



IT was the unanimous verdict of the mess-room that young Malden was taking his life in his hands. They voted that all his babble about original manuscripts and buried historical treasures was simply a fad which had incubated into a monomania under the wing of a fierce Indian June. They said the place for him was in the belly of a hammock, with a bag of ice on his head, rather than stumbling about among the foot-hills of the Himalayas in search of literary treasure-trove.

The opportunity of a lifetime had come to James Malden, subaltern in the Ninth Yorkshire Lancers—nicknamed the "Fiends" ever since that day, three years before, when they had joined in the terrible charge which broke the siege of Lucknow. His university course had led him to a rather close study of Oriental literature and had developed in him the passion for literary discovery. He had obtained his position in

the army with a view to original research, but when the Mutiny broke out he set aside all else and fought it through like the man he was. Now that peace had come again, and all was quiet along the upper waters of the Jumna, he longed to be off to ransack old monasteries and discover to the world their hidden treasures. His superiors thought it meant a stroll up the valley for a few days, to get a look at native life in the rough, so they had granted him leave of absence on the nominal plea of scientific research.

Malden's ideal was a dual one: first, to become a specialist in Oriental literature, a discoverer of hidden literary treasure, and, second, to win the hand, as he had won the love, of Elsie Farnham, a chestnut-haired, blue-eyed girl in a quiet Yorkshire village. Meanwhile Bardur-din was disconsolately rummaging among chests and closets in search of the few absolute necessities of what he believed to be a suicidal journey. It would not have been so bad had he been allowed to accompany his young master, but the refusal had been peremptory.

Malden had acquired a smattering of a few of the hill-tribe tongues, and he determined that the open geniality of his nature must do the rest. He felt sure that on the upper waters of the Jumna there must be monasteries where manuscripts that were worth their weight in diamonds lay hidden away in forgotten corners. He would hunt them out, buy them for a song, and startle the literary world with priceless histories, poems, liturgies, which should make his name famous among Oriental scholars. If there was anything probable, it was that his task was hopeless and dangerous; yet just such a one blind Fortune might use to show the futility of probabilities.

He was surprised that the farewells of his messmates were so serious, and still more surprised when Bardur-din, following him to the extreme limits of cantonments, bade him farewell with the words:

"I will watch the Jumna for the sign."

Malden's straightforward Anglo-Saxon nature had little in common with the mysticism of the East, and this oracular utterance had no ominous meaning for him, was no presage of swift-coming terror, of ultimate deliverance.

During the first week of his absence the mess-room of the Lancers rang with jokes

at the expense of the literary Don Quixote. During the second week there was much quiet talk on the part of those who had lost wagers, three to one, that he would be back before the seventh day had passed. During the third week there were many thoughtful brows, and men counted the hours which should terminate their comrade's furlough. And Bardur-din would start to speak, stop, lick his dry lips, and try again, but dared not tell why it was that for five days and nights his head had never touched his mother earth in slumber.

Within an hour of the expiration of the furlough, swift messengers were despatched in various directions. Bardur-din, like a hound unleashed, sped up the valley with a dozen good men at his back. After a week's fruitless search the greater number gave him up for dead. Large offers of reward could bring no traces of him beyond a certain small village among the hills. Bardur-din, hearing a rumor that he had asked his way to a monastery far up the mountain's side, had made his way thither, but was coldly informed that nothing had been seen of the young man; and as the monastery was known to contain no books, he was compelled to give up in despair. The Ninth Yorkshire Lancers succumbed to the inevitable, and, with uncovered heads, stood while the sad fact was recorded on the roll of the regiment that James Malden, subaltern, had disappeared and was presumably dead. The colonel wrote the sad news home—news which bowed a chestnut-crowned head and dimmed a pair of blue eyes in a little village in Yorkshire.

But what indeed had become of the young officer? On that eventful morning when Bardur-din sorrowfully watched him out of sight, he sprang up the path like a wild animal released from a cage. He thought the goal was almost reached, when, in fact, the race was but just begun.

The first night he slept in a village inn, with all its concomitants of wrangling children, mangy dogs, and smells innumerable; but comfort was one of the things he had sacrificed on the altar of his ambition, and he gloried in these things as the fakir glories in the spikes on which he impales himself. The next day found him roaming about a picturesque old temple which seemed to be one with the cliff be-



Drawn by Orson Lowell. Half-tone plate engraved by H. Davidson

"IT IS THE MONASTERY OF DELGAR VARG, AND IT CLINGS TO THE MOUNTAIN'S SIDE
SO HIGH THAT THE EAGLE DARES NOT SOAR TO IT"

neath which it rested, so legibly had time written its wrinkles upon them both. The priests listened patiently to his broken questions, and answered them all with the Oriental "yes," which means nothing—or less. He found there only some few reprints of the commoner chants, and forthwith fled up the valley, leaving the priests in mild wonder, which turned to a gentle ripple of amusement as one of them tapped his head and said knowingly, "The gods protect such."

Four days later the jaws of the Himalayas closed upon him as he entered the cañons of the Jumna, where the path hung between heaven and earth, and all the horizontal lines of nature are turned to perpendicular. He had ransacked temples without number, had turned the pages of a hundred books with as thirsty an eye as the miser's when he turns the sod to find whether his treasure is still safe, but he had been disappointed at every turn. He was beginning to learn the value of the Oriental "yes." It was being slowly forced in upon his consciousness that here in the shadow of the Himalayas man is nothing; that the long evening shadows of the mountain-peaks, the voice of the Jumna, the silent caravan of the zodiac, are the only real things, and that man is a mere excrescence on the face of nature. His eye showed all its wonted fixedness of purpose, but it had quieted to a steady glow, and no longer burned with the quick flame of immediate expectation. Night brought him to a little hamlet where the eye acknowledged no north or south, no east or west, but where zenith and nadir seemed the only tutelar deities of the place. Here he found a simpler folk, who apparently were anxious to please him. Yes, there were monasteries, but they were all farther down the valley, and he had doubtless visited them all. As the little company of peasants crouched before him and the single guttering light threw its wavering beam upon their mobile features, he thought he detected the semblance of excitement in their faces, for now and again they threw quick questioning glances at one another, as if there were a secret understanding between them. When they had retired, he put his hand on his host's shoulder, while the straight Anglo-Saxon eye shot through his subterfuge like the sun through a morning mist.

"What is it? What does it mean?" said the young man, slowly and authoritatively.

"Oh," groaned the native, "let the young master only take his eye from me and I will tell him everything. Who am I that I should keep back what my lord has already divined? We are poor simple folk and did not suppose that my lord could read our hearts like a scroll. There is a monastery whose name we dare not speak aloud, so sacred are its inmates. They are not of us"; and he swept out his arm in a gesture which included the mountain-peaks, the sky beyond, and the Jumna roaring in its bed, as if to say, "They are like these—elemental, reverend." Then lowering his tone to a husky whisper and glancing about for fear of espial, he said: "It is the monastery of Delgar Varg, and it clings to the mountain's side so high that the eagle dares not soar to it. They have no books there, it is said, but now and again I meet them as I go to gather wood on the upper spurs, and they are always repeating words of strange sound and accent, as if the gods had come down and taught them."

