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THE MURDER OF MRS. DOST

SIDELIGHTS on THE LIFE of THE GRIGO FAMILY

Dost Mahomet— A Native of Baluchistan— Subject to Paroxysms of Brutal Ferocity— Some Reminiscences of Coolgardie —

A Courtship, a Family Feud and an Abduction.

Mrs. Dost Mahomet, nee Annie Charlotte; Grigo, who was done to death in the Indian city of Kurrachee less than a fortnight ago, was a native of Parramatta, and came West with her parents in 1893. At the moment of her murder, she was about 30 years of age, -in the prime of her life, .and possessed of a singularly charming, manner, which won her the admiration and esteem of every one with whom she came into contact. She was intensely popular at Port Hedland, and universally respected, despite the intimacy of her relations with Dost Mahomet and his coffee-colored clan, all natives of Baluchistan, a great desert plateau lying between Persia and India, and Afghanistan and the Arabian Sea. The Beluchis affect the Mahometan religion, and are generally classified as robber nomads of Aryan stock. The Khan, of Herat, the ruler of the country, is a vassal of the British Crown.

The elder Grigo, the parental head of the family, dead several years, was widely known in Coolgardie in what are genetically described as' the "roarin' drunk days of the Old Camp." when the bars of the pubs ran rivers of sparkling champagne and beer and whisky cost only a fraction more to purchase than an. equal quantity of Water, J Grigo's first job was with Mr. John de Baun as baker and confectioner - the "confectionery" largely consisting in those days of. damper and sodden scones. drenched with soda and baking powder.

During Grigo's engagement with De Baun, Annie Charlotte Grigo, then a blushing and vivacious girl, of barely 16 summers, became in some way acquainted with Dost Mahomet, who was partners in a camel team with his compatriot Jourack, whom the Indian authorities " suspect of being accessory -to Mrs. Dost's death. Jourack is an old man of 80 a member of the elite of Baluchistan, and styled, because of his great age, and other reasons, "The Father of his Country."

When Mr. Grigo was informed his daughter had formed a close acquaintance-with Dost Mahomet, he flew into a violent rage, upbraided his erring daughter in dreadful language, and threatened her with his vengeance if she did not summarily cease her association with the white-turbaned follower of the prophet Mahomet. These threats, as is frequently the case, had an effect opposite to that contemplated by the irate parent. She left the parental, tent at the first convenient opportunity, flew to the camp of Dost, and Jourack on the flat at the- lower end of Bayley-street, |and complained of the treatment to which she had been subjected by her father. With her tacit consent or otherwise. Dost decided to abduct the girl, and placed her on the -back of a swift camel he flew with her that same night through the desert, to be followed later by a troop of horsemen, who continued the pursuit until their horses succumbed from exhaustion and thirst. Then the exasperated parent turned a revolver on himself, and attempted to take his life. Afterwards, Grigo went further afield, and. Became a member of the Hope Syndicate, which was heavily interested in the Great Oversight Mine, Bulong. He made about 12,000 out of his interest, but squandered the whole amount in three or four years by a judicious investment in wild cats and other hazardous ventures, which, devoured his competency with greater rapidity than he had accumulated it.

For ten long and miserable years Mrs. Dost was ostracised and denounced by her father as - an outcast, and refused admission to the family, circle. The mother, Mrs. Grigo, who afterwards migrated to Port Hedland [with the] the rest of the family, clung to her erring child, however, with characteristic maternal affection. Dost Mahomet was a fairly wealthy man, and. Was at the time of his death, worth several thousand pounds in cash, besides a quantity of landed property at Port Hedland, valued at between £2000 and £3000. Dost Mahomet was a man of somewhat moody disposition, of a fleeting imagination, early aroused to anger on the slightest provocation, cruel and implacable in his dislikes, a good friend and a bitter and vengeful enemy.

There were periods when Dost saw clots of blood and "ran amok" seeking victims to be sacrificed on the altar of his paroxysms of madness. He ran amok seven or eight times at Port Hedland, the last occasion being accompanied by his death. On one occasion he shot a valuable camel ...tal[?] malignity because he objected to its gait. On another occasion he seized his youngest child by the throat and nearly throttled it to death, simply because it omitted to respond with alacrity to a demand to throw itself into his arms. In -another instance he threatened to cleave a neighbour through the skull with a tomahawk, and was only induced to desist by his projected victim dropping to his knees and crawling away before Dost could give effect to his murderous intentions. Even Mrs. Dost was subject to his uncontrollable ebullitions of temper. When they were in India together, he treated her with hideous malevolence, and on one occasion locked her up in a room, ordered her to strip, and without the slightest provocation, brutally thrashed her with a leather whip.

Dost met his Waterloo at the hands of two of Mrs. Dost's brothers in the first week of April last year. On the day in question Dost struck Mrs. Dost violently over the head while he was at dinner. An elder brother intervened, and a fierce fight ensued between the combatants. The Mahometan, inspired by; frenzied rage, was getting the better of the struggle, when a younger brother picked up "a small block of jarrah, and furiously hit Dost on the head. That blow led up to Dost's death, an inquest, and a trial at the Criminal Sessions at Broome.

