

down, waiting till the maharajah should be advised of our arrival. Very soon a jemadar came in and informed us that "if the *sahib log*, who were the protectors of the poor, would deign to be led by him," we should be shown into the royal presence. So we rose and followed the obsequious official into another apartment.

The room where the maharajah awaited us was even smaller than the one into which we had been first shown. It was on the back of the house, and only half lighted by the few rays of afternoon sun that struggled through the dense foliage outside. I suppose this apartment had been chosen as the scene of the interview on account of its seclusion. Outside the window, which was closed, a sowar paced slowly up and down to keep away any curious listeners. A heavy curtain hung before the door through which we had entered. I thought that on the whole the place seemed pretty safe.

The old maharajah sat cross-legged upon a great pile of dark-red cushions, his slippers by his side, and a huge hookah before him. He wore a plain white pugree with a large jewel set on one side, and his body was swathed and wrapped in dark thick stuffs, as if he felt keenly the cold autumn air. His face was long, of an ashy yellowish colour, and an immense white moustache hung curling down over his sombre robe. One hand protruded from the folds and held the richly-jewelled mouthpiece of the pipe to his lips, and I noticed that the fingers were long

and crooked, winding themselves curiously round the gold stem, as if revelling in the touch of the precious metal and the gems. As we came within his range of vision, his dark eyes shot a quick glance of scrutiny at me and then dropped again. Not a movement of the head or body betrayed a consciousness of our presence. Isaacs made a long salutation in Hindustani, and I followed his example, but he did not take off his shoes or make anything more than an ordinary bow. It was quite evident that he was master of the situation. The old man took the pipe from his mouth and replied in a deep hollow voice that he was glad to see us, and that, in consideration of our wealth, fame, and renowned wisdom, he would waive all ceremony and beg us to be seated. We sat down cross-legged on cushions before him, and as near as we could get, so that it seemed as if we three were performing some sacred rite of which the object was the tall hookah that stood in the centre of our triangle.

Being seated, Isaacs addressed the prince, still in Hindustani, and said that the splendour of his sublime majesty, which was like the sun dispelling the clouds, so overcame him with fear and trembling, that he humbly implored permission to make use of the Persian tongue, which, he was aware, the lord of boundless wisdom spoke with even greater ease than himself.

Without waiting for an answer, and with no perceptible manifestation of any such "fear and trem-

bling" as he professed, Isaacs at once began to speak in his native tongue, and dropping all forms of ceremony or circumlocution plunged boldly into business. He did not hesitate to explain to the maharajah the strength of his position, dwelling on the fact that, by a word to the English of the whereabouts of Shere Ali, he could plunge Baithopoor into hopeless and endless entanglements, to which there could be but one issue — absorption into the British Rāj. He dwelt on the large sums the maharajah owed him for assistance lent during the late famine, and he skilfully produced the impression that he wanted the money down, then and there.

"If your majesty should refuse to satisfy my just claims, I have ample weapons by which to satisfy them for myself, and no considerations of mercy or pity for your majesty will tempt me to abate one rupee in the account of your indebtedness, which, as you well know, is not swelled by any usurious interest. You could not have borrowed the money on such easy terms from any bank in India or England, and if I have been merciful hitherto, I will be so no longer. What saith the Apostle of Allah? 'Verily, life for life, and eye for eye, and nose for nose, and ear for ear, and tooth for tooth, and for wounding retaliation.' And the time of your promise is expired and you shall pay me. And is not the wise Frank, who sitteth at my right hand, the ready writer, who giveth to the public every day a new book to read, the paper of news, *Khabar-i-Khagaz* wherein are written the

misdeeds of the wicked, and the dealings of the fraudulent and the unwary receive their just reward? And think you he will not make a great writing, several columns in length, and deliver it to the devils that perform his bidding, and shall they not multiply what he hath written, and sow it broadcast over the British Rāj for the minor consideration of one anna a copy, that all shall see how the Maharajah of Baithopoor doth scandalously repudiate his debts, and harbour traitors to the Rāj in his palace?"

Isaacs said all this in a solemn and impressive manner, calculated to inspire awe and terror in the soul of the unhappy debtor. As for the maharajah, the cold sweat stood on his face, and at the last words his anxiety was so great that the long fingers uncurled spasmodically and the jewelled mouthpiece fell back, as the head of a snake, among the silken coils of the tube at his feet. Instantly, on feeling the grasping hand empty, his majesty, with more alacrity than I would have expected, darted forward with outstretched claws, as a hawk on his prey, and seizing the glittering thing returned it to his lips with a look of evident relief. It was habit, of course, for we were not exactly the men to plunder him of his toy, but there was a fierceness about the whole action that spoke of the real miser. Then there was silence for a moment. The old man was evidently greatly impressed by the perils of his situation. Isaacs continued.