The young man said:

"Listen to me. Put me on the sure road to this monastery before the day has dawned, and let none of your fellows know. They will think I have gone back."

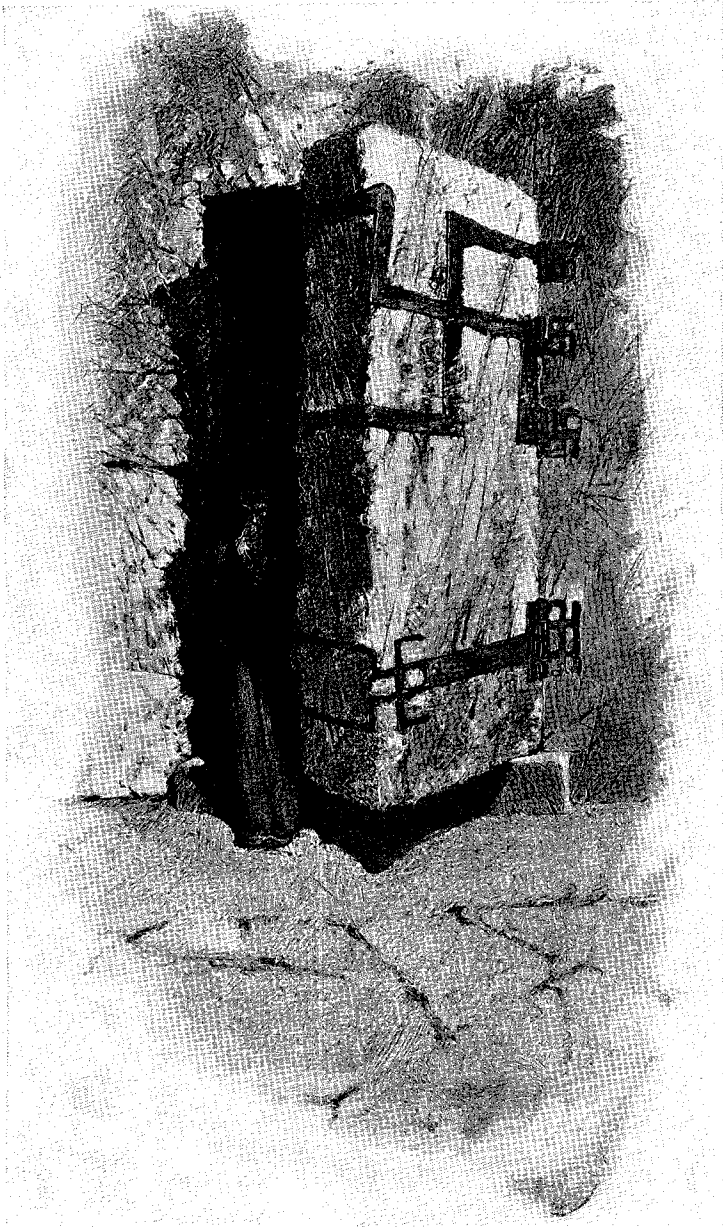
Before that compelling eye there was no choice but to consent, and long before the western peaks were ready to greet the rising sun, Malden was far on his way toward the Delgar Varg—up beyond the tree-line, up beyond all vegetation, until, although beneath a tropic sun, he trod on the margin of eternal snow. He panted for breath; his head seemed full to bursting. The rarity of the air oppressed and yet intoxicated him. Far beneath him, so far that he dared not look, sounded the voice of the Jumna, and with singular irrelevancy the parting words of Bardur-din flashed across his memory: "I will watch the Jumna for the sign."

He was still puzzling over this enigma when he rounded a point of rock and saw before him the walls of the sacred monastery. Grim, forbidding, rough, they offered no comfort to the eye and promised none to the body. But here body was reduced to the minimum; here, if anywhere, the world was eliminated, and the soul

could breathe the pure though attenuated atmosphere of an earthly Nirvana. The thought of danger never once crossed his mind. He was unarmed, and was coming as a guest to men who had renounced all violence.

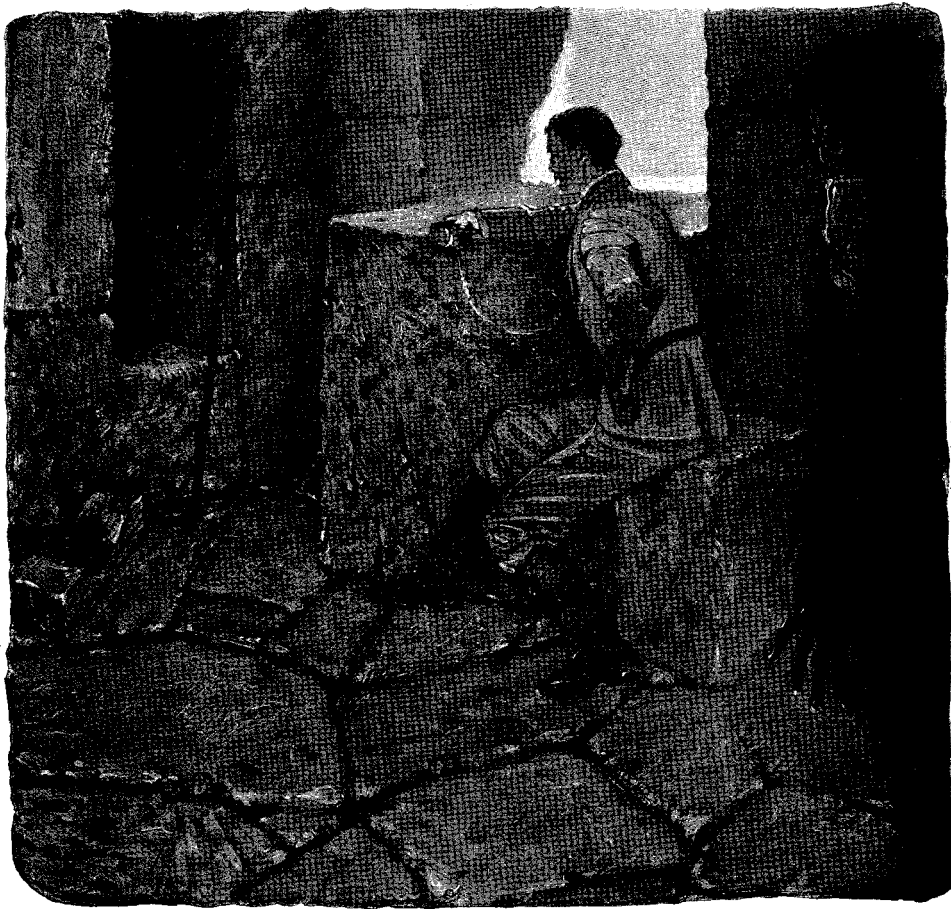
As he approached the massive stone slab that served for a door, it slowly opened, and a monk emerged. He was not aware

of the young man's approach, for when he looked up and saw him he suddenly seemed to shrink within his long, somber robe, his emaciated face turned visibly paler, and for a moment he stood at bay, as if the far-off world of struggling, marrying, loving humanity had sent a representative to invade their passionless retreat. But it was only for a moment, for he



