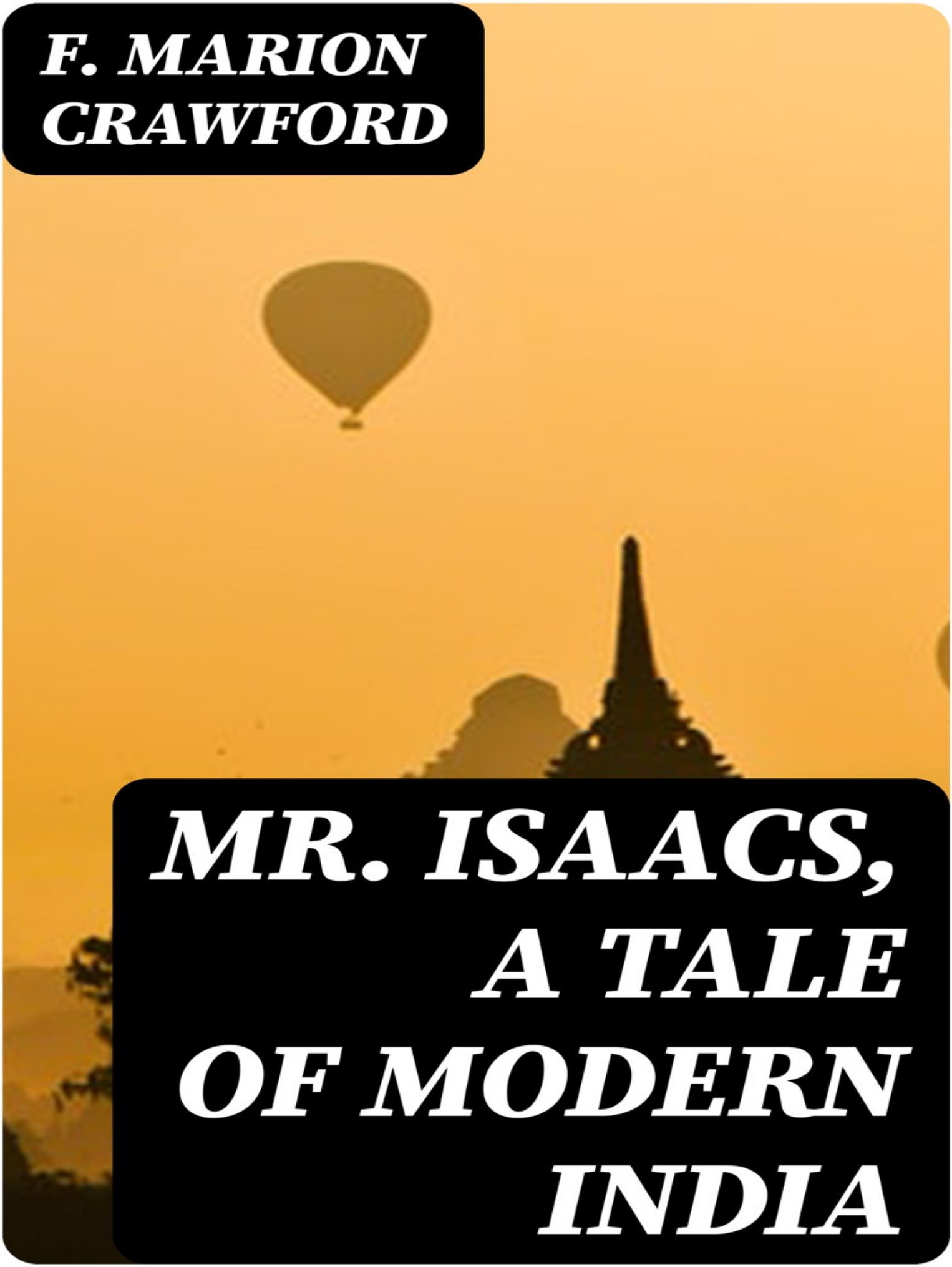
F. MARION CRAWFORD



MR. ISAACS, A TALE OF MODERN INDIA

F. Marion Crawford

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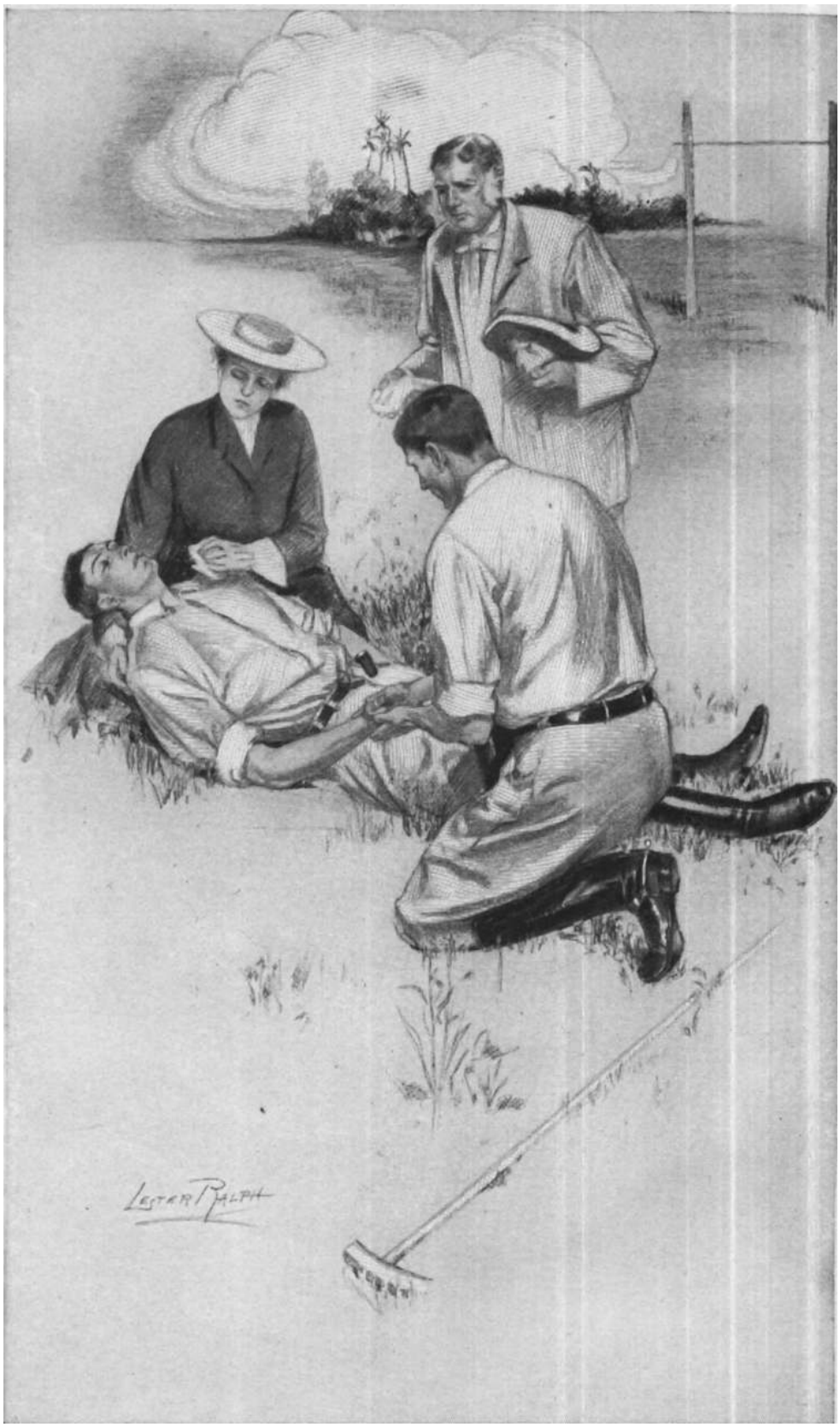

HER FACE WAS WHITER THAN HIS, THOUGH NOT A QUIVER

OF MOUTH OR EYELASH BETRAYED HER EMOTION. —*Mr. Isaacs*.

CHAPTER I.

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In spite of Jean-Jacques and his school, men are not everywhere born free, any more than they are everywhere in chains, unless these be of their own individual making. Especially in countries where excessive liberty or excessive tyranny favours the growth of that class most usually designated as adventurers, it is true that man, by his own dominant will, or by a still more potent servility, may rise to any grade of elevation; as by the absence of these qualities he may fall to any depth in the social scale.

Wherever freedom degenerates into license, the ruthless predatory instinct of certain bold and unscrupulous persons may, and almost certainly will, place at their disposal the goods, the honours, and the preferment justly the due of others; and in those more numerous and certainly more unhappy countries, where the rule of the tyrant is substituted for the law of God, the unwearying flatterer, patient under blows and abstemious under high-feeding, will assuredly make his way to power.

