

SHOES  
JOURNAL  
We have put in  
ED WEEKLY.  
The SOUTH CAROLINA.

# The BRONZE BELL

BY LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE  
AUTHOR OF "THE BRASS BOWL" ETC.  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS  
COPYRIGHT BY LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

SYNOPSIS.

David Amber, starting for a duck-shooting visit with his friend, Quain, comes upon a young lady equestrian, who has been dismounted by her horse becoming frightened at the sudden appearance in the road of a party Hindu. He declares he is Bharat Lal Chatterji, the appointed successor of the Bell, addresses Amber as a man of high rank and presents a mysterious little bronze box. "The token," into his hand, disappears in the wood. The girl calls Amber by name. He in turn addresses her as Miss Sophie Farrell, daughter of Col. Farrell of the British diplomatic service in India and visiting the Quain. Several nights later the Quain home is burglarized and the bronze box stolen. Amber and Quain go hunting on an island and become lost and Amber is left marooned. He wanders about, finally reaches a cabin and recognizes as its occupant an old friend named Rutton, whom he last met in England, and who appears to be in hiding. When Miss Farrell is mentioned Rutton is strangely agitated. Chatterji appears and summons Rutton to a meeting of a mysterious body. Rutton seizes a revolver and dashes after Chatterji. He returns wildly excited, says he has killed the Hindu, taken out and when dying asks Amber to go to India on a mysterious errand. Amber decides to leave at once for India. On the way he sends a letter to Mr. Labertouche, a scientific friend in Calcutta, by a quicker route. Upon arriving he finds a note awaiting him. It directs Amber to meet his friend at a certain place.

## CHAPTER VIII. (Continued.)

"Who?" Her glance was penetrating. "Oh, he's wyl'n' for you." She nodded, lifting a shrill voice. "Garge, O Garge! Ere's that Yankee." With a bare red elbow she indicated the further end of the room. "You'll find 'im down there," she said, her look not unkindly.

Amber thanked her quietly, and, extricating himself from the press around the bar, made his way in the direction indicated. A couple of billiard tables with a small mob of on-lookers hindered him, but by main strength and diplomacy he wormed his way past and reached the rear of the room. There were fewer loafers here and he had little hesitation about selecting from an attendant circle of sycophants the genius of the dive—Honest George himself, a fat and burly ruffian who filled to overflowing the inadequate accommodation of an arm-chair. Sitting thus enthroned in his shirt-sleeves, his greasy and unshaven red face irradiating a sort of low good-humor that was belied by the cold cunning of his little eyes, he fulfilled admirably the requirements of the role he played self-cast.

"Ere, you!" he hailed Amber brusquely. "You're a 'all of a job-unter, ain't you? Mister Abercrombie's been wyl'n' for you this hour gone. 'Know the w'y upstairs?" His tone was boisterous enough to fix upon Amber the attention of the knot of loafers round the arm-chair. Amber felt himself under the particular regard of a dozen pair of eyes, felt that his measure was taken and his identification complete. Displeased, he answered curtly: "No."

"This w'y, then," Honest George hoisted himself ponderously out of his arm-chair and lumbered heavily across the room, shouldering the crowd aside with a high-handed contempt for the pack of them. Jerking open a small door in the side wall, he beckoned Amber on with a backward nod of his heavy head. "Be a bit lively, carn't you?" he growled; and Amber, in despite of qualms of distrust, followed the fellow into a small and noisome hallway lighted by a single gas jet. On the one hand a flight of rickety steps ran up into repellent obscurity; on the other a low door stood open to the night.

The crimp lowered his voice. "Your friend's this w'y." He waved his fat red hand toward the door. "Them fools back there'll think you're tryin' for a berth with Abercrombie, the ship-master. I 'opes you'll not tyke offense at the w'y I 'ad to rag you back there, sir."

"No," said Amber, and Honest George led the way out into a small, flagged well between towering black walls and left him at the threshold of a second doorway. "Two flights up, the door at the top," he said; "knock twice and then twice." And without waiting for an answer he lurched heavily back to his own establishment.

Amber watched his broad back fill the dimly lighted doorway opposite and disappear, of two minds whether or not to turn tall and run. Suspicious enough in the beginning, the affair had now an exceeding evil smell—as repulsive figuratively as was the actual effluvia of the premises. With a shrug, at length, he took his courage in his hands—and his life, too, for all he knew to the contrary—and moved on into the blackness, groping his way cautiously down a short corridor, his fingers on either side brushing walls of rotten plaster. He had absolutely nothing to guide him beyond the crimp's terse instructions. Underfoot the flooring seemed to sag ominously; it creaked hideously. Abruptly he stumbled against an obstruction, halted, and lighted a match.

