

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

16 *The Grave of the Hundred Head*

*There's a widow in sleepy Chester  
Who weeps for her only son;  
There's a grave on the Pabeng River,  
A grave that the Burmans shun;  
And there's Subadar Prag Tewarri* 5  
*Who tells how the work was done.*

A Snider squibbed in the jungle —  
Somebody laughed and fled,  
And the men of the First Shikaris  
Picked up their Subaltern dead, 10  
With a big blue mark in his forehead  
And the back blown out of his head.

Subadar Prag Tewarri,  
Jemadar Hira Lal,  
Took command of the party, 15  
Twenty rifles in all,  
Marched them down to the river  
As the day was beginning to fall.

They buried the boy by the river,  
A blanket over his face — 20  
They wept for their dead Lieutenant,  
The men of an alien race —  
They made a *samadh* in his honour,  
A mark for his resting-place.

For they swore by the Holy Water, 25  
They swore by the salt they ate,  
That the soul of Lieutenant Eshmitt Sahib  
Should go to his God in state,  
With fifty file of Burmans

To open him Heaven's Gate. 30

The men of the First Shikaris  
Marched till the break of day,  
Till they came to the rebel village,  
The village of Pabengmay —  
A *jingal* covered the clearing, 35  
Calthrops hampered the way.

Subadar Prag Tewarri,  
Bidding them load with ball,  
Halted a dozen rifles  
Under the village wall; 40  
Sent out a flanking-party  
With Jemadar Hira Lal.

The men of the First Shikaris  
Shouted and smote and slew,  
Turning the grinning *jingal* 45  
On to the howling crew.  
The Jemadar's flanking-party  
Butchered the folk who flew.

Long was the morn of slaughter,  
Long was the list of slain, 50  
Five score heads were taken,  
Five score heads and twain;  
And the men of the First Shikaris  
Went back to their grave again,

Each man bearing a basket 55  
Red as his palms that day,  
Red as the blazing village —  
The village of Pabengmay.  
And the "*drip-drip-drip*" from the baskets  
Reddened the grass by the way. 60

They made a pile of their trophies  
High as a tall man's chin,

Head upon head distorted,  
Set in a sightless grin,  
Anger and pain and terror 65  
Stamped on the smoke-scorched skin.

Subadar Prag Tewarri  
Put the head of the Boh  
On the top of the mound of triumph,  
The head of his son below — 70  
With the sword and the peacock-banner  
That the world might behold and know.

Thus the *samadh* was perfect,  
Thus was the lesson plain  
Of the wrath of the First Shikaris — 75  
The price of a white man slain;  
And the men of the First Shikaris  
Went back into camp again.

Then a silence came to the river,  
A hush fell over the shore, 80  
And Bohs that were brave departed,  
And Sniders squibbed no more;  
For the Burmans said  
That a white man's head  
Must be paid for with heads five-score. 85

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A grave that the Burmans shun;  
And there's Subadar Prag Tewarri 90  
Who tells how the work was done.*

1886

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