Without doubt the Eastern portion of the world, where an hereditary, or at least traditional, despotism has never ceased since the earliest social records, and where a mode of thought infinitely more degrading than any feudalism has become ingrained in the blood and soul of the chief races, presents far more favourable conditions to the growth and development of the true adventurer than are offered in any free country. For in a free country the majority can rise and overthrow the favourite of fortune, whereas in a despotic

country they cannot. Of Eastern countries in this condition, Russia is the nearest to us; though perhaps we understand the Chinese character better than the Russian. The Ottoman empire and Persia are, and always have been, swayed by a clever band of flatterers acting through their nominal master; while India, under the kindly British rule, is a perfect instance of a ruthless military despotism, where neither blood nor stratagem have been spared in exacting the uttermost farthing from the miserable serfs—they are nothing else—and in robbing and defrauding the rich of their just and lawful possessions. All these countries teem with stories of adventurers risen from the ranks to the command of armies, of itinerant merchants wedded to princesses, of hardy sailors promoted to admiralties, of half-educated younger sons of English peers dying in the undisputed possession of ill-gotten millions. With the strong personal despotism of the First Napoleon began a new era of adventurers in France; not of elegant and accomplished adventurers like M. de St. Germain, Cagliostro, or the Comtesse de la Motte, but regular rag-tag-and-bobtail cut-throat moss-troopers, who carved and slashed themselves into notice by sheer animal strength and brutality.

