



"What he saw dispelled any fear of ghosts he might have had."

The King of the Jerawahs

By S. B. H. HURST

The treasure of Alexander the Great, guarded by wild Jerawahs, was legend throughout India—a tale of Bugs Sinnat

A WELL built, bearded Afghan of the Durani Clan walked past the ruins of the ancient palace of the Peshwas, in Poona, India, toward the dense native quarter that spreads about the river bank where the river Mutla joins the Mutha. He entered the warrens of go-downs and huts which the police avoid. At the door of one of these go-downs a blind man sat in the hot sun in apparent comfort. From his aged mouth dribbled the juice of the betel-nut. To this one the Afghan spoke gently.

"Brother of the dust who has gazed upon so much beauty that his eyes can no longer see common things—I am Ben Mohamet of the Clan Durani! A follower of the Prophet, a worshipper of the One God. . . . And, strange to say, considering the heat, I seek fish!"

The blind man nodded.

"What sort of fish?" he asked.

"*Bummollo mutche*—the fish called bummollo, of course," answered Ben Mohamet.

"That fish does not grow in Poona," drawled the blind man. "Is there no other fish you crave?"

"Of course! Old fish! Young fish—any sort of fish so that it is fish!" exclaimed Ben Mohamet.

"Will the spawn of a very big fish serve?" queried the blind man.

"Better still!" exclaimed Ben Mohamet.

"Spawn of Alexander—will that taste good?" asked the blind man.

"The best in the world!" exclaimed Ben Mohamet.

"Pass to where that great spawn congregate!" said the blind man politely.

The Afghan, Ben Mohamet, stooped and entered the hut, through the fragile wooden door. He walked six paces—until he felt a rug under his bare feet. Coming into the gloom out of the light he could see almost nothing. He lifted the rug and felt for a ring of brass under it. He found the ring and raised a narrow trapdoor. It was so small that he had to squeeze his wide shoulders through it, while his feet felt their way down wooden steps. As he dropped the trapdoor over his head the blind man came in swiftly and replaced the rug.

Ben Mohamet went down a dozen steps, his hands groping against the earth walls. He came to a very solid door of heavy teak. On this he knocked twice, then once, then three times. It was opened and a fierce face looked out—another Afghan.

"Well," asked the face, "who in Jehannum are you?"

Ben Mohamet laughed. "Jehannum—hell, eh? So you must be Shitan [Satan]!"

"I am a better man than Shitan," growled the other Afghan. "But answer my question!"

"My name is Ben Mohamet, of the Durani Clan!" exclaimed Ben Mohamet. "You have heard that name before!"

"A fairly common name among the Durani," said the other. "Who was your father?"

"Alexander the Great!" snapped Ben Mohamet.

"You had an excellent father," answered the other. "Your mother was—?"

"I never had any mother!" said Ben Mohamet.

The other Afghan threw the door wide open.

"Come in, brother Jerawah," he said courteously.

And Ben Mohamet entered the Sanctuary of the Jerawahs, a criminal society which claimed that it was founded when Alexander the Great gave their founder permission to steal from his camp followers, over two thousand years before, when he conquered northern India.

It was a fairly large place, this underground room. Three old brass lamps showed some light, but more shadows, through stained glass and fretwork. The room was full of eager men. Fifty or sixty Jerawahs. They were waiting for their king. Their king had sent word some days before that he was old, and getting tired, and that he would meet his subject Jerawahs in the Sanctuary, where he would appoint his successor, and give him the Key to the Great Secret. But the old king had not arrived. Ben Mohamet had hurried, afraid he would be too late. But something had apparently delayed the king. Conversation buzzed.

The day passed in anxious waiting. Then the Jerawahs grew angry. They were equal with their king in everything but authority—an authority recognized through the years by the Society as necessary to its existence, its continued success by the maintenance of some sort of discipline among such wild, turbulent, brave outlaws. . . .

Among these men Ben Mohamet circulated. His popularity was great. To begin with, his reputation was remarkable. He was magnetic, and swayed his fierce friends easily—both by strength of mind and body. Then—and this was the crowning glory!—he could tell the smuttiest tales in the most delightful manner. In a land of sparse amusement, among such men, Ben Mohamet's ability in this line made him as popular as a free vaudeville theater in a desert. . . .

ANOTHER day passed, and still the king did not arrive. Three more days, and then Ben Mohamet acted.

He addressed the men in a strong talk. He told them he was going out to find the missing king, and practically ordered them to wait and do nothing until he returned. The men cheered his decision.

But when he left the go-down, and walked away from the native quarter, Ben Mohamet did what for a member of a criminal society was a most extraordinary thing. He went boldly to a row of buildings which housed certain white officials. So far nothing unusual, perhaps. But then he went directly to the private office of the coroner, and opened the door without knocking!

The coroner looked up, startled. Natives do not enter the offices of Englishmen this way. The coroner looked keenly at his visitor. He was alone, and when Ben Mohamet shut the door quickly, the coroner reached into his desk.

"Never mind the gun, doc! I won't bite!" exclaimed Ben Mohamet, *in English*.

"Oh, Bugs!" the coroner laughed. "Another instance of your marvelous diversity. No one in the world would have taken you for anything but a big, tough and somewhat dirty Afghan!"

The doctor sniffed.

"And, by jingo, you have even taken on the typical Afghan stink with the stain on your skin. I congratulate you. But what's doing?"

Ben Mohamet—Horace Sinnat, Indian Secret Service 006, Domestic, known to his intimate friends as "Bugs"—laughed.

"I licked you, doc, for far less cheek when we were at school. You old son of a gun! At school you were the dirty little fag, and it was my job, as a member of the Sixth Form, to tell you to go and wash yourself. How are the mighty fallen! Ye gods, yes! That dirty little boy, now grown to more or less man's estate, tells me I stink. . . . Well, he is correct! The stink is a sort of life insurance!"

