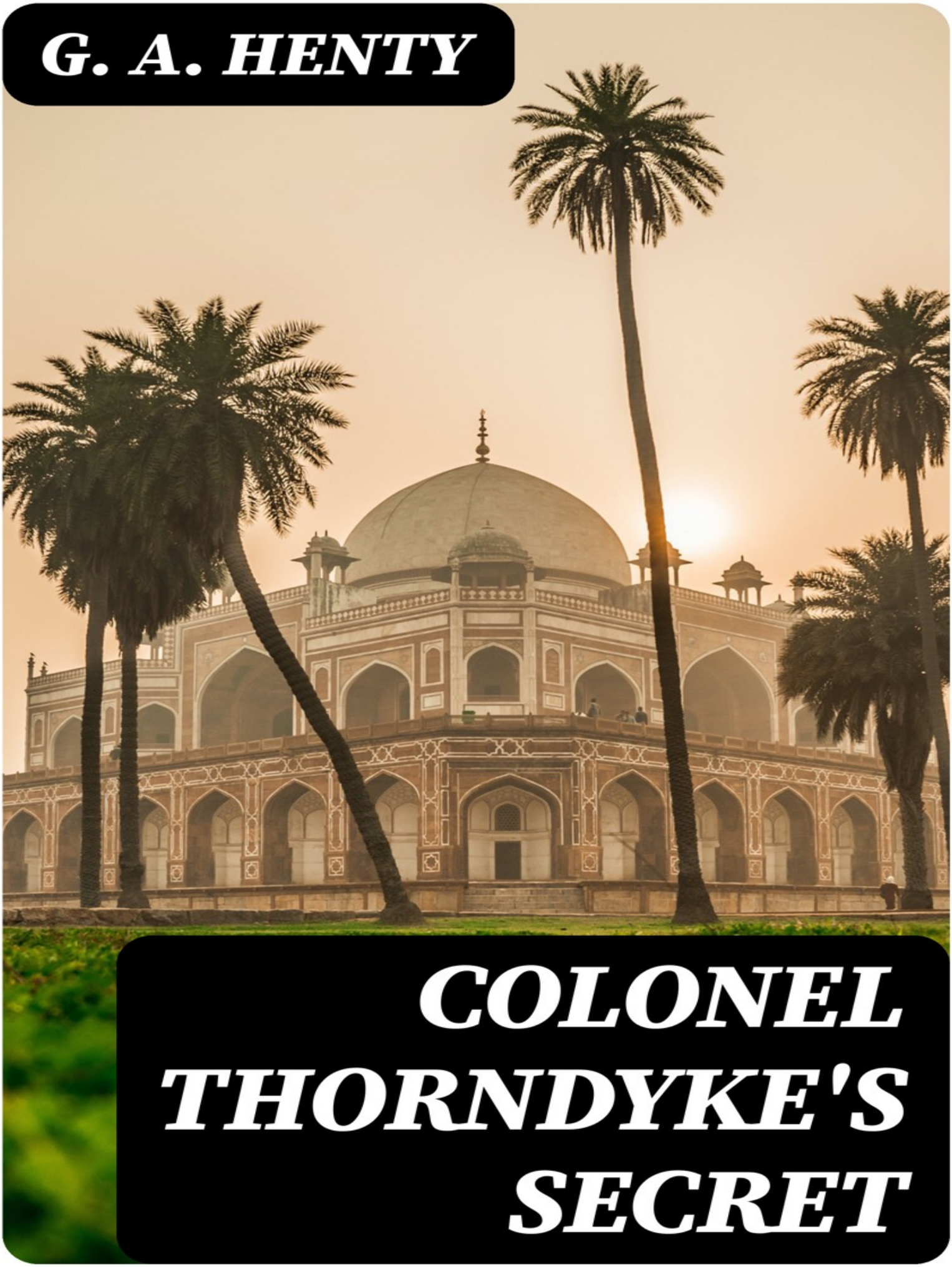
G. A. HENTY



COLONEL THORNDYKE'S SECRET

G. A. Henty

Colonel Thorndyke's Secret

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CHAPTER I.

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Squire Thorndyke, of the Manor House of Crawley, was, on the 1st of September; 1782, walking up and down the little terrace in front of the quaint old house in an unusually disturbed mood. He was a man of forty three or four, stoutly and strongly built, and inclined to be portly. Save the loss of his wife four years before, there had been but little to ruffle the easy tenor of his life. A younger son, he had, at his mother's death, when he was three and twenty, come in for the small estate at Crawley, which had been her jointure.