There is infinitely more grace and romance about the Eastern adventurer. There is very little slashing and hewing to be done there, and what there is, is managed as quietly as possible. When a Sultan must be rid of the last superfluous wife, she is quietly done up in a parcel with a few shot, and dropped into the Bosphorus without more ado. The good old-fashioned Rajah of Mudpoor did his killing without scandal, and when the kindly British wish to keep a

secret, the man is hanged in a quiet place where there are no reporters. As in the Greek tragedies, the butchery is done behind the scenes, and there is no glory connected with the business, only gain. The ghosts of the slain sometimes appear in the columns of the recalcitrant Indian newspapers and gibber a feeble little "Otototoi!" after the manner of the shade of Dareios, but there is very little heed paid to such visitations by the kindly British. But though the "raw head and bloody bones" type of adventurer is little in demand in the East, there is plenty of scope for the intelligent and wary flatterer, and some room for the honest man of superior gifts, who is sufficiently free from Oriental prejudice to do energetically the thing which comes in his way, distancing all competitors for the favours of fortune by sheer industry and unerring foresight.

I once knew a man in the East who was neither a flatterer nor freebooter, but who by his own masterly perseverance worked his way to immense wealth, and to such power as wealth commands, though his high view of the social aims of mankind deterred him from mixing in political questions. *Bon chien chasse de race* is a proverb which applies to horses, cattle, and men, as well as to dogs; and in this man, who was a noble type of the Aryan race, the qualities which have made that race dominant were developed in the highest degree. The sequel, indeed, might lead the ethnographer into a labyrinth of conjecture, but the story is too tempting a one for me to forego telling it, although the said ethnographer should lose his wits in striving to solve the puzzle.

In September, 1879, I was at Simla in the lower Himalayas,—at the time of the murder of Sir Louis Cavagnari at Kabul,—being called there in the interests of an Anglo-Indian newspaper, of which I was then editor. In other countries, notably in Europe and in America, there are hundreds of spots by the sea-shore, or on the mountain-side, where specific ills may be cured by their corresponding antidotes of air or water, or both. Following the aristocratic and holy example of the Bishops of Salzburg for the last eight centuries, the sovereigns of the Continent are told that the air and waters of Hofgastein are the only nenuphar for the over-taxed brain in labour beneath a crown. The self-indulgent sybarite is recommended to Ems, or Wiesbaden, or Aix-la-Chapelle, and the quasi-incurable sensualist to Aix in Savoy, or to Karlsbad in Bohemia. In our own magnificent land Bethesdas abound, in every state, from the attractive waters of lotus-eating Saratoga to the magnetic springs of Lansing, Michigan; from Virginia, the carcanet of sources, the heaving, the warm, the hot sulphur springs, the white sulphur, the alum, to the hot springs of Arkansas, the Ultima Thule of our migratory and despairing humanity. But in India, whatever the ailing, low fever, high fever, "brandy pawnee" fever, malaria caught in the chase of tigers in the Terai, or dysentery imbibed on the banks of the Ganges, there is only one cure, the "hills;" and chief of "hill-stations" is Simla.

On the hip rather than on the shoulder of the aspiring Himalayas, Simla—or Shumla, as the natives call it—presents during the wet monsoon period a concourse of pilgrims more varied even than the Bagnères de Bigorre in

the south of France, where the gay Frenchman asks permission of the lady with whom he is conversing to leave her abruptly, in order to part with his remaining lung, the loss of the first having brought him there. "Pardon, madame," said he, "je m'en vais cracher mon autre poumon."

To Simla the whole supreme Government migrates for the summer—Viceroy, council, clerks, printers, and hangers-on. Thither the high official from the plains takes his wife, his daughters, and his liver. There the journalists congregate to pick up the news that oozes through the pent-house of Government secrecy, and failing such scant drops of information, to manufacture as much as is necessary to fill the columns of their dailies. On the slopes of "Jako"—the wooded eminence that rises above the town—the enterprising German establishes his concert-hall and his beer-garden; among the rhododendron trees Madame Blavatzky, Colonel Olcott and Mr. Sinnett move mysteriously in the performance of their wonders; and the wealthy tourist from America, the botanist from Berlin, and the casual peer from Great Britain, are not wanting to complete the motley crowd. There are no roads in Simla proper where it is possible to drive, excepting one narrow way, reserved when I was there, and probably still set apart, for the exclusive delectation of the Viceroy. Every one rides—man, woman, and child; and every variety of horseflesh may be seen in abundance, from Lord Steepleton Kildare's thoroughbreds to the broad-sterned equestrian vessel of Mr. Currie Ghyrkins, the Revenue Commissioner of Mudnugger in Bengal. But I need not now dwell long on the description of this highly-

favoured spot, where Baron de Zach might have added force to his demonstration of the attraction of mountains for the pendulum. Having achieved my orientation and established my servants and luggage in one of the reputed hotels, I began to look about me, and, like an intelligent American observer, as I pride myself that I am, I found considerable pleasure in studying out the character of such of the changing crowd on the verandah and on the mall as caught my attention.

