

LUCKY RUBY OF BOH YOH.

A Tale of Burmah.

Colonel Rumford, a distinguished Anglo-Indian officer, who formerly commanded a Ghoorka regiment, has a magnificent ruby which always hangs around his neck, inside the shirt, attached to a small gold chain. According to a legend widely believed in Burmah, this ruby brings the best of good luck to its wearer. It is said to have been originally stolen from the royal crown of King Theebaw, who lost his kingdom to the British soon after the jewel disappeared. Theebaw's crown has never been found since the occupation of the Golden Palace—it was stolen by some of the troops and, therefore, it cannot be ascertained whether Colonel Rumford's ruby belonged to it.

But whatever may be the ruby's origin or virtue, it is a fact that the colonel has always had good luck since it came into his possession in 1887. No Anglo-Indian officer has had more wonderful escapes from death in frontier campaigns and on hunting expeditions. And throughout the service his escapes are put down to the credit of the charmed ruby. The manner in which the colonel acquired it was as strange and romantic as anything in Kipling's dacoit stories. It was told to the writer by Lieut.-Col. John MacGregor, a brother officer of Colonel Rumford's.

After the conquest of Durmah, Capt. Rumford, as he then was, had command of a small flying squadron of Ghoorkas, and was entrusted with the task of putting down dacoity in the province of Khaniyat. The country was very lawless at that time, and the Anglo-Indian troops were kept busy for years afterward hunting down outlaws. Indeed, that work is not yet finished. A murderous scoundrel named Boh Yoh, the original of a similar character, used by Kipling, was the principal dacoit leader in that province, or, indeed, in all Burmah. He had been born and reared in the uplands of the Ruby Mine mountains, and he became an outlaw in his boyhood. When he fought his way up to be the chief of a band he levied blackmail on all the villages for many miles along both banks of the Irrawaddy. It was paid to him with great regularity—far more regularly than taxes had been paid to King Theebaw. While that monarch reigned, Boh Yoh had a good time. Theebaw was a feeble, as well as a cruel, ruler, and he allowed the great dacoit chief to be real king over a large part of the country.

But when the British took possession things changed. The villagers heard that justice once more ruled in the land, and they mustered up courage to refuse Boh Yoh his tribute. He took his revenge promptly. Reports of burned villages and crucified men and women came in so thick and fast to the British authorities that his capture, dead or alive, became at once the ambition and despair of several young British officers who were sent after him; but of none more than Captain Rumford. Yet it seemed impossible to catch the Boh. Month after month he was chased, but he always managed to escape. He grew bolder and bolder in his raids on the villages under British protection, and Captain Rumford, with his little flying column of Ghoorkas, toiled after him vainly through jungles, across torrential rivers, and over mountains.

"Thakin," said Luang Thorn, the Burmese guide with the column, to the captain one day, "you may as well give up. Boh Yoh has the lucky ruby, and it is no use going after him, for you will never be able to catch him while he wears it."

"If that's your best excuse for not finding out where he is, I'll hang you to a tree as a traitor when we return," said the captain, sternly. And he meant it, too, for those were grim days in Burmah. "Lucky ruby? What on earth has a ruby to do with his luck?"

"Oh, yes, Thakin (the Burmese equivalent of 'Sahib') He stole the lucky ruby that was in the king's crown, and ever since then the king has been going down, and Boh Yoh has been rising."

"Look here, Luang! You just guide us to the place where we can find Boh Yoh, and we'll soon show you how much good his lucky ruby will do him."

"The lucky ruby does many things for him, they say," the guide went on. "It will even change him into another man when he likes, Thakin."

"I fancy this would change him in double-quick time, too," said the captain, pulling his revolver from his belt and examining it. "Yes, this would soon enough change Boh Yoh if he would get within range of it."

"But has not Thakin heard of the lucky ruby?" persisted the Burmese.

"No, Luang. I'm ashamed to say my education has been neglected in that matter. What about it?"

"Not heard of the ruby of Allompra? I thought everybody in Burmah knew the story."

"Tell me the story."

"Well, Thakin, long ago there was a brave man named Allompra, and he was a mighty hunter of the bear, the boar, and the tiger. As he was hunting one day, he met an old

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phoongee (Buddhist monk) in the forest, with his yellow gown and shaven head, and because he was so brave the phoongee asked him what he would like to be.

"I would like to be a king," said Allompra.

