REMINISCENCES

OF AN

INDIAN POLICE OFFICIAL.

CHAPTER I.

VINDICTIVENESS.—ANONYMOUS LETTERS.—THE WOULD-BE PARRICIDE.

Anonymous Letters.

Looking back on all these years, I have come to the conclusion that by far the worst feature in native character is vindictiveness, and that it accounts for nearly all the worst crimes in the calendar. The slightest thing arouses it, and it stops at nothing. Its favourite arena is the criminal court, its favourite weapon anonymous accusation.

I wonder how many anonymous letters are received in the public offices in India in a single day, and how many of them have the smallest foundation of fact!

Yet it is by no means safe, especially for a Police Officer, to disregard this means of obtaining information; but it requires no little judgment and
discrimination in dealing with it. At least ninety out of a hundred are vague, scurrilous, obviously malicious, and untrue, and can be at once consigned to the waste-paper basket. A small percentage may serve as warnings, or to put an Officer on his guard against events that are about to happen, or to indicate public feeling in disturbed times; a very small number will relate facts, or will make specific accusations supported by evidence that can be verified.

These last must, of course, be inquired into promptly, but with the utmost caution, lest grievous wrong be done to innocent persons. In most such cases it will sooner or later be discovered that the "bin name urzi," or anonymous letter, was the first step in an elaborate and diabolical conspiracy to injure an enemy.

I remember, for example, once receiving an anonymous letter accusing the "patel," or headman of a village, of having drowned a widow of his family, whose heir he was. Some dozen persons were named, some of whom were alleged to have witnessed the murder, others to have seen the patel throw the body into a disused well with a stone tied round its neck.

In the preliminary inquiry by a chief constable every one of the persons named gave evidence in accordance with the anonymous letter. But, to my mind, the evidence appeared far too good; and, hastening to the spot, I soon found that none of it could be true, and that the old widow had actually
died of cholera, and had been cremated in the usual public manner.

Another anonymous letter received in the village informed me that the "kulkarnee," or village accountant, had got up the plot and drafted the first letter; his house was searched, and the rough draft in his handwriting was actually found among his papers. Ten of the gang were then indicted for conspiracy, and received heavy sentences at the sessions.

It is not often, however, that discovery is so rapid, and then grievous and prolonged suffering is unavoidably occasioned to the innocent accused. The following case, the record of which no doubt still exists in a certain sessions court, is so remarkable in every way that I shall relate it in detail, styling it—

**The Would-be Parricide.**

One beautiful evening in November I found myself at the end of a wearisome march under the Syadri Ghauts, or mountains, in the South Konkan. I had recently attained to the dignity of Acting Superintendent of Police, and, as a part of my duty, I had to travel over the spurs running down from the Ghauts, and to place here and there, at the most advantageous spots, as many police posts as the then new parsimonious police re-organisation scheme would admit.

The assistant collector was encamped in the village below, and I was to remain a few days with him to combine business with snipe shooting. Mr. Platt
THE WOULD-BE PARRICIDE.

(as I shall call him) had been three or four years in charge of these same districts. Officials were not pitchforked about the Presidency in those good old days as they are now. An Assistant Collector and Magistrate had time thoroughly to know the people and to be known by them; whereas nowadays it is "aj ólé, oodya gélé, àsa chàlalé" (come to-day, gone-to-morrow, so it goes on).

Mr. Platt had often spoken to me of the village of Narrayengaum as an exceptionally good camp, and of Madhowrao, the "Khote," or middleman, as the best specimen of the old-fashioned Brahmin he had ever met. Madhowrao paid us a long visit after dinner, and I found him all that Platt had described—a kindly, courtly native gentleman, of about sixty years of age, above the average height, of spare but still active frame, with the intellectual, well-cut features and the curious green-grey eyes peculiar to the Chitpawan Brahmin.

Platt had previously told me the history of the family, which had received this village in "Khoti" tenure about a century before as a reward for great services to the then Peshwa, and had settled down there to reclaim and repopulate it as stipulated in the "Sanad," or deed of grant. Madhowrao's elder and only brother had died a few months before. It had been the boast of the two brothers that no process of the revenue, civil or criminal courts, had ever been sent to Narrayengaum, and that no policeman ever visited it on duty.

But the burden of Madhowrao's lament to us that
night was that all this had changed for the worse since his brother's death. His brother left a son, then about twenty-five years of age, whom we saw, and set down then and there as a most objectionable specimen of the youthful Brahmin of the new school. Madhowrao also had a son of about the same age, whom we did not see. His father was in great trouble about him; he told us that Vinayek had for eight or ten years caused him the greatest anxiety by absenting himself for months together, and wandering about the country as a sort of "Gosai," or religious mendicant; he would suddenly return, and as suddenly disappear.

He had in this way disappeared after a two months' visit in the previous month of July, and Madhowrao was getting very anxious about him. We learnt that since his uncle's death, Vinayek, now known as Vinayek Deo (Deo is a religious affix), had become very intimate with his cousin, and that the two had combined to put pressure on him to consent to a partition or "Wantup" of the village. In short, poor Madhowrao seemed to me to be worried out of his life by his son and nephew. I may mention that—his wife having died some years before—his household was superintended by his widowed sister, a nice-looking old lady, who insisted on our eating some very pungent cakes of her own making. I remember that she bored us a good deal with her reiterated abuse of the missing Vinayek Deo, and it was clear that they were on the worst possible terms.
I must here, for the sake of my story, describe the locality, and I should be tempted, if space permitted, to dwell at some length on the great natural beauties of the spot. The village lay at the head of a gorge or ravine, just below where a stream, of considerable volume even at that season, and a roaring, foaming torrent in the rains, tumbled over a precipice, about two hundred feet high, into a basin it had worn out below—a pool which, like all pools at the foot of waterfalls along the Ghauts, was popularly supposed to be of unfathomable depth, and to be the haunt of a monster alligator. On a rocky ledge near the top of the fall, and almost projecting over it, rose the fantastic outline of the laterite-built village temple, which, with its red-brown walls here and there covered with patches of delicate ferns, stood out in strong relief against the falling water and the brilliant verdure of the hillside. The village nestled under the hill on the left, nearly hidden from view by a dense thicket of bamboos, cocoa-nut trees, and rich, glossy-leaved mangoes. Two houses only stood on the right hand of the stream, that of Madhowrao, nearest the torrent; that of his nephew a hundred yards lower down, each surrounded by groves of the "areca," or betel-nut palm—"the straightest thing in nature," some one has called it, and certainly one of the most graceful of all our Indian palms. In the fair season it was an easy matter to cross the torrent-bed from stone to stone. In the monsoon, or rainy season, the only means of getting from the village to the Khote's houses was by a sort of suspension
bridge of bamboos. At that season, of course, the roar of the waterfall drowned every other noise in the village. Below the village the gorge spread out on either side into a sheet of rice fields, while the hillsides were terraced out with infinite labour into narrow plots for the growth of coarser grains. A fairer scene, a more picturesque spot, it is impossible to conceive. I left it with regret, little thinking that I should have to visit it again in a few months to inquire into the horrible murder of Vinayek Deo, alleged to have been committed by our respected old friends, his father Madhowrao and his old aunt.

For some time I heard nothing from or about the village. At last the chief constable, or "Foujdar," as he was termed in those days, reported that Madhowrao, having failed to trace his son, had applied to him for aid, and offered a small reward for intelligence of him. A notice, with a description of Vinayek Deo, was accordingly sent to neighbouring districts, and circulated throughout my own charge, but with no result.

Some months passed by, and I was at the headquarters station for the monsoon with all the other district officers, when it was reported by the same Foujdar that he had received by post an anonymous letter declaring, in the most circumstantial manner, that Vinayek Deo had been strangled in the dead of the night by his old father and aunt, and that, unable to dispose of or carry the body themselves, they had employed their two farm-servants, Baloo and Bapoo, to carry it to the torrent
and cast it into the deep pool, where it would doubtless be discovered, if the "mugger" (alligator) had not eaten it!

The Foujdar went on to say that he had at once proceeded to the village, had interrogated Baloo and Bapoo, who confessed to having been called up by Madhowra, in the middle of a tempestuous night in the previous July, that they were shown Vinayek Deo lying dead, with protruding tongue and eyes, and a cord round his neck, that Madhowrao and the old woman besought them to throw the corpse into the pool close by, and that after stripping off the clothes, which Madhowrao rolled up and gave to the old woman—his sister—they tied a heavy stone round it and hurled the body into the water.

