

THE TRAIL OF THE GOLDEN SCORPION.

A COMPLETE STORY.

By SYDNEY CLIVE.

Illustrated by S. H. Vedder.

I.

"LOOKS pretty and innocent, doesn't it?" observed the Man of Science.

"No, don't agree with you, it has a nasty expression in the bend of its tail, and all those jewels add to the native ugliness of the creature," said the Man of Action, decidedly. "Why on earth did Mahathala give it to you?"

"Gratitude; saved his little Princelet's life when he had smallpox. Bestowed on me no other fee, which rather distressed me, for though I'm not a licensed practitioner, I wouldn't mind taking a small acknowledgment of my services. You see, travelling in India is expensive, and I'm not over flush."

"And I should say you would need to be, in your walk in life," retorted the Man of Action. "You don't make much out of dried plants and herbs, I should think. Can't be much demand for them."

"No, there is not much, and the general public looks but coolly on a man who spends his life in scientific research," observed the Man of Science, with gentle sorrow. "The State ought to provide us with incomes, so that our minds should be left free for our great works. I have spent the best part of my life in this kind of thing"—he waved his hand towards a tray of withered leaves and plants—"and have received no return, save—a golden scorpion, for washing and dressing—I really did little else—a young coffee-coloured potentate. It makes one pause and consider whether one's time might not be more profitably employed."

The Man of Action laughed in answer to this tirade, as he lit his long cigar, and threw the match at the botanist's tray of dried treasures. It just escaped it, and the Man of Science sank back once more into his lounging attitude.

"Come now, Voltervane, talk sense—if you can. What are you going to do with this thing?"

As he spoke, the Man of Action lifted the

jewelled scorpion gingerly by its tail, and suspended it in mid-air between finger and thumb. In the half-darkness of the shadowed verandah, it gleamed and flashed with a strange lustre, quivering in every joint of its scaled and incrustated body.

"It shouldn't be made in *scales*," said Voltervane, surveying it critically. "But I suppose it was intended to give it that trembling, life-like appearance. You ask what I'm going to do with it, Dersingham? I ought to sell it, but I'm afraid I shall be tempted to keep it, as a beginning of a museum, which will never exist, but that plea will salve my conscience for the extravagance of laying up so much gold, and so many precious stones."

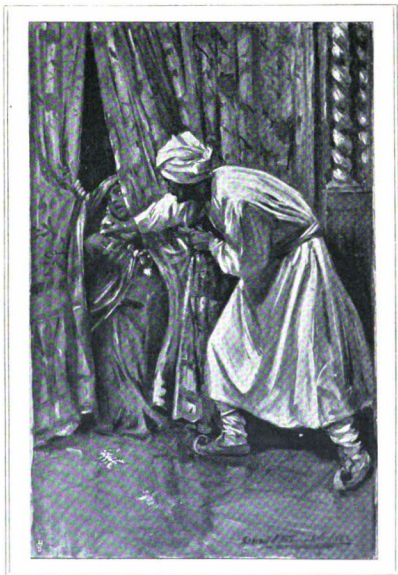
"If you take my advice, you will get rid of it," said Ralph Dersingham, eyeing the glittering thing with little favour, as it swayed gently backwards and forwards in his grasp. "Didn't the Rajah tell you anything about it, man? It has an evil name throughout the whole Presidency."

"When His Highness presented it to me with a flowery speech on my various virtues and talents, he informed me that it ensured the best possible fortune to the possessor," rejoined Voltervane; "and I don't see why it should have a bad reputation on that account. Of course, I didn't believe the Rajah; I regarded what he said as meant to enhance the value of his gift, nothing more."

"Well, every man who has this little beast in his possession dies, Voltervane; and, in the two cases that I know of personally, the death was not a pleasant one. The scorpion gives three warnings; you have three accidents, I believe, before the final one."