The insignificant flame showed him a flight of stairs, leading up to darkness. With a drumming heart he began to ascend, counting 21 steps ere his feet failed to find another. Then groping again, one hand encountered a banister-rail; with this for guide he turned and followed it until it began to slant upwards. This time he counted 16 steps before he reached the

above the level of the upper floor, discovered to him a thin line of light, bright along the threshold of a door. He began to breathe more freely, yet apprehension kept him strung up to a high tension of nerves.

He knocked the door loudly—only a double knock followed by another.

From within a voice called cheerfully, in English: "Come in." He fumbled for the knob, found and turned it, and entered a small, low-ceiled chamber, very cozy with lamp-light, and simply furnished with a single chair, a charpoy, a water-jug, a large mirror, and beneath the latter a dressing-table littered with a collection of toilet gear, cosmetics and bottles, which would have done credit to an actress.

There was but a single person in the room and he occupied the chair before the dressing table. As Amber came in, he rose; a middle-aged babu in a suit of pink satin, very dirty. In one hand something caught the light, glittering.

"Oah, Mister Amber, I believe?" he gurgled, oily and affable. "Believe me, most charmed to make acquaintance." And he laughed agreeably.

But Amber's face had darkened. With an oath he sprang back, threw his weight against the door, and with his left hand shot the bolt, while his right whipped from his pocket Rutton's automatic pistol.

"Drop that gun, you monkey!" he cried, sharply. "I was afraid of this, but I think you and I'll have an accounting before any one else gets in here."

## CHAPTER IX.

### Pink Satin.

Shaking with rage, Amber stood for a long moment with pistol poised and eyes wary; then, bewildered, he slowly lowered the weapon. "Well," he observed, reflectively, "I'm damned." For the glittering thing he had mistaken for a revolver lay at his feet; and it was nothing more nor less than a shoehorn. While as for the babu, he had dropped back into the chair and given way to a rude but reassuring paroxysm of gusty, silent laughter.

"I'm a fool," said Amber; "and if I'm not mistaken, you're Labertouche."

With a struggle the babu overcame his emotion. "I am, my dear fellow, I am," he gasped. "And I owe you an apology. Upon my word, I'd forgotten; one grows so accustomed to living the parts in these masquerades, after a time, that one forgets. Forgive me." He offered a hand which Amber grasped warmly in his unutterable relief. "I'm really delighted to meet you," continued Labertouche, seriously. "Any man who knows India can't help being glad to meet the author of 'The Peoples of the Hindu Kush.'"

"You did frighten me," Amber confessed, smiling. "I didn't know what to expect—or suspect. Certainly,"—with a glance round the incongruously furnished room—"I never looked forward to anything like this—or you, in that get-up."

"You wouldn't, you know," Labertouche admitted, gravely. "I might have warned you in my note; but that was a risky thing, at best. I feared to go into detail—it might have fallen into the wrong hands."

"Whose?" demanded Amber.

"That, my dear man, is what we're here to find out—if we can. But sit down; we shall have to have quite a bit of talk." He scraped a heap of gaily-colored native garments off one end of the charpoy and motioned Amber to the chair. At the same time he fished a cigar-case out of some recess of his clothing. "These are good," he remarked, opening the case and offering it to Amber; "I daren't smoke anything half so good when at work. The native tobacco is admirable, you know—quite three-fourths flint."

"At work?" questioned Amber, clipping the end of his cigar and lighting it. "You don't mean to say you travel round in those clothes?"

"But I do. It's business with me—though few people know it. Quain didn't; only I had a chance, one day, to tell him some rather startling facts about native life. This sort of thing, done properly, gives a man insight into a lot of unusual things."

Labertouche puffed his cigar into a glow and leaned back, clasping one knee with two brown hands and squinting up at the low, discolored ceiling. And Amber, looking him over, was amazed by the absolute fidelity of his make-up; the brownish stain on face and hands, the high-cut patent leather boots, the open-work socks through which his tinted calves showed grossly, his shapeless, baggy, soiled garments—all were hopelessly babu-ish.

"And if it isn't done properly?"

membered Rutton's emphatic prohibition.

But Quain had not failed to mention that. "Officially, no," said Labertouche readily. "Now and again, of course, I run across a bit of valuable information; and then, somehow, indirectly, the police get wind of it. But this going fanto in an amateur way is simply my hobby; I've been at it for years—and very successfully, too. Of course, it'll have its end. One's bound to slip up eventually. You can train yourself to live the life of the native, but you can't train your mind to think as he thinks. That's how the missteps happen. Some day . . ." He sighed, not in the least unhappily. "Some day I'll dodge into this hole, or another that I know of, put on somebody else's rags—say, these I'm wearing—and inconspicuously become a mysterious disappearance. That's how it is with all of us who go in for this sort of thing. But it's like opium, you know; you try it the first time for the lark of it; the end is tragedy."