On this the Foujdar had, of course, apprehended Madhowrao, his sister, and the two servants, had the house searched, and found a bundle of clothing and a pair of sandals hidden away, and was engaged in dragging the pool as well as he could. "The Sahib might rely upon his energy and intelligence, but it would be a great satisfaction if the Sahib could come down himself."

Of course the Sahib went down, and never shall I forget what an awful journey I had! It was raining from twelve to eighteen inches a day; every small watercourse was a raging torrent, and the path in the lower lands, leading along narrow rice bunds, afforded scarcely any footing for my unhappy "tat" (pony). However, everything has an end, and after two long weary days' marching I reached Narayen-
gaum, and put up in the only shelter there was—an outhouse at Madhowrao’s farm.

The Foujdar then produced a bundle full of bones he had just fished up from the pool, which we sealed up and sent off for examination by the Civil Surgeon, and then the prisoners were brought before me. I was shocked beyond measure at the utter collapse of Madhowrao. He only moaned, and seemed hardly able to articulate, and his old sister kept going from one fit of hysterics into another. Having had the statements of Baloo and Bapoo previously read to me by the Foujdar, I had each of these gentlemen brought into me separately, and his handcuffs removed. Then, ordering the police to stay outside, I made each of them tell his own tale in his own way, and each of them repeated in substance what I have above related. I found it impossible to shake them in any way—"they had seen their old master in sore trouble; he had asked them to help in getting rid of the body, and they naturally obeyed him; they knew nothing more; they had never told any one what had happened, and could not understand how it became known; they hoped the Sirkar would be merciful, and pardon them for telling the truth," and so on. The men were ordinary Kunbis (cultivators), of average intelligence, but they seemed to me rather to overdo their feelings of gratitude and devotion to Madhowrao. They repeated over and over the same story in nearly the same words. Their evidence, in a word, was too good, and I made up my mind at once that they were lying.
Duty, however, required me to take the case back with me to the Assistant, my old friend Platt. He too questioned the would-be approvers, failed to shake their evidence, and took them to the Magistrate, one of the most experienced officials then in India. Here again they related their story without deviating a hair's breadth. Yet the Magistrate and Platt were as convinced as I was that they were repeating a well-taught lesson!

At the Magistrate's desire, but very much against my own inclination, I transferred the Foujdar, and the police who had been with him at the inquiry, to other posts. The Magistrate took fresh steps to trace Vinayek Deo in the surrounding districts, while the prisoners were remanded from time to time for further investigation.

In due course the Civil Surgeon deposed that the bones found were those of a bullock, and it further transpired that the bundle of clothes (which undoubtedly had belonged to Vinayek Deo) were not found in any way concealed in Madhowrao's house—they were simply laid in his ow. chest with his own clothes. We had many interviews with Madhowrao, who now constantly repeated, "Jiwant hai, pun mee melya-shiwai nahi yènar" (He is alive, but he won't come till I am dead). A month or two passed, when the transferred Foujdar applied for three months' leave on medical certificate, his health having completely broken down (as he alleged) in consequence of his disgrace. With the Magistrate's consent I let him go, and I understood he had gone to a relative in Bombay.
The case by this time was practically out of my hands, and was borne on the monthly register of cases pending before Mr. Platt. These were the days of the old "Sudder Adawlut," now the High Court of Judicature, which was then famed for penning most offensive precepts and comments on the work of the Judges and Magistrates. This intelligent body soon noticed Mr. Platt's delay in disposing of the Narrayengaum murder case, and called for and received explanations which only made them more angry. Detailed reports were then called for, and the Magistrate was told that the Court were of opinion that, notwithstanding there was no corpus delicti, there was still ample evidence for the committal of the prisoners. A fierce paper war with the District Magistrate then ensued, and so time slipped on till November, when Platt was again on tour, leaving the four accused in the lock-up at headquarters. At last the Magistrate forwarded to him a peremptory order from the Sudder Court that he should forthwith commit the Narrayengaum murder case to the sessions, and report within fifteen days that he had done so.

What followed is best told in the following characteristic epistle, which I shortly after received from Platt:—

"You will be pining to hear from me the full details of the Narrayengaum murder case. I only wish you had been with me at the end, and could have seen how heavily I scored against those judicial fossils in Bombay.

"Well, when I received their idiotic and, as I think, illegal order to commit, I ordered Madhowrao and Co. to be sent down
to Viziadroog to meet me on Monday the 1st inst. On the previous evening I was pitched at Pimpulgaum, that little village on the opposite side of the creek—you know the place, close to the track that comes down from Rajapoor beyond—when a couple of policemen with a prisoner arrived, and the naik (corporal) in a great state of excitement handed me a packet with "Zarooz-zarooz" (urgent, urgent) written all over it. It was from your old Fouljar on leave, telling me that he sent the missing Vinayek Deo, whom he had followed up and caught far away in the Nizam's territory! I never felt more like licking a man in my life than when I saw the venomous young reptile and remembered all poor Madhowrao had suffered.

"To cut a long story short, I took him over to Viziadroog in my boat next morning, warning the police not to say who he was, and immediately on arrival had up the four prisoners—Madhowrao, his sister, and the two approvers. You can picture the scene to yourself. The Court was held as usual under that big banian tree in the fort, and I began by telling Madhowrao that I had now received final orders to commit the case to the sessions, but that I myself was firmly convinced of his innocence, and believed that Vinayek Deo was alive, and would sooner or later turn up.

"You will understand that this little harangue was by way of preparing Madhowrao. He, poor fellow, only said, as he always had, 'He is alive, but he has killed me.' The old lady squatted speechless, with her saree (dress) covering her face, and those two hounds, Baloo and Bapoo, retained their usual brutally stolid demeanour. I beckoned to the police behind the prisoners, and Vinayek Deo was brought almost noiselessly up, when I said to Madhowrao, 'God is great! Look behind you, Baba!' He turned, saw his son, and fell flat on his face insensible. The old lady went off into sreeching hysterics, but the two others, so far as I noticed, never moved a muscle of their countenances. We had the greatest difficulty in reviving poor old Madhowrao; in fact, I at one time feared he was a dead man. He was better, however, in the afternoon, though terribly weak, and I was able to resume proceedings with Vinayek Deo as prisoner No. 1, Baloo No. 2, and Bapo No. 3.

"Vinayek Deo made a clean breast of it, confessing that he and that evil-visaged cousin whom we saw at Narrayengaum last
THE IDENTIFICATION IN THE FORT.
year concocted the plot between them. Vinayek Deo was to disappear suddenly, and make his way in disguise to the Moghul (Nizam's dominion), and after a sufficient interval the cousin Luxmanrao was to get an anonymous petition sent in denouncing Madhowrao and the old lady. Baloo and Baboo were carefully coached up as to their story, and told not to vary it by a word, and were promised some lands rent free when Madhowrao was disposed of. A more fiendish conspiracy never entered a Brahmin's brain! You will have heard that I had the cousin arrested, and I have just committed the lot to the sessions on a charge of conspiracy, but I fear the cousin Luxmanrao will get off, for there is nothing but the confessions of the other three against him.

"The Magistrate writes me that on his return to the Sudder's precept he gave them a lecture, which they will hardly venture to publish in their monthly proceedings. He adds that he was sorry he could not send on my report, as I asked him to do; it was really 'too cheeky'! You must 'keep very kind' on your Foujdar. God knows what would have been the end but for his pluck and intelligence!"

The end of the case was that Vinayek Deo was sentenced to seven years' and Baloo and Bapoo to three years' each hard labour, while the cousin was acquitted. Madhowrao and the old lady quite got over it, and lived for some years afterwards. The cousin, however, went on a pilgrimage to Benares and died there, so Madhowrao had peace for the last few years of his life. I did "keep kindness" on the Foujdar. He was rapidly promoted, and died in harness as a police inspector. He always declared that when he went on leave he had no clue whatever, but he was deeply impressed by Madhowrao's demeanour, and very angry at having been disgraced, and was determined to find Vinayek Deo if he was alive, or never return to service again. He first
picked up a thread of intelligence at that sink of iniquity, Pandharapur, and his subsequent adventures in pursuit of the missing man would make a capital story in themselves.

In the present day, with improved means of communication by telegraph and otherwise, Vinayek Deo would probably have been found in a few weeks, and the plot would not have matured. Even if it had, under the existing Codes of Procedure, Madhowrao's suspense would not have been prolonged; the Magistrate would doubtless have committed the case for trial, but at the sessions the Judge would have certainly relied greatly upon the assessors' appreciation of the evidence of the two approvers and the surrounding circumstances, and Madhowrao would certainly have been acquitted, though he would have remained under a cloud till his rascally son turned up.

