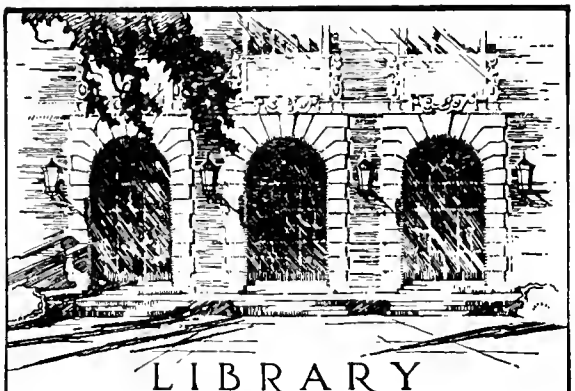

FAIRER THAN A FAIRY.

FAIRER THAN A FAIRY.

A Novel.

BY

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"UNDER THE RED DRAGON," "THE ROMANCE OF WAR," ETC.

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FAIRER THAN A FAIRY.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHANDPAUL GHAUT.

We lost sight of the land for a little time, and encountered a heavy head-wind after passing the low headland named Point Palmyras; but next morning saw us off the Sandheads, where we received on board the pilot who was to conduct us up the Hooghly, which we were now entering under half steam with a fair wind, and we were all on deck betimes to 'sniff' the land of our exile, and exchange congratulations that we were so soon to leave our floating prison, and already, in anticipation, our men were cheerily beginning to pack and strap their knapsacks below.

On our starboard bow there loomed dimly

a low flat cluster of islands, the soil of which is merely stiff black mud, amid the salt ooze of which the alligators revel, and the Java fern, the Buckra palm, and the samphire grasses grow. This is the Ganga Saugor of poor Leyden's beautiful poem, and which he anathematises as the place where human victims were exposed by the superstitious Hindoos:

> 'On sea-girt Saugor's desert isle,
> Mantled with thickets dark and dun,
> May never moon or starlight smile,
> Nor ever beam the summer sun!'

Poets have sung fluently of the beauty of the Ganges, but this deltoid of the mighty river, in addition to being both dangerous and difficult for navigation, owing to its numerous sand-banks, which are constantly shifting their relative positions, has shores that are totally devoid of interest, most desolate and unlovely, though always hailed with delight after the long voyage from Europe; and merrily we ran along them, with sail, steam, and tide, till we came to anchor for a brief space at Kedgeree, on the western bank of the stream—a town in a

swampy and unhealthy place, presenting to the eye a dismal and unbroken line of dense black wood and thicket.

To me the Hooghly looked swollen and brown; the sky was black and louring; and the shore on either side, as the stream narrowed, seemed fitting abodes for the grim Fever King. However, as we drew nearer the city of palaces, the clouds dispersed; the sun shone out hotly and fiercely, glowing on the land, which seemed to quiver and vibrate in its sheen, and on the river, which at times appeared to become a prismatic tide of flowing diamonds, rubies and topazes; and now a stout awning was rigged on the poop of the Punniar.

Fruit-boats with black and almost naked steersmen and paddlers were now coming thick about the ship; and I could perceive that as the banks narrowed, they increased in beauty and fertility.

As we bore on, the scenery became indeed lovely; rich and deep were the hues of the Indian foliage on the banks of the stream, which in some places were too densely wooded to permit the erection of houses;

but the 'holy river' itself teemed with busy life.

The shipping of every nation in the world was there, and boliahs, dingies, and countless other boats shot to and fro, filled with jabbering natives, clad only with the scanty cummerbund or middle-cloth. They literally swarmed about us as the Punniar cleft on her way; and now dwelling-houses of perfectly European aspect began to appear among the native villages, as each successive reach of the river was traversed; and these increased in number, in stateliness, beauty, and design, till ere long the river narrowed to the breadth of the Thames at Tilbury, and then Fort William appeared in all its strength and majesty.

Built in the form of an octagon, with many extensive outworks, it is laid out in squares, interspersed with groves of trees, and contains bomb-proof barracks for ten thousand soldiers. It is the chief defence of Calcutta; six hundred pieces of cannon are required to arm its walls, which were meant by Lord Clive to be, in case of dire extremity, the last stronghold of Britain in Bengal.

The 'City of Palaces'—with its Black Town and European Town, its extensive esplanade before the fort, its numerous *ghauts* or stately flights of broad steps leading down to the river; its magnificent edifices and stately streets, where carriages, phaetons, buggies, and palanquins are for ever passing to and fro, the black coachmen and valets attired in muslin with white turbans; its Parsees, Jews, sepoys, and so forth—has been so often and so ably described, that I shall not detain the reader from my own narrative by 'talking guide-book.'

'That is Garden Reach,' said Home of the Lancers, at a certain bend of the river; 'somehow, this place always reminds me of the Thames at Kew or Putney. The esplanade is, as you will ere long see, the great promenade of Calcutta, and there in the early morning, or in the evening, all the beauty and fashion of the place are to be seen mounted or in carriages. I was quartered here two years, and know every stone of the place. Beyond the fort, which you see is of vast extent, lies the Chowringhee Road, on which are some very hand-

some houses; they have all colonaded fronts, flat roofs, and beautiful gardens.'

Eagerly did I survey the quarters he indicated from the lower rigging of the steamer, particularly the neighbourhood of the East India Company's splendid Botanical Garden, which is three hundred acres in extent; for I knew that in one of those stately mansions, plastered with snow-white chunam, which rivals the finest marble of Carrara, *she* must be residing.

But now the steam was let off, and with a roar, as the iron cable rushed through the hawse-hole, the anchor was 'let go;' for we were close in by Chandpaul Ghaut, where we were to disembark when the order to do so was issued.

The Fort-major, attended by an officer of the medical staff, came on board to inspect the troops and hear the 'report' of our commanding officer, and to make the necessary arrangements for the landing of the various drafts; and at the same time there came on board a horde of natives, offering fruit or essences for sale, and clamouring for employment as porters, valets, grooms, grass-cutters, or water-carriers.

As we had come to anchor quite close to the ghaut, with a powerful warp sent out astern, I could perceive on the summit of it a group of young men, some in undress uniform, and others in plain clothes, watching our arrival with some interest, and scanning the deck with opera glasses as if in search of some one.

'This interest is usually manifested on the arrival of a vessel, or used to be, before the Overland Route made it so easy to come out here,' said Home; 'young fellows, and old fellows too, come to see the fair fresh faces from England, especially if ladies are expected; but so far as the Punniar is concerned, they will be disappointed, as Lonsdale was when he came on board at Tilbury.'

With the usual amount of banter which seems inseparable from both services, many old friends and acquaintances now began to greet and welcome each other, though not a few looked vaguely about, unable to see a familiar face.

Among those on the steps of the ghaut were two smart and good-looking young fellows in the dark-green braided and frogged

patrol-jackets of our corps, with handsome and expensive pith helmets, having blue veils twisted round them. Each had a cigar in his mouth—a Chinsurah cheroot of course; but they had cultivated so much beard and moustache of late that I did not at first recognise them till Lonsdale shouted,

'How are you, Tom? Jack, how goes it?'

'Welcome to Calcutta, Lonsdale,' cried the first; 'glad to see you again, Rudkin!'

'By Jove—Jack Dormer and Tom Prior!' I responded, waving my forage cap.

'Still the Damon and Pythias of the Rifle Brigade,' said Lonsdale, 'enjoying their post-prandial weeds, a soothing luxury which their classical prototypes never knew.'

'They could have the Falernian tipple though,' said Dormer.

'Which I don't envy them—prefer iced Cliquot or sparkling Moselle.'

'No girls—no ladies on board, I see, Lonsdale?'

'Not one, Jack, worse luck; not a bit of book-muslin!'

'How many of ours are with you, Rudkin?' asked Tom Prior.

'Two sergeants and 198 rank and file.'

'Glad to hear it—we'll need every man of them if this row goes on.'

'What row, Prior ?'

'About the greased cartridges.'

By this time a communication had been established between the ship and the ghaut; our two brothers of the Brigade came on board, and warmly we shook each other by the hand. Despite India, Dormer and Prior were still healthy and vigorous-looking young Englishmen, with short crisp hair, bushy moustaches, ruddy complexions, and clear penetrating eyes. The former was a fair man with a square open forehead; the latter, whose portrait I had seen in his father's house on that eventful night when the chestnut horse ran away, was very dark, with a good-natured mouth that seemed prone to laughter.

Other officers were now streaming on board, so a cross-fire of brief questions and replies rang on all sides.

'Welcome back, Jones, to the land of the pagoda-tree!' cried a tall Horse Artillery-man.

'Hope you have been shaking it successfully, Smith.'

'No, but Brown of ours has to some purpose.'

'What is the latest *gup* [*i.e.* gossip] about him?'

'Married a rich wife, and come in for a pot of money. She is a half caste though.'

'Oh, the devil she is!'

'How is old Potter of ours?' asked a line officer; 'has he got any liver left?'

'Poor Potter got a sunstroke on the march to Allahabad, and has gone home invalided,' replied Tom Prior. 'I say, Home, have you heard of Ellerslie of your corps?'

'Not since we sailed; how could I?'

'His story is quite romantic.'

'In what way, Prior?'

'He was engaged to a girl near Maidstone, but got his lower jaw blown away when at musketry practice.'

'Horrible! Poor fellow!'

'He wrote to absolve his fair one from her vows of troth and all that sort of thing, as he was now so disfigured that he feared she could never look upon him without shud-

dering; but his darling proved a regular brick! She wrote back, that if an inch of him came home she would marry it; and married they were—an awfully jolly girl too; and now she feeds him with Liebig's extract, and so forth, through a silver tube.'

('Just what my Blanche would do,' thought I.)

'By Jove, I would rather have had my brains blown out!' was the earnest response of Home.

'I thought Baird of ours would have been here to welcome us,' said an officer of the 72nd Highlanders.

'He is on duty,' said Dormer, 'and, as of old, is under the firm belief that every woman he passes on the course, or meets at a ball, is plotting nefariously against his single blessedness.'

'Yet he has a looking-glass in his bungalow, I suppose.'

'Is Rivington of the 1st Bengal at headquarters?' asked some one in the uniform of John Company's service,

'He died a month ago of jungle fever.'

'Macleod?'

'Gone on sick leave to the hills.'

'How's Tompkins of the 2nd Cavalry?'

'Oh, Tompkins is as jolly as ever; smokes his thirty cheroots a day, plays billiards as of old, and bets on everything, from the planters' plate to the longest straw out of the bungalow roof; takes his hock, sherry, and champagne like a cherub.'

And so on and on the friendly banter went, till I drew Dormer apart, to have my curiosity, now irrepressible, satisfied.

'Your cousins have reached Calcutta and are well, I hope, Jack?' said I.

'Yes, all right.'

'Both well in every way?'

'Both quite well, thanks, and exceedingly jolly.'

It was delightful to talk of *her* to one who must have seen her recently—only that morning, perhaps. I was about to ask one other question, though I scarcely knew how to form it, when Jack said,

'You must provide yourself with a kit-mutgar, syces, a punkahwallah, and ever so many servants to loaf about your compound. The first will employ the rest for

you—all as great rascals as himself, no doubt. Have seven of them, and christen them after the days of the week. Here is one, who seems just the sort of nigger you want,' he added, as a native clad in spotless white stuff, with a muslin turban of portentous dimensions twisted round his head, came forward salaaming and bowing very low.

He was a small undersized man, with a skin like mahogany, a lean, withered, and sapless-like frame, and black, piercing, and to my mind unpleasantly stealthy eyes.

'Qui hy—here, you—what is your deuced name?' asked Dormer.

'Rao Sing, sahibs.'

'A Hindoo, of course—*sing* means a lion. He doesn't look much like one, does he, Rudkin?'

'You have certificates, of course?' I queried.

'Yes, captain sahib,' he replied, producing a packet from his breast.

'These papers,' said Jack, 'are seldom worth a rush. They are transferred from one fellow to another, and are often sold

by those who have obtained masters to those who are in search of them; hence a description of the holder should always be appended, to prevent these Rum Johnnies from imposing upon us.'

I may here mention that this is the name for those native servants out of place, who dabble in a little English, and haunt the ghauts in search of employment when strangers arrive.

As Dormer looked over the papers, he burst into a fit of laughter at one which ran thus:

'I hereby do certify that the bearer of this document served at Dumdum as kitmutgar for six months, and that there is not a greater rascal in all British India.

'Pryce Jones,
'Capt. B. H. Artillery.'

'Very good certificate, captain sahib,' whined the proprietor, in perfect ignorance of this not uncommon practical joke.

Another ran thus:

'I hereby certify that the bearer, Rao Sing, served me as kitmutgar for a year at Agra, during which he made a small fortune out of me by peculation, and out of all my tradesmen by *dustoorie*.

'Jocelyn S. Stapleton,
'Colonel B.N.I.'

Dustoorie, a great source of expense to Europeans in the East, means the invariable custom among their domestics of getting a bonus on every article they purchase; the merchant is thus compelled to pay it without a murmur, and add the sum he loses, in self-defence, to the proper value of the article sold, and it was to this my acquaintance the Colonel referred.

These papers were probably practical jokes, as the man had other testimonials of undoubtedly good character.

'You are a gem, Rao Sing—you'll do,' said Dormer. 'I think you may as well engage him, Rudkin.'

On my doing so, he folded his brown paws together, bowed and salaamed again and again, in that slimy and snaky way peculiar to the Hindostanees, stealthy cunning glittering in his eyes the while.

'Kya hookm, captain sahib?' he asked, meaning 'What order have you to give?'

On which I turned him over to my servant, Dan O'Regan, that together they might look after my baggage; and Dan, a genuine bog-

trotter, who had never been in India before, viewed with singular distrust, comicality, and aversion 'the haythen naggur' who was to be his future compatriot.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MARCH TO DUMDUM.

NEXT morning, ere the sun was above the somewhat level scenery, and when his light was tipping with red the church-spires, the battlements of Fort William, and the roof of the Tirhetta Bazaar, the troops were all on shore in marching order, and those destined for the barracks at Dumdum—to wit, my detachment of Rifles, and some of the East India Company's European Artillery—began their way to that place.

It lies only seven miles from Calcutta, and brief though that journey, there are circumstances connected with it which I may never forget.

'Well,' thought I, 'my men once "handed over" to the colonel and adjutant at headquarters, I will get a horse from Prior or

some one, and scamper back in the direction of Chowringhee, after the Binghams.'

Rao Sing, my kitmutgar, had now provided me with the usual staff of dingy-looking native servants, who went with O'Regan in the baggage-waggon, and he eyed with astonishment their sole garment—the cummerbund.

'Bedad, the haythen craturs haven't rags enough on them to tie up a dacent-sized currant-bush!'

We took the route through the streets for Dumdum. Fort William towered high up on our right; we crossed the site of the old Mahratta Ditch, and where Omichunds Gardens lay in the year of Plassy; and so on through the streets of that stately city, which British enterprise has raised on the ground where once stood the petty Indian village of Govindpoor.

So full was I of anxiety to pay my projected visit, that the fun of Lonsdale intensely bored me, and little that we passed proved of interest, yet every group and object was new. Now it was the handsome English carriage of some dweller in Chowringhee—

the Park Lane of Calcutta—preceded by men bearing silver maces to clear the way; or a *carhancy*, the hackney carriage of the country, filled by half a dozen natives, whose skins were rancid with ghee; palanquins on poles, or a smart buggy, in which some officer or civilian was driving to pay his morning calls; *boxwallahs*, or native hawkers, clad in spotless white muslin, preceded by porters bearing the goods on their heads, and surrounded by naked little children, with only amulets tied round their brown necks.

Now it might be a fakir or religious mendicant, with no other covering than his beard and matted elf-locks, his face painted red or yellow, the eye of Siva on his brow, his beads in one lean bony hand, the other held forth to beg an anna from the passing Feringhees. Most of the people we passed were black, many half naked, or clad in tawdry silks, tattered brocades, and white cotton, all suggestive of anything but oriental splendour.

Here and there were pretty mosques, houses of Grecian architecture, white with chunam. In time we left the great city

behind us, and proceeded between orchards and gardens along the road that led to Dumdum. There Jack Dormer met us, mounted on one of those ugly horses peculiar to the Bengal breed, about fifteen hands high. He came flying along at full speed, with the blue veil of his pith helmet floating behind him.

'Good-morning,' said he, reining up; 'Prior is coming with the band to play you in—he'll meet us about a mile on this side of the barracks. We must get you and Lonsdale a mount. Prior has a fine Arab horse he means to part with,' added Jack, as he joined me in rear of my party, which Lonsdale, as subaltern, was leading. 'How many niggers has Rao Sing engaged for you?'

'Seven, I believe.'

'Ah, he believes in odd numbers, like the Rajah of Cuddelore, who had a wife for every day in the year. I'm in deuced low spirits this morning, Lance.'

'How—why?'

'I've lost a hundred and fifty gold mohurs by backing the wrong horse for the Governor-General's Plate at our last races; so my good

old governor at Thorsgill Hall must stump out again, unless my uncle Bingham will do the liberal thing; but I have bled him pretty well of late.'

'He is very wealthy?' I began, as a leading question.

'Wealthy! I believe you, my boy—rich as Crœsus! He made a pretty pot of money out of Indian bonds, the opium department, and in many other ways.'

'He lives somewhere between Garden Reach and the Chowringhee Road, I believe?'

'Exactly—in a house as big as a barrack, where every native servant has half-a-dozen more to help him to do nothing, and they seem equal in number to the slaves of the lamp in the palace of Aladdin?'

'You'll introduce me, won't you?'

'Of course, Rudkin; most happy indeed!'

'Does your cousin Blanche—I mean Miss Bingham—ever mention *me?*' I asked after a pause.

'No, not that I can remember.'

'How cautious the dear girl is!' thought I.

'Does Miss Guise do so?'

'No; I suppose her mind is too full of her engagement.'

'To whom?' I asked with the faintest emotion of pique.

'Colonel Stapleton.'

'Whew! Stapleton of the Bengal Army?'

'The same.'

'Have the ladies never referred to the pleasant time we all spent together at Thorsgill Hall?' I asked anxiously.

'Never, to me at least.'

'When did you see them last?'

'I had a glorious canter with Henriette on the course yesterday morning, just before I rode down to Chandpaul Ghaut. Blanche, of course, I have not seen since—since—'

'When?'

'Since her marriage.'

Her marriage!

The men were marching 'at ease,' singing, talking, and laughing, and at that moment, as Jack was intent on lighting a refractory cigar, he could not see the expression which I felt come over my face. No voice was left me to ask more questions; so after a few whiffs, Jack Dormer, all unconscious of the

stab he had given me, began speaking again.

'Did you not hear that she was married?'

'You forget that we came round the Cape, and were detained by disasters in Table Bay,' said I huskily.

'She hooked a baronet who came out with her and the Appletons overland. I must introduce you there too—nice girls—give good balls, and all that sort of thing.'

'And this baronet, Jack?'

'Sir Harry Calvert: he was in the Guards as captain—he got into a line regiment as lieutenant-colonel, and he is now up-country on the staff. He was an old admirer—met her at Brighton—her first love, she assured me, just as I was beginning to get spoony on her myself. Not that I believed her, for women never do marry their first loves, except in novels. Perhaps his little bit of title attracted her; she is as mad as a hatter about him, though why a hatter should be particularly so, I can't tell. Before they left Calcutta, you should have seen her placing her little kid-gloved hand and slender wrist

so confidingly on "dearest Harry's" arm, airing all her happiness with that bearing so peculiar to brides, you know.'

'How the deuce should I know? never was hooked in my life!' said I, in a voice that sounded strange to myself.

'And hanging on every word he says; only, I fear this cooing and billing won't last long up-country.'

'A deuced lucky hit for our staff-baronet,' said Lonsdale, who had now fallen to the rear and joined us; 'I know he lost a pot of money on that girl and her theatre in the Strand. He's just the man to make old Bingham's sacks or lacs of rupees fly, when the worthy owner thereof is in a warmer place than Kamptee, between which and the other hot place—you know the Indian saw—there seems only a sheet of paper.'

'You forget, Master Joe Lonsdale, that you are speaking of my uncle,' said Dormer half angrily. 'Can I give you any more news of these fair daughters of Britannia?'

'I don't think so,' said I faintly.

In the lives of all of us there are some days so full of pain, of mortification, and

sadness, that it would seem as if no joy in the time to come can efface them from the recollection; and such a day was this to me while marching along that Indian highway. I listened to Jack Dormer's barrack-room and Chowringhee gossip with that vague and sickly smile we all put on when we seek to conceal our emotions from others.

'Is not this story of—of Miss Bingham's marriage one of your usual jokes, Jack?' I asked after a long pause.

'Joke!' said he, with real astonishment; 'not at all; they had not been here a month when it took place. Uncle Bingham played the heavy father to perfection, and Blanche did indeed look lovely. It was quite a swell affair—I will show you the notice of it in the *Bengal Hurkaru*.'

Blanche married, and Henriette engaged—and to Stapleton! It was some time before I could at all realize these two facts. Had pique with me caused the latter state of affairs? I had not vanity enough left in me now to flatter myself that it was; yet I had been given fully to understand that her first and general impressions of him had been

most unfavourable. As if he half divined my thoughts, Jack Dormer said,

'Local *gup* avers that my cousin Henriette refused three excellent offers before she accepted Stapleton; and even now I don't think somehow she is very fond of him, while he is the most cool lover I ever saw.'

'I never knew an engaged man who, just about a week before he was to be turned off, didn't wish himself out of the scrape,' said Lonsdale; 'and from all I know of Calvert in London, he never seemed much of a marrying man. Perhaps he has sown all his wild oats, has reaped a crop of repentance, and his melancholy remains have made a resolution to be virtuous.'

'Sir Harry *is* getting rather grizzled now; so be assured that he will keep all moustached popinjays at a respectful distance from la belle Blanche,' added Dormer, laughing.

'There comes a time of life when every man should settle and marry,' said Lonsdale, with an air of reflection that seemed comical in him; 'and I agree with the late William Cobbett, M.P., and ex-sergeant-major, that one's wife should have good teeth, chew her

food well, and plant her feet firmly on the ground when she walks; and then she'll do.'

'How silent you have become, Rudkin!' said Dormer, presenting his case to me; 'have a cigar?'

'Thanks.'

I took it, for this was one of those occasions when the habit of smoking becomes a consolatory process, yet it failed me then. I was filled with rage, disappointment, and all the bitterness of wounded love and shattered self-esteem. Love at times took the form of contempt and loathing; then anon I prayed in my heart that whatever became of me, she at least might be happy; and then would come dull dogged indifference with but one desire—to avoid her in this world.

Yet that most natural desire now was not fated to be gratified.

While I was in this state of irritation, the brass band of the regiment, with Tom Prior and the adjutant, who was anxious to see what my new recruits were like, came suddenly in sight at a turn of the road.

'Eyes front—keep to your fours; silence,

men!' cried I, in a voice so firm and stern that Dormer said,

'Hallo, Rudkin, what the devil's up? Has a Brahminee cobra stung you?'

My reply, whatever it was, the crash of the bugles, trombones, and cornets thoroughly succeeded in drowning, and amid the ringing music I was not ill pleased to be left for a time to my own conflicting thoughts. Thirst oppressed me, and at a wayside hotel I imbibed a stiff glass of brandy-pawnee, at an hour so unusual that on any other occasion it might at least have made me giddy; but it strung my nerves, and through the medium thereof I began to *face* the calamity that had befallen me; for such it seemed to me *then*.

