suppose you heard the East a-calling. It is a cry which falls on deaf ears when pockets are full."

Baker was obviously trying to draw from Philip his reason for returning to Siam.

Philip hardened himself and refused to answer. He had seen that the allusion to Sarcombe and the doctor's opinion of the latter's marriage had been directed at himself. He lay back in the car and listened to the others talking.

"The Dutch, of course," continued Baker, "make a permanent home of their adopted country in Java."

"How do you account for that?" asked Harry.

Baker paused before answering.

"It's hard to say. But I expect it is because the average man 'lives' out here, whereas he merely 'exists' at Home. It's a case of champagne and motor cars instead of 'buses and beer. But here we are. Tell my syce to get down and open the gate, and I'll drive you right up to the door when I can turn this brute of a car round properly."

By a streak of luck, Philip had been able on his arrival to get Marlow's house again in Bangkok. He himself had no particular desire to go back to it, for it held too many associations of Rarouey and the first days of their life together. But Harry had become so enamoured with the bougainvillea-covered bungalow standing back from the Suriwongse Road that he had pestered his brother into renting it again.

Philip, however, had put his foot down when Harry had suggested that he himself need not continue in the Bank junior Mess but might come and live in Suriwongse Road.

"No, kid!" He was obdurate. "It is the best thing possible for a youngster to live in a Mess when he comes out here first. It doesn't do at all for him to live alone—at least at the beginning—makes him too solitary-minded and introspective——"

Harry demurred.

"But I shouldn't be living alone, you old fathead. And what's more, it's you that's introspective. You badly want some one to look after you, you bally melancholy-minded old owl!"

Philip had been startled, he remembered, at his junior's sudden insight into the turmoil of his own heart. By Jove, he had thought, the little beggar's been studying me all the time.

But, in reality, the sudden decision to leave England and return to Siam with his brother, his persistent restlessness at Home, and his unwillingness to settle down, his aching longing to revisit the East, and the very evident and hopeless breach between Sylvia and himself—all these had left traces of suffering on Philip's face and nervousness in his manner that were patent to the least observant.

"No, no!" he had said with an air of finality. "You go back to the Hankow junior Mess, and get some of the corners rubbed off you. And don't talk any more of that brother's-keeper rot to me. I know my way about this country."

When Harry had left him on the evening of the encounter with Baker at the Club, after which the two brothers had dined together, Philip took a chair out to the verandah above the porch of his house, lit a pipe and lay down to dream.

Old thoughts—and thoughts especially which had haunted him on the steamer all the way out to Singapore—scurried like phantoms through his troubled mind. Why had he left England? Why in the face of protests from all his people, had he adhered to the sudden decision to return to Siam which he had taken on hearing of Harry's appointment to the Bangkok branch of the Hankow Bank?

It was pique of course. Pique at the manner in which Sylvia had treated his honest attempt to deal manfully and squarely with a difficult situation.

But he saw now also that Sylvia's action was only the last nail driven in the coffin of his nausea at everything in England. He saw now that, like so many other men, he was bound to gravitate back again to this country.

There is a Siamese proverb that "he who has once drunk at the breast of the Mother of Waters (Menam) can never forget." There is no reasoning against this unholy fascination. It was, Philip knew, a fascination sufficiently potent in its own appeal, but doubly so through his passion for Rarouey.

He could not recall now how, at one time, he had struggled when the girl's unstinted love had been laid on the altar of his heart, but undoubtedly he had, at a certain period, revolted.

The passion on his side had been of slow growth. His love had not been like Rarouey's, a sweeping, tempestuous wave of self-abnegation which owed its impetus to a super-natural dread. Rather had it been a slow tide which, with many retrocessions and withdrawals, had gradually submerged his whole nature.

His parenthood and the coming of little Daylight had sent that tide surging high over his being. But the flood-mark had been reached when a woman of his own race had so cavalierly treated the confession he had made—the confession he had deemed essential as preparatory to the life they should lead together. The only possible life for him with a white wife would have been one based on mutual confidence and trust and an utter absence of any secrets between husband and wife.