For ten years he had led a life resembling that of most of his neighbors; he had hunted and shot, been a regular attendant at any main of cocks that was fought within fifteen miles of Crawley, had occasionally been up to London for a week or two to see the gay doings there. Of an evening he had generally gone down to the inn, where he talked over, with two or three of his own condition and a few of the better class of farmers, the news of the day, the war with the French, the troubles in Scotland, the alarming march of the Young Pretender, and his defeat at Culloden—with no very keen interest in the result, for the Southern gentry and yeomen, unlike those in the North, had no strong leanings either way. They had a dull dislike for Hanoverian George, but no great love for the exiled Stuarts, whose patron, the King of France, was an enemy of England.

More often, however, their thoughts turned upon local topics—the holding up of the coach of Sir James Harris or Squire Hamilton by highwaymen; the affray between the

French smugglers and the Revenue men near Selsea Bill or Shoreham; the delinquencies of the poaching gangs; the heaviness of the taxes, and the price of corn.

At the age of thirty-three Squire Thorndyke married the daughter of a neighboring landowner; a son was born and three years later Mrs. Thorndyke died. Since then the Squire had led a more retired life; he still went down to smoke his pipe at the inn parlor, but he gave up his visits to town; and cock fights, and even bull baiting, were no longer attractions to him. He was known as a good landlord to the three or four farmers who held land under him; was respected and liked in the village, where he was always ready to assist in cases of real distress; was of an easygoing disposition and on good terms with all his neighbors.

But today he was unusually disturbed in his mind. A messenger had ridden up two hours before with a letter from London. It was as follows:

“MY DEAR BROTHER JOHN:

“You will be surprised indeed at this letter from me, who, doubtless, you suppose to be fighting in India. I have done with fighting, and am nearly done with life. I was shot in the battle of Buxar, eighteen months ago. For a time the surgeons thought that it was going to be fatal; then I rallied, and for some months it seemed that, in spite of the ball that they were never able to find, I was going to get over it, and should be fit for service again. Then I got worse; first it was a cough, then the blood used to come up, and they said that the only chance for me was to come home. I did not believe it would be of any use, but I thought that I would rather die

at home than in India, so home I came, and have now been a week in London.

“I thought at first of going down to my place at Reigate, and having you and your boy there with me; but as I have certainly not many weeks, perhaps not many days, to live, I thought I would come down to you; so the day after you receive this letter I shall be with you. I shall not bring my little girl down; I have left her in good hands, and I shall only bring with me my Hindoo servant. He will give you no trouble—a mat to sleep on, and a little rice to eat, will satisfy his wants; and he will take the trouble of me a good deal off your hands. He was a Sepoy in my regiment, and has always evinced the greatest devotion for me. More than once in battle he has saved my life, and has, for the last three years, been my servant, and has nursed me since I have been ill as tenderly as a woman could have done. As I shall have time to tell you everything when I arrive, I will say no more now.”

The news had much affected John Thorndyke. His brother George was five years his senior, and had gone out as a cadet in the company's service when John was but thirteen, and this was his first home coming. Had it not been for a portrait that had been taken of him in his uniform just before he sailed, John would have had but little remembrance of him. In that he was represented as a thin, spare youth, with an expression of quiet determination in his face. From his father John had, of course, heard much about him.

“Nothing would satisfy him but to go out to India, John. There was, of course, no occasion for it, as he would have

this place after me—a fine estate and a good position: what could he want more? But he was a curious fellow. Once he formed an opinion there was no persuading him to change it. He was always getting ideas such as no one else would think of; he did not care for anything that other people cared for; never hunted nor shot. He used to puzzle me altogether with his ways, and, 'pon my word, I was not sorry when he said he would go to India, for there was no saying how he might have turned out if he had stopped here. He never could do anything like anybody else: nothing that he could have done would have surprised me.

“If he had told me that he intended to be a play actor, or a Jockey, or a private, or a book writer, I should not have been surprised. Upon my word, it was rather a relief to me when he said, 'I have made up my mind to go into the East India Service, father. I suppose you can get me a cadetship?' At least that was an honorable profession; and I knew, anyhow, that when he once said 'I have made up my mind, father,' no arguments would move him, and that if I did not get him a cadetship he was perfectly capable of running away, going up to London, and enlisting in one of their white regiments.”

John Thorndyke's own remembrances were that his brother had always been good natured to him, that he had often told him long stories about Indian adventures, and that a short time before he went away, having heard that he had been unmercifully beaten by the schoolmaster at Reigate for some trifling fault, he had gone down to the town, and had so battered the man that the school had to be closed for a fortnight. They had always kept up a

correspondence. When he received the news of his father's death George had written to him, begging him to go down to Reigate, and to manage the estate for him.

“Of course,” he said, “you will draw its income as long as you are there. I mayn't be back for another twenty years; one gets rich out here fast, what with plunder and presents and one thing and another, and it is no use to have money accumulating at home, so just live on the place as if it were your own, until I come home to turn you out.”

John had declined the offer.