"But does the Rajah keep a selection of these reptiles for presentation to his friends, as other people give photo-frames and note-books?" enquired Voltervane. It was the glaring defect of his character that he could

take nothing seriously. India—with her mystery, her tragedy, her shadows that hang equally over black and white; the land for ever by dawn, and the hand that touched the banjo strings is cold and heavy. India, where man walks for ever in the Shadow



THE PRIEST SAW THE HAND SNATCH UP HIS TREASURE.—HE RUSHED AT THE CURTAIN AND THRUST AT IT WITH FURY.

where the voice that sang the song at the camp fire in all innocent mirth—is hushed of Death, would, so one imagines, have a sobering effect on all, save the hopelessly

stupid and frivolous; and certainly Correth Voltervane was neither, but the habit of life stuck to him: he would laugh until the end.

Ralph Dersingham had spent the best years of a steady, practical life in Mahapore. He was Commissioner of a district that all other Government servants shunned—a district as large as England and Scotland, with a dismal name for plague, pestilence and famine, and for treachery and silent vengeance on the part of its inhabitants.

But the Man of Action knew the people, and lived and worked amongst them fearless and unharmed, though in the last plague visitation he had narrowly escaped being shot by an infuriated Hindoo, whose ill-smelling premises he was carbolicing—if one may coin a word—and whitewashing with his own hands. He had listened to native legends, native tales, native dreams; he had imbibed the mystic history of a mystic people, till he hesitated to call aught impossible. He looked gravely at his companion who put that careless question about the Rajah's stock of precious scorpions, and shook his head.

"No," said Dersingham, thoughtfully. "It's always the same little beast; there is only one, and it always comes back to Mahathala, always."

"A cheap present, 'pon my word," answered Voltervane, laughing. "But come, Ralph, do tell me what you know about it; you should give a sceptic, like myself, information calculated to convert him. I assure you if that little creature makes me a man of wealth, I'll believe every one of the stories you tell me. Yes, from the evil eye downwards."

"Listen to me, then, Voltervane," said Dersingham, solemnly. "This thing is hundreds of years old. The legend runs that it was made by a priest who loved a dancing girl; made of no one knows what; gold it seems to us; but they say that human blood is what cements these scales."

"Hardly possible, after all these years, I should imagine," murmured the Man of Science. "No, I didn't mean to interrupt, old chap, do go on."

"This scorpion," continued Dersingham, slowly, "was meant to aid him in his incantations, sorceries, and so on, but the Nautch girl saw it, and coveted it wildly, for the sake of the jewels. So she hid one day behind a curtain when the priest was at his unholy work, with this little beast beside him, so

close to the girl that she could have reached out her hand and taken it. When her lover's back was turned that was precisely what she did, but the priest saw the hand snatch up his treasure, and he rushed at the curtain and thrust at it with fury. The fingers that closed on the scorpion relaxed their hold, and the thief fell forward, enveloped in the folds of the curtain, stabbed to the heart. The priest, in his rage, spurned the body, but even as he did so, he saw that it was none other than his beloved Zeenut. Mad with anguish and remorse, for, so the legend runs, he had worshipped this girl with a love that was idolatry, he stabbed himself and died beside her; not, however, before he had invoked a terrible curse on the scorpion and on all who should possess it."

"Is that all?" enquired Correth Voltervane, with interest. "Don't you know what the curse was?"

"It is death," replied Dersingham. "I don't know how the scorpion came into the Rajah's possession, but this I do know, he is always trying to get rid of it. Over and over again has it been presented to people; they are delighted, naturally, till they die, and then in some mysterious way it comes back to Mahathala, and the old game begins."

"Why doesn't *he* die?" enquired the Man of Science, indignantly. "It seems a little hard that he should escape, when he is always palming it off on other people, doesn't it?"

"He probably has some counter charm; but sickness is always rife in his household, and his favourite wives are continually dying," returned the Man of Action, gravely. "And he can't get it out of the house, save by giving it to someone. They've tried to break it; they've tried to throw it into the pond; they've dropped it down a well; they've had it trampled on by scores of horsemen: but all to no purpose, the golden scorpion always——"

"Turns up smiling," supplemented Correth lightly. "And what do you advise me to do, Dersingham, with such a tough piece of goods? You said get rid of it, but how?"

"There's only one way—give it to someone," replied Ralph promptly. "You won't be able to sell it in India, and by the time you get to England it will probably have killed you."

"Humph! nice prospect. Well, may I give it to *you*?" said Voltervane, laughing.