Poor thing! Poor undeveloped, ignorant innocent soul! What can she know of the currents that flow hither and thither in a man's heart? She has never put out to sea in life. He felt forgiving as he mused on Sylvia Dean.

"I do believe if I had married her first and told her afterwards," he thought to himself, "there would never

have been any fuss. Indeed, if I had married her and settled down at Silverdene, becoming an English country gentleman and a member of the parish council and all that, she need never have known about Rarouey and the youngster."

He supposed little Sawang must have grown quite a lot —kiddies at that age in the East do sprout up amazingly. Rarouey, he knew, had gone back to the Huey Toh, to her own people with her *luk farang* child.

He had had two letters, written probably by the village letter-writer, telling him in England of how Rarouey *khit theung* (longed) for her white nai, and how the Huey Toh was not half as gay as Hminelongyi. But that had been within three months of his return Home, after which Philip had noticed there had been a long silence.

Candidly, he had to admit that he himself had found no time and taken no steps to break the silence, since he had not answered Rarouey's second letter. One who has lived any time in the East soon drifts into the lazy no-news-good-news style of conducting correspondence.

As a matter of fact, Rarouey had been too heart-broken at the death of Sawang to think of writing at first. Then, when her mother had pressed her to let the nai know, in order that he might have an opportunity of "making merit" at the little funeral, Rarouey had been too terrified at the thought of sending such disturbing news to convey any information whatsoever to the nai over there in England.

Later had come Ai Khao with his faltering love-suit, and the former terror of the *phi's* vengeance had gradually faded; so that, to tell the truth, Rarouey, with every month that went by, found it easier and easier to forget that she had ever been a white man's *mia*.

She thought less and less frequently of Harkness. . . .

Possibly in time his image would have been obliterated altogether, if only he had stayed away a little longer. Rarouey, like most Orientals, though capable of loving to the uttermost in presence, did not find that absence made her heart grow fonder.

CHAPTER XXX

THE GOOD DAMES

BAKER'S account of Sarcombe's marriage, though correct so far, had been highly misleading, inasmuch as it suppressed some very important circumstances. His story too of how Sarcombe had introduced his Siamese wife into Bangkok society had contained certain omissions.

The sardonic doctor had been more concerned with relating the ridiculous story about Mrs. Hubbard and the cathedral close and so delighted by the laughter that ensued that he had not thought it necessary to state that Mother Hubbard's fiat had produced no effect at all on the feminine cupboards of Bangkok ; for the good ladies who, from the Olympian heights of Sapatum and Sathorn, set the fashion and give the tone of West Kensington to the rest of European society, simply declined to be bound by Mrs. Hubbard's absurdly charitable decision.

Though they affected to admire her Christian-like spirit, they flatly refused to place Mrs. Sarcombe on their visiting lists.

" But," as Mrs. Parlett told her friends assembled (first and third Fridays) for badminton and tea. " But, my dears, where *are* you going to draw the line? Which of you would like to have to go into dinner at some Legation behind a woman like that, tell me? "

" But what about Madame Sartoris? " asked Mrs. Wace.

The others turned and looked at her somewhat pityingly.

Pretty, gentle, little Mrs. Wace was a new-comer. She had not yet shed some unfortunate social ideals, but her ideas regarding the quality of humankind were in process of transformation. Probably, in time, she would approximate more and more to the tests and standards of the élite.

"Ah! Madame Sartoris is a different question altogether. She is the daughter of a Chao Phya," (Siamese Noble) was the crushing reply delivered with an air of final argument.

But some other lady in the group had a still stronger reason to give why Madame Sartoris should be accepted socially.

"Besides, her husband belongs to the Diplomatic Corps."

They all nodded assent, shewing that the fact just stated effectively precluded any parallel between the Sartoris ménage and the Sarcombe marriage.

However, there was still a demurrer to come regarding the question of Mrs. Sarcombe's eligibility. Mrs. Carstairs, a judicial matron, who loved to have every question threshed out, now added with a great air of equity.

