

The Sending of Dana Da

Rudyard Kipling

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When the Devil rides on your chest, remember the chamar.
—Native Proverb.

Once upon a time some people in India made a new heaven and a new earth out of broken teacups, a missing brooch or two, and a hair brush. These were hidden under bushes, or stuffed into holes in the hillside, and an entire civil service of subordinate gods used to find or mend them again; and everyone said: "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy." Several other things happened also, but the religion never seemed to get much beyond its first manifestations; though it added an air-line postal dak, and orchestral effects in order to keep abreast of the times, and stall off competition.

This religion was too elastic for ordinary use. It stretched itself and embraced pieces of everything that medicine men of all ages have manufactured. It approved and stole from Freemasonry; looted the Latter-day Rosicrucians of half their pet words; took any fragments of Egyptian philosophy that it found in the Encyclopaedia Britannica; annexed as many of the Vedas as had been translated into French or English, and talked of all the rest; built in the German versions of what is left of the Zend Avesta; encouraged white, gray, and black magic, including Spiritualism, palmistry, fortune-telling by cards, hot chestnuts, double-kerneled nuts and tallow droppings; would have adopted Voodoo and Oboe had it known anything about them, and showed itself, in every way, one of the most accommodating arrangements that had ever been invented since the birth of the sea.

When it was in thorough working order, with all the machinery down to the subscriptions complete, Dana Da came from nowhere, with nothing in his hands, and wrote a chapter in its history which has hitherto been unpublished. He said that his first name was Dana, and his second was Da. Now, setting aside Dana of the New York Sun, Dana is a Bhil name, and Da fits no native of India unless you accept the Bengali De as the original spelling. Da is Lap or Finnish; and Dana Da was neither Finn, Chin, Bhil, Bengali, Lap, Nair, Gond, Romaney, Magh, Bokhariot, Kurd, Armenian, Levantine, Jew, Persian, Punjabi, Madrasi, Parsee, nor anything else known to ethnologists. He was simply Dana Da, and declined to give further information. For the sake of brevity, and as roughly indicating his origin, he was called "The Native." He might have been the original Old Man of the Mountains, who is said to be the only authorized head of the Teacup Creed. Some, people said that he was; but Dana Da used to smile and deny any connection with the cult; explaining that he was an "independent experimenter."

As I have said, he came from nowhere, with his hands behind his back, and studied the creed for three weeks; sitting at the feet of those best competent to explain its mysteries. Then he laughed aloud and went away, but the laugh might have been either of devotion or derision.

When he returned he was without money, but his pride was unabated. He declared that he knew more about the things in heaven and earth than those who taught him, and for this contumacy was abandoned altogether.

His next appearance in public life was at a big cantonment in Upper India, and he was then telling fortunes with the help of three leaden dice, a very dirty old cloth, and a little tin box of opium pills. He told betteught him, and for this contumacy was abandoned altogether.

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His next appearance in public life was at a big cantonment in Upper India, and he was then telling fortunes with the help of three leaden dice, a very dirty old cloth, and a little tin box of opium pills. He told better fortunes when he was allowed half a bottle of whisky; but the things which he invented on the opium were quite worth the money. He was in reduced circumstances. Among other people's he told the fortune of an Englishman who had once been interested in the Simla creed, but who, later on, had married and forgotten all his old knowledge in the study of babies and Exchange. The Englishman allowed Dana Da to tell a fortune for charity's sake, and gave him five rupees, a dinner, and some old clothes. When he had eaten, Dana Da professed gratitude, and asked if there were anything he could do for his host—in the esoteric line.

"Is there anyone that you love?" said Dana Da. The Englishman loved his wife, but had no desire to drag her name into the conversation. He therefore shook his head.

"Is there anyone that you hate?" said Dana Da. The Englishman said that there were several men whom he hated deeply.

"Very good," said Dana Da, upon whom the whisky and the opium were beginning to tell. "Only give me their names, and I will dispatch a Sending to them and kill them."

Now a Sending is a horrible arrangement, first invented, they say, in Iceland. It is a thing sent by a wizard, and may take any form, but most generally wanders about the land in the shape of a little purple cloud till it finds the sendee, and him it kills by changing into the form of a horse, or a cat, or a man without a face. It is not strictly a native patent, though chamars can, if irritated, dispatch a Sending which sits on the breast of their enemy by night and nearly kills him. Very few natives care to irritate chamars for this reason.

