

THE RAJAH'S TREASURE.

By H. G. WELLS.

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Between Jehu and Bimabur, on the Himalayan slopes, and between the jungles and the higher country where the pines and the deodars are gathered together, ruled the rajah, of whose wonderful treasure I am telling. Hundreds of thousands of people heard of that treasure as its time heard of it not buried inaccessibly, but in a patent safe, sunk into the wall of a little room beyond the hall of audience. Very great was the treasure, people said, for the rajah had prospered all his days. He had found Mindapore a village, and behold! it was a city. Below his fort of unwholen stone the flat-roofed huts of mud had multiplied; and now there sprang up houses and bungalows, engendered a bazaar in the midst of it, as a fat oyster secretes a pearl. And the rajah had waited his city about.

Moreover, the Holy Palace up the river prospered, and the land up the passes was made safe. Merchants and fakirs multiplied about the wells, men came and went, twice even white men.



HE KEPT HIS OWN THOUGHTS AND WENT HIS OWN WAY.

from the plain on missions to the people over beyond the deodars, and the streets of the town were even denser with poultry and children, and little dyes dyed yellow, and with all the multitudinous rich odors of human increase.

The rajah pushed his boundaries east and west, the Pax Britannica censuring, and made his fort ever larger and stronger, and built himself a palace at last, and a harem, and made gardens, so that he could live magnificently and dispense justice to all that owned his way. And indubitably he did dispense justice—in the name of Allah! upholding the teaching of his prophet, in a purely Oriental manner, of course, throughout all his land. Such were the splendid properties of the rajah's rule. The rajah was a pretty, yellow-faced man, with a long black beard, now steadily growing gray, thick lips and shiny eyes. He was pious, very pious in his daily routine, and swift and unaccountable in his actions. None dared withstand him to his face, even in little things, and not a woman in the harem dared by any device to try and cheat him from his will. He kept his own thoughts and went his own way without counsel from any man; he was a lone man, but seemed jealous of his himself.

Golam Shah, his vizier, was but a servant, a currier of orders, and Samud Singh, his master of horse, but a drifter of soldiers. They were tools, he would tell them outright in his pride of power, staves in his hand that he could break at his will. He went rarely to the harem, taking no delight in the society of women or singers, or in matches; and he was childless. And his cousin, the youth Azim Khan, loved and feared him, and only in the remotest recesses of his heart did he ever dare to wish the rajah would presently die and make a way to the throne. And Azim grew in years and knowledge, and Golam Shah and Samud Singh sought his friendship with an eye to the milder days that would come. But the rajah did not die. He grew a little plumper and a little more gray, and that was all; until the days came when the talk of the treasure spread through the land.

It would be hard to say when first the rumor spread about the bazars of the plain that the rajah of Mindapore was making a hoard. None knew how it began or where. Perhaps from merchants of whom he had bought. It began long before the day of the safe, it was said that rubies had been hidden away, and then not only rubies, but ornaments of gold, and pearls and diamonds from Goleconda and all manner of precious stones. Even the deputy commissioner at Allapore heard of it. At last the story reached the palace of Mindapore itself, and Azim Khan, who was the rajah's cousin and his heir, and nominally his commander in chief and Golam Shah, the chief minister, talked it over one with another in a tentative way.

"He has something new," said Golam Shah, querulously; "he has something new, and he is keeping it all from me." Azim Khan watched him cunningly. "I have told you what I have heard," he said. "For my own part I know nothing."

"He goes to and fro musing and humming to himself," said Golam Shah, "as one who thinks of a pleasure."

Azim Khan was inclined in an open-minded way to cherish a femme. "No," said Golam; "it is not that. He was never like that. He is near treacherous, and besides, these months or more it has been, and it still keeps on. His eyes are bright, his

cheeks flush. And sometimes he hides, hides ever, and will not let me know or suspect."

"More rubies, they are saying," and Azim, dreamily, and repeated, as if for his own pleasure, "Rubies." For Azim was the heir.

"Especially is it since that Englishman came," said Golam, "three months ago. A big old man, not wrinkled as an old man should be, but red, and with red hair streaking his gray, and with a tight skin and a big body sticking out before. So—a hippopotamus of a man, a great quivering mud bank of a man, who laughed mightily, so that the people stopped and listened in the street. He came, he laughed, and presently we heard him laugh together."

"Well," said Azim.

"He was a diamond merchant, perhaps—or a dealer in rubies. Do Englishmen deal in such things."

"Would I had seen him!" said Azim. "He took gold away," said Golam.

Both were silent for a space, and the purring noise of the wheel of the upper wall, and the chatter of the voices about it rising and falling, made a pleasant sound in the air. "Since the Englishman went," said Golam, "he has been different. He hides something from me—something in his robes. Rubies! What else can it be?"

"He has not buried it!" said Azim.

"He will. Then he will want to dig it up again and look at it," said Golam, "I go softly. Sometimes I almost come upon him. Then he starts—"

"He grows old and nervous," said Azim, and there was a pause.

"Before the English came," said Golam, "looking at the rings upon his fingers, as he returned to his constant preoccupation; 'there were no rubies nervous and old.'"

"The English are for a time," said Azim, philosophically, watching a speck of a vulture in the air, over the walnut tree that hid the palace.