At last the dinner-hour came. With the rest I filed into the large dining-room and took my seat. The place allotted to me was the last at one side of the long table, and the chair opposite was vacant, though two remarkably well-dressed servants, in turbans of white and gold, stood with folded arms behind it, apparently awaiting their master. Nor was he long in coming. I never remember to have been so much struck by the personal appearance of any man in my life. He sat down opposite me, and immediately one of his two servants, or *khitmatgars*, as they are called, retired, and came back bearing a priceless goblet and flask of the purest old Venetian mould. Filling the former, he ceremoniously presented his master with a brimming beaker of cold water. A water-drinker in India is always a phenomenon, but a water-drinker who did the thing so artistically was such a manifestation as I had never seen. I was interested beyond the possibility of holding my peace, and as I watched the man's abstemious meal,—for he ate little,—I contrasted him with our neighbours at the board, who seemed to be vying, like the captives of Circe, to ascertain by trial who could swallow the most beef and mountain mutton, and who could

absorb the most "pegs"—those vile concoctions of spirits, ice, and soda-water, which have destroyed so many splendid constitutions under the tropical sun. As I watched him an impression came over me that he must be an Italian. I scanned his appearance narrowly, and watched for a word that should betray his accent. He spoke to his servant in Hindustani, and I noticed at once the peculiar sound of the dental consonants, never to be acquired by a northern-born person.

Before I go farther, let me try and describe Mr. Isaacs; I certainly could not have done so satisfactorily after my first meeting, but subsequent acquaintance, and the events I am about to chronicle, threw me so often in his society, and gave me such ample opportunities of observation, that the minutest details of his form and feature, as well as the smallest peculiarities of his character and manner, are indelibly graven in my memory.

Isaacs was a man of more than medium stature, though he would never be spoken of as tall. An easy grace marked his movements at all times, whether deliberate or vehement,—and he often went to each extreme,—a grace which no one acquainted with the science of the human frame would be at a loss to explain for a moment. The perfect harmony of all the parts, the even symmetry of every muscle, the equal distribution of a strength, not colossal and overwhelming, but ever ready for action, the natural courtesy of gesture—all told of a body in which true proportion of every limb and sinew were at once the main feature and the pervading characteristic. This infinitely supple and swiftly-moving figure was but the pedestal, as it

were, for the noble face and nobler brain to which it owed its life and majestic bearing. A long oval face of a wondrous transparent olive tint, and of a decidedly Oriental type. A prominent brow and arched but delicate eyebrows fitly surmounted a nose smoothly aquiline, but with the broad well-set nostrils that bespeak active courage. His mouth, often smiling, never laughed, and the lips, though closely meeting, were not thin and writhing and cunning, as one so often sees in eastern faces, but rather inclined to a generous Greek fullness, the curling lines ever ready to express a sympathy or a scorn which, the commanding features above seemed to control and curb, as the stern, square-elbowed Arab checks his rebellious horse, or gives him the rein, at will.

But though Mr. Isaacs was endowed with exceptional gifts of beauty by a bountiful nature, those I have enumerated were by no means what first attracted the attention of the observer. I have spoken of his graceful figure and perfect Iranian features, but I hardly noticed either at our first meeting. I was enthralled and fascinated by his eyes. I once saw in France a jewel composed of six precious stones, each a gem of great value, so set that they appeared to form but one solid mass, yielding a strange radiance that changed its hue at every movement, and multiplied the sunlight a thousand-fold. Were I to seek a comparison for my friend's eyes, I might find an imperfect one in this masterpiece of the jeweler's art. They were dark and of remarkable size; when half closed they were long and almond-shaped; when suddenly opened in anger or surprise they had the roundness and bold keenness of the eagle's sight. There

was a depth of life and vital light in them that told of the pent-up force of a hundred generations of Persian magii. They blazed with the splendour of a god-like nature, needing neither meat nor strong drink to feed its power.

My mind was made up. Between his eyes, his temperance, and his dental consonants, he certainly might be an Italian. Being myself a native of Italy, though an American by parentage, I addressed him in the language, feeling comparatively sure of his answer. To my surprise, and somewhat to my confusion, he answered in two words of modern Greek—"[Greek: *den enoêsa*]"—"I do not understand." He evidently supposed I was speaking a Greek dialect, and answered in the one phrase of that tongue which he knew, and not a good phrase at that.

"Pardon me," said I in English, "I believed you a countryman, and ventured to address you in my native tongue. May I inquire whether you speak English?"

I was not a little astonished when he answered me in pure English, and with an evident command of the language. We fell into conversation, and I found him pungent, ready, impressive, and most entertaining, thoroughly acquainted with Anglo-Indian and English topics, and apparently well read. An Indian dinner is a long affair, so that we had ample time to break the ice, an easy matter always for people who are not English, and when, after the fruit, he invited me to come down and smoke with him in his rooms, I gladly availed myself of the opportunity. We separated for a few moments, and I despatched my servant to the manager of the hotel to ascertain the name of the strange gentleman who looked like an Italian and spoke like

a fellow of Balliol. Having discovered that he was a "Mr. Isaacs," I wended my way through verandahs and corridors, preceded by a *chuprassie* and followed by my pipe-bearer, till I came to his rooms.