"What can I do for you?" laughed the doctor.

"I want to find out about an old Afghan who seems to have disappeared. Any dead old Afghans come your way recently?"

The doctor stared.

"Gad, Bugs, you are positively uncanny. How did you know about that old chap?"

"I didn't," exclaimed Bugs. "I thought something had happened to him, though! . . . Don't ask me too many questions, please, doc. What

happened to him?"

"Can you identify the old man?" asked the doctor.

"I can," answered Bugs.

"Come back here with me, then, and see if I have the body of the man you are looking for. I am glad you dropped in! There seems to be quite a mystery! The old fellow was murdered!"

"Murdered?" exclaimed Bugs.

"Yes! But you are the first person I have told. I just found out—did a bit of a post-mortem. . . . Here we are—is this your man?"

Bugs nodded. Lying in the morgue was the missing King of the Jerawahs!

"Please give me all the facts," said the secret service man. "Then have him buried without any comments. Not a word that he was murdered—that is a secret only you and I must share with the murderer. No relatives will turn up to claim the body—I know that! I was looking for the old man, remember! I will straighten out the entire affair. Make out an order in which I assume all responsibility. I will sign it, to protect you—although there will never be any need of that, never any investigation. And don't say a word to a soul!"

BUGS left the morgue and went back to the sanctuary of the Jerawahs. . . .

"The king is dead! Long live the king!" he muttered. "They don't know it yet, but the Jerawahs are going to elect another king—according to the rules when a king dies without appointing his successor. And that new king will be myself!"

He went down into the sanctuary. There he called the big, fierce men about him.

"The king is dead," he shouted.

For a moment there was silence. Then a roar that began to grow. Bugs managed to stop it.

"It is easy to find another king, and a younger and stronger king who will lead you to fresh conquests," he shouted. "For years it has been that our king was useless to us. The new king will be your help. So I have decided to help you—by becoming your king!"

Not a word greeted this announcement. The men just stared. They liked Ben Mohamet, knew him for a strong man, a man to follow; but his sudden announcement took their breath away. Bugs followed up this advantage.

"You will take me for your king," he spoke with

authority, "because the Key to the Great Secret died with the old king, and I am the only man able to find it. And as king I will change the old law in this one way: For whereas all our kings have for more than two thousand years kept the Great Secret a secret—telling us they kept it for Alexander, who promised to come back—I will reveal the secret, and make you all rich men!"

A howl of questions answered him. How did he know what the secret was? Or where the key was hidden, and so on.

Bugs laughed at them.

"I wonder you have been content to wait so idly for so long," he said sarcastically. "Have you turned Buddhists?"

This was calculated insult. They demanded what he meant. They were all of them good Mohametans.

"Only a Buddhist expects a man to come back to earth again for another life!" he sneered, "Yet our kings have been waiting, it seems, for Alexander to return. . . . Oh, hell, forget it! The king is dead. And I am the administrator—of Alexander and our own old king—administrator of the dead king's bequest! And I have the Key! I will fight any man who says I am not his king! But I obey the law! And the law of the Jerawahs says the new king must be elected if the old king does not name him before the assembly! Now, elect me swiftly, and don't make faces when you do it. Some faces are insults, and I will knock the face off the man who insults me! . . . Elect me, quickly. And I will share this treasure with you, my subjects!"

The strong braggart whom the Afghans love! This was Bugs as he spoke.

He was elected unanimously. Then he gathered his men around him, and gave them very careful and very positive instructions. After that he left the sanctuary.

IT was night and grown a mite cooler. Fireflies, low stars, bats and flying foxes across the face of a low moon. Bugs walked toward a small house that stood, of course, in its own compound. It was the house of a white man—rented by a white man. It is easy to enter a white man's house in India.

Bugs slipped into the outer corridor. The old man sitting on his haunches pulling the punkah cord was startled by a big man sitting down by his side. He was relieved when he saw the big man was

an Afghan and a fellow Mohametan. But he stopped pulling the punkah for a moment.

"Tano!" [pull!] growled an English voice inside the house.

Bugs grinned at the punkah waller, and whispered.

"I have heard this white man is going on a hunting trip, and will need a good man to go along. I want that job! When he asks thee if you know of a good man—which he surely will do—then tell him that your cousin Ben Mohamet is a fine, strong man. Such will be true, and I will give you eight annas for your trouble. If you don't do what I order I may break your neck! Now, pull your cord—I go forward a space to listen about this hunting trip. The man has a friend with him—hear them! Keep your mouth shut, punkah waller, and earn thy money!"

The scared punkah waller, cherishing the hope of eight annas in real money if he obeyed this truculent Afghan, continued to pull. Bugs crept forward, until he could hear two Englishmen talking in low tones and drinking whisky.

"The hell of it is," Bugs was thinking, "that I haven't got the Key to the Secret. I know what it is—every Jerawah does. But I don't know where the Treasure is hidden—only the old king knew that! I believe this murderer in here tortured the king and made him, an old man, tell where the Secret Place of Alexander the Great is hidden. If he did, I will make him tell me—and without either torturing or killing him. But if this brute hasn't got the Key to the Secret, well—then I will have to cease being a Jerawah. Because I won't be able to keep my promise to my 'subjects'! Hate to do that, because being a member of that old criminal society—about which no official in India has ever heard!—has helped me to pull off a lot of successful jobs. . . . Now—let's listen!"

Two Englishmen were talking.

"Well, Harris," said one, "now we have had the drink and the preliminaries may be said to be over—what's the great news you have been bragging about for the last ten minutes. Or are you just drunk?"

