

# THE SPIRIT-APE

By G. B. LANCASTER

Illustrated by Maurice Greiffenhagen



THROUGH the palms and the dense, twisted mangroves along the river-bank the moisture which earth had sweated off during the day dripped back again, hanging heavily in the big, scentless flower-cups where small flies drowned themselves, and shaking the slender grasses when it fell on their tips. From the river sounded the creak of oars and the one-noted unmusical Malay cry of a couple of coolies pulling a flat-boat up towards the intake at the Shallack Mine.

Outside his hut across the compound, Barrow yawned with a half-groan and mopped his forehead.

"Ma-ling," he shouted, "bring lemons and the ice. The sahibs come."

He spoke in the dialect of that particular part of Malay, but the two white men crossing the compound heard and understood. Tufnell quickened his steps.

"Ice!" he said. "Where, in the name of all amazement, did you get ice from, you voluptuous sinner? Ice! Make her walk, Barrow! I haven't seen ice since I left the States."

"Well, this is American make. Quong Lu brought some up river last night. He'd bought it from one of your countrymen down at Porebuti. They told him it would keep him cold for ever, and I found him this morning watching it melt, and cursing himself hot enough to set fire to the whole thing. He let me buy a little—at a price. It went up in value as it went down in bulk, I fancy. Ma-ling, give the cups to the sahibs and put the tray here."

Tufnell snatched a cut lemon and squeezed it into his cup. He dashed the whisky in, poured the tepid water after, and

watched Barrow drop the ice-lumps greedily. His hands shook as he lifted it, feeling the ice against his parched lips, for his last bout of fever and ague was still heavy on him.

"Here's yours, Mac." Barrow handed the other cup. "Ma-ling, bring a chair for Doctor Sahib. Not that one—Tufnell Sahib split it last time. What's up, Tuffy?"

Tufnell put down the empty cup and flung himself into the long chair next Barrow's.

"Nasty muck!" he said. "Even the ice isn't cold. But, sakes, it makes me homesick for the States again!"

"Blathers!" said Macintosh. "Why would ye want to be thinkin' of the States, whin it's niver the livin' ye could make out of them till ye lift them at all?"

Macintosh was as Irish as his name was not. He had twinkling blue eyes either side a blunt nose, and at present he was clean-shaven, except for a fringe of sandy whisker under his chin. Tufnell wore a right-hand moustache and a left-hand side-whisker, but to the men who looked at him there was more of the tragic than the comic in his face.

This was Barrow's idea. He had a goatee just now, and his thick moustache was brushed up. But it had gone through various changes since the night when young Cutts, still soft and fresh from England, had disgraced his manhood by an explosion of hysterical tears before the assembled multitude of his fellows. These were four—Derret had since died—but Cutts ignored them all.

"They're all alike," he gasped—"those cursed Malays and Chinkies! I'll bet they can't tell themselves apart. And we're all alike—nothing but hair and eyes and noses. I can't stand it, I tell you—I can't stand it! Oh, if only one of you had his mouth on top, or wore his moustache as a bow-tie!"

Barrow nodded his sympathy. He knew what that camp of flat-faced, slant-eyed, greasy coolies had meant to him.

"But we have some scope for originality in our beards," he said.

In the utter desolate monotony of life on the Shallack Mine, any new idea was a godsend. The weary men jumped at this, and for many months the coolies heard occasional bursts of laughter from the sahibs' quarters, where no such sounds had been heard for long, and saw curious sproutings and shaven patches on the sahibs' faces. Derrett was gone now, and the joke had worn thin. But no man liked to give it up, and so acknowledge that there was no humour left in him.

Tufnell's chair creaked as he tossed himself restlessly.

"When are we going to *do* something?" he demanded. "When's that new machinery coming up? When are they going to send the fellow to take Derrett's place? When are we going to get some work done? That's what I want to know."

"If askin' would answer, ye'd know this long time," said Macintosh dryly. "Bedad, man, who's tu tell ye, when there is not one has a notion at all?"