The fashion of the hookah or narghyle in India has long disappeared from the English portion of society. Its place has been assumed and usurped by the cheroot from Burmah or Trichinopoli, by the cigarette from Egypt, or the more expensive Manilla and Havana cigars. I, however, in an early burst of Oriental enthusiasm, had ventured upon the obsolete fashion, and so charmed was I by the indolent aromatic enjoyment I got from the rather cumbrous machine, that I never gave it up while in the East. So when Mr. Isaacs invited me to come and smoke in his rooms, or rather before his rooms, for the September air was still warm in the hills, I ordered my "bearer" to bring down the apparatus and to prepare it for use. I myself passed through the glass door in accordance with my new acquaintance's invitation, curious to see the kind of abode in which a man who struck me as being so unlike his fellows spent his summer months. For some minutes after I entered I did not speak, and indeed I hardly breathed. It seemed to me that I was suddenly transported into the subterranean chambers whither the wicked magician sent Aladdin in quest of the lamp. A soft but strong light filled the room, though I did not immediately comprehend whence it came, nor did I think to look, so amazed was I by the extraordinary splendour of the objects that met my eyes. In the first glance it appeared as if the walls and the ceiling were lined with gold and precious stones; and in reality it was almost literally the truth. The

apartment, I soon saw, was small,—for India at least,—and every available space, nook and cranny, were filled with gold and jeweled ornaments, shining weapons, or uncouth but resplendent idols. There were sabres in scabbards set from end to end with diamonds and sapphires, with cross hilts of rubies in massive gold mounting, the spoil of some worsted rajah or Nawab of the mutiny. There were narghyles four feet high, crusted with gems and curiously wrought work from Baghdad or Herat; water flasks of gold and drinking cups of jade; yataghans from Bourn and idols from the far East. Gorgeous lamps of the octagonal Oriental shape hung from the ceiling, and, fed by aromatic oils, shed their soothing light on all around. The floor was covered with a rich soft pile, and low divans were heaped with cushions of deep-tinted silk and gold. On the floor, in a corner which seemed the favourite resting-place of my host, lay open two or three superbly illuminated Arabic manuscripts, and from a chafing dish of silver near by a thin thread of snow-white smoke sent up its faint perfume through the still air. To find myself transported from the conventionalities of a stiff and starched Anglo-Indian hotel to such a scene was something novel and delicious in the extreme. No wonder I stood speechless and amazed. Mr. Isaacs remained near the door while I breathed in the strange sights to which he had introduced me. At last I turned, and from contemplating the magnificence of inanimate wealth I was riveted by the majestic face and expression of the beautiful living creature who, by a turn of his wand, or, to speak prosaically, by an invitation to smoke, had lifted me out of humdrum into a land peopled with all the effulgent phantasies and the

priceless realities of the magic East. As I gazed, it seemed as if the illumination from the lamps above were caught up and flung back with the vitality of living fire by his dark eyes, in which more than ever I saw and realised the inexplicable blending of the precious stones with the burning spark of a divine soul breathing within. For some moments we stood thus; he evidently amused at my astonishment, and I fascinated and excited by the problem presented me for solution in his person and possessions.

"Yes," said Isaacs, "you are naturally surprised at my little Eldorado, so snugly hidden away in the lower story of a commonplace hotel. Perhaps you are surprised at finding me here, too. But come out into the air, your hookah is blazing, and so are the stars."

I followed him into the verandah, where the long cane chairs of the country were placed, and taking the tube of the pipe from the solemn Mussulman whose duty it was to prepare it, I stretched myself out in that indolent lazy peace which is only to be enjoyed in tropical countries. Silent and for the nonce perfectly happy, I slowly inhaled the fragrant vapour of tobacco and aromatic herbs and honey with which the hookah is filled. No sound save the monotonous bubbling and chuckling of the smoke through the water, or the gentle rustle of the leaves on the huge rhododendron-tree which reared its dusky branches to the night in the middle of the lawn. There was no moon, though the stars were bright and clear, the foaming path of the milky way stretching overhead like the wake of some great heavenly ship; a soft mellow lustre from the lamps in Isaacs' room threw a golden stain half across the verandah, and the

chafing dish within, as the light breeze fanned the coals, sent out a little cloud of perfume which mingled pleasantly with the odour of the *chillum* in the pipe. The turbaned servant squatted on the edge of the steps at a little distance, peering into the dusk, as Indians will do for hours together. Isaacs lay quite still in his chair, his hands above his head, the light through the open door just falling on the jeweled mouthpiece of his narghyle. He sighed—a sigh only half regretful, half contented, and seemed about to speak, but the spirit did not move him, and the profound silence continued. For my part, I was so much absorbed in my reflections on the things I had seen that I had nothing to say, and the strange personality of the man made me wish to let him begin upon his own subject, if perchance I might gain some insight into his mind and mode of thought. There are times when silence seems to be sacred, even unaccountably so. A feeling is in us that to speak would be almost a sacrilege, though we are unable to account in any way for the pause. At such moments every one seems instinctively to feel the same influence, and the first person who breaks the spell either experiences a sensation of awkwardness, and says something very foolish, or, conscious of the odds against him, delivers himself of a sentiment of ponderous severity and sententiousness. As I smoked, watching the great flaming bowl of the water pipe, a little coal, forced up by the expansion of the heat, toppled over the edge and fell tinkling on the metal foot below. The quick ear of the servant on the steps caught the sound, and he rose and came forward to trim the fire. Though he did not speak, his act was a diversion. The spell was broken.