"Walters," answered Harris, "I am not drunk, although I have had a lot. The stuff won't take hold tonight, and I know why. You know, Walters, you and I have been partners in crime for many years, and have always trusted one another—we can trust each other, can't we?"

"Oh hell, cut out the chatter! What's wrong with you?" growled Walters.

"Murdering a man," Harris lowered his voice, "murdering a man always affects me like this—so it does you!"

"Don't use that word, you drunken fool!" hissed Walters.

"All right—anything to oblige," answered Harris. "It was only an old native, anyhow. Funny thing. Old chap was taken sick outside my door, and my tender heart had him brought into my house. The old bird babbled quite a bit, and I listened. What he said determined me to keep him here till he—er, died! He would have died soon, anyway, being very old. . . . Well, Walters, you have heard about the buried treasure of Alexander the Great, haven't you?"

"Everybody in India has heard about that," growled Walters. "Many archeologists say it must be worth twenty millions. But it never will be found, so why talk about it? Besides, looking for it—how many hundreds have hunted for it, until now everyone says it never will be found!—looking for it would be hard, honest and expensive work! . . . What in hell are you talking about, Harris?"

"I know where it is," said Harris softly. "And I am cold sober!"

"What!" exclaimed Walters.

"Not so loud! That old chap whom I—er, allowed to die. He talked. Oh, after his first babblings I used drugs to make him tell me all. I may have beaten him a little. Made a few mild threats, you know, too! Old men are like young men—they don't enjoy having the soles of their feet roasted. What does it matter? I had the body taken to the proper authorities—the morgue. I said I had done all I could for him, and was complimented upon my charity. Forget that! The big thing is that I know to within a few feet how to enter the underground pleasure room of Alexander the Great, up north in the Punjaub, and how to get the stuff! It's a desert now—where the place is!"

"But," broke in Walters, "do you realize that you are talking about what is probably the greatest hidden treasure in the world? The historical, the archeological value! Millions! The old man was kidding you, Harris!"

"No, he wasn't. He babbled about being the Keeper of the Secret of Alexander the Great, or words to that effect. He said he was on his way to

pass the secret to some other man before he died, because one man had always known the secret, and only one was allowed to know it. Talked crazily about keeping the Key to the Treasure until Alexander came back to use it! Sort of Buddhist rot. But he didn't fool me about the directions. He begged and pleaded with me to let him go—so he could pass the secret on. But, naturally, I wouldn't let him go. Then, when he realized I meant to keep him till he died, he got scared that the Key would be lost. So he gave it to me—after I swore on a brass crucifix I went out and bought in the bazar that I would not tell about it except to one man. I don't know the man he had in mind. He was too near dead to talk coherently, but he babbled something about a Jerawah—which in some dialects means an outlaw, as you know. That's all. The old man is dead and buried, and no one suspects I did him in. Now, our finances will permit us hiring one husky native to fetch and carry for us. When we get the stuff under our hands we will dispose of the husky native—we can't be too particular about this, and can't afford to have the government step in. Treasure trove is a funny law, you know. Now, call that punkah coolie. He will know of some strong native. Then we will raise all we can on promises and bad checks. Then, ho for the golden north! Call the punkah waller!"

Walters called. His heart throbbed at the wonder of the tale he had just heard. The treasure room of Alexander was authentic—no man in India doubted that; but no man believed it ever would be found. The years had covered it—with ruins, sand, what not. And India is a big country. But the place was— somewhere in the Punjaub, probably. Had Harris really obtained the secret of the place—supposed to have been when Alexander the Great died unexpectedly?

The punkah stopped and the coolie entered cringing. To him Harris spoke in fluent Hindustani about a hunting trip, as Bugs had easily deduced he would do. Did the coolie know of a strong native, not a Hindoo, but a Mohametan, of course? . . . The coolie did know of such a one. His cousin!

"Sahib, I will find my cousin, who will be honored to work for the sahib, and send him in to you!"

Presently a well-built, swaggering Afghan came in. He did not bow or cringe. He was a man of the hills. . . .

"Did the sahibs need me?"

"We need a good, strong man who is not afraid. We go on a shooting trip. Have you references?"

The big Mohametan had references—many of them. They were all good, even laudatory. His name was Ben Mohamet. Harris hired him.

"Do you understand or speak English?" asked Harris.

"I am sorry, but I don't know a single word except gothell," said Ben Mohamet.

"You'll do," grinned Harris.

IT was a long journey, in terrible heat. Northward and through the country of the Rajputs, through the Punjaub, the land of the Sikhs, to a small station at the end of a spur of single line, which ended at the desert, where there was nothing but a broken down dak bungalow, and an old man who lived in the deserted place. Their belongings were dumped off the train. The train crew seemed amused. The Scotch engineer wiped his face with a piece of waste.

"I am taking my train back the now," he said. "It will be five days before I am back, and there is no other train. Was it to shoot jackals you came?"

He laughed.

"No!" snapped Harris.

"That's all there is on the desert," grinned the engineer, "except desert fever, which the doctors don't savvy, and a few other things, including vultures. The vultures are the undertakers hereabouts! It's a cheap burial, but not one I'd choose for myself. . . . Scotch, am I? Well. . . . But, thankit, I'm no maniac to go out on a blooming desert to shoot! I have heard there are 'holy men' to be found among the ruins. Maybe ye came here to shoot them!"

"I'll shoot you if you don't shut up!" shouted Harris.

The engineer put his thumb to his nose.

"Goodbye," he said as he started his engine. "Be careful the holy men don't eat you before the vultures get you!"

In the meanwhile Walters was inquiring of the kitmatgar regarding means of crossing the desert—was there a camel or two, or a bullock cart to be hired?