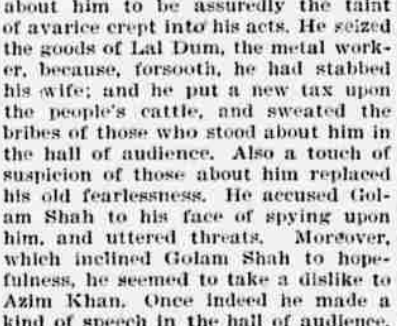
"That, I say, was even before the coming of the safe. It came in a packing case. Such a case it was as had never been seen before in all the slope of the Himalayan mountains. It was an elephant's burden. It was days drawing the elephant and nearer tediously. At Allapore the news preceded it, and crowds went to see it pass upon the railway. Afterwards elephants and then a great multitude of men dragged it up the hills. And this great case being opened in the hall of audience revealed within itself a monstrous iron box, like no other box that had ever come to the city."

"It was made, so the story went, by mechanics in England, expressly to the order of the rajah, that he might keep his treasures therein and sleep in peace. It was so hard that the hardest fists powdered upon its corners, and so strong that cannon fire point blank at it would have produced no effect upon it. And it looked with a magic lock. There was a word, and none knew the word but the rajah. With that word, and a little key that hung about his neck, one could open the lock; but without it none could do so."

So the story half whispered its wonderful self about the city. The rajah caused this safe to be built into the wall of his palace in a little room beyond the hall of audience. He superintended the building of it with jealous eyes. And there he would go thither by day, once at least every day, coming back with brighter eyes.

"He goes to count his treasure," said Golam Shah, standing beside the empty dais.

And in those days it was that the rajah began to change. He who had been cunning and subtle became choleric and outspoken. His judgment grew



DRAWING THE GREAT CASE TO THE HALL OF AUDIENCE.

harsh, and a taint that seemed to all about him to be assuredly the taint of avarice crept into his acts. He seized the goods of Lal Dum, the metal worker, because, forsooth, he had stabbed his wife; and he put a new tax upon the people's cattle, and evicted the tribes of those who stood about him in the hall of audience. Also a touch of suspicion of those about him replaced his old fearlessness. He accused Golam Shah to his face of spying upon him, and uttered threats. Moreover, which inclined Golam Shah to hopefulness, he seemed to take a dislike to Azim Khan. Once indeed he made a kind of speech in the hall of audience. Therein he declared many times over in a peculiar husky voice, husky yet full of conviction, that Azim Khan was not worth a half anna, not a half anna to any man.

In those latter days of the rajah's decline, moreover, when merchants

came, he would go aside with them secretly into the little room, and speak low, so that those in the hall of audience, however they strained their ears, could hear nothing of his speech. These things Golam Shah and Azim Khan, and Samud Singh, who had joined their councils, treasured in their hearts.

PART II.

"It is true about the treasure," said Azim; "they talked of it around the well of the travelers; even the merchants from Tibet had heard the tale, and had come their way with jewels of price, and afterwards they went secretly, telling no one."



HIS HAND WOULD TIGHTEN ON THE CURTAIN.

the rajah. "Another stone," was the rumor that went the round of the city. "The bee makes hoards," said Azim Khan, the rajah's heir, sitting in the upper chamber of Golam Shah. "Therefore we will wait awhile." For Azim was more coward than traitor.

Golam Shah heard him with a touch of impatience, notwithstanding that the feebleness of Azim was Golam's chief hope in the happy future that was coming.

Such were the last days of the reign of the rajah of Mindapore. In the days when the story of the making of his hoard had spread abroad from Peshawar to Calcutta. "Here am I," said the wife of the deputy commissioner at Allapore, enlarging on the topic, "wearing paste, while the sound is positively lumpy with buried treasures."

"But isn't it had that horrid old man should have so much?"

"He has—"

At last there were men in the Deccan even who could tell you of particulars of the rubies and precious stones that the rajah had gathered together. But so circumspect was the rajah that Azim Khan and Golam Shah had never even set eyes on the glittering heaps that they knew were accumulating in the safe.

The rajah ever went into the little room alone, and even then he locked the door of the little room—it had a couple of locks—before he went to the safe and unlocked it. He never even all the ministers and officers and guards listened and looked at one another as the door of the room behind the curtain closed.

The rajah changed indeed, in these days, not only in the particulars of his rule, but in his appearance. "He is growing old. How fast he grows old! The time is almost ripe," whispered Samud Singh. The rajah's hand became tremulous, his step was now somewhat unsteady, and his memory curiously defective. He would come back from the treasure-room, and his hand would tighten fiercely on the curtain, and he would stumble on the steps of the dais. "His eyesight fails," said Golam. "See!—His turban is askew. He is sleepy even in the forenoon. His judgments are those of a child."

And as the story went, one night, so suddenly old and enfeebled still ruling men. That alone would have given a properly constituted heir-apparent a revolutionary turn of mind. But the treasure was certainly the chief cause that set the idle, garrulous, pleasure-loving Azim plotting against his cousin, and as the story went, one night, so suddenly old and enfeebled still ruling men. That alone would have given a properly constituted heir-apparent a revolutionary turn of mind. But the treasure was certainly the chief cause that set the idle, garrulous, pleasure-loving Azim plotting against his cousin, and as the story went, one night, so suddenly old and enfeebled still ruling men. That alone would have given a properly constituted heir-apparent a revolutionary turn of mind. But the treasure was certainly the chief cause that set the idle, garrulous, pleasure-loving Azim plotting against his cousin, and as the story went, one night, so suddenly old and enfeebled still ruling men. 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