"Let me dispatch a Sending," said Dana Da; "I am nearly dead now with want, and drink, and opium; but I should like to kill a man before I die. I can send a Sending anywhere you choose, and in any form except in the shape of a man."

The Englishman had no friends that he wished to kill, but partly to soothe Dana Da, whose eyes were rolling, and partly to see what would be done, he asked whether a modified Sending could not be arranged for—such a Sending as should make a man's life a burden to him, and yet do him no harm. If this were possible, he notified his willingness to give Dana Da ten rupees for the job.

"I am not what I was once," said Dana Da, "and I must take the money because I am poor. To what Englishman shall I send it?"

"Send a Sending to Lone Sahib," said the Englishman, naming a man who had been most bitter in rebuking him for his apostasy from the Teacup Creed. Dana Da laughed and nodded.

"I could have chosen no better man myself," said he. "I will see that he finds the Sending about his path and about his bed."

He lay down on the hearthrug, turned up the whites of his eyes, shivered all over, and began to snort. This was magic, or opium, or the Sending, or all three. When he opened his eyes he vowed that the Sending had started upon the warpath, and was at that moment flying up to the town where Lone Sahib lives.

"Give me my ten rupees," said Dana Da, wearily, "and write a letter to Lone Sahib, telling him, and all who believe with him, that you and a friend are using a power greater than theirs. They will see that you are speaking the truth."

He departed unsteadily, with the promise of some more rupees if anything came of the Sending.

The Englishman sent a letter to Lone Sahib, couched in what he remembered of the terminology of the creed. He wrote: "I also, in the days of what you held to be my backsliding, have obtained enlightenment, and with enlightenment has come power." Then he grew so deeply mysterious that the recipient of the letter could make neither head nor tail of it, and was proportionately impressed; for he fancied that his friend had become a "fifth rounder." When a man is a "fifth rounder" he can do more than Slade and Houdin combined.

Lone Sahib read the letter in five different fashions, and was beginning a sixth interpretation, when his bearer dashed in with the news that there was a cat on the bed. Now, if there was one thing that Lone Sahib hated more than another it was a cat. He rated the bearer for not turning it out of the house. The bearer said that he was afraid. All the doors of the bedroom had been shut throughout the morning, and no real cat could possibly have entered the room. He would prefer not to meddle with the creature.

Lone Sahib entered the room gingerly, and there, on the pillow of his bed, sprawled and whimpered a wee white kitten, not a jumpsome, frisky little beast, but a sluglike crawler with its eyes barely opened and its paws

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lacking strength or direction—a kitten that ought to have been in a basket with its mamma. Lone Sahib caught it by the scruff of its neck, handed it over to the sweeper to be drowned, and fined the bearer four annas.

That evening, as he was reading in his room, he fancied that he saw something moving about on the hearthrug, outside the circle of light from his reading lamp. When the thing began to myowl, he realized that it was a kitten—a wee white kitten, nearly blind and very miserable. He was seriously angry, and spoke bitterly to his bearer, who said that there was no kitten in the room when he brought in the lamp, and real kittens of tender age generally had mother cats in attendance.

"If the Presence will go out into the veranda and listen," said the bearer, "he will hear no cats. How, therefore, can the kitten on the bed and the kitten on the hearthrug be real kittens?"

Lone Sahib went out to listen, and the bearer followed him, but there was no sound of Rachel mewling for her children. He returned to his room, having hurled the kitten down the hillside, and wrote out the incidents of the day for the benefit of his coreligionists. Those people were so absolutely free from superstition that they ascribed anything a little out of the common to agencies. As it was their business to know all about the agencies, they were on terms of almost indecent familiarity with manifestations of every kind. Their letters dropped from the ceiling—un—stamped—and spirits used to squatter up and down their staircases all night. But they had never come into contact with kittens. Lone Sahib wrote out the facts, noting the hour and the minute, as every psychical observer is bound to do, and appending the Englishman's letter because it was the most mysterious document and might have had a bearing upon anything in this world or the next. An outsider would have translated all the tangle thus: "Look out! You laughed at me once, and now I am going to make you sit up."