Drawn by Orson Lowell. Half-tone plate engraved by C. W. Chadwick

"THE MASSIVE STONE SLAB THAT SERVED FOR A DOOR . . . SLOWLY
OPENED, AND A MONK EMERGED"



Drawn by Orson Lowell. Half-tone plate engraved by H. Davidson

"IT WAS JUST ON THE STROKE OF TEN"

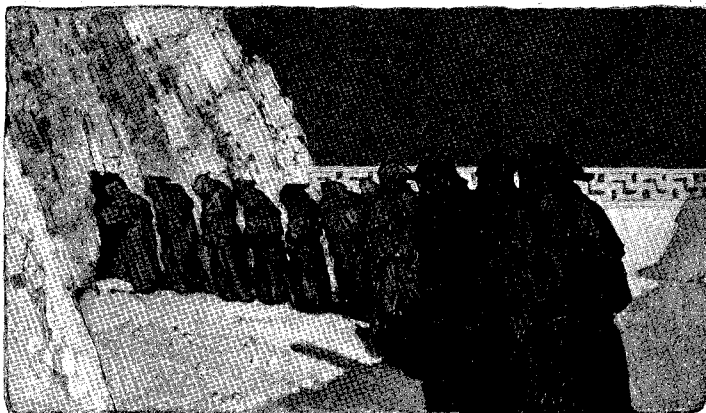
quickly recovered himself,—remembering, perhaps, that surprise itself is a child of feeling,—and with studied courtesy led the young man within the cloister. Left to himself for a short space while his conductor retired to announce his arrival to the abbot, Malden looked curiously about. Here indeed was a building that fitted the pattern of his dream. Huge monoliths were piled together like the Druid temples of England. Massiveness, solidity, primeval simplicity were everywhere evident.

Presently the abbot appeared, together with other members of the brotherhood, quiet, sedate, venerable. Where was the excited rush to see the foreigner which had greeted him at every border village? Here inquisitiveness itself was counted a passion, and no question was asked, no confidence invited.

He was shown to an apartment near

the front of the building, and there was lodged in the fashion of the brotherhood. No excuses were made for the simple though plentiful fare of millet porridge. No protestations of regret were made when they indicated the stone floor as his only bed and a block of wood his pillow. This he felt to be a delicate compliment, as if they realized that he must have renounced mere creature comfort in aspiring to this well-nigh inaccessible retreat; but no prying look, no leading question, invaded the privacy of his mind. They awaited the disclosure of his purpose with apparent apathy.

A day passed, and he began to feel uneasy. Here was a place where words were not wasted; here men had no time for gossip, no use for the common language of the world, and he was dimly aware that even his most casual word was accurately noted



"A SMALL OPENING IN THE FACE OF THE PRECIPICE THROUGH WHICH WERE PASSING IN SINGLE FILE THE MEMBERS OF THE BROTHERHOOD"

and passed from man to man as being worthy of careful note. Here was no carelessness, no shuffling, no inconsequence. If there was a manuscript, its value would surely be known. That there was some such writing he felt sure, for in the dead of night he had heard one of the monks pacing the corridor, repeating what appeared to be a passage from some writing, which he was burning in upon the memory.

It was the second day of his stay. He felt that he must approach the object of his coming, whatever be the result. The abbot and two of the brotherhood were seated with him in the court. Little was said, but each man was busy with his thoughts. Summoning up what nonchalance he could, he asked, with apparent unconcern:

"Is your retreat supplied with books, like other monasteries?"

An instant later he saw that there was no concealment of his plans. The abbot shot a lightning glance at him. The other two sat with downcast eyes, but the slight expansion of their nostrils and the tense attitude in which they sat showed that they awaited each word as if it would decide the destiny of an empire. The abbot fixed his cold eye on him. Here were men who read without words, who conversed without language. It flashed through his

mind that these were the men who, during the years of the Mutiny, would sit at a certain hour of evening and talk with one another over hundreds of miles of space, project their thoughts at will, and give warning of the movements of the English. He was aroused by the calm voice of the abbot:

"We have no books."

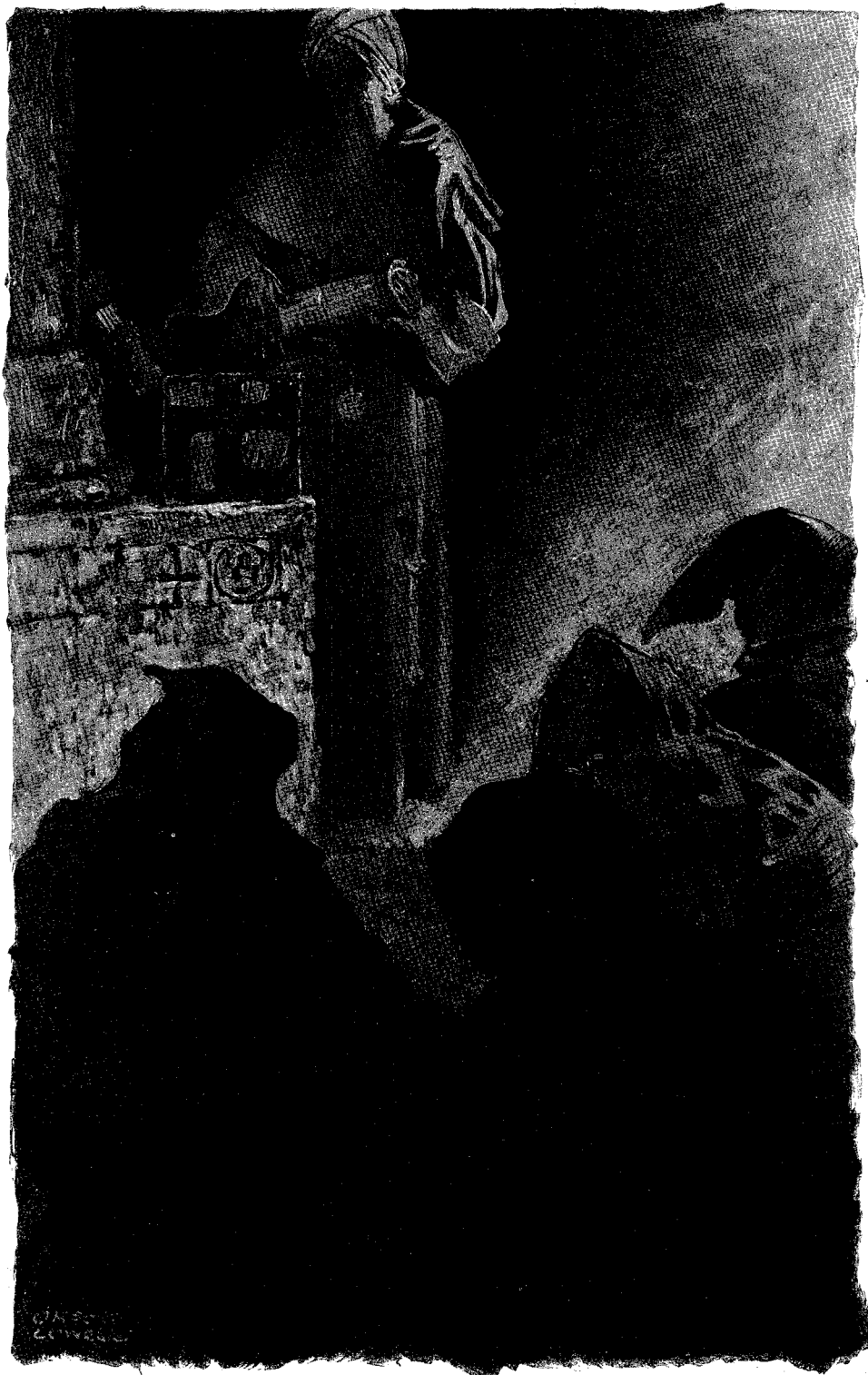
But if Malden's agitation had revealed his secret, none the less did the abbot's answer betray his. Its calmness was the calmness of suppressed excitement. It was the deadly stillness that intervenes between the lightning flash and the answering thunder. It was challenge, threat, and warning all in one. Not only was there a book, but it must be a book of priceless value; perhaps it contained the secrets of that almost superhuman lore that had lent such sinews to the rebellion.