"Nay, sahib." The kitmatgar spread his hands pathetically. "Here there is nothing like that. Just heat waves, and some jackals, who are sick, and some facquirs [holy men] who are mad. Only the sick and the mad go out on the desert—for the holy

men are lepers, also!"

"Nice prospect!" growled Walters.

He walked out of the dak bungalow and met his partner returning from his unprofitable argument with the Scotch engineer. To him he told the ill news.

"Curses!" snarled Harris. "We can't walk. What in hell will we do?"

"Search me," answered Walters. "Looks like a lot of bad luck. There are lepers and madmen and sick jackals in the desert, and scorching heat and fever no doctor ever cured."

"Shut up," stormed Harris. "Or if you want to go back there is still time to flag that train! I'm going on, whether you do or not!"

"We're partners," responded Walters placatingly. "I'll stay with it. But have you seen Ben Mohamet recently?"

"Why, no! I thought he was in the bungalow with you!"

"And I thought he was out there in the sun with you—giving you his immoral support against the engineer!"

They called and searched, but Ben Mohamet had gone. He had gone so suddenly and quietly that he might have evaporated.

"So!" growled Harris. "He found out what the desert was like, heard about the lepers and so on, then heard there were neither camels nor bullocks—and then he deserted. Well, I'd like to shoot him, but you can't blame him—he has no stake in this and don't know what it's all about. Let's see what sort of a chicken the kitmatgar has for dinner. I expect it will be one Alexander did not take away with him because it was too old to eat!"

It was a very ancient chicken. The kitmatgar, who had done his best in a place where six white men in two years was a fair average, began to dislike Harris. Walters was not so bad, but Harris was not like a sahib at all. At length he turned angrily.

"The chicken was born on the same day as yourself, sahib—it was a day of ill omen!"

Harris jumped to his feet. Walters tried to restrain him.

"I'll shoot the *banchoot cabutchal!*" Harris was shouting furiously, dragging at his revolver.

The frightened kitmatgar ran—just as Ben Mohamet appeared at the door.

"Oh," said Harris, becoming calm, for he had no wish to start trouble with this powerful Afghan.

"Oh, where have you been?"

The Afghan grinned.

"Sahib," he said, "this place is surely Jehannum [hell]. Behold, there is nothing for men—even the women have left it! But, back some miles, I had seen from the train a man with three camels. He was going back the way we came, but I managed to catch up with him. I—hem—I borrowed the camels!"

"You *borrowed* the camels?" gasped Harris.

"It is the way of my country," grinned Ben Mohamet. "When one wants a thing—a horse or a woman or some little thing—he takes it. That is, if he is a better fighter than the owner of the woman or horse or what not. As he pays nothing he says he borrowed it—the woman of the horse, or, as in this case, camels! But let us go swiftly, sahibs. The camels are here. The man I borrowed from may find police somewhere. Such men, who can not protect themselves, usually do. So let us go—wherever the sahibs desire to go!"

"My God!" exclaimed Harris enthusiastically. "You big Afghan, you are a man after my own heart. You won't lose by this, either. Will he, Walters?"

"I should say not," agreed Walters.

They started an hour after sundown. Day travel in that desert was well-nigh impossible.

BEN MOHAMET seemed to know a lot about camels, which was lucky as neither Walters nor Harris did. As they ambled through the vague sheen of the moon's reflection on the sand, the Afghan regaled them with typical Afghan stories—the sort which would have made Boccaccio blush. There was one about an interesting Sultan of Swat, at which Walters protested, but which Harris enjoyed.

"But," said Ben Mohamet with marvelous surprise, "I expected the sahibs would require entertainment in this dry march. However, if Walters sahib does not enjoy my tale—and he is the only man I ever met who did not—then will I talk of other things. . . . That old rock lying over there! It must be an ancient burial place. The sahibs know, of course, that this midnight moon-sheen, near graves, is the best place to see ghosts!"

"Shut up!" growled Harris.

Ben Mohamet stopped the camels suddenly.

"See there!" he hissed.

The two Englishmen looked, and shivered. On

the rock—a fallen piece of vast masonry—an apparition leaped in the light of the moon. It looked like a skeleton at its religious devotions. . . .

“He is worshipping Shitan!” exclaimed Ben Mohamet in awed tones.

“Worshipping Satan!” echoed Harris.

“Yes,” answered Ben Mohamet in a matter-of-fact way, although his yoke seemed to indicate that, brave and tough man though he was, he would rather be somewhere else. “Yes, he worships Shitan. Would the sahibs like to go and join him?”

“What the hell do you mean?” both sahibs asked the question.

“Oh, I thought the sahibs came out into the desert maybe to study the things of the desert!” apologized Ben Mohamet. “That is not a ghost over there! No, only some devil-worshipper with leprosy. Quite harmless!”

“Drive on!” growled Harris. “Our ideas of what is harmless differ!”

Ben Mohamet urged the camels forward, but that night ride was a ride through the dead of ages, and the Afghan, with all his country’s love and dread of ghosts and djinns could not help talking about it. . . . The sand stirred by the camel’s feet was the dust of dead men—the dust of an army of long ago, the dust of many armies!

“What armies?” asked Harris.

“All of them,” answered Ben Mohamet with historical generosity. “From the time of Adam and Eve, from the time the sons of Abraham came hither to spy out the land!”

Walters coughed sarcastically.

“But what does it matter to a ghost, what army he fought in?” asked Ben Mohamet. “That mess of ruins, lying so black in the moonlight, let us rest there!”

“We will not rest until dawn!” growled Harris.

“As the sahib commands,” grunted Ben Mohamet.