I was at great pains to satisfy myself whether Vinayek Deo's object really was to get his father convicted of his own murder. I hoped that his vindictiveness only went as far as seeking to involve his father in disgrace and suffering; but subsequent interviews with Vinayek Deo in gaol left me no room for doubt. The man himself was actually rather proud of his performance, and evidently enjoyed relating how the plot was hatched and carried out. He seemed to me positively to exult in all his father had suffered, and only to regret that his cousin had not shared his own fate.

As to the motives of the two servants, Baloo and Bapoo, I could never discover that they had any
beyond those above-stated; they were common labourers, possessed of no land of their own, and they firmly believed that Vinayek Deo and his cousin would reward them if they stuck to their story. They admitted that they bore no ill-will towards Madhowrao, in whose house they had lived for years, and who, as well as his old sister, had always treated them well. They were very little higher than animals as to intelligence, but had not the gratitude that animals show to those who feed them.
CHAPTER II.

THE GREAT MILITARY PENSION FRAUDS.-
TANNAK: THE DUMMY PENSIONER.

Part I.

In the true history of "The Would-be Parricide" I sketched the progress of a conspiracy, the first step in which was an anonymous petition of the false and more common type. I now follow it up by an account of another, but a true anonymous letter, which in a great measure led to the disclosure of an organised system of fraud extending over many years.

It is necessary for the purposes of my narrative that I should accurately describe the localities. I might, without risk of injuring the feelings of any one, even give the real names of the actors in the drama, for nearly thirty-five years have passed away, and, with one exception, every one concerned has long left India and been gathered to his fathers; the record, however, no doubt remains preserved in the archives of the Military Department.

My own knowledge of the case is derived from the perusal of a copy of the proceedings of a Military Court of Inquiry at the time, and from notes furnished to me.
since by the chief person connected with the affair, whose permission I have obtained to make use of them. During the early stages I was, as the Police Officer of the district, necessarily cognisant of what was going on, but I had nothing officially to do with the inquiry, beyond furnishing a couple of the most intelligent and reliable of my constables to aid the Assistant Magistrate—men who, I am glad to remember, thoroughly justified my selection, and ultimately rose to posts of (to them) considerable emolument in the Bombay City Police.

In the days I speak of, the South Konkan, which properly includes the two “zillahs,” or districts, of Kolaba and Rutnagherry, was the favourite recruiting-ground of the Bombay Army. The ranks were then filled with sturdy Mahrattas, descendants of Sivaji’s invincible “Hedkaris,” inhabiting the spurs and valleys below the great Syladri range of mountains. Every regiment also contained many outcast mhars from the same region, excellent soldiers, many of whom rose to high rank.

All this, I am told, has now been changed; recruiting parties, though still sent into the district, find great difficulty in enlisting even the small proportion of undersized men that fastidious commissioned officers will now admit into their battalions. Eighty-two Bombay cotton mills and other factories and the railways have absorbed all the spare labour the Konkan can provide, and mhars and low castes fill the scavenger corps of the Bombay Health Department. Still, there must be thousands of military
pensioners spread over this country, whose well-being should be the care of a humane Government; and if anything that appears in this paper draws the attention of authority to their condition, it will not have been penned in vain.

Nearly in the centre of this South Konkan, six miles from the sea-board and the little fair-season port of Hurnee, is the old cantonment of Dapoolie, formerly the chief of many small military posts dotted along the coast after our subjugation of the country between 1817 and 1819. Dapoolie survived them all, being selected, by reason of its position, as the headquarters of the Native Veteran Battalion, to which were drafted all invalided sepoys still capable of some light duty, but not yet entitled to full pension.

Dapoolie thus naturally became the headquarters also of the Pension Pay Department—a department of considerable importance even now, seeing that it pays away some six lakhs per annum, and in the days of which I speak swallowed up nearly the whole land revenue of the Rutsnaghi. Zillah. The Paymaster, provided with a strong establishment of Purbhus, or clerks, resided here, and twice during the fair season was expected to visit the principal towns accessible from the sea-board, and at each of them to pay the pensioners in the neighbourhood, previously summoned for the purpose. At Dapoolie itself he made quarterly payments, and the majority of the pensioners were settled within fairly easy reach of the cantonment. The system had been in force for
nearly twenty years, during most of which time the same officer had held the post of paymaster.

Instances of personating deceased pensioners had occasionally but rarely cropped up, and on the whole the military authorities had no reason to doubt that all was going well. Towards the end of the "fifties," the Native Veteran Battalion, or the "Guttram Phal- tan," as natives called it, was abolished, having, I may mention, done very useful service during the Mutiny years, 1857 to 1859, when even the decrepit military pensioners joined them in taking all the Treasury and other stationary guards throughout the Konkan.

The abolition of the cantonment had been determined upon, and specific orders were expected every month. In the interim the Bazaar-master (an old European Officer of the battalion) remained in charge of the cantonment.

It was at this time that my friend, whom I shall call Colt, joined the district as Assistant Collector and Magistrate in charge of the northern "talookas," or sub-districts, wherein Dapoolie is situate. Colt was an officer of some few years' standing, endowed with remarkable energy; and though in no sense of the word a good Mahratti or Guzerati scholar, yet possessed of an unusual practical knowledge of both those vernaculars, especially of Mahratti, which he wrote and read easily, and spoke like a native. He was thus quite independent of his sheristedar (secretary) and karkoons (clerks); always opened and read his own post, and often wrote his own orders before handing his correspondence to his office.
Many a mile have we two jogged along the tracks in that part of the country. The only five miles of made road in the district at that time was from Dapoolie to Hurnee, and one could hardly do more than six miles an hour. Colt stopped and talked to every knot of wayfarers we caught up; as I subsequently remembered, was particularly conversational with those who seemed to be pensioned sepoys on their way to the quarterly payment. Their story was always much to the same effect: "It is a good and kind Sirkar (Government). Our pensions are liberal, and we should be content, but the sowkar (money-lender) eats us up, and the Sirkar is blind and helpless." On one occasion I was staying with Colt in the Assistant Collector's picturesque bungalow at Hurnee; there are, by the way, few more beautiful views than that from the spacious verandah. The post was brought up, and Colt, in his armchair, proceeded to open the various packets, sorting and noting on them from time to time. "Hullo," he said suddenly, "here's an anonymous petition saying that a pensioned Jemadar died seven years ago, and that his pension is still drawn by the village headman."

We discussed a little what ought to be done with it, and finally the sheristellar (head clerk) was sent for. He was not shown the petition, but simply asked what was the usual practice in regard to petitions about military pensions, and promptly replied that they should be sent with an endorsement in English by the Saheb to the Paymaster Saheb for the latter's disposal.
Colt seemed to acquiesce, and I quite understood that he had passed on the petition to Dapoolie in accordance with the usual routine.

More than a year passed, and Colt, whose children were ailing, obtained permission to pass the monsoon or rainy months at Dapoolie, instead of at Rutnagiri, the civil headquarters at which I, in common with all other civil officers, was doomed to stay. An old friend of Colt's, the Medical Superintendent of vaccination, accompanied him, and they took a house together. About the middle of the rainy season, Colt wrote to me privately to send him the two most reliable and intelligent men under me, and to let it seem as if the order originated from myself, and was merely a transfer to and from his own usual police guard. At the same time the Magistrate took an opportunity privately of requesting me to give Colt any aid he might ask for, but to keep my own counsel, as there was something serious afoot. Of course I complied, and for two or three months more daily looked out for some stirring news from Dapoolie to relieve the horrible monotony of our daily life.

At last, one evening late in October, while "the station" was assembled and trying to kill time at the daily croquet squabble, the bells of a "dak" runner were heard approaching—obviously an "1xprësh," for the regular post was long in. Fearing it might be news of a murder or dacoity, I rushed off to the post-office and found one much-sealed packet addressed in Colt's hand to the
Magistrate, who soon sent for me to request me to transfer a dozen police to Hurnee to obey Colt's orders. He then showed me that officer's confidential despatch, and I made a copy of it for him, and also of a letter which he then and there wrote to the Chief Secretary to Government, enclosing the former, suggesting that a military court of inquiry should assemble at Dapoolie as soon as the "coast opened" for native craft, and that Colt should be nominated to prosecute.