But Malden had regained control of his features and was able to conceal the fact that he had guessed their secret. It made him tingle to the finger-tips to think what might have been the result had they seen that he read them even as they read him. In order the more perfectly to throw them off their guard, he made the frank statement that he had been wandering about looking at the native books in the monasteries, but as they had none, he would merely rest a few days and then go back down the valley. He was pleased to note that the tension was rapidly relaxed, and by the time the evening shadows fell he felt that he was entirely out of danger. He gave up the idea once and for all of trying to gain possession of their sacred book: he was not meditating a theft. But he hoped that Fortune would give him an opportunity of looking into the sacred volume, and perhaps when the monks became aware that he had seen it, they might let him copy portions of it. At any rate, he argued that it was then or never, and he must be willing to take a certain amount of risk for the sake of success. The acquisition of such a treasure would surely acquit him before his superior officer if he overstayed his furlough.

The moment he was alone he set to work to put together the fragments of knowledge which he had already acquired. In the first place, why was he lodged in a room in the extreme front of the building? Evidently the sacred book must be in some

apartment in the rear of the house. He remembered that about ten o'clock that very morning he had heard a single trumpet, and then had heard hurrying feet on all sides, and after that perfect stillness for upward of an hour. Where had everybody gone? Here was his first clue, and it must be followed up. After a night's sound sleep he awoke with every sense alert and with hope burning high within him, though he did not let it appear in his face. Having eaten his simple meal, he took a stroll about the neighborhood of the monastery, and then returned to his room alone. It was close on the hour of ten. He sat with his face turned away from the door, and had drawn out his watch to note the time. It was just on the stroke of ten. He was holding his open watch in his hand, and on its crystal as in a mirror the wall behind him and the open door were clearly reflected. If he had not had himself well under control he would have started or uttered an exclamation; for there, reflected in the crystal of his watch, he saw the face of a monk peer in at him from the open door, as if to make sure of his whereabouts, and then silently disappear.

An instant later the long-drawn blast of the trumpet sounded, and again he heard the sound of hurrying feet. He leaped from his seat and hastened into the hall. It was empty. He ran into the inner court. It was deserted. He passed through a corridor leading to the rear of the building, and pushing open a heavy door, looked cautiously out. A narrow strip of ground intervened between the building and the side of the mountain which towered up into the blue; but his eye was fascinated by the sight of a small opening in the face of the precipice through which were passing in single file the members of the brotherhood. All were covered with long, somber robes, the cowls of which completely hid their heads. When the last one had entered, the opening closed; and so skilfully had it been contrived that, though Malden ran forward and examined the face of the rock closely, he could not detect where the joints of the door were. The rock was seamed and scored in all directions, and the joints of the opening had been cunningly contrived so as to follow the seams, with the result that the most suspicious eye never would have discovered the place. He could hardly believe the



Drawn by Orson Lowell. Half-tone plate engraved by H. Davidson

"AN IRON-BOUND CHEST, FROM WHICH HE TOOK WITH REVERENT
HANDS A HEAVY SCROLL"

evidence of his own eyes, and yet he knew that he was awake and sane. He returned to his room with his head in a whirl and his pulse going at tempestuous speed. Here was a clue, indeed; but how to follow it into the bowels of the earth was a difficult question to solve. He revolved in his mind a dozen plans, but rejected them all. If it were down in the plains, it would be an easy matter to bribe one of the monks to introduce him into the secret chamber under cover of the night; but that would not do here. He might go at midnight and try to find the secret of the door, but this he knew would be useless. He might boldly ask to be admitted, but this would have been suicidal. At last a scheme flashed across his mind which sent the blood rioting through his veins and almost forced a cry of triumph from his lips. It was a desperate chance, but he had taken desperate chances before and come through safe. Having thought of it, he deemed it would be cowardice not to make the attempt. He must in some way get possession of one of the long hooded robes of the monks, and must then watch his chance to enter with them into the secret chamber. Once inside that secret door, he must leave the rest to good fortune and his ready wit. The disguise might be detected, but it was not probable, for the body and head were completely shrouded by the ample garment.

All that day he spent in trying to invent a plan whereby he could get one of the robes. He had seen none except those the monks wore when they entered the cave. The day brought no solution to this difficulty; but when his head touched the hard wooden pillow that night and he thought of his comfortable bolster in his quarters in cantonments, he lighted upon a plan which might succeed. The next morning he complained of headache, refused to eat, and lay tossing from side to side as if in pain. The wooden pillow seemed specially to add to his discomfort. He would push the wooden block away, and fold up his coat and put it under his head, only to draw it away dissatisfied. They brought him a bunch of straw, but he rejected it. A pillow of soft moss was likewise scorned. At last one of the monks appeared carrying on his arm one of the long robes of the brotherhood. This was placed under the sufferer's head. At first he seemed dissatis-

fied with it also, but after rearranging it two or three times he appeared to fall asleep.

The hour for retirement had come, and the trumpet sounded forth its single note. Through half-shut eyes Malden saw one of the monks bend over him to listen to his regular breathing, and, assured that he was asleep, all filed out of the door and hastened away. The next instant Malden was on his feet, looking surprisingly alert for an ill man. He threw the robe over him with a single motion and hurried down the hall. He was in time, for there was a silent line of men passing through the opening into the rock. He fell in near the end of the line, and bowed his head to pass the dark portal. Even as he did so he heard the far-off voice of the Jumna fretting against her rocks, and again there flashed across his mind the words of Bardur-din: "I will watch the Jumna for the sign." The cold, dark passage struck a chill to his heart, and he would even then have turned back. But it was too late now: the die had been cast; he had taken the hand of Fortune, and he must follow now, wherever she should lead.

As soon as his eyes became accustomed to the dim light that struggled down from some crevice far overhead, he saw that they had entered a vast cavern which seemed to branch off in many directions, and he heard the ripple of a stream of water somewhere in the darkness behind him. He had no time to examine his surroundings, for the abbot had already ascended a dais at one side, and the monks were arranging themselves in a double semicircle before him. Blind Fortune indeed had him by the hand, for at any moment any one of a thousand things might happen which would reveal his identity, and then that might occur which so often happens to Fortune's votaries. His only course was to follow closely the example of the others.