"Well, I tell you I won't stand it!" Tufnell sat up in sudden desperation. "I'm sick of it all—oh, I'm sick of it all!"

He rocked himself in his chair, and Macintosh, meeting Barrow's eyes, finished his drink and stood up.

"Ye had dreams again last night, thin, was it? Ah, come along, Tuffy darlint, an' I'll put ye to sleep *aisy* as a field of poppies!"

Tufnell struck out at him blindly.

"Oh, don't be a blessed fool!" he said bitterly.

Macintosh put a hand on the shaking shoulder.

"Was it the same thing as befor on ye, thin?" he asked gravely.

"Ah, yes!" Tufnell shuddered, staring through the dusky compound to the coolie cooking-fires blinking among the trees. "I went out—it was too hot to sleep—and I heard it call, and I saw it in the branches."

"That big ape from the devil knows where? Sure, I'll be puttin' a bullet into it some night. Ay, will I."

"Don't I tell you it's no ape?" Tufnell sprang up. "It's human! I swear to you it's human! It's the kind of thing we've come from, and I wish we could go back to it. *They* have no civilisation to haunt them,

and to make them curse the day they were born!"

He was walking the dried, dusty grass with reeling steps. Macintosh hooked an arm through his and drew him towards the door.

"Sure, we'll talk of it after," he said— "to-morrow, or next day. Or there's plenty spare time to the back of that. Ye're wold from want of sleep, Tufnell, man. Let's see now if I can do anything, though I'm not wishful tu interfere with Nature often, moind."

Fifteen minutes later he came back alone. Barrow was still smoking and watching the thickening mists across the compound. Rancous voices and the harsh jangle of gongs sounded from the coolies' quarters. Night-birds called now and again, and the snarl of the river among the mangrove-roots seemed louder. He looked up at Macintosh with narrowed eyes, and the doctor nodded.

"Ay, well, hallucinations are common enough up here," he said. "An' why wouldn't they be? But it's none so *aisy* tu get the better of them. Ye can make no sinse out of this idea at all, Barrow?"

"None whatever. I don't much like the look of Tuffy, old man."

"Och, bedad, he'll win through with it! We had to have our firin', did we not? The bhoy, now—he is settin' down with his dark hour at this minit."

"Young Cutts? Got one of his silent fits again?"

"Silent, is it? 'Tis the back-ind of a week since I had a word from him. He sits an' looks at the wall. Did he come across tu see ye, thin?"

"No." Barrow refilled his pipe. "Mac, I've been thinking that you had better shift camp again. We could keep an eye on the mine machinery from here, and I think it is wise for us all to be together."

Macintosh twisted his big, thin body to face the other man squarely.

"Four white men tu two hundred coolies is not over-big odds if it comes tu bein' ugly," he said. "Bhut I du not think it is there that the danger lies. It's himself a man has tu foight out here, an', bedad, it's precious few on 'em understand it in toime. Ay, so."

"We got through it," said Barrow shortly.

"An' you, with the hard head like an ould pint pot tu ye, why wouldn't ye, thin? An' me tu busy wi' the coolies to be takin' up notions, glory be. Bhut those tu—we must rouse thim, Barrow, if we have to marry Cutts tu a coolie girl tu du it."

"You wouldn't think of such a thing." Barrow sat up in alarm. "They are not bad-looking, and if you put the idea into his head——"

"Blathers! He a white man, an' a gentleman! Howly smoke, an' is this all the ice ye have? It's gone hot on me. No, there is no marriage nor giving in marriage for the white man who chooses tu make his livin' beyond the coast, an' five hundred miles tu the back of that. Well"—he lifted himself with a long sigh—"it's my best fut I must be puttin' out again. There's plenty sick among the coolies this dhray weather, an' it's glad we should be that we have not the wivves an' families to go demented over, for, sure, they have more than is raisonable."

Barrow watched him tramp into the sliding malarial mists from the mangrove swamps where the mosquitoes bred. Then he turned into his hut and sat down to write his fifteenth letter to the syndicate of the Shallack Mine.