Lone Sahib's coreligionists found that meaning in it; but their translation was refined and full of four-syllable words. They held a sederunt, and were filled with tremulous joy, for, in spite of their familiarity with all the other worlds and cycles, they had a very human awe of things sent from ghostland. They met in Lone Sahib's room in shrouded and sepulchral gloom, and their conclave was broken up by a clinking among the photo frames on the mantelpiece. A wee white kitten, nearly blind, was looping and writhing itself between the clock and the candlesticks. That stopped all investigations or doubtings. Here was the manifestation in the flesh. It was, so far as could be seen, devoid of purpose, but it was a manifestation of undoubted authenticity.

They drafted a round robin to the Englishman, the backslider of old days, adjuring him in the interests of the creed to explain whether there was any connection between the embodiment of some Egyptian god or other (I have forgotten the name) and his communication. They called the kitten Ra, or Toth, or Shem, or Noah, or something; and when Lone Sahib confessed that the first one had, at his most misguided instance, been drowned by the sweeper, they said consolingly that in his next life he would be a "bounder," and not even a "rounder" of the lowest grade. These words may not be quite correct, but they express the sense of the house accurately.

When the Englishman received the round robin—it came by post—he was startled and bewildered. He sent into the bazaar for Dana Da, who read the letter and laughed. "That is my Sending," said he. "I told you I would work well. Now give me another ten rupees."

"But what in the world is this gibberish about Egyptian gods?" asked the Englishman.

"Cats," said Dana Da, with a hiccough, for he had discovered the Englishman's whisky bottle. "Cats and cats and cats! Never was such a Sending. A hundred of cats. Now give me ten more rupees and write as I dictate."

Dana Da's letter was a curiosity. It bore the Englishman's signature, and hinted at cats—at a Sending of cats. The mere words on paper were creepy and uncanny to behold.

"What have you done, though?" said the Englishman; "I am as much in the dark as ever. Do you mean to say that you can actually send this absurd Sending you talk about?"

"Judge for yourself," said Dana Da. "What does that letter mean? In a little time they will all be at my feet and yours, and I, oh, glory! will be drugged or drunk all day long."

Dana Da knew his people.

When a man who hates cats wakes up in the morning and finds a little squirming kitten on his breast, or puts his hand into his ulster pocket and finds a little half-dead kitten where his gloves should be, or opens his trunk and finds a vile kitten among his dress shirts, or goes for a long ride with his mackintosh strapped on his saddle-bow and shakes a little sprawling kitten from its folds when he opens it, or goes out to dinner and finds a little blind kitten under his chair, or stays at home and finds a writhing kitten under the quilt, or wriggling among his boots, or hanging, head downward, in his tobacco jar, or being mangled by his terrier in the veranda—when

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such a man finds one kitten, neither more nor less, once a day in a place where no kitten rightly could or should be, he is naturally upset. When he dare not murder his daily trove because he believes it to be a manifestation, an emissary, an embodiment, and half a dozen other things all out of the regular course of nature, he is more than upset. He is actually distressed. Some of Lone Sahib's coreligionists thought that he was a highly favored individual; but many said that if he had treated the first kitten with proper respect—as suited a Toth–Ra Tum–Sennacherib Embodiment—all his trouble would have been averted. They compared him to the Ancient Mariner, but none the less they were proud of him and proud of the Englishman who had sent the manifestation. They did not call it a Sending because Icelandic magic was not in their programme.

After sixteen kittens—that is to say, after one fortnight, for there were three kittens on the first day to impress the fact of the Sending, the whole camp was uplifted by a letter—it came flying through a window—from the Old Man of the Mountains—the head of all the creed—explaining the manifestation in the most beautiful language and soaking up all the credit of it for himself. The Englishman, said the letter, was not there at all. He was a backslider without power or asceticism, who couldn't even raise a table by force of volition, much less project an army of kittens through space. The entire arrangement, said the letter, was strictly orthodox, worked and sanctioned by the highest authorities within the pale of the creed. There was great joy at this, for some of the weaker brethren seeing that an outsider who had been working on independent lines could create kittens, whereas their own rulers had never gone beyond crockery—and broken at that—were showing a desire to break line on their own trail. In fact, there was the promise of a schism. A second round robin was drafted to the Englishman, beginning: "Oh, Scoffer," and ending with a selection of curses from the rites of Mizraim and Memphis and the Commination of Jugana; who was a "fifth rounder," upon whose name an upstart "third rounder" once traded. A papal excommunication is a billet–doux compared to the Commination of Jugana. The Englishman had been proved under the hand and seal of the Old Man of the Mountains to have appropriated virtue and pretended to have power which, in reality, belonged only to the supreme head. Naturally the round robin did not spare him.