"Your majesty well perceives that you have sur-

rounded yourself with dangers on all sides. No danger threatens me. I could buy you and Baithopoor to-morrow if I chose. But I am a just man. When the prophet, whose name be blessed, saith that we shall have eye for eye, and nose for nose, and for wounding retaliation, he saith also that 'he that remitteth the same as alms it shall be an atonement unto him.' Now your majesty is a hard man, and I well know that if I force you to pay me now you will cruelly tax and oppress your subjects to refill your coffers. And many of your subjects are true believers, following the prophet, upon whom be peace; and it is also written 'Thou shalt rob a stranger, but thou shalt not rob a brother,'—and if I cause you to rob my brethren is not the sin mine, and the atonement thereof? Now also has the lawful interest on your bond mounted up to several lakhs of rupees. But for the sake of my brethren who are in bondage to you, who are an unbeliever and shall broil everlastingly in raging flames, I will yet make a covenant with you, and the agreement thereof shall be this:

"You shall deliver into my hand, before the dark half of the next moon, the man"—Isaacs lowered his voice to a whisper, barely audible in the still room, where the only sound heard as he paused was the tread of the sowar on the verandah outside—"the man Shere Ali, formerly Emir of Afghanistan, now hidden in your palace of Baithopoor. Him you shall give to me safe and untouched at the place

which I shall choose, northwards from here, in the pass towards Keitung. And there shall not be an hair of his head touched, and if it is good in my eyes I will give him up to the British; and if it is good in my eyes, I will slay him, and you shall ask no questions. And if you refuse to do this I will go to the great lord sahib and tell him of your doings, and you will be arrested before this night and shall not escape. But if you consent and put your hand to this agreement, I will speak no word, and you shall depart in peace; and moreover, for the sake of the true believers in your kingdom I will remit to you the whole of the interest on your debt; and the bond you shall pay at your convenience. I have spoken, do you answer me." Isaacs calmly took from his pocket two rolls covered with Persian writing, and lighting a cigarette, proceeded to peruse them carefully, to detect any flaw or error in their composition. The face of the old maharajah betrayed great emotion, but he bravely pulled away at his hookah and tried to think over the situation. In the hope of delivering himself from his whole debt he had rashly given himself into the hands of a man who hated him, though he had discovered that hatred too late. He had flattered himself that the loan had been made out of friendly feeling and a desire for his interest and support; he found that Isaacs had lent the money, for real or imaginary religious motives, in the interest of his co-religionists. I sat silently watching the varying passions as they swept over the

repulsive face of the old man. The silence must have lasted a quarter of an hour.

"Give me the covenant," he said at last, "for I am in the tiger's clutches. I will sign it, since I must. But it shall be requited to you, Abdul Hafiz; and when your body has been eaten of jackals and wild pigs in the forest, your soul shall enter into the shape of a despised sweeper, and you and your offspring shall scavenge the streets of the cities of my kingdom and of the kingdom of my son, and son's son, to ten thousand generations." A Hindoo cannot express scorn more deadly or hate more lasting than this. Isaacs smiled, but there was a concentrated look in his face, relentless and hard, as he answered the insult.

"I am not going to bandy words with you. But if you are not quick about signing that paper I may change my mind, and send for the Angrezi sowars from Peterhof. So you had better hurry yourself." Isaacs produced a small inkhorn and a reed pen from his pocket. "Sign," he said, rising to his feet "before that soldier outside passes the window three times, or I will deliver you to the British."

Trembling in every joint, and the perspiration standing on his face like beads, the old man seized the pen and traced his name and titles at the foot, first of one copy, and then of the other. Isaacs followed, writing his full name in the Persian character, and I signed my name last, "Paul Griggs," in large letters at the bottom of each roll, adding the

word "witness," in case of the transaction becoming known.

"And now," said Isaacs to the maharajah, "despatch at once a messenger, and let the man here mentioned be brought under a strong guard and by circuitous roads to the pass of Keitung, and let them there encamp before the third week from to-day, when the moon is at the full. And I will be there and will receive the man. And woe to you if he come not; and woe to you if you oppress the true believers in your realm." He turned on his heel, and I followed him out of the room after making a brief salutation to the old man, cowering among his cushions, a ceremony which Isaacs omitted, whether intentionally or from forgetfulness, I could not say. We passed through the house out into the air, and mounting our horses rode away, leaving the double row of servants salaaming to the ground. The duration of our private interview with the maharajah had given them an immense idea of our importance. We had come at four and it was now nearly five. The long pauses and the Persian circumlocutions had occupied a good deal of time.

"You do not seem to have needed my counsel or assistance much," I said. "With such an armoury of weapons you could manage half-a-dozen maharajahs."

"Yes — perhaps so. But I have strong reasons for wishing this affair quickly over, and the editor of a daily paper is a thing of terror to a native prince; you must have seen that."

"What do you mean to do with your man when he is safely in your hands, if it is not an indiscreet question?"

"Do with him?" asked Isaacs with some astonishment. "Is it possible you have not guessed? He is a brave man, and a true believer. I will give him money and letters, that he may make his way to Baghdad, or wherever he will be safe. He shall depart in peace, and be as free as air."

I had half suspected my friend of some such generous intention, but he had played his part of unrelenting hardness so well in our late interview with the Hindoo prince that it seemed incomprehensible that a man should be so pitiless and so kind on the same day. There was not a trace of hardness on his beautiful features now, and as we rounded the hill and caught the last beams of the sun, now sinking behind the mountains, his face seemed transfigured as with a glory, and I could hardly bear to look at him. He held his hat in his hand and faced the west for an instant, as though thanking the declining day for its freshness and beauty; and I thought to myself that the sun was lucky to see such an exquisite picture before he bid Simla good-night, and that he should shine the brighter for it the next day, since he would look on nothing fairer in his twelve hours' wandering over the other half of creation.

"And now," said he, "it is late, but if we ride towards Annandale we may meet them coming back

from the polo match we have missed." His eyes glowed at the thought. Shere Ali, the maharajah, bonds, principal, and interest, were all forgotten in the anticipation of a brief meeting with the woman he loved.