

THE ORDEAL BY FIRE

A Hindoo Ceremony That Puzzles the Uninitiated.

WALK OVER GLOWING COALS.

The Participants in the Mystifying Spectacle Play With the Fiery Embers as Children Play With Sand and Emerge Unharmed.

I once witnessed a most remarkable ordeal by fire at Benares, India. It was held on the grounds of a villa on the outskirts of the city, and among us were some of the most prominent men and women of official and social life in British India. Army and navy officers touched elbows with French savants, all more than glad to accept an invitation that might at least offer opportunity either to catch some clew toward solving the mystery of the Indian fire ordeal or else catch the priestly performers in a nice trap at consummate and age long deception, successfully worked among a superstitious and overcredulous people like the Hindus.

Seats had been arranged for our party out on the spacious lawn, where a trench had been dug sixteen feet long, six feet wide and four feet deep. The fire in the trench was lighted before noon, but the ordeal itself was not to come off until after sunset. The trench was filled with kindling wood and logs and was set afire by the attendants, who kept up a blaze as hot as a blast furnace all day long, until the trench by sunset was filled three feet deep with a compact, glowing bed of red-hot coals.

We were escorted to our seats at about 6:30, and we were not inclined to question the reality of that fire from the moment we sat down within twelve feet of it. Whatever else might be fraud or hypnotism in this Indian fire ordeal, we could not for a moment doubt the realism of that scorching heat that made our eyes smart and grow bloodshot. We, who had come to scoff and doubt, were soon realizing that the managers of the Benares fire ordeal had already gained 75 points out of 100 in favor of their honesty and of their power over the mighty element of fire, that figures so largely in oriental philosophy as one of the three or four primal elements of the physical universe.

A great commotion and babel of voices soon proclaimed the coming of the procession of priests, headed by the arch priest Brahmopoots, carrying a huge Indian sword, followed by the two minor priests who were destined to walk unharmed through that yard thick fiery bed, scintillating in the increasing darkness and lighting up the dark faces of the hundreds of gaping Hindoos standing behind us. While we Europeans and Americans, always hypercritical and given to scientific research, were awaiting the coming of the moment when our 75 per cent of credulity was either to be shattered or rounded out to the fullness of a complete and abiding faith in Hindoo control and mastery of the devouring element of fire, our Hindoo fellow on-lookers, on the other hand, were anticipating the ordeal with all the simplicity of credulous children. Ours was an almost terrifying heart tension, and we almost wished that we were not occult-mental skeptics, always bent on doubting things of an extraordinary nature.

The priests marched about the trench chanting and performing mystic incantations, carrying along a glass reliquary, or shrine, in which was seen the image of the god Siva, who, in the Hindoo religious system, is one of the trinity and is worshipped as the destroyer, Brahma being the creator and Vishnu the preserver of the universe. We do not know to this day what those priests said as they perambulated about that fiery trench, but we do know what soon followed, for, at the end of the incantation, the two candidates for the ordeal plunged into the red-hot coals and walked ankle deep the whole length of the trench, backward and forward, time and time again. They played with that scintillating, glowing fire as children play with the sands of Coronado beach, kicking it with their feet and stooping down to pick up handfuls of the glowing coals, tossing them in the air, to be blown by the rising evening breeze all over our heads and our easily inflammable clothing. We were really afraid. No doubt about those sparks and live, falling coals!

When the two priests had walked up and down alone through that fiery trench unscathed and unscorched, then the whole Hindoo throng seemed to suddenly catch the spirit of their priests, and, sure of their conquest over the power of fire, they began plunging into the trench. Old men and young children walked through that fiery furnace, forward and backward, and when they had fired of this "playing with fire" they came out as they had entered, not a hair or a garment scorched, not even the soles of their feet blistered.

Only males are allowed to go through the fire ordeal. Never yet has any scientific theory explained the power of the Siva worshippers over fire. We ourselves were absolutely convinced that trickery was not to be considered as an explanation of what we had witnessed.—Los Angeles Times.

A Caddie's Cadenza.
Lady Golfer (to would be caddie)—But what do you know about the game? Can you make a tee, for instance? The Would Be Caddie—Can I make—Why, in my young days, lily, I used to do it that well they called mem the teacaddy.—London Sketch.

THE GREAT "WAR COMET."

Its Fiery, Spreading Tail Was Fifty Million Miles Long.