"It is said—mind, I don't vouch for it, and hearsay evidence never weighs with me—but I have heard—on fairly good authority, only I'm not going to say whose—that this Siamese lady—oh yes, I will call her a lady until I hear to the contrary (*breath*) Siamese lady whom Mr. Sarcombe has married, is a niece—or I may be wrong, she may only be a grand-child or a step-daughter—of one of these Lao Chiefs of old family in the North."

These arch parentheses, pronounced in the most exquisite non-committal manner which it would be possible to imagine, unfortunately failed of their effect.

There happened to be present in the circle of deliberating ladies a Man, a single man, one of those men of which Bangkok has not the monopoly. He was, in short, one of those men who attach themselves to the platonic skirts

of some " senior lady of the station " whose husband is too bored or too busy to do anything but despise the association or to heed the covert talk it creates.

Making themselves useful by writing out dinner menus and advising on invitations to be issued, or carrying the lesser tittle-tattle of the club-bar to the ladies' room, men of this type feel themselves well rewarded by a secret glow they experience when they are met driving alone with their Beatrice or seen seated tête-à-tête with her at the Races.

One of these satellites, James Arthur, who revolved round the constellation of one of the " senior ladies " here present, was seated in the circle quite at home in this " hen-shine."

From him there now came a voluntary item of information about Mrs. Sarcombe. He said it with an apologetic cough, as if ashamed of the knowledge and regretful at having to traverse Mrs. Carstairs' belief.

" Ah—er—I understand that the lady in question was—er—in point of fact, a servant of the—er—Chief, and not a relation at all."

" A Lao Chief is nothing much anyhow," said Mrs. Firmin, with bitter emphasis. " You can pick them like berries off the trees in the North."

And so the conclave unanimously decided that, though they could not prevent Sarcombe from being such an imbecile as to bring his wife to call upon them, they hoped he would not do so on one of their big At-Home days, when they might be obliged to be at least decently polite to the creature.

If the newly-married couple came on any other day, they could contrive to be " not-at-home."

Most of them possessed a Head-Boy who had been trained to convey to the densest visitor the full significance of the rebuff intended by the inflexion of the tone in which he uttered the words, " Missy—not-at-home."

In any case, these ladies made up their minds to go home and instruct the dutiful memories of their husbands to indicate indirectly to Sarcombe at the Club that a visit

would not be welcome. Even granted that all these stratagems failed, and the Sarcombes *did* succeed in depositing paste-boards in any of the Olympian boxes, in the last resort the return call would certainly be omitted by one and all.

And as for Mrs. Hubbard—well, she could do as she pleased in her minority of one.

Of this conclave Philip Harkness did not know, nor was he aware of the wretched fiasco of Sarcombe's attempt to bring a Siamese wife into the ultra-snobbish milieu of Bangkok European society. He had not seen poor little Mae Boon Tha, sitting forlorn in the Ladies' Room at the club, dressed in an unaccustomed and uncomfortable costume, and superciliously ignored by her cutting white sisters.

If he had done so, perhaps the idea which one evening came into his head as he sat smoking on his verandah and thinking far into the deep purple night hung with silent stars would have been abandoned after reflection.

But he thought merely of what Sarcombe had said to him at the Siam Dinner in London, and he thought of Rarouey, of all she had been and was to him, the only woman—he saw now—whom he had ever loved with a true passion, the mother of his child, his little Daylight.

He came to a sudden decision. . . .

Two days later Philip's house in Suriwongse Road was shut up, and Harry received a chit while at tiffin in the Bank Mess.

"Dear Hal, I have gone up country on business. Will probably be away two months. 'Poste Restante, Laowieng,' will find me after the 21st and until further notice. Be good! Yours, Philip."

CHAPTER XXXI

LOVERS' MEETING

With the death of little Sawang there vanished the last vestiges of dread that the spell of *hlong* had possessed for Rarouey. So immured had she become, so contemptuous of any possible danger that still might befall her, that she could now calmly discuss the subject with others. Ai Khao, for whose opinion she had an increasing regard, assured her.

"Nay little sister," he said soothingly, as they sat side by side in the house together one evening. "The *phi* cannot mean to harm thee now."

"The curse—if ever curse there was—has surely passed from me," pleaded Rarouey.