When all were seated, the abbot turned to a deep fissure in the rocky wall behind him, and drew forth an iron-bound chest, from which he took with reverent hands a heavy scroll, wrapped in what appeared to be a casing of parchment or of skin, dark with age, and polished smooth by the impress of hands that had lain in the tomb, it might be, for a thousand years. Seating himself on the floor of the dais, he unrolled the precious scroll as tenderly as a mother would handle a new-born infant. Malden



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"HE DREAMED OF THE LITTLE YORKSHIRE VILLAGE AND THE ONE
WHO WAITED FOR HIM THERE"

forgot all else. Here was the treasure of which he had dreamed, for which he had risked everything. It was worth the risk, even though life itself were the wager. But though the object of his search was in sight, it was apparently as far off as ever, for it was guarded as the apple of the eye, and it would require all his courage, patience, and skill to obtain an opportunity to examine it.

His train of thought was interrupted by the voice of the abbot as he droned forth a single sentence of the sacred writing. The sound was taken up by the monks, and each clause was repeated three times in unison. After a whole paragraph had been gone over thus, the abbot turned back to the beginning and began questioning the monks on what had been read. He began at the head of the line and questioned them one by one. Malden saw, to his dismay, that his turn would surely come and that discovery would then be inevitable. Fortune, having led him thus far, had deserted him at the critical moment. Slowly the questions came down the line, and each monk answered quietly and promptly. Now the man at his left was speaking. He heard his voice as if it were far away. He was not afraid, but it was hard to wait for the ax to fall. His neighbor ceased, and he heard the abbot propounding the question which might be the last he should ever hear. During that brief moment there passed before his mental vision the face of a beautiful girl in the Yorkshire village, the faces of his father and mother, the faces of his messmates of the Ninth Lancers, and lastly the face of Bardur-din as he pronounced those words: "I will watch the Jumna for the sign."

The abbot stopped. There was no answer. The question was repeated. Still all was silent. The abbot looked up in surprise, and the monks nearest him stirred impatiently. Still the question remained unanswered. The abbot repeated it in a stern voice. By this time all eyes were turned upon him. He arose in his place, and threw the cowl from his head. Instant death was preferable to this horrible suspense. The effect was as though an electric shock had been passed through the entire company. Every man leaped to his feet. The cavern rang with hoarse cries and deep-breathed curses. Ah! they were men, after all! Feeling had conquered.

They were all feeling now. All the repressed passion of years had risen to the surface. As he stood that instant at bay and beheld the havoc that passion was playing with their asceticism, he knew that he was lost; not so much because he had discovered the sacred volume as because he had shamed them in the citadel of their faith. He had destroyed forever the fiction that human fear, hope, joy, love, and sorrow can be eliminated from the scheme of life. The pillars and walls of their fancied earthly Nirvana were falling in ruins about them. They seemed like a pack of wolves that had stopped to snarl before they sprang upon him.

At that instant the abbot's voice rang out in stern rebuke. He of all that company had preserved his outward calmness of demeanor. Only the eagle flashing of his eye, the heaving of his chest, and the death-like pallor of his face showed that passion had him likewise in its grip. But he had been betrayed into no outburst of passion; he had not openly blasphemed and denied the validity of his creed. His voice rang out like a trumpet above the discordant cries of the multitude:

"Silence!"

For a moment it seemed doubtful whether they would obey, but first one face and then another fell as the consciousness of their undoing came upon them. There stood the dauntless Englishman with folded arms looking straight into the face of death without a tremor. He it was of all that company who in the hour of trial had proved his mastery of passion. Here in tableau was shown forth the victory of the West over the East, the victory of Christian philosophy over pantheistic. On the side of the West it was the subjugation of the feelings; on the side of the East it was their annihilation. On the West it was the harnessing of the passions; on the East it was the chaining of them to a dungeon floor. On the West it was the taming and the use of impulse; on the East it was its crucifixion.

Again he heard the abbot's voice, slow, restrained, but inexorable, like that of the judge as he pronounces sentence of death:

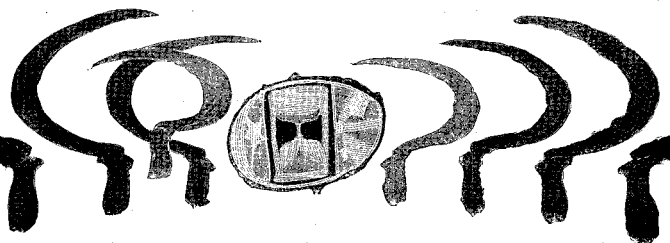
"Our secret place has been discovered, our sacred shrine defiled, our book seen by alien eyes. We have been attacked at the point where the whole sanctity and power of our religion centers. This rash intruder



"HE BECAME WELL-NIGH AS SACRED AN OBJECT AS
THE BOOK ITSELF"

would carry away the mystic truths of this book and scatter them up and down the earth for scholars to gloat over and the swinish herd to ridicule. Yet we must not kill. By so doing we should become unworthy of the book and would snap the golden thread which holds us to its truths. No, we must not kill. But this man must never leave this place. He shall be forever immolated here as a perpetual sacrifice. Here to these grim walls he shall be chained until he shall have learned the emptiness of tears, the hollowness of laughter, and the nothingness of love. Here day by day he shall hear this book read and its truths expounded. He shall learn what he came to learn, but he shall never take that knowledge away. Does this meet with your assent?"

A deep note of approval fell from every mouth, for this they knew would be worse than death.



Malden was glad. He loved life, he was young; he had never tasted the bitterness of hopeless confinement, or perhaps he would have begged them on his knees to end his life at once. But he had in fullest measure that typical Anglo-Saxon hardihood which gives up hope only with life itself.

By this time all show of passion had been repressed, and his captors went about calmly but swiftly to carry out the orders of their chief. A chain was fastened about his waist and riveted to a ponderous stone, which permitted him, though with great labor, to move about the floor of the cavern, but by no possibility to approach the niche where the sacred volume was placed. And there they left him to himself. There was the end of all his ambition. There he must wear his life away, a perpetual mark of scorn and vengeance. Wave upon wave of feeling dashed over and submerged him. He lay down upon the rocky bed which was to be his life-home and gave way to a paroxysm of self-reproach. It was not for himself that he mourned, but for those who loved him and who would never cease to feel that he had allowed the light fancy of a moment to lead him to his end.

The storm spent itself at last, and then he dragged himself toward the spot whence came the sound of running water. There he found a large spring from which a steady stream flowed away into the darkness. Beside this spring he made his home. Three times a day a monk would bring him his bowl of millet porridge and perform such offices as the case required. He had as good food, as good clothing, and as good a bed as any of the brotherhood. Liberty was the only thing he lacked, and that lack turned all the rest to wormwood. Every day the monks assembled at the appointed time and resumed the study of the book.