Barrow was the eldest of this little colony of white men which lay five hundred miles by open scow up the Pe-ang River, and he was feeling his responsibilities heavily to-night. He had felt them before when Derrett died of fever in this very hut, and when Hendon, once a lieutenant in a dragoon regiment, had gone mad and disappeared. As he told Macintosh, he himself had "got through it." But he never grew accustomed to the breaking-in of the young ones. He knew how the loneliness and the great threat of the forest jungles told on them. He knew how the harsh screaming of the birds jarred untried nerves, and what ghastly shapes the mangroves took in the changing lights. He knew how the little yellow noiseless men became an obsession, a living horror. He knew how the longing for one night of London or New York, one touch of a woman's lips, tore the soul out of a man for the time and left his pride unguarded.

He knew what the fever and ague did, too, and how the enforced idleness of these last six months was eating into the spirits of them all. So he worded his letter with all the venom at his command, while the coolie fires blinked at him across the empty silence of the compound.

It was an hour before Macintosh's work was done in the coolie quarters, and another half-hour before the derricks and crushing-plant of the deserted mine showed gaunt among its naked earth-heaps. Ten months ago the machinery in the crushing-shed, after having been patched by Barrow until

it was no more than a shameless collection of scrap-iron, had finally given out, and not all Barrow's contrivances and makeshifts had been able to persuade the engines to run more than quarter-speed without the boilers bursting, or the rollers to work evenly in their broken-cogged connections. He and Tufnell had written out reports—acres of reports—and sent them down to headquarters. But the gold from the Shallack Mine had been a negligible quantity for some time, and the Syndicate were not inclined to spend money on it. They sent up an order for Barrow to patch the machinery, and the four white men had gone up with one impulse and looked over the shed again.

"Patch it," said Barrow—"patch it! Oh, great Scott, even I can't be sure what is the original of anything now!"

And so they wrote more letters and sat down to wait again.

Over the races and the cradles and the refuse jungle-vines were thick already, and as Macintosh's tread sounded along the track, a little grey monkey sprang chattering from a broken derrick and swung itself into a near tree-top. To Macintosh's fancy, there was something of threat in its angry tone. He shook himself with a half-laugh.

"An' it's the nice ould bhoys I am, tu be no better than Tufnell," he said.

There was no light in the hut which had once been Barrow's office, and Macintosh grunted as he climbed the last slope.

"It's a foine couple the tu of them are," he muttered. "The three, bedad, for it is Barrow's intintion tu fret himself over the notion that the coolies will be throublin' us before long. Begor, if we did bhut have a tu-three of that Syndicate up here for a week-ind, we'd sind them back wiser! Ay, would we! Are ye there, Cutts?"

Against the open door the outline of a man showed faintly. It did not move, but it spoke, and Macintosh thanked Heaven for that. Cutts had not spoken of his free will for ten days.

"Whom did you think it was," he said now—"the Director of the Syndicate?"

"Belike. Or that man-monkey Tufnell is for iver talkin' about."

"What man-monkey?"

Macintosh had passed into the hut and lit the hanging lamp. He turned at the sharp note in the young voice.

"Faith, I have tould ye this hundred toimes! Tufnell sees it walk whin he has the fever on him. An', bedad, with the

attacks he's had lately, 'tis the strange thing tu me that he is contint with one. I'd be seein' a dozen, no less. Come an' have a play at the shticks, Cutts. Ye near got home on me last toime."

Cutts moved into the light. He was a handsome boy, for all his sullenness, and the long, drooping moustache shading his rather weak chin gave a mournful softness to his whole face.

"Can't," he said shortly. "I hurt my hand."

"An' what would ye be doin' that for? Let me see. Glory be tu goodness, man, what du ye mean by timplin' blood-poisonin' on ye this way?"

He held Cutts' palm close, staring at the deep ragged tear across the ball of the thumb. The skin round the edge of it was stiffened, and Macintosh muttered under breath as he got bandages and ointment.