“I am very well where I am,” he wrote, “and the care of the estate would be a horrible worry to me; besides, I have just married, and if I ever have any children they would be brought up beyond their station. I have done what I can for you. I have seen the family lawyers, who have engaged a man who has been steward to Sir John Hieover, and looked after the estate during his son's minority. But the young blade, on coming of age, set to work to make ducks and drakes of the property, and Newman could not bear to see the estate going to the Jews, so, as luck would have it, he resigned a month ago, and has been appointed steward at Reigate. Of course, if you don't like the arrangement you must write and say so. It will be a year before I get your answer, and he has only been engaged for certain for that time; it must lie with you as to permanent arrangement.”

So Newman had taken charge of the Reigate estate, and had continued to manage it ever since, although George had written home in great displeasure at his offer being refused.

Inside the Manor the bustle of preparations was going on; the spare room, which had not been used for many years, was being turned out, and a great fire lighted to air it. John Thorndyke had sent a letter by the returning messenger to a friend in town, begging him to go at once to Leadenhall Street and send down a supply of Indian condiments for his brother's use, and had then betaken himself to the garden to think the matter over. The next day a post chaise arrived, bringing the invalid and his colored servant, whose complexion and Indian garb struck the maids with an awe not unmingled with alarm. John Thorndyke could hardly believe that the bent and emaciated figure was that of his brother, but he remembered the voice when the latter said, holding out his hand to him:

“Well, brother John, here I am, what is left of me. Gracious, man, who would have thought that you were going to grow up such a fine tall fellow? You are more fitted to be a soldier than I am. No, don't try to help me out; Ramoo will do that—he is accustomed to my ways, and I would as soon trust myself to a rogue elephant as to you.”

“I am sorry to see you looking so bad, brother George.”

“What must be must. I have had my fling; and after thirty years of marching and fighting, I have no right to grumble if I am laid upon my back at last.”

Leaning on Ramoo's arm, Colonel Thorndyke made his way into the house, and when the Hindoo had arranged the cushions of the sofa, took his place there in a half reclining position.

“I am not always as bad as this, John,” he said; “the jolting of your confounded roads has been too much for me.

If I were the King I would hang every fellow who had anything to do with them—contractors, boards of county magistrates, and the whole lot. If I had known what it was going to be like I would have hired a sedan chair, and had myself carried down. That is what I have been doing in London; but I would rather have had an Indian palkee, that one could have lain down comfortably in."

"What shall I get you first, George? I have got some lemons."

"I want something better than lemons, John. Have you any Burgundy handy?"

"Yes, plenty."

"If you give a bottle to Ramoo he will know how much water I want."

Here the servants entered with a tray with a chicken and a dish of kidneys.

"I sent up yesterday for some of the Indian things that you are accustomed to, George, but they have not come down yet."

"I brought a store down with me. This will do capitally for the present. Ramoo will do the cooking for me in future. He need not go into the kitchen to scare the maids. I could see they looked at him as if he had been his infernal majesty, as he came in. He can do it anywhere; all he wants is an iron pot with some holes in it, and some charcoal. He can squat out there on the veranda, or, if it is bad weather, any shed will do for him.

"Well, it is nice to be home again, John," he went on, after he had eaten a few mouthfuls of chicken and drunk a tumbler of Burgundy and water. "I am glad to be back, now I

am here, though I dare say I should not have come home for another ten years if it had not been for this rascally bullet. Where is your boy?”

“He is away at school.”

“Well, I think I will go up to bed at once, if you don't mind, John. I shall be fitter to talk in the morning.”

The next day, indeed, Colonel Thorndyke was materially better. His voice was stronger and more cheery, and when he came down after breakfast he took his seat in an easy chair instead of on the sofa.

“Now, brother,” he said, “we will have a cozy chat. There are several things I want done, but the chief of these is that when I am gone you should go down to Reigate, as I wanted you to do ten years ago. I want you to seem to be its master, as well as be its master, until Millicent comes of age, if not longer. Her name is Millicent Conyers Thorndyke. I wish her to be called Millicent Conyers, and to appear as your ward, and not as your niece and heiress of the property. If there is one thing in the world I have a greater horror of than another, it is of a girl being married for her money. I don't suppose that anyone knows that I have a daughter—at any rate, none beyond a few Indian chums. She was sent home with an ayah under the charge of the widow of a comrade of mine. I had been away for months, and only went back to Calcutta in time to see her mother die. So that is all right.”

“I could not do such a thing as that, George. I should be living under false colors. It is not that I mind so much leaving here and looking after the child's interest at Reigate, but I could not possibly take possession of the place as its

owner when I should not be so. Besides, there are other objections. Mark would grow up supposing himself to be the heir."

