

KING FOR A DAY

(Continued from yesterday)

By
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When the captain rose to his feet the secretary whispered in his ear: "For heaven's sake, don't say anything about the judicial's wife. Talk about dacoits." But the speech, so beautifully written, so lucid in its meaning and so complicated in its detail, became a waving sea of foam. From out the billowy waste of this indefinite mass there loomed only the tall figure of the cadaverous J. C., and attached to it, as a tangible something, the fact that he had lost his wife and settled the dacoits.

It was glorious, this getting up before two strings of more or less bald-headed officials to tell them how the state ought to be run—the ship steered, as it were. "Gentlemen," he began, starting off bravely enough, "we are pleased to have among us once more our fellow skipper, the judicial commissioner."

"The old buck's got a rare streak of humor on tonight," whispered Lushton. "His jovial face adds to the harmony of the occasion. I will not allude to his late loss, as we all know how deeply he feels it."

"Gad! But he's rubbing it in," said Lushton.

"I repeat, we are glad to have him among us again. My secretary assures me that there's not a single dacoit left alive in the province. There's nothing like putting these rebellious chaps down. I had a mutiny myself once on board the Kangaroo. I shot the ring-leaders and made every other's son of the rest of them walk the plank. So I'm proud of the good work the judicial has done in this respect."

Now, it had been a source of irritating regret to every deputy commissioner in the service that when he had caught a dacoit red handed, convicted and sentenced him to be hanged and sent the ruling up to the judicial for confirmation he had been promptly sat on officially and the prisoner either pardoned or let off with a light sentence; consequently these little pleasantries of the captain were looked upon as satire.

The secretary sighed as he shoved in his pocket the written speech, which the captain had allowed to slip to the floor. "It'll do for another time, I suppose," he said wearily, "when he gets over this infernal touch of sun or Burma head."

The other speeches did not appeal to Captain Larry much nor, for the matter of that, to the others either. He had certainly made the hit of the evening.

"It's great, this," he said bucolically to the secretary as they drove home.

"What, sir?"

"Why, making speeches and driving home in your own carriage. I hate going aboard ship in a jiggledy sampan at night. I'll have a string of wharfs put all along the front there so that ships won't have to load at their moorings. Just put me in mind of that tomorrow."

Next day there was considerable diversion on the Newcastle Maid. "The old man's got the d. t.'s," the chief engineer told the first officer. "I locked him in his cabin last night when they brought him off, and he's banging things around there in great shape; swears he's the ruler of Burma and Sir Gimmel Somebody. I won't let him out till he gets all right again, for he'd go up to the agents with this cock and bull story. They'd cable home to the owners, and he'd be taken out of the ship sure."

That's why Sir Lemuel tarried for a day on the Newcastle Maid. Nobody would go near him but the chief engineer, who handed him meat and drink through a porthole and laughed soothingly at his fancy tales.

After chota hazri next morning the secretary brought to Captain Larry a large basket of official papers for his perusal and signature. That was Sir Lemuel's time for work. His motto was business first and afterward more business. Each paper was carefully contained in a cardboard holder secured by red tape.

"The log, eh, mate?" said Larry when the secretary brought them into his room. "It looks shipshape too."

"This file, sir, is the case of Deputy Commissioner Grant, first grade, of Bungalow. He has memorialized the government that Coatsworth, second grade, has been appointed over his head to the commissionership of Bhang. He's senior to Coatsworth, you know, sir, in the service."

"Well, why has Coatsworth been made first mate, then?"

"Grant's afraid it's because he offended you, sir, when you went to Bungalow. He received you in a jahir coat, you remember, and you were awfully angry about it."

"Oh, I was, was I? Just shows what an ass Sir Lemuel can be sometimes. Make Grant a commissioner at once and I'll sign the papers."

"But there's no commissionership open, sir, unless you set back Coatsworth."

"Well, I'll set him back. I'll discharge him from the service. What else have you got there? What's that

bundle on the deck?"

"They're native petitions, sir."

Larry took up one. It began with an oriental profusion of gracious titles bestowed upon the commissioner and went into business by stating that the writer, Baboo Sen's wife, had got two children by "the grace of God and the kind favor of Sir Lemuel, the Father of all Burmans," and the long petition was all to the end that Baboo Sen might have a month's leave of absence.

Larry chuckled, for he did not understand the complex nature of a Baboo's English. The next petition gave him much food for thought. It made his head ache. The English was like logarithms. "Here," he said to the secretary, "you fix these petitions up later, I'm not used to them."

He straightened out the rest of the official business in short order. Judgments that would have taken the wind out of Solomon's sails he delivered with a rapidity that made the secretary's head swim. They were not all according to the code and would probably not stand if sent up to the privy council. At any rate, they would give Sir Lemuel much patient undoing when he came into his own again. The secretary unlocked the official seal and worked it, while the captain limited his signature to "L. Jones."

"That's not forgery," he mused; "it means 'Larry Jones.'"