"Here, chuck over the poor little beastie. And now, my dear friend, I beg your acceptance of this very elegant reptile. What! won't have it? Ah, well, then I'm afraid I must keep it myself."

"Will you grant me one favour," said Dersingham, earnestly; he knew it was useless to argue with Correth. "It's for your own sake; will you promise me one thing?"

"One, a million! Ask on, and it shall be granted thee," and Voltervane struck a theatrical attitude, whilst his friend continued:

"You will, I expect, disregard the first warning; you will probably pay no attention to the second; but don't persist in your pig-headed obstinacy when you receive the third; that I do implore and entreat you."

"Oh, if I recognise the warning—and I'll try to—I won't treat it lightly," answered the Man of Science, still swinging the topic of conversation by its pliable tail. "I'm off now to see that missionary, poor fellow. I can't do him much good, but it's a comfort to his daughter, and—she really is a very charming girl, Ralph."

Under the deep yellow-brown of Indian tan the Commissioner flushed red. "She is," he said, briefly. "Correth, I—I think I'll come with you, if you've no objection. It's a pleasant ride in the cool to the Mission House."

"I shall be delighted," rejoined Voltervane, in all sincerity, and the two set forth to visit the man who was dying of decline, after battling, with a sublime patience, against the difficulties that beset a missionary in that Presidency.

II.

For the natives objected strongly to conscientious meddling with their religious opinions, and their way of shewing their resentment was apt to cause hurried and secret flittings on the part of the zealots. Sometimes the missionaries had sought a refuge with the Commissioner, whom they regarded as a very backsliding and lukewarm adherent in the days of their authority, but who protected them when they had brought a hornets' nest about their ears, and kept them from the wrath of an aggravated and superstitious population.

Alan Dene had not had sufficient time to make himself obnoxious to his desired flock; also, he was a very gentle enthusiast,

large-hearted, if narrow-minded, and more anxious to win the love of the people than a martyr's crown.

He lay in placid content on the verandah of the dilapidated old Mission House, waiting patiently for the last grains of the sands of life to run out.

"It is pleasant to see you, Mr. Voltervane," and two shadowy hands were held out. "Oh, I am much the same. Ralph, it is good of you to come; we have missed you lately, haven't we, Mary?" and the missionary turned to his daughter.

"We have," said Mary, quietly. "We thought we were forgotten."

And even as she said the words she read in Ralph Dersingham's eyes a silent protest against such an impossible supposition.

She was a delicately-moulded creature, whose chief charm lay in her extreme refinement of feature and form. The Commissioner loved her with all the strength of a nature deepened and mellowed by years of silent abnegation, and she returned his affection. There was the unspoken compact between them that marriage should not be thought of whilst Alan Dene lived; and it comforted the missionary to know that his daughter would not be left desolate by his death, that a strong arm would be there to support her, a steady heart to cherish her.

Now Ralph Dersingham had complained often of Correth Voltervane's incurable habit of laughing at everything; had the Commissioner but known, it was his—Dersingham's—salvation. For, when the Man of Science appeared at Mahathala, Mary Dene was strangely attracted by him, and he by her; and the ship that contained the Commissioner's entire and only cargo of happiness seemed in danger of foundering on the rock of treachery. But Voltervane laughed to himself at himself so consumedly, and was so entertained at the idea of a cross-grained, poverty-stricken, scientific bachelor of over forty falling in love; he put himself before Mary in such a ridiculous light, his constant frivolous tone of scepticism contrasted so unfavourably with Ralph's grave reserve, that Mary was disappointed and disgusted, and turned willingly from the Man of Science to the Man of Action. And the former had the pleasure of knowing that as he sank in Mary's estimation, her lover rose. "Which is very proper, and just as it should be," he told

himself, but his laugh was not quite so frequent after the visits to the Mission House.

They stayed to share the evening meal of the Denes, and afterwards the lovers

sunk on his breast, and a careless hold on his bridle rein.

Which was, perhaps, the reason that his trusted mare shied suddenly, and threw him violently against the low stone wall of an adjacent garden. Ralph leaped from his horse, and was beside him in an instant.

"The first of the scorpion's warnings," he muttered, as he raised his senseless friend. "How will it end?"