"Mark will be all right. I have, since I have been in London, signed a will, leaving the rest of my fortune between them. I had it drawn up by our father's solicitors, relying upon your consent to do what I asked you. I have explained the matter to them, and given them the assignment, or whatever they call it, of the Reigate estate to you, until my daughter comes of age, appointing them her guardians should you die before that. Thus, you will be placed in a proper position; and should it be known by any means that the child is my daughter, that deed will still be a proof that you are carrying out my wishes, and are absolute master of the estate until she comes of age."

"I must think it all over, George. It is a singular proposal, and I own I would rather things went on in their regular course."

"Yes, yes, I understand that, John; but you see I have altogether set my mind on this matter. I want to know that my girl is not going to be married for her money; and, at any rate, that deed makes you master of the Reigate estates for the next thirteen years; so the only thing that I really want of you is to let the girl be called your ward instead of your niece, and that she and everyone else shall be in ignorance that she is an heiress. So far from doing the girl a wrong, you will be doing her a benefit; and as I have explained the whole matter to our lawyers, no one can possibly think that the thing has been done from any motive whatever except that of affording me satisfaction."

“I will think the matter over,” John repeated. “Of course, brother, it has been in your mind for some time, but it comes altogether fresh to me, and I must look at it in every light. For myself, I have no wish at all to become master of our father's estate. I have been going in one groove for the last twenty years, and don't care about changing it. You wished me to do so ten years ago, and I declined then, and the ten years have not made me more desirous of change than I was before.”

“All right; think it over. Please send Ramoo in to me; I have tired myself in talking.”

John Thorndyke smoked many churchwarden pipes in the little arbor in his garden that day. In the afternoon his brother was so weak and tired that the subject of the conversation was not reverted to. At eight o'clock the Colonel went off to bed. The next morning, after breakfast, he was brighter again.

“Well, John, what has come of your thinking?” he asked.

“I don't like it, George.”

“You mayn't like it, John, but you will do it. I am not going to have my girl run after by ruined spendthrifts who want her money to repair their fortunes; and I tell you frankly, if you refuse I shall go up to town tomorrow, and I shall make a new will, leaving all my property to your son, subject to a life annuity of 200 pounds a year to the child, and ordering that, in the event of his dying before he comes of age, or of refusing to accept the provisions of the will, or handing any of the property or money over to my daughter, the whole estate, money, jewels, and all, shall go to the London hospitals, subject, as before, to the annuity.

“Don't be an ass, brother John. Do you think that I don't know what I am doing? I have seen enough of the evils of marrying for money out in India. Every ship that comes out brings so many girls sent out to some relation to be put on the marriage market, and marrying men old enough to be pretty nearly their grandfathers, with the natural consequence that there is the devil to pay before they have been married a year or two. Come, you know you will do it; why not give in at once, and have done with it? It is not a bad thing for you, it will be a good thing for your boy, it will save my girl from fortune hunters, and enable me to die quietly and comfortably.”

“All right, George, I will do it. Mind, I don't do it willingly, but I do it for your sake.”

“That is right,” Colonel Thorndyke said, holding out his thin bronzed hand to his brother; “that is off my mind. Now, there is only one other thing—those confounded jewels. But I won't talk about them now.”

It was not indeed till three or four days later that the Colonel again spoke to his brother on any than ordinary matters. He had indeed been very weak and ailing. After breakfast, when, as usual, he was a little stronger and brighter than later in the day, he said to his brother suddenly:—

“I suppose there are no hiding places in this room?”

“Hiding places! What do you mean, George?”

“Places where a fellow could hide up and hear what we are talking about.”

“No, I don't think so,” the Squire replied, looking round vaguely. “Such an idea never occurred to me. Why do you

ask?”

“Because, John, if there is such a thing as a hiding place, someone will be sure to be hiding there. Where does that door lead to?”

“It doesn't lead anywhere; it used to lead into the next room, but it was closed up before my time, and turned into a cupboard, and this door is permanently closed.”

“Do you mind stepping round into the next room and seeing if anyone is in the cupboard?”

Thinking that his brother was a little light headed, John Thorndyke went into the next room, and returned, saying gravely that no one was there.

“Will you look behind the curtains, John, and under this sofa, and everywhere else where even a cat could be hidden? That seems all right,” the Colonel went on, as his brother continued the search. “You know there is a saying that walls have ears, and I am not sure that it is not so. I have been haunted with the feeling that everything I did was watched, and that everything I said was listened to for years; and I can tell you it is a devilishly unpleasant thought. Draw your chair quite close to me. It is about my jewels, John. I always had a fancy for jewels—not to wear them, but to own them. In my time I have had good opportunities in that way, both in the Madras Presidency and in the Carnatic. In the first place, I have never cared for taking presents in money, but I have never refused jewels; and what with Rajahs and Nabobs and Ministers that one had helped or done a good turn to somehow, a good deal came to me that way.