"The Germans," said Isaacs, "say that an angel is passing over the house. I do not believe it."

I was surprised at the remark. It did not seem quite natural for Mr. Isaacs to begin talking about the Germans, and from the tone of his voice I could almost have fancied he thought the proverb was held as an article of faith by the Teutonic races in general.

"I do not believe it," he repeated reflectively. "There is no such thing as an angel 'passing'; it is a misuse of terms. If there are such things as angels, their changes of place cannot be described as motion, seeing that from the very nature of things such changes must be instantaneous, not involving time as a necessary element. Have you ever thought much about angels? By-the-bye, pardon my abruptness, but as there is no one to introduce us, what is your name?"

"My name is Griggs—Paul Griggs. I am an American, but was born in Italy. I know your name is Isaacs; but, frankly, I do not comprehend how you came by the appellation, for I do not believe you are either, English, American, or Jewish of origin."

"Quite right," he replied, "I am neither Yankee, Jew, nor beef-eater; in fact, I am not a European at all. And since you probably would not guess my nationality, I will tell you that I am a Persian, a pure Iranian, a degenerate descendant of Zoroaster, as you call him, though by religion I follow the prophet, whose name be blessed," he added, with an expression of face I did not then understand. "I call myself Isaacs for convenience in business. There is no concealment about it, as many know my story; but it has an attractive

Semitic twang that suite my occupation, and is simpler and shorter for Englishmen to write than Abdul Hafizben-Isâk, which is my lawful name."

"Since you lay sufficient store by your business to have been willing to change your name, may I inquire what your business is? It seems to be a lucrative one, to judge by the accumulations of wealth you have allowed me a glimpse of."

"Yes. Wealth is my occupation. I am a dealer in precious stones and similar objects of value. Some day I will show you my diamonds; they are worth seeing."

It is no uncommon thing to meet in India men of all Asiatic nationalities buying and selling stones of worth, and enriching themselves in the business. I supposed he had come with a caravan by way of Baghdad, and had settled. But again, his perfect command of English, as pure as though he had been educated at Eton and Oxford, his extremely careful, though quiet, English dress, and especially his polished manners, argued a longer residence in the European civilisation of his adopted home than agreed with his young looks, supposing him to have come to India at sixteen or seventeen. A pardonable curiosity led me to remark this.

"You must have come here very young," I said. "A thoroughbred Persian does not learn to speak English like a university man, and to quote German proverbs, in a residence of a few years; unless, indeed, he possess the secret by which the initiated absorb knowledge without effort, and assimilate it without the laborious process of intellectual digestion."

"I am older than I look—considerably. I have been in India twelve years, and with a natural talent for languages, stimulated by constant intercourse with Englishmen who know their own speech well, I have succeeded, as you say, in acquiring a certain fluency and mastery of accent. I have had an adventurous life enough. I see no reason why I should not tell you something of it, especially as you are not English, and can therefore hear me with an unprejudiced ear. But, really, do you care for a yarn?"

I begged him to proceed, and I beckoned the servant to arrange our pipes, that we might not be disturbed. When this was done, Isaacs began.

"I am going to try and make a long story short. We Persians like to listen to long stories, as we like to sit and look on at a wedding nautch. But we are radically averse to dancing or telling long tales ourselves, so I shall condense as much as possible. I was born in Persia, of Persian parents, as I told you, but I will not burden your memory with names you are not familiar with. My father was a merchant in prosperous circumstances, and a man of no mean learning in Arabic and Persian literature. I soon showed a strong taste for books, and every opportunity was given me for pursuing my inclinations in this respect. At the early age of twelve I was kidnapped by a party of slave-dealers, and carried off into Roum—Turkey you call it. I will not dwell upon my tears and indignation. We travelled rapidly, and my captors treated me well, as they invariably do their prizes, well knowing how much of the value of a slave depends on his plump and sleek condition when brought to market. In Istamboul I was soon disposed of, my fair skin and

accomplishments as a writer and a singer of Persian songs fetching a high price.

"It is no uncommon thing for boys to be stolen and sold in this way. A rich pacha will pay almost anything. The fate of such slaves is not generally a happy one." Isaacs paused a moment, and drew in two or three long breaths of smoke. "Do you see that bright star in the south?" he said, pointing with his long jewel-set mouthpiece.

"Yes. It must be Sirius."