"How did ye do that?" he demanded. And then, to Cutts' silence, he added: "The sinse of a tame cat settin' by the foire—that's what ye have! Stand still, now. Devil a bit of ye stirs out o' here till I'm through with ye. An' the mail is goin' down tu-morrow, Cutts. Bedad, I near forgot tu tell ye! You'll be wantin' tu write to your mother. An' what will she say to the fist ye will be wroitin'?"

Cutts laughed shortly. His face was drawn with the pain of Macintosh's handling.

"I'll tell her I ricked my wrist playing tennis," he said.

"Tennis?" Macintosh looked up in amaze. "Is it the same throuble on ye as with Tufnell, thin?"

"D'youn think I'd tell her what it's like up here?" The boy's voice was bitter. "She's an invalid, and she thinks about me all day long. Do you imagine I'd let her have *this* to think about?" He glanced round the empty, desolate hut, with the broken chicks at the end leading through to the bedrooms. "I am not quite such a cad, I hope."

"What do ye tell her, thin?" asked Macintosh half diffidently. But something seemed to have broken down the dam of Cutts' long silence at last.

"I tell her about all the people I meet—the jolly girls I play tennis with, and the fellows who lend me polo ponies. And I tell her about the dances I go to, and the swimming matches we have. Oh, lots of things!"

The Pe-ang was full of alligators up here, and the only dancing was done by dead

leaves in a wind. Macintosh rubbed his nose as he turned away.

"I'm not sayin' that your imagination is any more legitimate than Tuffy's," he said; "but if the tu of ye will be believin' what is not the truth, thin it's mighty glad I am that your attack has taken ye so peaceable-like, Cutts."

Two days later Barrow called Macintosh aside.

"That ape has been seen in the compound," he said. "One of the foremen told me that it was a 'spirit-ape,' and it had come for a white man. It's a common superstition, I understand."

Macintosh felt a chill across his shoulders, and it made him angry.

"Indeed? An' would he be tellin' us which one the gentleman wants?"

"It will probably be the lot, unless we can clear this up. The fellow was green with fear, and they'd send us all into the next world sooner than stay scared. Tong Lip as good as hinted it."

"Arrah, what's the matter with powder an' shot, thin? I'll have that frind of Tuffy's tu-night, an' stretch his skin between trees tu-morrow."

"Wait a minute!" Barrow dropped his voice. "Tong Lip's description was like Tuffy's. He said it walked like a man, and its arms were short, though it swung itself into the trees like a monkey. It struck me—don't laugh—but it struck me—You know, Hendon's body was never found."

"Ye mean—" Macintosh bit at his thumb in silence. Then he lifted his shoulders with a kind of shudder. "It is possible," he said. "Faith, is there aught that is not possible in this ould rogue of a world? We will watch, thin. But if there is no other way, it will be the rifle, Barrow. Sh-h-h! Ye must remember that the manhood went out of Hendon this twelve-month an' more. An' if there is some creature to quit out of this, it must be him before there is harm done."

"Harm!" Barrow looked startled. "I hadn't thought of that."

"Had ye not? Well, I had. What would he be here for, else? It's lucky we will be if his is the first loife goin' out of here. Cutts an' I will shift camp tu-night, an' ye will sit up with me. We will not tell the others. They are bhut bhoys, anyhow."

The memory of that night's watching only left Barrow with his life. And yet it was nothing to a night which came after. But the sickly paleness of dawn was over the

compound before Macintosh lifted from where he lay by the open door and touched Barrow's knee.

"Would ye conthrive tu look?" he whispered. "Tu, an' no less!"

It seemed no more than the flicker of tree-shadows across the compound, but they leapt and darted and ran back and forth as tree-shadows never did. There was no sound in the whole world, and in the grey hush and the flicker of that noiseless life Barrow shivered with sweat on his forehead. Macintosh spoke.

"I du not know what is the one, blut the other is a man—I saw the skin glisten. Will ye come—now?"