"The chief's hand is pretty shaky this morning," thought the secretary, for the signature was not much like the careful, clerical hand that he was accustomed to see.

Sir Lemuel's wine had been a standing reproach to Government House. A dinner there either turned a man into a teetotaler or a dyspeptic, and at tiffin when the captain broached a bottle of it he set his glass down with a roar.

"He's brought me the vinegar," he exclaimed, "for the coal oil. Is there no better wine in the house than this?" he asked the butler, and when told there wasn't he insisted upon the secretary writing out an order at once for fifty dozen Pommery. "Have it back in time for dinner, sure! I'll leave some for Lem too. This stuff isn't good for his blood," he said to himself grimly.

"I'm glad this race meet is on while I'm king," he thought as he drove down after tiffin, taking his secretary with him. "They say the Prince of Wales always gets the straight tip, and I'll be sure to be put on to something good."

And he was. Captain Lushton told him that his mare Nettle was sure to win the Rangun Plate, forgetting to mention that he himself had backed Tomboy for the same race.

"Must have wrenched a leg," Lushton assured Larry when Nettle came in absolutely last, but as the secretary wrote "I O U's" for all the bets he made and as Sir Lemuel would be into his own again before settling day and would have to pay up it did not really matter to the captain.

The regiment was so pleased with Sir Lemuel's contributions that the best they had in their marquee was none too good for him. The ladies found him an equally ready mark. Mrs. Leyburn was pretty and had fish to fry. "I must do a little missionary work while the Ironclad's away," she thought. Her mission was to install her husband in the position of port officer. That came out later—came out at the ball that night. The captain assured her that he would attend.

There is always a sort of Donnybrook Derby at the end of a race day in Rangun. Ponies are gently sequestered from their more or less willing owners and handed over, minus their saddles, to sailors, who pilot them erratically around the course for a contributed prize. When the captain saw the hat going around for the prize money he ordered the secretary to write out a "chit" for 200 rupees. "Give them something worth while, poor chaps!" he said.

"And to think that the Ironclad has kept this bottled up so long!" muttered Lushton.

"I always said you had a good heart," Mrs. Leyburn whispered to the captain. "If people would only let you show it," she added maliciously, meaning, of course, Lady Jones.

The chief commissioner was easily the most popular man in Burma that night. It was with difficulty the blue-jackets could be kept from carrying him home on their shoulders. "I hope Lem is looking after the cargo all right," murmured the captain as he drove home to dinner. "I seem to be getting along nicely. Lucky the old cat's awny."

The captain danced the opening quadrille at the ball with the wife of the financial commissioner, and, bar a little enthusiastic rolling, engendered of his sea life, and a couple of torn trains as they swept a little too close, he managed it pretty well. The secretary had piloted him that far. Then Mrs. Leyburn swooped down upon him.

There is an adornment indigenous to every ballroom in the east, known as the kala jagab. It may be a conservatory or a bay window. A quiet seat among the crotons, with the drowsy drone of the waits sitting in and out among the leaves, is just the place to

work a man.

I'm telling you this now, but Mrs. Leyburn knew it long ago, moons before Captain Larry opened the ball with the financial commissioner's wife. Not that Mrs. Leyburn was the only woman with a mission—official life in India is full of them—only she had the start; that was all.

"It's scandalous," another missionary said to Captain Lushton. "They've been in there an hour; they've sat out three dances. I'm sorry for poor dear Lady Jones."

Among the crotons the missionary in the field was saying: "I'm sure Jack ordered the launch to meet you at the steamer that time, Sir Lemuel. He knows you were frightfully angry about it and has felt it terribly. He's simply afraid to ask you for the billet of port officer, and that horrible man who is acting officer now will get it, and poor Jack won't be able to send me up to Darjeeling next hot weather. And you'll be going for a month again next season, Sir Lemuel, won't you?"

Now, as it happened, the captain had had a row with the acting port officer coming up the river, so it was just in his mitt, as he expressed it. "I'll arrange it for Jack tomorrow," he said. "Never fear, little woman." ("He spoke of you as Jack," she told Leyburn later on, "and it's all right, love. Lucky the Ironclad was away.")

A lady approaching from the ballroom heard a little rustle among the plants, pushed eagerly forward and stood before them. Another missionary had entered the field. "I beg pardon, Sir Lemuel," and she disappeared. "Perfectly scandalous!" she said as she met Lushton. "Some one ought to advise dear Lady Jones of that designing creature's behavior."

"For Cupid's sake, don't," ejaculated Lushton fervently. "Let the old boy have his fling. He doesn't get out often."

"I've no intention of doing so myself," said his companion with asperity.

But all the same a telegram went that night to Lady Jones at Promé, which bore good fruit next day and much of it.

When they emerged from the crotons Mrs. Leyburn was triumphant. The captain was also more or less pleased with things as they were. "Jack will probably crack Lem's head when he doesn't get his appointment," he thought.

