

SWAMI RAM'S REINCARNATION

By FRANK BLIGHTON

CHAPTER IV.

Pacheco's Death.

"How did you get here?" demanded the magnate.

"The ways of my people are not the ways of yours, sahib. Did you not give me permission to come? And who am I that I should presume to disobey you—or the gods?"

"The gods?"

"Vishnu and Siva," salaamed the Hindu. "They, too, are here. Has the sahib never read the lines of one of his own people?"

"Far or forgot to me is near; Shadow and sunlight are the same; The vanished gods to me appear; And one to me are shame and fame."

"But it's incredible," returned the mine owner. "I rode my horse almost to death—and there were times when I had all I could do to get through."

He gazed, more and more mystified, at the gaunt figure who seemed to have

forgotten fatigue or hunger at the mere sight of him. Jitendra was naked to his loins, which were girded with a cloth almost the same hue as his body.

His legs and feet were bare, and save for a thick something swathed about his neck and his snow-white turban, he was otherwise nude. It was inexplicable—and the incongruity of the poetry which the Hindu had quoted, together with his devotion, added to the American's perplexity.

Then his eyes fell upon the feet of the little brown man.

He was conscious of a swift, remorseful throb. The feet were bare—bruised, cut, swollen, bleeding—the feet of a man who has plodded across the flinty surface of the open country, who has unhesitatingly kept on through chaparral, woods, streams—the feet of a man unused to unremitting pursuit.

Buck Williams gulped—there was a lump in his throat.

"You have followed me all of these nine days—afoot?" he sternly demanded.

"Yes, Sahib Buck," replied the Oriental. "I pray the sahib not to turn away his face from that of his servant."

"But I did not see you once."

"I remembered the sahib's threat of punishment," meekly returned Jitendra.

"But why—of course it's absurd even to think of it—but why in the devil didn't you work the occult stuff, Jitendra—that is, if you could? I'm sorry to have caused you all this trouble and worry. If you could send your astral body on ahead and then follow it—well, I wouldn't have cared. Why didn't you do that?"

"Sahib, it is not permitted to invoke the powers of the gods when our own efforts will avail. Only when no other means are at hand for deliverance may I call upon Vishnu and Siva."

There was nothing to be gained by discussion, Williams decided. Yet he could not imagine in what manner the Oriental had anticipated his own arrival.

"You were ahead of me?" he asked. Jitendra bowed.

"How did you know this was El Tigre? There are many other mines around these hills."

The Hindu silently stretched his hand, pointing to the huge sign on the company store above them. The mine owner laughed.

"It was a foolish question, wasn't it? I guess I'm almost too tired to think straight. Well, we'd better be getting up to camp," continued Williams.

He dismounted stiffly from the horse, and the other dropped lightly to the road, meekly following in the rear.

"I'm a man of my word, Jitendra; and while I can't promise that you'll ever live long enough to resume your journey at El Paso, I'll be glad to see you and the other boys arrive from Cullacan. If you get in bad, remember, I gave you the straight dope on this proposition, and don't blame me."

A careful search of the premises disclosed no pseudo-insurrectos in ambush.

Williams, much relieved, permitted Jitendra to aid in carrying a supply of canned food to his own house, a stout adobe building somewhat higher than the others, with its back against the hill. His horse was picketed alongside, where the thick grass carpeted the slope, and a brook beyond obviated the necessity of fetching water up the steep ascent from the bed of the creek far below.

The two ate ravenously, but Jitendra scrupulously abstained from anything except vegetables. He glanced at the American and fingered a can of condensed milk longingly.

"Take it—there's lots more in the storehouse," said Williams kindly.

Jitendra bowed his thanks and ripped off the top with an opener. "In my country," he observed, "we drink the milk of the goat."

But Buck Williams, worn and

wary, only half understood him. He relaxed in his chair and slept as sleeps a man who feels at last a degree of comparative safety after many perils.

Once he fancied he heard the notes of a life, but drowned off again, to dream of the invincible spirit of the men of '76, who rebelled against oppression, laying down their lives that their descendants might enjoy the blessings of liberty.

He saw vividly an army of soldiers in buff and blue, with cocked hats, marching across the muddy Rio Grande, and before the stern and indomitable man who led them Manuel Pacheco and his ragged bandits fled precipitately.

But the dream passed; at least the phantasmagoria of the Continental army, with Washington at its head, faded, while oddly enough, the features of Pacheco persisted. Something was gripping his arms cruelly. Buck Williams tried to rise.