Malden's struggle with himself was tragic. Not a day passed when the memory of his home, his love, his work did not send him on a mad chase about the confines of his prison-house, dragging behind him the ponderous stone, until exhaustion felled him to the ground and merciful sleep spread its mantle over him. Many a time he said to himself that this was the road which many had traveled and which led to insanity, and he brought all the power of his will into operation to combat it. He

set himself to work to formulate a scheme of existence which should tide him over the interval till he should hear the shouts of his countrymen as they battered down his prison door. He would spend part of the time in conning the words which were read from the sacred scroll, for even yet he might be able to make use of it. At other times he would recall by the aid of a quickened memory what passages he could from the great English classics, the greatest being, to his mind, the English Bible. And thus he schooled himself against the frenzy of despair that daily seized him. What at first was done by sheer force of will at last became the habit of his life. Within a month he acquired the stoicism of the life-captive. There were times when he almost exulted in his position. He rapidly acquired the language of the sacred book, though its meaning was far from clear. Hour after hour he would sit and repeat its sonorous periods, putting meaning into them, shaping tragedy or comedy as he pleased, and fitting them to the andante or allegro of the soul, as the impulse of the hour led him.

But ever and ever through his dreams there ran one strange refrain. Whether he dreamed of the little Yorkshire village and the one who waited for him there, or of the roar and tumult of battle, or of the noisy comradeship of the mess-room, there ran through it all, now slow and sad as a requiem, now exultant as a triumphal march, those eight short words: "I will watch the Jumna for the sign."

As time went on, the cold came creeping into his prison-house. The monks provided him with wood for a fire, though it must have cost them great labor to bring it up from the valley. Gradually he was becoming an object of interest to them for his own sake. His fortitude astonished them, and his growing knowledge of the sacred book they deemed little short of miraculous. When he lighted his first fire he was nearly swept off his feet again by the tide of memory; but he had learned stern self-repression, and even the old familiar smell of smoke and all the pictures that memory painted, dipping its brush into that flame, could not unman him.

But one night, not long after he had been supplied with fuel, he awoke at the hour of midnight, and thrusting out his hands toward the dying embers, burst into

a peal of laughter so weird, so horrible, that it might have been an echo from the pit. He laughed long and loud, and the walls of the grotto took it up and laughed in chorus.

"O Bardur-din, forgive me!" he cried. "Hereafter I will be your servant and not you mine."

When the brotherhood entered the next morning they found him laughing aloud and gesticulating wildly. His eye gleamed with that old imperious light, and he shook his clenched fist at them and spoke rough English words the meaning of which they could not guess. If they had understood, they never would have said that he had gone mad.

From that day on he would sit the live-long day and carve into curious shapes the chips from his fire-wood, or he would take one of the sticks, cut it into sections, divide and subdivide it, and having fashioned each bit, would call the monks about him and say:

"See me launch my little boats."

Then he would place them on the surface of the spring, and ever and anon one of them would slip over the edge and float away into the darkness. The monks would stand about him with awe and reverence upon their faces, and would go away wondering that the gods should choose such a one for their inspiration. So, as the months went by, he sat and chanted the sacred book and carved his little boats, until he became well-nigh as sacred an object as the book itself. He knew it from beginning to end, and often the abbot would let the monks chant the sacred oracle to the measure of the "madman's" song.

In the year 1884 there was trouble among the hill tribes on the upper waters of the Jumna, and among the first regiments ordered to the front was the Ninth Yorkshire Lancers. The old names were all gone now. Twenty-three years had done their work. The names were all new, and the Sepoy Rebellion was own kin to the "Arabian Nights" and to Grimm's "Fairy Tales." But the regiment was made of the same old stuff, as the recalcitrant hill tribe found out to its cost, and after a short campaign the Lancers went into cantonments on the same spot where, twenty-three years before, it had mourned the loss of a brave subaltern.

It was at the end of a February day, and a number of the mess were talking over Gordon's expedition into equatorial Africa, when there entered a young man of graceful carriage and scholarly brow.

"Well," he exclaimed, "I have been told that these people are superstitious, but I never supposed they carried it to this extent. I have been in and out of native houses in this vicinity for a month, and there is not one of them that does not contain a fetish like this"; and he threw on the table a small piece of wood carved in the shape of a diamond, and having a roughly executed H in the center.

Several of the mess smiled to think that any one should be interested in such child's play; but at that moment entered an aged servant, the pet of the regiment, too old to work, but too well beloved to be turned loose upon the world. As he passed the table his eye lighted upon the fetish, and he stopped. It was Bardur-din. He grasped the edge of the table, and looked wildly from one to the other.

"Well, what do you make of it, Bardur-din?" laughed one of the young men. But the aged servant could only make a hoarse sound in his throat. He swayed and would have fallen had not a strong arm been thrown around his shoulders.

"Here, some brandy, quick! The old fellow has had a turn."

He was laid on a bench, and a cushion was thrust beneath his head. Under the stimulus of the spirits he rapidly revived.

"Bring the big book."

"I am afraid he is wandering," said McElroy, rather sadly, for it was hard to see the faithful servant go to pieces.

"Nonsense," said Goode; "he is all right. He wants something; that's all."

"The book—the big book with the names," repeated Bardur-din.

"It's the regiment roll that he wants. Bring it out, Goode. There is something on his mind, and we had better humor him."

The book was spread out on the table, and Bardur-din, rising on his elbow, eyed it eagerly.

"Long ago—Malden—ten—fifteen—twenty years."

They searched, and found the record of the mysterious disappearance of one Malden, subaltern.

"Why, he was lost away back—just after

the Mutiny, according to this. It says 'Probably dead,' but nothing more."

"Not dead, not dead," whispered Bardur-din, excitedly. "Show me the piece of wood."

They put it in his hands.

"Look!" he cried. "Where did this come from?"

"Why, every house about here has one. They say that Mother Jumna brings them."

"Does she bring them still?" There was life and death in the question.

"Yes, I believe so. The owner gave me this because he said that Mother Jumna had brought him a new one."

"Then he is alive. Listen."

They crowded about him now eagerly enough. The fetish was worth looking at, after all. The tension was telling on the old man, and he could hardly more than whisper brokenly.

"Sepoy Rebellion—sometimes officer captured—taken away, tortured, and killed." Gradually they drew from Bardur-din how that the regiment had made a system of signs whereby a captive might be traced. A scrap of paper, a rag torn from the clothing, a piece of knotted string, might be a clue to his whereabouts, and to this system many a man owed his rescue. The sign agreed upon by the Ninth Lancers was the shape of a diamond with the letter H in the center, and this was the fetish that Mother Jumna had been sending down the valley for nearly a quarter of a century.

"I promised him that I would watch the Jumna for the sign, and I did so for two months; but, unhappy man that I am, I gave him up too soon. Do not delay. Follow the lead of the Jumna, and she will tell you where he is."

The officers looked at one another in amazement. Could it be possible that an officer of the Ninth Lancers could have lain for twenty-three years in a dungeon in India? Before two suns had set, a strong party of men were on their way up the valley. Bardur-din was too weak to accompany them, but he told them of the village to which he had traced the missing man, and they made this their first objective point. It was the village where Malden had found the path to Delgar Varg.

Men were placed along the river's bank to watch for the sign, and before many hours had passed it was found that it

came down a wild mountain stream from the west. Here was work indeed. It would take a better climber than the chamois or the wild mountain goat to follow that torrent to its icy birthplace; but the men were on a warm trail, and the thought that an officer of the Ninth—their regiment—had been lying for over two decades in some loathsome dungeon or in one of the frost-bound caves of the upper Himalayas gave them the will and the determination to climb, if need be, to where, as the villager had told Malden so long ago, the eagle itself dared not soar.