He handed the letter to Dana Da to translate into decent English. The effect on Dana Da was curious. At first he was furiously angry, and then he laughed for five minutes.

"I had thought," he said, "that they would have come to me. In another week I would have shown that I sent the Sending, and they would have discrowned the Old Man of the Mountains who has sent this Sending of mine. Do you do nothing. The time has come for me to act. Write as I dictate, and I will put them to shame. But give me ten more rupees."

At Dana Da's dictation the Englishman wrote nothing less than a formal challenge to the Old Man of the Mountains. It wound up: "And if this manifestation be from your hand, then let it go forward; but if it be from my hand, I will that the Sending shall cease in two days' time. On that day there shall be twelve kittens and thenceforward none at all. The people shall judge between us." This was signed by Dana Da, who added pentacles and pentagrams, and a crux ansata, and half a dozen swastikas, and a Triple Tau to his name, just to show that he was all he laid claim to be.

The challenge was read out to the gentlemen and ladies, and they remembered then that Dana Da had laughed at them some years ago. It was officially announced that the Old Man of the Mountains would treat the matter with contempt; Dana Da being an independent investigator without a single "round" at the back of him. But this did not soothe his people. They wanted to see a fight. They were very human for all their spirituality. Lone Sahib, who was really being worn out with kittens, submitted meekly to his fate. He felt that he was being "kittened to prove the power of Dana Da," as the poet says.

When the stated day dawned, the shower of kittens began. Some were white and some were tabby, and all were about the same loathsome age. Three were on his hearth–rug, three in his bathroom, and the other six turned up at intervals among the visitors who came to see the prophecy break down. Never was a more satisfactory Sending. On the next day there were no kittens, and the next day and all the other days were kittenless and quiet. The people murmured and looked to the Old Man of the Mountains for an explanation. A letter, written on a palm leaf, dropped from the ceiling, but everyone except Lone Sahib felt that letters were not what the occasion demanded. There should have been cats, there should have been cats—full–grown ones. The letter proved conclusively that there had been a hitch in the psychic current which, colliding with a dual identity, had interfered with the percipient activity all along the main line. The kittens were still going on, but owing to some failure in the developing fluid, they were not materialized. The air was thick with letters for a few days afterwards. Unseen

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hands played Gluck and Beethoven on finger-bowls and clock shades; but all men felt that psychic life was a mockery without materialized kittens. Even Lone Sahib shouted with the majority on this head. Dana Da's letters were very insulting, and if he had then offered to lead a new departure, there is no knowing what might not have happened.

But Dana Da was dying of whisky and opium in the Englishman's go-down, and had small heart for new creeds.

"They have been put to shame," said he. "Never was such a Sending. It has killed me."

"Nonsense," said the Englishman, "you are going to die, Dana Da, and that sort of stuff must be left behind. I'll admit that you have made some queer things come about. Tell me honestly, now, how was it done?"

"Give me ten more rupees," said Dana Da, faintly, "and if I die before I spend them, bury them with me." The silver was counted out while Dana Da was fighting with death. His hand closed upon the money and he smiled a grim smile.

"Bend low," he whispered. The Englishman bent.

"Bunnia—mission school—expelled—box-wallah (peddler)—Ceylon pearl merchant—all mine English education—outcasted, and made up name Dana Da—England with American thought—reading man and—and—you gave me ten rupees several times—I gave the Sahib's bearer two—eight a month for cats—little, little cats. I wrote, and he put them about—very clever man. Very few kittens now in the bazaar. Ask Lone Sahib's sweeper's wife."

So saying, Dana Da gasped and passed away into a land where, if all be true, there are no materializations and the making of new creeds is discouraged.

But consider the gorgeous simplicity of it all!