The wonderful "war comet" of 1861 sprang so suddenly into view and blazed with such unexampled brilliancy as to astonish the astronomers and frighten those unlearned in cometary lore half out of their wits. The unlearned declared that the civil war, which was just getting well under headway, must have something to do with it. However this may be, it burst forth, unheralded and uninvited, shining with greater brilliancy and magnitude than any phenomena of a similar nature which that generation had ever seen.

On the night of July 3 of that year it exhibited a most wonderful spectacle. In the evening the nucleus did not appear to be larger than a star in the first or second magnitude. As the small hours of the morning approached, however, the nucleus visibly increased in both magnitude and brilliancy. The tail waved back and forth over our little world in a most threatening manner, at times sending rays almost to the zenith. On the morning of July 5 the astronomers announced through the daily papers that the head of the great comet was only separated from the earth by a distance of 12,000,000 miles. According to the report sent out from the Cambridge observatory, the comet appears to have passed its ascending node between the 27th and the 29th of June in longitude 270 degrees, the longitude of the earth being 277 degrees at the same time.

On Oct. 10 its tail extended over a space of 50,000,000 miles and at several points was not less than 10,000,000 miles in width.

At first it was generally conceded that it was the famous comet of 1556, the one which caused the Emperor Charles V. of France to resign his imperial throne, he taking it to be a warning from God. All surmises were subsequently set at rest by the discovery that it was the famous Thatcher comet, discovered by Professor A. F. Thatcher at the Rutherford observatory in New York city.

A STRANGE MAKEUP.

When Wilton Lackaye Looked "Like a Sore Finger."

Barrett was a very pompous man, and as my bump of reverence has always been a concavity he early marked me out for his displeasure. After giving me a list of plays for which to procure wardrobes—plays which he did not do during the season—he suddenly changed his mind and put on "Julius Caesar" in Richmond, Va. It was impossible to get an armor there. I played Metellus Cimber, first citizen and Phasarius—and a soldier! Luckily I had sandals and fleshings. I borrowed a tunic from Otis Skinner, a toga from the stage manager, who was out of the bill; I had a mob skirt made in the theater; I got out a makeup for Phasarius, the barbarian, but the soldier? All of the utility men were compelled to "eke the battle rabble out" as soldiers in the last act. I could not get in the town a helmet and armor, so I simply "lurked" behind the other soldiers clad in fleshings, sandals and Skinner's tunic, which came halfway to my knees. I was then five feet eleven and three-fourths and weighed 130 pounds, so you may imagine the audience hardly became conscious of me until my third entrance.

My modest disposition and my desire not to meet the star's eye did not avail me. He spotted me the first thing. As the curtain came down he called me and thundered, "What do you think you represent?"

I shyly responded, "A camp follower, sir, lurking behind the main column and robbing the dead."
"Huh!" he grunted, his eye passing up my stretch of shanks in pink fleshings, surmounted by the tight little tunic at top. "You look like a sore finger!"—Wilton Lackaye in Bohemian Magazine.

A Dame School in England, 1837.

On a perch forming a triangle with the corner of the room sat a cock and two hens. Under a stump bed immediately beneath was a dog kennel in the occupation of three black terriers, whose barking, added to the noise of the children and the cackling of the fowls on the approach of a stranger, was almost deafening. There was only one small window, at which sat the teacher, obstructing three-fourths of the light it was capable of admitting.—Parliamentary Report.

The Number Three.

Three, which since the days of Pythagoras has been the divine number, is not invariably fortunate, for, though the fates are three, so also are the furies. The graces are three, but so also are the judges in hades and the heads of Cerberus. Then there are the records of three disloyal tribes in Welsh history; there are the three robbers in Orion's belt; there were the three tyrants at Athens, and 3 in mythology is as unlucky as it is divine.

Rapid Change.

"My hair turned from raven black to snowy white in a single night."
"That's nothing. I went into a pawnbroker's shop once and stayed only fifteen minutes. When I came out my watch had turned from gold to silver."
—London Tit-Bits.

Must Have Read It.

He (virtuously)—I call it simply outrageous for the newspapers to print all this terrible stuff. She (sternly)—How do you know it is terrible?—Baltimore American.

Time brings no mercy to the bigot's hate.—Schiller.

THE EXPIATORY DEAD.

Inexplicable Fate of the Enemies of Dreyfus Revision.