Spectral shadows of monuments of lost faces. Fragments of forgotten peoples. Old when Alexander crossed the Indus. Matters of deep speculation when Buddha dreamed under the Boh tree. Bits of the beginnings of the world. Stained by blood and tears, scorched by the same old sun. . . . And, as Ben Mohamet kept muttering, the air was so full of lost souls that breathing was difficult!

“And the devil-worshippers and lepers eat snakes and rock toads—else they would starve,” added Ben Mohamet in the tone of a *moonsh*

[teacher].

“Will you shut up—*choop row, toom!*” shouted the exasperated Harris.

Ben Mohamet laughed.

“Surely if the sahib commands! But be not afraid, for I am with you! . . . Yet it is strange that ye are more afraid than I—for the English did certainly beat hell out of us Afghans in a couple of wars!”

Harris started to swear. His band was on his revolver. Walters restrained him.

“Don’t be a fool, and don’t let him see you reach for that thing! We are helpless without him to drive the camels. Don’t you know what talkers all these Pathans are? Take it easy, old man—he still obeys and will continue to obey, but he must talk—he can’t help it any more than he could help stealing a camel or a horse or a woman that looked good to him!”

“Men came to India forty thousand years ago,” muttered Ben Mohamet. “They drove the monkeys before them and took their cities—also adopted some of the monkeys’ customs. But a Chinaman was here before them. He wrote in his book, ‘. . . The desert bleaches souls and faces, and is terrible always, especially at night.’ So, when he went back to China his face had turned yellow, and the Chinese faces have been yellow ever since!”

Walters laughed.

“Some day a man, or a hundred men, will collect the notions of the Afghans in a book,” he said. “They are wonderful beyond education!”

“Get along, you spawn of filth,” Ben Mohamet urged the camels.

And so the dreadful night passed. Ended in heat and sand. Clothes, eyes, ears, hair—all filled with sand. A horrible, clinging sand.

“Blood in it!” said Ben Mohamet cheerfully.

They made a weary camp among some ruins, so lonely and deserted that it might have been an apex of the world never reached by men—the ruins the broken toys of young gods. . . . They were too tired to eat. Ben Mohamet tethered the camels, but there was neither drink nor food for them. Then the three men sank into uneasy sleep.

But before sleeping Ben Mohamet faced in the direction of Mecca and said his prayers.

THEY started again that night. That desert has never been properly explored, and India is so filled with ancient ruins and buried cities and

monuments to the great dead—King Asoka alone erected sixty-nine thousand monuments all over the country to Gotama Sidartha—that the archeologists had never troubled the desert ruins, merely classifying them, more or less correctly or incorrectly, with certain periods. To Walters these wrecks of empires were intensely interesting, but they were not there to explore.

“I am coming back here some time,” he whispered to Harris.

“You’ll come alone, then,” stuttered Harris as his camel put its foot into a yawning hole, which Ben Mohamet explained, with his usual air of knowing all about the world’s horrible things, was the grave of a woman who was never properly married!

“No grave of such woman ever closes,” he said, “because the ghost of the woman who did not obey the Law ever tries to crawl out to go and get married properly—then slips back and crawls out and slips back for eons, until the time appointed!”

But they saw neither jackals nor holy men, which was a relief, and on the dawn of the fourth day Harris checked up and told Walters that the place was only a few miles ahead.

“If that old man you, er—hum,” growled Walters, who was tired and nervous.

“If he what?” snapped Harris, who was equally worn out.

“If he really knew what he was talking about, and wasn’t kidding you,” Walters replied.

“He wasn’t kidding me,” answered Harris. “He believed I would keep my promise and carry the Key to the Secret to his friend. I swore I would, you know, on that crucifix! Unfortunately, the old man was unable to tell me the name of his friend! He only managed to babble about a Jerawah, which means an outlaw. Otherwise, of course, I would have taken the Key to whoever the old man desired me to!”

“Of course!” laughed Walters. “By the way, it’s a damn good job you made certain that Ben Mohamet does not understand English!”

“He’s a good man,” replied Harris, “and should be able to dig well. There may be quite a bit of digging, you know!”

But when they reached the spot which, according to the Key given by the King of the Jerawahs, was the entrance to the pleasure room of the great Alexander, Harris got a surprise. Ben Mohamet positively refused to dig!

“I am a Durani. I am a fighter. It is beneath a Durani to work,” he said shortly.

“But—” began Harris.

“Dig yourself,” said Ben Mohamet insultingly, and one must know India to appreciate what an insult it was, coming from an Afghan to an Englishman. “I knew you were lying when you said you wanted to hunt! Men don’t hunt with little revolvers and shovels. But dig! I will sit here at my ease and watch you!”

Harris dragged out his revolver. Walters shouted at him not to shoot, but Harris aimed at Ben Mohamet and pulled the trigger. There was a click.

Ben Mohamet laughed. Harris screamed:

“There are no shells in it!”

Ben Mohamet laughed again.

“Of course not,” he giped. “I extracted them! I even threw away the extra ones you had! I did that when I discovered you were liars! Such liars might get angry with me, and try to shoot me! Well, I may be shot some day, or more likely, be hanged—as you will be. But if I am shot I want to be shot by a man—not by a liar!”

Astounded by the sudden turn of events, Harris could only gasp. Here was the servant he had expected to make do the heavy work of digging first refusing to dig and then reviling both Walters and himself, after carefully making their revolvers harmless.

Ben Mohamet was thinking: “Now, while eventually I intend to let these dirty crooks know who I am, I must be careful not to let them suspect I am a friend of certain members of a criminal society. The existence of the Jerawahs must remain unknown to them. Quite an interesting job! Because, also, I have to be very careful that the Jerawahs don’t even imagine I am a secret service man!”

Aloud he drawled: “Go ahead and dig, sahibs! I won’t stop your digging! All I will prevent is your shooting me! And as that is already accomplished—I will now rest and watch you dig!”