The captain slipped away early from the ball. It seemed somehow as though the fun had gone out of the thing. He began to have misgivings as to the likelihood of the chief engineer keeping his brother shut up much longer. "I'll get out of this in the morning," he said as he turned into bed. "I've had enough of it. I'll scuttle the ship and clear out."

This virtuous intention would have been easy of accomplishment, comparatively, if he had not slept until 10 o'clock. When he arose the secretary came to him with a troubled face. "There's a telegram from Lady Jones, Sir Lemuel, asking for the carriage to meet her at the station, and I've sent it. She's chartered a special train, and we expect her any moment."

"Great Scott, I'm lost!" moaned the captain. "I must get out of this. Help me dress quickly, that's a good fellow."

An official accosted him as he came out of his room. "I want to see you, Sir Lemuel."

"Is that your tontom at the door?" answered the captain quite irrelevantly.

"Yes, Sir Lemuel."

"Well, just wait here for a few minutes. I've got to meet Lady Jones, and I'm late."

Jumping into the cart he drove off at a furious clip. Fate, in the shape



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of the Ironclad, swooped down upon him at the very gate. He met Lady Jones face to face.

"Stop!" she cried excitedly. "Where are you going, Sir Lemuel?"

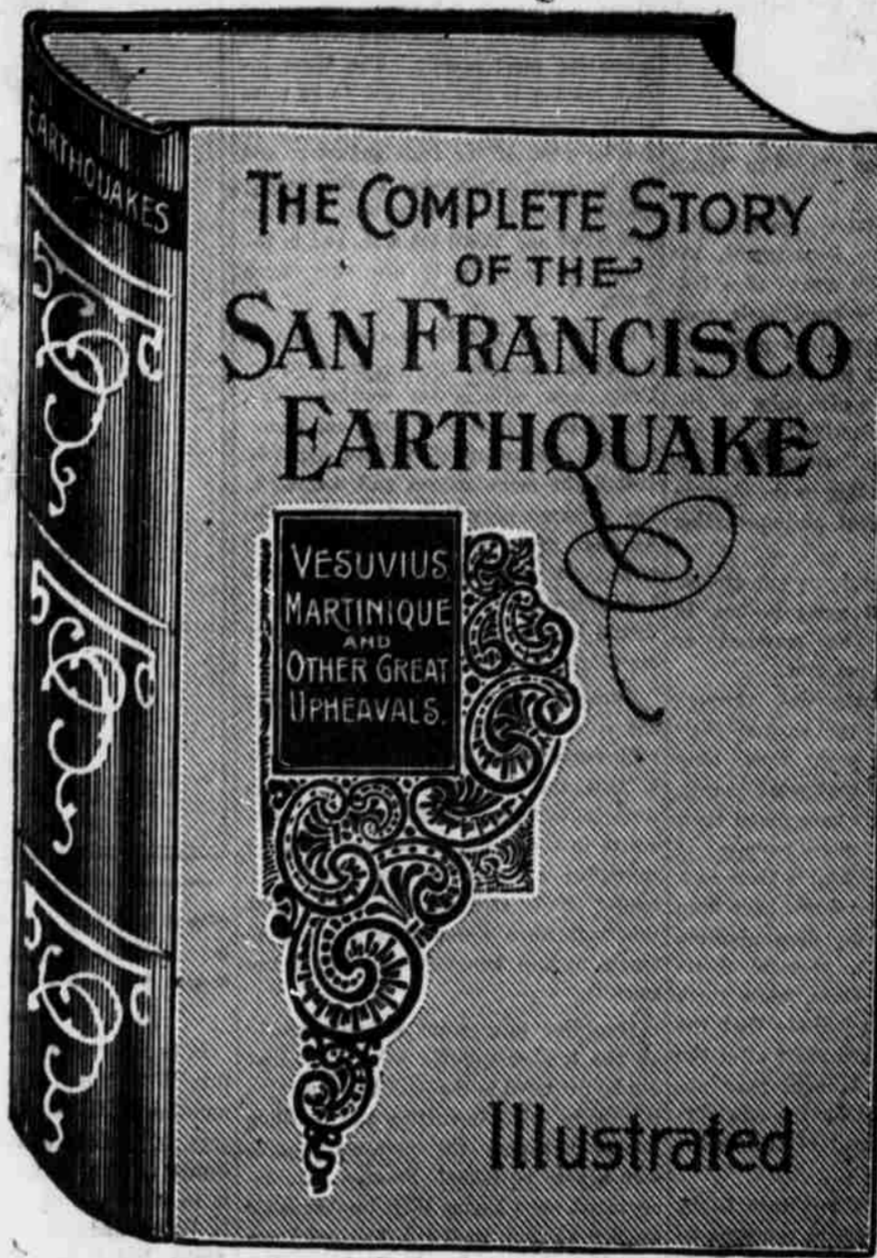
"I'm not Sir Lemuel!" roared back the disappointed captain.

"Nice exhibition you're making of yourself—chief commissioner of Burma!"

"I'm not the commissioner of Burma. I'm not your Sir Lemuel," he answered, anxious to get away at any cost.

(Continued from page 6)

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