Amber drew a long breath, his eyes glistening with wonder and admiration of the man. "You don't mean to tell me you run such risks for the pure love of it?"

"Well . . ." perhaps not altogether. But we needn't go into details, need we?" Labertouche's smile robbed the rebuke of its sting. "The opium simile is a very good one, though I say it who shouldn't. One acquires a taste for the unbidden, and one hires a little room like this from an unprincipled blackguard like Honest George, and inensibly one goes deeper and deeper until one gets beyond one's depth. That is all. It explains me sufficiently. And," he chuckled, "you'd never have known it if your case hadn't been exceptional."

"It is, I think," Amber's expression became anxious. "I want to know what you think of it—now Quain's told you. And, I say, what did you mean by 'news of the Fs.'?"

"News of the Farrells—father and daughter, of course," Labertouche's eyes twinkled.

"But how in the name of all that's strange—!"

"Did I connect Rutton with the Farrells? At first by simple inference. You were charged with a secret errand, demanding the utmost haste, by Rutton; your first thought was to

enthroned, and for a little time ruled Khandavar. It was then that I knew him. He was continually dissatisfied, however, and after a year or two disappeared. It was rumored that he'd struck a bargain with his prime minister, one Salig Singh. At all events Salig Singh contrived to usurp the throne, government offering no objection. Rutton turned up eventually in Russia and married a woman there who died in childbirth—twenty years ago, perhaps. The child did not survive its mother . . ." Labertouche paused deliberately, his glance searching Amber's face. "So the report ran, at least," he concluded, quietly.

"How do you know all this?" Amber countered, evasively.

"Government watches its wards very tenderly," said Labertouche with a grin. "Besides, India's a great place for gossip. . . . And then," he pursued tenaciously, "I remembered something else. I recalled that Rutton had one very close friend, an Englishman named Farrell—"

"Oh, what's the use?" Amber cut in nervously. "You understand the situation too well. It's no good my trying to keep anything from you."

"Such as the fact that Colonel Farrell adopted Rutton's daughter, who, as it happens, did survive her mother? Yes; I knew that—or, rather, part I knew and part I guessed. But don't worry, Mr. Amber; I'll keep the secret."

"For the girl's sake," said Amber, twisting his hands together.

"For her sake. I pledge my word."

"Thank you."

"And now . . . for what purpose did Rutton ask you to come to India? Wasn't it to get Miss Farrell out of the country?"

"I think you're the devil himself," said Amber.

"I'm not," confessed Labertouche; "but I am a member of the Indian secret service—not officially connected with the police, observe!—and I know a deal that you don't. I think, in short, I can place my finger on the reason why Rutton was so concerned to get his daughter out of the country."

Amber looked his question.

"You read the papers, don't you, in America?"

"Rather." Amber smiled.

"You've surely not been so blind as to miss the occasional reports that

Labertouche laughed good-naturedly tonight you will learn some of this Dohla Baksh—some, at least, undoubtedly. May I ring—this token?"

Unbuttoning his shirt, Labertouche studied it for a moment in silence, returning it with a deep perturbation.

"The thing is strange," said Amber. "For the present I'll miss it as simply what it is—a token, a sign by which I shall know another. . . . but turn the stone in; and hands in your pockets when you're out."

Amber obeyed. "We'll see how it goes."

"Yes," Labertouche rose, away his cigar and stamp of fire.

"But the Farrells?"

"Forgive me; I had forgotten. Farrells are at Darjeeling, Colonel is stationed just now for him."

"Then," said Amber, with a look of surprise. "I leave for Darjeeling tomorrow."

"I know no reason why you shouldn't," agreed Labertouche. "Anything turns up I'll contrive to let you know." He looked Amber down with a glance that took in every detail. "I'm sorry," he said, "you couldn't have managed a trace shabbier. Still, a touch and there, you'll do excellent as a sailor on a spree."

"As bad as that?"

"Oah, my dear fellow!—It was the babu speaking, while he looked around Amber with his head cocked to one side, like an inquisitive daw, now and again darting to peck at him with hands that

ostensibly but deftly arranged details of his attire to please a taste fast and exacting in such matters—my dear fellow, surely you appreciate the danger of venturing into native dress in European dress? As regards out-and-out sahib, I am meanly, of course. It is permissible for rift sailors and Tommies from the and so on, to indulge in debauch among nateeves, but first-class

—Oah, noah! You would be me in no-time-at-all, where we are going."