“You traitor!” stormed the helpless Harris.

“Not that,” laughed Ben Mohamet. “You hired me to go hunting, not to dig. Had you told me all the truth there would have been no trouble.”

Walters broke in with: “Wait till evening. We’re all hot and tired now, and don’t feel like doing anything. Wait, and keep quiet. We will find a way to handle this damned Afghan!”

So they waited through the heat of the day, until

the dusk began etching fantastic shadows among the ruins—rains of monoliths of the Dawn Men showing strangely among fallen facades of bits of Buddhist temples and palaces of dead and forgotten kings and empires—with an early moon lending a ghostliness to it all.

“You won’t dig, Ben Mohamet?” asked Harris.

“Digging is for coolies!” drawled Ben Mohamet. “I will watch!”

There was nothing for Harris and Walters to do but dig. And the sand was loose and difficult, and the night was hot. But to their surprise the way was not long. A few feet below the surface of the spot so carefully marked on Harris’ chart—made from the feeble lines drawn by the fingernail of the dying King of the Jerawahs—their shovels struck wood. Exultantly they tore into their digging. The delighted exclamations rang oddly in broken English phrases among the ruins, where the dark lay like black pools edged with silver.

“Someone has been here not so very long ago!” panted Harris.

“The boards proved that!” gasped Walters as he tugged at the end of one of them. “And they also prove that it was not robbers. Robbers would not have troubled to cover the place again after getting the loot!”

Ben Mohamet, apparently indifferent, watched eagerly. . . .

The boards were lifted, disclosing a short flight of old stone steps.

“So,” thought Ben Mohamet, “the kings, or some of them, who preceded me came here to see that everything was in order.” He chuckled, “But I’ll bet they didn’t have two Englishmen to dig for them! Had to do it themselves!”

But Harris and Walters had dashed down the steps, and were trying to open a door of heavy brass—a beautifully wrought thing, green with the patina of twenty-two hundred years. They could not budge it. They sweated and pushed and tried to pull it open. They were tired with digging, and the door defied them.

The powerful form of Ben Mohamet came down the steps.

“I do not mind opening the door,” he drawled, “Digging in the sand is different. But what in hell is this place? Tell me that!”

Walters answered, after a warning touch on Harris’ elbow.

“An old tomb,” he said. “We may find some

little gold or other treasure there. Help us with the door, and you shall have some of the gold!”

Ben Mohamet laughed.

“I would open a lot of doors for gold,” he said. “But I will not allow you to *give* me any. No! If I see anything I want I will take it—as I did the camels!”

“Let’s jump him! There are two of us!” whispered Harris.

“Let him do the heavy work first,” cautioned Walters, while Bugs grinned. He grinned, and then, as the swaggering Ben Mohamet, he cried out:

“One side, weaklings! Let a *man* do this thing!”

Bugs was an unusually strong man, with the gift of being able to release every pound of energy at a given moment. He applied himself to the door strongly. The door moved slightly. Bugs gathered himself and went at the door like a halfback making a touchdown through the line. Next moment he was sprawling in the stuffy darkness of the Pleasure Room of Alexander of Macedon. The door lay under him. He had broken it down, not opened it!

Astonished at such athletic force, Harris and Walters ceased for the moment to be crooks. They applauded as at a football game.

“Bring the lamps!” ordered Ben Mohamet, and the two Englishmen hastened to obey.

What did it matter? Nothing mattered now they had the place! So they tried to comfort themselves as they ran to obey their servant, the Afghan!

EAGERLY, with trembling fingers they lit the lamps and carried them down the ancient seeps—steps once trodden by Alexander, his court, his slaves, his dancing girls. The brief movements of the acrid desert air stirred faint whisperings in the sand, until even the callous crooks felt awed by a feeling of the supernatural, a sense of something beyond the senses. . . . At the doorway Ben Mohamet waited.

“I can hear, smell and see ghosts,” he said hollowly. “And we had better wait a few minutes for the air in there to clear!”

“You afraid?” snarled Harris.

“Much afraid,” answered Ben Mohamet, calmly and without shame. “Go in there in the dark—one may breathe but not easily—go in there in the dark, and maybe you will see what I saw! If you do you will . . . but go in, in the dark!”

“Hell,” growled Walters. “The air’s all right.

Ghosts are the bunk. Come on, Harris, let's go in, with the lamps, of course!"

But Harris hesitated. The fear that comes to the murderer had gripped him.

"I'm just as eager as you to see what's inside, but let's wait a moment," he gasped.

Walters had better nerves. He laughed.

"What was it you saw in there that scared you, Ben Mohamet?" he asked.

"The ghost of an old man," answered Ben Mohamet, with an excellent shiver. "That ghost motioned me to go away. Its lips moved. I thought it was the guardian of the tomb—you said it was a tomb! But I was mistaken. Because the ghost tried to tell me that he had been a king when alive! I could not understand what country he was king of, but he did manage to make me understand that he had been murdered. So, I came out quickly, and very much afraid. All men know that the ghost of a murdered king is the most dangerous sort of ghost."

Harris felt sick. But the word "king" somewhat reassured him. He did not know that he had killed the king of the Jerawahs.

"King?" he asked.

"He said so!" exclaimed Ben Mohamet.

And then he very accurately described the old king whom Harris had so cruelly murdered. . . .

"My God!" Harris leaned against the wall.

"Oh hell, come on in!" sneered Walters. "What's eating you? Scared of ghosts! Well, no ghost shows under lamplight, and we have three lamps! Come on!"

He went through the doorway, and Harris got hold of himself and followed. And what he saw dispelled any fear of ghosts he might have had. The Treasure of the Conqueror! The place of his many loves. The hidden sleeping room and banquet hall of Alexander the Great, heaped high with the loot of conquered cities of India, which he had left there before he crossed the river Indus for the last time. The treasure he had left in charge of a criminal! And which the kings of the criminals had guarded ever since!