Was the old axiom of 'a fair face and a false heart' true? And was my ideal woman but a very common piece of human clay after all? Prior to our embarkation at Tilbury, I had suffered all the grinding torture and suspense her silence induced, an agony which to one who loves truly and keenly is intolerable: I dared not admit even to myself, as day by day the weeks and months rolled

on, that cherished hopes began to fade. As we steamed up the Hooghly, I had been in a state of almost delirious happiness at the certain prospect of meeting Blanche within an hour or two after our long separation; and *this* was the news I heard!

I looked back with anger now to those dreamy hours of affection and anxiety, when I had welcomed every sunset with the knowledge that one day more of our time of probation was past; how every time the log-line was thrown I welcomed the distance that was shortening between Blanche and myself, hailing the waves as they ran past me and were left astern in the sunshine.

I resolved, if possible, to forget her, and hoped that change of scene would enable me to do so: and certainly change and total separation seldom fail to achieve that end; but as yet it was bitter to feel the conviction that I had gone from out her life as completely as if I had never existed.

Nothing remained of her now to me but a lock of that wonderful golden hair, a relic I resolved to destroy.

'Well, well; it is all over now, and we are

parted for ever, in this world at least!' thought I.

But it was not to be so. People may lose sight of each other for a time, but they don't part 'for ever' in this age of steam by land and sea so readily and hopelessly as they did in the days of our forefathers.

CHAPTER XXV.

WHAT I LIT MY PIPE WITH.

'THIS is my bunk,' said Dormer, with whom I had promised to breakfast, as he ushered me into his quarters, after I had—early though the hour—duly 'reported' myself to the commandant at Dumdum, to the lieutenant-colonel of my battalion, and seen my detachment 'told off' to their various companies by the adjutant and sergeant-major.

Like others in that famous barrack, Jack's abode was not very luxurious. In one corner of the room was a charpoy, or bed; in another were any number of bottles, some full, others empty; elsewhere were hog-spears, guns, a regulation rifle, some Indian arms, among them a handsome tulwar taken in a skirmish from the chief of a hill-tribe. A hookah, an

overland and a buffalo trunk, a bamboo chair covered by a tiger-skin, in the head of which was the orifice made by a ball from Jack's breech-loader; a couple of Landseer's dogs framed in light-coloured wood, a cane-bottomed chair or two, and a plain toon wooden table, made up the appurtenances and ornaments of the 'den,' as he not inaptly termed it; but to these I must add a somewhat tattered punkah overhead, a bare floor, very much discoloured by stains of ink, and a board or two on which some orders or regulations were pasted.

Outside, the shadows were deep and dark under the bright fierce light of the uprisen and unclouded sun. The barracks of Dumdum are situated in a very swampy district, for where they are not environed by jungles and paddy-fields, they are so by a salt-water lake; and as an officer has written, the place 'has been especially selected as the headquarters of the artillery, because it is the dampest place in India, and therefore considered eminently adapted to the purpose of carrying on experiments in gunpowder; and moreover, on account of its morning fogs, a

very fitting place for practising at a long range against invisible targets.'

To these disadvantages may be added, that it is, or was, a 'half batta station,' as officers quartered so near the Presidency are allowed less pay than those living at a distance; so young subalterns were compelled to add economy to their other military studies.

'Khoda Bux!' shouted Dormer, making a lash on the toon-wood table with his riding-switch; 'kitmutgar, qui hy, is the punkah-wallah asleep?'

'Sahib, yes,' said his native servant with a low salaam.

'Then rouse him with that bamboo stick; the lazy devil is always chewing opium, or smoking bang from his cocoa-nut hubble-bubble.'

The order was promptly obeyed, and after hearing sundry whacks bestowed upon a pair of bare brown shoulders, thereby eliciting shrill outcries, the cord outside the room was pulled, and the frayed and shabby punkah overhead began to sway slowly to and fro.

'Breakfast now, Khoda — and look sharp about it; set covers for five,' said Dormer, as

we were now joined by Lonsdale, Prior, Jones of the Horse Artillery, and a staff-surgeon, Doctor Gargill, who was a Scotchman of course.

Notwithstanding the morning march of seven miles from Calcutta, I had no great appetite for breakfast, especially the thoroughly Indian one laid before us by Khoda Bux: rice, with green chillies, cayenne, butter and fish, fried cockup, *â la mode des Indes*, all mashed up together, with cold beef and red-tamarind chutney from Madras; so while my companions, all hearty and jolly young fellows, did ample justice to those things, I contented myself with a great cup of cold tea well dashed with brandy.

'Rudkin,' said Jack, 'if you begin Indian life this way, you'll kill yourself. Do get up an appetite; but if you won't eat, look at that old copy of the *Hurkaru*, you'll find all about my cousin's marriage there.'

This was ill calculated to achieve what Jack recommended; but I turned over the paper and found the paragraph referred to; it ran thus:

'The festivities of the last few days in Mr.

Bingham's princely mansion have terminated in the solemnisation of the nuptials between Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Harry Calvert, Bart., with Miss Blanche Bingham at the cathedral, which was filled on the occasion by a brilliant company. The gallant bridegroom, attended by Colonel J. S. Stapleton, B. N. I., entered the sacred edifice shortly after eleven o'clock, accompanied by the bride, who looked very lovely in her *crêpe du Chine* dress trimmed with deep Brussels lace, and her veil, which was of the same, relieved with orange flowers, pearls, and diamonds. The bridesmaids—six belles of Chowringhee—wore white silk dresses trimmed with pink rosebuds; but none looked more beautiful than the bride's own cousin, Miss Guise. The ceremony was performed by the Lord Bishop,' etc.

'Where is Stapleton just now?' I asked, as I tore up the paper and proceeded to light my pipe with it.

'The Colonel is at Agra, giving evidence before a general court-martial,' said Doctor Gargill; 'discontents are increasing fast among the Company's troops; and if much more of this thing goes on, we'll have some-

thing else to do than studying the *Army List* or the thermometer, or making up a betting-book over a bottle of bitter, next to iced champagne the greatest luxury in an Indian cantonment.'

What those discontents were to which the doctor referred I cared not then to inquire; though I was to hear enough of them in the coming time.

'Anything in the shape of fluid is better than your Scotch whisky, doctor,' said Lonsdale, 'for that I consider slow poison.'

'Slow, indeed!' retorted Gargill; 'I have drunk it every day for twenty years, and am not dead yet; and what does Captain Osburne tell us? That of all the wines that were sent to Runjeet Sing by the Governor-General, consisting of port, claret, hock, champagne, etc., the Scotch *whisky* was the wine he liked best.'

'You'll be recommending boiled bagpipes next,' said Dormer; and as Gargill began to look irritated, to change the subject he turned to Prior: 'Is it true, Tom, what Jones has been saying, that you have become so frightfully spoony on one of the Appleton girls?'

'Well, I must confess to a weakness for Jacky,' replied Prior, laughing; 'but I have not yet made up my mind to propose.'

'Why, she is both handsome and lively.'

'Would she accept me?'

'Would she!' exclaimed Jack, as he lay back in a bamboo chair, and puffed at a long cheroot; 'don't you know that girls in their teens—like older girls past their thirties—will accept anybody?'

'This is complimentary to the ladies in general, and to me in particular, Jack.'

The lightness of heart displayed by those around me made my own feel heavier by very contrast; but I had to rouse myself, for now as a captain I had various duties to perform that had not fallen to my share before. I had to receive over my company from the officer who had been in charge of it, and I had the arms, accoutrements, books, and pay accounts of the men to examine with care and attention; and yet amid these duties there was the ever-recurring question in my mind, Was this world the same that it was before I knew Blanche? It scarcely seemed so; yet I resolved—hard though the

task—to do as I had done before I saw her fair and faithless face—to throw myself with ardour into my profession. There was plenty to do, and there was much to learn; and I could but hope, that as my sword-belt wore my coat, so would the memory of this sting wear away.

Therefore to my duty—to the task of looking after my soldiers in the new land to which we had come—I turned mechanically, but with a sick heart, from which ambition and enthusiasm had for the time alike died out. I had my place in life to fulfil, like those who return from the grave when they have buried their dead; but the duties I once loved so well seemed dull drudgery now; nevertheless, they helped me to get through the day.

In my fantastic reveries I was more than once 'rowed' by the colonel for sundry petty mistakes, and should certainly have been so by the adjutant; but I was his senior officer now, and only underwent a serious expostulation for losing my distance at open column, for missing my covering and marching on the camp colour in such a fashion that it

passed through the centre of a subdivision when we were 'right in front,' and other enormities.

But often the memory of the past haunted me in the lone hours of the hot Indian night, when all was still but the howling jackals in the adjacent swamp, and nothing stirred save these, the mosquitoes, and the sentries, who hourly clanged the metal ghurrie to indicate the time.

'What the deuce is the matter with you, Lance?' Lonsdale would sometimes say; 'in all my life I never saw a man so altered as you.'

One night, feeling dull and low-spirited, I went over to Dormer's quarters after mess.

'Enter, master,' said Khoda Bux, bowing and salaaming; 'Dormer Sahib at home.'

I found Jack jolly and lively as usual, and after imbibing sundry glasses of brandy-pawnee, and smoking more cheroots than were good for me, I was seized by one of those absurd fits of confidence that men often have at such times, and had a desire to speak of Blanche. I had never even inquired where she and her husband were, but I asked him now.

'They are up-country at Allahabad, where Calvert is on the staff,' replied Dormer.

Then, after a little circumlocution, I told him all the story of our engagement, and of her deliberate perfidy, to which honest Jack listened with genuine indignation.

'Don't bother about it, old fellow,' said he, after a pause; 'you'll forget it in time. I was thrown over myself once for a cursed fellow in the Civil Service—thought of shooting myself or some one else, or of volunteering against the hill-tribes; but now I am as jolly as a sand-boy, and when I see how matrimony has spoiled my once ideal, I look back with wonder to the

> "Hubble bubble,
> Toil and trouble."

the whole affair gave me. Love at Blanche's age is simply a farce. Be assured, Rudkin, that the real love, which is calculated to rouse romance or despair, which is deep, strong, and lasting, is not the love for a school-girl, but for a ripe woman between her twenties and thirties.'

And Jack perhaps was right.

'This,' said he, 'accounts for what was a

puzzle to me—your ill-concealed repugnance to visit the Binghams after asking for an introduction, or even for going near Chowringhee at all.'

'Believe me, Dormer, I would rather have been dead in my coffin, with that girl's tears falling on my face—a widow—than alive with the fierce and wild emotions I feel at times.'

'Events have proved that her tears would soon have been dried,' said he with a sly smile.

'You don't know, Jack, how I doted on the girl.'

'Very likely; but a baronet in hand is worth two captains in the bush.'

'But hang it, Jack,' said I, annoyed by his banter, 'I was solemnly engaged to her.'

'Blanche could never be very solemn at any time; and even if one is so, I don't think it makes much difference on the Overland Route sometimes, and it was often worse when girls had to come round the Cape. You may consider yourself deuced lucky. She might have changed her mind when it was too late. It will be all the

same a hundred years hence; and what's the odds so long as you are happy ?'

Thinking he would console me with such sage reflections as these, Jack reclined back in his bamboo easy-chair, one leg over an arm thereof, the other placed on the toon-wood table, with his glass of brandy-and-water on one side of him, a pile of cigar ashes on the other, and looking the very picture of a handsome, saucy and perfectly contented young Englishman.

'You'll come with me and see my cousin Henriette ?' said he.

'Excuse me, Jack—I am rather sore about the sex just now,' I replied, feeling after *all* that had passed, it would be impossible for me to meet Miss Guise with pleasure again. Dormer eyed me with a curious smile, and said:

'This is an age of progression, old fellow —steam, telegraphy, science, and all that sort of thing, including table-turning and paper collars; so hearts are won and lost, broken and mended again, with a celerity that would have appalled our powdered grand-parents. So a day will come when

you may sing with Tommy Moore, and laugh at the time referred to :

"My only books
Were woman's looks,
And folly all they taught me."'

'Two in the morning,' said I, looking at my watch, as the metal ghurrie was clanged at the main guard ; 'time to turn in.'

'Egad, yes. Don't think me inhospitable; but we have to be up betimes for an hour's recreation, named light-infantry exercise, among the fog and wet grass of this most dismal hole Dumdum, where in summer the vapour is exactly like that which comes from a wet blanket before a blazing fire. Qui hy! Khoda Bux, have coffee ready for us at gun-fire, and woe to you if you fail, unhappy pagan!'

After sharing my secret with Jack Dormer —though his consolations were somewhat offhand and extremely commonplace — I began to feel lighter in heart, and daily less 'sore' on the subject of Blanche Bingham.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON THE COURSE AT CALCUTTA.

On an evening soon after this confidence had been reposed in Dormer, he, Lonsdale, and I ordered our horses for the purpose of having a turn on the course at Calcutta, where the fashionables and idlers ride or drive from six o'clock till darkness sets in—seeing and being seen.

At a little distance from the barracks we crossed a stream, near which there is—or was—a Hindoo temple, consisting of four horse-shoe arches, to which flights of steps ascended. The roof was shaped like an inverted pear, of pure white marble, and under it was a bronze four-armed idol on a pedestal of red stone.

On the steps nearest the stream, a tiny tributary of the greater river, was a charming-looking little Hindoo maiden, clad in one

of those indescribable, and to all appearance shapeless, garments generally worn by the native women, and which appear to be always of one piece. To me it seemed brilliant scarlet cotton. Her long black hair was all unbound, and she was chanting some monotonous evening prayer, while from one of those plaited baskets that are made at Pullicat she was casting, with an action full of inimitable grace, flowers of various colours into the stream—votive offerings doubtless to be borne into the 'Nile of Hindostan'—the holy Ganga or river, which the Hindoos are taught to believe is the eldest daughter of the great mountain Himavata, and as it issues from the root of the Bujputra tree, flows directly from heaven. For in costume or customs, in manners and superstition, the natives of Hindostan are unchanged since the days of Alexander of Macedon.

'Is she about to bathe?' asked Lonsdale, checking his horse for a moment and adjusting his eye-glass, doubtless to aid his powers of vision.

'Not at all,' replied Dormer; 'you are still in a state of griffinage. She is simply

saying the last of the three prayers which the Hindoos must say daily—in the morning, at noon, and in the evening—always with their faces turned to the east. Their votive offerings generally consist of fruits, flowers, rice, and incense or spices made at the temples.'

'Such a charming picture the whole thing makes—the temple, the stream, and the girl,' said I, 'together with that little grove of baubool-trees behind the edifice.'

These trees — the *acacia Arabica* — are singularly graceful, and bear a yellow flower, shedding a delightful perfume which scents the air for a great distance; and I turned away and rode on with my companions, all unconscious of the part this little Hindoo maiden was yet to play in my narrative.

In due time we reached the spacious course or esplanade which lies between the Chowringhee Road and the great citadel of Fort William, and at the extreme end of which stands the Government House, erected by the Marquis of Wellesley, a structure every way worthy of the ruler of an empire so vast as that of India. It consists of a centre with

four wings, and over the colossal arches or gates that lead to it are placed sphinxes, and on two are the royal arms and those of the East India Company.

On the level plain before it were crowds of Europeans and natives, enjoying the cool air of the evening, and there were every variety and shade of beauty and every description of vehicle, from the stately coach-and-four to the palanquins and hackeries of Hindostan. Equestrians were very numerous. Many of these were ladies; but many more were officers of Horse Artillery, the Bengal Light Cavalry, in silver-grey uniforms, faced with orange and laced with silver, or in the blue undress surtout of the Line, with gilt shoulder-scales and scarlet sash.

Of course we proceeded to inspect and criticise the ladies.

'I say, Joe, do you see that fair one in the brown-holland riding-habit trimmed with red braid?' asked Dormer.

'On the piebald—the horse for luck?'

'Yes—so now is your time to wish.'

'Well, what about her? She isn't young—nor pretty either.'

'She has four lacs of rupees in Bank of Bengal shares, and other interests; think of that; four lacs, Joe!'

'Sacks I could understand, but lacs are beyond me. "What's the demmed total?" as Mantalini says.'

'A lac is ten thousand pounds sterling.'

'Forty thousand pounds—by Jove! I'll have her—that is, if you can get me introduced.'

'Of course I can; she is always tiffing or dining and so forth at the Binghams', or Mrs. Appleton's, in Chowringhee. I suppose *you* don't care about trying your hand, Lance?'

'No—thanks, Dormer.'

'Rudkin is evidently above all mercenary considerations,' said Lonsdale, who was no doubt sure of success, for it was extraordinary the progress he could make with women when he chose to be insinuating, exactly because he did not care a doit about any one in particular. His practised manner was reduced to a method; risks he often ran, but no repulse ever broke Joe's heart, or affected his uncommon flow of spirits.

Unluckily for this matrimonial scheme between him and Dormer, before it could be put in operation the order came for our battalion to change its quarters.

'Ah, there is a lovely girl!' exclaimed Joe with admiration; if *she* had only a lac or so of rupees!'

'And so she has—she's my cousin Henriette, by Jove!' said Dormer; 'and attended only by a European groom. Here she usually has a staff of fellows—a regular *suwarri*—about her.'

Lonsdale was introduced in form; me she instantly recognised, and gave me a brilliant smile.

'Very warm this evening,' I ventured to say.

To this original remark she assented cordially, adding:

'What do you think of India?'

'I have been in India before for a year with the Light Cavalry,' said I.

'Calcutta, then?'

'Really, I can scarcely judge as yet,' said I, feeling somewhat confused in my manner.

'Have you left cards on any one yet?'

'On none.'

'Why? How odd!'

'Hard duty at Dumdum—' I was beginning.

'Smoking cheroots, drinking brandy-pawnee in his shirt-sleeves, lolling in the verandah, studying the *Army List* or thermometer, and trying to get through the day somehow—these are the hard duties he has to undergo at Dumdum,' said Dormer; 'will you believe it, cousin Henriette, he has become a veritable hermit—a misanthrope?'

'No, I will not believe it,' said she, smiling, yet scanning my face closely the while.

'Have you heard from the dear old people at Thorsgill Hall lately?' asked Dormer.

'Yes—by the last mail.'

'They are well, I hope?' said I.

'Yes—and aunt Dormer says the burned wing is quite repaired now, and the ghosts are scared for ever,' she replied, with a quick blushing glance at me. 'I read the announcement of your arrival with troops on board the Punniar in the papers. Why have you never called with cousin Jack to see me?'

'Pardon me, but I shall hasten to do myself this pleasure to-morrow.'

'Too late.'

'How so? I have offended you?'

'Oh no, indeed no; but I take the river steamer to-morrow for up-country with Jacky Appleton. I go to Allahabad—to—to—visit friends there.'

As I looked into the soft sweet face—yet it was a marked one and full of character too—memory went back to the time of our peculiar parting at Thorsgill Hall. She was quite collected now, and another bright smile spread over her features as she said:

'We have met once more after all, Captain Rudkin.'

'Yes; you bade me farewell, adding, I remember, "for ever, too probably;" but I told you that we should meet again.'

(I certainly did; but thought it would be under different circumstances.)

'The moment I learn that you are back from Allahabad, I shall do myself the honour of visiting you with your cousin,' said I; and after a little conversation on general subjects, in which Lonsdale, who was en-

chanted by her beauty, bore a part, we separated.

She was going, I knew, to visit her cousin Blanche, to whose marriage, or even her existence, she had never made the slightest reference; neither did I, for somehow we both felt it to be an awkward subject.

'How flushed you look, Rudkin!' observed Lonsdale, as we rode homeward after evening gunfire.

'It is not quite the season for the prickly heat in Calcutta,' said I evasively.

'But it is always the season here for plenty of *gup* among the *Ditchers*, as the residents of Calcutta are called,' Jack remarked. 'Will you believe it, Rudkin, that if you dance twice consecutively with the same girl, it is considered equal to an engagement?'

'But the Overland Route will alter all that.'

I wondered when the cousins met what Henriette Guise would say of me to Blanche, and whether the mention of my name would yet stir a chord of secret tenderness in her heart. Whether it did so or not mattered little or nothing now. The face

and voice of Henriette brought all the vanished past more vividly before me, and reflection banished sleep long after I had cast myself upon my charpoy, or native bed of wattled tape, after Rao Sing had whisked the chowry, an implement like a horse's tail tied to a red drumstick, and drawn the muslin curtains close for the same purpose, to exclude those worse than all the plagues of Egypt—the mosquitoes.

On comparing notes next day on parade, I found that Joe Lonsdale had been thinking all night long of Henriette, whom he declared to be 'the sweetest girl he had ever met in his life,' and that he was quite prepared to 'enter stakes' against Stapleton.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BEWITCHED SEPOY.

One afternoon, a little subsequent to my chance meeting with Henriette Guise, I was strolling along the road that lies between the rice and paddy fields, and when passing near the little temple in the baubool grove, saw there the same young girl whom I had seen before. With many genuflexions that were full of wonderful grace, she was now fanning the bronze idol; while a Hindoo fakir—a hideous old man, with his lean and shrunken body smeared with grease and ashes, his elf-locks matted with the same unpleasant condiments, the eye of Siva painted on his brow, a brass lotah hanging at his girdle, and his sole attire a cummerbund—was solemnly anointing the god with ghee; and on his knees before it, offering rice, fruit, and flowers, in obedience to those laws compiled

by Menou 1280 years before the Christian era, was a tall and powerfully-built grenadier of the 2nd Bengal Native Infantry, praying very devoutedly.

I drew a little nearer, but not so close as to intrude upon these strange devotions, as some of the ceremonies of the *pooja* were about to be performed. A mat was spread before the shrine, on which were placed a bell of metal to be rung, a conch shell on which to blow; and a censer filled with benzoin, sugar, and other articles, was lighted, wherewith to offer incense to the god. While the fakir, after using both the bell and the conch, gave the *tiluk*, or mark on the forehead of the idol, then dipping his right thumb in sandal-wood ashes, he continued to mutter his prayers and ashlocks, or verses, in honour of his imaginary deity, and to throw more benzoin and ral into the burning censer, the girl began to dance before the shrine; but the grenadier remained rapt in his devotion.

The girl had no music but the sound of her own soft voice, as she sang in a low and monotonous cadence. Then, as her light

and certainly scanty dress became inflated by the wind and by her whirling movements, though there was nothing of the Nautch dancing in her measures, never did a lovely little female form seem more completely or lusciously to swim, as it were, in the air, which her bare and outstretched taper arms and tiny hands seemed as if seeking to embrace.

Her long unbound tresses floated wildly around her, at times almost hiding her small face, and so absorbed was she and her companions also that they did not perceive that I was looking on; and that now another Sepoy—a subadar, in his *raggic*, or undress jacket—a native captain of the same regiment as the devotee, had drawn near the shrine, but made no genuflexion, or showed any intention of joining in what was going forward.

His keen black glittering orbs were fixed solely on the girl, whose extreme beauty attracted his attention acutely; but suddenly his figure caught her eye.

Then her features seemed to become convulsed with terror and horror; her eyes

glared wildly as she parted and threw back her hair with her hands; and shrinking, crouching down beside the pedestal of the idol, she pointed silently to the subadar. The fakir set down his censer, and uttered a shrill cry of dismay, on hearing which the grenadier sprang to his feet.