"And see! How long is it since thy farang husband left thee to thy fate?"

"It is months gone," she responded. "And not a letter has he sent for many moons past."

"Then, if while far from the protection of the farang all this time, no harm has befallen thee, how can it be that now a hair of thy pretty head shall fall?"

She did not admit it, but Rarouey was also conscious of a growing shame of having demeaned herself with Philip. She had flung her love unsought before a man of another race; and though he had not maltreated her while she was with him, her alien husband had, as Ai Khao put it, left her to her fate when his own people called him back to his own country.

"The farang by now must have taken a white-faced Mem of his own race to wife," was Ai Khao's final argument. "Why think more of him, little one?"

"I think of him?" she exclaimed, "I don't think of him! He has certainly forgotten me quite. And now he is nothing, nothing to me!"

As if to prove that all Philip's influence had ceased, she stretched out for another quid of betel.

She took the nut and the lime and rolled them in a sirih leaf, squatting on the floor in the manner of her own people. The room bore traces of dirt and disorder now also.

Ai Khao sidled nearer to her and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Is that so?" he whispered. "Then *lon cha* (darling listen) come with me. We will be happy. We will go back to my paddy lands. I have fifteen rai, and the rice they yield is the finest in Mae Wong."

"Nay," she murmured, gently removing his hand. "I am old now. It is not seemly to talk to me of another husband. Find thou some other woman. Surely there are many maidens that would go with thee——"

His love making did not move her—clear proof (she thought to herself) that she now was indeed past mating.

She liked Ai Khao, but she had never dreamed of looking upon him with the eyes of a lover.

"*Lon cha!*" he whispered again, flicking the ash from his cheeroot. "Say not so. Thou art more beautiful and more desirable than all the maidens of the Lao country. I love thee. I think of thee! My desire is like a fire——"

Mae Noi came in upon them.

Fortunately their attitude at the moment gave no cause for suspicion, and Rarouey's mother had not overheard Ai Khao's impassioned phrases. Besides she was too full of her own affairs.

Rarouey with great coolness asked lightly where her mother had been.

"Ah ha!" chuckled the old dame in reply, evidently in

high good humour with herself and the world. "I give thee three guesses little one."

"I won't guess," retorted Rarouey, who knew what these mincing tones and airs generally meant. "What is it to me where thou goest or whence thou comest?"

"Now, now, little one," chided Mae Noi. "Be reasonable! Don't fly out so at thy old mother who has been doing her best for thee."

She chuckled again.

A silence ensued in the room.

Ai Khao, to relieve the strain picked up his *ken*, lay on his back and began piping a melancholy melody on the Lao reeds.

He too had seen Mae Noi come back before of an evening in the same high spirits as now, and he knew as well as Rarouey where the old mother had been. He pretended to be engrossed in his music making, but he could hear all that passed, and he took good care that nothing escaped him.

"Yes," went on Mae Noi. "It is all finely arranged. I saw the Chao himself—he offered four catties (three hundred and twenty ticals) and I said that we would let him have an answer——"

"Enough!" cried Rarouey. "This bargaining has gone far enough! Too often hast thou sold me like a block of wood. Thou hast had thy 'milk-money' (price paid at marriage to the mother of the bride in Siam), and there is no complaint——"

"But this is not——" her mother began.

"Listen to me! Once and for all. I will *not* go to the palace of the Chao. I will *not* be the slave of anyone! Rather would I live in the jungles of the Mae Chem! Once was I sold to a good-for-nothing fellow, Ai Seng. But he went and left me and my babe——"

"Yes?" sneered Mae Noi. "And then the farang came and bewitched thee, making thee follow him like a dog——"

"That too is done with," returned Rarouey. "The farang will not come back again. But this time—I have

made up my mind not to be sold again. Rather would I go and eat herbs in the jungle. That is my last word! If the name of the Chief is mentioned to me again, I leave this house——"

Her mother saw she was defeated and went out grumbling and muttering.

"Bravo! Bravo! little sister!" whispered Ai Khao, sidling up to her again. "But why shouldst thou eat herbs in the jungle when there is white rice to be had from my fields in the Mae Wong."

