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THE FANATIC

By KOBOLD KNIGHT

A grim story of the Moplah rebellion in India, a Mohammedan uprising and an English woman who came to Pallampaki to convert the heathen

GUGU PAYAPAN SOORLIE—or just Gugu, as his mother called him for short—was no gurgling infant. His chest measurement was forty-eight inches, with an expansion of six when he gently sighed; he stood five feet and a bit high and was in fact a very healthy, average specimen of the bad Moplah-men who inhabited the fever-stricken backwater country of the Malabar Coast in India.

Gugu had the hawk eyes and the hook nose of his ancestors, the Arab pirates who, generations past, scourged the East and left racial legacies on every coast from the Laccadives and the Coromandel to the distant Carolines—and back again. He had inherited much of their fierce, cruel nature and indifference to suffering, early demonstrations of which occasioned his doting mother much pardonable pride.

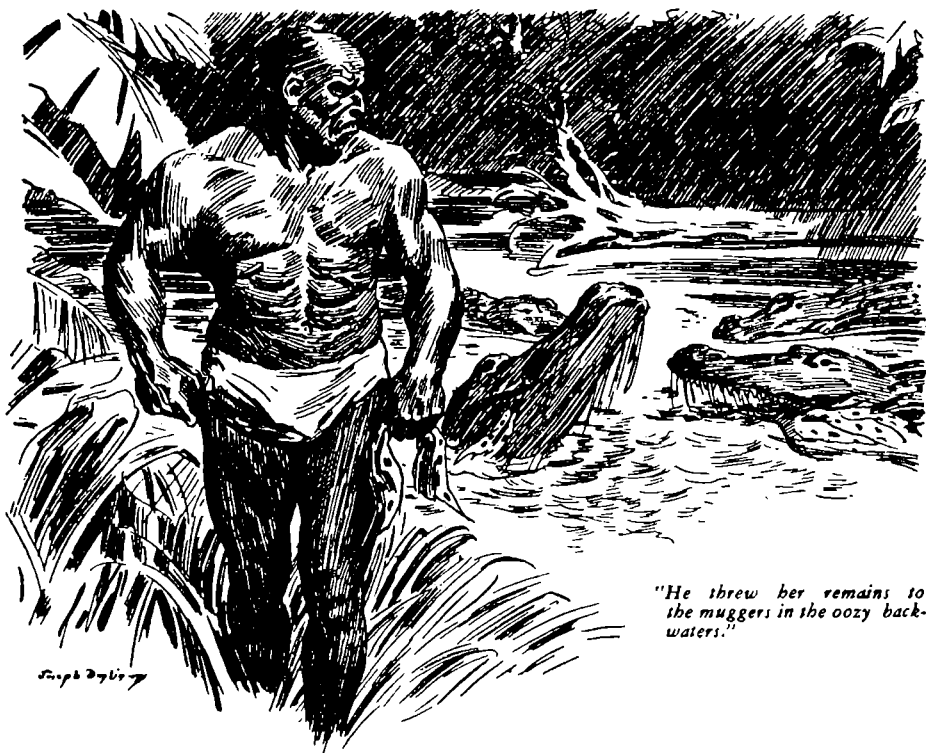
At the age of fifteen, Gugu one day tired of the everlasting maternal worship, artistically skewered the lady with his ten-inch pen-knife and threw her remains to the muggers in the oozy backwaters. For this precocious prowess he was rewarded with the envy of all the young men in his village—and incidentally earned the immediate displeasure of Saunders Sahib, the European Senior District Police Superintendent.

With his worldly belongings packed tightly in a small chatty-pot, his loin-cloth and his knife, Gugu fled the neighborhood and took up residence farther south in the malodorous hamlet of Pallampaki, wot not to Saunders Sahib of the North. Here, by dint of his strength,

his ready aptitude amicably to settle all personal discussions with his trusty blade, and his irreproachable piety—for he was a good Mohammedan—Gugu quickly ingratiated himself with his foster-tribe. Five months later found him installed as yard-coolie at the bungalow of Pemberton Sahib, the young, red-haired, pink-complexioned and newly-appointed representative of His Majesty's Law in Pallampaki.