The marvel of this faithful care was, of course, lost to the two crooks, who knew nothing about the Jerawahs, but to the secret service man it was a greater wonder than the treasure itself.

Two pillars of gold, carved with ancient Greek inscriptions. The two crooks only cared that the pillars were gold, but Ben Mohamet was more interested in the inscriptions.

"Hollow!" exclaimed Harris, tapping the pillars. "But worth thousands!"

"Sayings of Aristotle engraved in gold!" thought Bugs. "Very fitting! Aristotle was Alexander's first teacher, of course! By Jove, Oxford University did teach me something besides football!"

"Those old lamps!" Harris' voice cracked. "Solid gold!"

Bugs noticed that the lamps had been left trimmed and ready—as if Alexander had gone hunting and was coming back there to his home to sleep.

Then suddenly the marvel of the place got Walters, who had some poetry in his soul and no recent murder on it.

"That little silver slipper in the corner there," he exclaimed. "The slipper of a slave girl. Lovely as a flower! The slipper dropped from her foot a few moments ago! She was scared by our coming in, and ran away in a hurry! See! There! She is watching us from over there, in the shadows!"

"Oh, cut it out!" growled Harris. "Do your play-acting on a stage when we get out of this with the stuff! Attend to business now! How are we going to get it all away from here? It will require a couple of motor trucks. More than that. . . . Never mind seeing girls among the shadows!"

He walked toward the shadows.

"My God!" he exclaimed.

"What?" Walters almost squealed.

He might well cry out. For the shadow in which he had pretended to see the dancing girl was thrown by what has been called "The Legend of India." The magnificent bed of Alexander. Even the working coolies, the lowest castes, have been told the story of that bed by their mothers when they were children. . . . That great bed of ivory, of perfect elephants' tusks, a marvel of arrangement, interlaced and bound together by bands of gold. . . . That was the bed—all India knew of the bed! But the story—and all India knew the story!

For on the great bed, among the fragments of her tattered finery, lay the skeleton of the favorite dancing girl of Alexander. . . . And the simple, pathetic tale. She had danced her best for the king, but he had been—as he often was at that time, when he was beginning to claim that he was a god—he had been irritable. He had not meant to hurt her, but he had said that her dancing was not pleasing to him. And the girl had flung herself on

the great bed and thrust a dagger into her own heart, and died there. So grieved that her dancing did not please. . . . The fallen slipper was hers. The two crooks did not know the story. They were merely Englishmen, and the mothers of India do not tell their prettiest stories to the conquering race. But Bugs, Ben Mohamet, knew the tale. How Alexander had gone away from the place, leaving the body of the girl on the bed. How sudden remorse had overtaken him.

"Close the door," he had ordered. "The place shall be her tomb!"

One of his generals had suggested they remove the enormous treasure, but Alexander had turned savagely on him.

"Close the door!" he commanded.

Then he had placed the criminal Jerawah in charge of the tomb of the dancing girl.

"Guard it until I return!"

Then he had gone, leaving the dead girl amid the gold of a hundred cities. So, just as the Taj Mahal was the tomb of Mumtaz Mahal, the favorite wife of Shah Jehan, so was the ancient pleasure house of Alexander the tomb of a little dancing girl, whose name was quite unknown.

Harris had turned away from the skeleton, and Walters was saying, "Now, who do you think that was when it was alive?"

He spoke callously, sneeringly. He little dreamed that Ben Mohamet, who of course knew no English, had to hold himself, to control his anger with all the self-control he had so long cultivated—lest he, too soon, betray his identity as Horace Sinnat by thrashing Walters, as such sacrilege deserved.

Harris was shouting. The old walls echoed to an alien language. Never before had they heard English.

"Urns! Urns! Golden urns!"

"Wine urns!" exulted Walters. "Open one and see if there's a drink in it!"

Harris tore the top off a magnificent Grecian urn. The light showed some little red mud at the bottom of it—the wine had dried to that. But even to such gluttonous crooks the sight of so much gold became oppressive. They began to wonder how they were going to get it across the desert; how they would sell it to the best advantage. . . . They were discussing this when Harris noticed that Ben Mohamet was not in sight.

"Where the hell has that swine gone?" asked

Harris.

He learned quickly. Ben Mohamet came running through the doorway from outside. He was plainly scared.

"The robbers of the desert, sahibs!" he said. "And the big fool I was—throwing away the shells for your revolvers. The robbers come. They will kill us all! We cannot fight them. They are terrible men. Let us run quickly, sahibs!"

"But the loot?" snarled Harris painfully.

"If we run quickly the robbers will not find us," Ben Mohamet spoke hurriedly. "We may close the entrance, and they may not find the place. But if we stay here they will hear and find us. . . . Let us run. We must, to save our lives. Quick, let us close the entrance!"

The robbers were very close! The two crooks hurried. They had laid down the planks—to lift the great door would have taken too long—and were trying to hide the planks with sand, when Ben Mohamet pointed with a trembling finger. And Harris and Walters saw!

Stalking among the ruins, the moonlight that glittered on their weapons making them seem gigantic, was a body of men.

"Quick!" Ben Mohamet gripped an arm of each of his employers. "Run! This way!"

Fear took possession of the two crooks. They ran, stumbling through the sand and over fallen stones of antiquity—Ben Mohamet guiding them they ran—northward. They ran until the Englishmen could run no farther. Harris and Walters threw themselves down, choking with fatigue; and even Bugs was tired. But the loss of the loot rose in agony in them.

