pillars that stood in row after row till

of light from the dull, dead surface.

said in an eager whisper:

be Buddha himself."

for several minutes before Crawford

"It's all right, Hall; there's no mis-

He pointed, as he spoke, down one of

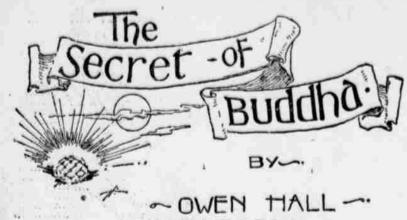
the long dim vistas between the black

pillars, which had so far escaped my

take about the place. See-that must

were lost in the dim obscurity,

The Home Reading Circle



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SYNOPSIS The story is narrated by the author, who, with his friend Crawford, is seeking the rulned city of Aranapura, in south-eastern India. The object of the search is some treasure that the men believe lies hidden in the ancient hall of Buddha, within the ruined city. They have ob-tained this knowledge from a document that a grateful fakeer has given to Craw-ford. They interpret the contents to mean that at full moon the beams will fall upon the spot in the hall where the trees-ure is concealed. The men find the ruined city, but to locate the hall among the mass of crifmbling walls is apparently a hopeless task. At least, so it seems to the narrator as he gazes upon the shapeless mass that was once a noble city.

I was in the very act of turning to Crawford with a rather disappointed laugh to say so, when my eye was arrested by a phenomenon. The sun was going down, and at the moment his level ray streamed in a dazzling river of flashing light through the parrow gorge in the hills. It blazed on the still surface of the lake; it spread in waves of liquid gold over the desolate site of the city of Sondavalla; it crowned with a perfect hale of glory the huge precipitous rock that rose darkly between me and the western sky. My eye had rested almost unconsciously, on the citadel rock as I turned, and I uttered an exclamation of surprise. There, at a distance of perhaps a third of its height from the sharply-defined summit, there glanced from the black wall of stone a succession of sparkling arrows of light that darted through the long shadows cast by the rock across the plain. For a second or two I stared in wonder at the sight; then like a flash its meaning burst upon my mind.

"Eureka!" I exclaimed, in a sudder burst of excitement. "Eureka!" "Why, what the mischief do you said Crawford, rather crossly, "what have you found now?"

"The hall, man! Your black and ancient hall, as sure as I'm a living sinner!" I stretched out my hand as I spoke, and pointed to the rock, Craw ford's eyes followed the direction, and

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated, after he had stared at it fixedly for a minuate. "I believe you're right."

We had both sprung to our feet, and for some minutes we stood without a had gone to sleep before we started. word gazing at the phenomenon that At last all was ready, and we get out. had suggested so much to us both: It could not have been more than five minutes at the most, yet it was long enough to exhaust the sight. Even as thing strangely mysterious in the busi- was able to follow his lead, but it was shifted, contracted, and suddenly went out I turned startled eyes on my com- and the effect was heightened and foot. When we had got clear of the panion. What did it mean?

"Oh, that's all right," he said, "It could only last for a minute or two light-the marvelous moonlight of the the entrance was a wide one, wide while the sun was directly on the level, but it was as good as an hour. All a ghostly splendor. It lay on the sil- through side by side, and that it we've got to do now is to make the ent lake, a burnished shield of silver; it stretched forward into what looked like most of our luck, for upon my soul it rested on the soaring masses of the an abyss of impenetrable darkness. Our was about the greatest streak of luck

that ever I came across." the rock as if we expected to see the lights again, but of course none appeared, and at last we sat down again and discussed our next proceedings. We were both persuaded now that we had solved the mystery of the hall, as it was evident that the setting sun had shone through the citadel rock from side to side, showing plainly that it was hollow, and had window openings looking both east and west. We were agreed that there must be some means of entrance from below, though of course it might have been blocked up in the course of centuries, and all we

had to do was to find it. "Ticklish, isn't it?" I observed, when we had arranged our programme to our mutual satisfaction.

"Devilish!" replied Crawford, sen-tentiously; 'but you don't expect to



"EUREKA!" I EXCLAIMED. pick up diamonds on the parade ground

You've got to risk something It was clear that Crawford was right and, now that I was fairly committed to it, the risk seemed rather to add to than detract from the interest of the adventure. There was no hurry, because, as Crawford pointed out, all we could hope to do before midnight was to find our way to the place, and that

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could scarcely take many hours to do, We had our evening meal, and, as we did so, watched the gradually waning daylight as it died away from the lake and the plain, and at last the sky, till

moon rose, clear and liquid, from be-

which indeed might more properly be called a hole, was left beand the mass of rubbish which so nearly filled it up. The entrance looked dark and forbidding enough, but it was and cling round the pillars, but it evident that it was the only hope of acevident that it was the only hope of accomplishing our object, and we did not hesitate. As the bearer of the lantern, I took the lead, and slowly and with difficulty, by getting on all fours I managed to get through. The fallen mass sloped away on the inner as it had done on the outer side, and after I had waited long enough to light Crawford on his way through the parrow entrance, I proceded to descend to the level of the ancient entrance, closely followed by my companion.