He dropped into the shadows and wriggled away. Barrow followed, feeling physically sick. So many years among the ingrained superstition of the East had not left him where it found him.

A scream split up the silence, rocking through the trees and echoing along the river. Tufnell burst out through the hut door, with livid face and eyes contracted by horror.

"I saw it again!" he stuttered. "It looked in at the window! Mac, Barrow, I saw it! Oh, why did you give me that sleeping-stuff, so I couldn't get up at once? I thought I'd have died! I saw it!"

The flickering shadows had gone at the first sound, and the two men had Tufnell by the arms. They swept him back to the hut and shut the door.

"Aisy! Would ye wake the whole camp on us?" cried Macintosh. "Ye saw it, did ye? An' ye'd had the sinse of a white mouse ye'd have seen it for the last toime! Barrow an' I were after the gentlemin with the rifles then."

"But you couldn't have shot it. It—it isn't human; its eyes showed that. You couldn't have killed it. But it will kill me if it comes again. Don't leave me, you fellows—don't leave me!"

"Begor, we will see if it is apt tu be human tu-morrow night," said Macintosh cheerfully. "Ye saw the one only, thin?"

"How many more do you want? Oh, you fellows, you fellows, I must get away from this place! I shall die if I stay here—I shall die!"

"Blathers!" said Macintosh unconcernedly, and tucked him into bed. But when the camp roused in the morning, a very real fear roused with it. A coolie boy had been found dead by the river, and Macintosh's examination proved that he had been strangled.

"The min putt it down to that ould ape," he said, "which is just where it should be, of course. Blut if it takes another life, ours go with it. Du you fellows understand that? They will not haveanny thicks played on them, these coolies."

He looked round the table, where the four white men were breakfasting off muddy fish and sodden bread. Barrow nodded brief assent. Tufnell shuddered and pushed his plate aside. The constant fever attacks had sapped his nerve.

"Well, let us get through and be done with it," he said. "We can only die once, thanks be."

Young Cutts laughed, tipping his chair back. He had torn the bandage from his hand, and it showed swelled and blackened.

"Only once?" he said. "Up here we die every day. We're dead to everything every day, aren't we—the men we knew, and the women we loved, and the games we played? I'm younger than you, but I'd begun to learn what life was. Now I've learnt what death is. Tuffy was right when he said that the tree-men and the cave-men had the best of it. They lived and they fought and they died, but they didn't think. That hell is reserved for us civilised men. Oh, if only we needn't think! If only we could get back to their day and stop thinking!"

He stood up abruptly and went out. Macintosh stared after him.

"Faith, the youth of this assembly makes loife clane an' cheerful for us older min," he observed. "Have ye got anything tu be sayin', Tuffy?"

"If you had soul enough to feel at all, you'd be hipped, too," Tufnell pushed his chair back. "I suppose you'll want us to attend that funeral, will you? You don't do things by halves."

Macintosh's laugh followed him out, but the Irishman's face was grave as he bent over to Barrow.

"What would ye be lettin' on that the second thing was?" he asked. "One was a *man*, an' it was a man did the stranglin'. Blut the other? An' is it the other that frightens Tufnell an' the coolies? An' whoy du they see blut the one?"

"The devil knows!" said Barrow, and went away troubled, to prepare for the funeral of the coolie boy and for the after pacification of the camp.

Macintosh searched for footprints on the drying weed and the caked mud by the naked mangrove roots, where great land-crabs backed away with snapping claws. But he found

the footprints of men only, and the smell of decay and of over-ripe fruits followed him back to that solemn service before the ranks of yellow-brown men whose stolid indifference hid a threat that the white men fully guessed at. If the "spirit-ape" was not content with this, then it was a white life that he had come for, and he should have it.