But Correth was merely stunned for a second or two; he opened his eyes upon his friend, with such a terrible expression in them of horrible, insane fear, such a look of hideous, soul-shaking terror, that Dersingham turned away his head with a shudder.

"My God," said Voltervane, sitting upright and glaring at some object before him, "did you ever see such a devil's face,

and the blood—and snakes—and the dead body, and——" he gave a sudden shriek, and hid his face like a frightened child on Dersingham's shoulder. "Don't leave me, don't leave me," he moaned; "Ralph——"

"All right, old fellow, I'm here," said the Commissioner soothingly. "You've had a fall and are a bit shaken, that's all."

But Voltervane was himself again. He rose to his feet with Ralph's assistance, and looked at him steadily.

"It seems to me," he said collectedly,

"THE FIRST OF THE SCORPION'S WARNINGS!
—HOW WILL IT END?"

"I've made a silly ass of myself. All the fault of your bogey tales of scorpions and priests, my boy. What made the mare shy, I wonder? If I weren't a teetotaler," he added lightly, "the vision I had as I came to' would make one think I was in for an attack of D.T.'s. My liver's out of order, I



wandered in the compound, with jackals to serenade them, and Correth stayed with the sick man. The two friends rode home in silence, Dersingham enjoying the delicious luxury of recalling every look, word and tone of Mary's, now that they were parted, and Voltervane deep in thought, with his head

presume. I'll take a dose of calomel this very night."

As he slowly mounted his horse, he glanced at Dersingham's troubled face.

"I suppose you think that the scorpion had something to do with my fall and visions," Correth said with an unsteady laugh. "Why, man, did you never hear before of a rabbit hole, and of a man having a threatening of a bilious attack?"

To which brave words, however, Ralph gave no answer.

III.

The stillness of an Indian night, disturbed only now and again by the howl of a jackal, was suddenly broken by a shrill scream—the scream men utter when taken unawares by death.

"The scorpion," said Dersingham, as he leaped from his bed and rushed to Voltervane's room, where he saw something very different from what he had expected.

On the floor, with Voltervane kneeling on his chest, lay a Hindoo, his dusky face turned to a deep plum colour, his eyes protruding in a manner horrible to see, and his tongue lolling out in the agonies of suffocation, as the iron hand of the Man of Science slowly choked the breath from his body.

In an instant Dersingham had dragged his friend from the prostrate creature, and dashed cold water over the Hindoo, who lay gurgling and gasping with the relief of the removal of that relentless grasp from his throat.

"Man alive," cried Ralph in horror, "why did you nearly kill the poor wretch?"

"Because of this," panted Voltervane, and, as he spoke, he shewed his left arm, dripping blood from a deep knife wound. "That beggar came to rob me, I went for him though I was unarmed, and he tried to kill me. He would have done it, too, if I hadn't tripped him up, and taught him a little lesson. Ah, you brute," as the man moaned and writhed on the floor, "I fancy you won't try to stab an Englishman again in a hurry."

"We must have this investigated," observed Dersingham, assuming his official manner, as the Hindoo put up a prayer for mercy. "You caught him in *flagrante delicto*, Voltervane?"

"Oh, I don't want to prosecute the beggar," replied Correth carelessly. "I wanted to kill him, it is true, a few seconds

ago, but I bear no malice. I wonder who he is?"

"A stranger to me," answered Dersingham, scanning the man who grovelled before him. "I suppose we ought to search him, he may have——"

But the words died on his lips, as the Hindoo, with trembling hands, took something from his breast, and laid it with averted face at Voltervane's feet. It was the golden scorpion.

"Oh, if you had only let him escape with it!" cried Dersingham involuntarily. "Let him keep it, for God's sake, let him keep it!"

"It seems a dashed cowardly thing to do, if it really has the power of killing the poor beggar," returned Voltervane. "But I don't think you'll find him accept the generous present. Ask him."

Ralph spoke to the would-be thief and offered him the precious creature, that represented untold wealth to the Hindoo, but the latter retreated from the gift in horror, saying something Correth could not catch.

"He says he would not have taken it had he known what it was, and that he has no desire to die in torments," Dersingham translated grimly. "You were right."

"Then tell him to be off immediately, and not sit there," retorted the Man of Science impatiently, and at a word from Dersingham, the Hindoo gathered himself up and disappeared through the open door.

