

The Wine of Dhassi.

In all the history of the "White Regiment" they had never met with such a man as Edwards. The experience of this regiment runs in one direction, and is great, very great, as every one from Port Said to Aswar can tell you.

The cellar of their mess contains the finest and choicest liquors that can be secured with money, experience and skill. Genius has at times not been wanting when an unusual by fine allotment has been with held from them by some stubborn dealer. But these stories can be told another time.

Edwards was an American and he was voted by the whole mess to be "good enough." Every one who knows these men will tell you that when they declare one to be good enough, that individual is indeed one of the favored ones of fortune. For of all regiments of the line none are more careful in their selection of acquaintances, especially of civilians.

They seemed to take to Edwards, however, as if he was one of themselves. And in fact the one thing which they regretted above all others was that he was not one of them.

He was a man who had seen service, and service of that nature which they themselves had experienced. One day while Martin, their crack rifleman, was practising he had been asked to shoot, but refused. However upon being urged he had placed ten shots from a repeating rifle in the spot where Martin at best could only put five. And with the revolver—I may say that after the officers of the regiment had seen him shoot, they put him under oath never to shoot again as long as he should be with them. They did not wish their young officers to grow up in shame of them, they said, nor their own character as marksmen, which was as good as any on the line, ruined forever. After that the subject was never referred to.

He always joined the mess in the evening and dinner without him was as bad as without the senior captain. It was the custom in the regiment to find out just where a man belonged. This usually begins the second week and the quartermaster directs the affair. He started with the light wines, passing up through the heavy ones, ending with the brandies and whiskies. From the amount which a man is able to stand, his position is determined.

The American finished the wine list as if it had been water and the whiskies were like the wines. They had never dreamed of this sort of thing. Consultations and private plannings were frequent. A course of mixed drinks was tried but all the concoctions that human ingenuity could form from liquor failed ridiculously. The only man who had ever approached such a record was their own Colonel Rollins, but he had finally succumbed. They were totally nonplused. Edwards was cheerful and indifferent through it all.

Now in the White Regiment there was a rumor which had lived from beyond the memory of man. In the cellar of the mess, so it says, there was somewhere a wine, the effects of which were so different from ordinary wines that it should be used only in great emergencies. Once it had been used but that was so long ago that nothing is remembered of it. Except that the result was such that those who saw its workings never spoke of it they never whispered it even among themselves.

But this was a great emergency, and the quartermaster, senior captain and a major decided that if such a wine really existed, now was the time to use it. So the three spent an hour searching behind caske, over wine cases, through pyramids of flasks, jugs and demijohns, until finally some dozen bottles were discovered hidden away in a little niche.

The three returned covered with dust

and cobwebs but jubilant; each bearing a strange looking bottle beneath his arm. A label of coarse, rotting paper was clinging to each upon which the officers deciphered the word, "Dhassi."

On the following evening the mess seemed to be filled with a suppressed excitement. Every officer was present, trying to look coolly indifferent, but failing quite conspicuously. Edwards was there of course, carelessly correct and precise as ever, wondering a little at the strange feeling in the air, but not caring enough to find out what it was.

The officers ate scarcely anything, but Edwards ate an exceptionally large dinner much to the disgust of the impatient mess.

The eyes of the officers sparkled as they watched him pick up the bottle of Dhassi which had been placed before him. He calmly looked at the wine, poured out a little and looked about inquisitively at the silent officers, who began talking volubly.

The scheme was safely launched and the mess sighed and felt somewhat relieved. Everything proceeded as usual. The first flask was finished and the second followed immediately. Little "Prot" was talking down at the end of the table, when suddenly the Colonel tapped gently with his wine glass on the table and smiled meaningly.

Edwards had slipped down in his chair with his chin on his breast and his eyes were closed. His slow and regular breathing could be heard by everyone. The White Regiment had scored a great victory.

Suddenly he opened his eyes wide and sat up straight, looking directly past Hapford as if he were expected to look through the wall.

"Make it two." His voice was clear and rang out sharp. The officers sat leaning forward and their faces were tense and drawn.

"Make it two, by the clock of Zangoor."

"What is the clock by the gates of Fort Amhatuc," whispered the senior major down the table.

"Bring the ponies and the rope. Have Sakor carry them, and remember, two. And Magoor must be at the bungalow at the same hour in readiness when he comes. He must be treated according to his rank." He stopped ruminatingly and the matter seemed ended, when little Hapford quietly said "Kang Mora hasn't any rank."

Now this was a very plain bluff, but something was needed to keep him to the thread of his story and he took a desperate chance.

"Kang Mora?" said Edwards a little crossly, "who said anything about Kang Mora. This is Prince Alar Juh of whom I am speaking."

At this name, the mess started to their feet—all except Hapford, who remained seated with his chin on his hands. Prince Alar Juh was the most precious prisoner in this part of the country and was held in Fort Amhatuc. It is no wonder that the officers arose to their feet, for the escape of the Prince meant a matter of life or death to somebody.

"You didn't tell me all I am to do after I get him into the bungalow," said Hapford talking calmly. The rest slipped back into their chairs.

"That's strange, I thought I told you all about it once," said Edwards meditating.

"You will turn him over to Magoor who will watch him and take care of him. You are to watch him because I do not trust entirely. Keep the Prince in good shape because when we want him again he must be as good as when we take him."

"How long will he be at the bungalow?" asked Hapford.

"Not over two weeks. All you will have to do is to be careful. No body will ever think of looking there for him. The negotiations won't last so very long."

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