

THE NABOB

OF SINGAPORE.

BY ST. GEORGE RATHEORNE.

Author of 'Baron Sam,' 'Monsieur Bob,'
'Captain Tom,' 'Miss Pauline of New
York,' Etc.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PAGE TURNED DOWN.

A few days glide by. The work progresses rapidly—still it takes a certain amount of time to accomplish such a vast amount of business, and at the end of the third day they are not yet ready, though the Irie again floats upon the bosom of Singapore Harbour.

Major Max has taken up his quarters on board, so that he can personally superintend the various preparations. As the recognised leader of the expedition, much depends upon his judgment. He personally hires the crew, and as there is a premium offered to the right sort of men, he has a chance of securing a full complement of sturdy Jack Tars before sailing time comes. Most of them are English sailors, and the spice of danger in the engagement serves as an added inducement to such brave lads.

The soldier has almost entirely abandoned the field in favour of Nat, and it is certainly the Nabob's own fault if he does not improve these golden hours. The divine spark is glowing in his heart, and at last he is deeply and madly in love; so he tells Max very often.

It is not very pleasant news to Major Max, of course, but he has experienced many strange things during the course of his eventful life, and can smile calmly while listening to the handsome young Nabob going into rhapsodies over his lady love.

When Max makes no remark, he flies into a little rage, and demands imperiously whether the major has any objection to the match—if he does not think Eulalie good enough for him. This tickles the soldier that he bursts into a roar of laughter, and in a cynical voice says:

'I have been in doubt about it, but have hoped she will, after a while, attain the high pinnacle that the wife or sweetheart of a royal Nabob should reach. Seriously speaking, you conceived young Apollo, I think Eulalie ten times too good for you in your natural state. If I were sure this sudden reformation would not soon peter out, and the last stage be worse than the first, I might feel justified in believing all would be well.'

Then he gives Nat such a lecture as the gay young dog never received before—shows him his faults and Eulalie's virtues—and finally winds up by saying:

'If you are lucky enough to win her, it will be a hundred times more than you deserve. See that you are always gentle and true with her. We may not find her father, but, please God, I am bound to look after her happiness, for the love I bore Tom Thorpe.'

Nat Mayne looked fixedly at the other a minute, as though a sudden idea were forcing itself through his brain. Men upon whom fortune ever smiles are it comes hard upon them when circumstances throw them upon their own resources.

'H'm!' he says, but there is a world of significance in the expression.

Major Max holds his ground—he is a soldier by profession and not used to flight in the face of danger; but he has turned very white.

They are alone in the cabin of the ship, and it is evening. The carpenters and painters have gone home, the captain is ashore, and the men mostly on deck, fraternizing in the dog watch.

'Uncle Max, I am astounded,' says Mayne.

'At what, pray?'

'You have revealed your secret.'

'My secret?' calmly.

'You love Eulalie Thorpe yourself.'

Some men would have perjured themselves indignantly denying the truth of this accusation, but Major Max says nothing—he knows it is so; he can no longer conceal the fact from himself, and even Nat's eyes have discovered it.

The Nabob waits, but hears no denial. He even allows himself to show anger, just as though he has the right to monopolise the love-making of the world. He has stood the lecture of the major meekly, and grinned while his pet sins were being paraded before his eyes; it is his turn now to chide—yes, to taunt.

'I am amazed to think a man of your age would allow himself to be enchanted by a pair of dark eyes belonging to a girl only a few years beyond the short dress period. Why, bless your poor heart, she isn't near

half your age, sir, and could well look up to you as her father.'

Major Max preserves his temper.

'Ah, my dear boy, the divine spark of love does not think of age. It has always been so. You will at thirty-five or forty be just as apt to get into rhapsodies over a charming ballet-dancer of sixteen. Some people think men get more foolish in love matters the older they grow; but I can say, without any conceit, that I have never caused a woman to shed a tear. You accuse me of loving Eulalie. Well, what of it? She is a charming girl—she comes nearer my ideal of a true woman than any one I have yet met. Yes, I love the girl with all my heart and soul. If I were fortunate enough to win her, I would be the happiest man on earth.'

He says this solemnly, but Mayne shows intense excitement.

'Confound it all,' he says, 'will you step in between and rain the one true love episode of my life? She belongs to me. Why, I met her fourteen months ago in Paris. I told you all about it that night. The fact of our coming together again proves the existence of a fate binding our hearts together. Everything combines to make her mine, enthusiastically, as he snatches out her picture and kisses it again and again.

The major frowns at this.

'I presume the fact of your having flirted with her at a Parisian hospital a year ago, and accidentally meeting her again over there, does give you a pre-emption claim; but what should I say, I who have thought of her sweet face for three long years? Seat here it is in the locker on my watch chain.