I had nearly got to the bottom when a stone on which I had set my foot sud-denly gave way and I rolled helplessly downwards. The lantern, although extinguished, was most fortunately found to be unbroken when Crawford scrambled down to where I lay, and after some trouble we managed to relight it. Till this had been accomplished I had been content to lie still, feeling a little bruised and sore, and almost reluctant to make an exertion which might make me aware of some more serious injury than I was yet conscious of having received. When at last I roused the shadows stole over the scene in myself and gained my feet I was glad darker and yet darker tones. The to find that except a slight sprain of my right angle I seemed little the hind the forest and flooded both sky worse.



and earth with silver light. We waited till she had risen some distance in the heaven, and both our attendants enced surgeon's hand over the place posed for conversation as we proceeded and the sooner we find this blessed hall on our adventure. There was somethe better." I found he was right. I we looked the flashing points of light ness, which, in spite of myself, oppressed me with a sense of foreboding, ness and beauty of the scene. Moon- farther into the passage, we found that innermost tropics-steeped the scene in enough for ten or twelve men to march hat ever I came across."

the violet blue of the sky; it broaded, floor, and shone faintly on the walls
We stood for some minutes gazing at soft and misty, over the silent ruins that extended upwards out of sight of the dead city into which we were making our way. There was some thing startling in the silence. A sound cautiously forward, for the place of any kind-the rustling of a leaf, the note of a bird, even the cry of a beast of prey, would have seemed a relief in that impressive stillness. We followed the line of the great avenue which had been so plainly marked out by the "I thought so," he said; "the steps leading, as we knew it did, directly to the great central mass of rock which now rose gray and ghostly before us.

> could hardly have exceeded two miles, Our silent tread on the mossy turf disturbed no echoes among the shapeless mounds of what had once been stone, and only the soft, weird whisper of the night breeze reached us as it stole through the ruins and barely stirred the leaves of the great trees that rose so mysteriously from unseen depths among the crumbling We made our way steadily onwards till at last the mass of rock rose frowning and perpendicular overhead. It looked black and forbidding. failed to brighten it as it stood out, black, bare and threatening, against the sky. There were no ruins close to the rock, and in most places the level ground reached to its very base. Here and there we came upon a piece of shattered rock which seemed to have fallen from the cliff and sunk deeply into the earth, and once or twice these splintered rocks appeared to have brought with them masses of what

The distance from our camping place

looked like crumbling masonry. We searched in vain on the side we had reached for some sign of an entrance or passage into the rock, and it was not till we had traced it round that side and more than half of the other that Crawford, who had taken the lead, came to halt in the dark shadow that stretched westward from the citadel. When I joined him I found that he was standing at the foot of a sloping mass of rubbish and shattered masonry larger than any we had yet met with. This seemed piled up against the face of the cliff as though it had slid from

"I think there is something here," Crawford said, straining his eyes to look upwards through the deep shadow. I followed his example, and it did seem to me, too, that just above the heap, at whose foot we were standing, there was something that looked like a darker hollow in the black face of the beetling rock.

"You've got the lantern," he added, in a half whisper, as if he were afraid of waking an echo in the intense si-

I produced the lantern and we lighted it. It was small, and, although easily carried, threw but a feeble light on our surroundings. By its light, however, we contrived to scramble up till we reached the top. Our impres-sion had been correct; there was-or at any rate there had been-a doorway. At first I thought it was effectually

"Now for it!" said Crawford, cheer fully, when he had passed his experi "I'm afraid it may give you some trouble by and by, but you'll be able to Neither Crawford nor I seemed dis- limp through this job tonight, I fancy, slowly, and not without pain each time I rested any weight on the injured made more intense by the solemn still- loose stones and rubbish that had rolled mountain range that towered up into lantern glimmered feebly on the rocky without showing any indication of a seemed well fitted for the lair of beast of prey, but, except the faint echo of our own footsteps, there was not a sound of life. At last Crawford

heaps of crumbling ruin on either hand, at last!" Then we began to ascend the great, black staircase cut out of the solid rock, the surface smooth and polished, the edges clean-cut and sharp, as if but yesterday from the hands of the workmen who had lived and died and we met no obstacle in the path. two thousand years ago. The steps seemed never ending to me as I labored after my companion. Upwards and upwards still; the same glistening steps the same dull black walls; the same impenetrable darkness that closed above our heads-it became like nightmare to me, and it seemed as if it would never end. It ended at last, and it came like a surprise,