Young Pemberton, three months out from home, employed his ample leisure, fanned by a punkah and refrigerated by lime-juice and soda, in the earnest composition of a treatise entitled *The Mind of the Oriental*. In Gugu, his new yard-boy, Pemberton found endless "material." Gugu's piety, inherited from those same passionate Moslems who left their ineradicable marks all over the East, set the Moplah turning his shiny eagle-face Mecca-wards at least three times a day—quite regardless of where circumstances and his bungalow duties found him. Pemberton, much impressed, spent hours questioning the ingenuous Gugu—through a Mallialum interpreter—and learning all about it. Much he learnt; among it, why boot-leather was unclean and how the Prophet would one day lift Gugu into Paradise by the little top-knot of hair that grew, like a solitary coco-palm in a convex paddy-field, on the very summit of Gugu's shaven cranium.

It was at about this time that there stalked righteously forth from the provinces of England a spinster lady bent on the salvation of the heathen. Armed with



"He threw her remains to the muggers in the oozy backwaters."

six bales of striped bathing-drawers and two gross of cotton nightgowns wherewith to clothe the heathen's nakedness, countless pamphlets and brochures calculated to bring enlightenment to his soul, and other appurtenances, Miss Laetitia Shane landed like a crusader at Allepei, girt her loins and declared red war on heathendom. She brought with her a secretary in the person of a singularly attractive and no less pious niece—Miss Mollie Shane, aged eighteen.

The vicissitudes of the mission were many and varied. They began with a most sudden reverse and an undignified rout on the night of their arrival—when it was discovered that the Travellers' Bungalow was infested with playful little backwater tarantulas no bigger than saucers! They ended—more or less—after

heartbreaking hardship, with the arrival of both members of the party on stretchers and in the throes of a first attack of backwater malaria at Pallampaki—up away and beyond, near the Ghats.

Fate sits like some grotesque telephone-operator at a fantastic central-exchange, here plugging in a new connection, there pulling out an old. At the same time as the Misses Shane (fifty-five and eighteen, respectively) established themselves at Pallampaki, all sorts of other things happened and were happening. Some they knew of; others they did not; but, like troubles, they all came together. The saddest shock to Miss Laetitia was the discovery that her "heathen," hitherto almost fondly regarded as fair and easy game, cherished a faith of their own and practised it with a zeal that was at once

an enlightenment and a shattering of English provincial views! Almost as sad was her suspicion that Mollie was losing enthusiasm. Simultaneously, young Pemberton cast eyes upon Miss Mollie, Miss Mollie flashed back a glance that was indicative of an inner turmoil between pious denial and impious desire—and the Eastern Cupid, cradling two hundred feet aloft in the bows of an ironwood-tree, chortled and blew butterfly-kisses to the benign Gods that are.

Meanwhile Gugu, the yard-wallah, had got into religious difficulties of his own—a contretemps considerably more serious for him than it would have been for his ethical brother in Europe. In between whiles he had gone and had a little love affair off his own bat. As befitted a man pulsating with that intense passion that, incongruously, makes saints or sinners merely as the caprice moves it, Gugu's love-making had been virile—no mere presentation of calling-cards and polite exchange of coy glances. It had involved, first, the slaughter of an arrogant and indignant husband—for the lady, aged thirteen, was already bestowed in respectable wedlock. This was nothing. It had been a fair fight (and it was quite a while since native Pallampaki had enjoyed such entertainment). The really important lapse was occasioned by the ardent Gugu's disregard of an ecclesiastical injunction. The priest, after watching and thoroughly approving the fight, had ordered that a short while should be allowed to pass before Gugu and his new consort entered into their connubial bliss. This in order to propitiate the Gods. Gugu, eaten with passion, had been flagrantly disobedient, and as a result had been summarily excommunicated. The process was morally similar to that practised in other lands—but again it was infinitely more serious. The actual cere-

mony had been simplicity itself; the priest had whisked out a sharp knife and deftly severed Gugu's top-knot!

FOR a few days after his anathematization Gugu padded the footpath between the police bungalow and the native quarter merrily enough. His hand closing about the haft of his pig-sticker—skilfully concealed under his loin-cloth—gave him reassurance that nothing was more remote than the possibility of an untimely death. He comforted himself by reflecting that the top-knot would soon grow to its original, pre-excommunication height of four or five inches.

But underneath his healthy bravado there persisted yet a little uneasiness. It was a horrible contemplation even in its remoteness—that were death to overtake him the Prophet would have nothing by which to grip hold of him, and thus he would be left lamenting while all other good Moplahs were lifted into Heaven! Each day as he passed by the crocodile-infested swamps on his way to the bungalow he bent his shaven head downward and observed carefully by the reflection in the green, stagnant water just what progress his top-knot had made in the past twenty-four hours.