Twice have these arms strained her to my heart and snatched her from the eager grasp of a cruel death. Would it not be natural for me to say Heaven meant her for me; and, were I twenty years younger, and as homely as a scarecrow, a dozen Nabobs, were they combinations of Adonis and Lothar, could not force me to yield one iota of my claim.'

'Twice, you say? echoes Nat, aghast at the tiger he has aroused.

'Ay, twice; for Eulalie Thorpe was no other than the girl I bore down the mountain side of Mont Blanc, the girl whose pictured face has haunted me ever since.'

'Then am I undone. I could hold my own against one rescue, for in regard to that you promised secrecy; but two—never. Heaven help me, I've lost just when I thought I had won.'

The Nabob is a sorry-looking individual in his despair—such a contrast to the high-stepping dandy usually seen upon the streets, the observed of all, the admiration of women, the envy of men. He is simply crushed.

'Wait!' says Major Max, slowly, and the distracted Nat, ceasing to run his fingers through his yellow hair, raises his blue eyes to the face of his companion.

He suddenly remembers something.

'Your promise! it is what he mutters, breathlessly.

'Yes, my promise. It was given off hand and under a blind misunderstanding. I never dreamed when I said I would advance your interests before my own, that Eulalie was the child of the Alps.'

'Still, you did promise.'

'And I shall keep it.'

'Under bless you, Uncle Max.'

'Under one condition. You shall have the first chance to win her. I will stand aside, agreeing to do nothing to sway her mind one way or the other. You shall have, I say, a certain time, weeks if you will, or months. If at the end of that time you have won her heart, and she consents to be your wife, I shall go on in my way just as though nothing had ever happened. If, on the other hand, you fail, then it must be you who shall step aside and let me try my fate. Is this just, Nat Mayne?'

The other has turned red and white alternately.

He knows he is dealing with a man of honour. Major Max has one for him more than for any other person on earth would.

At the same time, he understands that Max Lee is dead in earnest—that he has not been aroused like this since the time he was in love with Nat's mother, and was outgeneraled because of a treacherous handsome friend and a woman's sickle heart.

He must clinch matters—put the soldier in a hole, so to speak, and tie his hands. All this is considered—it only takes a short time to mentally review the incidents of the past.

'I don't know why I should hesitate to tell you—I have improved each shining hour. It has been quick work. I'll admit, but many a fort is captured by assault as well as by a long siege. Well, I have won.'

Major Max starts violently.

'Do you mean that you have already asked her to be your wife?'

'She's going to redeem me. Oh! I'll make a paragon of a husband yet, if there can be such an anomaly on earth. I never dreamed I should ever come to it. Why, fortune has been so prodigal with her favours that hitherto I have been reckoned a heart smasher, and I say it without mean-

ing to boast. But at last I have met my Sedan—I have been obliged to capitulate. It's a decent serious business to a fellow like me.'

The soldier sticks to his point and is not to be swayed from his course.

'Have you told her you love her?' he continues, hoarsely.

'Yes,' returns Nat, doggedly.

'And asked her to be your wife?'

'I did.'

'Tell me her answer.'

'She was a little coy, but I am a diplomat in love matters, and I finally made her confess she returned the affection, and would in course of time make me happy for life.'

He stretches the truth a little, to cover the case, this young gentleman whom fortune loves to honour, and who trembles in his elegant patent leathers, lest the plain man he has called 'aged' distance him in the race for a young girl's heart. Eulalie has asked for time to search her heart, while she gives him some encouragement. He 'anticipates the market.'

With him the old motto, 'all's fair in love or war,' has always held good. Like all men of his class, the handsome Nabob is selfish. He has never known the exquisite pleasure of giving up his own comfort to another, and in this matter he does not give a thought as to what is to become of Major Max, for his whole time is taken up with bother about the future condition of one Nat Mayne.

And the major believes him.

He does not give way to any emotion, for he is a man who has learned to control his feelings.

Quietly opening his locker charm, with the point of a penknife he takes out the small bit of card-board containing Eulalie's face, and, walking over, tosses it through the open ball's eye. The Nabob watches him curiously.

'Far be it from me to carry around the likeness of another man's promised wife. That page shall be turned down. Let us talk of another subject, my dear boy,' he says, resolutely; and Nabob Nat secretly admires the man whose life his father wrecked, but whose nobility of soul even adversity could not diminish.

'There's one good thing about the melancholy days of autumn,' said Snersby.

'What is that?'

'When a man gets a plain, ordinary coat, he can't go about calling it "hay fever."'

'What is the greatest difficulty you encounter in a journey to the arctic regions?'

'Asked the inquisitive man. "Getting back home," was the prompt reply of the professional explorer.

'Are you married?'