The camp kept its own watch that night—kept it with the sound of gongs and tom-toms and the unmusical Malay singing. It fell asleep at last, exhausted by its efforts. But in the intense silence which followed, Macintosh woke suddenly in the belief that a clammy hand had touched his breast. He sprang up and looked from the window. The compound was seething in the white mist of dawn, and the trees beyond it lifted in huge disintegrated masses. In the mist two things moved—shapeless, almost colourless at times, then vaguely outlined in somewhat human form. They seemed to be dancing noiselessly there with the mist in the sun-dried compound, and Macintosh felt the prickle of horror up his spine and along the nape of his neck. Tufnell's words came to him again: "You can't kill it! I tell you it isn't human. You can't kill it!" He reached over and took his rifle.

"Be jabers, I'll thy, annyhow!" he said, and went out, ghost-like and silent in his pale pyjamas.

Which was the thing Tufnell and the coolies saw, and which was reserved for himself and Barrow, he did not know; but in a few minutes the rifle would answer that question. The mist was thick as he crawled round the compound rim. Near the huts he halted, trying to dredge through it with his keen eyesight. Then something dropped on him from behind, gripping his throat with eager, strong fingers. Its weight was heavy on him—too heavy for him to throw it off or to twist. He struggled, feeling the sweat spring on his skin and the light dance and freckle and darken before his eyes. Then sense left him and he lay still.

Barrow knelt over him when he woke, and Barrow's face was grim. "You're not the only one who was called for last night," he said. "They got woman in one of the river huts, and she's dead. Yes, you're all right. Lipi Tat found you and helped bring you back. You cured his wife last week. But there are plenty who would have been glad to stick you where you lay. There is going to be a life for a life over this, old man."

"There shall be." Macintosh sat up,

rubbing his throat. "It was a human caught me, an' whin I get the killin' of him tu-night, sure, I'll be apt tu du it in a way he will not loike!"

"If you don't do it to-night, you won't do it at all," said Barrow significantly. "Here's a deputation now. I expected it."

"Um-m!" grunted Macintosh, getting on his feet. "Tell tu them, Barrow, that I am going tu settle the hash of that ould ghost tu-night, fur sure. Tell them that I have got medicine that will du it, blut they must keep each one in his house, or they will be apt to find themselves with the loss of their own lives, for my medicine is stropp. An', bedad, that's thruth! How can we go shootin' by an' large with them streetlin' all over the compound?"

Barrow translated, and the coolie spokesman answered politely that medicine would not kill a spirit-ape. Macintosh grunted again.

"Ah, it's the outrageous old bhoys they are for common-sense! Let me at 'em!"

For a full half-hour the two white men talked to the deputation. They had seen the half-hid knives in the yellow-brown hands, and the half-hid threat in the cunning flat faces. But without that they knew well that their lives were not worth the paper their birth certificates were written on if they could not, in Barrow's language, "put up a bluff that would stand."

The men retired at last, surly and unsatisfied, and Barrow called in Cutts and Tufnell, and shut both doors.

"It's come to this," he said. "If there's another death to-night, the coolies will fly off the handle. It will be a clean wipe-out, and I don't much blame them. Now, shall we get a scow and make a bolt for it—there's just the chance that we may get away—or shall we see the thing through? I have no right to endanger your lives, but I'm not keen on knuckling down. What do you say?"

Cutts said nothing. His "silent fit" had returned, and he sat sullenly nursing his hand. Tufnell said a great deal, and Macintosh looked at him.

"Begorra, it's amazin' the amount of wit ye haven't got!" he said. "There is not one of your plaus could hould up longer than your breath is blowin' it. A pleasant lot of good ye are, an' with Cutts tu the back of ye yet! Let me see that hand of yours, Cutts. Ah, what have ye been at, at all, at all, tu make this of it, bhoys?"

Cutts yielded up the swelled, inflamed hand indifferently. His eyes were tired and strange. Then he spoke suddenly.

"They were lucky beggars, those tree-men, you know. They couldn't think!"