Slow as that progress was, he was satisfied with it. It was inconvenient, of course—having no top-knot. There were one or two minor disputes he desired to settle with certain bloods of the locality (there were always one or two such discussions on hand), but these, he decided with some perspicacity, could wait awhile. He did not care to embark on them until risk to his immortal soul was minimized by a new sturdy growth of top-knot to accommodate the Prophet's fist—if it came. And then Fate plugged in one of those senseless, illogical connections, and poor old Gugu opened his black eyes as wide as the night-owl's and frantically

racked what brain he possessed—not much—for a means of saving himself.

It came insidiously but surely—the whispered news that Hasan Hadji, the Moplah overlord of those parts, was about to summon the faithful to rise up, massacre the infidels and liberate the land. Old Hasan, grown stiff-limbed and irritable through long inactivity, had decided that it was high time to have another shindy against his suzerain, the Emperor of India. The edict was noised forth in undertones in the darker corners of the mosques—after the manner of the Moplah kind.

The signs that should have warned Pemberton, Pallampaki's policeman, that all was not well in Malabar, passed unnoticed. (One does not blame Pemberton, of course. Three months in India leaves quite a fair bit more about India to be learnt. Besides he was too busy, writing his *Mind of the Oriental*.) But up in the North old Saunders Sahib, saddened and hardened and sharpened by his thirty years among the volcanic Moplah-folk, began to scent the trouble within forty-eight hours of Hasan's fit of irritability—which was as well, and what he was there for. He discovered it the sooner because he was half expecting something of the sort. Such uprisings have been periodical affairs in the territory of the bad Moplah-men ever since first the Arab pirate-dhows swooped down like kites with the southwest monsoon—to chase the peace-loving Dravidians into sanctuary beyond the great Ghats. In fact, this particular tamasha was long overdue. So when Saunders found his Moplah syce sharpening his knife on the sly and expectorating vehemently whenever his infidel master's presence polluted the air, Saunders Sahib quickly sat down and drafted a code telegram to the General Officer commanding His Majesty's Forces at Jeltanpur.

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The actual wording of the missive is unimportant, but it meant:

"Please send plenty of good soldiers and pop-guns to help me down here. Old Hasan's had a bilious attack and there's going to be trouble. Urgent. Don't forget I have half a dozen young pups scattered about the country who can't talk the lingo and haven't quite learnt their jobs. Juldee-juldee.

"SAUNDERS."

If Saunders was jumping about like an electrified cat at his end of the country, friend Gugu, down in the South, was no less perturbed. He was far too devout a Moslem to contemplate keeping out of the row—when Hasan gave the signal for the overture to begin—as a means of safeguarding his soul. Top-knot or no top-knot, he would fight! He reverently attended divine service, was duly blessed and given alleged invulnerability by the same priest who had so lately excommunicated him—and he spent the evenings sharpening his knife until the edge on it would have brought a blush to the hollow-ground blade of a Kropp razor. He gloated openly on the number of Christians he would dismember and visioned himself arriving at the gates of Paradise with a long and valiant record of the "kafir-killing" he had done for the glory of the One True Faith! It was at this point that Gugu always became a little uneasy.

What if an infidel bullet were to kill him—before the top-knot had had time to grow? Dreadful! Then Gugu would go to sleep and dream nightmare-dreams of the Prophet's hand slipping and slithering forlornly about the half-inch tuft of greasy, kinky hair that now adorned Gugu's head. Horrible! It mattered very little that the priest had assured him to the contrary—since his return to the fold. Gugu respected and revered clergymen—but he had a sneaking suspicion that one could not believe *quite* everything they said.

"Nerves" is not a very fashionable complaint among the Moplahs. (Those who suffer from it die young. Nerve-specialists die young also—from want of employment.) By the time a week of waiting for Hasan's signal had gone by, Gugu had worked himself into a state that might accurately have been diagnosed as acute neurosis. In this time the top-knot had added another quarter-inch to its height. This was scarcely enough, for it was rumored that the hullabaloo was due to begin in five days' time. Five days! By then the hair might reasonably be expected to have attained to—say—an inch. (To be sure Gugu thought of it as a "thumbnail" —but no matter.) Yoh! What self-respecting Prophet's hand could be expected to get a grip on an inch of hair—a grip firm enough to lift a solid fifteen stone of flesh and muscle? Gugu was at his wit's end!