"Only a king, when you might be a great saint?" said the monk.

"Well, a king will do for me," replied the worldly huntsman, thinking all the time that the phoongee was only jesting with him.

"But the phoongee led him into the heart of the forest, and there presented him with a beautiful ruby, saying:

"Allompra, I know your heart is very brave, for I have seen you hunting the bear, the boar, and the tiger; and I give you this ruby as a charm for your protection. If you turn your attention to men and keep this ruby, you will yet be a king and so will your posterity after you as long as they do the same."

Allompra went home with the ruby and pondered much the strange words the phoongee had said to him. He looked at the ruby again and again, and the more he looked the more wonderful it grew. It was of real pigeon blood color. When he turned it in his fingers and gazed at it, castles and soldiers and battles moved in panorama before his eyes. Allompra was brave—none braver—but he was frightened by this wonderful sight.

"I'll give it back to the phoongee he said to himself. "The nats [devils] are inside it, and I shall come to no good if I keep it."

And so the next day he returned to the forest with the ruby, but no trace of the phoongee was to be found. Even where he had stood and walked there were no footprints.

Then Allompra made a great resolve. The King of Pegu and his Taline followers had overrun the country and taken the royal city of Ava. He, the lowly huntsman, would recapture the city and free his country, on the strength of the ruby which had been so strangely given to him.

This he truly did, and from a simple peasant became the greatest king that ever ruled in Burmah. His descendants reigned after him, until King Theebaw lost the lucky ruby from his crown, and the British came in.

"That is the tale of the lucky ruby, and if Boh Yoh has really got it, as people say, you cannot catch him, Thakin."

"You find out where he is, Luang, and trust us to catch him," replied the young Englishman, interested in the story, but not impressed by it.

By this time it was nearly dusk, and the column pitched camp for the night. Suddenly there was a little commotion in the camp, for the arrival of a 'friendly' who knew something of the whereabouts of Boh Yoh was announced.

He was immediately taken to the commanding officer, before whom he respectfully sat, Burmese fashion, on his knees, with both hands clasped in front of him. He was soiled with travel, and looked as if he had been very badly used.

"Well, my man, what have you to say for yourself?" the officer demanded.

"The Thakin is great, and the friend of the poor—" began the native.

"Yes, yes; I know all about that," Capt. Rumford interrupted, tartly. "But what about Boh Yoh?"

"Boh Yoh!" hissed the stranger, in what appeared to be a tone of concentrated hate. "I know where he is. He and all his bad-

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mashes are encamped behind the Lushai Pagoda. He made me prisoner, and was going to crucify me. But now I will guide you where he is, and thus be revenged on him." And the native grinned in pleasurable anticipation.

The hearts of the English officer and his bloodthirsty little Ghoorkas arose. At last they were going to beard the robber in his den. The men lay down on the bare ground and slept all the more soundly because they were going to fight next day. That some of them would probably be killed was a matter of no account in comparison with the good shikar before them.

The camp was soon hushed into silence. The night was very dark, for it was at the beginning of the monsoon. The mosquitoes were troublesome, especially to Capt. Rumford, who was not so used to their incessant biting and buzzing as the Ghoorkas were. His rest was disturbed. The snoring of the men and the noise of the insects worried him, and he tossed uneasily for some time on the mackintosh sheet on which he lay.

At last he fell asleep and began to dream. This—mind you!—is the captain's own story, as he told it to his friend, Colonel MacGregor, and if it seems almost incredible, he must bear the blame—not the writer, who merely tells the story as it was told to him. He dreamed that a spy had come into his camp unobserved, and was crawling towards him on his hands and knees. Spellbound, he could neither move hand nor foot to protect himself. Nearer and nearer the murderer crept, with his dao in his hand, ready to plunge it into his breast.

With a great effort and a loud shriek the officer awoke at last—to find his left hand gripping the throat of a native, while his right was instinctively searching for his revolver beneath his pillow. The scoundrel shook himself free with a violent effort, leaving a part of his scanty dress behind him, and disappeared into the darkness. Two or three ineffectual revolver shots sent after him only served to awaken the sleepers, who immediately sprang to arms.

But there was no enemy in sight, and no attack was made on the camp. Rumford felt extremely vexed that his would be murderer should escape from him scot free and was half inclined to think that the whole affair must have been a nightmare, till it was discovered that the friendly stranger had unaccountably disappeared.