"Remember your promise," said Ralph entreatingly to Correth. "The third warning you will take notice of."

"I don't consider I've had the second," replied Voltervane coolly. "And now, my dear fellow, let us go to sleep again; what a fool I was to have my revolver just beyond convenient reaching distance!"

The next morning when the two friends met, by tacit consent neither mentioned the night's adventure. Correth thought a good deal of the scorpion that, prompted by some strange whim, he had put in his pocket, and Ralph was distinctly preoccupied. Both were, however, startled into practical life by a message from Mary Dene, saying her father had died during the night.

"We'll go over at once," said the Man of Science. "Poor fellow, I little thought yesterday was the last time I should see him in life. What a pity, as he was going to die any way, that I did not give Alan Dene the scorpion," Correth said to himself, but he

laughed the next moment at having for an instant believed in the absurd powers with which the small reptile was credited.

They found Mary very quiet, very composed, but she clung to Dersingham in a manner that shewed she was thankful for his support and presence.

The Man of Science turned abruptly on his heel, and left them. He went into the neglected, untidy compound, and here the third warning of the scorpion came to him, in the shape of a cobra, on which, in unusual carelessness (for as a rule he walked with the utmost circumspection), he trod, and had it not been for almost unprecedented quickness in stepping back, it would have bitten him.

Such an escape is a thing to set a man's heart beating with uncomfortable rapidity, and to make his knees fail beneath him. Correth Voltervane made his way back to the house and sat down rather suddenly, whilst he wiped from his forehead a dew that fear had brought there.

"I am getting nervous and confoundedly fanciful; so whether this little beast is to blame or not, I'll get rid of it before I lose my nerve, quite," he said, and as he looked at the shining thing lying on his palm a sudden idea came to him.

Lightly, with an air of furtiveness, as though about to commit some crime, he stole through the house to the death chamber. It was empty of all save what lay there. Voltervane looked

earnestly at the placid face, then he slipped the scorpion between the pale folded hands, and withdrew as silently as he had come.

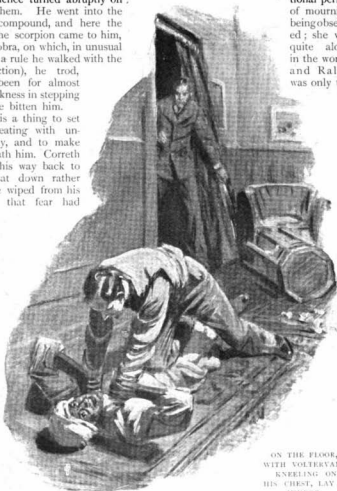
"Its chances of doing mischief must be over now," he murmured. "I've given it away to a man whom it can't possibly harm ;

I fancy I've broken the charm, or removed the curse, whichever you like to call it."

IV.

A week after her father's death, Mary Dene was married to Ralph Dersingham. Her desolate position had prevented a conven-

tional period of mourning being observed; she was quite alone in the world, and Ralph was only too



ON THE FLOOR,
WITH VOLTERVANE
KNEELING ON
HIS CHEST, LAY A
HINDOO.

eager to have the right to protect and cherish her. The wedding took place at a little station many miles from Mahathala; the bride was the guest of the chaplain and his wife, and Ralph stayed at the hotel. He had in vain tried to persuade Correth to accompany him in the capacity of best man,

but the Man of Science refused firmly, rather to Ralph's surprise.

But as Correth said to himself: "Though I've killed my happiness, I don't think I can attend its funeral. I shall stay on here and endeavour to accustom myself to think of her as another man's wife."

He had taken a fancy to the ramshackle old Mission House, and he established himself there, pending another and more legitimate occupant, during the absence of bride and bridegroom from the Commissioner's bungalow on a brief wedding tour. After all, it was something to inhabit the same dwelling that had once sheltered Mary, and Correth tried in vain to laugh at himself, and say he was a sentimental idiot.

The night the happy pair arrived at Mahat-hala, he was invited to dinner, and went to see Mary in her new character, with a strange mingling of pain and pleasure.

"Welcome home, Mrs. Dersing-ham," he said gaily, as he clasped Mary's hand in his. "As an old friend I may claim a privilege," and without waiting for permission, he kissed her brow lightly, but the touch of his lips was icy cold.