Rarouey let his hand rest on her shoulder this time. She was tired of struggling.

. . . On the following morning Philip Harkness rode into the village of Huey Toh. From a foolish sentiment he had insisted on camping the night before on the identical spot near the creek where the dacoity had taken place. The scene came back to his memory, but robbed now of most of its former terrifying associations, for Rarouey was once more near him.

He had come up by train to rail-head, and then he had pushed on, travelling light, and avoiding stations where he knew he was likely to meet Europeans.

His mind was a fever of unrest. He was going back to the woman whose fascination over him had increased with every stage of the journey that brought her nearer.

And now, on the day when he should see her again, his heart was singing with joy. Soon, soon he thought he would hold in his arms once more the same passionately devoted Rarouey that he had known and had loved before.

Little Daylight too!

What a difference he would find in him! The jolly little beggar! Would he recognise him? Yes of course!

He would come on him making mud-pies perhaps in the roadway, and he would catch him up, howling most likely with fright, and would carry him to his mother. And then what a reunion! The villagers would think him mad, but what did he care?

A bullock cart came round the corner of the path to the creek.

The rider had to draw up and let it pass.

"*Sabai?*" (Is it well?) he called out to the man trudging in front.

"Sabai!" responded the Lao with a smile that answered his.

The whole world was bright with joy, and everyone was happy to-day. How pleasant brown faces were to see, thought Philip, recalling an essay of Lafcadio Hearn on the subject.

The man halloed to his bullocks and drew them to the side of the road. Round the corner came a woman, holding a child by the hand.

It was Rarouey!

Philip recognised her before she noticed him.

"Rarouey!" he cried.

Ai Khao had set his cart into motion again, but stopped when he heard the farang address Rarouey. He stood by his bullocks watching, his hand on the wooden pole, but he took no part in the ensuing conversation.

"Where are you going?" asked Philip. "See! I was just coming to find thee."

Rarouey did not answer at once.

She bent her head and stood scraping the dust of the path into a little heap with her bare foot. Her eyes were cast down, her mind working to a decision.

She looked up at Philip who still sat his horse.

"Going?" she repeated with studied insolence. "Where should I be going but with my husband to his house?"

This was the man who had made her "lose face" before all her people and who was shaming her again now before Ai Khao.

"Your what? Who? That man? Impossible! Don't mock me Rarouey!" cried Philip.

He got down clumsily from his horse.

He thought he heard a low laugh from Ai Khao, and he went towards the man, his riding whip in his clenched hand. But Ai Khao's face was an impassive mask. He looked with feigned stupidity at the farang. So this was

the white man who had bewitched Rarouey. Mad! Madder than most farangs he looked! Pray Buddha that he did them no harm!

Philip turned from him and walked back.

His pony was straying, and he hitched the reins to a branch.

"Come here," he said to Rarouey.

But she only stiffened and stood still.

Philip scanned her face. She was as pretty as ever, dressed in a plain white cotton blouse, and a *pha sin* with the skirt of blue and gold. But, as she looked defiantly yet fearfuly back at him, there was none of the familiar response that he had once known how to wake in her eyes.

Could it be?

He was shaken by a dreadful thought. He remembered what she had said. So this was the manner of his return, and this her new husband, a sot, a boor——

It was incredible!

His senses must be playing tricks. He passed the back of his hand across his brow and took off his topee to fan his face. Rarouey saw how old and haggard he had grown.

She made a movement as if to push past him. Philip put out his hand to stop her. The child, Ai Seng's child, whimpered and held her back, clinging to her skirts. She bent and picked it up, placing it astride her hip.

"*Lon cha,* listen to me," said Philip, with infinite gentleness.

He had used the same words as Ai Khao the evening before, and Rarouey's eyes flickered at the remembrance. She cowered back from his touch.

"Listen to me," went on her farang lover. "Listen dear. Do you not understand? I have come back for you. Did you not believe that I loved you as well as ever? I have come back to you. I could not stay for thinking of you. We shall never more be parted. I am going to marry you, make you mine by all the rites of the Church and law."