His dark face seemed to grow darker with sudden rage and hatred, while the veins in his forehead swelled and his eyes sparkled with fire; and shouting something—I know not what—in which the word *jadoo* (magic) occurred more than once, he drew his bayonet and rushed on the subadar, who drew his sword and stood on his defence, like a man who quite expected the attack.

Here was a serious case of insubordination, and of drawing a weapon upon a superior officer. I also drew, and hastened forward to interfere; but I was too late. The grenadier had eluded the point of his adversary's sword, and plunged the bayonet into his side. In doing so, however, a stone caught his foot; he fell heavily forward, and ere he could rise, the foot of the bleeding subadar was planted on his breast, and he was on the point of

being run through the heart, as the wounded officer raised the hilt upward at arm's length, pointing the blade downward for that purpose.

With a wild cry the dancing girl sprang forward and threw herself upon the body of the grenadier, and sought with her own slender and sylph-like form to shield him from the death that was impending. One arm was around him, and one, like her eyes, uplifted imploringly to the face of the dark and now certainly ferocious-looking subadar.

'Spare him—spare him!' she said in Hindostanee, and then her voice died away; but though her lips were silent, her beautiful eyes were full of eloquence, and the soul of a woman beamed in her expression, though her face was almost childish. She was by far the fairest of her race I had ever seen, and in her complexion she had an olive lustre that was almost Spanish. Her forehead was broad and low; her mouth was, though full and pouting, small and beautiful, and the little upper lip that quivered now with terror revealed the whiteness of her teeth. Her hair, black of course, but glossy,

voluminous, and silky, covered all her shoulders and the face and breast of her father, for such I afterwards learned the prostrate grenadier to be.

The infuriated subadar was merciless, and swearing by Siva, the god of terror, who dwells amid the eternal snow of the Himalayas, that he would have vengeance, was about to pin the grenadier to the earth with his sword, when I parried the downward thrust by mine and grasped his hand. On perceiving that I was a European officer, he instantly saluted me, and placing his left hand on his wound showed it to me covered with blood, as if mutely asserting that he was right in what he was about to do.

The girl now clung to me, embracing my knees, kissing my hand, and entreating me to protect her father, who looked sullenly on, but keeping the drawn bayonet still in his hand, as if for his own defence.

'This is rank mutiny,' said I in Hindostanee; 'how dared you, grenadier, to draw upon the subadar?'

'Because he has wronged me, captain sahib,' replied the Sepoy; 'and but for the

devilish spells he has cast upon me I should not have been under his foot.'

'Would you have killed him?' I asked.

'Yes, sahib!' hissed the Sepoy through his set teeth, which glistened white under his black moustache.

'And wherefore?'

'To break the charm.'

I did not understand what all this meant; but turning to the native captain, I said:

'Subadar, do you know this man?'

'Yes, sahib, his name is Gunga Ram,' replied the subadar, who was now getting faint, and whose wound I stanched by placing my handkerchief folded as a pad upon it, and binding it there with his own sash.

'Surrender your bayonet,' said I sternly to the Sepoy, who immediately gave me the weapon. I then pointed with my sword to the barracks, saying, 'You must march there before us as a prisoner—proceed instantly.'

The man salaamed, and obeying without a murmur, went straight to the main guard-house.

In due time he was arraigned before a general court-martial, in full-dress uniform,

minus his belt, shako, and shoes, for drawing upon his superior officer and attempting to murder Kureem Sing, subadar of the 2nd Bengal Native Infantry. I was the principal witness in this trial, at which the following strange revelations were made:

The subadar and Gunga Ram had long been at feud, and the former, as superior, had of course many opportunities of galling and tormenting the latter, who had crowned their enmity by refusing to give him his daughter Azuma, the girl whom I had seen at the wayside temple, and whose uncle, Kalidasa Ram, was the fakir, a religious mendicant and priest. There are regular sets of dancing girls attached to all the great Hindoo temples, dedicated to that purpose by their parents; but the scene of this outrage was simply a wayside shrine.

From the moment of Gunga's refusal a change came over his whole constitution. From being a tall, hardy, and gallant soldier, he became weak, timid, and quite irresolute. He lost flesh daily; even his stature he asserted was diminishing, while hourly he felt the process of decay was becoming worse

and worse. In vain did the medical officers assure him that all this was pure fancy. The conviction preyed upon his mind, inducing the most morbid melancholy, and life —with certain death drawing nearer and nearer—became intolerable.

He had but one enemy in the world, the subadar, who was his evil genius, and of whose magic spells he believed himself to be the victim. He was assured that Kureem Sing had been frequently seen near the stream in which the girl cast the votive flowers. It is a common belief with the Hindoos, that if you wish to get rid of an enemy, you have only to fashion a waxen or clay figure as much like him or her as possible, subject it to certain magical incantations, and melt it, if wax, before the fire; if of clay, place it in a running stream, and as the model melts or wastes, so surely will your enemy pine and die of some mysterious and indescribable disease; hence Gunga Ram was certain that he was the helpless victim of *jadoo*, or magic, and that nothing but the death of the subadar would break the spell.

In vain had his brother the fakir given

him a certain charm, or *mantra*, which he showed the court. It was bound about his right arm, and consisted of a dingy scrap of paper, on which some words in Arabic were written.

He reverently replaced it, exclaiming:

'O Om, thou divine spirit, remember me!'

This strange superstition is mentioned in the history of Scotland so far back as the tenth century, when the illness of King Duff, as Buchanan records, was found to proceed from a wax model which a woman was melting before a fire at Forres; and the same superstition, known as the *corp-creé*, still exists in the Highlands. A marked instance of it occurred among the Sepoys in the case of Bucktawur Sing, of the 15th or 30th (I forget which) Regiment of the Bengal Army, just before the desperate mutiny at Nuseerabad in Rajpootana.

It proved a difficult matter to deal with mentally; but one fact was plain before the court—that insubordination and attempted murder must be summarily punished; so Gunga Ram was sentenced to be confined for life in the common prison at Calcutta.

Three days before his removal, when visiting the barrack cells in my capacity as captain of the day, I saw the unfortunate Gunga Ram lying on his charpoy, greatly depressed in spirit. He knew me, and thanked me for preserving a life which he assured me could not last long now, adding that as he was degraded and had lost his position as a high-caste Brahmin by what he had undergone, he did not regret to die but for the sake of his daughter Azuma, who would be left helpless in the world, and at the mercy of the subadar perhaps.

I bade him cheer up and be of good heart; that his sentence might be commuted after a time, and that I would endeavour to get some kind *mehm sahib*, or European lady, to take charge of Azuma.

In English so broken and absurd, that to repeat it verbatim would be useless, the poor fellow said:

'Captain sahib, you pledge me your word that you will be kind to my girl?'

'I do.'

'I served at Maharajahpore, Moodkee, and Ferozeshuhur, where I was thrice wounded,'

said he, pointing to his medals. 'I thank you, captain sahib, and shall go to prison—or to the holy Ganges—death—with peace and comfort now.'

He placed my hand upon his head in token of gratitude, and then I left him.

He was taken from the barracks to prison under an escort, consisting of a *naick*, or corporal, and six, commanded by his enemy the subadar, and from this time Gunga passes out of my story, though Azuma has to play a rather prominent part in it.

On that same evening 'letters of readiness' came for the battalion from head-quarters; hence we knew that we must soon be on the move, though we knew not exactly for where. All was surmise in the mess-room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AZUMA.

WEARY, after a hard morning drill amid the mists that so often pervade the marshy locality of Dumdum, I had discussed a pretty solid tiffin, and was roused from what is commonly called 'a lie down,' or siesta, by Dan O'Regan, announcing that a person wished to see me.

'Who or what is he?'

'Sure it's one of them haythen naygurs, sir,' replied Dan; 'he calls himself a praste —but, oh to the Lord, that I may never see such another!'

Dan had been in such a perpetual state of perplexity and wonder at all the sights and scenes around us since we left the Punniar, that his surprise now was nothing new; so I said briefly:

'Show him up.'

Considering the object of my visitor, I thought it a fortunate circumstance that I was quite alone. Dormer had ridden into Calcutta, to attend one of those auction-marts which then used to be a sort of lounge for the idle; Prior, having sat too long at mess the night before, had inadvertently lit his pipe with a letter of credit, and hiring one of those hack-carriages known as 'Dum-dumers,' had also driven to the city about it in some perplexity; while Lonsdale had gone by river to Barrackpore, a large canton-ment or military village on the east side of the Hooghly.

Somewhat to my surprise, O'Regan ushered in the Hindoo fakir, Kalidasa Ram, whom I had last seen at the court-martial, as naked, as greasy, and as filthy as ever. He ap-proached me bowing and salaaming, and coming so close that I was glad to place my table between him and myself; for the whole room was now pervaded by the odour of the rancid ghee with which his limbs were smeared, while some strange devices, half hidden by his long beard, were done on his bare breast in yellow chalk.

I thought of desiring Rao Sing to burn some pastiles in a *dhooie-kalsin*, one of those clay vessels for the purpose of fumigation.

The conversation that ensued was in Hindostanee.

Whether it was the result of superstition, fear, or real bad health induced by both, no one could tell, but the poor grenadier, Gunga Ram, was, as my visitor informed me, dead; all the specifics in the *dawah khana* (medicine chest) of the doctor sahib could not lengthen his days.

'Well,' said I, somewhat impatiently, as my visitor's personal aspect disgusted me, 'what have I to do with this?'

'Much,' he replied, putting down his pilgrim's staff and placing the palms of his lean dark hands together; 'much.'

'The deuce I have! In what way?'

'Rudkin sahib—captain sahib—hear me,' said the fakir, in whose sunken eyes a strange leering light was beginning to twinkle; 'you remember the girl Azuma?'

'I do perfectly.'

'And that she was beautiful to look upon?'

'Very,' said I, beginning to be puzzled by the old man's manner and expression of face.

'You did much to protect her father from the punishment his imprudence brought upon him; and for that, the pretty Azuma is more than grateful.'

'Did she send you to say so?' I asked impatiently.

'No; but he implored you to protect and befriend her, which perhaps, captain sahib, you have forgotten. But I—her kinsman—am her lawful protector, who can bestow her as I please; for she has no other friend in the world but me and Brahma—unless I add the captain sahib.'

'Well?' I asked, staring at him as he paused.

'I am going a long pilgrimage, even to Ganga Dwara—the Gate of the Ganges—and the great fair of Hurdwar, in the kingdom of Delhi.'

'I wish you a pleasant journey; but what is all this to me?' I asked, as he filled his mouth with betel-nut and chunam.

'Little, I know; but it matters much to Azuma; she will be left quite alone, and the

sahib must remember how fair she is. Could not the sahib watch over her until some mehm sahib requires an ayah ?'

'I! What the mischief *can* the old fellow mean ?' was my next thought.

'She is beautiful; she dances, she sings, and tells wonderful tales of the genii, and of the powers of Vishnu, Siva, and Brahma; she gladdens the eyes of all who see her,' he added, grinning horribly.

'I grant you all this, and will see if any of the ladies of the regiment can protect her.'

'I must make an offering to the great shrine of Vishnu at the end of my journey,' he continued, drawing nearer me, his eyes gleaming stealthily, his lean hands outstretched, his smeared body tainting the air and causing me to recoil, while sinking his voice, he added, 'I must offer a silver lotus to Vishnu; I can beg my way to Hurdwar; but the sacred lotus will cost me a hundred and fifty rupees. If the captain sahib will give me that sum, Azuma shall remain as hostage for it.'

He paused for a reply, cringing and salaaming.

'I shall certainly not make any such arrangement. Joupaugal!—Away, fool!' said I angrily.

'I am no fool,' he replied meekly.

'A very decided knave, then! Do you actually propose to sell the girl as if she were goods in a bazaar—and to me?'

'If not to you I shall to some one else, who will be less scrupulous—perhaps to the subadar, Kureem Sing.'

'Think of how great a horror she must have of that man, whom she deems her father's destroyer. She is so beautiful—do have some pity,' I urged.

'I would rather have the rupees. How can I go to Hurdwar without the sacred lotus?'

'Begone, I say, or I shall summon a file of the guard and have you expelled from the barracks.'

He came back twice again at intervals of half an hour, threatening to bestow her on the temple of the monkey god; and being really anxious to save or serve the girl, while also remembering that I had pledged my word to her dying father, I gave the old

wretch the money, and told him to fetch her at once. In the meantime I went in search of some of the ladies of the regiment; but found that they were all gone with a carriage party to the Botanical Gardens in the city.

On returning to my quarters I found the fakir already there with the poor little girl, whom he had tricked out with silver bangles on her slender wrists, the flowers and perfume of jasmine in her glossy hair, and over her head a pink scarf of Dacca muslin, edged with slender silver lace.

She knelt down very humbly and kissed my hand.

To reassure her, I told her to cheer up, and that I hoped very soon to find her a kind mistress—perhaps before nightfall—among the mehm sahibs. She seemed then to take courage, and looked up at me with smiles of gratitude; while the fakir, having pocketed his rupees, shouldered a wallet—which I perceived to be filled with those little cakes known as *chupatties*, the rapid and mysterious distribution of which over all India was beginning to excite much attention

and speculation about this time—exclaimed, 'Wah! wah!' (Well done!), and salaamed his odious person out of the room.

The rancid ghee had departed, and the fragrance of the jasmine flowers was pleasant in its place.

'I have neither father nor mother—sister nor brother—you will be kind to me, sahib?' said the poor girl, looking up at me with an imploring expression in her soft dark oriental eyes, while the horrible fakir was fraternising with some Hindoo Sepoys ere he left the barrack-gate.

'Kind to you—who could fail to be so?'

I kissed the falling tears from the poor little—well, they were rather brown—cheeks. It was done in a brotherly way, of course, and quite platonically; but the tears being so kissed away, there might be a strong temptation to continue the process after they were gone. So I put her in the care of Dan O'Regan's wife till some of our ladies returned.

Though any such transaction as that with the fakir was expressly forbidden by the East India Company, I had scarcely completed the

strange investment of my spare rupees when the adjutant dropped in to mention that the battalion would move up-country in a day or two, and that as some serious commotions were expected, every officer was to reduce his establishment of native servants, male or female, as much as possible.

What was I to do now with Azuma? After the orders just mentioned, it would have been worse than useless to speak to any of the ladies of the corps concerning her, and Miss Guise, who alone could have assisted me, was at Allahabad.

She could not remain in my quarters, as she would not be there an hour before Dormer, Joe Lonsdale, Prior, or some other equally enterprising spirits discovered her; so what plan could I fall upon?

'I am always in some infernal scrape,' thought I, as I sighed and lit a cigar, wishing the while that the fakir was at the bottom of his sacred Ganges, with his lotus —a flower, strangely enough, holy alike to the ancient Egyptians and the modern Hindoos.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PALANQUIN.

The 'letters of readiness' which the battalion received were rapidly followed by the 'route,' and of all the places in India, so far as I was concerned, it was for—Allahabad! 'What strange events, what unexpected meetings and sudden separations are sailors liable to!' says Captain Marryat; but so it is too with soldiers; and here we were ordered up-country, to where she—*they* were!

'We are actually to march for Allahabad,' I repeated for the third time to Dormer, as we idled in the mess-room.

'Yes; what is there so wonderful in that?' he asked.

'It is terrible, Jack.'

'How so? The distance, do you mean?—about four hundred and sixty miles, as the crow flies.'

'*She* is there, and, of course, her devilish husband too! I shall be meeting her daily in those deuced cantonments. My bungalow may actually be next to his. What shall I do, Jack?'

'Don't think of such things, especially at this perilous time.'

'Perilous—how.'

'When disturbances are daily expected among the native troops.'

'I forgot; but then I must—'

'You must meet Blanche, and her husband too, as any gentleman should,' said Jack, with more decision of manner than he usually adopted, 'and as if nothing had ever passed between you and her. Depend upon it, she will affect to forget, if she has not already forgotten, all about it. A woman always flatters herself that she has never but once been in love, and that is with the hero for the time.'

'What a horrid idea, Jack! This is rank heresy.'

'Fact though, my dear boy,' said Jack. 'Pass the brandy-bottle; thanks. Once you're up-country, she'll perhaps make as

great a fuss with you as she does with her Maltese spaniel. Calvert gave her one of these curs as they came out overland.' ('*Vide* little Tiny, cashiered,' thought I.) 'Don't make a silly show of wearing the willow, old fellow. It is no use, once you're thrown over.'

'Will you believe it, Jack, that before this artful girl came to Thorsgill Hall I was on the point of proposing to your cousin Henriette?'

'The deuce you were! You have a great desire to become a member of the family. Henriette is by far the finer girl of the two.'

'It is like fatality, this move to Allahabad,' I began again. 'There, probably, I shall see her every day; and how can I face her, or rather how can she face me?'

'What sort of a station is Allahabad?' asked Lonsdale, who now came into the room.

'Oh, a delightful one,' replied Dormer; 'healthy, although humid, and the permanent station of the Sudder-commission. There every man "falls in love with his pretty wife over again, or his neighbour's, if

he prefers her,'' as Fanny Fern has it; so it will be just the place for you, Joe.'

When I went back to my quarters, I heard something very different from the light-hearted banter of my comrades in the mess-bungalow. Kneeling on a carpet, with her face to the east, Azuma was concluding her morning prayer in Hindostanee, and was saying, very devoutly and softly:

'God is One; Creator of all that is; a perfect sphere, without beginning and without end! Fire is the superior of the Brahmin; but Vishnu is superior to fire. Unveil, O Thou who givest sustenance to the world, that face of the true sun, which is now hidden by a ray of golden light, so that we may see the truth and know our whole duty!'

Such was the conclusion of the poor girl's prayer to her imaginary deity, 'the great lord of the lotus.'

As she arose to greet me, I found that her dark eyes were swimming in tears, and she told me that she had heard of the 'route' up-country from Rao Sing.

'And what of that?' I asked, taking her

child-like hands in mine. 'You cannot regret leaving this place, where that odious subadar, Kureem Sing, is quartered?'

'Oh, no,' said she. 'Then you are not intending to leave me behind?'

'Far from it; you shall have a palanquin for yourself. I know two ladies at Allahabad, and there you shall go with me to them. Are you happy now?'

'Oh, yes, yes, yes!' replied the girl, her eyes becoming more than ever radiant with smiles and tears, as she nestled with inimitable grace on the floor close beside my feet, and placing her elbows on my knees, and her chin in her hands, gazed up at me with gratitude. Next to that emotion the great passion of the girl's heart was a boundless love and regard for the memory of her father, the old soldier of the 2nd Grenadiers. I had saved him from the sword of that sorcerer, the subadar—I, a Feringhee officer, one of the *Ghora-logue*, or white people; consequently I was a species of demi-god in her eyes.

I soon found that, flattered by my notice and kindness, the girl's manner became

caressing, and certainly full of peril for her as time passed on.

At first her face was always suffused with blushes when I addressed her, and her humid eyes were cast down; but as she became accustomed to me, her confusion passed away, and softly and pleadingly they always looked into mine.

'Yes, Azuma,' said I, 'when at Allahabad I hope to find a young lady whose ayah you must be; a lady with eyes as dark and as beautiful as your own,' I added, thinking of Henriette Guise.

'Oh, do not put poor Azuma away!' pleaded the little Hindoo; 'she will fan you when you are hot and weary, and watch you when you go to sleep.'

I feared there was not much chance of my sleeping if the conversation went on thus, for she added:

'When last I lit my love-lamp, and set it on the holy river, it floated bravely down, when those of twenty other girls at the ghaut went out or sunk.'

'And what then?'

'On that evening I saw *you*.'

Here was an alarming inference, and most alluringly drawn, with all that wonderful sweetness and subtlety of manner peculiar to all the women of the East, especially the Indo-Britons or Eurasians.

It was fortunate for her that my kitmutgar, Rao Sing, was a Hindoo; otherwise the poor girl might have starved; as the edibles prepared for her by Dan and his wife, whose special care 'the bit cratur,' as she called her, was, were deemed by Azuma polluted and unfit for food by the laws of her religion. And most simple were her tastes: a little boiled rice on a lotus-leaf, fruit of any kind, the great oriental delicacy of *tyer* or clouted cream, the gelatinous *nouga*, which, like the luscious toddy, is procured from the Palmyra palm, and eaten with sugar—these, and such as these, with a chupattie and clarified butter, sufficed her as food; for the laws of Menou forbid his followers to eat of anything that has ever had animal life.

Times there were when she would sing to me long stanzas in honour of Krishnu, under his name of Rama, and of his loves with the milkmaids of Madhura; and there was a

novelty in this strange friendship that made me *forget* much of the past.

At last came the day when we were to march. I was roused from dreamless slumber by the bugles sounding 'the warning' in the barrack-square, and by the voice of Rao Sing saying:

'Salaam, sahib; master want to be washee —bath ready.'

Then I sprang into the brick-built trough so named, and the jars of water, which had been standing all night in the shady cool verandah, were soused over me, the greatest of Indian luxuries. A wing of a chicken on a piece of toast, and a tumbler of cold sangaree (negus) at the mess-bungalow, sufficed for breakfast, and I repaired to the parade-ground, where the battalion was falling in, and the sergeants 'proving' the companies.

This was one of those steamy mornings peculiar to that locality, especially at that particular season; but when the sun rose and attained some height, the full fierceness of his glare was dreadful when reflected from the walls of white-washed masonry around

us; and though, like the other officers, I wore a sun-helmet, while the men had only puggerees, I felt as if my eyes would be scorched in their sockets before the column got in motion, headed by the European band of the 2nd Bengal Grenadiers, which, with the usual military courtesy, played us to the station of the first section of the Great East-Indian Railway, which at that time went no farther than, viâ Burdwan, to Rajmahal on the Ganges.

'Good-bye, Rudkin,' said Jones of the Bengal Horse Artillery, as we marched out of Dumdum; 'you are deuced lucky to be leaving this hole, where for so many hours daily we of the scientific corps have to imbibe fog and gunpowder smoke, while wading about after field-battery bullocks in the wet grass, and, supposing that we are at gun-practice, firing John Company's cannon-shot at invisible targets, when we would rather be flirting in the Botanical or out with the Calcutta hounds.'

I had seen my little friend off in her palanquin, and in charge of Rao Sing, borne by four bearers, who, like all others in the

East, uttered dismal sounds as they trotted along, to the cadence of their own bare feet, in this fashion: 'Hih, hah—huh, hah! hih, hah—huh, hah!'

A special train conveyed the regiment through Burdwan, an extensive coal district, to the ancient city of Rajmahal, which stands on the western bank of the Ganges, at the base of a range of undulating hills. The modern or European town consisted then of one street, composed of stone houses, generally two stories in height. There the line of railway, which it was intended to carry up the whole valley of the Ganges, terminated, and we had to take the river steamers, or other boats, for the remainder of the journey.

The battalion, with its baggage, women, children, and servants, European and native, proved too numerous a multitude for one boat, and so we required three, and this number increased in proportion as we ascended the river. I was fortunately in the same craft with my friends Dormer, Prior, and Lonsdale. On this watery way we practised with our rifles and revolvers at the

claret and champagne bottles as they were thrown overboard, and occasionally had whiffs upon the air that were the reverse of 'the sweet south that breathes upon a bank of violets,' when the dead bodies of Hindoos, with vultures perching on them, floated past; and once we came with a terrible shock upon something more odious still—the enormously swollen carcass of a dead elephant, in a great state of decomposition, rolling down the current.