"Thank goodness, that's all," said Crawford, as he stopped and held up the lantern. It glimmered like a rush Seen close at hand, even the moonlight light in a cathedral, but it showed us nothing. Beyond the radius of its puny light all was an abyss of the blackest darkness By going cautiously round with the light we soon discovered that we stood in a wide ante chamber which opened by a narrow doorway into another. At the momen when Crawford advanced through this holding the lantern before him, a sudden gust of wind blew out the light and left us in darkness. But no! It took only a moment to convince me that my first impression was wrongit was no longer dark. There was light-a faint, gray, uncertain light which seemed to steal through the darkness and rather to dilute its quality than absolutely to substitute any thing else in its place. From where I stood in the ante-chamber I could see plainly that it came from the inne chamber through the narrow doorway and it was strong enough to enable me to see Crawford's figure as he

paused at the entrance.
"It's the hall," he said, in a voice that was almost a whisper. "Come on! There's light enough in here without the lantern." As he spoke he passed through the doorway and disappeared in the gray darkness, and I made haste to limp after him.

PART III.

In the course of many wanderings ! had been in many strange places and seen not a few sights that were both curious and impressive, but I cannot say that among them all my memory can single out one in all respects so im pressive as this. As I stood within the entrance and looked round, the words of the Pali writing came back to my ancient hall." It was a hall of vast

notice, and there faintly outlined against the darkness, was something gray and gigantic but yet human in share. As he spoke he moved down the hall towards it, and, although I confess with a creeping sensation in the region of my spine, I followed him. We must have walked at least a hundred yards down the black avenue of pillars before we reached it, but when we did so there was no longer the faintest doubt in my mind that our information had been correct, and that fortune had guided us to the spot indicated by the Pall writing. It was a huge figure which had evidently been cut out of the solid black rock when the temple hall was excavated. It was scated on a great square block of stone in the usual cross-legged attitude, and looking upwards one could see the vast, calm, expressionless features, and higher still the point where the top of the head joined to and supported the roof. Crawford, I could see, was examining the figure carefully on every side, but my ankle had grown painful and I contented myself with resting against the pedestal and following his motions with my eye. At last he join-

"Look here, Hall," he said, "I've looked everywhere but I can see no signs of any secret place for the treasure, and what is still more remarkable I don't see any possible way for moonlight to come in when the moon's over-head. The only-thing to be done now is to wait and see what happens at the moment of full moon, and that will be at nineteen minutes past twelve. In the meantime I can see it will be necessary to take Seni into our confidence and I think it will be almost necessary to fetch that little crowbar. You don't mind my leaving you alone here, do you, while I fetch Seni? I fancy there's just about time to do it, and in case we're a few minutes late you can mark the exact spot."

"Yes," I said, a little wearily, "yet, ! can do as much as that, no doubt, if anything happens to point it out."
"Oh, come now," he replied with rather an anxious laugh, "what's the use of swallowing a cow and choking on the tail. I haven't a shadow of a doubt about it now, and I don't believe you have either. It's that confounded ankle of your's that spoke

I felt that he was right, and I couldn't but feel that his proposal was the best that could be made under the circumstances, as I could be of very little active service either in securing or carrying off any treasure there might be concealed. I therefore agreed heartily to do my best to trace and indications there might be of the hiding place until Crawford returned with assistance, and, having carefully lighted the lantern to show him the way he

I need hardly say that I should have preferred Crawford's share of the business had I been in a condition to underlike a shudder that I watched the light glimmering farther and farther away till at last it disappeared through the square opening of the doorway by which we had entered, leaving me alone in the desolate temple. For some seconds I could catch the faint echo of my companion's footsteps as he descended toiled, and then they died away leaving a deathly stillness behind in which the beating of my heart sounded like a drum. How long should I have to thought that filled my mind, though it I fell.

lantern's light we found that a narrow represented the walls, the huge square each vista in the hope of convincing myself that there was nothing to be tween the arched top of the gateway the shadows overhead which seemed to hope of hearing the sound of footsteps and the mass of rubbish which so represent the roof; all alike were on the stairs, I cannot tell, for although black. The faint light seemed to float I tried again and again to read the figures on the dial plate of my watch I could never satisfy myself that I had succeeded. Had there been a hope of I hardly know how long we stood in a seat anywhere I might have sought it, but there was none, and indeed I silence, but at least it must have been was afraid to lose sight of the gigantic figure which I felt instinctively to be turned and grasping me by the arm connected with the discovery I was

waiting for. I was standing opposite the figure now, and, as I peered upwards through the darkness at the face that held me with an almost hypnotic spell, some thing happened. I could not have said what it was that chained my attention and made the blood run coldly through my limbs, but there was something-the face had changed. Its expression had changed, or seemed to change, s dozen times before, but I knew that this was different-it had really changed this time. What was it?