Colt's report was most sensational. It appeared that for nearly two years he had been secretly collecting evidence which showed that, not only had the pensions of deceased pensioners been drawn after their deaths, but that there was an organised conspiracy between "sowkars," or money-lenders, on the one hand, and the Purbhu clerks of the Pension Pay Office on the other, by which pensioned sepoys, and the pensioned families of sepoys perished in service, had been systematically robbed of their pensions for a long series of years. The descriptive rolls of the unfortunates—without which they could not claim payment—were pledged wholesale to money-lenders, who, with the connivance of the clerks, sent up dummies to personate the pensioners and draw their pay, which was every evening brought to the head clerk's office, and there distributed among the sowkars, who let their miserable victims have a few rupees to carry on with till the next pay day.

Colt had actually arrested two of these dummies
with many pensioners' rolls and the full pensions on their persons: he had also seized the account-books for two years of the leading sowkars for three miles round, and found abundant corroborative evidence in them. He had removed the three personating dummies to Hurnee in close custody, and they had already made a clean breast of it, and disclosed ramifications of the plot of the extent of which he himself was not previously aware. Free pardon to these personators, and the prompt suspension from office of the entire military Pension Pay Establishment, was earnestly solicited.

The Magistrate felt, and said, that the arrest and removal of the personators from the limits of the Cantonment without the least communication with the Bazaar-master, as also the seizure of the sowkar's books, might be regarded by higher authorities as a very irregular, high-handed, if not illegal proceeding. On the other hand, it was not to be forgotten that for some few years the military authority in the cantonment of Dapoolie had been notoriously lax, and was certainly ill-defined, and he believed Colt would be able to justify whatever irregularities he might have committed. He would therefore strenuously support him at every point. The Government in the Secret Department (Sir Henry Anderson being Secretary) supported him also, and the military authorities were invited to convene a Court of Inquiry and to suspend the Pay Establishment; pensioners to be paid in the interval by civil agency.
After weeks of harassing delay, which Colt utilised in collecting and arranging his evidence, and the pay clerks devoted to sending daily scurrilous memorials and petitions, anonymous and otherwise, to Government, a "General Order" appeared appointing a Court of Inquiry to assemble at Dapoolie to conduct an investigation into matters which would there be officially communicated to them. The Military Department "saw no present reason for suspending the pension pay subordinates!" The Civil Government authorised a free pardon to the personators. Of the three officers nominated to the Court, the President was at Belgaum, another member in Guzerat, and the third at Ahmednugger, and it was nearly Christmas before the Court could assemble. The details of their proceedings and other explanatory matter must be reserved for another chapter.
CHAPTER III.

THE GREAT MILITARY PENSION FRAUDS—continued.

PART II.

Long before the military court of inquiry could assemble at Dapoolie I had an opportunity of seeing my friend Colt, and hearing from his own mouth, and from his friend the vaccinating Doctor, the details of the grand coup by which the conspiracy had been at last exploded.

I was surprised to learn that Colt had not even then taken any steps towards ascertaining the truth of the anonymous letter (to which I have before referred) alleging the fraudulent drawing of a deceased pensioner's pay: he proposed to reserve this particular case for the Court. A less wary man would have worked upon this information from the outset, and thereby, as I easily perceived afterwards, have put the conspirators on their guard.

"Had I," said Colt, "followed the regular routine and sent the petition to the pension paymaster for disposal, it would probably have been so arranged that proof of the fraud would have been difficult—worse still, the office might have brought the case
forward as a discovery by themselves, and made capital out of it before the Court. If, on the other hand, I, as Magistrate, had instituted an independent inquiry, the office would have taken alarm, and guessed that I suspected them generally, and would have had ample time and opportunity to 'square' or warn every one all round. It was wiser to let them remain undisturbed in blissful ignorance, impressed with the belief that the new Assistant Collector took no more interest than his predecessors in pensioners or their affairs. It doesn’t do to rush your fence, old fellow! So I’ve left that particular case untouched, and have all this time been picking up what information I could get on other matters more nearly concerning living pensioners and their wrongs. The dead man’s case, if it turns out true (as I believe it will), will be a bonne bouche for the Court to start upon, and will strengthen my position before them at the outset.”

Colt had derived most of his information from two persons to whom I should certainly never have resorted myself: a retired Europe… Conductor of the Ordnance Department, and a young Parsee shop-keeper—about the last people I should have expected to find versed in Hindoo life, or to be able or willing to impart information worth having. Mr. Daniel Monk, the retired Conductor aforesaid, had been for some years settled in a small village a few miles from Dapoolie, where he had leased a few acres of rough land, built himself a small hut, and gone in for coffee growing, more for amusement than with a view to
profit. He lived a most secluded life, with one old Mahommedan who had been a quarter of a century in his service.

Domestic trouble in earlier days was supposed to have driven him to the life of a recluse: but, though I knew him as well as any one in those parts, I could never induce him to speak of, or even to refer to, the past.

He rarely left the village; he hardly set foot outside his garden more than twice a year, when he had to get a life certificate to enable him to draw his small annuity: but he was much visited by all classes of natives, who held him in high respect for his blameless life, and perhaps entertained some superstitious regard for him because of his fakir-like habits. Somehow or other, he had taught himself enough Mahratti to be able to read native newspapers, but he took no interest whatever in the current events that interest Europeans; he was, above all, a peacemaker, and many a foolish quarrel was referred to him and settled at his little hut, where he might be seen any day from the road, seated in his verandah or pottering about among his coffee trees.

A grand old fellow, past sixty years of age when I knew him, six feet two in height, and as straight as a dart, invariably clad in a loose striped cotton blouse, pyjamas, native sandals, and no stockings.

I have been led to describe him, because he subsequently played an important part in another matter. "But that's another story," as Kipling says! Living this life, he had come to know many of the native
pensioners; and his old servant—who, I verily believe, thought he was a saint—brought many of them to him with their troubles.

Fulloo was the son of an old Parsee shopkeeper, who supplied the few European officers in Dapoolie with "Europe stores," and the richer native pensioners with British brandies and other poisons. A very intelligent young fellow of twenty-five was Fulloo, extremely energetic and pushing—as all his people are—and very popular with European and native alike. I am much afraid, however, that Colt would have got very little assistance out of Fulloo, if Fulloo's bibulous customers among the pensioners had paid their little accounts regularly: but the conspirators who robbed them, in their greed left the men barely sufficient to live upon, and were foolish enough not to let Fulloo's bills be regarded as a first claim on their pensions. So Fulloo naturally hated the usurers and the office purbhus (clerks), and was ready enough to impart all he knew—and perhaps a little more—to Colt, to whom, however, he subsequently proved a most valuable agent.

I must here briefly describe, for the information of uninitiated readers, the process of pension payment as it then existed and probably still exists. It was simplicity itself. On being admitted to pension, each man or woman was carefully examined, and a descriptive roll drawn up containing minute details as to age, height, any distinctive marks or scars, general appearance, and so forth. A copy of this document, showing the monthly amount payable, and
DAPOOLIE: PAYING THE PENSIONERS.
where payable, was then handed to the pensioner in a neat tin case, with instructions to present it each quarter to the Pension Paymaster. In his office it ought to have remained for a day at most for comparison with the register, then the pensioner’s name was called out, and on his answering to it the Pension Paymaster was bound to compare the claimant with his descriptive roll, and then to pay him the quarter’s pension in arrears, endorsing on the back of the roll the date and amount paid; the roll was then returned to the pensioner. It was expressly forbidden by general orders that the pensioner should transfer, or by sale or mortgage, part with his descriptive roll. The roll of a deceased pensioner was, or should have been, returned by the village officers to the Pension Pay Office with a report of the death. Nothing could be simpler, nothing could be more perfect as a system, to secure the pensioner getting his pension himself, or to protect the Government against fraud, provided the Pension Paymaster rigorously adhered to his orders, and did what he certified on honour every quarter he had done, viz.: compared each pensioner with his descriptive roll at the time of payment.

But this comparison was a tedious and troublesome business, and the certificate “on honour” came to be regarded as a form. From a comparison of only a percentage, it at last became the rule to compare none of the pensioners with their rolls; and a large majority of the pensioners, ignorant and improvident as they mostly are, habitually pledged
their rolls with the money-lenders for cash advances. The pensioner, at any rate, could not draw his pension without producing his roll, and it was not given to him till the sowkar or usurer, had got a fresh bond out of him up to date. Even then the sowkar usually accompanied his client to the Pay Office, and sat outside—armed with a decree of attachment, in most cases—till the victim came out with his roll and money.