“Then I always made a point of carrying money with me, and after a defeat of the enemy or a successful siege, there was always lots of loot, and the soldiers were glad enough to sell anything in the way of jewels for a tithe of their value in gold. I should say if I put the value of the jewels at 50,000 pounds I am not much wide of the mark. That is all right, there is no bother about them; the trouble came from a diamond bracelet that I got from a soldier. We were in camp near Tanjore. I was officer of the day. I had made my rounds, and was coming back to my quarters, when I saw a soldier coming out of a tent thirty or forty yards away. It was a moonlight night, and the tent was one belonging to a white Madras regiment. Suddenly, I saw another figure, that had been lying down outside the tent, rise. I saw the flash of the moonlight on steel; then there was a blow, and the soldier fell. I drew my sword and rushed forward.

“The native—for I could see that it was a native—was bending over the man he had stabbed. His back was towards me, and on the sandy soil he did not hear my footsteps until I was close to him; then he sprang up with a cry of fury, and leaped on me like a tiger. I was so taken by surprise that before I could use my sword the fellow had given me a nasty stab on the shoulder; but before he could strike again I had run him through. By this time several other, men ran out of the tent, uttering exclamations of rage at seeing their fallen comrade.

“'What is it, sir?' they asked me.

“'This scoundrel, here, has stabbed your comrade,' I said. 'He did not see me coming, and I ran up just as he was, I think, rifling him for booty. He came at me like a wild cat,

and has given me a nasty stab. However, I have put an end to his game. Is your comrade dead?'

“'No, sir, he is breathing still; but I fancy there is little chance for him.'

“'You had better carry him to the hospital tent at once; I will send a surgeon there.'

“I called the regimental surgeon up, and went with him to the hospital tent, telling him what had happened. He shook his head after examining the man's wound, which was fairly between the shoulders.

“'He may live a few hours, but there is no chance of his getting better.'

“'Now,' I said, 'you may as well have a look at my wound, for the villain stabbed me too.'

“'You have had a pretty narrow escape of it,' he said, as he examined it. 'If he had struck an inch or two nearer the shoulder the knife would have gone right into you; but you see I expect he was springing as he struck, and the blow fell nearly perpendicularly, and it glanced down over your ribs, and made a gash six inches long. There is no danger. I will bandage it now, and tomorrow morning I will sew the edges together, and make a proper job of it.'

“In the morning one of the hospital attendants came to me and said the soldier who had been wounded wanted to speak to me. The doctor said he would not live long. I went across to him. He was on a bed some little distance from any of the others, for it was the healthy season, and there were only three or four others in the tent.

“'I hear, Major Thorndyke,' he said in a low voice, 'that you killed that fellow who gave me this wound, and that you

yourself were stabbed.'

“'Mine is not a serious business, my man,' I said. 'I wish you had got off as easily.'

“'I have been expecting it, sir,' he said; 'and how I came to be fool enough to go outside the tent by myself I cannot think. I was uneasy, and could not sleep; I felt hot and feverish, and came out for a breath of fresh air. I will tell you what caused it, sir. About two years ago a cousin of mine, in one of the King's regiments, who was dying, they said, of fever (but I know the doctors thought he had been poisoned), said to me, “Here are some things that will make your fortune if ever you get to England; but I tell you beforehand, they are dangerous things to keep about you. I fancy that they have something to do with my being like this now. A year ago I went with some others into one of their great temples on a feast day. Well, the god had got on all his trinkets, and among them was a bracelet with the biggest diamonds I ever saw. I did not think so much of it at the time, but I kept on thinking of them afterwards, and it happened that some months after our visit we took the place by storm. I made straight for the temple, and I got the jewels. It don't matter how I got them—I got them. Well, since that I have never had any peace; pretty near every night one or other of our tents was turned topsy turvy, all the kits turned out, and even the ground dug up with knives. You know how silently Indian thieves can work. However, nothing was ever stolen, and as for the diamonds, at the end of every day's march I always went out as soon as it was quite dark, and buried the bracelet between the tent pegs; it did not take a minute to do. When we moved, of

course, I took it up again. At last I gave that up, for however early I turned out in the morning there was sure to be a native about. I took then to dropping it down the barrel of my gun; that way I beat them. Still, I have always somehow felt myself watched, and my tent has been disturbed a great deal oftener than any of the others. I have had half a mind to throw the things away many a time, but I could not bring myself to do it."