The company consisted of nineteen men in all, six of whom were officers and the rest picked men whose faithfulness could be relied upon. When it became plain that the path lay straight up the side of the mountain, Lieutenant Archibald gathered the men about him and said:

"Of course, men, we cannot tell what is before us. There is no precedent to indicate what sort of reception we shall get up there, or at the hands of what sort of men. It may be an easy enterprise, it may be desperate. We must be sure of working together to the last gasp. If there is one here who has a family dependent on him or who shrinks in any measure from this work, he may go back; but as for me, I follow this trail to its end, though it lead me to the highest peak of the Himalayas. There is an Englishman and a comrade, an officer of the Ninth Yorkshire Lancers, at the other end of this, and I shall never leave this valley till I find him."

The answer to this appeal was more expressive than words. Each man glanced up the dizzy height, with its ragged gorges and its frowning precipices, and instinctively tightened his belt. There was not one that wished to go back till this disgrace to the regiment had been wiped out and their comrade had been brought in triumph to the old familiar mess-room.

Then they began the ascent. There could be no path, for even had they known of the Delgar Varg, they could not have been sure that the stream came from it. The water was their only guide, and by it they struggled up the mountain-side, now winding their way through gorges where they had to wade waist-deep in the chilly water, now making long detours in order to surmount lofty precipices over which the torrent poured. Night overtook them

half-way up the steep ascent. The violence of the exercise and the rarity of the air had begun to tell on all, but their resolution was as grim as ever. Dried grass supplied them with fuel for a fire, beside which they dried their sodden garments and then lay down to the sleep of exhaustion. Only Archibald sat all night with his hard, set face staring into the fire, his features now and then twitching with the motion of his thoughts. Ever and anon as he turned to heap another armful of grass upon the fire or glanced at the sky to note the progress of the night, he would murmur, "Twenty-three years—twenty-three years!"

As soon as it was light enough to proceed without stumbling, the party pushed on silently up the bed of the stream. They must be approaching the end of their climb, and so all unnecessary noise was forbidden. The men had no surplus breath to waste in speech, but each one had his senses on the alert to discover signs of human habitation. Obstacles were overcome which under ordinary circumstances would have daunted the bravest of them. They picked their way without fear or complaint along narrow ledges and up shelving reaches of bare rock where the rashest Alpine climber would have shuddered and where a false step would have been instant death. They were not mountaineering for pleasure; it was for human life, for British life, for the honor of the regiment: and every man kept his mental eye on the goal of his intent, and steadied his nerve by contemplation of the greatness of the interests at stake.

So on and up they climbed, stopping to rest only when the fierce exertion in that rare atmosphere brought blood from their ears and noses. This they wiped away as if ashamed that any single fiber in them should rebel at such a time.

Soon they plunged into a thick cloud which enveloped the upper reaches of the mountain. This added greatly to the obstacles in their way, for they could see only a few feet in any direction. Fortunately, this did not last long, for they came abruptly against the face of a precipice from the foot of which the stream seemed to flow directly. Here they stood in silence, exhausted, chilled to the bone, without shelter, and far beyond all vegetation that would serve for fuel. Yet there was no

sign of weakness. Their faces were all upward. The rock before them was no sterner or more unyielding than their purpose. As they stood there panting from their violent exertion, and gazing into the waters of the stream, there floated out from the bowels of the earth another of those mute witnesses of Malden's faith in the regiment. The men looked at one another in silence, and blushed to think that the regiment had been thus late in proving itself worthy of his faith.

At this moment they were startled by a clear, long-drawn trumpet blast, which seemed so near that they could almost stretch out the hand into the mist and lay hold upon the one who blew it. Not a sound was made, but each man crouched as in the act to spring, and each hand sought its weapon. There was nothing to indicate whether this was a call to arms or whether their presence was as yet unknown. The sound put new life into the men. They were certainly upon the threshold of success or failure, which meant success or death. Removing their shoes, in order to preserve unbroken silence, they crept cautiously through the mist toward the point from which the sound had come. Almost before they were aware, they drew up against a wall built of massive stones overgrown with lichens and dripping with moisture. Not a sound was to be heard. They groped their way along beneath the wall till they came to the massive portal. The ponderous door was swinging partly open, and like ghosts the men slipped one by one into the darkness of the grim edifice.

A death-like stillness reigned. No being of human shape was to be seen. It might have been the house of the dead, so awful was the gloom, and so vainly did even imagination cope with the environment. Archibald and two of the other officers advanced slowly down the corridor, examining every side passage and every corner, for fear of a surprise or an ambush. The inner court showed no sign of human habitation. The men were summoned, and drew up in the court in perfect silence. The kitchen showed signs of human life. Various utensils lay about. The ashes of the fire beneath the great kettle in the fireplace were still glowing hot. Man had been here within an hour. A spasm of apprehension, not of fear, knocked at the heart of the

leader. His memory brought back to him all that his boyhood reading had said of invisible beings and occult powers, but he repressed his feelings and sternly continued the search. The place was manifestly deserted; but for what reason, to what end? An unknown danger that cannot by any possibility be anticipated is the hardest thing for a soldier to bear, but there was nothing to do but to wait. Time must solve the mystery.

The men were hungry and cold, and here were food and fuel. While some kept a sharp lookout, others piled the fireplace with dried grass, and before long cold and hunger, those two coadjutors of fear, had been banished, and the men stood about, wondering what was to come next. It is hard to say how long they could have endured the tension. It was worse than climbing the steep ascent; it was worse than cold and hunger; it was almost worse than fear. With the odds ten to one they would have grappled with an open foe and been happy; but here it was hard to tell what they had to deal with. Manifestly it was no ordinary enemy. Even at this moment they might be surrounded by a foe who could strike death into their ranks and still remain unseen and safe from attack. The very roof might fall and crush them; the floor might open beneath their feet and swallow them. The only thing to do was to wait.

Archibald was about to begin another and more thorough search, more for the purpose of keeping the men busy than with any hope of discovering anything, when a door leading to a rear inclosure opened slowly and a tall hooded monk entered, followed by another and a third. These weird figures had already set foot upon the kitchen threshold when they caught sight of the unwelcome visitors. For an instant they seemed paralyzed with astonishment and fear, but the next moment they leaped back with a piercing cry, only to fall into the hands of half a dozen men who had intercepted them from behind. They did not struggle to escape, but cried out with all their might, as if to some one at a distance. Archibald pushed open the door by which they had entered, and looked out into the dim inclosure. He was none too soon, for at that very instant he saw, through the mist, a dark orifice in the rock close as if by magic. By a strong effort of the will

he pulled himself together and hurried back to the kitchen, where the men saw by his pale face that something of moment had been discovered. He called the officers aside and told them what he had seen. The general opinion was that the secret door must be found and forced without delay. Every minute might mean death to the captive who was doubtless immured within. The men were hurried out into the rear inclosure, and there Archibald explained the situation and urged them to stand together like one man, whatever might happen. They needed no exhortation.

No beam of wood could be found to use as a battering-ram, so a huge stone was torn from a wall, and in the hands of six strong men was rushed across the inclosure and dashed against the face of the rock where Archibald had seen the opening. No effect was visible. Again and again the stone was hurled against the barrier, and still it stood firm. The men were beginning to show the effects of the terrible exertion. Their hands were torn and bleeding, and they were gasping for breath.