He half leaped from the comfortable chair in which he had been sitting. His heavy eyes widened.

Opposite him sat Manuel Pacheco himself, on his face an evil leer; and trussed like a chicken in the corner was the Hindu, gazing mutely at him with a curiously intent expression.

"Welcome to El Tigre, Senor Williams," sneered the ex-foreman. "I have been expecting you for some days."

Buck Williams struggled futilely. A rawhide riata had been looped around his elbows behind his back, throwing his shoulders so far out of place that the pain was frightful. Another twist of the same riata had pinned his wrists, his knees and ankles to the floor.

Natural, a man of strong impulses, Williams ceased to wince at the inexorable thongs, but cursed his former mine foreman with expletives of a high dynamic quality.

Pacheco merely adjusted his heavy, gold-fringed epaulets and complacently patted away an imaginary wrinkle in the neat blue coat he wore as he signaled to the other mozos, standing respectfully but curiously beyond the door.

"Assist Senor Williams and his servant to horses," he curtly directed. It was already sunrise. Outside the house the two were securely bound to the animals, and the party started down the trail toward the coast. At the fork of the highway leading on the left to Cullacan, they debouched to the right.

"Where are you taking us?" imperiously demanded El Tigre's owner. "The commandante at Zapatillo desires your presence, senor," leered Pacheco.

"I'll get you for this, you greaser dog!" exclaimed the American.

For answer Pacheco drove his horse between the animal Williams was riding and Jitendra's mount, leaned over and struck the American a heavy blow across his unprotected face.

Although half-blinded with rage at the blow, Williams an instant later felt a strange thrill of some event out of the ordinary. Pacheco drew back, his brutish face wreathed in a grin of ferocious triumph; but the smile suddenly stiffened.

He reeled in his saddle; a second later his eyes almost started from their sockets with agony. His cigar-colored features grew purplish and a fleck of foam rose to his gasping lips.

His bridle-hand relaxed; convulsively his legs drove the spurs on the high-topped boots into the sides of the horse he was riding. The animal reared, pawing the air with a peculiar and unaccountable terror, and would have bolted had not one of the command grasped it by the reins.

Buck Williams gazed mutely at the retreating figure of the private he scarcely heard. He did not need their chorus of alarm to know that Pacheco was dying—was dead.

Yet there had been nothing—absolutely nothing—save only the quick bending of Jitendra's lean body in the captain's direction—a swift inclination of the turbaned head at the instant following the cowardly blow.

The sergeant, Jesus Corabado, volleyed a command and the column halted, while the corpse of Manuel Pacheco was stripped of uniform and equipment. Following the unique but simple Mexican-insurrecto method of promotion, Corabado donned the neat blue jacket, with its heavily fringed epaulets, and buckled the sword around him.

On the same principle, a corporal substituted the former sergeant's coat for his own, and a private in his shirt-sleeves put on the corporal's jacket.

"Volante!" cried the new captain. The soldiers closed in and the column moved forward. Manuel Pacheco that was lay rigid and stark on the caliche, gazing at the cerulean sky with fixed and sightless eyes.

Buck Williams turned to look at Jitendra. The Oriental's face was in-

scrutable. He was gazing straight ahead, immovable, as if beholding some scene yet to emerge from the womb of time.

They rode on for several miles, the American growing more and more perplexed. Something—from somewhere—had annihilated the man who had vented his brutality in a contemptible blow upon the face of one powerless to resist.

Had Buck's hands been unbound, Manuel Pacheco, ex-foreman in the employ of the El Tigre mine, would never have dared to offer such an affront to its owner; no, not if he had been in the center of a regiment of disciplined troops instead of a mere company of ragged peons whose counterfeited military air only heightened their ridiculous appearance and magnified their ignorant swagger.

They were banditti, not patriots; and their movements now were those of a body of half-terrified, yet revengeful men actuated by some intelligence superior to their own. The hideously sudden and unexplained death of their previous commander had dazed them.

The more he thought, the more incomprehensible the whole affair appeared to Buck Williams. He knew Mexico. His acquisition of the mineral land on which El Tigre was located had been achieved during the last years of the Diaz regime.

The very name of the mine itself had been derived from him. El Tigre signified "The Tiger," and that name had fallen once from the lips of a thieving peon, who was overtaken and effectually chastised by Buck himself for stealing camp supplies in the early days of his operations.

For Buck was named "The Tiger" because of his implacable fury when any attempt to victimize him was made by the subtle methods which Mexicans usually employ with a "gringo" unaccustomed to their ways.