As I had fully foreseen, the closed palanquin occupied by my protégée soon excited the comments and curiosity of the ladies of the regiment, particularly of the adjutant's wife, who was a great gossip; and the result was, that when we came to Bhoglipoor, a large Mohammedan town in a district covered with forests and thickets, amid which the wild elephant roams untamed, Jack Dormer took me to task on the subject, with a somewhat comical expression of face.

'Rudkin, that confounded palanquin of yours is a source of serious speculation to all the ladies of the battalion,' said he, laughing.

'Let them speculate as they please, if they won't take the contents off my hands,' I replied with irritation.

'The wife of the adjutant alone compliments you.'

'How—for what?'

'For showing some desire to settle in life.'

'In what way?'

'Providing yourself with an ayah before you have a wife and family; like having a coachman without the carriage-and-pair.'

'Let the palanquin alone, Jack. Tell the ladies who are making themselves so busy, that a writer who knew India well has written, that 'there are three things of which you must never ask the contents—a subaltern's bungalow, a lady's chit, and a governor-general's cranium.'

'True; but you are a captain.'

'Yes; but we are all subalterns under the rank of major.'

'By Jove, I never knew that before!'

'Any military dictionary will tell you so.'

Rumour spread fast that the veiled occupant of the palanquin was a young girl of great beauty; and when we reached Patna,

passing through a fleet of 'opium clippers' and budgerows or passage-boats, a magnificent and walled city, having many mosques and temples, Prior and Lonsdale began on the subject once more.

'I fear,' said Tom, 'that all the ladies of the battalion would put you in Coventry, but you are deemed the best round-dancer in the corps, so they can't spare you; moreover, that palanquin, or its supposed occupant, is a dreadful aggravation to the unwedded vestals—'

'Who have failed in the matrimonial market here, and yet won't go home as "returned goods,"' said I.

'Exactly; you comprehend, my friend.'

'Yes; but I shall not be interfered with.'

'Of course not!'

'My intentions are the best in the world; and this is the reward of philanthropy!' said I angrily.

On this they shouted with laughter.

'Now, don't be a humbug, Lance,' said Lonsdale; 'it looks more like philandering, as the adjutant's wife maintains it to be.'

'Before that worthy lady expresses an

opinion, I wish she would reflect whether her opinion is worth having.'

But they were bent on teazing me.

'Don't put yourself on a highly-moral pedestal, Rudkin,' said Jack Dormer; 'the idea of a fellow travelling about the world with a girl in a palanquin, and thinking that people won't speak of it!'

'Of course,' added Tom Prior, 'the wonderfully strong yet tender feelings of Mrs. Grundy are inexpressibly shocked.'

I applied a few mild adjectives to the name of the good lady in question.

'Had she been a Hindoo of fifty—but one of fifteen!'

'I am the victim of circumstances, Dormer, said I. 'How could I foresee the order about reducing the number of native servants to the lowest minimum?'

'What *do* you mean?' they all asked together.

I then told them the story of the friendless girl, the promise I had given to her father, and of the fakir from whose cupidity I was anxious to save her, and then the banter to some extent ceased.

'It is quite a dilemma, Jack,' said I; 'but it would be utter inhumanity to cast the poor thing adrift here.'

'Of course; she's so pretty too; it is not to be thought of!'

'And to gratify the evil-minded and self-righteous, who go about thanking God that they are not as others are!'

To all this they agreed with me, and that, on reaching a large station like Allahabad, something might be done for her easily.

It was a grilling April now; the season of mango-fish and the prickly-heat; the curse of the young European in India; where in some places, when sleeping under 'a Bengal blanket,' as our soldiers call the sun, the mercury in the thermometer stands at the fever point, and those who cannot afford iced drinks are reduced to bitter beer, cold tea, and grumbling at the clerk of the weather.

A little soured by the remarks that had been made to me, by the somewhat cold manner of some of the ladies on the poop, and having other things to occupy my mind, I did not, like Dormer, Prior, Lonsdale, and

others, enjoy myself, as youth only can enjoy itself, and find everything funny, sunny, and glorious, at Benares, where our river-boats tarried for a time.

All the cabin-passengers went on shore to see the sights of that place, the holy city of the Hindoos, and one so strictly oriental in character, that it differs widely from all the other cities of Hindostan.

Through her half-opened veil I saw the poor girl Azuma, screening her fine eyes with her well-shaped little hand, and gazing with longing and eagerness at the wonderful combination of the beautiful and the grotesque, all piled confusedly together within that stupendous wall which there spreads along the river's bank. The long, handsome, and lofty ghauts, crowded by gaily attired natives, the closely-packed houses, the lofty temples, the still more lofty minarets, and the luxuriant foliage fringing the parapets, and even the flat roofs, of many of the mansions; and the whole city was steeped in the purple light of a setting sun.

Seeing the eagerness of the girl's look,

'Azuma,' said I, 'should you like to be taken on shore?'

'Yes; oh, yes!' she exclaimed, with clasped hands.

'Well, I shall escort you.'

Desiring Rao Sing to summon the bearers, while I put on my sword and sun-helmet, her palanquin was landed at the foot of one of the stately ghauts, at a place where the water was so clear, and the downward reflection of everything so sharp and well defined, that the eye almost failed to detect the white steps which were real and those which were reflection.

Through the narrow streets, which are crowded by a population of more than half a million, we threaded our way, till we came to a dâk-bungalow, or house for travellers, commanding a pleasant view of the great mosque, built by Aurengzebe, on the site of the Hindoo temple of Mahadura. It was kept by a European, and there I ordered dinner; and amused as a child would have been, with all the sights and scenes around her, the Hindoo girl sat on a divan at a window overlooking the esplanade before the mosque.

The *tatty*, or window-screen, composed of the roots of sweet-scented grass, well drenched with water, was partially lifted up, and the cool atmosphere of the room was delightful. Our dinner over—mine was quite an Indo-European repast, hers was simply rice and fruit—I lit a cigar, had a bottle of St. Julien, and proceeded to enjoy the luxury of total idleness; while the Hindoo, seated by my knee, in her favourite position, on a *morah*, or ratten footstool, excited by the many objects around her connected with her peculiar faith—the great number of pagodas, dedicated to the almost countless gods of the Hindoo mythology—prattled away (poor little pagan!) of the world to come, while I listened with a good-natured smile, and made concentric rings of smoke in the air.

Her father had been a high-caste Brahmin, and to them alone is taught the language of the Shasters, those volumes which contain the philosophy of the Hindoos; and from him she had learned all about Yama, the future abode of the good, the approach to which is through delightful paths, under the

shadow of fragrant trees, by the side of streams covered with the lotus—paths where showers of flowers fall upon them as they pass, and where the air resounds with the songs of angels.

Then, while her dark eyes grew round and startled in expression by the eagerness and fervour of her thoughts, while clasping my hand in hers, she prattled away of the passage to the *other* place, through dark and dismal paths, where the wicked trod over sharp stones, amid showers of hot ashes and burning coal, and where the air was loaded by the wails and shrieks of horrible apparitions. And while she spoke of these things, with an earnestness and grace peculiarly oriental and her own, I could not help recalling the remark of the Abbé Dupanloup, how necessary it was that *some* belief should exist in the human heart.

In her manner there was much that reminded me of a Maltese girl, who, at Valetta, insisted on enlightening me on the legends of the saints.

While conversing there, or rather while dreamily listening to my protégée, we were

suddenly startled by vociferous shouts of 'Rama, Rama!' and a multitude of those religious beggars, fakirs or pilgrims, who infest Benares and make it their head-quarters, poured past in all their disgusting squalor, dirt, and scantiness of costume, on their way to some pagoda.

'Look, look, sahib!' she exclaimed, and pointed with her hand, and I saw the horrid fakir, Kalidasa Ram, like all the rest, distributing from his wallet those mysterious chupatties, or tiny cakes, to the hordes of natives who accompanied them. What could this mean, or of what was it the symbol?

I asked Azuma if it had aught to do with the Hindoo faith; but she shook her head, and replied that she never heard of such a thing before; and that, so far from distributing anything, these fakirs looked instead for alms and offerings, invoking curses on the heads of all who withheld them, thinking to gain that from terror which they failed to get from religion or charity.

So the evening stole on; the shadows were deepening in the narrow streets of

Benares; red as blood, the last light of the sun lingered on the minarets of the mosque of Aurengzebe, which rise to the height of two hundred and thirty feet above the river; the bottle of St. Julien was empty; my third cheroot was ended; and the head of Azuma began to droop wearily on her hand. I summoned her attendants, and we proceeded back to the ghaut, getting on board the river-boat amid the sudden darkness that always follows sunset in India; but I heard a 'cheeky' young subaltern of 'ours' say to some one:

'By jingo, here comes Rudkin, on guard over the palanquin!'

But those who made light of the matter little knew how much this attractive girl's future troubled me.

After reaching Mirzapore, with its ghauts and glittering temples, its flaming iron works and busy carpet manufactories, and passing through fleets of cotton boats in the snaky windings of the river between high banks, I knew that next morning would find us at —Allahabad.

'And now, Heaven help me,' thought I.

'I am about to see again this fairy-like creature who has so cruelly deceived me. Her husband is on the staff—my senior officer too—and perhaps to him I may have to present myself.'

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MORNING VISIT.

Duly next morning we found ourselves close to the famous and ancient city of Allahabad, with its great fortress, which was founded by the Emperor Ackbar on the site of the older Hindoo town of Prayag, which signifies a junction, for there is the confluence of the Jumna with the Ganges. The water of the latter was then low, and near the stately fort of Ackbar—which I shall have to describe at a subsequent time—were visible a number of sand-banks, the resort of legions of alligators, which we could see basking amid the ooze in the sunshine.

We landed while the sun was below the horizon, yet his coming radiance tipped redly the summit of the Bundelcund bank of the Jumna, which is rocky, and rises in towering

cliffs crowned by Hindoo pagodas and mouldering hill-forts. From the city and fortress of Allah we had to march a considerable distance to reach the cantonments into which we were played by the European band of the 6th Bengal Native Infantry. The air on this occasion was, I remember, 'The Laird of Cockpen,' adopted out of compliment to the Governor-General, the Marquis of Dalhousie, whose patrimony in Scotland was a place of that name.

In India it is—or in my time was—the custom, on marching into or arriving at a station, for an officer to call on all the married ladies.

'So, Rudkin, we must get their names,' said Dormer, 'and call upon every one, even before we get the mess established.'

'On Lady Calvert too—I?'

'You—of course; the visit will create quite a sensation in her breast, I have no doubt; I like sensations, though I hate a scene.'

'There will be no scene, Jack—be assured of that,' I replied, knowing well that if I omitted to call on her, and her only, the

circumstance must excite remark in the entire cantonments, and that she would have scored it down to pique, jealousy, revenge, or some other similar sentiment, which now I was far from feeling, and certainly had no desire to display, even had I felt it.

The officers of the 6th had breakfast awaiting us in their mess-bungalow, and the moment that meal was over Dormer and I set forth to visit his cousins.

'Better get it over at once, Rudkin,' said he.

The residence of Sir Harry Calvert was a fine stately mansion outside the cantonments, and surrounded by beautiful gardens. In architecture it was somewhat Grecian, with a noble portico of fluted pillars; a broad cornice finished its third story, and thereon, like enormous and bloated herons, with stupendous beaks and pouches, sat some of those birds called adjutants in India, only moving now and then to inflict sharp punishment on any smaller animal of the winged creation that came near them.

A verandah surrounded the house, and between the pillars of it were large green

blinds of split bamboo, to exclude the glare of the sun at noon; but now, at half-past eight, the morning was pleasant, fresh, and invigorating.

'Mehm Sahib—hye! Mehm Sahib Calvert in?' I asked of the durwan whom we found dozing in the verandah.

'Yes, and missy Beebee,' replied the official, a fat old Hindostanee in an enormous white turban.

'He means Henriette, of course,' said Jack, as we gave him our cards and entered a marble vestibule, where a fountain—a jet—filled with gold and silver fish, was plashing pleasantly from one basin to another below.

We were ushered into a double drawing-room of perfectly European aspect, so far as mirrors, console-table, glass-shades, and many framed engravings could make it. I felt a little bewildered at first. Would Blanche—I could never think of her as Lady Calvert—on seeing me grow pale, change colour, cling to a chair, or what?

Unchanged in all her fair beauty, save that she looked a little paler, the result of the climate doubtless—she rose from a

plaited cane sofa, on which she had been lying, fanning herself, well powdered, and with all her beautiful hair floating about her for coolness.

Henriette started from the piano as we were announced, and unmistakably her lovely face looked paler, whiter than usual, and there was a troubled expression in her fine eyes.

Dormer kissed both his charming cousins in a cousinly way, and Blanche, so far from exhibiting the smallest emotion, greeted me frankly with full-open eyes that never flinched, though she *did* speak nervously and rapidly.

'Welcome to Allahabad! When did you arrive?' she asked, making great use of her fan, a miracle of Chinese carving.

'I little thought we should ever meet again,' said I, in a voice that faltered in spite of myself, and of her terribly reassuring manner. I felt, too, somewhat sad.

'Here you will find me in full performance of all the duties of domestic life, and fulfilling all those offices that accrue to the representative British matron in India,' said

she, with something of her old playful manner, which seemed most heartless now.

Apparently Dormer felt this, for he asked sharply,

'Where's Calvert?'

'Breakfasting with the commandant.'

I was not sorry to hear this; it would have proved rather too much to have met him just then. She poured questions upon us, without waiting or seeming to care for the answer.

'When did you arrive?—oh, this morning, I remember. Had you a pleasant voyage out? Did you not find Dumdum a horrid place? Will you remain with your corps or get on the staff? Did any ladies come out with you? Any marriages likely to take place?' etc.

Such were the commonplaces asked me, while I looked wonderingly in her eyes, and on her lips and hair, which I had been wont to cover with kisses in the past time that seemed now a hundred years ago.

'I am glad, indeed, to see you,' she said during a pause; 'it seems such an age since we parted at dear Thorsgill Hall. We

had quite a flirtation there, you must remember?'

'I am not likely to *forget*,' said I very quietly, while my eyes wandered unconsciously to those of Henriette, who had scarcely spoken; but how truly did her words on the morning of our parting at Thorsgill come back to me, when she said 'that Blanche made light of everything'!

A flirtation! And this was the creature for whom I had worn out my heart and wasted its best affection.

The words cured me, however. 'Better,' says a writer, 'ah, better for the old love to be buried deep in the earth, with a headstone setting forth its extent and constancy, than for it thus to walk again like an apparition through the chambers of the soul, where it has become a stranger, and its presence is as unwelcome as unexpected.'

'You have just come too late for my cousin's fancy ball,' said Henriette, breaking another awkward pause; 'we had it last week.'

'And a delightful one it was!' added Blanche.

'In what character did you go, Lady Calvert?' I asked.

'I went as Queen Elizabeth.'

'And there would be an Earl of Leicester, of course?'

'Yes—Colonel Stapleton. By the way, he remains with us, having got a staff appointment, through Sir Harry.'

'*He* ought to have been Leicester,' said Dormer.

'He was on duty at the fort.'

'And you, Miss Guise?'

'I went as Mary Queen of Scots,' said Henriette, colouring a little. 'Do you think it was very vain of me?'

'Far from it; a charming Mary you must have made. There would no doubt be a Bothwell or a Chastelard?'

'I had neither,' replied Henriette; 'Jacky Appleton was my attendant as Mary Seton.'

'I am quite anxious to see this celebrated namesake of mine,' said Jack Dormer.

'She has gone shopping in the carriage to Allahabad,' replied Lady Calvert; and then she added, 'I have a reception to-night, and hope you will both do me the

pleasure of coming, and then you shall see her.'

Jack expressed his delight and mine, and we bowed ourselves out. The durwan gave us our swords in the vestibule, and we issued into the cloudless sunshine.

'What a heaven life would be but for its memories!' thought I, mentally quoting some author—I know not whom. And this was the girl who had come between me and my wits—between me and Henriette—the folds of whose dress, the waves of whose golden hair, and whose smiles and accents had been more to me than life, or death, or heaven.

All had passed like a dream, but I still seemed to hear the sound of her voice in my ear as we passed through the cantonments in search of our compounds and bungalows, where our servants, European and native, would be putting all our 'traps' in order.

The lines occupied by the 6th Bengal Infantry, a corps with dark-green facings, and locally known as the *Gowan-ka-Pultan*, from the name of the Scotsman who raised

them in the year 1759, some of the 3rd Oude Irregulars, and of the Ferozepore Regiment of Sikhs, were, as usual in such cantonments, streets of little bungalows or huts, built of bamboos, thatched with straw and plastered over with mud, baked hard and dry in the sunshine. On the flanks of those streets were a better species of similar edifices for the subadars and other native officers; and in all these huts there was one apartment, the zenana, occupied by the females of the family, into which no man, no matter what his rank, dared to penetrate, save the sepoy himself.

Through these streets of huts an incredible number of natives were always swarming, wrangling with the sutlers, or offering for sale rice, shawls, pipe-sticks, tobacco, *bhang*, and jewellery; and there, too, were indecent nautch girls, half or wholly naked fakirs, fortune-tellers, jugglers with swords, baskets, balls, and spinning-tops, tumblers and snake-charmers with their flutes.

There, too, were the sepoys, lithe, but bony and awkward, busy in every direction, with their various modes of cooking, each

according to rules of his faith, Hindoo or Mohammedan, but chiefly making pilaff, though many were content to dine on a piece of common bread steeped in pure cold water.

It was on this day that I first became conscious that the sepoys were beginning to eye furtively and sullenly the European officers, and to avoid, if possible, according them the usual salute when passing.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BLANCHE'S RECEPTION.

We dined with the 6th in their mess-bungalow, which, like such places in general, was all windows, draughts, and open doors, with a huge tattered punkah swaying overhead. I then hastened to my quarters to make an elaborate toilet and don my full uniform, as I had been assured at mess that I should find 'the commandant, the staff, and the entire garrison, the collector, judge, the cream of the Civil Service, and everybody that was anybody, at Lady Calvert's.'

'How will all this new and strange intercourse end?' thought I, while hooking on my elaborately braided jacket, with its Crimean medals and clasps, adjusting my crimson sash and silver-mounted belt to a nicety, and making a most careful parting behind,

by the use of a pair of ivory-handled hair-brushes.

As I passed through the outer room of my bungalow, I came suddenly upon Azuma, who was coquettishly arranging her muslin costume, wreathing the masses of her dark perfumed hair, and playing with her ankle ornaments, as I paused for a minute to observe her, for her passion for jewellery was truly oriental, and I had rather foolishly fostered it as we came up-country. She greeted me with one of her brightest smiles, but said, for perhaps I had a preoccupied expression:

'My lord sahib looks weary and ill; stay, and poor Azuma shall nurse you so nicely, so gently.'

But I put her little brown hand aside with impatience, as I thought of another hand which never again should rest in mine, and then the smile on her face died away.

'I am going to the house of a great mehm sahib, Azuma,' said I kindly; 'but I shall not forget you when there.'

She took my hand between hers and kissed it.

'Perhaps she may want an ayah, and how fortunate that will be for you!'

Her countenance fell again. She threw up her arms and turned away. What she meant I had no time to inquire; but in India a European is always forcibly impressed by what a traveller terms 'the luxuriant use of the arms made by women in conversation, whether they are walking or sitting, and even when the tones of the voice are by no means animated.'

I found Calvert's house a blaze of light, and the punkahs all at work, as the heat was excessive. Dormer, Lonsdale, Prior, and many more of 'ours' were present; their dark-green Rifle uniforms standing boldly out among the light dresses of the ladies, the silver-grey of the Light Cavalry, and the scarlet of the Staff and 6th Bengal. Both drawing-rooms were crowded, and so many of the artillery, engineers, dragoons, and others hovered about our hostess, that some time elapsed before I got near her.

'Who is that in the sugar-loaf hat?' asked Lonsdale of Captain Birch, the Fort-adjutant.

'A Parsee—Peeroo Mull—the great banker in Allahabad; a good friend to know, I can assure you.'

'By Jove, he might pass for the twin-brother of Ali Baba; but here comes a swell with no end of diamonds.'

'His Highness the Rajah of Chutneypore, escorted by Innes of the Engineers,' replied the adjutant.

'He looks as stolid and as grand as if he had just walked out of Madame Tussaud's,' was the off-hand comment of Lonsdale, as the Rajah, a dark, little, and, to my idea, cunning-looking personage, passed towards the head of the room, the gay crowd parting courteously before him. From head to foot he was literally covered with jewels; his turban, his body-dress—a shapeless kind of garment—and his sandals were all blazing with diamonds.

'Who are those that Dormer is making himself so agreeable to—three pretty girls?' asked Lonsdale.

'Oh, those are Armenians—each is said to carry a lac of rupees on her own person in jewels,' replied Birch.

They were all fair and handsome, though black-haired. The headdress of each was a tiara of leaf-gold, with long pendants behind, the front being a mass of precious stones.

Our English ladies were all gaily and exquisitely dressed; but their principal charms were not in their costume. Amid the throng many black servants in white jackets and turbans were handing about fast-melting ices and sparkling champagne, on massive silver salvers, under the direction of the Khansaman, or native butler. At last I got near Blanche, who held out her hand to me, with a brighter smile than before; for, amid the ever-shifting throng of her guests, she was more self-possessed than before.

'So glad you have come early; I must introduce you to my—to Harry. Sir Harry—Captain Rudkin, an old European friend.'

We bowed as she passed on to speak to some one else. Calvert, a tall and good-looking man, about five-and-thirty, or perhaps forty, was in staff uniform. He was already getting grizzled and rather bald. I was spiteful enough to be glad to see that, and hope ere long his head would shine like

a billiard ball. Moreover, I thought he had a dissipated look, and recalled a passage in Joe Lonsdale's letter from London to me at Tilbury.

He was talking to me of India and the growing discontent among the Company's troops; and while I replied mechanically, my eyes were following Blanche. Her hair, as golden and luxuriant as ever, was slightly blown about by the punkah overhead; but her cheeks, once ever like the rose-leaf, had again resumed something of that tinge amid the heat of her crowded rooms. She was simply clad in Dacca muslin, with the prettiest of Delhi bracelets on her snowy wrists, and delicate gloves on her hands. Fairer she seemed than ever, and my heart throbbed, but was *not* to be lost again.

'Oh, Mr. Prior,' I heard her say to Tom, 'you are *so* like your portrait!'

'My portrait?' he repeated, with a bewildered air.

'Yes—a full length.'

'Ah, at Stoke Priory; you have been there, then?'

'One night; I shall not likely forget it.'

'Nor shall I,' was my thought as I turned away with something like disgust growing in my heart to find that she could callously and smilingly recur to that occasion, and pass on laughingly to join Colonel Stapleton, who at that moment was ushered in. Her words and bearing were indeed rapidly curing me; yet I could not keep my gaze from following her, and this she soon discovered; so I resolved to visit her as seldom as possible, if ever again, and cursed the fate that had sent our battalion to Allahabad.