"One more, boys! One more, with a will; and if it does not work, we will try something else."

Again the boulder went crashing against the secret door with desperate force, and this time the blow told. The door had sunken in a full inch and was evidently about to give way. A few more blows sent it reeling in with a crash. Archibald leaped to the orifice, but was driven back by a burst of flame and smoke. A raging fire had been built in the passage, and no man could pass it. As the smoke drifted out, they peered in and saw dim figures beyond the fire darting this way and that, and fuel was being constantly added to the fire.

It was a crisis that must be met instantly and unerringly, for every moment lessened the chance of rescuing the prisoner. But Archibald was equal to the test. The three monks who had been taken were swiftly brought and made by signs to understand that they must go first into the cavern. They must walk to their death through the flames unless they could induce their comrades to extinguish them. At first they stolidly refused; but when they were dragged to the opening and the fierce fire threw out live tongues at them, their

stolidity was melted, and they shouted pitiously to those within and begged them to spare them. There was no response, and the determined men prepared to thrust one of the monks into the flames. They would surely have been sacrificed had not their comrades become assured that the threat was no vain one. A voice was heard from within, and the joy of the captives showed that their comrades had capitulated. The fire was quickly drawn back into the cavern. Through the hot embers and between the rocky walls, that almost glowed with the fierce heat, the officers rushed, closely followed by the men.

There they were brought face to face with a scene which branded itself deeply into the memory. In the center of the lofty cavern burned a fire, which lighted up every crack and crevice of their comrade's prison-house. Beyond it stood a line of figures, as motionless as if carved in stone. On a dais to one side stood the venerable abbot, holding in his hands a skin case. Anger, pity, sorrow, joy, triumph, despair grappled with one another for the possession of his features. But over it all there brooded the spirit of calm determination. It was a scene from the "Inferno," so weird were the shrouded shapes that waited their leader's commands, so high, so stern, so malignant was the face of him who was their master.

But the picture did not end here. To one side, beside a pool of water that glowed like the jewel eye of a god in the light of the fire, stood a man. Ah! was it a man indeed, or was it a spirit upon whom these fiends were wreaking vengeance, so still he stood, so white, so transparent, so wildly he looked out from beneath his long elf-locks? There was the lofty brow, the strong aquiline nose, the deep gray eye like that of a falcon sweeping to his prey. It was no youthful enthusiast in search of sacred lore, no dashing young officer. He had been all this, but now he was a decrepit old man who had forgotten the light of God's sun, but who had never lost faith in his fellow-Englishmen. Years might come and go, sorrow might shrink his hand to the thinness of paper, but it was the same free mind, the same unsullied temper, the same high faith in God.

It took a full moment for the rescuing

party to take in this wild scene. Before that moment had expired the abbot rushed toward the fire and hurled the case and its contents into the flames. At sight of this the captive leaped forward. Lifting his clenched fist, he cried:

"No, you cannot save it from me, for I have its contents here in my brain, every word and syllable of it."

He began chanting passages from it in a wild, high voice. It was true. They had lost the document, and he had committed it to memory. He alone had it in his grasp. As the monks realized this, they made a rush at him as if to tear him to pieces; but they were too late. The band of rescuers were before them, and surrounded the person of the captive and drove back the rabble with their sword-points. Archibald with a single stroke of his blade broke one of the links of the chain, and Malden was a free man once more. How changed he was in a moment! He was no longer the frenzied captive chanting a heathen psalm: he was an English gentleman.

He turned to Archibald, shook him by the hand, and said:

"I have overstepped my furlough. I trust you will be able to make it right with the colonel."

Ah, how Archibald wanted to take him in his arms and hug him! How the men wanted to lift him on high and carry him in triumph from his living tomb! During all those years he had remembered that he was on furlough. He must be exonerated. Not a word against the regiment; not a breath of suspicion that during all those long years it had forgotten his name.

How they brought Malden down that mountain-side they were never able coherently to tell, but five days later they came into cantonments bearing in a roughly improvised litter no other than James Malden, subaltern of the Ninth Yorkshire Lancers.

In the deepest archives of the British Museum library you may find the record of a remarkable discovery in the line of Oriental literature and of the light it shed upon that fascinating subject. This you may find; but search as they may, James Malden and Elsie Farnham will never find those lost years again.

THE SIREN

BY JOHN LUTHER LONG

Author of "Madame Butterfly," etc.

I

BRASSID



HEY tell yet, on the porches of the Crazy-Quilt House,—though it is two years,—how savage Brassid met the laughing Sea-Lady, and how, at last, he adored her laughter more the more she laughed at him, and how she loved his savagery more the more savage he was to her.

And, then, on to the consequences of that laughter and that savagery, which you are to know at the end.

Mrs. Mouthon—she is the lady who uses snuff—insists that it is all pretense: that Brassid was *not* savage in his room, and that Miss Princeps never laughed in her room. Mrs. Mouthon's was between theirs.

Nevertheless, Miss Carat, who has the one deaf ear, contends that it is absurd, absolutely absurd. For, she argues, why *should* they pretend, in the first place, and why should they *not*, if they liked, in the last place? But, then, Miss Carat, the other five whisper, always opposes anything which proceeds from Mrs. Mouthon.

It seems that Brassid, weary and seeking seclusion, arrived on the last train of a Wednesday night. The man who carried his bag up from the little station told him that the Crazy-Quilt House was a sanatorium for women. It appeared that Brassid and the porter, who was also many other things at the hotel, would be the only men in the house—a state of affairs which immediately created a subtle camaraderie between the two men, though the porter was colored.

"Please call me in time for the first train up to-morrow morning," said Brassid, as the friendly porter dragged himself out of his room.

"It goes at six o'clock, sir," warned the porter, perhaps wishing to detain him a little longer, for already the porter liked Brassid amazingly. Did I mention that every one did this, in spite of his ferocity?

"No matter," said Brassid, shivering at the thought of the unearthly hour—Brassid, who composed poems in bed until ten in the morning!

"All right, sir," said the porter, as if warning Brassid that he would regret it.

However, that was why Brassid appeared at the dinner-table in a dinner-coat—because he knew that the invalid ladies would be there.

There were six, and one vacant place—opposite. The lady on his left put up her lorgnon in haste. The one at the top of the table put something like a pepper-box into her ear and leaned to listen.

"Lovely weather!" said Brassid.

"Rheumatic weather!" said the lady with the pepper-box.

"It's no such thing!" said the lady who took snuff. "It's asthmatic!"

Something dropped with a small clatter into Brassid's plate. The lady on his left flung her lorgnon to her eyes. Miss Carat jammed her pepper-box to her ear. Some one laughed, then checked it.

An old locket, in the fashion of a heart, lay in Brassid's plate. A bit of ribbon gave evidence of some severed attachment. Brassid was hopelessly fitting back to its place a flake of blue enamel.

He tried to discourage the interest in his keepsake by covering it with his napkin. Then he looked up. The vacant seat was occupied, and the lady was trying to smother her laughter.

Brassid got red and crunched the napkin in a way which said plainly: "So it was *you* who laughed!"