"Ah, you an' your thinkin'!" cried Macintosh, in exasperation. "There'll be none of us thinkin' tu-morrow if we don't think tu some purpose now. I will be stayin' with you, Barrow, an' we have tu revolvers an' three rifles, tu say nothin' of an ould duck-gun. The others must do as they best will. An' though I cannot promise tu them a long life, sure, it may be merry."

"Oh, of course, we'll have to stay," said Tufnell, shrugging. "We can't show funk before a set of beastly coolies."

"Remember ye that tu-morrow mornin'," said Macintosh grimly. "Cutts, if ye take the bandage off again, ye'll be a dead man with tetanus within the week belike. Shall we sthroll along out an' see how lies the land, Barrow?"

They gave the result of their inspection at the midday meal. It was not encouraging. The women were burning joss-sticks and praying their gods in mortal fear of the night; but the men were standing in sullen groups, and they looked aslant with muttering whispers as the white men went by. Tufnell thrust aside the dried goat's meat and the half-rotten bananas, and dropped his face in his hands.

"Oh, what's the good of praying?" he said. "They don't expect their gods to answer, do they?"

"Presumably," said Barrow dryly. It was long since he had prayed—until the last two days.

"They are fools," said Cutts sharply. "If prayers could do anything, my mother would have had me out of this long ago."

"Well, we'll probably all be out of it by this time to-morrow," answered Barrow, and Cutts laughed as he left the room. But that laugh haunted Barrow.

He spoke of it to Macintosh that night, when the two sat waiting in the silence for the coming of the Thing. Across the compound, noise had died out where the coolies had shut themselves into their huts. Tufnell and Cutts had gone to bed long ago—Cutts with indifference and Tufnell with half-shamed apology.

"I would be no use, you know," he had said. "If I saw that thing again, I'd go mad, I think. I couldn't shoot at it, and I don't think there's any earthly use in your trying. I—I feel that it isn't a living thing, you know."

"If ye should maybe feel the grip of his paws on your throat, ye'd feel different, I'm thinkin'," said Macintosh. "Bhut be off. Two of us can fix him, an' plinty, tu."

Barrow spoke little during those long hours in the dreary, close hut. Once he said: "Shall we see the two again, I wonder?"

And Macintosh answered: "Faith, I know which I'm putting daylight intu if we du."

And a little later Barrow said: "I'm rather anxious about young Cutts, you know. I believe he is half off his head sometimes."

To this Macintosh retorted: "Ah, it's a mighty lot of trouble you'd be meetin' if all that you were lookin' for came your way." And then they were silent, with the chill of dread and mystery on them, and the dark of night about them drifting imperceptibly into the pallor of dawn.

The trees were shaping into darker blots on the dark when Macintosh gripped Barrow's shoulder.

"I see them, bedad," he said. "Tu, there are, an' that's thruth. Ah, ye devils!"

He flung his rifle forward and a double shot rang out. Barrow heard a scream, high, shrill, and unearthly—it curdled his blood—and then he saw Macintosh leap over the low window-sill, slipping in fresh bullets as he ran. Cries and curses of confusion came from the coolie quarters, and Barrow shouted to them—

"Follow the Doctor-sahib! He has killed the beast! He has killed it!" And then he, too, ran on into the night.

Along the trees sheltering the river, Macintosh followed what seemed like the scrambling and crashing of more than one body. The sounds came out of the black dark among the upper branches, and a thin, querulous thread of sobbing underran the other noise. Macintosh set his lips grimly as he heard it. For he could swear that that sound was human. In the tangling banyan roots that made a lattice-work before the river he stopped suddenly. Overhead the Thing had halted also. There seemed to be one only, and it was evidently crouched in the branches, complaining in low, wordless mutters. Macintosh lifted his voice.

"Come down, or I'll shoot!" he cried. "Will ye come, thin?"

For what seemed an eternity he waited. Then, with an unspoken prayer, he fired.

There was a gesticulating and ever-thickening crowd of coolies round the still thing on the ground when Macintosh thrust out to meet Barrow. He put his hand on Barrow's arm and turned him away.