'Have some champagne and be jolly,' urged Dormer, in an earnest whisper; 'this sort of thing won't do, Rudkin.'

'I can't help it, Jack,' said I; 'you can never know the havoc that fair little creature has made with me. I wish I had never, never met her; and yet, when I think of the days of sweet companionship at Thorsgill Hall, surely she must have loved me *then!*'

'Very probably she fancied she did.'

'What sort of man is her husband—clever?'

'Well, he seems to have all the sense

never made use of by Solomon,' was Jack's response.

'Miss Appleton, Captain Rudkin and my cousin, Mr. Dormer, of the Rifles,' said Henriette, introducing us to a very pretty girl, having a gay manner, which won her the credit of being one of the greatest flirts at the station, with the reputation for saying the strangest things in the world, and, if *gup* was to be believed, of doing them too. So an animated conversation began between her and Dormer forthwith; while I seated myself beside Henriette, whom I thought it strange that, save to utter one or two commonplace remarks, Stapleton never approached during the whole evening. Hence I was half inclined to deem Jack's story of their engagement a false rumour. All the more so, that I caught her quiet dark eyes regarding me sometimes with kind and melancholy interest, convincing me that she knew our story.

'Lady Calvert,' I heard Miss Appleton say, 'you did not join our riding-party this morning.'

'I was engaged.'

'But it was a promise,' said Miss Appleton.

'Sometimes, my dear Jacky, promises are like those wonderful chupatties that are in circulation—made to be broken.'

So it was, indeed, with her; and her promise to me was as significant of future treachery as those same chupatties were to be.

'Blanche,' resumed Miss Appleton behind her fan, laughing, 'I wish you had seen Brown of the Oude Irregulars this morning on his grey Arab.'

'What sort of an air has he in the saddle?'

'Oh, don't ask, pray!'

'Why?'

'Because it beats that of an infantry adjutant. Oh, what have I said!' she suddenly exclaimed, and looked with coquettish entreaty at Dormer. 'I do hope you are not an adjutant, Mr. Dormer?'

Jack hastened to assure her that he had not the honour to be so useful a person; and now, as the company were beginning to disperse, and some to make whispered arrangements for meeting at the band-stand

next evening, he and I rose to take our departure.

As we bade our hostess farewell, she said laughingly, while leaning on Stapleton's arm and furiously flirting her fan:

'Your friend Mr. Lonsdale tells me he is quite smitten with my youngest Armenian friend.'

'Oh, cousin, Lonsdale is always in love with some one.'

'And love, as Madame de Staël says—for so I read at school—is but an episode in a man's life. Good-night, Captain Rudkin. We shall perhaps meet at the band to-morrow;' and she sailed off towards the Rajah, whose palkee, formed of the richest materials, preceded by fifty torch-bearers and followed by as many more, was now announced as being at the portico.

'She looked at me, Jack, as she made that trite quotation,' said I, as we descended the brilliantly-lighted stair; 'she has no more heart than a Hindoo idol!'

'Not half so much as a Hindoo girl, certainly,' he responded, with a wink that provoked me, all the more as, until he said

this, I had utterly forgotten all about Azuma and lost the best of opportunities for getting her placed somewhere. However, if I had forgotten her, *others* had not.

Several ladies who were whispering together in the vestibule suddenly ceased as Dormer and I passed out on our way to the cantonments; and next morning at parade I learned that gossip had already been busy about me. There were at the station two Presbyterian spinsters, who, like most Scots folks out of Scotland, had left their kirk behind them, but not their malevolence; mature damsels, with uncommonly tight opinions and loose tongues, who had been asserting that the poor girl whom her hard destiny had cast on my hands was a *gholaum*, a slave, or something of that kind.

Ignorant of all this as yet, on returning to my bungalow, to my surprise I found Azuma lingering in the verandah and gazing at the moon. The sight of Blanche had made me gloomy.

'Why are you here at this strange hour?' said I. 'Go to your charpoy.'

'I waited to see you return,' she replied

very kindly. 'Is my lord sahib sorry that he took me from Kalidasa the fakir? If so, send me back to Dumdum.'

'To the cruel subadar Kureem Sing?'

'No, no,' said she, shuddering and covering her eyes; 'but you shall have no trouble with the poor Hindoo girl; she will hide herself in the jungle if you bid her.'

'No, Azuma, you shall stay where you are.'

'Oh, I am happy—so happy!' and, kneeling by my side, she covered my hand with tears and kisses.

'Poor child,' said I, raising her from the floor; 'the dew is falling heavily, the verandah is quite damp, and you are chilled. Call Regan's wife to attend to you; and now good-night.'

She kissed her little hand to me and retired with a grateful glance; her whole manner was plaintively sweet and touching.

'That girl is evidently getting a deuced deal too fond of me,' thought I, as Rao Sing, looking very cross and sleepy, appeared with my night-light and the chowry; 'but I shall not make such a fool of myself as to fall in love with her or any one else.'

After one grand passion, it seems for a time difficult to love another; to man—woman, too, doubtless—they seem mere substitutes or illusions; even courtship becomes matter of fact; for the old, old story that is told with tremulous lip to a first is easily repeated to a second or third.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A CONFIRMED FLIRT.

I DID not see Blanche again for a little time. The day after her reception I was on duty as 'captain of the day.' As such, I had to see all the cells opened and fresh bread served out to the prisoners, who were becoming unusually numerous among the sepoys, as frequent cases of insubordination were now occurring. From the prison I turned to where the white walls and green jalousies of Sir Harry Calvert's house were shining in the morning sun, and I scarcely know what I was thinking of, when the 'orderly sergeant' told me that the cells were all reclosed.

At eight I went over to the mess-bungalow, where I found several of 'ours' reading the papers, or discussing their coffee and the

personal appearance of the ladies we had met over-night; and there was but one opinion about 'the wonderful beauty of Lady Calvert,' which under other circumstances might have been pleasant enough to hear. Among others, Lonsdale was there, and I questioned him about the miniature which Stapleton had exhibited for off-hand criticism at 'the Rag,' and asked him if he had seen any resemblance; but he seemed unable to remember, or, more probably, was unwilling to say what he thought.

Visiting the guards and barrack-rooms after each meal occupied the rest of the day till 'retreat,' when I inspected the inlying picquet, and we all sat late at mess, as some strange rumours had come floating up country of a mutiny among the 2nd Grenadiers at Dumdum; but as yet nothing was known for certainty.

On the following day I had occasion to visit the fort of Allahabad, where a company of 'ours' was stationed, and remained all night, being rather quizzed, I remember, about occupying 'a haunted bungalow,' where a ghost in white always came at

twelve at night and blew out the lamp, which in such places is often merely a crystal tumbler with a little oil and floating wick. Whether it came or not I cannot say; but when I awoke at gun-fire, and summoned Rao Sing to bring me a cup of cold tea, the night-light was certainly *out*.

Apart from the presence of Blanche at the station, I think I should have enjoyed soldiering at Allahabad very much; most of the officers were very pleasant, and the ladies were all one could wish; thus our occasional reunions at the bandstand, where the musicians of each corps played in succession, were always gay and well attended.

Daily then, when Sir Harry was not present, and sometimes even when he was so, she had always a crowd of the most foolish fellows at the station hovering around her, in puggerees or pith helmets and patrol raggies; and with them she practised the old game of attraction and playing with the hearts of others without endangering her own. She was the loadstar, the cynosure of all the subalterns in quarters, and they seemed to vie with each other as to who

would make the most silly remark, or pay her the most exaggerated compliment.

Sometimes a revengeful devil seemed to whisper in my ear:

'Why not cut in and have a flirtation with her, and then leave her disdainfully?'

My old love would have found this perilous work—playing with edged tools indeed; and my soul shrank from the idea, for 'there are some hearts so constituted that they must possess *all* or nothing,' says Florence Marryat truly.

The Rajah of Chutneypore was often there with a gay and glittering *suwarrie* of armed followers, and his palkee was always deposited by the side of that of Lady Calvert, whose most valuable diamonds were of course alleged by good-natured people to be his gifts.

Many times there were when I purposely avoided this promenade, where I found myself on a footing so strange and unnatural with her; and frequently rode to Mhow, Pertabgur, or Koosee, to kill time and keep out of the way.

At these band-stand promenades I became

painfully sensible of one fact: that Henriette Guise was cold in her manner, though kind, but nothing more. She would not be cordial with me. Why was this? Was it caused by the memory of the past, or a fear of what might be again? Was it the whisper about Azuma, or her own engagement with Stapleton—if engagement there was?

So far as the luckless Hindoo girl was concerned, I felt the inutility of attempting to explain to her how completely I had been the victim of circumstances in that matter; and yet there were many reasons for which I was anxious to retain the good opinion of Miss Guise.

'It is the old story of "much ado about nothing,"' said I one day to Dormer; 'and I wish I could assure your cousin that I am actuated only by pure pity—platonism—what you will.'

'Platonism!' responded Jack, with one of his most knowing glances. '*Mon camarade, c'est un mot dangereux!*'

The somewhat uncertain state of our Indian affairs was, I understood, the cause alone that delayed the marriage of Henriette; but

for my part, I thought the *blasé* Colonel remarkably cool in his attentions.

Blanche never permitted me to pass her carriage or palkee without summoning me to her side by a wave of her fan, and engaging in some of her old waggish raillery; but I thought it terrible to see that this creature, formed in so beautiful a mould, was just as much delighted with the attentions of any of the garrison as with those of the fool she had married; and she would no doubt have had me on her staff too, but I shrank from *that* position with her after the past; and since that time she was evidently fuller of flirtation, of vanity, and aplomb than ever.

'Cousin Jack,' said she one day while the band of the 6th were playing some of the melodies of the *Trovatore*, 'don't you think my Harry the handsomest man in the cantonments?'

'Not at all, Blanche,' said Jack Dormer bluntly; 'he's not so handsome as I am, and not half as much so as Rudkin there.'

She flushed at this reply, and turning to Henriette:

'What is in your little bottle, dear—Jockey Club, or Frangipanni ?'

'It is Stapleton's.'

'Never mind, cousin; he won't mind *me* having it. Do you ?' she added, looking up at the Colonel, who approached tugging his whiskers; and as he made some well-bred reply, she sighed; for this once pet of mine was a well-skilled artist in all manner of sighing, and she could give plaintive upward glances at him, exactly as she had been wont to do on me and others; and now she lay languidly back in her handsome palkee, fanning herself, and looking like the princess of a fairy-tale, while the tawny and nearly naked bearers squatted close by, and stared with wonder at her white beauty.

'Is it true, Colonel,' I heard her ask after a pause, 'that old' (some one—I did not catch the name) 'has gone to Calcutta ?'

'Yes,' replied the Colonel in a low voice; 'he has disbanded his zenana, and gone in for morality—a pew in the cathedral and a wife at Chowringhee.'

I certainly thought this a very free-and-easy mode of speaking to a lady; but there

came a day when I ceased to be surprised at anything. Rumour in the cantonments said that the Colonel spent a great deal of his time at Sir Harry's mansion; that he tiffed there daily; that the durwan knew pretty well that when the Colonel Sahib once passed in, he would not pass out in a hurry—so the Scotch spinsters averred—till driving time or the hour for the band-stand arrived; but as there are no doors, and almost every aperture is open in India, with ignorant native servants hovering everywhere, it is of course a 'great country' for gossips, though they are usually not shocked at much.

On this day there was an undefinable something in the manner of Blanche that sorely jarred on my feelings, and as I lifted my sun-helmet and left her, on chancing to look back, the hollow-hearted beauty blew me a kiss from the points of her pretty fingers, and laughingly drew the white-silk curtain of the palkee. There was a mockery in this that shocked me.

Repelled thus on one hand, I was not without perils to face by counter-attraction on the other.

I had been nearly nearly ten days at Allahabad without getting Azuma any employment. I had ventured to ask Blanche's interest; but she only looked at me quizzically and laughed, while Henriette rose and left us.

'What the devil am I to do, Jack?' said I one day in great perplexity. 'Shall I be saddled with this little Houri for life?'

But Dormer only threw himself back in his bamboo arm-chair and uttered a roar of laughter. He could little foresee the tragic end to this part of my story. On this last evening when I left Blanche and entered my bungalow to dress for mess, I found the girl on her knees, with her back to the setting sun, her face turned eastward as usual, and so greatly absorbed in her devotions as to be unaware of my approach; so I heard her praying to the goddess of destruction—to Kali, who was adored by the Thugs—to Kali, 'the dark goddess with the iron mace'—Kali, 'the flesh-tearer'—that I might be protected amid the perils to come.

'What are those perils?' I asked, when

she had ended her evening prayer. 'Do tell me,' I added caressingly.

'Hush, Rao Sing!' she said, glancing hastily round, as if fearful of being overheard, and then shaking her head mournfully; and, strange to say, no power of mine and no entreaty could draw the secret from her.

'You have been speaking to the mehm sahibs about me,' said she, looking down, as if to conceal the angry glitter in her eye; but I saw her beautiful little bust heaving with suppressed emotion. 'I hate them! O, how I hate them!'

'Why?' I asked, surprised by this sudden outburst.

'Are they not tyrants and lords rather than wives or loves to those slaves their Feringhee husbands?'

I was half inclined to agree with her, being rather sore on the subject of the mehm sahibs just then.

'Believe me, Azuma, that I would not give a hair of your head for all the mehm sahibs in Allahabad.'

'Will you swear this?' she asked, with an

expression in her black eyes as if seeking to read my soul.

'By what?' I asked, thinking I was going too far.

'Kali!'

'Yes; by Kali and jingo to boot.'

If this satisfied her and dried her tears, what did it matter to me? She now took my hands in hers and scanned my face attentively.

'You sorrow; you are grieving for some one. I can read it in your eyes,' said she, a little reproachfully.

'Perhaps.'

'For some one far, far away in the isle of the Feringhees?'

'That I do not, be assured, Azuma.'

'You regret something, then?' she persisted.

'We have all something in life to regret; save one so innocent as you, Azuma.'

'Do not talk to me thus,' she exclaimed impetuously, for by nature she was full of passion and wild and sudden impulse; 'yet you are my lord and master, and poor little Azuma is your slave, and loves you much—

oh, you can never know how much, for you have no caste, and cannot meet her in the other world!'

She now threw her arm round my neck, and clung to me wildly, imploring me to take her away from Allahabad—away to Calcutta or Bombay.

'This is utter madness, child,' said I, becoming quite bewildered. 'Why should I take you to either place; and how leave my regiment?'

'Oh, you know not what you say; it must soon leave you,' she said in a sad low wailing voice, and sinking again on her knees, covered her face with her hands, and sobbed bitterly.

I was beginning to think her brain was turned, and was compelled to summon O'Regan's wife, as the bugles were already sounding for mess; but the next day's dawk, or post, let in a terrible light on the secret that preyed on the heart of the Hindoo girl.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

STARTLING NEWS.

As if it were but yesterday, I remember when tidings came to us of the mutiny of Meerut and the revolt of the city and kingdom of Delhi.

Prior to this there had been mutterings of the coming storm at Dumdum, Umballa, and Sealkote, concerning the greased cartridges, which were merely an excuse for revolting, as after that took place the sepoys used them freely enough against us without fear of losing caste. At each of these three dépôts there was of necessity a good deal of preliminary drill to be gone through, to teach the men how to handle the rifle, which had been substituted for the old musket, and how to make up the greased cartridges.

While this tuition was in progress at

Dumdum a sepoy of the 2nd Grenadiers was taunted by a *classie*, or workman in the magazine, with having lost his caste, by biting cartridges greased with the fat of bullocks and cows.

The horrified Brahmin rushed at once to the barracks and spread the report of this among his comrades. The cartridges were by them distinctly seen to be greased. Fast spread the alarm among the Hindoos, and the Mohammedans, fearing that the fat of the pig—the accursed of the Prophet—might be also used, took up the alarm in common with them.

On the Inspector-General of Ordnance admitting that beef fat *was* used in the process, General Birch telegraphed to the three dépôts prohibiting the issue of any cartridges but such as were in a dry state; still the discontent spread after the cause was removed; so it is impossible to account for the terrible results, save on the theory of a premeditated plot, a mighty organised conspiracy.

Who, then, was the active agent in this?

An idea seemed gradually to spread among

all the people of Hindostan that, on the centenary of Clive's great victory at Plassy, the *raj*, or rule, of the East India Company would crumble to pieces under the united power of the sepoy troops; and as an emblem of their perfect unanimity, the chupatties, and in some instances the lotus flower, were passed from fort to fort and from cantonment to cantonment, pledging each regiment to stand by the other in the intended massacre of their officers and all Europeans.

Nowhere was the hatred of the latter more deep and strong than in the kingdom of Delhi, where the swaggering insolence of the Mohammedans was never very much concealed; for the loss of empire inspired the tributary king and all his people with sullen animosity against us; so, while feeling their weakness, they did but abide their time, though their blood was dreadfully inflamed by the final decision of Lord Dalhousie in 1849 that, on the death of the reigning king —an orthodox Soonee—his grandson should be recognised as heir, apparently upon the sole condition that he retired from the

Palace at Delhi and took up his residence at Kootub.

To relate how we came to meddle in the affairs of Delhi, or annexed the kingdom of Oude, whose people are followers of Ali, is foreign from my story; but the first result of the mischief-makers was the refusal on the part of the 19th Native Infantry, stationed at Berhampore, to use any cartridges at all. In consequence of this, Colonel Mitchell disarmed them in presence of a European regiment and a battery of guns. They were disbanded, and scattered themselves over the upper provinces, spreading discontent wherever they went and inflaming the people.

Incited by a mutineer called Mungal Pandy, whose name afterwards became the sobriquet for all his comrades, the 34th Native Infantry revolted at Barrackpore, and were turned out of the service, to carry their grievances elsewhere. Matters grew worse and worse. The 7th Oude Irregular Infantry, on the 3rd of May, refused to use their cartridges, and left their parade in a tumultuous mob. By Sir Henry Lawrence,

H.M. 32nd Foot and eight pieces of cannon were at once called out, when the sight of the gunners with their lighted matches proved too much for the mutineers, who flung away their rifles and fled in the wildest confusion.

But a more terrible scene was to come at Meerut, initiated by the 3rd Light Cavalry, eighty-five of whom were sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. On this there was a general revolt of all the native troops at the station. Colonel Finnis of the 11th was murdered by his own men; the jail was forced, and all the felons and miscreants, mutineers and dacoits therein, were released and armed.

Joined by these reckless villains, the whole cantonments and adjacent dwelling-houses were by the mutineers given to the flames, and every European who fell into their hands was barbarously mutilated, then slain. This took place on the 9th of May,—the outbreak occurring at a time when our 6th Dragoon Guards and 60th Rifles were at church; and before these troops could prevent it, the whole armed force from Meerut set off *en masse* for

the city of Delhi, where all the native troops instantly mutinied. A general massacre of all Europeans ensued, with a barbarity truly oriental, yet baffling all description, and forty-eight young girls—all ladies—were taken into the palace of Delhi, and after being most infamously used for many days by the leaders of the revolt, were stripped and turned into the street, to be destroyed by the Kindalas and lowest ruffians there; one is said to have been crucified against the wall inside the Cashmere Gate.

On the day I refer to, Lonsdale and I were seated quietly tiffing in the mess-bungalow on chicken-cutlets with tomato sauce, washed down with foaming Bass. All was still in the parade-ground where the sun was glaring outside, and where the sepoys, in their own lines, were cooking in a fashion peculiar to themselves; for after bathing—an indispensable ceremony—each man kindles his own fire, around which he draws a circle, within which no man of an inferior caste dare pass. He then kneads his chupatties, of flour, rice, or dahl (pease-meal), and bakes them on an inverted vessel, pours on

them melted ghee from a brass pot, and the simple repast is soon concluded.

All was going on with us as usual in Allahabad, when tidings of these terrible events were brought by the dawk boat up the river, and an emotion of utter *insecurity* pervaded the breast of every European there. Officers of all regiments at the station came crowding into our mess-bungalow.

And now the mysterious warnings of Azuma, her grief and her terror for me, showed that among my own native servants dark hints must have reached her ears that were unheard by me, and unknown to O'Regan or his wife, before whom they could freely converse in Hindostanee. I had again and again urged her to speak and explain what she knew; but terror always seemed to fetter her tongue, though of whom it could be I knew not, unless it were the horrible fakir, Kalidasa Ram, who, I understood, had been seen more than once in the sepoy lines.

All remained quiet at Allahabad, though every post brought us fresh stories of horror; now it was at Ferozepore, where H.M. 61st

Foot succeeded in cutting up the mutineers and blowing many from the guns; anon it was at Allyghur, Lucknow, Nuzeerabad, Bareilly, and many other places, whence we heard only of mutiny, murder, destruction of property and life under circumstances so cruel that one might have thought all the fiends of the lower regions had been vomited upward into Hindostan.

Of some premonitory symptoms of the coming storm I became personally cognizant however.

One morning, prior to our taking a ride round the city, I had breakfasted with that most heedless of all heedless fellows, Joe Lonsdale, whose natural flow of spirits even the growing dangers failed to effect; but the dawk-wallah (or postman) had left at his quarters a number of letters, some of which had not a cheering influence upon that usually lively personage.

He opened them before me, and commented freely upon their contents. He had actually proposed for one of the Armenian 'fifty thousand pounders,' as he called them, and been refused.

'She is engaged, I now hear, to some devil of a fellow in the opium department,' said Joe, while making up a cigarette. 'Just my luck always; but what are the odds, so long as I am happy! Why did I not propose for the second sister? I have squeezed her hand more than once under Calvert's table-cloth. I think she'd have had me, and that would still have kept the rupees in the family.'

'Meaning you?'

'Of course; but it's too late now,' he added, going on with the perusal of his correspondence. There was a dun, from the Agra or some other bank, for an instalment on a renewed bill. 'A confounded nuisance,' he ejaculated, 'to have to pay so many rupees per month for what was spent long ago; it is a burning shame! What is this?—an account from a *bunniah* (shopkeeper) in the city for bitter beer, champagne, and cheroots; from another for glazed boots, white kids, and perfumes, with Gazepore rose-water; another for ices, soda-and-brandy, a silver-mounted hookah; another for jewellery for a lady.'

'Who is she?' I asked; 'the Armenian?'

'No; a little Eurasian girl I meet at the band-stand sometimes.'

'Have you cash to settle all these, Joe?'

'By no means.'

'What is the total?'

'I haven't the heart to inquire; but if this row with the Pandies goes on, I shall pay them all off with a roll on the drum. A rising here is just the thing for me, Rudkin, in the present state of my exchequer, if my book fails on the Bangalore races.'

'For Heaven's sake, Joe, don't talk so thoughtlessly,' said I; 'the faces of the married men and of their wives are sad to contemplate in their gnawing anxiety.'

'Then thank Heaven you have not a wife, or any little responsibilities either.'

I was silent—when I thought of the two beautiful cousins, and how nearly I had been becoming the spouse of each in succession.

'I think I shall order some more of everything from these niggers; they are becoming very importunate now, and moreover they decline to take the Company's paper.'

'Which I am certain bodes evil.'

'How?'

By showing that they have no faith in the stability of our rule.'

'Perhaps; but when you can't pay, a fresh order imparts commercial confidence; so I'll have some more brandy, ices, wine, and cheroots; promise them all their balances at an early day, and to each wind up with something about the state of the thermometer and prospect of the indigo crop. Qui hy!' he added, shouting for his native servant; 'order the horses round—and now, Rudkin, we shall start for the bazaar.'