"I can never find my way back among those twisting ruins," sobbed Harris. "My compass and the chart are with our things in camp—and the robbers must have them. If this swine hadn't stolen our shells we might have shot it out with the robbers!"

"He's just a cowardly boaster," gasped Walters. "He was worse scared than we were!"

He stopped talking suddenly—horrified. Harris gripped him in terror. Ben Mohamet seemed unmoved.

Soft footsteps in the sand. And a horrible sound—men with broken mouths trying to talk, mewling like strange, sick cats. . . .

"The lepers!" said Ben Mohamet shortly.

They came forward cringing, those poor

outcasts. The moon showed their hideous deformity, their starved and wasted bodies, the horror of their fell disease. They came and crowded about the horrified Englishmen. But Ben Mohamet waved them back gently. He turned to the two crooks.

"Find some small coins in your pockets," he commanded. "Then I will get rid of these. Otherwise they will crowd so close that they will touch us—and you know what that will mean!" he concluded significantly.

Harris and Walters thrust their hands into their pockets and searched. They found altogether three rupees and six annas. They gave them to Ben Mohamet. Ben Mohamet waved the lepers farther back, and spoke sonorously.

"In the name of Allah the Compassionate Compassioner!" he intoned. "In the name of the One God and His Prophet Mohamet. In such great Names, and of the Charity ordained by the Kuran, do I give thee these alms. Take them, brothers of pain, and go thy ways, for, behold, it is all we have. In the name of Allah, the One God whose compassion for His children never dies—take these poor alms, and go in peace!"

He threw the money to the poor fellows. They picked it up painfully with broken and withered fingers. They bowed like shadows and went. The three rupees six annas was a small fortune to them. . . .

"My God," exclaimed Walters. "Ben Mohamet spoke like a Mohametan Mullah—with the voice of an English bishop of Oxford!"

"Forget the talk," growled Harris. "I am dying of thirst, and when I get a drink I shall be starving!"

"We need food and drink badly," Walters spoke to Ben Mohamet. "You gave all our money to those sick beggars. We have left millions behind us! What are we to do?"

Ben Mohamet laughed.

"That is easy," he said. "Money would not help you—there are no bazars on the desert. But I will get food and drink. You stay right here, so that I may find you easily when I come back with the food!"

"How will you get it?" Walters was incredulous.

"As I got the camels," laughed Ben Mohamet. "Steal, of course. Those damned robbers will be in our camp. They will have food of their own, too. I will go back and take what we need—all I can carry—from those robbers. Steal it!"

Ben Mohamet walked away.

"The fellow is the most wonderful bunch of contradictions I ever saw," said Walters.

"Are you fool enough to think he will come back?" asked Harris.

"We'll wait and see, anyhow!" exclaimed Walters.

BUGS walked away from the two crooks. He walked fast, but he did not have to go all the way back to the treasure room of Alexander. Half a mile from where Harris and Walters waited, two "robbers of the desert," Jerawahs of course, met him with both food and drink.

"You obeyed orders well, Coomer Ali," said Bugs as he took the stuff. "Now act in my place, and guard the treasure until I come for it. The others will obey me, of course, even if they did not realize that they would be helpless trying to dispose of the gold. The British Raj is not so hard on poor men, and the Raj will pay us very well for the gold—better than anyone else. The Raj will claim some of it—that is the law—for getting us money for it that we can use. But be at peace. We are just poor wandering men who found the treasure, and reported the finding honestly. The government will never know we are Jerawahs!"

"What did the white men know?" asked Coomer Ali.

"Just as I thought, and told you when you brought the camels," answered Bugs. "They were doctors in the hospital where the king died. They gave our king a talking drug, and got the Key of the Place from him! But they told no one else. They dare not tell. They won't tell now, because they hope to come back some day—when it will be too late. And if they did tell they know that no one would believe them—because they are both known to be awful liars!"

"They must die!" exclaimed Coomer Ali.

"Don't worry," said king Ben Mohamet grimly. "They will both die!"

He made a significant gesture about his throat, and walked back to Harris and Walters with the food. . . .

"We are near the edge of the desert, to the north," he told them as they ate eagerly. "We will walk a few more miles. You must walk, or you will never have a chance to come back for the loot, because the robbers will miss the food and follow my tracks and find us and kill us! Hurry, now!"

They walked, painfully. As they walked they

whispered a plot to turn and kill Ben Mohamet.

“We can’t let this fellow get away with the secret of the place,” said Harris. “See, the sand is getting firmer. We are at the edge of the desert, and soon will be at some town. When you are ready, say so. Then we will jump this damned Afghan!”

“Ready!” whispered Walters a few moments later.

The dark hour before the dawn was paling to the coming sun. Harris and Walters jumped suddenly at Ben Mohamet. With a swift movement he eluded them, laughing as he dodged. Then his voice grew stern, and he said grimly, *in English*:

“That’s enough!”

And so quickly that neither Harris nor Walters could see where he got if from, Bugs pulled his automatic from under his clothes. . . . The two crooks were staring with open mouths. Then Walters gasped brokenly:

“You . . . talk . . . English?”

“Naturally!” drawled Bugs in that language.

“But . . . but. . . who are you?”

“My name is Sinnat . . . of the secret service!” drawled Bugs.

“My God!” Harris cried. “The one man every crook in India fears!”

The day came with its usual suddenness. Walters was pointing as he shivered. Three men—three splendid Sikh policemen on horses—were cantering toward them.

Harris was babbling. He had lost his head entirely.

“Sikh police!” he gasped. “But . . . we don’t want them!”

“No,” answered Bugs. “But they want you! You are wanted—for murder! And you, Walters, as an accessory! Probably there are many other crimes! Stand up now. You are a couple of rotters, but try to remember that you were born white, and don’t act the coward before these Sikhs!”