I gazed fixedly at the great, calm, features till suddenly it flashed upon me. It was the eyes. Till that moment the great orbs had looked out fixed, and rigid, with a dull stare into the dim shadows that surrounded them, but now they woke to life—a strange, pale face. I stared; I rubbed my eyes to make sure that it was not another trick of the fancy only more vivid than any that had gone before, but when I looked again the impression had only grown stronger. From the centre of each eyeball a dim, ghostly ray of light was gleaming, and moment by moment it was growing brighter. It struck downward, and I could trace its path through the gray shadows like the flight of a phosphorescent arrow. My eye followed the two slender lines as they fell, and I noticed that they inclined to one another till at last they joined and as a single ray of light settled upon the right knee of the sitting Upon that knee the glant right hand of the image lay, not flat, but in an easy posture that brought the forefinger slightly over the thumb. It was here-here, on the inner edge of th thumb, that the united ray of silver moonlight fell. Hitherto I had followed it mechan

ically, curiously and wonderingly, but without connecting it intellig atly with anything else; but now it appealed to my mind like a revelation, and the words of the Pall writing seemed to throb in my ear once more. glance of the Queen of Night shall rest upon the secret place where lie the hidden treasures of the beloved one." *

It was here, then, here that the treasure lay! I forgot my weariness; I ceased for the moment to feel the pain of my disabled ankle; I sprang forward and laid my hand on the spot where the silver arrow of the moon light fell. As I stood my shoulder was just on the level of the massive knee of the great figure on which the hand rested. Following the glance of the moon I laid my hand on the giant thumb. It yielded to the pressure, and moving aside as if on a pivot, showed that the hand was hollow, and as the pale shaft of the moon light fell upon its contents there was flashed back a reflection of many-colored lights. It was the treasure!

For a moment I paused and almost gasped for breath. My eyes seemed dazzled by the sight, and the surprise of the sudden discovery was like a shock to my nerves. Before I had time to recover, or indeed to think; before I could make up my mind to stretch out my hand and touch the glittering prize, something like a gray hadow flitted past me. At the san moment there was a strange, grasping guttural sound close to my ear, and I felt my throat grasped by long, bony fingers, that felt like those of a skeleton, and sent a thrill of superstitious horror tingling through every nerve in my body. I staggered and grasped wildly at my assailant, but the sud the great staircase up which we had denness of the attack and the smoothness of the rock floor on which I stood caused me to lose my balance. My desperate clutch closed upon some thing, indeed, but it felt unsubstantial wait for his return? This was the first and yielded no support-and then

We examined the image of Buddha by the aid of the lantern and found the with the exception of one ruby of great size, entirely empty. We examined the floor for some traces of my mysterious assailant, but, as might have been expected, without success. A few yards away, however, at the foot of one of the black pillars, I saw something glitter in the lamplight, I stooped and picked it up. It was a very large uncut emerald-I have it still-all that remains to me of the sparkling heap of gems so strangely revealed when the Queen of Night disclosed the long-kept secret of Buddha. THE END

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IT WAS THE LIGHT SHINING IN MY EYES THAT ROUSED ME. was quickly followed by the question: Should anything happen in his absence? I was there to watch for the sign that was to disclose the hiding-place of the nized as that of Seni, exclaimed: "Altreasure-would it come? In any other lah be praised, he yet lives!" I sat up place, at any other time, I should have laughed the very idea to scorn-but around for some seconds before I could here? I looked around on every side, only to be met by the long, straight shafts of the dense black pillars; far away on the right I could trace the with a gaso, faint outline of one of the rock-hewn windows through which the gray light filtered into the black cavern in which

I felt that I must pull myself together to resist the strain on my nerves, and I decided that it was better, even at the cost of some pain, to move about | this must be a piece of what he had the rugged heap of masonry and rocks memory so vividly that I seemed to than to remain at rest and become the till we reached the top. Our impress hear them repeated, "the black and become the victim of a thousand fancies. I began to walk, or rather to limp size. The first impression it made on the senses was its blackness. On every to restore me to my usual condition of have been a piece of my old fakeer's mind. How long I limped up and down | body cloth-only that was buried with

"The devil it is! But how do you

there remained a torn fragment of

Crawford examined it closely for few moments. "Well," he said, at last, barred by the fallen stone, but on ex- side the blackness closed it in; the mind. How long I limped up and down body cloth-only that was buried with aming the place more carefully by the floor, the walls, or the shadows that that black collonade, peering down him-it's dirty enough, anyhow."

It was the light of Crawford's lantern shining in my eyes that roused me to consciousness. A voice, which I recogwith difficulty and stared stupidly remember anything of what had occurred-then it came to me suddenly, "It's gone, Crawford," I exclaimed

know? Who's got it?" Crawford replied, eagerly. I held out my right hand, in which

dirty yellow cloth. "I don't know," I said, "but I fancy