We rode into the city, nine-tenths of the native houses of which consist of mud superstructures upon the remains of ancient splendour, the ruins of the days of the great Ackbar; the only fine buildings in the place being the royal palace, now our government house, and the Serai and mausoleums of the Sultan Koshru and his mother. As we rode through the streets I was distinctly sensible of a lowering, obstinate, and sullen expression in the faces of nearly every man we passed; and also, that though an edict had been issued prohibiting all who were not in the service

from carrying or wearing arms in public, it seemed to be but partially obeyed, if at all, as every able-bodied passenger, whether Hindoo or Mohammedan, was accoutred with a musket, match-lock, and spear; many had shields slung on their backs, and many had tulwars and khunjurs (*i. e.* swords and daggers), with pistols in their belt; and all this display seemed indicative of approaching trouble.

If more evidence were wanting, we found it in the bazaar, where Lonsdale went to distribute his orders, and restore confidence in his creditors by running deeper in their debt. We perceived the greatest excitement prevailing there. Travelling fakirs had brought in exaggerated stories, which they exultingly related, of the outbreaks at Nowgong and the massacre at Jhansi, where fifty-five hapless Europeans, including ladies and children, were besieged in a little star-fort, were ultimately starved into surrendering, and were then destroyed by the native cavalry, who tied them in two rows, separating the men from the women. The former were first slaughtered before their wives and their

children, who clutched their mother's skirts, in which they buried their little frightened faces; and then all were put to death by the sword and pistol. The sole difference between these dreadful murders and those which had been, or were being, enacted elsewhere was, that the unfortunate ladies were neither stripped nor subjected to any indignity. The first victim who was cut down was Captain Burgess, whose elbows were tied behind his back, and he was permitted to have a Prayer-book in his hands.

The relation of these things, which were told in a very scared manner and with bated breath by Peeroo Mull, the opulent native banker, made our blood boil to fever heat, and even Joe Lonsdale looked about the bazaar, as if he would like to have emptied his revolver (we never went abroad without one now) on some of the 'niggers,' who were swaggering with arms, in defiance of the issued order.

Although in more than one instance an itinerant fakir had received a hundred lashes on his meagre back at the triangles for denouncing war against us, outside the

bazaar we came suddenly on one of these bigoted knaves, who was perched between the humps of a dromedary, preaching to a fast-gathering crowd; and though we lingered a few minutes to observe and listen, he neither lowered his voice nor ceased his harangue; yet he must have been aware that I, at least, knew the language in which he spoke, for this orator was no other than Kalidasa Ram, looking more lean and attenuated, his ribs seeming to start through his brown skin, more than ever smeared with ashes and ghee, and with the huge eye of Siva painted on his forehead, and with a sword and dagger stuck in his sole garment, a narrow and filthy cummerbund.

The listening crowd were Hindoos and Mohammedans, and, though hating and despising each other, they had one sympathy in common—their hatred of us.

Vishnu the Preserver had appeared, he told them, to several Brahmin sepoys in a dream at the same moment, though these sepoys were hundreds of leagues apart; and the four-armed god had told them that the days of the Ghora-logue (white people) were num-

bered; that the *raj* (rule) of the pale beasts would soon be over, and their curry-faced women must become the slaves and play-things of their conquerors. He assured the Mohammedans that Allah would bless any attempt they made to throw off the yoke of the infidel Feringhees, whose queen wished to make Christians of all Hindostan by the destruction of caste. Jan Bool, he continued, while he ground his teeth, and his eyes flashed with a glare like that of insanity, shall rend his raiment and cast ashes on his head; and the Koompanie, with their tea-trade and their ships, shall pass away, for the hundredth year had come. Then again should the widows of the Hindoo perform the Suttee and the Thugs offer lives to Kali; their gods would be no longer called mere idols of brass and stone; no longer would their bread be polluted with the bone-dust of the sacred cow or the salt with its blood; neither should the sepoys of any creed be compelled to defile themselves by touching cartridges greased with the fat of the unclean pig.

Among the listening crowd, who were

getting excited, I saw my rascal Rao Sing, with Jack Dormer's kitmutgar, Khoda Bux; and as 'Deen! Deen!' (Faith! Faith!) began to be muttered on all sides, Lonsdale and I, deeming that we were somewhat in peril, and by our presence might provoke an outbreak, quitted and rode back to the cantonments to report what we had heard and seen.

On entering the mess-bungalow we found a strong muster of officers belonging to the 6th, the staff, and our corps, who had invited them to 'tiffin,' as luncheon is always called in India.

'When are these horrors to end?' exclaimed our colonel, when we told him what Peeroo Mull had related of the dreadful events at Nowgong and Jhansi. 'Will your Pandies here be stanch, do you think?' he asked the colonel of the 6th Native Infantry.

'As they have not yet mutinied, I think it scarcely fair to apply that sobriquet to them,' replied the other stiffly. 'I can swear by them. Remember the scene of yesterday morning; it was one which would not have

disgraced the earlier days of the first French Revolution.'

What he referred to has now become a matter of history. On hearing that a suspicion of their loyalty was entertained by the Europeans at the station, they went to their officers in a body, and with tears in their eyes—crocodile tears they proved in the sequel—besought them to have faith in their honour. They then fraternised in the most brotherly manner; perfect confidence was restored; the regiment even offered to march against Delhi, and it was almost believed that had any mutineers approached us they would have been attacked by the 6th.

'I am glad to hear you are so confident, colonel,' said I, 'for we Europeans are but a handful; and if I thought all would remain quiet in Allahabad, I'd volunteer for service against the Pandies elsewhere.'

'And so would I—and I—and I,' said Dormer and others.

'We require every man here that we have,' responded the colonel; 'but I cannot help thinking that, notwithstanding the melo-dramatic scene of yesterday, those fellows of the

6th are doubtful. Many have passed me without saluting, and some have dared to make insulting remarks when Miss Guise and other ladies have passed them.'

'There are a few black sheep everywhere,' remarked Captain Birch; 'but I am sure we may trust the battalion. My opinion of Indians is, that those in whom you put trust will be worthy of it; but those in whom you have no confidence hold themselves justified in deceiving you.'

'My subadar major,' resumed the colonel of the 6th emphatically, 'has sworn on the head of a Brahmin Jemidar—the most sacred oath a Hindoo can take—that he will answer for the faith of my entire battalion.'

'We are wise, at all events, to spend so much of our time in revolver practice,' said Lonsdale; 'besides I can't help thinking that his highness of Chutneypore is up to some secret game.'

'And so do I,' added Dormer; 'he was a daily dangler about Calvert's house, and now he never even enters the cantonment, though my cousin Blanche has more than once sent for him.'

Stapleton, who was present and had not yet spoken, smiled quietly in his old disdainful way, and gave the inevitable tug to his long fair moustache and whiskers, which were blended together.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A TERRIBLE REVELATION.

NOTWITHSTANDING the confident assertions of the colonel and officers of the sepoy regiment, we felt that we were all as it were on the brink of a volcano.

It is impossible to describe the agony of the *suspense* endured at this time by the Europeans in such stations as Allahabad, where as yet the native troops had *not* revolted, but still might rise at any favourable or capricious moment. No man could reckon upon the events of an hour; no man laid his head on the pillow at night with the certainty that he would be a live man in the morning; and in the morning none rose without a dread that we might never see the sun set; for such was the fate of many: and worst of all were the anxieties of those who had wives and helpless little ones; for all

over India, even in those places which were apparently quiet, the sepoys of the Infantry and the sowars of the Light Cavalry were planning and arranging the most dreadful schemes to murder each other's officers, to seize on their wives and daughters, to make spoil of everything, and yet remain true 'to their salt,' as the treacherous wretches phrased it.

Instead of revolting in detail, had all India done so at once—as India yet may do, when the natives learn their own power—the vast peninsula must have been lost to us for a time, if not for ever.

How soon might the atrocities of Meerut, Delhi, Jhansi, and many other places, be enacted in those as yet quiet cantonments at Allahabad, was the surmise of us all. How soon might those we loved best on earth be stretched lifeless on the ground, or be barbarously mutilated ere they were hacked to pieces by those demons of Hindoos and Mohammedans, though the former had sworn to be true to us over the waters of the Ganges, and the latter on the Koran! Parents, if they were to be destroyed,

pondered on what might be the future fate of their helpless children, though, with a keen refinement of cruelty, these were usually destroyed first by the mutineers under the eyes of their parents, and the wife was subjected to every barbarity before the destruction of her husband.

In the evening of that day on which I had been in the city I did not go to mess, as Calvert had invited me to a male supper-party, and to see a match at billiards played by Stapleton and Dormer, on which some heavy bets were pending. The heat was now something awful, so I had my charpoy removed into the verandah, and, stretching myself on it, I gradually dozed off to sleep, despite the boredom of mosquitoes, the fear lest a Brahminee cobra or some such reptile might come wriggling along the floor, or a huge centipede fall flop on my face from the straw roof of the edifice I had once pictured myself sharing with Blanche Bingham. I was beginning to hate India now and everything therein; from the Governor-General down to Rao Sing, who, with his white turban, black-glowing eyes, brown face, and

white grinning teeth, seemed always so provokingly cool and comfortable that I felt inclined to throw something at his head.

The occasional cantonment sounds, the hourly clang of the little gongs or ghurries, the cry of 'All's well!' from our sentries passing from post to post, and dying away in the distance as darkness fell and the stars came out, the sepoy challenge 'Hookam durr?' and the answer 'Perhind' (similar to our 'Who comes there?' and the reply, 'Friend!'), alike failed to disturb me; but I had a strange dream of Blanche, of whom I fancied myself in pursuit along an unknown path, in some far and foreign country; but she always contrived to elude me, till once, just when about to overtake her, I thought a faintness came upon me, and then she drew my head caressingly upon her breast.

As I looked up lovingly upon her, her eyes of golden hazel seemed to darken more and more, till her face became a strange mingled likeness of Henriette Guise and Azuma the Hindoo girl. I started and awoke, to find my head actually supported by the little brown arm of the latter; and as I started up

to keep my appointment with Calvert, she laid her finger on her mouth, and then glanced nervously around her.

'Sahib,' she whispered, 'I must speak now: if you go forth to-night, go armed.'

'I am never otherwise, Azuma.'

'But great danger is very near you,' she whispered earnestly.

'Very probably; but what is this danger? Are the sepoys of the 6th—the Gowan-ka-Pultan—not true to their salt?'

She shook her pretty little head mournfully.

'Danger is nearer you than them, and than you think.'

Blanche's perfidy had made me very distrustful of every one, but I asked:

'What *do* you mean by these frequent hints and innuendoes of coming peril to me? Whence or from whom is it to come? Do speak, Azuma,' I added caressingly.

'You do not know,' she whispered, 'how little the sepoys here are to be trusted, and with what consummate treachery they can hide the purpose they have in hand. Oh that you were safe beyond the Mahratta

ditch! It would matter little then what becomes of Azuma!'

How piquante and winning the little creature looked as she said this in her most touching manner!

'You have heard something, girl, that I know not, and that my friends know nothing of. What is this terrible secret that preys upon your mind?'

But that I was never fated to learn; her lips parted, and she was about to speak, when a face—the face, I felt certain, of Rao Sing, my kitmutgar—appeared within the green jalousie of a window overlooking the verandah. I could see the white teeth and eyeballs glistening between the spars, and the girl, fearing no doubt that she had been overheard, sprang from my side and disappeared. I entered my room hurriedly, with the intention of punishing the eavesdropper; but Rao Sing—if he it was—had levanted by a window that was open on the other side.

Perplexed and annoyed by the communication but half made, and by the interruption, or watching, that savoured of both jealousy

and treachery, I was nevertheless compelled to keep my appointment; and taking my sword and revolver, passed along the sepoy lines, left the cantonments, and took my way to the house of Sir Harry Calvert, whom I found with several officers in the billiard-room, Birch, Innes, and others from the fort, smoking, laughing, and chatting gaily; most of them were in their shirt-sleeves.

Stapleton, who had just left the ladies in the drawing-room, was in full uniform, which he proceeded to doff that he might play with greater ease; and tossing his sash and gold-embroidered shoulder-belt with its cartridge-box to Sir Harry's kitmutgar, desired him to take it away.

Now it chanced that this servant was quite a new hand, a native belonging to a very wild race, the Kholees, who are often preferred, especially in Goojerat, for the service of the police, or as porters to gentlemen's houses. He was a very ignorant fellow, and consequently had rather hazy ideas of the relation existing between the Colonel and Miss Guise, as an Oriental has no conception

whatever of the true position of a Christian woman—more than all, that of an English lady—as maid, wife, or widow; so, in a blundering way, he took the sash and pouch-belt to her room, and there left them.

Through this mistake there occurred a discovery that led to some very painful events; and others that occurred subsequently have quite blotted from my mind the playing of Stapleton and Jack Dormer, the bets that were made, and the number of gold mohurs and rupees that changed hands on the occasion as the night wore on.

Many had left the house, but a protracted game ensued between Sir Harry Calvert and Lonsdale, Dormer acting as marker. I had promised to wait for the two last named, that we might walk to our quarters together; and as the billiard-room had become oppressively hot, I wandered into the garden, pondering in the cool starlight on the peculiarity of my position—the guest of Blanche's husband, and longing to be far from Allahabad and at any other station in India, even those now desolated by mutiny and massacre. How strange it all seemed! and then thoughts

that I could not thrust aside pressed themselves upon me.

I heard the languid, drawling voice of Calvert, the rollicking tones of Lonsdale and of others chatting gaily in the billiard-room, the tall windows of which came down to the floor of the verandah, and as the *tattys* or screens of scented grass matting were drawn aside, long bright flakes of steady light fell brightly athwart the flowery parterres. I could hear the click of the billiard balls, and the flap occasionally of the great birds' wings on the roof as these noises roused them; but now a very different sound stole out upon the soft air of the Indian night from other windows.

It was the voice of Henriette Guise, accompanying herself at the piano, as she sang one of those low and plaintive lyrics which I had often heard her perform at Thorsgill Hall. All the past came upon me, summoned by her sweetly modulated and familiar voice, and memory went back to the constraint and peculiarity of our farewell on the morning of her departure for Brighton, the tremor in her tones, the quiver of her

lips, and the perplexing expression of her very beautiful eyes.

'Bah;' thought I bitterly; 'as the fiancée of Colonel Stapleton she must have got over all that humbug now! The world is only a huge teetotum after all.'

She seemed to be alone; the song was one she had often sung to *me* before Blanche came. Could she be thinking of that vanished time? Her voice gradually died away, but the subdued tinkling of the piano continued in a way that suggested she had become sunk in thought, and that the pretty white fingers, which had lingered in mine on that eventful evening in the library oriel, were wandering over the keys mechanically.

At last I heard the lid of the instrument closed, and then her shadow slowly passed the white silk window-curtains, as if she was retiring for the night; but, lost in thought, I know not how long I lingered in the garden-seat on which I had cast myself under a shady russa tree, the spreading foliage of which was covered with crimson and yellow flowers in their fullest bloom.

The players were still deep in their game,

and I thought of joining them, when suddenly I heard the sound of voices near me, talking and laughing, but in subdued tones: they were those of Blanche and Stapleton, who I thought had gone to the cantonments long ago.

They were on the other side of one of those prickly-pear hedges which intersected the spacious garden in some places, and they seemed to be promenading to and fro.

'O Jocelyn,' said she, 'something startling is about to happen.'

'Startling, dear Blanche?'

'Yes,' she replied, and in fancy I could see her old bright smile, or it might be her pleading expression, playing about her face.

'What is it? Speak!' said Stapleton impatiently.

'Poor Harry has to leave this, to inspect a troop of Horse Artillery.'

'Where does the troop lie?'

'At Chutneypore.'

'Sorry it isn't the Cove of Cork, which is rather farther off. But we must be careful, Blanche; in India, these silk curtains and tattys of woven grass, which do duty for

doors and windows, and those swarms of native servants that are always gliding about stealthily and noiselessly with their bare feet, keen eyes, and open ears, surprising people in the most innocent acts of playfulness, and supposing there must be guilt in everything, may all serve to teach us caution.'

'I most fear Henriette, with her quiet earnest eyes.'

An expression of impatience escaped Stapleton, who added,

'The dew is damp on that beautiful hair of yours; we must go indoors.'

But they lingered, however. Such were the terms on which they were. Oh, it was too terrible! Fairer than a fairy, the old General was fond of calling her; but he could little conceive that she was falser than a fiend. I remained as if paralysed, and was compelled to hear more of this mingled flirtation and banter, and thereby found a key to much that had puzzled me in the past time. I disdained to eavesdrop, yet I, of all men, feared to stir lest my discovery should become known to them, and so perhaps overwhelm her with mortification and fear.

Keen observers though they were, as I have elsewhere said, Mesdames Poplin and Jelipott at Thorsgill Hall had not detected anything of this, though they seemed to know that Henriette Guise 'was breaking her poor heart about that conceited Captain Rudkin.'

She had deluded me, and now she was yet more cruelly deluding another, who, to do him justice, loved her only too well. Where was all this to end? Oh for the old duelling days, thought I, and a brace of pistols at ten paces!

'A lovely hand yours is indeed, Blanche,' he said in a low voice.

'Take care, or I shall lose my marriage ring!'

'It certainly hangs loosely on your pretty finger.'

Even then and there he could not repress his constitutional habit of sneering quietly.

'I wish Captain Rudkin had not come here up-country,' said Blanche after a pause.

'Why?'

'You know that I did use him ill.'

'He seems to have deuced soon consoled

himself, if report says true. Never mind Rudkin; your flirtation with him I always laughed at; but now, were it not for this accursed tie, which binds you to another—'

'You might have prevented its formation had you chosen—and—and—'

'What?'

'You did not.'

His reply was inaudible; but he added,

'Were you free to-morrow, I would marry you, Blanche, without a month's delay.'

'Easily said, when you know I am not likely to be—free!' she replied bitterly, as they passed indoors.

And this was the woman I had so loved, and for whom I had sacrificed another! The cure was complete now, and yet it filled me with honest sorrow.

I sat for a time like one in a dream, and scarcely was able to realize the truth of what I had heard. The lights still streamed out from the windows of the billiard-room, and then I heard again the click of the balls and the voices of the players. 'The woman who deliberates is lost,' says Addison; but here was a heartless flirt who never deliberated at

all. But it seems impossible to account for the capricious fancies of some women, or the kind of men they will love. Here was Stapleton, selfish, cold, blandly insincere, cautious, and *blasé*, loved to all appearance beyond Calvert, who, though somewhat *blasé* too, was generous, open, gallant, tender, and true to her; and loved beyond me, who would have faced a battery of guns for her.

Something like a malediction escaped me, and, fearing they might return, I quitted the garden, and without waiting for Dormer or Lonsdale, hurried home to the cantonments, feeling sick at heart and crushed in spirit.

Had these two forgotten the mine beneath our feet—the volcano to which I have referred?

Alas, it seemed so.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SLEEP OF AZUMA.

ANOTHER great shock awaited me; but let me not anticipate. At the door of my bungalow, I was surprised to see my kitmutgar, Rao Sing, hovering about.

'Waiting for captain sahib,' said he, salaaming.

'Bring some brandy-pawnee and cigars into the verandah, place them on the tea-poy, and then you may leave me. Who the deuce is that on the sofa?' I asked, on seeing by the starlight a white figure lying thereon at full length.

He told me it was Azuma; that she had waited long in my outer room to see me, but was now sound asleep; and begged me not to disturb her, as she had seemed very weary. All this did not seem strange, though her presence there was unusual. Doubtless the

poor girl had some fresh warning to give me of impending danger before retiring for the night.

Seating myself in the cool verandah, with the brandy-and-water beside me on the tea-poy, or little table, I lay back in my cane easy-chair, and fixing my eyes on the stars, gave way to reflections, which were only disturbed by hearing Dormer, with Joe Lonsdale, stumbling into the next bungalow, the latter hiccuping a good deal, and saying,

'Wish I had a couple of cousins here like you, Jack! She *is* a stunning girl, though in a quiet way, Miss Guise; I prefer her, by Jove! to Lady Calvert, who carries too much sail for me. Horrid chinsurahs; and I've been smoking like a factory chimney.'

Even heedless Joe was not so shortsighted as I had been. How ingenious we are at self-torture, and how apt to muse on corroding thoughts; to feed, as it were, on our own hearts! I had now the mortifying knowledge and conviction that she had never loved me at all, but had systematically and aforethought come between Henriette and me, unless it were the case that 'a woman who

really loves the love of the time being will never admit, even to herself, that she has ever loved any one else.'

And for this creature, who had seemed as bright as a sunbeam, pure as the snow that has newly fallen on the waving branch—this fruit of the Dead Sea, so beautiful to the eye, yet bitter to the taste—I had forsaken Henriette without a word of explanation. I had been *lured* away from her, and deliberately taught to treasure another in my inner heart; another, the touch of whose hand and the glance of whose eye were both magnetic to me; under whose window at the old hall I had often watched when all were abed—watched as a pilgrim might the light of his altar, as little Azuma did the idols of her temple.

When I recalled all the sweet intercourse of the past, all the tenderness I had lavished upon her, all our delicious little speeches and avowals of mutual regard, I was lost in wonder at the baseness of such a change as this.

Report said that Stapleton was engaged to Henriette Guise. I dared not inform the

girl of all I knew; yet how could I permit her to sacrifice herself to one so worthless?

All thought of going to bed had left me, as I knew that in an hour or so the morning bugles would sound for parade. 'Remembering the wondrous adaptability of the human heart, what matters the past?' asks a writer. 'Hearts are not like roses—that die, having once withered. No, rather, like the branch from which the flowers spring, they have power, when aided by the sunshine, to put forth fresh buds, so long as the parent tree lasts.'

How full the world seemed of cross-purposes, thought I, while glancing at the recumbent figure of Azuma as the daylight came in, as it always does in the tropics, quickly, and remembering that the impulsive yet gentle Hindoo worshipped me as if I were a superior being. When I had last looked back, on leaving her on the preceding evening, I had seen her kneeling with her hands clasped in prayer—a prayer that was heard by no earthly ear—with her eyes full of tears, and I knew that these and the invocation were alike for me.

She was a singular contrast to Blanche Bingham certainly; but still there was a glorious beauty in her dark eyes, and much of child-like prettiness or subtlety of grace in all her little ways. Brilliant was her smile, with all its Indian warmth of expression. Charming indeed was all her beauty in its way, though I knew it would be so evanescent, that at forty she would be quite an old woman—perhaps a grandmother.

She slept so soundly that even the deep sullen boom of the morning gun, as it pealed over the sleeping cantonments, failed to make her stir or give the slightest start.

Her figure seemed graceful; yet there was a rigid kind of angularity in it that began to impress me with surprise. I tossed aside the end of my cigar, and, entering the bungalow, lifted the *doopatta*, or large muslin veil, which completely enveloped her.

Horror! The poor girl had been murdered—most brutally murdered; and the 'sound sleep,' of which the slimy reptile Rao Sing had spoken, was the endless slumber of death.

She was drenched in blood, and all the

floor below the cane sofa on which she lay was one large pool of the same crimson tint, and amid it lay a *khunjar*, or native dagger, which I knew belonged to Rao Sing, and which had been twice plunged in her heart, consequently no cry could have escaped her.