"It's nice to be at home again," said Ralph, as he surveyed his graceful young wife with pardonable pride. "In the first place, there's no place like it, and in the second, Correth, we were really unfortunate; our honeymoon was a chapter of accidents;

some ill-fate seemed to pursue Mary. She had a narrow escape from drowning when we were fording a river; then when we were out riding, her horse fell, and it was a miracle

that he did not crush her; and lastly, the wing of the hotel we were staying in caught fire, whilst she was having a siesta, and it was with difficulty I rescued her. Really I assure you, I am glad to have her at home."

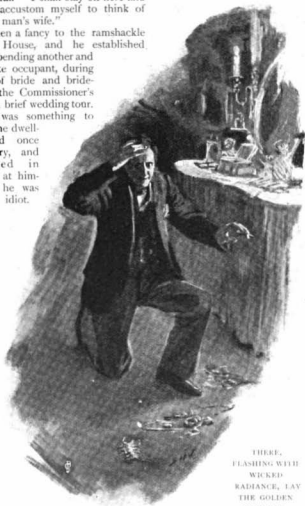
As Dersing-ham spoke, Correth thought of the golden scorpion, and in spite of all scepticism, he shivered with apprehension as he wondered whether from the grave that mysterious, wicked creature could exert its awful power over the dead man's daughter.

No, it was impossible, how could it be?

When Mary left the dinner table, Ralph turned to his friend, eager to ask a question that had been on his lips the whole evening.

"Voltervane, what have you done with that infernal little reptile?" he asked eagerly; "have you it still in your possession?"

"No," answered Correth briefly, "you can make yourself quite easy, old fellow. The



THERE,
FLASHING WITH
WICKED
RADIANCE, LAY
THE GOLDEN
SCORPION.

golden scorpion will harm no one again. It is safely out of the way."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Dersingham with a sigh of relief. "I was haunted by the idea you would disregard the third and last warning. I am thankful you didn't, that's all. Shall we join Mary now?"

"I wonder what he would think of the way in which I rid myself of the noxious little beast," thought Correth. "Somehow, I fancy he would object."

He did not stay long, though Ralph pressed him to, and Mary added her entreaties very prettily, but even though you are a philosopher, and a laughing one to boot, it is not always easy to look at happiness, the happiness you coveted for yourself, through another man's eyes.

"For a man to fall in love at my age is stark, staring lunacy, and I ought to be shut up in an asylum," he said to himself as he remained smoking on his verandah, for he hated sleep, and had trained himself to manage with an infinitesimal quantity.

And he remained on, in the glorious, pure splendour of an Indian night, thinking, smoking and enjoying the perfect peace, when the latter was suddenly broken by the sound of a horse's galloping. Voltervane threw away his cigar and sprang to his feet. There was a sound of dire terror, of great need, in that mad gallop. Fearing he scarcely knew what, Correth waited with beating heart for that reckless rider to draw rein at the Mission House.

A half-inarticulate exclamation escaped him as the horseman threw himself from the saddle and Correth recognised in him one of Dersingham's servants. The man leaped up the verandah steps, holding out a note which Correth snatched from him. One glance at the few words it contained was sufficient to make the Man of Science leap into the saddle the servant had just vacated, and ride back with mad speed to the house he had quitted but a few hours since. And to Correth it seemed that the horse galloped to the sound of the words that had struck cold terror to his heart: "Come, for God's sake, Mary is dying!"

As steed and rider thundered along, these words were everywhere—in the air, whispered in his ear by a thousand voices, and in the distant cry of a jackal, Correth heard that one awful sentence. It seemed to him as though the whole world were telling him that Mary must die, and he set his teeth and

swore that if human skill could avail aught she should be saved. With the first vague hint of dawn, he arrived at the Commissioner's bungalow, which, in the cold chill of unborn morning, had that desolate, lonely air which houses often wear when death is an inmate.

No one was about, no one seemed stirring, and Voltervane left his horse and went to the room where the dying girl lay.

Several servants were huddled round the open doorway, but they fell aside as Correth passed and made his way to the bed, beside which knelt Ralph Dersingham.