Now "The Tiger" was bound fast to the back of a horse, en route to some tribunal of whose authority he was ignorant but of whose judgments he could guess.

Pacheco, of himself, would not have dared to presume to lay hands upon him, nor did the indolent Mexican foreman possess sufficient initiative to seize on a mining property of the magnitude of El Tigre unless with inspiration from bigger minds than his. But Pacheco was dead—a bloated purple corpse—struck down almost at the instant of his atrocious blow and hurried into the great unknown.

Pacheco's death was, and forever would be, utterly baffling. Buck Williams knew—unless Jitendra could and would explain it.

He turned to glance at the little Hindu with growing feeling of respect, bordering on awe. He noticed that, while surrounding them, the soldiers were riding well away from Jitendra and himself.

The mysterious demise of their captain had evidently not been without its effect. Buck wondered why Jitendra and himself had not been shot down.

It must be because definite orders had been sent out both for his capture and disposition—otherwise the rifles of the bandit command would, ere this, have visited a death as sudden, but by no means as mysterious, upon both.

"Jitendra," whispered Williams. The Hindu turned.

"What was it that killed Pacheco?" "The vengeance of Vishnu, sahib," answered the other.

"I do not understand," replied the mine owner. He was a little irritated to think that he, a strong, lusty American, was inferior in resources for resistance to his enemies, while a gaunt, emaciated, undersized atom bound as securely as himself to another horse, invoked apparently occult powers with such startling results.

Jitendra's hands were tied as were his own—he could see the flesh swelling on the bony wrists where the taut rawhide was shrinking in the heat of the sun.

"The vengeance of Vishnu," at last he mechanically repeated, when the Hindu had apparently failed to notice his remark.

"Yes, Sahib Buck." The squalid adobe structures of Zapatillo were now clearly in view. The soldiers sat a little more erect, closed their ragged ranks into slightly straighter lines, and the horses, sensing a delayed meal, moved forward at a swifter pace.

Still Jitendra did not vouchsafe any explanation. Only at the gate of the camp itself, a few minutes later, did Buck Williams catch a low murmur of words. He listened eagerly.

The Hindu seemed to be chanting, but the words were English:

They reckon ill who leave me out; When me they fly—I am the wings. I am the doubter and the doubt, And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

WANTED—A NEW HAND.

The science of surgery has been developed to such a wonderful degree in the world war that a mother has appealed to the medical department at Fort Sheridan to graft a new hand on a five months old child that was born without that member.

The chief surgeon reluctantly admits that science has not reached that point. A new hand can not be furnished the little child now, but who knows what the future may bring it?

In five or ten years it may be possible to amputate the stump of the living child and graft on the hand of a child that has just died. The time will undoubtedly come when surgical

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science will be able to accomplish even this wonder.
During the civil war many thousands of arms and legs were sawed off without the aid of an anasthetic. Today such a thing is never even considered. A few years ago the putting of a tooth was a fearful ordeal to the victim. Today whole sets are extracted without pain.
The modern surgeon cuts a man open, turns him inside out, cleans his organs, sews him up again, and in a few weeks the fellow is up and trying to put one over on his competitor in business.

The wonders of surgery are so great as to be almost unbelievable to the lay mind, and yet it is only in its infancy. Another great war will result in as great achievements in the development of the science as the one just closed, and it will not be at all surprising to see the hands of the dead grafted onto the shattered stumps of the living. Few things are impossible to the man of science who is determined to succeed.

EXECUTOR'S NOTICE.
Having this day qualified before the Clerk of the Superior Court of Franklin County as Executor of W. L. McGhee, deceased, I hereby notify all persons holding claims against said estate to present them to me within one year from the date hereof or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate will please make settlement with me.
This February 3rd, 1920.
CLAUDE L. MCGHEE, Executor
2-6-20 of W. L. McGhee, dec'd.

ADMINISTRATORS NOTICE TO CREDITORS.
Having qualified as administrator of the estate of Miss Mary O. Dent, late of Franklin County, N. C., this is to notify all persons having claims against said estate to present them to the undersigned on or before the 3rd day of February, 1921, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate will please make immediate payment. This 3rd day of February, 1920.
G. C. SHAW, Adm'r.
2-6-20 of Mary O. Dent.

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We were very fortunate in buying our stock before the sharp advance in cost. Our present prices are not based on the higher Wholesale market today but on the prices we paid several months ago, with only a fair and honest margin of profit.
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