But there were many usurers who would not even trust their clients so far as this, but refused to let the rolls pass again into the hands of their pensioner debtors. Thus a system of dummy pensioners grew up with the connivance of the clerks of the Pay Office, who, of course, were regularly remunerated by the usurers, or not unfrequently had shares in the loans. The usurers then privately handed over their clients' rolls to the clerks, and on an appointed day dummies deputed by the usurers went up, answered to the clients' names, drew the money, received the rolls, and handed the whole (money and rolls) to the usurer at the end of the day's work. It may easily be conceived how completely an indebted pensioner was at the mercy of his creditor, how great was the facility and temptation to the office clerks in the case of deceased pensioners.

Having mastered the outlines of the nefarious conspiracy, Colt's main object was to get at the dummies, to catch them in the very act, with pensions and descriptive rolls on their persons. It was with this object that he settled himself down at
Dapoolie in the monsoon with his friend the doctor, in a bungalow, only separated from the office and residence of the paymaster by a public road; these houses, like all the officers' houses in the station, stood round the edge of and faced the little parade-ground. The brook "Jog" ran behind them, so that persons with information had easy access along its rocky bank to Colt's office without being seen by the assembled pensioners and usurers, or by the clerks in the Pay Office.

About a hundred yards off, on the parade-ground, stood the old quarter-guard, where the treasure needed for payment was kept. From it every morning a little procession of clerks, with two or three pensioners carrying bags of money, wended its way to the Pay Office, and from the office a similar little procession returned every evening with the unexpended balance. Colt soon learnt that the principal dummy was one Tannak, and that he was commonly employed to carry the treasure to and fro. It was some weeks, however, before reliable information was brought by Fulloo that certain large pensions were to be drawn by him.

At last one evening Fulloo rushed in from the brook, and reported that Tannak had drawn three heavy pensions, and that another dummy had drawn others, and that they probably had both the cash and descriptive rolls on them. Colt and the doctor had just time to issue certain orders to his own police and to ensconce themselves behind the garden hedge, when the little procession emerged from the Pay
Office, Tannak leading, loaded with one bag of coin, a pensioner carrying another, the treasurer and another clerk and a peon bringing up the rear. Allowing them just time to enter the quarter-guard, Colt and the doctor raced to the door, entered and shut it, and Colt, turning to Tannak, said, "Tannak, I take you prisoner! You have just drawn the pensions of Subedar-Major Rannâk, Jemedar Babaji, and Rowji Naique, and you have the money and the descriptive rolls in your waist-cloth!"

Without a word, but in abject terror, Tannak produced what he was taxed with, saying, "The sowkars and the clerks have taught me." A similar formality with similar results was gone through with the pensioner dummy, who had two pensions and rolls on his person. Not a word was said to the clerks, who were speechless with fright. The two prisoners were at once escorted by Colt and the doctor to the limits of the cantonment, and handed over to Colt's own police guard, which he had ordered out for the purpose, who conveyed them in a cart to the lock-up at Hurnee. Colt then went to five or six usurers' houses in small villages adjoining the camp and secured their account-books, which he at once took off to Hurnee for minute examination. It was certainly very neatly managed.

The two dummies were, of course, set at liberty directly Colt received Government sanction to their being made approvers. Of the old fellow arrested with Tannak, and three other pensioners similarly employed from time to time, who subsequently gave
THE GREAT MILITARY PENSION FRAUDS.

33
evidence before the Court of Inquiry, it is unnecessary to speak further; but Tannak merits special description.

Tannak was the son of an old Subedar-Major, who had distinguished himself at the brilliant little battle of Koregaum, and in his old age had settled down at Daporeelle with a special pension. There, in the Mhars' quarter, he built himself a good stone house, buying the occupancy right of a few acres of good land in the vicinity. He brought up his son for the army, and Tannak was duly drilled in the "juvenile squad" up to the age of sixteen, when he so lamed himself in an accident that he could not be enlisted, and after his father's death he had to live as best he could on the family acres. Needless to say, they were soon mortgaged to a usurer in the neighbourhood, who employed him for many years in his transactions with low-caste clients, process serving, executions, and the like.

A fine-looking fellow, well set up and drilled, with a certain military smartness about him, Tannak was unusually intelligent, and, having miraculously abstained from drink, was always trustworthy. So it came to pass when he grew older that he was employed, first by his own usurer, then by others, and finally by usurers and office clerks together, as their most reliable agent at pay time, when he comported himself exactly like a pensioned sepoy, and no ordinary observer would have believed but that he was one. The man was full of humour, and made us almost die of laughing when he related his ex-
periences, and acted over and over again how he used to go up and salute the Paymaster sahib, and say "Hazzur"* to any particular name called out for

which he was to answer. He rarely drew *more than two pensions in one day (!), one in the morning and one in the afternoon, lest the sahib might remember him; but on special occasions, such as that on which

* Present.
he was arrested, he had drawn as many as five, making some slight alteration in his dress and voice, and manner generally. The man was, in fact, a born actor, and thoroughly entered into the fun of the thing. He thought it a great compliment that he was always told off to personate the pensioners of high rank, and was quite proud of having drawn the pension and special allowance of Subedar-Major and Sirdar Bahadur Ramnâk for four years without intermission.

He described to us with great drollery the nocturnal meetings of usurers, clerks, and defrauded pensioners. He, canny man, neither gave up cash nor rolls till he had received his own little commission down, ten, fifteen, or even twenty rupees, and then he would try to get better terms for the poor pensioners concerned, and had even threatened to split if enough money were not doled out to each to carry him on to next quarter-day. He was thus a personage of no small importance and influence in the neighbourhood, and did Colt right good service when the Court was sitting. I afterwards employed him regularly as a secret detective. He never failed me, entering con amore into any matter confided to him, and on more than one occasion displaying remarkable detective ability.

To proceed with my tale. When Colt knew that the sealed orders for the Court had arrived at Dapoolie, he took Tannak back with him, and, much more confident in his staunchness than I must confess I was, let him run loose, as it were, among his
old associates. Of course, both sowkars and office clerks did their utmost to corrupt him, and to induce him to throw Colt over before the Court. Tannak heard all they had to say, and held out vague hopes, but he never really wavered, and soon furnished Colt with a very valuable piece of information.

The sealed orders came in a large packet addressed "To the President of the Court of Inquiry convened under General order No. so-and-so—to await arrival." The post-master, a Purbhu,* ought, of course, to have kept it in his own charge till the President's arrival, but he chose to deliver it to the Bazaar-master, who, very imprudently—not to say improperly—retained it in his drawer, where it was accessible to his clerks, all bosom-friends of the Pay Office clerks. Tannak had not been a week back at Dapoolie when he informed Colt that by some means or other they had got a copy of the orders, and were busily engaged in devising means to meet Colt's charges by influencing certain witnesses whose names were mentioned.

The first arrival was Waller, the junior member of the Court, a very clever young fellow and an excellent Mahratti scholar, who subsequently earned the Victoria Cross, and rose before his death to high position in the Political Department. He had not the remotest idea what the subject for inquiry was, and must have had rather a dull time of it for a week or so; being impecunious after his long journey, as any subaltern would be, he suffered no little dis-

* Purbhus by caste are almost always clerks or writers by profession.
comfort, for he saw the danger and impropriety of borrowing from any one on the spot.

The fact, however, that he was very hard up was soon made known in the bazaar, and Fulloo's first important service was to tell Colt that it had been arranged by the conspirators that one of the chief peasant usurers was to call on him one evening and offer him a loan. Colt thereupon wrote him a confidential note warning him of the coming visit, and to be on his guard against all and sundry. The lieutenant in due course wrote that the visit and proposal had duly come off, and that he should report the incident to the President, as he afterwards did.

The President and second member of the Court arrived nearly together, and no time was lost in convening the first meeting. The selection of the Court did great credit to the judgment of Headquarters. The President, a brevet-colonel of no small personal experience of military courts-martial, had a sufficient colloquial knowledge of the vernacular, and though somewhat brusque and hasty, was remarkably quick of observation, and the incarnation of fairness. Captain Bird, the second member, had long been adjutant of his regiment, and was an unusually good Mahratti scholar, besides being an excellent accountant. The members were nearly strangers to each other, and complete strangers to the Pension Paymaster and to Colt.