It was characteristic of Philip's delicacy and innocence that, in his pleading, he did not mention that he was richer than before. He imagined Rarouey still cared for him for himself and that the mention of money would offend her.

"I will see to the upbringing of our little Daylight," he went on. "Come back with me dear. We will live in Siam. I won't go back to England. I love you, have always loved you and you only. And now I want you for all the time."

"To be your Mem?" she asked. "Like Bun Tha who lost all face when she became the Lao Mem of Nai Sarcombe? Nay! Once I did a foolishness in following the Nai, thinking a *phi* had bewitched me with love of thee. But now it is the Nai who is bewitched and would do a greater foolishness turning me into a Mem—me a woman of this country. Nay, nay!"

There was a decisive determination in her tone, as of one who states a conclusion well thought out.

"My mother would fain marry me to the Chao," she said. "But that too I refused. I go now to live with Ai Khao, this Lao here, in the Mae Wong. He has paddy fields. It is a suitable match for me. It is my proper station. The great life of farangs in towns is finished for me. The *phi* cannot harm me——"

"*Lon cha!*" cried Philip in agonised entreaty.

"——And as for little Sawang, the Nai has no more anxiety for him. He died two months ago."

Philip stood stunned and numbed, unaware that the strengthening sunshine was beating down on his unprotected neck.

A cicada started shrilling in the jungle grass.

Rarouey shifted the child across to her other side.

"Is the Nai going to let me pass now?" she jested and did not wait for an answer.

"Come back—Rarouey, my love—come back——" Philip cried.

She laughed at him and, turning, went her way.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE LANDING STAGE AT ALEX.

On the evening of the 23rd of October, 1915, Philip Harkness stood among a group of officers waiting for the launch that was to come and take off a batch of wounded at Alexandria.

Philip was a "walking case," his trouble being a gunshot wound which he had picked up in a patrol scrap on the Canal. It was his right arm this time. He had greatly aged; his hair was thinning at the temples; he was burnt yellow by the desert sun and emaciated by malaria; he had that hard-bitten look which most Englishmen succeed in obtaining in the East and in his eyes there was now that sombre expression of abiding weariness which all men acquired during the war.

It was nothing to him that he was bound for "Blighty."

Other fellows joked, laughed, and compared notes in the manner of their kind about the first meal they should have in Town or the first "show" they would do. His people even did not know where he was. He had not written since he left Siam to join up with the Indian Army Reserve early in the year above mentioned. Harry, too, when the pressing peril of England began, incubus-like to force itself upon him daily, hourly and principally on waking each morning—Harry had gone, chucking up his billet in the Hankow Bank. Philip had given him the money for his passage Home and Harry had been absorbed into K's army. That was all he knew.

Philip himself had seen service now for nearly a year. He had been fairly lucky he supposed, first on the North West Frontier of India and thereafter in the Canal fighting. Though he was a capable company officer, he had not distinguished himself in any way, partly because of his lack of sympathy in commanding coloured troops. And —probably because of his rather morose efficiency—he had made few friends recently. The best of these friends—Lovel, "daft" Lovel—had been scuppered by an infernal Arab sniper in the same engagement as he himself had been wounded.

A youngster wearing the badges of the 54th Sikhs strolled up and demanded to know if anyone would save his life by giving him a cigarette. Philip lit one himself.

"Wonder how much longer they are going to keep us on this ruddy wharf?" asked the boy. He had an arm hanging loose.

"It's a bad show this," said Philip, disgruntled. "Rotten bandobast. This sort of thing is just typical. No wonder we are losing the war!"

"They've taken the stretcher cases back to the hospital again," remarked another man, a swarthy big-boned Irish Fusilier with a bandage over his eye. "Got sick of waiting for a launch."

"I heard from the M.L.O. that there is some kick-up about two transports full of Very Adorable Darlings that have just arrived," contributed the young fellow who was smoking one of Philip's cigarettes.

"And it is coming on to blow for a sandstorm too," quoth the Irishman. "Well it's a poor heart that never rejoices."