"'Well, sir, I have carried the bracelet ever since. I have done as he did, and always had it in my musket barrel—When we had fighting to do I would drop it out into my hand and slip it into my ammunition pouch; but I know that I have always been followed, just as Bill was. I suppose they found out that I went to see him before he died. Anyhow, my tent has been rummaged again and again. I have no doubt that fellow whom you killed last night had been watching me all the time, and thought that I had come out to hide the things. However, there they are, sir. One of my mates brought my musket here a quarter of an hour ago, and emptied the barrel out for me. Now, sir, you did your best to save my life last night, and you killed that fellow who did for me, and you pretty nearly got killed yourself. I have got no one else I could give the things to, and if I were to give them to one of my mates in the regiment they would probably cost him his life, as they have cost me mine. But you will know what to do with the things; they are worth a lot of money if you can get them home. Mind, sir, you have got to be careful. I have heard tales of how those priests will follow up a temple jewel that has been lost for years, and never give it up until they get it back again.'

“'I ought to give it up,' I said.

“'You don't know where it came from, sir,' he replied. 'I was one of a party of convalescents who were sent up just before that fight, and my own regiment was not there: it might have been here, and it might have been in the Carnatic. Bill never told me, and I have no more idea than a babe unborn.'

“The gems were certainly magnificent; and though I knew well enough that these untiring Brahmins would not be long in guessing that the things had come into my possession, I took the bracelet. I thought, anyhow, that I might have a few hours' start; the fellow I had killed might, of course, have one or two others with him, but I had to risk that. I got leave an hour later, and went down to Madras, and got them put into a place of safety. That I was watched all the time I was in India afterwards I have no doubt, but no attempts were made to assassinate me. They would have known that I went straight away, but whether I had buried them somewhere on the road, or had given them to someone's care at Madras they could not know, and there was, therefore, nothing for them to do but to wait till I made a move.

“I have no doubt whatever that they came over in the same ship with me. Two or three times during the week I was in London I saw colored men in the street outside the hotel. Once it was a Lascar seaman, another time a dark looking sailor in European clothes: he might pass for a Spaniard. Several times as I was going about in a sedan chair I looked out suddenly, and each time there was a dark face somewhere in the street behind. I had a letter this

morning from the lawyer, and he mentioned that two days ago his offices had been broken into, and every strong box and drawer forced open, but that, curiously enough, they could not find that anything had been stolen, though in the cashier's box there were 30 pounds in gold. Of course it was my friends. I have no doubt that one or two of them have followed me down here; and for anything I know they may be lurking somewhere in your garden at the present moment—that is, if they are not standing beside us in this room."

John Thorndyke looked round with an uncomfortable feeling.

"How do you mean, George?"

"I mean some of those Indian fellows can do all sorts of wonderful conjuring tricks. I have seen them go up into the air on a rope and never come down again, and for aught I know they may be able to render themselves invisible. Seriously, I think that it is likely as not."

"Well, and where are the things to be found now, George?"

"That I won't tell you, John. Before I go I will whisper it in your ear, and give you the means of finding them, but not till then. No, I will write it down on a piece of paper, and slip it into your hand. As soon as you get out of the room you glance at it, and then put the piece of paper into your mouth, chew it up and swallow it. I tell you I dare not even whisper it; but whatever you do, take no steps in the matter until your son comes of age."

"There can surely be no danger in another twelve years, George; they will have given up the search long before

that.”

“Not they,” the Colonel said emphatically. “If they die others will take their places: it is a sacred business with them. My advice to you is, either sell them directly you get them into your hands, or go straight to Amsterdam and sell them there to one of the diamond cutters, who will turn them out so that they will be altered beyond all recognition. Don't sell more than two stones at most to any one man; then they will never come out as a bracelet again, and the hunt will be over.”

“I would almost rather leave them alone altogether, George.”

“Well, they are worth 50,000 pounds if they are worth a penny, and a great deal more I should say; but you cannot leave them alone without leaving everything alone, for all my gems are with them, and 52,000 pounds in gold. Of course, if you like you can, when you get the box, pick those diamonds out and chuck them away, but if you do you must do it openly, so that anyone watching you may see you do it, otherwise the search will go on.”

Two days later, as Ramoo was helping the Colonel to the sofa, the latter was seized with a violent fit of coughing, then a rush of blood poured from his lips. His brother and Ramoo laid him on the sofa almost insensible.

“Run and get some water, Ramoo,” John Thorndyke said.

As Ramoo left the room the Colonel feebly placed his snuffbox in his brother's hand with a significant glance; then he made several desperate efforts to speak, and tried to struggle up into a sitting position; another gush of blood poured from him, and as it ceased he fell back dead.

John Thorndyke was bitterly grieved at the death of his brother, and it was not until he went up to his room that night that he thought of the snuffbox that he had dropped into his pocket as his brother handed it to him. He had no doubt that it contained the instructions as to the treasure. It was of Indian manufacture. He emptied the snuff from it, but it contained nothing else. He was convinced that the secret must be hidden there, and after in vain endeavoring to find a spring, he took a poker and hammered it, and as it bent a spring gave way, and showed a very shallow false bottom.