At the preliminary meeting the President, after a short address, produced the sealed packet of orders,
together with an official letter from the Bazaar-master, reporting that it had been handed to him (the President) by the Bazaar-master. He was about to open it when Colt rose and deferentially requested that it should be first inspected, and its appearance and condition noted. The President could not suppress a look of angry surprise towards Colt, a sort of "you d—- d cheeky young civilian" kind of a look, but, controlling himself, said: "Well, gentlemen, there's no harm in that." And proceeding to inspect the seals before passing the packet round, ejaculated, "My God! gentlemen, it has been tampered with!" And so it evidently had; by some means—probably with the heated blade of a knife—the seals had been evidently raised, and re-set, but the paper under the seals had been cut! Tableau! Marked change in the manner of the President to Colt the prosecutor. Bazaar-master and post-master summoned to the Court. Packet carefully cut open and contents read, while the Court awaited the arrival of the two officials. The junior member produces correspondence with Colt, and reports the loan incident. Rough notes of proceedings drawn up, and the Pension Paymaster summoned to appear forthwith with all his office establishment.

Meantime arrives the post-master, who states that he handed the packet to the Bazaar-master, as being the chief military officer at Dapoolie. The seals were then intact, and did not bear their present appearance. The Bazaar-master, by no means a "master mind," says he received the sealed packet
from the post-master, though it was not addressed to his care; thought it was all right; did not think of examining the seals; put the packet in his office drawer; does not always lock his office drawer, but is quite sure none of his establishment would dare to look into it! President, dismissing him, observes briefly that the facts will be forthwith reported to army headquarters.* Then enters the Pension Paymaster, with some eight or ten clerks and a couple of peons. The contents of the sealed packet are read out to them, and they request that a copy may be supplied to them. The Paymaster is warned to keep his office papers under lock and key, and told that he will be informed when his own presence or that of his clerks is required.

The President, inviting Colt to remain for consultation, declared that he had been much impressed by the incident of the tampered-with seals, and resolved that it be forthwith reported to army headquarters. Colt, meekly observing that he had excellent reasons for suspecting foul play, ventured to put in a letter asking, for reasons stated, that the Court should also recommend the immediate suspension of the entire Pension Pay Establishment, and the transfer of all its records, and, temporarily, of all its duties, to the Court itself. Considerable discussion followed. Colt requested to withdraw, was re-called and informed that the Court had decided to adopt his suggestion and to forward his letter. Adjournment sine die.

* N.B.—He was promptly retired from the service.
Such is a brief record of the opening day, and it must be admitted that Colt scored heavily. He never would tell me how much he knew about the sealed packet; but I have a shrewd suspicion that from some place of concealment he actually saw the packet opened by the clerks and certain usurers in secret conclave. If so, he must have possessed amazing self-control not to have seized them in the act.

Almost by return of post the President received authority from army headquarters to suspend everyone they named and to carry on the Pension Paymaster's duties pending further orders. Captain Bird accordingly took possession of all the office papers, and from this point the inquiry may be said to have begun. The proceedings were from time to time sensational in the extreme, but the account of them will take another chapter.
CHAPTER IV.

THE GREAT MILITARY PENSION FRAUDS—continued.

PART III.

After the grand coup of the suspension of the entire Pension Pay Department there was a long lull at Dapoolie. The Court of Inquiry were fully occupied in making lists of and taking over the documents in the office, and in mastering the office routine.

My friend Colt went off to the village wherein had resided the deceased pensioner, whose pension—so said the anonymous petition—had been drawn for seven years after his death. The case was a very clear one, and the conspirators, who included the village patel and kulkarni, were duly committed to the sessions; where, I may mention, they were soon after convicted and sentenced to various long terms of imprisonment. There was no direct evidence, however, to support their story that the clerks in the Pay Office were cognizant of, and shared in, the plunder, but Colt had no doubt this was so.

In due course the Court reassembled, and Colt opened his case, first of all by putting in copies of the proceedings in the deceased pensioner's case just
referred to. He then called his best witness in his strongest case, that of Subedar-Major Sirdar Bahadur Ramnâk Bhâgnâk. I have already mentioned that for specially good service he, from one fund and another, received the (to him) magnificent pension of sixty-seven rupees a month, or rather that, with the connivance of the clerk, my friend Tannâk drew it regularly for the sowkars, who doled out to him about ten rupees a month! Three of these cor-morants had him down in their books for several hundreds of rupees. Every quarter-day he passed a fresh bond to each creditor, and the whole of the sowkar's dealings with him were found carefully recorded in their accounts. The fine old fellow resided in Dapoolie. His appearance was familiar to every one, and his deeds of prowess were common talk. Almost every day he might be seen wending his way across the "maidan," or parade-ground, within a few yards of the Paymaster's office, clad in a long white gaberidine, or night shirt (as we should rather term it in these degenerate days), a long staff in his hand, his beard and fierce-looking white mustachios curled upward and backward, and always accompanied by a child or two. I remember a sketch of Van Ruith's which might have been his portrait. It was truly remarkable that a personage so notable—the head of the pensioners' list—should not have been treated with special honour and consideration, that his absence at each quarterly payment for more than four years should not have attracted the attention of the paymaster; but so it was!
Mr. Colt assured me that his grand soldier-like appearance, his frank demeanour, and the obvious truthfulness with which he gave his evidence had as powerful an effect on the Court as he himself calculated upon.

Colt then proceeded to call over a hundred witnesses in dozens of similar cases, and could have gone on for months, but that the President declared that the Court was satisfied. A short report of progress was then made to army headquarters, and permission was asked for and obtained for the Court to adjourn to Chiplooo, another important paying station. A few more important cases were picked up there, and then the Court returned to Dapoolie, and prepared and sent in a voluminous report. They were promptly instructed to supply the Paymaster and the clerks with a copy of it, and to call upon them for any explanation they might desire to give.

The Paymaster elected to appear personally before the Court; his subordinates promised to submit a joint written defence. In due course the Paymaster appeared, and the pith of his argument was, that in the twenty years he had performed the duties, he had no doubt that laxity had crept in, but that he was confident in the rectitude of his clerks, whom he vehemently declared to be maligneD individuals.

Asked by the President if he habitually compared each applicant for payment of his pension with his description roll, he was forced to admit that he had not done so for some years, as his experience was so
great that he was confident he could detect personation at a glance.

Asked how he reconciled it with his duty to sign at the foot of the quarterly list of payments the certificate, "I hereby certify on my honour that at the time of payment I duly compared each pensioner with his descriptive roll," the poor old gentleman said that he had regarded this as a mere form; and he insisted again and again that he never could be deceived, but should instantly detect any personator.

At this moment the President, after consulting with his colleagues, passed a pencilled note over to Colt: "Call Tannak in quietly from behind." Now Tannak was always kept handy at the stable. Colt slipped out and told Tannak to go round and come up to the front door just as he did when drawing pensions. In a few minutes Tannak appeared at the threshold, and, drawing himself up, delivered himself of a military salute, ejaculating, "Saheb! Meri urzee hai" (I have a petition to make).

Quoth the President, "Major, look at that man! Is he a pensioner?"

"Certainly he is," replied the major. "I am quite familiar with his appearance."

"Doubtless you are, sir," drily remarked the President. "This man is Tannak, who has often personated pensioners, and drawn four and five pensions in a single day."

Tableau! in the midst of which the poor old paymaster drifted away, and Tannak, saluting, returned to his stable.
After numerous and at last peremptory messages, the clerks came to the Court with a document purporting to be their defence. It consisted mainly of gross abuse of Colt, the prosecutor, enlarged on a few discrepancies in the evidence, and announced their intention of prosecuting Colt for suborning evidence.

Asked if that was all they had to say, they replied in the affirmative, but expressed a hope that the Court would receive any further statement they might be able to make. The President said that it would take the Court ten days to prepare their report to headquarters, and that they would receive anything tendered on or before the tenth day, when the doors would be closed, and the prosecutor himself would leave the neighbourhood on other urgent duty.

Colt thought he observed the clerks rather prick up their ears at the latter piece of news, and determined not to relax his vigilance in the interim—and he was repaid. The ten days slipped away without a sign from the clerks, and Colt made his arrangements for a long march on the eleventh day. The evening before, he was walking down the bazaar, when he came upon one of the petty sowkars whose books had not been seized at the outset, but who had been casually mentioned in the course of the inquiry. The man was walking briskly and somewhat jauntily along, but on meeting Colt he was visibly disconcerted. Colt could not understand what it meant, and for the time dismissed the matter from his mind. Very early in the morning, however, he was awakened by the Parsi informer Fulloo's voice at his
bedside in the old deserted bungalow in which he slept. "Saheb! Saheb! get up. The clerks have some 'daga' (treachery) afoot; they've had a meeting with Dewchund Shroff." Now Dewchund was the very man Colt had met and disconcerted on the previous evening.