Considerable feeling was aroused in the locality by the' tragic occurrence, and was reflected in the attitude of the jury empanelled to try the charge. Without hearing the evidence for the defence - without even leaving the court - the. jury returned a verdict of "Not Guilty," the foreman remarking that there was no evidence of murderous intent under the circumstances detailed by the prosecution. The verdict was widely acclaimed with popular enthusiasm.

Dost's death was resented .by his compatriots. They showed their smouldering indignation in various ways. And. when Mrs. Dost, visited Kurrachee last May a. procession of the dead man's relatives, numbering between 300 and 400 souls, wailing and sobbing bitterly, called on Mrs. Dost, and asked to be informed of the manner in which he had met his death.

Mrs. Dost entered into elaborate explanations, and had considerable difficulty in explaining away the suspicion that she had been accessory to his death "I found on arriving here," Mrs.' Dost wrote to her mother On May 24; "that someone had spread the tale that I had secretly -admitted my brother to my room, with the object of- doing Dost to death. I eventually convinced Dost's relatives that this was absolutely untrue, and they now treat me with remarkable civility and generosity. They have provided me with a milk-white palfrey to gallop about the fields and paddocks, and show me every consideration. In a week or two I am to shift to a big house about 10 miles distant from the town, lying amidst groves of shrubs

and fruit-trees, where I trust I shall be as happy as ever, until I can prepare to. return to the West, for which I have saved up my fare."

There is very little doubt now in the minds of her sorrowing relatives, that preparations were then being secretly made for her murder, for which purpose there is no doubt she was decoyed out of the. State. The Beluchis think nothing of a life, more or less. They regard battle, murder and sudden death as a ready means to a most desirable end and consummate their vengeance with less concern than they slaughter a sheep or slay a bullock for a tribal orgie. The head of the clan orders and justifies the murder on the ground of expediency. The man and the weapon are found without any trouble in the ordinary course of events.

The residents of Port Hedland resorted to the most remarkable expedients to prevent Mrs. Dost from proceeding to India with her five children, accompanied by Lai [Lal] Mahomet and Karde Bux. The latter is a son of Jourack, who made, all the arrangements for the journey, and vetoed, in the presence of the shipping clerk, Mrs. Dost's suggestion that tickets should be taken for the return journey. The police, though cognisant of Mrs. Dost's apprehension that she was being taken to India to be strangled, out of revenge for the disclosures she had made about Jourack's dishonest administration of Dost Mahomet's estate, were unable to offer the slightest effective resistance to the arrangement, simply because Mrs. Dost refused to countenance any proceedings.

Almost at the last moment, Corporal Brodie struck the brilliant idea of arresting Mrs. Dost on account of a bogus unpaid debt for £20. This dodge might have worked successfully and Mrs. Dost might have been alive today, but for the haste with which the warrant was executed. Jourack early learned of the development, and hustled round with such alacrity that he had raised the amount somehow, and paid it over to the police, 15 or 20. minutes before the order was given for the steamer to: continue her voyage.to. the north.

Mrs. Dost's relatives repeatedly warned her to take every conceivable step to secure her safety. She was urged to carry a loaded revolver, and to place herself under the care of the British plenipotentiary residing at Kurrachee. It is difficult to say whether she acted on this advice. Her letter of May 24 establishes the impression that either she was absolutely reckless as to her fate, or that she had been lulled into a sense, of false security by the cringing representations made to her by her dead husband's relatives.

Of the six Dost children now domiciled in India, the eldest is a youth of 14, thoroughly steeped in the prejudices of the Beluchis, and to all practical intents and purposes a native of the country. Brought up in the Mohametam religion, he displays an inconceivable repugnance against European customs and observances, and has the most incurable objection against dressing himself in the sombre garb of Christian civilisation. This youngster, if. Brought back to Australia, will prove a difficult nut to crack. His avuncular relatives are of the opinion his redemption can only be brought about by a life at sea, on board an Australian man-of-war. The youngest child is only two years of age.

"Baby" Mrs. Dost remarks in her letter to her mother on May 24, "is always calling for ' Granma! Granma!" So you see she has not forgotten you, mother dear. I shall find it difficult to tear myself away from the children (they were taken to India to be educated in the faith of their father), but I suppose it must be. done, so I must face the parting with what fortitude I may command."

A member of the Grigo family, came from the Nor' West to Perth, last week, to consult the police as to the best course to pursue in respect of the murder of his sister, and the return of the children to their native country. It is believed Mrs. Dost affixed her signature to a will before leaving for Kurrachee, and left, it in the custody, of the Hedland branch of the Union Bank. In any event, whatever the position may be, young Grigo's mission to Perth includes a proposal to the Government to secure the return of the Dost family to Port Hedland, and the forcible administration by the State of the property of the murdered woman in the interests of the surviving family of children.

Meantime, Jourack and his compatriots, who escaped from Hedland about a week before it was known Mrs. Dost had been murdered, are fleeing across the desert, with the ultimate intention of massing on Tanami, and probably escaping out of Australia by way of Port Darwin. This lawless vagabond should unquestionably be arrested, and forced to account for his connection with Mrs. Dost's murder. Until the Indian authorities make closer representations on the subject, the evidence of Jourack's complicity is merely a matter of suspicion, which may fade away into the distance by the time the whole of the circumstances have been investigated.