In this was a thin gold coin, evidently of considerable antiquity, and a small piece of paper, on which was written the word “Masulipatam.” John Thorndyke looked at it in bewilderment; that it was connected with the secret he felt certain, but alone it was absolutely useless. Doubtless his brother had intended to give him the key of the riddle, when he had so desperately striven to speak. After in vain thinking the matter over he said:

“Well, thank goodness; there is nothing to be done about the matter for another thirteen or fourteen years; it is of no use worrying about it now.” He went to an old fashioned cabinet, and placed the coin and piece of paper in a very cunningly devised secret drawer. The next morning he went out into the garden and dropped the battered snuffbox into the well, and then dismissed the subject from his mind.

CHAPTER II

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Standing some two miles out of Reigate is the village of Crowswood, a quiet place and fairly well to do, thanks in no small degree to Squire Thorndyke, who owned the whole of the parish, and by whom and his tenants the greater portion of the village were employed. Greatly had the closing of the Manor House, after the death of old Squire Thorndyke, been felt. There were no more jellies, soups, and other comforts to be looked for in time of sickness, no abatement of rent when the breadwinner was sick or disabled, no check to the drunkards, whom the knowledge that they would be turned out of their cottage at a week's notice kept in some sort of order. When, therefore, after ten years of absence of all government, John Thorndyke, after the death of his brother, the Colonel, came down and took possession, he found the place sadly changed from what it had been when he had left it twenty years before. His first act was to dismiss Newman; who, completely unchecked, had, he found, been sadly mismanaging affairs. It was not long, however, before his hand made itself felt. Two out of the three public houses were shut up in six months, a score of their habitual frequenters had, weeks before, been turned out of their houses, an order had been issued that unless a cottage was kept in good order and the garden bright and blooming with flowers in the summer a fresh tenant would be found for it. Every child must be sent to the village school; the Squire was ready to do what there was to be done in the way of thatching and whitewashing, repairing palings and painting

doors and windows, but, as he told the people, the village had to be kept clean and decent, and anyone who would not conform to the rules was at liberty to leave without a day's notice.

Many of the villagers grumbled under their breath, but public opinion was, on the whole, favorable. There was someone to look after them now, someone who would see that the greater portion of the wages was not spent at the alehouse, who would take an interest in the people, and would lend a helping hand in bad times. There was a feeling of regret that the Squire was a widower, but the post of visitor and almoner was well supplied by the lady who acted as companion and governess to the Squire's little ward and regulated the affairs of his household.

John Thorndyke had never had much occasion for the display of energy before, but he had an abundance of it, although hitherto latent. He had come into this business against his will, but he took it up with a determination to do well in it. The income was legally his until his niece came of age, but he was determined he would take nothing out of the estate beyond the necessary expenses of the position, and that all surplus should be expended in improving it in every way possible, so that he could hand it over to her in the most perfect condition. Therefore, when he came into possession he made a close inspection of the farms, with their houses, barns, and other tenements. Where he saw that the men were doing their best, that the hedges and fields were in good order, he did everything that was necessary without a word; but where there were slovenly

farming and signs of neglect and carelessness, he spoke out his mind sharply.

“This has all got to be amended,” he said. “What must be done I will do, but unless I see things well kept up, the fences in good order, the hedges cut, the cattle in good condition, and everything going on as it ought to be, out you go next Christmas. The estate at present is a disgrace to the county, but it shall not be so any longer if I can help it. I shall do my share, and anyone who is not prepared to do the same had better look out for another holding at once.”

No one rejoiced more at the coming home of the Squire than Mr. Bastow, the Rector. He had had a pleasant time of it during the life of the old Squire. He was always a welcome guest at the house; Mr. Thorndyke had been ever ready to put his hand into his pocket for any repairs needed for the church, and bore on his shoulders almost the entire expense of the village school. In the latter respect there had been no falling off, he having given explicit instructions to his solicitors to pay his usual annual subscriptions to the school until his son's return from India. But with the death of the Squire the Rector had gradually lost all authority in the village.

For a time force of habit had had its effect, but as this wore out and the people recognized that he had no real authority things went from bad to worse. Drunken men would shout jeeringly as they passed the Rectory on their way home from the alehouse; women no longer feared reproof for the untidiness of their houses and children; the school was half emptied and the church almost wholly so.

For seven or eight years Mr. Bastow had a hard time of it. It was, then, both with pleasure as an old friend, and with renewed hopefulness for the village, that he visited John Thorndyke on his return. The change in the state of affairs was almost instantaneous. As soon as it became known that the Rector was backed, heart and soul, by the Squire's authority, and that a complaint from him was followed the next day by a notice to quit at the end of a week, his own authority was established as firmly as it had been in the old Squire's time, and in a couple of years Crowswood became quite a model village. Every garden blossomed with flowers; roses and eglantine clustered over the cottages, neatness and order prevailed everywhere.