After some palaver with Fulloo, Colt decided only to pretend to go, and to make his way back to Dapoolie by eleven o'clock. Accordingly "chota hazri" (early breakfast) was taken as usual, and the remaining kit sent off, and about seven o'clock Colt cantered round the "maidan" and took a cordial farewell of the members of the Court, and then started ostensibly on the march. Four or five miles off he turned back, and, knowing the ground well, made his way round by a "nullah" to the back of his old house, stabled his "tat," and from a clump of bushes watched the entrance to the court's office.

About half-past ten he perceived a procession of spotlessly-dressed clerks filing into the court's compound or garden; and shortly afterwards, being sure that they were before the Court, he walked quietly down, and entering by a side gate Colt was in the court-room before the clerks (who were seated in a semicircle with their backs to him) could perceive him.

"Hullo!" shouted the President. "What—not gone yet?"

"No," said Colt quietly. "I thought I'd just see it out to-day."

"Well, Mr. Prosecutor," quoth the President, "your
presence is most opportune, for the accused have just brought us a letter which they say contains matter of serious import to them, and we may as well go into it at once." The discomfiture of the clerks, Colt told me, was ludicrous—they would have given anything to have got the letter back, but the President had it, opened it, and at once began to read it.

Now, one of the class of cases Colt had produced related to the swindling of female pensioners who received some small quarterly allowance from the State because their husbands had been killed in action, or for some kindred reason. They too had pledged their descriptive rolls with sowkars, and many of them had never received an anna for years. One Cassee, for instance, entitled to two rupees a month, or six rupees per quarter, had left her roll with a leading sowcar, and gone to service in Poona with the family of the Bazaar-master there. For seven years or more she had never left Poona, and Colt proved it, and showed that her pension had all the time been drawn in Dapoolie by sowcars. It was a strong case, and one that had particularly aroused the indignation of the Court at the time.

The clerks' petition related to this case. They said that they had just accidentally discovered a most important piece of evidence, which would at once break down this case, and the Court would then easily see how Mr. Colt must have fabricated most of the other evidence against them. The evidence lay in the testimony of one Dewchund Shroff, who had
dealings with Cassee, and would produce his book to show that on several occasions during eighteen months of her supposed absence at Poona, she must have been in Dapoolie and paid small instalments in person; they therefore prayed instant inquiry, and that Dewchund might be summoned to bring his books.

The Court agreed, and sent off the summons to Dewchund, who lived quite close, Colt merely requested that no one of the accused should leave the court-room till Dewchund arrived. This was granted and the Court sat in solemn silence for about half-an-hour, when Dewchund was seen walking with all his old jauntiness up the carriage-drive, some red-covered account-books under his arm. Entering the room, however, he caught sight of Colt, and simply collapsed!

The President called upon the head pension clerk to examine Dewchund, and with abject misery depicted in his countenance the former went through the preconcerted lesson.

"Do you know one Cassee Kom Nagoo?"

"Yes, I do."

"Have you had money dealings with her?"

"Yes."

"When has she paid you money with her own hand?"

"I will look at my books and tell you." Books reluctantly untied and referred to by Dewchund.

"She paid me on such a date Rs. 2, on another date Rs. 2 'hasta Khood,' with her own hand."
Books thereupon handed round to the Court, and extracts taken in silence.

Clerks and Dewchund evidently more chirpy, but Court glum, and lookingcoldly at Colt, who merely said, "Will the Court permit me to see those books?" "Certainly," says the President in his iciest manner.

Now Colt had been for some time a special officer of income-tax; he read Guzerati well, and was thoroughly up in all matters relating to native account-books. After a moment's inspection he quietly handed them back to the President, remarking—

"I demand that these books be impounded, and I take Dewchund in custody. These books have been tampered with! The leaves containing the entries have been interpolated."

Great excitement in the Court. The President observing, "Take care, sir; this is a most serious accusation you make, and it should be substantiated at once."

To which Colt replied—

"Let these miserable men—look at them, gentlemen!—let them nominate a member of a panchayet, or Jury, let the Court nominate another, and myself a third, and I agree to abide by their award."

No sooner said than done, and the panchayet in due course assembled. Colt's quick eye had detected one sufficient flaw which convinced him that a panchayet would find many more.

Native account-books are made of native paper, cut
with a sharp knife, like that of a shoemaker, from reams of paper in which there is usually a crease in folding. Every leaf cut, of course, has the same crease, and Colt instantly noticed that the leaves on which Cassee's items were endorsed had a different crease from the rest of the book, and therefore must have been recently sewn in. He also noticed that though there were entries for past years, checked at the Dewali item by item, when a small circular mark like the letter O is made at the left-hand of each item, there were no such marks on these particular pages!

To cut a long story short, the panchayet unanimously, by these and other details, pronounced the entries to be false. Colt took possession of Dewchund, the clerks sneaked off, and the Court proceeded to relate in the report to headquarters this "grand climax."

In "due course," that is to say, after some months deliberation, orders came down from army headquarters dismissing every soul in the Pension Pay Establishment, from the Paymaster down to the peons. In the then defective state of the criminal law it was found that no one could be prosecuted. I believe military pensioners have since been fairly treated; but so long as men so ignorant have anything—be it a piece of paper, be it a simple token—that they think they can pledge, or that they can be persuaded is pledgable, so long will this villainous extortion exist in a greater or less degree according to the vigilance of the paymaster for the time being.
Colt in due course of time received the high commendations of the Secretary of State, and no one can deny that he merited them. What happened to Dewchund I do not remember. Tannak became a respectable character, and a very useful police informer, and died at a green old age, greatly looked up to by pensioners, and never weary of relating the incidents of the Court of Inquiry, where he boasted that Colt Saheb would have been helpless without him.

At some future time I shall have a story to tell about native account-books and their fabrication; but, following the lines I have laid down, I must next address myself to the topic of undetected murders.

Moral—for those about to begin official life in India learn to read well and write the vernacular of the district you are serving in. You will be but a belled cat otherwise. Read your own petitions yourself, to yourself, by yourself; act on them with the utmost caution. Keep anonymous letters locked up, and don’t speak of them even to your trusty “Sheristadar.” Do not “rush your fence” when you do act, or you will find disappointment, and your zeal will be effectually extinguished.
CHAPTER V
BUSSAPA'S REVENGE.

Before recounting the history of another anonymous petition, it will be convenient to relate one more instance of vindictiveness, surpassing, and even more unnatural than that of Vinayek Deo, the "would-be parricide." It occurred in the southern Mahratta country some ten or fifteen years ago, and was duly chronicled in official reports as one of the most remarkable crimes of the year.

When I first knew Bussapa Patel, about 1863, he was as fine and promising a specimen of the young Mahratta as one would wish to see. About twenty years of age, tall for a Mahratta, strongly built, with a particularly frank and intelligent cast of countenance, he was the pride of his old father, Yellapa Patel, one of the most prosperous farmers in the cotton country, who had had him educated in much better style than was then customary among people of his class.

Yellapa, like all cotton growers in that part of the Western Presidency, profited enormously by the high price of the staple during the American war. Silver was poured into the country (literally) in
crores or millions sterling, and cultivators who previously had as much as they could do to live, suddenly found themselves possessed of sums their imaginations had never dreamt of. What to do with their wealth, how to spend their cash, was their problem.

Having laden their women and children with ornaments, and decked them out in expensive saris (petticoats) they launched into the wildest extravagance in the matter of carts and trotting bullocks, going even as far as silver-plated yokes and harness studded with silver mountings. Even silver tires to the wheels became the fashion. Twelve and fifteen hundred rupees were eagerly paid for a pair of trotting bullocks.* Trotting matches for large stakes were common; and the whole rural population appeared with expensive red silk umbrellas, which an enterprising English firm imported as likely to gratify the general taste for display.

Many took to drink, not country liquor such as had satisfied them previously, but British brandy, rum, gin, and even champagne. Among these last was Yellapa, who was rarely sober during the last few months of his life, having by his example and encouragement made Bussapa a drunkard also.

About the time when Yellapa died the tide of prosperity turned. The American war at an end, down went the price of cotton, and a series of bad seasons set in, culminating with the great famine of 1876–77 and the rat plague. Silver tires, silver

* A rupee was then worth 2s. 3d.
ornaments, disappeared from every household, valuable cattle died from drought and disease, or had to be sold for what they would fetch; and every farmer, Bussapa Patel among them, found himself heavily in debt to the village sawkar. Habits of drinking and reckless extravagance contracted during the "cotton mania" were not easily shaken off, and Bussapa went on from bad to worse, became extremely violent in temper when in his cups, and sullen and morose in his sober intervals.