'No, sir. "Then I can't employ you. We find that married men know better how to obey than bachelors."'

CHAPTER XV.

THE QUEEN OF THE MALACCA STRAITS.

AT THE close of the major marks out a line for himself, and walks along it with soldierly precision. He continually looks upon Eulalie as lost to him. While courteous in his manner, he at the same time is formal. In a word, he endeavours to be gentle and kind while manifesting a sort of paternal interest in the girl.

Perhaps she wonders at his action, but her mind is full of the great work upon which they are about to start, and the change in his manner is not enough in itself to excite inquiry.

The Nabob waits on her assiduously. She never expresses a wish but that he is off to execute it. It would only be natural that this homage on the part of a handsome man must be pleasing to almost any girl; but Eulalie is a sensible young woman, and too much of this sort of thing sets her to thinking.

There is always an unpleasant idea connected with devotion from an Adonis—one is often tempted to estimate how many other girls there were in the past for whom he had shown the same undying affection.

It takes away from the satisfaction of the victory. After all, your sensible girl of today is a jealous creature, and would rather know she is the first and last and only love of a man's heart, than to discover herself to be only one of a dozen to whom he has sworn eternal fidelity.

The preparations go on, and the Irie is rapidly reaching a point when she will be ready to sail. Nothing that will tend to their comfort or further the object of their business has been neglected, and it looks as

though the major has carried out matters with his usual thoroughness.

Meantime, unknown to our friends, other complications are arising which may cause them trouble. Lord Aleck and the Jew have endeavoured to argue the matter—to make Thaddeus unbend and let him in as they agreed; but the American is not so easily won as a man. They were ready to ruin him in order to save themselves, and it is not in his nature to give up a million or so in order to gratify two such unscrupulous plungers.

When they find him inexorable, they turn their minds in another direction and begin to plan revenge.

Thaddeus has so arranged his business that he can see his way clear, and hence decides to accompany the pilgrims on their voyage.

Perhaps, after all, he has love in his heart for his winsome niece, and can think of her happiness until some other gigantic scheme intrudes itself upon his mind for consideration.

Such an enterprise cannot be kept a secret, and all Singapore is interested in the voyage of the Irie. Everywhere Eulalie is an object of interest—people stare at her in the street—at the hotel, until it becomes perfectly embarrassing. Whether this comes from the fact that her intended undertaking is known, or because she is the niece and heiress of the American prince of finance who so recently scooped in a million or two, is never understood.

They come to what probably will be their last night at Singapore. Major Max has received assurances from the captain and Alva Green that the ship will be ready to sail by the following afternoon.

As there is no telling when they may enjoy solid land again, our friends do not go aboard; they will spend this, their last night at Singapore, ashore.

Major Max is satisfied. A score of little things have been done that will add to Eulalie's comfort aboard the ship, and the English captain declares no sailing vessel ever left Singapore looking half so fine. They expect to spend their last night in the strange city of Singapore at the great wooden caravansary a few blocks from the new harbour known as Tangong Pagar, where steamers draw in to load with coal, and some of them to discharge and receive freight.

In most foreign parts of the far East, the transportation steamers anchor in the stream or harbour, and only assume charge of their passengers while they are on the ship.

They must come aboard and leave in their own way, and at their own expense.

Hence, an arriving steamer is at once beset by a regiment of Chinese, Malaysians, and other native boatmen, clamouring for patronage, and, in point of noise, together with a stiffness of price that can only be supported by strict organisation, they equal any band of piratical hackmen New York or Niagara ever knew. Ordinarily a Spanish dollar is necessary to enable one to get ashore with a small amount of luggage.

The hotel does not equal a Parisian caravansary, but the rooms are large and comfortable, and the service very fair. Chinese are everywhere; in Singapore they seem to almost monopolise business.

At the table they wait on you, cook your meals, serve you as guides around the city; you enter a bank and find all the officials Chinamen; in trade you bargain with them. It is astonishing, and shows what we have really escaped in at last awakening to the evil of Chinese immigration. No nation can compete with the Celestials; let them get a foothold and they are bound eventually to monopolise things.

The singular vehicle in general use amuses our friends. This equipage, as in India, is known as a garri, and is drawn by one diminutive horse. Sometimes the driver has a seat, and again he is compelled to trot alongside his strange steed.

Probably it is Chinese who has the beet time at Singapore; when Balinda has an hour off, the two can be seen wandering about the city in search of strange sights, and they find plenty of them. When they take a ride in a garri, and put on as much style as though they were members of some royal family.

The music on the Esplanade, in front of the museum, has been a pleasant feature of their stay in the so-called 'city of lions.' Of all the Europeans in Singapore the British predominate, though the Germans are not far behind; and after them come the Italians, French, and a few scattering others. Of Americans there are virtually

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