All her ornaments of which she was so fond—the *kutchi-kuppi* or gold pins of her silky hair, her gold *varanmalai* necklace, at which hung a row of pagoda coins, her earrings, and her *manili-koppu* or bangles that were round her slender ankles—had all been rent from her with savage violence, after death, as our doctor—Gargill, who was promptly summoned—informed me; and by whom—whom could I suspect but Rao Sing, whom I had detected eavesdropping? His must have been the white teeth and eyeballs I had seen glistening through the green jalousies; he must have been the object of the poor girl's terror, and his must have been the hand that sealed her lips by death, lest she might reveal some secret—some terrible Indian plot which she had discovered.

The fellow had artfully enough disposed

her body on the sofa, as if asleep, to deceive me, and with his spoil, including many gold mohurs, or sixteen-rupee pieces, of mine, had quietly gone over to the sepoy lines, where all trace of him was lost and sure concealment given him; for, as I have elsewhere mentioned, there are apartments in the dwellings of the native soldiers from which even the officer of the day is excluded.

This unexpected horror drew me from my own corroding thoughts, from sorrow for, and mortification at, the conduct of Lady Calvert. I could think quietly of her as Lady Calvert *now*, and I pondered sadly over the regard this impulsive Oriental girl had displayed for myself—a regard excited only by a little kindness and compassion.

Poor Azuma! it was truly in an evil hour she linked her destiny, even for a month, with mine. I knew that all the love of this simple heart was lavished without return on me, and her death, and more than all, the mode of it, filled me with grief and fury. It was, I thought, terribly significant that our lotus-eating life in Allahabad was at an end.

I meant to inter her remains, though most

of the Hindoos either burn their dead or throw them into the Ganges or its tributaries. The funeral piles of the rich are mingled with sandal-wood and fed by aromatic oils, while the poor are consumed with humble faggots. But my intentions were frustrated by a noisy crowd of the 6th Bengal Infantry, led by Kalidasa Ram, who came to my bungalow when I was absent, and carried her away for cremation in rear of the sepoy lines.

I offered fifty gold mohurs for the murderer's apprehension, but did so in vain; for now 'great events were on the gale,' and the assassination of this unfortunate girl was only a prelude to the greater horrors that were to ensue among us.

But the burning of the poor girl's remains, if it was a source of intense repugnance to me, was no less so to honest Dan O'Regan, a pious Catholic, who had said all the prayers for the dead on his knees by the side of the 'poor haythen craythur,' as he called her, 'who was so sinless and so simple.'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

STAPLETON'S CARTRIDGE-BOX.

As I afterwards learned, I was not the only one in the cantonments of Allahabad who passed a sleepless night.

After a laughing time of it with Jacky Appleton, a lively and amusing girl, and marvelling much *where* her cousin Blanche was, Henriette Guise had retired to her room, where, to her surprise, and perhaps amusement, she found Stapleton's belt and cartridge-box lying on her bed. She was puzzled to know how they came to be there, and on expressing something of this to her ayah, the latter proposed to put them out of the room.

'It is some joke of the Colonel's, or more probably some mistake,' said Henriette, with a smile that was not perhaps altogether one of brightness; 'but I suppose the day is

coming when I must get used to seeing such things about me.'

Seated before her mirror and lost in thought, or reflections engendered by the song she had been singing to herself, Henriette had her long black hair let down and brushed out by the quick tawny fingers of the ayah; then it was coiled up for the night; she was disrobed, and lay down on perhaps rather than *in* her bed, the nights were so warm now; the lamp was adjusted, the mosquito curtains drawn, and then the ayah withdrew.

The song she had sung was still lingering in the ears and on the lips of Henriette, till suddenly she said to herself,

'Why think of it or of those days *now?* Let me put such thoughts aside and for ever; it should be so.'

Then as if to aid her to do this—whatever the memories were that she referred to—she looked from time to time at the gay staff-belt with its velvet-and-gold-embroidered cartridge-box, and suddenly inspired by one of those impulses which are quite unaccountable, she slipped from her bed and took them

in her hands. As she did so the flap of the box unclosed, and instead of cartridges, which one might have expected to find there in such perilous times, there fell out a packet of letters and notes.

At that moment she caught sight of her own figure reflected in the tall pier-glass, looking so pure and pale in her laced and frilled night-dress, her dark braided tresses and dark eyes, and her little 'white feet glancing bare,' that with something of a coquettish smile she thought, 'Well, I am surely pretty;' but another would have said she was simply lovely.

She then proceeded to gather up the Colonel's letters for the purpose of replacing them. Many were open or without envelopes; and to a girl of her well-bred mind and delicate nature, the idea of reading any of these documents would never have occurred; but while arranging them, she suddenly perceived that they were all in her cousin Blanche's handwriting, and were addressed—though without signatures—to Colonel Stapleton.

A hidden evil, the extent and nature of

which she could not at first fathom, a cold foreboding of coming shame and sorrow, fell upon her shrinking and sensitive heart, and she sank for a moment on her knees, as many of the well-known 'trifles light as air' began to take tangible shapes for her torment now.

'It is wrong even to think of reading one of them,' she murmured, 'and yet—and yet, what secrets may be here!'

In all there were twelve. Twelve! Evidently they were not invitations, but pretty long epistles; so what could they be about? And how did these two come to correspond? She was all unaware of this excessive intimacy. Tremblingly, lest she might be tempted, she proceeded to replace them one by one in the strange and unusual receptacle from which they had dropped, and as she did so she could perceive, by the post-marks on those which still had envelopes, dates and names of places far apart, some in England and some in India.

What mystery was here? Alas, it was soon to be solved.

As she took up the last, which had acci-

dentally opened, her startled eyes saw that it commenced with terms of affection which no friendship could warrant. In great horror and dismay she pushed back the tresses from her white temples, as if seeking coolness, air, and then said resolutely aloud,

'I shall discover what is hidden here; the temptation put before me is too great, too terrible, for the human heart to resist.'

Then, with eyes swimming and almost blinded by tears, she read through the last of these fatal letters from Blanche, though every word stabbed her sensitive bosom with pain even as a bayonet would have done; and from it she learned, but too surely and too sadly, the terms that existed between her flirting kinswoman and her intended, even before she came to Thorsgill Hall, so true it is that the treachery of the human heart is as boundless as the sea. She now remembered Stapleton's undisguised irritation at the episode of the storm, the wild night ride that ended at Stoke Priory, and a hundred other things, that seemed either harmless or inexplicable, were plain enough now 'as proofs of Holy Writ.'

She threw herself on her bed and buried her sweet pale face in the pillow, lest the heavy sobs that convulsed her white shoulders and bosom might be overheard through the frail walls of the Indian house. Suddenly she started up and stood erect, her dark eyes flashing through their tears and her hands clenched tightly.

'She cruelly deceived poor Rudkin,' she muttered; 'so was she to be trusted in future? Has she made a shipwreck of his life, as she has made of mine? Yet I in turn deceived Stapleton, whom I accepted out of mere pique, when he—an insult!—proposed to me out of mere ennui, or more probably to cloak this cruel intrigue. What an escape I have had! A little time and this traitor, whom I was schooling myself to love, would have been my husband. O my God, what a hollow world it is!'

After a time an emotion of thankfulness blended with her sorrow and disgust; then, as her indignation grew less, she became more composed, and throwing on a loose robe, she unlocked her escritoire, a handsome white-ivory box inlaid with Bombay silver

work. With hasty and trembling fingers she drew off her betrothal ring, selected from among her jewellery some gifts of Stapleton's, bestowed upon her at Calcutta and Allahabad, and making up these and the letters too in *one* packet, she addressed it to Colonel Stapleton, and sealed it with a seal which she well knew he would recognise as her family crest, a coroneted swan; and filled the while with wonder that Stapleton could be so madly careless of her erring cousin's honour—to say nothing of his own—as to make such a place as his cartridge-box the receptacle for their secrets, she placed the packet therein, and carefully closed the flap over it.

On her bed she lay sleepless in the silence of the night, thinking bitterly, at times madly, of the shame that might come upon Blanche, whom she really loved so much; on the insult to which she herself had been subjected; of the lover she had lost in me; of her regard, such as it was, bestowed on Stapleton, and by him despised! And she could not but think with pity of one who was ignorant of this terrible secret, the suave, bland, good-looking fellow, with the parted

hair, a row of teeth like ivory, mild blue eyes, and fly-away whiskers, who after sowing his wild oats while in the Guards, and spending a fortune on the danseuse of Lonsdale's letter, was content now to soldier in earnest, and to broil as a domestic Benedick in India, for the sake of the little flirt who had married him solely for his baronetcy.

Yet Stapleton might not have been at first to blame in this black business; for Blanche, she knew, by her coquetry of manner had a way of luring or insensibly compelling men to make love to her.

'How true are one's first instincts!' she said. 'In the early days of our acquaintance I mistrusted, even disliked, Stapleton; and now—I hate him!'

Fortunately she did not feel in all this that any cherished idol was shattered, or that the great passion of her life was crushed; no light had gone out of it; a flood of light had rather been cast upon it. But she did loathe herself for having trusted Stapleton, and felt that their mock engagement—more than ever a mockery now—had degraded her in her own eyes.

'Perhaps I shall get over all this in time,' she thought; 'but oh, what am I to do to save Blanche? Kind Heaven, inspire me, for the worst may be yet to come!'

Imploringly the dark eyes of the girl looked upward, beyond the ceiling where the dark punkah hung motionless and still in the hot breathless night, for doubtless the treacherous wallah was in the sepoy lines hatching mischief; but she knew that far beyond that ceiling was the blue starry sky, and that the eyes of God were on her.

'Rudkin deserted me,' she continued to mutter, 'and Blanche and Stapleton have both deceived me. In whom can I trust?'

A gulf must for ever yawn between her past and future life; and with all her hair thrown back, and with hands placed upon her throbbing temples, she tried to look calmly at the bitter empty years that were to come—years in which she must mistrust every one—the arid desert she might have to journey over alone—all alone!

She felt it alike impossible to remain in Allahabad the guest of her cousin, and to leave her to this great peril by returning

instantly, as she felt inclined to do, to her family at Calcutta; and in her gentle heart she felt no genuine indignation at Blanche, but only terror and pity for her, so loved, so petted and admired.

Her night-lamp had gone out; she was in darkness now, and she lay there praying, talking to herself, weeping with eyes wide open, and seeing, as one might in a dream, the red fire-flies flashing about outside the green closed jalousies, till the distant boom of the morning gun announced that day was at hand, and the hot and airless Indian night had passed away.

By this time she was almost in a fever with bitter thought; but she could little dream that I shared her secret, and that I too, after a sleepless night, started at the boom of the same morning gun.

When I heard of all this affair of the cartridge-box afterwards, I cursed Stapleton in my heart. Yet why and wherefore? He was vain and weak, and this brilliant but artful and winning creature had, as the phrase is, 'flung herself at him,' as she had done at me, at Sir Harry Calvert, and others

probably; so he had yielded to the snare, for doubtless 'the woman had tempted,' as long ago in Eden.

When the usual time for rising—an early hour in India—came, Henriette was unable to leave her bed, and, in short, was very feverish and seriously indisposed. With all her usual impulsive manner and display of affection, Blanche kissed her and hung about her, doing various little kind offices; but the tears which Henriette could with difficulty restrain, her coldness of manner and curt yet sad replies, her hard-set mouth and eyes, caused considerable perplexity to the little *intriguante*, who was far from guessing the cause even when Sir Harry knocked on the doorpost and said laughingly:

'Are Stapleton's pouch and belt in Miss Guise's room, Blanche?'

'Yes, Harry; how on earth came they to be here?' she replied, changing colour visibly, yet without a suspicion that anything was known.

'Oh, it seems that his new kitmutgar, a Kholee idiot, left it here last night. Stapleton requires them instantly, as he is field-officer

of the day. I shall take them—thanks,' he added, as Blanche handed out the required accoutrement. 'By-by, darling,' said Sir Harry, little knowing what he held in his hands; 'I too am going to parade—an awful bore!'

'Without kissing me once—fie, Harry!' said she, with one of her prettiest pouts, as she ran her child-like fingers through his long fair whiskers.

'And now I am off like a bird,' said the tall and good-looking ex-Guardsman, as he stooped, kissed the little sharer of his dignities, and clattered away with his sword and spurs to join his friend Stapleton.

The caresses, the condolences, even the presence of Blanche, were intolerable to her cousin, who became inspired by an intense longing to get away from her house and to return home. She became seriously indisposed, and remained secluded in her room. A week slipped away thus.

To her satisfaction she was spared the annoyance of any visits from Colonel Stapleton, who must have heard of her illness, but ignored the circumstance. He never now

came near the mansion of the Calverts, where he had been a daily visitor, and avoided even turning his horse's head in that direction if possible.

The increased weight of the appendage to his shoulder-belt had caused Stapleton to examine it, and the contents thereof—the returned presents and Blanche's letters all sealed up *together*, and addressed to him in the handwriting of Miss Guise—at once informed him that she now knew all. With her, he felt certain that if she had read all the letters—which he never doubted she must have done—the matter was past all explanation; hence he never attempted to make one; and though feeling a little flattered by the rumours of her indisposition, he never sent to her even one card of inquiry. He cursed his kitmutgar, and resolved to horsewhip him; but he disappeared just about that time, and with him all the Colonel's silver plate vanished too.

Blanche knew not what to think of his studious and continued absence; as little did she know that the Colonel had carefully committed to the flames every scrap of her

handwriting that he possessed; while to Sir Harry Calvert, though the cold conduct of Stapleton was inexplicable, he disdained to notice it, and they contented themselves with simply bowing to each other when on parade or duty. Henriette and he were supposed to have quarrelled.

'I've dangled after his wife too long perhaps; too openly, certainly,' was the reflection of the Colonel. 'Perhaps Sir Harry was not the husband for her, and she was not the wife for Sir Harry; yet they have taken each other to have and to hold, for better or worse, et cetera; so I think I'll send in my papers and get away from this.'

He did not know the nature of Henriette; thus he was not without natural alarm that, prompted by revenge and justice, she might lay bare this awkward secret, and cause a terrible *esclandre;* and well did he know that nowhere was gossip more doted on, especially by the self-righteous, than in India. Should this come to pass—

'The devil!' thought he; 'to become the property of newspapers—the *Hurkaru*, and all the other prints of India and England.'

Malice loves a shining light, even as the seemingly pious love self-glorification, while the great herd of the undiscovered go about thanking God that they are not as other men. Stapleton, whose constitutional hauteur and *insouciance* had won him many enemies, knew well how such a piece of scandal as 'a row between him and Calvert' would be enjoyed. He knew how his past history would be ransacked, and already heard the dark innuendoes of those who 'always expected something queer would happen,' the cowards who stabbed in the dark, and others who said, 'this will take his infernal pride down a peg;' but in his selfishness of spirit he never thought of *her* pride of heart and the perils of a lost position. He could abandon himself freely to a pleasant intrigue with a thorough-paced little flirt, but disliked the probable results.

For long had Stapleton partaken of Sir Harry's hospitality—his *recherché* dinners, with strange but tempting Indian dishes, his pickles hot as red cinders, his curries, green chillies, and stuffed mango nuts, his dry champagne and wonderful claret; of all till

the finger-glasses came with variegated laurel-leaves in the Ghazepore rose-water; had ridden his horses and smoked his best cigars; and, as kind people would be sure to say, *this* was his return!

All the scandalous stories he had read, heard, or scoffed at and made light of in others, came scathingly back to his memory now. Was he to become a source of mockery too?

And she—but he never thought of her, and only felt the truth of the adage, 'the trains of the devil are long, but they are sure to blow up at last.'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HOW THE SIXTH WERE 'TRUE TO THEIR SALT.'

NOTWITHSTANDING the terrors that reigned now in so many parts of India, Joe Lonsdale and Tom Prior, with Lady Calvert and other enterprising spirits, were actually organising a fancy ball to soothe the drooping spirits of the ladies at the station, especially as all seemed to be so quiet in Allahabad, and that such perfect confidence was reposed by the officers of the 6th Bengal Native Infantry and other Indian corps in their men. To this entertainment Joe proposed to go as a certain person who shall be nameless, and to that end had picturesquely provided himself with horns, a curling tail, and fiery trident tipped with glowing tinfoil; and it was enacted by the managing committee that there should be no more Queens of Scots than

three, and that any lady who came to the ball in question 'not in fancy dress would not be admitted without a certificate that she was over her fiftieth year; and no officer was to be present in uniform save the officer of the day.' By these measures they thought to ensure a fair muster of picturesque costumes.

Unfortunately for the intended festivity, it was knocked on the head by our battalion receiving a sudden route for Lucknow, taking the Indian Railway to Calpee, thence to cross the Ganges at Cawnpore, and march the rest, a distance of some thirty *coss*, or sixty miles English; and most unfortunately for ourselves—for me especially, as I was anxious to be away from Allahabad—Jack Dormer and I, as the first two officers on the rolster for duty, were left behind in charge of some convalescents with the women and children, who were unfitted for so hasty a movement.

This departure of the only European regiment from Allahabad had in the sequel a most fatal effect for us all.

Dormer and I had been made honorary

members of the mess of the 6th, as our own had departed.

On the evening of the 5th of June, dressed in an open shell-jacket and a white vest—a free-and-easy costume for the climate—and luckily having with me my sword and revolver in its case, I sauntered slowly towards the mess-bungalow, and could hear from a distance the notes of Blanche's piano, and her voice floating through the open windows on the soft and ambient air, bringing 'the old time o'er me' once again, but for a moment only; and soon the distant cadence was drowned by the drums and fifes under the mess-house verandah announcing that dinner was served.

The ghurries had clanged seven in the evening, and the unclouded sun, which had been glaring all day in his Oriental fierceness, scorching, as it were, the cantonments, defying all the coolness to be achieved by the libations of tatty-wetters, punkahs, cold tea, or iced champagne, was now sinking westward beyond the windings of the Jumna.

Opposite me at the table was seated Stapleton, with his immovable expression,

or rather conventional smile on his face while twirling his moustache. How little he knew that I held the clue to his secret thoughts; and how much his voice grated on my ear as he talked and laughed with Birch, the fort-adjutant! Laughed? Poor wretch, he little knew where three hours hence would find him!

All the most trivial events of this evening of the 5th of June are vividly impressed upon my mind.

I felt preoccupied; was it to be in my case, as in that of so many men, that a woman was to influence by good or evil—evil and falsehood in the present instance—all the future of my career? 'Adam,' says a female novelist, 'took his first lesson (in deceit) from Eve; but Eve took hers from the devil.'

I was roused from my casuistic thoughts by Dormer saying,

'Pass the wine, Rudkin, and don't go to sleep. I have lost a pot of money—always my luck—upon that deuced billiard-match of Calvert's; and after mine with Stapleton, I was just thinking of substituting German-

silver for my plate or leaving it at Peeroo Mull's, when my rascal Khoda Bux bolted with it.'

'And my buggywallah has vanished with my trap and horse,' said one of the 6th. 'Look sharp there,' he added to one of the native servants, with an adjective; 'we require fresh wine.'

'Sahib may dam him own eyes as much as he pleases,' said the servant, insolently giving the speaker's chair a push, 'but I will tank him not to dam mine.'

'Leave the room, fellow,' said the president, who was a young lieutenant.

The native grinned and withdrew immediately.

'Where the devil have all the *noukur-lague* gone?' said Dormer, looking round; and we now perceived that we were left to attend upon ourselves, and that the whole retinue of native servants had quitted the mess bungalow.

Before any one had time to reply, the scattered report of musketry was heard.

'What is that?' demanded Dormer, starting up.

'Shots!'

'Shots indeed,' exclaimed Stapleton, as two bullets whistled through the window past his head and sank into the wall beyond.

'It is a disturbance in the bazaar,' said one.

'It is not,' suggested another more correctly; 'the 6th are revolting; this is the way these scoundrels are *true to their salt!*'

This proved to be the case; we saw a tremendous commotion in their lines, along the front of which one sepoy appeared, as if engaged in a solitary game of football, with what proved to be a bleeding head, just hewn from the shoulders of a European drummer; and now, starting from the table, we all rushed to secure our swords and other arms, revolvers, and rifles.

This was exactly at half-past nine in the evening. It would appear that some stragglers, among whom was Kureem Sing, ex-subadar of the disbanded 2nd Grenadiers, had reached the cantonments about nightfall, and worked the men of the 6th, after all their promises, to frenzy by falsehoods.

The Hindoos among them were warned to beware of the Feringhee queen's insidious designs upon their sacred caste; the Mohammedans were adjured by their common faith and the memory of the Prophet. They were desired to lose no time in extirpating us all, as fresh troops were marching up-country to destroy all who refused to embrace Christianity. Many were coming by water in the river budgerees; others from Agra, drawn by those screaming, fiery, and smoking dragons, who travelled on the iron road with a swiftness surpassing the Ekkas of old.

After wavering for a time the sepoys became convinced by the exhortations of these firebrands. The Mussulmans had ever in secret a natural hatred of the Christians; but with the Hindoos caste has attained the culminating point of power beyond what it possesses in any other land, as it is incorporated with their religion, and has rendered the supposed possessors of it bigoted, fanatical, and uncompromising, as it denies the possibility of conversion, and ignores all proselytism with supreme contempt.

An indiscriminate fire of musketry was now opened on all sides, and the work of death and pillage began. Nearly all the ladies, the soldier's wives, and the children had been placed in the fort at Allahabad; but there were three or four who had left the cantonments and taken up their residence in Sir Harry Calvert's mansion, and of those who were there, Jack Dormer and I instantly thought.

'To the fort, to the fort!' was the cry on every hand. 'We have not a moment to lose.'

'I must save my cousins,' exclaimed Dormer; 'who will follow me? Rudkin?'

'Of course,' said I.

'And I,' added Stapleton, who, whatever he lacked, did not lack the true instinctive courage of an English gentleman.

As we rushed through the cantonments towards the house of Calvert a hailstorm of balls swept about us, and five officers of the 6th, together with nine young ensigns doing duty with that corps, were shot down in a few minutes, while five only made their escape to the fort. The first I saw hit was a

poor lad of sixteen. He passed me rearward, running he knew not whither; he had his hand placed over the region of his heart; there was wildness in his eyes and agony in his face.

'O mother!' he cried, in a voice like a scream; he then fell and rolled over on his back, stone dead, with his unclosed eyes staring at the—to me at that time—most hateful Indian sky.

Dormer's servant, with Dan O'Regan and a number of our convalescents, came rushing after us from the hospital on the first alarm, throwing on their accoutrements and loading and capping their rifles as they ran; and, at the head of these, we made a stand at the gates of Calvert's house, and opened a sharp fire of musketry on all who approached. Luckily all the mutineers of the 6th did not come that way, as some found employment in plundering the bungalows before firing them, and others in forcing the jail to liberate all the thieves, *dacoits*, *kindalas*, and pariahs, *shodas* and other infamous characters who were there, to the number of more than three thousand.

We had indeed not a moment to lose!

On the first sound of the firing Sir Harry had ordered out his carriage and horses to convey Blanche and her friends to the fort; but the native servants had all joined the mutineers; so while the gate was defended by O'Regan and his comrades, Dormer and I harnessed and traced the horses at the back of the mansion, where, accompanied by Miss Appleton, Blanche appeared in a piquante blue-silk hood and cashmere shawl.