"Yes," went on the first speaker, "it's damned droll. It seems this lot of lively young things with dinky blue uniforms have succeeded in arriving out here totally unbeknown to the War Office. Most of them are just out for a joy ride and don't know a bandage from a duster. The G.O.C. has wired that they won't be allowed to land because of the shortage of rations."

The congestion on the pier grew worse. A motor

launch fussed up to the landing steps. Some girls stepped ashore.

"Why these must be some of the darlints!" ejaculated the Irishman. "Let's go and see them."

Philip did not move. The party of nurses came past him slowly, talking in excited tones to a harassed young doctor with them. One of them touched Philip's arm involuntarily, making him wince.

"Oh I'm so sorry!" she said, and then stopped.

Improbabilities do happen in life and were happening every day of the war.

It was Sylvia Dean.

She too looked older and the babyish contours of her face had been thinned by sufferings and war. In her dark wide open eyes, formerly dancing with a mischievous insatiable curiosity towards life, there was now the hunted look of a grown woman who has looked Horror in the face, looked and not been afraid.

Philip turned slowly, holding his arm across his face as if in defence.

He knew that Sylvia had gone to Belgium with one of the earlier volunteer ambulance motor convoys, but the landing stage at Alexandria was about the last place on earth where he would have expected to meet her.

Sylvia blushed deeply but recovered from her surprise quickly.

"Why, Philip," she asked chokingly. "What are *you* doing here?"

"I am going Home," he answered simply. "And you?"

"I have just arrived here for duty."

"On one of these transports out there?"

"Yes," she explained. "They are making a fuss because a lot of the women on board are not qualified. But I and a few others who do know our business have come ashore to settle matters."

"Then—if they will let you——"

"Yes. I shall stay. I have already had a year of it. I was in Belgium—but don't let us speak of that now.

Tell me. What have you been doing since I last saw you?—Oh excuse me a moment! Wait for me, won't you?"

The whole of the party from the launch had disembarked, and she dashed after the medical officer in charge and explained something.

A military landing officer strolled up, with a sheet of nominal rolls in his hand.

"Will all the officer 'walking' cases for the 'Gascon' please fall in over here?" he asked.

Philip looked away from him towards Sylvia. She came back hastily to him.

"I do believe we are all going off to our ship on the launch that brought you ashore," he said. "We have only a few minutes, and my boat sails at midnight."

"Oh, Phil," cried Sylvia. "What a pity! Goodness knows when we shall meet again either. Shocking bad luck to run up against each other like this."

"I thought you did not want to see me again,' said Philip.

"Of course not, you silly boy! Why, I'm awfully glad to see you again even if only for this moment."

Her answer shewed that she was hurt by his indifference.

The fierce Washington light which had spluttered into brilliance above their heads threw great shadows on their faces, and accentuated the hollows under Philip's eyes

"Poor old boy! How ill you are looking!" went on Sylvia breathlessly. "You have had a bad time I can see, but I'm glad you are going Home. Are you going down to Birnam? Your mother told me before I left that they had not heard from you or of you for such a long time."

"What?—Oh I don't know—Birnam? Yes—I suppose so. No, I haven't written much lately——"

The big-boned Irishman with the bandage over his eye passed them and took an insolent look at Sylvia.

"Coming on board, Harkness?" he asked. "They are just pushing off!"

"Presently! Presently!" snapped Philip.

They had so much to say to each other and such a short time in which to tell it.

And with that, he caught hold of Sylvia's left hand and turned the little fingers up to the light.

"No ring!" he said with a laugh, letting the hand drop again.

"No," faltered Sylvia. "What made you say that? Dear boy, don't you remember what I told you at Birnam over a year ago. Well it is still true——"

She dropped her voice and looked round. Men passing hardly looked at these two sheltering under the corrugated roof of a shed. Indian stretcher-bearers stepped gingerly on the slippery stones of the landing steps.

"I love you and will never—never marry anyone else but you—— But——"

"The 'but' no longer exists. My child is dead," said Philip.

The Landing Officer came up and saluted, deferentially, not because of Philip's two "pips" but because he saw a lady.

"Will you please go on board, sir," he said. "You are the last——"

THE END

Printed in Great Britain by Ebenezer Baylis & Son, Trinity Works, Worcester.