IT WAS in conversation with Pemberton's head bungalow "butler"—a most superior individual—that Gugu learnt of hair-restorer. The butler, it seemed, had once served a bald-headed planter in the Dooars who had smeared his head with a magic preparation out of a bottle. Swamy! The hair had sprouted upon the Sahib's head like the new grass on the Ghats after a hot-weather rain! There was a bottle of the same preparation standing on Pemberton Sahib's dressing-table. (That was the connection.)

That, actually, the liquid was no more than brilliantine, used to smooth the young policeman's unruly, ruddy locks, was of little moment. For a consideration that deprived the credulous Gugu of his last piece, the butler stole it.

Alas, the brilliantine-bottle was found to be empty! Since his acquaintance with Miss Mollie Shane, Pemberton had had frequent recourse to it—and used it all! Catastrophe upon catastrophe! Gugu, his

new-raised hopes thus dashed to the ground, was like a man demented. There was only one thing now to be done. To beg leave of absence and an advance of his month's wages and to set out for the coast; there to purchase from the Parsee merchants a bottle of the precious magic-juice, rapidly apply it to his seedy top-knot and return in time for the beginning of the fracas—so that he might slaughter Pemberton personally and miss none of the glory.

He approached his master. Pemberton did not see eye to eye with him in the matter, forbade leave, declined to advance the ten rupees, set Gugu about his business—and went on to begin "Chapter 13" of *The Mind of the Oriental*. (A most unlucky chapter—as things turned out.)

Gugu stretched his few wits again and begged leave to see the elder Miss Shane. (He had heard stories of how easy it was to get money out of the lady.) He squatted on the compound and wept copious tears, inventing on the spot a long yarn about a mother recently deceased in the vicinity of Allepei. (It had just that little grain of truth in it that gave it conviction—though to be sure Gugu was not truthful in the detail!) But Miss Laetitia had learnt a surprizing lot in the short while she had been in Malabar and very rightly declined to part with ten rupees so abruptly. She suggested a compromise. Provided Gugu would abandon his heathen ways, she conceded, discard his picturesquely draped loincloth, assume striped-cotton bathing-drawers, and at once embrace the manners, morals and particular religion of a people and a country he had never seen—and hardly knew of—provided all this she would ultimately advance him the sum of five rupees.

Gugu, very polite, inquired whether it was possible to accomplish all this uplift

in the short space of five days. Miss Shane returned an emphatic no.

Gugu, realizing that he might hope for little here, mentally resolved that when Hasan Hadji gave the sign, he—Gugu—would attend personally also to the dispatch of this godless woman. (He dwelt on the manner of it for one ecstatic instant. Had Miss Shane been gifted with the faculty of telepathy she would have fainted on the spot.) Aloud, Gugu embarked on a series of untranslatable and unpublishable reflections on Miss Shane's appearance, her integrity and her chastity. Those about her chastity were—happily—baseless. Having rid himself of this homily, to the vast secret entertainment of the interpreter, and added to it a little lecture on the crime of sterility, Gugu swung eloquently upon his hardened heel and padded off to think out further schemes—and to give an extra anticipatory whetting to his knife.

THAT night Gugu unburdened his soul to his newly acquired wife. It was against his better judgment, but, husband-like, he did it. On the following morning his wife, wife-like, gossiped Gugu's trouble to the Shane bungalow ayah. That was how Miss Mollie got to know.

Whether Mollie was moved by religious ardor, whether she merely wanted an excuse to go to Pemberton's bungalow (for Aunt Laetitia had been *rather* strict just lately), or whether the story of Gugu's recent love-affair touched a sympathetic spot in her, it will probably never be known. However it was, she managed to spend the better part of two hours with Pemberton that next morning—discussing Gugu. Actually, only about ten minutes of this time had any relevance to that worthy—but never mind. Then Mollie betook herself with an interpreter to Gugu. She had a plan—and a trump card to work it. Aunt Laetitia's hair had lately

been falling out in chunks, and Aunt Laetitia—unostentatiously, of course—doctored it with a potent hair-restorer. Mollie had a small phial of the mixture on her person. She reasoned that a convert at the price of a small bottle of hair-tonic was logically a far greater achievement than a convert at the price of ten rupees. (Wouldn't Aunt Laetitia be pleased when she heard!)