"Come back," he said. "They will bring him—it in. We will, maybe, see the ape no more, Barrow. It has got the white loife for which it came."



"He put his hand on Barrow's arm and turned him away."

"Then it was Hendon?" whispered Barrow.

"No." Macintosh looked straight forward into the grey dawn. "No, it was Cutts. He has been lame and crazy this month past, although ye did not know nt. I was lookin' for something to happen, bhut I did not expect this. An' what that other was that came for him, I du not know. Perhaps we will not know now."

They buried young Cutts that afternoon, and through the night following Tufnell slept peacefully. His eyes were clear and sane when he spoke to Macintosh of the matter some days later.

"I want to tell you that I've been a fool, Mac," he said.

"Sure, ye need not putt yesilf tu the trouble," said Macintosh politely.

"I've been thinking," said Tufnell, "that it must have been only Cutts all the time. I said it wasn't human, but a man is hardly human when he's mad, is he?"

"Far from it," said Macintosh, glancing down at the letter which he was writing to young Cutts' mother.

"And, of course, he didn't look human with nothing but those monkey-skins tied round him. The coolies think the same now. It was only that old yarn about a spirit-ape that scared them. And, of course, nobody has seen anything since—since Cutts went."

"Of course not," agreed Macintosh. But his keen glance followed Tufnell out with something of curiosity in it. "Then it was only Cutts they saw," he said. "And whoy is the other reserved for Barrow and me only? An' is it both of us have seen it again, I would well like to know? Bedad, I expected tu see nt standing with the three of us at the bhoy's grave."

And then he finished his letter.

"To prove to you the esteem in which your son was held up here," he wrote, "I can assure you that every white man within a hundred miles was present at the funeral. He will be much missed on the tennis and the polo ground, and a big entertainment which was to have taken place has been postponed indefinitely in honour of his memory. I am requested by his many friends to assure you of their deep sympathy and regret."

He addressed the envelope and licked it down. Then he glanced round the comfortless room, with the broken chicks and the dirty floor. Across the compound Barrow was walking with head bent, and Macintosh knew what he had come to say.

"Yes, I saw it again last noight," he said, as Barrow came in—"same as yesilf."

"It—perhaps it was only shadows in the compound," said Barrow.

"Bhut ye know that it was not, and so do I. Then what was it?"

"I've been thinking that—well, you know that all things seem possible up here—"

"If ye have a theory at all, out with it, and I will not laugh at ye. Faith, in this quare ould life of ours, who is tu say what is truth and what is not?"

Barrow lowered his voice, and even through the quick dusk which was filling the room, Macintosh saw that he looked shame-faced.

"Cutts was always longing to go back to the beginnings of our race—to the day when we couldn't think. We don't know what we came from or to what we go, and if it could be possible for the past to incorporate itself with the present under conditions which invited the fusion, then—then I think Cutts let himself be possessed by the spirit of what was once our life."

"Glory be tu goodness!" said Macintosh, staring. "Du ye know what ye are saying at all?"

"You and I have seen what we were and what we are playing together in the compound," said Barrow. "For some reason which I can't explain, Tufnell and the coolies could only see the—the other while it was possessing Cutts. For some reason which also I can't explain, you and I see a dim shape in the compound still. Is it the essence of all that was savage and primitive and enduring in our race, waiting for another man to give it a home—as Cutts did, and perhaps Hendon?"

He stopped abruptly, and there was silence—a long silence, which Barrow broke himself.

"Of course, you can call it rot—" he began, and then Macintosh stood up with a quick movement.

"I du not," he said—"no, I du not. Bhut we will keep this matter tu ourselves, Barrow. An', sure, we will attempt to kape that ould ape disembodied for long enough tu discourage him well. An' we will watch Tufnell."

"And ourselves," said Barrow. Then he laughed. "What would the fellows at home think to hear us talking like this?" he said.

"They haven't lived here," answered Macintosh, and the two men stood in silence, watching the mist crawl and lift among the mangroves where the edges of the night touched, sickly warm and black.