"That is my star. Do you believe in the agency of the stars in human affairs? Of course you do not; you are a European: how should you? But to proceed. The stars, or the fates or Kâli, or whatever you like to term your kismet, your portion of good and evil, allotted me a somewhat happier existence than generally falls to the share of young slaves in Roum. I was bought by an old man of great wealth and of still greater learning, who was so taken with my proficiency in Arabic and in writing that he resolved to make of me a pupil instead of a servant to carry his coffee and pipe, or a slave to bear the heavier burden of his vices. Nothing better could have happened to me. I was installed in his house and treated with exemplary kindness, though he kept me rigorously at work with my books. I need not tell you that with such a master I made fair progress, and that at the age of twenty-one I was, for a Turk, a young man of remarkably good education. Then my master died suddenly, and I was thrown into great distress. I was of course nothing but a slave, and liable to be sold at any time. I escaped. Active and enduring, though never possessing any vast muscular strength, I bore with ease the hardships of a long journey on

foot with little food and scant lodging. Falling in with a band of pilgrims, I recognised the wisdom of joining them on their march to Mecca. I was, of course, a sound Mohammedan, as I am to this day, and my knowledge of the Koran soon gained me some reputation in the caravan. I was considered a creditable addition, and altogether an eligible pilgrim. My exceptional physique protected me from the disease and exhaustion of which not a few of our number died by the wayside, and the other pilgrims, in consideration of my youth and piety, gave me willingly the few handfuls of rice and dates that I needed to support life and strength.

"You have read about Mecca; and your *hadji* barber, who of course has been there, has doubtless related his experiences to you scores of times in the plains, as he does everywhere. As you may imagine, I had no intention of returning towards Roum with my companions. When I had fulfilled all the observances required, I made my way to Yeddah and shipped on board an Arabian craft, touching at Mocha, and bearing coffee to Bombay. I had to work my passage, and as I had no experience of the sea, save in the caïques of the Golden Horn, you will readily conceive that the captain of the vessel had plenty of fault to find. But my agility and quick comprehension stood me in good stead, and in a few days I had learned enough to haul on a rope or to reef the great latteen sails as well as any of them. The knowledge that I was just returning from a pilgrimage to Mecca obtained for me also a certain respect among the crew. It makes very little difference what the trade, business, or branch of learning; in mechanical labour, or intellectual effort, the educated man is always superior to

the common labourer. One who is in the habit of applying his powers in the right way will carry his system into any occupation, and it will help him as much to handle a rope as to write a poem.

"At last we landed in Bombay. I was in a wretched condition. What little clothes I had had were in tatters; hard work and little food had made me even thinner than my youthful age and slight frame tolerated. I had in all about three pence money in small copper coins, carefully hoarded against a rainy day. I could not speak a word of the Indian dialects, still less of English, and I knew no one save the crew of the vessel I had come in, as poor as I, but saved from starvation by the slender pittance allowed them on land. I wandered about all day through the bazaars, occasionally speaking to some solemn looking old shopkeeper or long-bearded Mussulman, who, I hoped, might understand a little Arabic. But not one did I find. At evening I bathed in the tank of a temple full from the recent rains, and I lay down supperless to sleep on the steps of the great mosque. As I lay on the hard stones I looked up to my star, and took comfort, and slept. That night a dream came to me. I thought I was still awake and lying on the steps, watching the wondrous ruler of my fate. And as I looked he glided down from his starry throne with an easy swinging motion, like a soap-bubble settling to the earth. And the star came and poised among the branches of the palm-tree over the tank, opalescent, unearthly, heart shaking. His face was as the face of the prophet, whose name be blessed, and his limbs were as the limbs of the Hameshaspenthas of old. Garments he had none, being of heavenly birth, but he was

clothed with light as with a garment, and the crest of his silver hair was to him a crown of glory. And he spoke with the tongues of a thousand lutes, sweet strong tones, that rose and fell on the night air as the song of a lover beneath the lattice of his mistress, the song of the mighty star wooing the beautiful sleeping earth. And then he looked on me and said: 'Abdul Hafiz, be of good cheer. I am with thee and will not forsake thee, even to the day when thou shalt pass over the burning bridge of death. Thou shalt touch the diamond of the rivers and the pearl of the sea, and they shall abide with thee, and great shall be thy wealth. And the sunlight which is in the diamond shall warm thee and comfort thy heart; and the moonlight which is in the pearl shall give thee peace in the night-time, and thy children shall be to thee a garland of roses in the land of the unbeliever.' And the star floated down from the palm-branches and touched me with his hand, and breathed upon my lips the cool breath of the outer firmament, and departed. Then I awoke and saw him again in his place far down the horizon, and he was alone, for the dawn was in the sky and the lesser lights were extinguished. And I rose from the stony stairway that seemed like a bed of flowers for the hopeful dream, and I turned westward, and praised Allah, and went my way.