"Always the dead!" Reinach cried bitterly. "Whenever we find a forgery, a crime, always it is set to the account of a dead man!"
And he drew up a list, horrible in its eloquence, of the dead who strewed the dark path of this monstrous case of crime and cruelty and infamy. Yet there had fallen so many of the enemies of truth and justice that he might have called them the expiatory dead.

Three I have told you of—that poor wretch, Lemercler-Picard, "found dead" in his room in the Rue de Sevres; Henri, "found dead," with a closed razor near by; Felix Faure, "found dead" and smuggled into his palace.

There were many others. Captain d'Attel, who claimed to have heard Dreyfus avow his guilt to Lebrun-Remault the day of his degradation, was "found dead" in a railway train, his corpse blue and already on the way to decomposition, though his journey had lasted but an hour. This pretended confession, which Dreyfus never made, D'Attel confided to his friend, Chaumelin-Fervillere, a member of the chamber of deputies. Now, the deputy took train one day to visit his home. An hour later he was "found dead" on the railway tracks between two stations. And Rocher of the prison guards, who also claimed to have heard Dreyfus say, "I am guilty, but I am not the only one!" died, and to this day no one knows where or how. It was as though eternal truth had reached down and slain this lie wherever it lifted its evil head.

The prefect Barreme was summoned to Paris by his government chief. He was "found dead" in his compartment when the train arrived at the Gare St. Lazare. Laurenceau, prefect of the north, was called to Paris to give evidence regarding the spy system on the German frontier. There was no accident on the journey. The next day he was "found dead" in his room at the Hotel Terminus.

Lorimer, one of Henri's most tireless agents of forgery and crime, was "found dead," hanged in a lonely barn; another, Guenee, was "found dead" on the floor of his room in Paris. Then there was Munier. His part in the conspiracy had been to falsify the meaning of a cryptic telegram sent by Palazzardi to the Italian government, so that it affirmed the guilt of Dreyfus. And Munier was "found dead" in a railway train. Was it any wonder the martyr's friends began to see in these mysterious and opportune deaths the work of an avenging destiny? With grim emphasis Reinach declared, "Decidement la fatalite est Dreyfusarde!"—the very stars in their courses fought against the lie.—Vance Thompson in Success Magazine.

POINTED PARAGRAPHS.

Remember that the money you squander won't work for you.

We are always too young to have known better if our mothers are the judges.

Men do a lot of things just as foolish as having their clothes button in the back.

Dreaming of what you would do if you had a large income is probably about the slowest way to get one.

The man who falls in his efforts to do something well is still more of a success than the one who never tries.

A mother worries if her daughters are not invited to parties and then sits up and worries because they are out late when they are invited.

Ever occur to you that you ought to dress up more and brush your clothes oftener? Most people as they become too neglect their personal appearance too much.—Atchison Glob.

Jury Friendships.

"The eleven men in the world for whom I entertain a feeling of peculiar friendliness are those with whom I served on a jury once," said a broker. "There isn't any other human tie just like that existing among jurors in a criminal case. There we are, twelve men, all perfect strangers to each other, with different tastes, temperaments and habits, picked up and bound together for days in the most trying circumstances. The hardships, the tragic phases of the situation, reveal us in a new light. Hitherto unsuspected traits crop out. We argue, we quarrel, we sympathize, we make up, in a manner that would surprise our closest friends. The responsibility that we share sets up apart from everybody else and establishes a bond of interest and sympathy that is pretty sure to last."—New York Sun.

A Plea For the Indolent.

Men who fill unaccustomed positions exacting severe mental toll are almost sure to be short lived. Persons whose callings subject them to a heavy nervous strain ought occasionally to spend a day or two in bed. Even an afternoon nap is a tonic and may do much to lessen the wear and tear of nervous, anxious days. One of the ablest statesmen of modern times, when once reproached in early life for indolence, reported, "I am storing energy."—William Mathews in Success Magazine.

The Angel Face.

"He said I had a face like one of Raphael's angels," said the blond, with ill concealed satisfaction.
"Oh, well, the faces of Raphael's angels were all painted, you know," replied the jealous little brunette.—Chicago Record-Herald.

A Lesser Evil.

Messenger—Your wife has eloped with your chauffeur. Husband—Thank fortune! Now I won't have to break it to her that the cook has left.—Harper's Weekly.