His wife, to whom it was said he was deeply attached, then died, leaving him a fine, bright little boy of about five or six years of age. Little Bhow seemed to be the only thing Bussapa cared for, and he loved to send him out into the village, where he was a great pet, dressed in a little bright crimson jacket, and wearing such silver anklets and bangles as he could still afford to give him.

As may be well imagined, Bussapa's affairs had drifted into a well-nigh hopeless state by the end of the great famine. He had mortgaged all he had, including his "inam," or serice land, to the principal banker in the village, and was only able to stagger along with the aid of small advances obtained from time to time from the same source.

Dewchund Shroff was not a bad sort of fellow, as sawkars go; he and his father had had dealings with the Patels for many years, and the families were as intimate as Mahrattas and Waniaas can be. Little Bhow was an almost daily visitor at Dewchund's shop, where he was always sure to get some sweet-
meat or other little treat dear to childhood. Latterly, indeed, Bhow passed nearly all his time out of school at or near Dewchund's place, for his father Bussapa's drunken violence frightened the little fellow, while Dewchund always made much of him.

Dewchund's relations with Bussapa gradually became strained; the latter's constant applications for fresh advances, his violence and obstinate refusal to go into his account, or to enter into a new bond, angered Dewchund, whose patience was finally exhausted when he learnt indirectly that Bussapa, instead of dealing exclusively with him, as had
hitherto been the understanding between them, had secretly obtained an advance on his coming cotton crop from a merchant at Coompta.

A stormy scene ensued between them, Dewchund taxing Bussapa with breach of faith, Bussapa retorting by vile abuse and threats of what harm he, as Patel, would do to the sawkar. Losing temper altogether, Dewchund at last told Bussapa that if he did not settle up within three days he would file a suit against him without further notice. During the next two days Bussapa drank heavily, and was hardly seen outside his house; but little Bhow, as usual, passed most of his time down at Dewchund's shop.

It afterwards transpired that Dewchund took no steps whatever to carry out his threat, and he always declared that he only uttered it in anger, that for the sake of old friendship he would have been willing to let matters go on as before, if Bussapa would only show himself fair and reasonable.

On the third night after the quarrel, Dewchund's shutters were up, and he was sitting about midnight making up his accounts in his shop, according to custom, when Bussapa knocked at the shutters and demanded admittance. Dewchund let him in, put up the shutters, and, turning round, saw Bussapa mouthing and muttering to himself in a corner. The man's haggard, blazing eyes and suppressed manner frightened Dewchund; he was about to call out, when Bussapa said, "Hold your tongue! I've brought your money. Where is the account?"
this they sat down, Bussapa became seemingly calmer, and Dewchund produced the ledger and quietly made up the total with interest. The usual wrangle followed, but at last Dewchund agreed to knock off a good lump sum of interest, and Bussapa made him bring out the mortgage deed and other bonds, and told him to endorse them as discharged, and, moreover, to write out a receipt in full of all demands.

Dewchund demurred to doing this until he had secured, or at least had seen the money, which he supposed Bussapa carried about him in notes. Bussapa became very indignant at this, and got up, exclaiming, "I am not lying; I've brought the money value. Come and see. I put the bag in your out-buildings."

Rather surprised, and getting much alarmed, Dewchund lit a lantern, and they went into the back yard, Bussapa leading the way to a shed, in one corner of which was a large heap of dried cow-dung cakes, the fuel of the country, which had evidently been just disturbed. There Bussapa, putting down the lantern, suddenly seized Dewchund by the throat with one hand, so that he could not cry out, forced him to the ground, and, in suppressed tones, spoke rapidly into his ear, "You devil, I have paid you with my son's life! I've killed little Bhow, and hidden his body in that heap. If you don't agree to what I say, I'll raise the alarm now, and accuse you of having murdered him for the sake of his ornaments! Quick! If you consent, raise
your arm, and then come back with me to the shop."

Stupefied with fear, Dewchund lifted his hand, and Bussapa, still holding him firmly, half led, half dragged him back to the house, where, after again threatening him if he should call out, Bussapa released his hold, and in the same suppressed fierce tone said, "Now you're paid, give me the papers and a receipt." Dewchund so far recovered his presence of mind as to ask what was to be done with the body, and Bussapa replied, "We will take it away, and bury it in the nullah (watercourse) presently." On this Dewchund gave up the papers duly endorsed, with trembling hand wrote out a receipt in full, and then followed Bussapa with the light to the shed.

Bussapa took out the poor little body from the heap of cow-dung, wrapped it in his blanket, and bade Dewchund lead the way to a dry nullah a few hundred yards off, and to carry a shovel with him. There Bussapa dug a deep hole in the loose shingle and buried the body, piling on large stones. It was near daylight when, returning by another route, they reached the confines of the village and separated, Bussapa assuring Dewchund that he need have no fear, as he should accusesome "Kaikarris,"* or basket-makers, then encamped near the village, of the murder.

* "Kaikarris" belong to the predatory tribes; ostensibly they are basket-makers. For a full account of them, see General Hervey's Diary before mentioned.
Dewchund crept home more dead than alive, shivering with terror, and feeling very little confidence in Bussapa's assurance. Bussapa, brooding devilishly over the events of the night, first destroyed all the papers by fire, and then tossing off cup after cup of raw spirit, communed with himself somewhat as follows: "That sowkar devil can't sue and disgrace me now, that's true; and I now owe nothing, that's good! But what a price! How can I live without little Bhow? Are! Are! What can I do? . . . I must give the alarm directly about the little fellow's disappearance. . . . I'll have the Kaikarris' camp searched first . . . I can easily slip little Bhow's ornaments into one of their huts while making search . . . then the body will be found later in the day. . . . But stop a moment! Why should I let that sowkar devil off after all? He forced me to kill Bhow. He ought to die. . . ."

Falling at last into a drunken stupor, Bussapa was roused about nine in the morning by a servant asking where was "Bhow Baba," and he acted at once on the evil resolution he had already half formed. Heading a search-party he went from house to house, inquiring and looking in out-buildings, till they got to Dewchund's shop. Dewchund's face and terrified manner were enough to rouse suspicion; the disturbed heap of cow-dung, the shovel, evidently lately used, added to it; a neighbour had heard Dewchund returning to his house early in the morning; a Kaikari on the prowl had seen him
sneaking back to it; there were tracks from the shed leading to the nullah; the nullah was searched, fresh digging found, and the child's body was speedily exhumed.

Dewchund was seized and handed over to the police, and no one doubted that he really had strangled the poor little fellow, taken his ornaments, and disposed of the body in the dead of night. His incoherent protestations, his asseverations that Bussapa had killed his own son, were naturally regarded as the ravings of a detected criminal. The "Punchayat," or Coroner's jury, found that the little boy had been strangled by Dewchund for the sake of his ornaments, and though these were not found in his house, Dewchund was hurried off to jail, and ultimately brought before a magistrate.

With some difficulty a "vakil," or pleader, was found to defend him. Even he for some time placed no credit in the ghastly story Dewchund related, but at last he induced the magistrate to order a search of Bussapa's house, and there, in a bundle of Bussapa's own clothes, the few paltry ornaments were found concealed. Bussapa, in his besotted malignity, had forgotten to take them with him and secrete them in Dewchund's house when the alarm was first given; and the police immediately taking possession of the house, he never found an opportunity of rectifying the omission afterwards.

Kept under strict surveillance after the discovery of the ornaments, and unable to obtain liquor, Bussapa's nerve gave way in a few days, and he
made a clean breast of it. Dewchund was released, and in due course Bussapa was arraigned, convicted, and hanged.

To the last his principal regret was that he had not done for Dewchund! And, indeed, had he not, in his bemuddled excitement, forgotten to take the silver anklets with him to Dewchund's house on the day of the latter's arrest, Dewchund would in all human probability have been hanged in his stead. The chain of circumstantial evidence against him lacked but this one link, and the true story of the crime as persisted in by him would have been set aside as utterly incredible.

Bussapa, in his confession, asserted, and no doubt truthfully, that the idea of sacrificing his son never entered his brain till just before he visited Dewchund on the fatal night—that it suddenly flashed across him in his rage and despair what a fine revenge this would be, how easy a release from Dewchund's clutches. The boy was sleeping beside him, was dead in a moment, and he was out on his way to the sowkar's house with the body before he fully realised what he had done. There is a saying, "Revengeful like a Canarese," and this tale hideously illustrates it.