The children were tidily dressed and respectful in manner, the women bright and cheerful, and the solitary alehouse remaining had but few customers, and those few were never allowed to transgress the bounds of moderation. The Squire had a talk with the landlord a fortnight after his arrival.

“I am not going to turn you out, Peters,” he said. “I hear that you make some efforts to keep your house decently; the other two I shall send packing directly their terms are up. Whether you remain permanently must depend upon yourself. I will do up your house for you, and build a bar parlor alongside, where quiet men can sit and smoke their pipes and talk and take their beer in comfort, and have liberty to enjoy themselves as long as their enjoyment does not cause annoyance to other people or keep their wives and children in rags. I will do anything for you if I find the place well conducted; but I warn you that I will have no

drunkenness. A man who, to my knowledge, gets drunk twice, will not get drunk a third time in this parish, and if you let men get drunk here it is your fault as much as theirs. Now we understand each other."

Things once placed on a satisfactory footing, the Squire had but little more trouble, and it soon came to be understood that he was not to be trifled with, and that Crowswood was no longer a place for the idle or shiftless. Two or three of the farmers left at the termination of their year, but better men took their places, and John Thorndyke, having settled matters to his satisfaction, now began to attend more to other affairs. He had been, when he first came back, welcomed with great heartiness by all the gentry of the neighborhood; his father had been a popular man, and young Thorndyke had been regarded as a pleasant young fellow, and would in any case have been welcomed, if only because Crowswood had become a nuisance to the whole district. It was, indeed, a sort of rendezvous for poachers and bad characters, it was more than suspected that gangs of thieves and burglars made it their headquarters, and that even highwaymen found it a convenient and quiet resort.

Thus, then, the transformation effected within a few months of Mr. Thorndyke's return caused general and lively satisfaction, and a year later he was put on the Commission of the Peace, and became one of the most regular attendants at the Bench of Magistrates. Reluctantly as he had taken up his present position, he found it, as time went on, a pleasant one. He had not been conscious before that time hung somewhat heavily on his hands, but here he had

duties to perform and ample employment. His nature was naturally somewhat a masterful one, and both as a magistrate and a landlord he had scope and power of action. Occasionally he went up to London, always driving his gig, with a pair of fast trotting horses, and was known to the frequenters of the coffee houses chiefly patronized by country gentlemen. Altogether, John Thorndyke became quite a notable person in the district, and men were inclined to congratulate themselves upon the fact that he, and not the Indian officer, his brother, had come into the estate.

The idea of an old Indian officer in those days was that he was almost of necessity an invalid, and an irritable one, with a liver hopelessly deranged, a yellow complexion, and a hatred of the English climate. The fact that, instead of leaving the army and coming home at his father's death, George Thorndyke had chosen to remain abroad and leave the estate to the management of agents, had specially prejudiced him in the eyes of the people of that part, and had heightened the warmth with which they had received his brother. John Thorndyke had upon the occasion, of his first visit to the family solicitors spoken his mind with much freedom as to the manner in which Newman had been allowed a free hand.

“Another ten years,” he said, “and there would not have been a cottage habitable on the estate, nor a farm worth cultivating. He did absolutely nothing beyond collecting the rents. He let the whole place go to rack and ruin. The first day I arrived I sent him out of the house, with a talking to that he won't forget as long as he lives.”

“We never heard any complaints about him, Mr. Thorndyke, except that I think we did once hear from the Rector of the place that his conduct was not satisfactory. I remember that we wrote to him about it, and he said that the Rector was a malignant fellow, on bad terms with all his parishioners.”

“If I had the scoundrel here,” John Thorndyke said with indignation, “I would let him have a taste of the lash of my dog whip. You should not have taken the fellow's word; you should have sent down someone to find out the true state of things. Why, the place has been an eyesore to the whole neighborhood, the resort of poaching, thieving rascals; by gad, if my brother George had gone down there I don't know what would have happened! It will cost a couple of years' rent to get things put straight.”

When the Squire was at home there was scarce an evening when the Rector did not come up to smoke a pipe and take his glass of old Jamaica or Hollands with him.

“Look here, Bastow,” the latter said, some three years after his return, “what are you going to do with that boy of yours? I hear bad reports of him from everyone; he gets into broils at the alehouse, and I hear that he consorts with a bad lot of fellows down at Reigate. One of my tenants—I won't mention names—complained to me that he had persecuted his daughter with his attentions. They say, he was recognized among that poaching gang that had an affray with Sir James Hartrop's keepers. The thing is becoming a gross scandal.”

“I don't know what to do about him, Squire; the boy has always been a trouble to me. You see, before you came