ANIMAL SAGACITY.

The Instinct That Leads the Ostrich to Protect Its Eggs.

The nature students—everybody is a nature student nowadays—were trying to outdo one another.

"Eagles when the sun is overhead shade their young with outspread wings," said the first. "On August afternoons I have seen a mother eagle stand patiently two full hours, her left wing spread like an umbrella, while in its cool shade her nestlings slept."

"Squirrels," said the second, "can tell whether a nut is good or bad without opening it. A chestnut, a walnut, a shellbark, they lift it in their little paws, hold it to their faces a moment, then if it is bad cast it aside. How do they tell? By the weight, by the sound? I incline to think they do it by the smell."

"Ostriches never sit," said the third. "They lay their eggs on the pale Saharan sands, and the sun does the rest. But before the ostriches depart from their eggs they place on the top of each a pinch of sand, for they know that the germ will mount to the top and that the sun's heat would kill the germ were it not protected."

"A trained elephant," said the fourth student, "danced very badly at a matinee performance and was accordingly beaten cruelly by its master. That night, hearing a shuffling noise outside, the master crept forth, and there in the moonlight he found the elephant carefully practicing its dance steps."

A PRIVILEGE RESERVED.

Ceremoniously Witnessed at a Jeweler's Ring Counter.

"I want a plain gold ring for a lady. Best you've got in the store."

"For this lady?"
"Sure! Who else would it be for? Pull off your glove, Katie, and let the gentleman measure your finger."

The girl withdrew her woolen glove and bashfully extended her small hand, red and toil worn, toward the clerk.

"There, that's about the size," said the jeweler to the girl.

"Do you wish him to put it on?"
"No—not yet," said the blushing girl. "When he puts that ring on, it's on to stay."

Size, quality and price at last were settled satisfactorily, and the young man pulled from his pocket a shining coin.

"Here you are, gold for gold!" he exclaimed proudly. "Nothin' but gold 'll pay for that ring."

"Haven't you anything smaller?" asked the sordid clerk.

"Plenty, but nothin' good enough to pay for that ring."

"Bit of sentiment, eh?" queried an interested bystander.

"Oh, yes, sir," said the girl, with evident pride. "He's been saying that twenty dollar gold piece for nearly four months, waiting to buy this ring."—New York Press.

Your Own Body.

Think deliberately of the house you live in—your body. Make up your mind not to abuse it. Eat nothing that will hurt it; wear nothing that distorts or pains it. Do not overload it with victuals or drink or work. Give yourself regular and abundant sleep. Keep your body warmly clad. At the first signal of danger from any of the thousand enemies that surround you defend yourself. Do not take cold; guard yourself against it. If you feel the first symptoms, give yourself heroic treatment. Get into a fine glow of heat by exercise. This is the only body you will ever have in this world. A large share of pleasure and pain of life will come through the use you make of it. Study deeply and diligently the structure of it, the laws that should govern it, the pains and penalties that will surely follow a violation of every law of life or health.

Torpedo Boats.

Torpedo boats and torpedo destroyers are thin skinned, unarmored craft. Often the steel hull is only about half an inch in thickness, but they travel as fast as many railway trains, some thirty or thirty-five miles an hour. They discharge their deadly bolt and run. A dark, stormy night is their chance. Then, without a light showing, they dash in and launch their torpedo, escaping, if they can, the hail of rapid fire that is sure to deluge them.—Frank E. Channon in St. Nicholas.

Force of Habit.

Realizing that he should pay her a compliment, the chronic debtor hesitates before the beautiful woman. At last he says to her:
"Just make a little tab for me, and next time I'm down your way I'll tell you how well you are looking."

But the look on her countenance was enough to make him realize that compliments must be paid on face value and that beauty keeps no books.—St. Louis Republic.

Friends and Reputation.

He who believes himself surrounded by admirers and whose vanity is hourly feasted with all the luxuries of praise easily persuades himself that his influence will be extended beyond this life; that those who he thinks are proud to be numbered among his friends will endeavor to vindicate his choice by zeal for his reputation.—Dr. Johnson in "Idler Papers."

The Riddle.

His Daughter—Papa, did you know mamma long before you married her? Her Father—Just between you and me, my dear, I don't know her yet.—Chicago News.

It's a sure thing that one can't be sure of anything in this world.—Van Buren Current Local.

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