At the sound of his friend's footsteps, the Commissioner turned and Correth saw that his pale face was very tranquil.

"Thank you for coming, old fellow," he said, quietly; "but it's too late—she died half-an-hour ago—yes—it was cholera. She suffered a good deal—for two hours."

Voltervane gazed at the figure on the bed; he scarcely grasped that it was Mary who lay before him; Mary, whom he had last seen in all the glory of her ethereal loveliness but a few short hours ago.

"I sent for you because I knew—you would help us—if anyone could." Dersingham's voice was curiously even and monotonous. "It—if you'll manage all for me, old fellow, I shall be very grateful—I don't feel as though I could."

Voltervane could only say "yes," and watch Ralph in some anxiety, as the latter, with an abstracted, musing air, smoothed back the fair hair that had fallen half over the dead girl's face, bidding it from view.

"Ralph," Correth said, gently, but with determination, drawing his friend away, "come with me, you must not stay here, it is worse than useless. Go into your dressing-room, and I will give you something to make you sleep. Come, old fellow, do obey me."

"Very well," said Dersingham, with strange docility. "I'll do anything you like, Correth, and—I'm very tired."

He walked in a groping, half blind fashion to the dressing-room, stumbling like a drunken man. Voltervane followed him, and once he had him lying on the sofa, he hurriedly looked in the medicine chest for a sleeping draught, and administered one that would at least ensure some hours of blessed oblivion. Then he left him, and once more entered the death-chamber where lay all that was mortal of the woman the two men had loved so well.

With reverent hands, Correth arranged the

richly-hued hair on the pillow and, sceptic though he called himself, he wished he could lay some emblem of Christianity upon that quiet breast.

On the dressing table lay Mary's Bible and little crucifix; the latter was what he wanted, and he took it. But, as he turned away, with his elbow he swept off the table a crystal box, lined with velvet. It fell with a crash to the floor, and broke into many fragments.

It had been Mary's jewel box, and her trinkets went rolling in every direction. With an impatient exclamation at his carelessness, after listening to hear if the noise had awakened Ralph, Voltervane stooped to collect the scattered ornaments, when he beheld a sight that seemed to paralyse him with horror.

There, on the matting, flashing and shining with wicked radiance in the darkened room, lay the golden scorpion—the evil thing he had fondly imagined buried for ever in Alan Dene's grave.

Carefully Correth picked it up and examined it. Yes, it was the same; of that there could be no doubt. He thought of Dersingham's description the previous night of the perils that had beset Mary; the dangers she had undergone; three in number. She had in all probability removed the scorpion from her father's lifeless hands, to substitute some more pious token. Then she placed the creature for safe keeping in that box, and entirely forgot its existence in the sorrows and joys that were so quickly crowded on her.

Correth saw it all, and he knew that he was the passive murderer of the woman for whose sake he would have died.

Mechanically, he slipped the scorpion into

his pocket, and tried to think what he could do. What was there to be done? Only one thing—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!

The day wore on; Dersingham awoke to find his friend watching beside him, and the unnatural composure of the Man of Action gave way. Correth was glad to see him weep; his own eyes were hot, but the well of tears seemed dried.

"I've done all," he said very gently.

"Yes; it is at sundown."

There was no chaplain at Mahathala, and Dersingham could not command his voice, so it fell to the lot of Voltervane to read the Burial Service over Mary. Quietly, reverently, the solemn words fell on the still air; Correth read not only for the dead, he read for himself, the living. When all was over, he went back to the deserted, bereaved house, and stayed some time with Dersingham, then with a solemnity not unbefitting the occasion, he bade his friend good-bye and returned to the Mission House.

In his room, with locked doors, Voltervane placed the jewelled scorpion on the table, beside a loaded revolver. Then he sat down and wrote a letter to Dersingham, telling him briefly the story of his attempt to rid himself innocently of the evil creature, and the harm he had so unwittingly wrought thereby.

"Bury the accursed thing with me, and, old fellow, if you can, forgive me for having ruined your happiness. I am making what reparation I can by carrying out the old Scriptural law of 'A life for a life,'" Correth wrote, with a steady hand. "I am cured of my scepticism, and I could not live after having been the cause of Mary's death, for, Ralph—I loved her, too."