"The sun being up, all was life, and the life in me spoke of a most capacious appetite. So I cast about for a shop where I might buy a little food with my few coppers, and seeing a confectioner spreading out his wares, I went near and took stock of the queer balls of flour and sugar, and strange oily-looking sweetmeats. Having selected what I thought would

be within my modest means, I addressed the shopkeeper to call his attention, though I knew he would not understand me, and I touched with my hand the article I wanted, showing with the other some of the small coins I had. As soon as I touched the sweetmeats the man became very angry, and bounding from his seat called his neighbours together, and they all shouted and screamed at me, and called a man I thought to be a soldier, though he looked more like an ape in his long loose trousers of dirty black, and his untidy red turban, under which cumbrous garments his thin and stunted frame seemed even blacker and more contemptible than nature had made them. I afterwards discovered him to be one of the Bombay police. He seized me by the arm, and I, knowing I had done no wrong, and curious to discover, if possible, what the trouble was, accompanied him whither he led me. After waiting many hours in a kind of little shed where there were more policemen, I was brought before an Englishman. Of course all attempts at explanation were useless. I could speak not a word of anything but Arabic and Persian, and no one present understood either. At last, when I was in despair, trying to muster a few words of Greek I had learned in Istamboul, and failing signally therein, an old man with a long beard looked curiously in at the door of the crowded court. Some instinct told me to appeal to him, and I addressed him in Arabic. To my infinite relief he replied in that tongue, and volunteered to be interpreter. In a few moments I learned that my crime was that I had *touched* the sweetmeats on the counter.

"In India, as you who have lived here doubtless know, it is a criminal offence, punishable by fine or imprisonment,

for a non-Hindu person to defile the food of even the lowest caste man. To touch one sweetmeat in a trayful defiles the whole baking, rendering it all unfit for the use of any Hindu, no matter how mean. Knowing nothing of caste and its prejudices, it was with the greatest difficulty that the *moolah*, who was trying to help me out of my trouble, could make me comprehend wherein my wrong-doing lay, and that the English courts, being obliged in their own interest to uphold and protect the caste practices of the Hindus, at the risk of another mutiny, could not make any exception in favour of a stranger unacquainted with Indian customs. So the Englishman who presided said he would have to inflict a fine, but being a very young man, not yet hardened to the despotic ways of Eastern life, he generously paid the fine himself, and gave me a rupee as a present into the bargain. It was only two shillings, but as I had not had so much money for months I was as grateful as though it had been a hundred. If I ever meet him I will requite him, for I owe him all I now possess.

"My case being dismissed, I left the court with the old *moolah*, who took me to his house and inquired of my story, having first given me a good meal of rice and sweetmeats, and that greatest of luxuries, a little pot of fragrant Mocha coffee; he sat in silence while I ate, ministering to my wants, and evidently pleased with the good he was doing. Then he brought out a package of *birris*, those little cigarettes rolled in leaves that they smoke in Bombay, and I told him what had happened to me. I implored him to put me in the way of obtaining some work by which I could at least support life, and he promised to do so, begging me to stay with him until

I should be independent. The day following I was engaged to pull a punkah in the house of an English lawyer connected with an immense lawsuit involving one of the Mohammedan principalities. For this irksome work I was to receive six rupees—twelve shillings—monthly, but before the month was up I was transferred, by the kindness of the English lawyer and the good offices of my co-religionist the *moolah*, to the retinue of the Nizam of Haiderabad, then in Bombay. Since that time I have never known want.

"I soon mastered enough of the dialects to suit my needs, and applied myself to the study of English, for which opportunities were not lacking. At the end of two years I could speak the language enough to be understood, and my accent from the first was a matter of surprise to all; I had also saved out of my gratuities about one hundred rupees. Having been conversant with the qualities of many kinds of precious stones from my youth up, I determined to invest my economies in a diamond or a pearl. Before long I struck a bargain with an old *marwarri* over a small stone, of which I thought he misjudged the value, owing to the rough cutting. The fellow was cunning and hard in his dealings, but my superior knowledge of diamonds gave me the advantage. I paid him ninety-three rupees for the little gem, and sold it again in a month for two hundred to a young English 'collector and magistrate,' who wanted to make his wife a present. I bought a larger stone, and again made nearly a hundred per cent on the money. Then I bought two, and so on, until having accumulated sufficient capital, I bade farewell to the Court of the Nizam, where my salary never exceeded sixteen rupees a month as scribe and Arabic

interpreter, and I went my way with about two thousand rupees in cash and precious stones. I came northwards, and finally settled in Delhi, where I set up as a dealer in gems and objects of intrinsic value. It is now twelve years since I landed in Bombay. I have never soiled my hands with usury, though I have twice advanced large sums at legal interest for purposes I am not at liberty to disclose; I have never cheated a customer or underrated a gem I bought of a poor man, and my wealth, as you may judge from what you have seen, is considerable. Moreover, though in constant intercourse with Hindus and English, I have not forfeited my title to be called a true believer and a follower of the prophet, whose name be blessed."

Isaacs ceased speaking, and presently the waning moon rose pathetically over the crest of the mountains with that curiously doleful look she wears after the full is past, as if weeping over the loss of her better half. The wind rose and soughed drearily through the rhododendrons and the pines; and Kiramat Ali, the pipe-bearer, shivered audibly as he drew his long cloth uniform around him. We rose and entered my friend's rooms, where the warmth of the lights, the soft rugs and downy cushions, invited us temptingly to sit down and continue our conversation. But it was late, for Isaacs, like a true Oriental, had not hurried himself over his narrative, and it had been nine o'clock when we sat down to smoke. So I bade him good-night, and, musing on all I had heard and seen, retired to my own apartments, glancing at Sirius and at the unhappy-looking moon before I turned in from the verandah.