"All right; I guess I can play part, babu. At least, I've plenty of atmosphere," Amber laughed, mentioning the incident of the peg he had consumed over Honest George's

"I had noticed that; a habit, indeed. I think—I stepped back to look at you again—I think you will be a One moment."

He seized Amber's hat and stamped it out of shape; and stored to its owner if he years in less than minutes. Amber laughed, putting "Surely you couldn't ask me more disreputable," he said, dubious survey of himself in the

"You'll do," chuckled Labertouche approvingly. "Just ram your into your trousers pockets, and unbuttoning your coat, and along as if nocturnal rambles in slums of Calcutta were an ever, thing to you. If you're spoken don't betray too much familiarity the vernacular. You know about limit of the average Tommy's vocabulary; don't go beyond it." He bolted and locked the door by which Amber had entered, putting the in his pocket, and turned to a second door across the room. "We'll

take this way; I chose this place because it's a regular rabbit warren, with a dozen entrances and exits. I'll be you in a passage leading to the back. Wait in the doorway until you see stroll past; give me thirty yards and follow. Keep in the middle of the way, avoid a crowd as the plug and don't lose sight of me. I'll be in front of Dohla Baksh's shop in enough to light a cheroot and go without looking back. When come out I'll be waiting for you. We lose one another, get back to your hotel as quickly as possible. I'll send you word. If I don't, I shall stand you've taken the first morning train for Darjeeling. I think that's all."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## A Marriage Black List.

The habit of making inquiries at private detective offices as to the marital and mode of life of any young man who is under consideration as a suitable husband by the relatives of a girl whom he wishes to marry leads to some curious complications in Austria and Hungary. Young men in debt are inscribed on the so-called "black list" at the inquiry office.

Good parties are, on the other hand, put down on the "white list." For young Hungarian aristocrats who were involved in debt to such an extent that the only possibility of retrieving their fortunes lay in making rich marriages formed a kind of company for the purpose of finding wives. Each was provided with a rich bride, preferably an American heiress, as his turn came.

## A Woman's Rule.

Mme. Bernhardt, at a supper in New York, smiled sympathetically over the story of a young actor who had applied vainly for the post of secretary to a rich widow.

"He failed, I understand," said Mme. Bernhardt, "because he didn't apply."

## Merchants.



Stood for a Long Moment With Pistol Poised and Eyes Wary.

travel by the longer route—which, as it happens, Miss Farrell had started upon a little while before. You had recently met her, and I've heard she's rather a striking young woman. You see?"

"Yes," admitted Amber, sheepishly. "But—"

"And then I remembered something," interrupted Labertouche. "I recall Rutton. I knew him years ago, when he was a young man. You know the yarn about him?"

"A little—mighty little. I know now that he was a Rajput—though he never told me that; I know that he married a Russian noblewoman—Amber hesitated imperceptibly—"that she died soon after, that he chose to live out of India and to die rather than return to it."

"He was," said Labertouche, "a singular man, an exotic result of the unnatural conditions we English have brought about in India. The word renegade describes him aptly, I think; he was born and bred a Brahmin, a Rajput, of the hottest and bluest blood in Rajputana; he died to all intents and purposes a European—with an English heart. He is—was—by rights Maharana of Khandavar. As the young maharaj he was sent to England to be educated. I'm told his record at Oxford was a brilliant one. He became a convert to Christianity—that was predestined—was admitted to the Church of England, a communicant. When his father died and he was summoned to take his place, Rutton at first refused. Pressure was put to bear upon him by the English government and he returned, was

leak out about native unrest in India?"

"Surely you don't mean—"

"I assuredly do mean that the Second Mutiny impends," declared Labertouche, solemnly. "Such, at least, is my belief, and such is the belief of every thinking man in India who is at all informed. The entire country is undermined with conspiracy and sedition; day after day a vast, silent, underground movement goes on, fomenting rebellion against the English rule. The worst of it is, there's no stopping it, no way of scotching the serpent; its heads are myriad, seemingly. And yet—I don't know—since yesterday I have hoped that through you we might eventually strike to the heart of the movement."

"Through me!" cried Amber, startled.

Labertouche nodded. "Just so. The information you have already brought us is invaluable. Have you thought of the significance of Chatterji's 'Message of the Bell'?"

"Even now," Amber quoted mechanically, "The Gateway of Swords yawns wide, that he who is without fear may pass within; to the end that the Body be purged of the Scarlet Evil." He shook his head mystified. "No; I don't understand."

"It's so simple," urged Labertouche; "all but the Gateway of Swords. I don't place that yet. But the 'Body'—plainly that is India—'Scarlet Evil'—could anything tinglingly describe English rule native point of view?"

Amber felt of his head soil "And yet," he averred plaintively, "it doesn't feel like wood."