"I thought so," muttered the young officer, "so it was not entirely a dream after all."

It was soon broad daylight, and the men made their simple breakfast of beef and cocoa. As they were eating it, the captain's orderly picked up a piece of string from the ground, with a large knob in the middle of it.

"Dekho, dekho, Huzoor (Look, look, sir!) he said. 'Here is the loocha's caste string!'

'It can't be,' said the captain, for he knew that, as neither the Burmese nor the surrounding tribes have any caste, they could have no need of caste-strings around their necks. He took the string and opened the knot in the middle. Imagine his surprise when a magnificent ruby dropped out of it on to the ground. It sparkled with unexampled lustre, and with a play of colors impossible to describe.

Luang Thorn was for a moment dumb-founded, but he soon recovered his wits sufficiently to declare that this must be the lucky ruby, and Boh Yoh must have been the stranger who made the night attack. The troops were put in motion at once, and they fell on the track of Boh Yoh's band sooner than they expected. Frequent escapes had made the dacoits less vigilant, till at last they fell a prey to their own temerity, for it had become quite a craze with them to play pranks in the camp of the enemy.

When they were cornered at last, they fought pluckily enough, but the superior arms and resistless dash of the Ghoorkas soon prevailed. Captain Rumford was among the first to break into the enclosure of stones and bushes in which they had entrenched themselves, and he came face to face with the treacherous native who had fled after trying to kill him in his sleep. He rushed at him, and Boh Yoh—for it was indeed he—accepted the challenge manfully. They fought hand-to-hand for a few moments, and then the Englishman stunned his foe by a crashing blow with the flat of his blade. When the dacoit recovered consciousness, a captive at last in the hands of the men he had so often defied, he was heard to mutter: "My ruby—where is my ruby? If I had not lost it—"

So he kept on, day after day, submitting patiently to his captivity, in the feeling that fate had decided against him. Great was the rejoicing among the industrious and peaceful inhabitants of the Province of Khaniyat, when they heard that their worst scourge was a prisoner at last.

"I remember very well the execution of Boh Yoh on the maidan outside the walls of Mandalay, along with the most important of his comrades who were captured with him," said Lieutenant-Colonel MacGregor. "Although I did not take part in Rumford's expedition, I witnessed the execution. It occurred in 1887."



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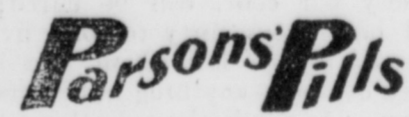
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"It was at first intended to hang him. But as nobody doubted Boh Yoh's war-like qualities, whatever else might be his feelings, he was given his choice of shooting or hanging, and he chose the former. He himself, with the callous cruelty so natural to Asiatics, had not even scrupled to crucify his captives. Many of them might be seen dangling, bare skeletons, from the teak trees of the province.

"Before his execution he confessed his insane and fatal escapade in which he lost the talisman he treasured so highly. Emboldened by previous successes, he had fearlessly entered the Ghoorka camp in the guise of a captive who had escaped from his own band. His purpose was to lead the troops into an ambush, from which none of them could have escaped. But, after his interview with Captain Rumford, an irresistible desire to kill the officer in his sleep took possession of him, and so he spoiled his own game.

"It was a solemn sight to see Boh Yoh and his chief lieutenant tied to trees, with their hands pinioned to their sides. As the command to fire was given to the executing party, and the bang of the rifles followed, the dacoit was heard to groan aloud: 'The ruby—the ruby!'—after which he dropped his head on his chest and died."—New York Evening Post.

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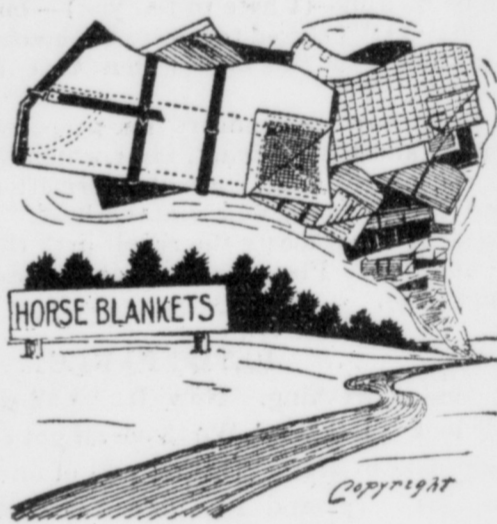
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