That night found Gugu clad in a pair of the striped-cotton drawers, armed with a pamphlet setting forth in glowing terms—like an insurance agent's prospectus—the rival merits of an alien creed and the undoubted advantages to be had by adopting it—and a small bottle of hair-restorer.

Since Gugu was entirely innocent of literary ability, the booklet was soon abandoned. He gazed at it patiently for upward of a solid hour, holding it upside down and waiting for it to perform the magic that had so enthusiastically been claimed for it. But at length, since nothing happened except that his arm became a little stiff, he lugubriously laid it aside. The rest of the night he spent alternately rubbing Aunt Laetitia's hair-tonic on his head and waking his wife to inquire the progress his top-knot had made.

THE thunderbolt fell. Gugu discarded his new religion and his new pants in the blink of an eyelid, oiled himself from head to foot, shouted and twirled himself into a passion, and in the ranks of a few thousand other howling insensate human fiends sought infidels to carve to pieces.

Pallampaki, as a small European community, was very lucky. Thanks to the far-sightedness of Saunders of the North, a small detachment of Carnatics arrived just before the noise began. When the blow fell and the Moplahs, to the last man, went shrieking amuck, Pallampaki was more or less ready for them. But only more or less. Two persons at least among

the Europeans were unprepared. The first was Pemberton, because of his inexperience and because of his *Mind of the Oriental*. (He had rather stuck in the middle of "Chapter 13.") The other was Mollie Shane. Through Pemberton's short-sightedness the girl he loved was carried off within a quarter of an hour of the launching of Hasan's rebellion. It was a question who suffered more, Mollie or the man whose fault it was. Pemberton, half demented, dared not leave the stockade about the village godown that formed the European refuge. There he waited, suffering the tortures of the thrice damned.

Malabar was a shambles. The fiends, seeking death rather than avoiding it, attacked, maimed and butchered until the green of the backwaters was turned to a dull red. And Mollie was among them—somewhere! Pemberton and Miss Laetitia in the stockade worked like devils at barricading the godown, dreading to cease lest they should contemplate Mollie's probable fate and go mad. Toward night-fall, when hope had been abandoned, they leapt again to their weary feet—their feeling a mixture of amazement and terror. Somewhere outside, Mollie's faint, frantic voice called for help!

Pemberton was the first out of the godown; Miss Laetitia, armed only with her shining faith, was next; followed the jemadar and half a dozen of his men. At the end of the narrow village street, deserted since the hour Hasan's hand had struck, Mollie struggled to free herself from the grasp of a powerful, thick-set Moplah! The soldiers, headed now by the demented young policeman, hurled themselves forward. The Moplah let go the girl and with his great knife slew two of the soldiers before the jemadar, with one mighty stroke of his sword, all but severed the fanatic's head from his sturdy, glistening shoulders! The man fell to the baked ground. It was then that Pem-

berton recognized him. It was Gugu!

Half decapitated, Gugu grinned from ear to ear and lovingly fingered his short top-knot. Allah be praised! There was enough of it to afford the Prophet a good grip! What if he had been remiss in not slaying either the Police Sahib or the ugly, ancient godless woman; he had had no opportunity. But he had now made amends; he had slain two infidels; he would see Paradise. The blessings of the True God be upon the little Memsahib who had given him the hair-restorer!

He grinned gratefully at the hysterical Mollie and reflected that he was not sorry he had saved her from Hasan Hadji and brought her back to her friends. Yoh! But how she had struggled and screamed and scratched—not knowing where he was taking her, and understanding no word of any but an infidel tongue!

He remembered that the plan had involved a certain amount of compromise between his gratitude to the little Memsahib and his religious principles, but he felt reasonably sure that Allah would understand. After all, the subject was a mere woman, and Allah did not attach much importance to females.

He hardly troubled to wonder why her friends were killing him. He half suspected that the old heathen woman (Aunt Laetitia) believed she would go to her paradise if she helped slay one of the Faith. Ho, ho! That was funny! And it did not matter. He himself had just slain two infidel soldiers—Paradise for him! Allah and the little Mem be praised—for the top-knot!

At this the jemadar's blade flashed again, severing the head, so that it rolled, still grinning, clear of the body. Miss Laetitia comforted the sobbing, unnerved Mollie while she watched the execution. She flinched a little as the blade fell, but a hard, zealous light shone in her eyes. A fanatical light—almost!