How beautiful she looked in the extremity of her terror, as the sound of the musketry and the yells on all hands appalled her; for the horrors that had happened elsewhere were around us now. Her tears fell fast; but tears, like smiles, are often snares; faces are sometimes lies, and Lavater a fool.

'Thanks, thanks,' she murmured, as I half lifted her into the carriage; 'I deceived you once cruelly, Lancelot Rudkin,' she whispered, with her white hand placed on my arm.

'Yes,' said I, but quite coolly.

'You will forgive me for all that now?'

'I do; but there is another deceit for which I cannot forgive you.'

'Name it.'

'Ask your own heart.'

She grew paler than even terror had made her, and exclaimed, as I now assisted two other ladies in,

'Henriette, Henriette, why does she linger? We shall all perish if she keeps us waiting thus!'

Dormer hurried to his cousin's room, aware that she was ill in bed. But she was not there. Her couch was in disorder; the stains of bloody hands were upon the white coverlet, and the mosquito curtains were torn down. The young fellow's heart died within him.

'Henriette, Henriette!' he cried again and again; but there was no response.

She had been carried off by the native servants to perish miserably, and at that moment to look for her would be vain and ensure the destruction of all the rest. Can pen and ink portray the horror and great pity that filled his breast at that moment? He dared not tell of this to Blanche. He came rushing out, with a face as pale as a sheet of paper, and said hoarsely,

'She is dressing—away, away! I shall bring her off with me on Calvert's horse.'

O'Regan was installed as driver with his rifle slung, and he drove the carriage at frantic speed along the road towards the city, where all was yet quiet, and where an artillery officer with two pieces of cannon held the bridge of the Jumna to prevent the advance of some mutineers who were expected from Benares.

Many other fugitives were now flying towards the fort, while we, the handful of Europeans, endeavoured to cover their retreat as well as we could. What a scene it was! Delicate English ladies and the humbler wives of our soldiers, who had but one community of feeling now, wild with terror, their children clutching their skirts and hiding therein their scared little faces; fathers and husbands looking in keen misery at both, and then turning with a scowl of fierce defiance at the revolters.

'Do not straggle, do not straggle! keep together, all Europeans and Indo-Britons!' cried Sir Harry Calvert, who towered above us all in stature. The *blasé* Guardsman of

Regent Street and 'the Row' was gone now, and in his place the resolute English officer remained.

We were closely pressed and often brought to a stand by nearly a hundred sepoys and other armed natives, led by Rao Sing, by Jack's kitmutgar, Khoda Bux, and by the now frantic fakir Kalidasa Ram, whose yells and gestures of exultation were as those of a tearing lunatic now; and whose name, singular to say, was that borne by the greatest of Hindoo poets, the author of the exquisite and tender 'Sacontala,' which has been rendered into English by Sir William Jones.

During one of these compulsory stands or temporary halts, Dormer, with teeth clenched and blood-shot eyes, informed me that his cousin had been carried off.

A terrible pang wrung my heart as he said this. In the rage and sorrow that filled me I could make no reply; but raised my hands and eyes upward, framing the while some unuttered vow of vengeance.

When I thought of her extreme beauty, her sweetness of disposition and delicacy of person and nature, and of all that she had so

nearly been to me—when all that flashed upon me—I say, when I thought of her, helpless in the hands of demons such as these mutineers, my blood alternately boiled and curdled, and I could but hope—almost pray in my heart—that they had slain her and—*at once.*

Though a mere 'handful,' we more than once faced about and rushed at the rascals with the charged bayonet, a movement which, notwithstanding their excess in numbers, never failed to scatter them. Carrying a large brass lotah filled with water thickly impregnated with *bhang*, the fakir Kalidasa Ram—escaping the balls of our best marksmen as if he had a charmed life—passed among them, giving each man a mouthful.

The effect of this drug is to madden rather than intoxicate, and its results soon became apparent, as it transformed them into literal demons, with all the energy of insanity and the recklessness of the drunkard. The secret and long-pent-up hatred of generations and of race, caste, creed, and colour were there. Their eyeballs gleamed and blazed; their white teeth glistened as they ground them;

they hissed and hooted, yelled and shrieked in the madness of their rancour and loathing, the Mohammedan vieing with the Hindoo, the Bheel, the Kholee, and the Khond, who worship the cattle goddess.

And to think that Henriette Guise was in the hands of such human demons! . . .

'*Chulo—chulo! Deen—deen!*' ('Come on! Faith—faith!') cried the subadar Kureem Sing, brandishing a tulwar. 'Death to the Koompanie Bahadour, who seeks to defile us in this world and destroy us in that to come by making us Christians! Death to the Feringhees and their queen, who greases the cartridges with the fat of the sacred cow!'

In a sudden rush made by a few whom these cries inspired with fresh courage, Sir Harry Calvert was cut off from us and surrounded by them, but displayed the greatest valour. Sword in hand he charged three or four of them, escaping their bullets, as luckily the *bhang* had the effect of making them shoot wildly. He was met, however, by the bayonets of two and the tulwar of Kureem Sing, whose left arm was protected by a round shield. His horse unluckily proved

restive and unmanageable, and ere he could either strike or parry, a bayonet pierced his thigh and the blood spouted forth.

Wheeling his horse round, by a back-handed blow he clove the skull of one antagonist, and closing in with another, whose shako had fallen off, he seized him by the hair of the head and thrust his sword into his throat, but was now stabbed in the arm, and would inevitably have been cut down and destroyed but for me.

When I saw his deadly peril I thought of Blanche, and forgot her errors. This tall, empty-headed, yet gentlemanly 'Rawdon Crawley' of a husband loved her well, and I thought that I would rescue him if I could for her sake, or rather for the memory of the vanished past; hoping at the same time that some sepoy bullet might cut short Stapleton's career. Like many others of our genuine Britons, Sir Harry was one who could box, swim like a duck, fence to perfection, defend a wicket gallantly, a prime bowler, clear ever so many five-barred gates or ride a hurdle race; and for such a stately fellow to be beset thus by 'those beastly niggers,

those infernal Pandies,' as he freely called them, was an intolerable thing, so he defended himself like a paladin, till his sword-arm was wounded and the weapon fell from his hand.

Followed by four of ours, poor fellows who had quitted the sick-ward in the hospital to fight for their lives, I made a rush at Kureem Sing and those who adhered to him, and driving them back, rescued Sir Harry, whose horse was led off by the bridle, and who had no time to thank me; for I was now surrounded in turn, and the three feeble fellows who remained with me were speedily beaten down and bayoneted.

'Save Captain Rudkin!' I heard a voice cry amid the horrid hurly-burly and darkness, for night was fairly in now; and a fine old staff-officer spurred his horse towards me alone, for the attempt to rescue me seemed too desperate, and in a minute or less all was over with us both. There was a wild yell, a rough shout ending in a shriek, and the old colonel was down under his horse's hoofs, his grey hairs were trampled in blood and dust, yet he struggled manfully with all his

strength till three bayonets pinned him to the earth in death.

Far away in a drawing-room in happy England a lady is sitting under a glittering lustre, making a doll's frock for a little golden-haired girl that is nestling by her knee, and they are talking of papa—'of dear papa,' whom they are soon to see—in blessed unconsciousness that he is lying on his face, pierced by three bayonet wounds, a ball through his head, and his brains oozing from the orifice.

Never more will poor papa kiss his little one or his 'dear old woman,' as he was wont to call the girl-wife who knew not that she was a widow.

In this conflict no man asked for mercy, for none expected it. Resolved to sell my life as dearly as I could, I rushed again upon Kureem Sing, who seemed the chief leader among our pursuers in that quarter. My sword—one of those rubbishy regulation weapons furnished by our army-clothiers—broke on his round shield; but passing the point of his weapon, I closed in, and, grasping his right wrist, dashed my hilt with the

remaining fragment of the blade into his mouth with all the strength of arm I could exert, demolishing his entire front stock of grinders; but at that moment I was struck down by the butt end of a musket, which was applied with sufficient force fairly under the left ear to render me senseless for a time.

When I recovered the moon was shining; all around me were dead, and the shouts and shots sounded faint and distant now. Giddy and weak, I felt unable to walk, and, to seek concealment, crawled on my hands and knees, and hid among some tall, green, feathery jungle-grass that grew by the wayside, intending to remain there until I could gather sufficient strength and coherence of ideas to reach the fort at Allahabad. By this time the cantonments, Calvert's handsome house, and all the other buildings in the vicinity, were in flames of every hue and colour, varying according to the nature of the fuel that fed them. Skyward they rose in dancing and waving pinnacles, while vast volumes of sombre smoke rolled away sullenly on the night wind. I could hear the crack-

ling and roar of the conflagration, mingling with the incessant and distant shouts of the mutineers, '*Muro Feringheeun Ko!*' ('Kill the Europeans!')

Anon these shouts seemed to come nearer and nearer the place where I lay. Then came the sound of chains and the rumble of artillery. The shouts soon rose into frantic yells, and two field-pieces came past, with the drag-ropes manned by sepoys, and followed by a naked rabble of the lowest wretches who frequent the market-place, and usually hang about all cantonments. Past me they swept at a run, like yelling fiends, and in spite of my peril a loud cry of despair escaped me when I saw a European woman, with her black hair dishevelled, her dress torn to ribbons and grimed with dust and mud, bound helplessly by the hands and feet to the trail of one of those guns; and this most helpless creature was—Henriette Guise!

Mechanically I struggled up, as if I would seek to follow her; but again the light went out of my eyes, a deathlike sickness of the heart came over me, and I fell senseless on my face amid the now dewy jungle-grass.

It would appear, as I have stated, that two guns, under an artillery officer, had been placed at the pontoon-bridge of the Jumna, to guard the passage of the river there. Two companies of the infamous 6th Bengal Native Infantry were also posted at the same place, for the same purpose, while one hundred and fifty sowars, or troopers of the 3rd Oude Irregulars held a garden which lay between the fort and the bridge.

When firing was heard in the cantonments, the two companies of the 6th seized the cannon and fired them at the artillery officer, who galloped to the garden for the Oude cavalry, while the officers of the 6th were hustled, insulted, and had several harmless shots fired at them; but they were allowed to escape into the fort, which some time subsequently Sir Harry, with the remains of our party, reached in safety, with Blanche and many others, but, unfortunately, not all the European women in Allahabad.

Intent on recapturing the guns, Lieutenant Alexander, a gallant young fellow, came galloping out of the garden with as many troopers as would follow him; but as he

dashed along the road a sepoy, from a place of concealment, shot him through the heart.

Certain now that the game was over at the bridge, the artillery officer fled to the fort, and put the commandant there on his guard. The garrison consisted of seventy European invalids from Chunar, in the Mirzapore district; the Ferozepore battalion of Sikhs, four hundred strong; eighty sepoys of the treacherous 6th, who held the main gate; and a company of volunteers, formed of all the European civilians, clerks and so forth, in the city; and brave fellows they all proved themselves in the end.

The first step of the officer commanding was to disarm and expel the detachment of the 6th, whose rifles were all found to be loaded, capped, and ready for immediate mischief.

The mutineers, on being joined by the 3000 malefactors whom they let loose from the jail, now proceeded to the general work of massacre and destruction, torture and pillage, with hearty good will. Captain Birch, the garrison adjutant, and Lieutenant Innes, the executive engineer, being found in

the streets, were both shot down; and one officer of the 6th was actually crucified to the ground with four bayonets, and then had a fire kindled above his body; but these and many other horrors are matters of history now.

Three officers escaped, perfectly nude, into the fort by swimming the Ganges; the fourth, who made a similar attempt, was Stapleton, and most miserable was his fate. In his haste he sprang in at a place where, among the tall reeds, some alligators, eighteen or twenty feet in length, were lurking for prey; for to these ferocious and formidable brutes man and beast are equally acceptable, and when hungry they are said to swallow even stones and other substances incapable of nourishment, simply to prevent contraction of the intestines consequent on lack of food.

When the luckless Colonel took a header, and sprang in, he did not see that the enormous flat head of one of these monsters was close to him among the ooze, where they left their eggs to be hatched by the sun; and ere his shuddering companions — who

were now safe on the other side—could speak, they saw him rise with a shrill cry and his arms tossed upward from the water, and then disappear in a vortex, which the moonlight plainly showed to be crimsoned with his blood.

Attracted by this, others of these voracious monsters swam towards the spot, where an evident contention took place for the fragments of his body: and such was the unthought-of end of Jocelyn Stapleton!

Meanwhile terrible was the work that was taking place in the city. Many of the British residents, who on the first fear of a rising took refuge in the fort, had now returned to their dwellings, trusting to assurances of the 6th Regiment, and all these were barbarously mutilated before death ended their miseries. One entire family, consisting of three generations, they burned alive. In other instances, the nose, ears, lips, fingers, and toes were chopped off, and then the limbs were hacked, till the shrieking victim perished of loss of blood.

Poor little innocent children were bayoneted or brained against the stones before

the eyes of their shrieking parents, who perished next. Upwards of fifty Europeans were thus destroyed in the night. Those fiends did not permit even their own countrymen to escape, for the wealthy banker, Peeroo Mull, had his house sacked, and the shops of many opulent natives were destroyed. 'The destruction in the European bungalows was wanton and insensate,' says the editor of the *Delhi Gazette;* 'the furniture was broken into fragments, the glass and crockery utterly smashed, and even the canvas of the punkahs cut into shreds.'

And now, before recurring to my own miseries and adventures, I shall detail those of some of my friends in the fort of Allahabad, which I was never fated to reach.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BLANCHE REFLECTS.

The streets of Allahabad are about half a mile distant from the fort, or were so then; and during the four or five days subsequent to our friends finding shelter in it, wild mobs of mutineers and rioters were seen rushing to and fro, plundering, burning, and murdering any stray European or Indo-Briton whose place of hiding they discovered. By day under a hot blazing sun, and by night under the baleful dew, the little garrison manned the ramparts, throwing shot and shell, grape and canister, from the guns and mortars, to scatter and destroy those Indian devils wherever they were to be seen and whenever they came within range.

The fort held by our people was once unequalled in beauty, but has gained in strength what it has lost in external appear-

ance. Occupying a strong position at the confluence of the Ganges and Jumna, it is of great extent, and is defended towards the rivers by bastioned walls of polished red freestone. In the inner side the fortifications are of very regular construction and of great strength, though the interior is finely planted with trees.

Many of the edifices within it are ancient; among the latter erections is an arched and subterranean excavation, alleged to be part of an underground passage to Delhi, which is only three hundred and ninety miles distant! Within the principal gateway, which is Grecian in design, is a pillar composed of a single stone, forty-two feet high, about three feet in diameter, covered with Sanscrit inscriptions, and said to be the pestle with which Bheem Sing, a Hindoo giant, was wont to pound his *bhang* in a mortar.

It was beneath the walls of this fort that, until the days of the Emperor Shah Jehan, the Hindoos were wont to indulge in the pleasant luxury of cutting off their *own* heads, as an offering to the holy Ganges.

The Europeans now dared not venture to make a sortie from the fort lest in their absence their Sikh compatriots might mutiny, and then their last place of shelter would be lost. The Sikhs seemed to have but little sympathy, however, with the mutineers, though their religious principles were deduced from those of Nanik, a Hindoo philosopher or deist, whose chief doctrine was universal toleration; so the Sikh soldiers in the fort of Allahabad behaved nobly, and were literally 'true to their salt.'

The volunteers, who were now compelled to fight for their lives and the lives of those who were dear to them, were told off in three small companies, and on the morning of the 7th the little garrison was strengthened by the sudden and welcome arrival of fifty of the 1st Madras Fusiliers (now H.M. 102nd Foot), whom Neill—the energetic and the provident—had sent on from Benares. As soon as tidings of the mutiny at Allahabad reached him he came on himself with these men, getting over seventy miles in two nights, relays of natives being compelled to push the cars which contained them.

On the day after his arrival, the whole of the revolted 6th marched from the station under a Mohammedan priest, who unfurled the green flag of the Prophet, intrenched them in a strong position, and proclaimed himself vicegerent of the King of Delhi.

Against this man Colonel Neill marched from the fort of Allahabad with 200 bayonets, besides artillery and cavalry; he assailed the post with vigour; it was stormed, and the rebels were routed in terrible confusion. On this occasion Jack Dormer won the Victoria Cross, and the Sikhs, under Captain Brayser, displayed their usual courage and zeal alike in cutting up the Mohammedans, who were led by the subadar Kureem Sing, and the Hindoos, at the head of whom was the half mad and wholly knavish Kalidasa Ram, who was winged by Dan O'Regan most successfully.

The troops were then encamped outside the fort, within which they had now collected for protection fully two hundred European women, whose fears and privations were terrible. The heat was intolerable; cases of

sunstroke were frequent, and those who had duties to perform wore wetted cloths about their heads. The dreadful scourge of cholera now came upon them, and the fort re-echoed with the shrieks of those who perished. Seventy fighting men died of it, and in one night twenty of these were consigned to one huge and uncouth grave. Food became alarmingly scarce. Any native who sold our people even a handful of rice was mutilated by the others, and in one instance a baker who had done so was found with his nose slit and his hands cut off.

Two ladies who were ill in the common hospital died of sheer fright; one of these was Blanche's friend, Miss Appleton; and meanwhile, amid all this terrible scene of misery and suffering, where was the once gay and giddy Blanche Bingham?

For days and nights, with her soiled and tattered attire unchanged, her beautiful hair dishevelled, matted, and in disorder, her vanity, her foibles, *espièglerie* of manner all gone, she had watched beside the wretched charpoy whereon, in a huge and desolate room in the barracks within the fort, her

husband lay wounded, feverish, and hovering between time and eternity.

Born and bred amid luxury, accustomed from earliest infancy to have every whim and fancy gratified to the full, and to the enjoyment of everything that wealth could procure, they were now reduced to the level of vagrants or gipsies, so far as mere comfort was concerned, and, moreover, were momentarily menaced by disease and sudden death; for within the fort of Allahabad, as in many other beleaguered places at that time in India, there were many ways of dying.

All privacy was destroyed, and, irrespective of rank, many were compelled to huddle together in one room; and this sudden change proved the more severe for ladies and gentlemen, accustomed to all the comforts and luxuries of Indian life, to be reduced to their own resources by the desertion of all servants, to have to wait upon themselves, to be suddenly deprived of all conveniences and attendance, and to be absolutely without a change of clothing.

Blanche daily attended to the dressing of her husband's wounds, to fanning his face,

and getting him cooling drinks when such could be procured; and the big, burly, good-natured Englishman saw with pity and anxiety how her soft face became lined and wan, her eyes inflamed and sunken, and gathering something of a wild expression from the scenes and sights around her.

'Take courage, my dear little girl,' said he, caressing her hair with his large white handsome hand; 'in time we'll get over all these infernal troubles, which I suppose are an unlooked-for portion of the legacy we inherit from old father Adam, for his little mistake in Eden.'

To Blanche, her past life seemed to have been blotted out or to have been like a dream, and as unreal as the present was unnatural. How long was this nightmare to last? How did it begin? How and when was it to end? All that was occurring under her eye, even in the same apartment, was grievous, distressing, and to her of course consisting of most unusual episodes.

In one corner lay a poor lady in silent misery, grovelling on the bare floor. She had seen her husband hacked to pieces before

her eyes, after his throat had been slowly but partially cut with a pane of glass; for most ingenious in their modes of torture were these Oriental savages. In another was a poor bereaved mother mourning a missing—too probably a slaughtered—child. She had a hundred little anecdotes to tell, tearfully and despairingly, of her lost pet—her little angel. She was *so* different from all other children; she had so many pretty peculiarities, never seen before in one so young and tender; and now—now all that remained of her was a lock of flaxen hair, a broken doll, and an empty frock.

It was sad, sad—the child whose chubby hands should never more caress her face, and whose soft dimples she could never again 'devour with kisses.'

'Dead—dead! Oh no, doctor—*not* dead!' she heard another cry despairingly, as she cast herself on the prostrate and yet warm form of the handsome young husband, to whom she had been wedded but a month before, and whose breast a ball had pierced that morning. 'Oh, do not tell me that he is dead!' she continued, while a mist

gathered before her eyes, and all around her seemed a dream.

'May the heavens be your bed, poor thing!' said Dan O'Regan, as, by the doctor's orders, he laid his kind yet strong hands upon her, and carried her to another apartment, and covered up the distorted dead face lest its memory might blast her sight and haunt her mind for ever.

These and a thousand other episodes of misery were caused by those wretched mutineers; and Blanche could remember that, on the morning of the very day they revolted, the chaplain had been preaching 'Peace on earth and good-will towards men,' when he might have taken his text from the third chapter of Joel, 'Beat your ploughshares into swords and your pruning-hooks into spears; let the weak say, I am strong.'

I was supposed to be destroyed, and Henriette too, for Sir Harry told how I had rescued him, and in doing so had imperilled my life; and Blanche listened to him gravely and sadly. Had she any remorse for all the mischief she had wrought us? I doubt it much, and fear that if safe she might have

played the same game again; but now—*now*, menaced with danger and death in so many ways, she began to reflect; and she saw in the far distance, as it were, a flaxen-haired little girl, with beaming eyes and innocent face, guileless, and unsuspecting evil, and thinking not of it: it was herself as she had left her mother's arms, and when she first came, a tiny girl, to white-haired uncle Dormer at Thorsgill Hall.

How different she was now! And in fancy she saw the hall as it seemed in those days—its red walls, towers, and oriels shining in the sun, its waving woods and green meadows, the gardens and the terrace, with the old ruin behind so full of gloom and awe—and felt that never more might she be in those happy days of childhood and innocence, or see those scenes again.

Amid her present misery, she looked back with remorse to the folly and duplicity of her past though brief life. Oh, was the game worth the candle? If spared, how different she thought she should be. She might have perished, as poor Henriette and so many more had done. Her mad wild love for Sta-

pleton seemed to have passed away, and she could but shudder when she thought of his awful and unusual end. The glamour by which her fancy had surrounded him was all dispelled, and when viewed dispassionately, his many faults came prominently forward; she saw in him only the *blasé* and treacherous man of the world, and began to consider that she had made a great escape.

And her husband was lying there on that wretched charpoy, feeble as a child, doubly wounded, faint and feverish. She shuddered amid her own thoughts as she caressed him, for the once strong man was now as weak as a child.

'Oh, Harry darling, for sweet Brighton once again!' she murmured in his ear as she fanned his flushed face; 'Brighton, with the breezy pier and the band, the green fields, the sunny terraced houses, the white cliffs, the cool waves rolling on the beach, and the fresh odour of the seaweed! How different is the heat of this most dreadful Allahabad!'

'Anywhere but here, little woman,' he sighed; 'anywhere out of this hot breathless place of disease and death!'

The poor fellow was grateful for the unwonted tenderness and attention of his flirting little wife, and added, with earnest and affectionate manner,

'My poor Blanche, I wish to heaven you were safe beyond the Calcutta ditch, and you shall go with the first party that leaves this for down-country.'

'But not without *you*, Harry. You surely wish me to be with you?' she asked with clasped hands.

'Not here—not here, certainly.'

'There is no one whose duty and desire it should be to be by your side but poor Blanche's. Do say that you will keep me with you.'

She tried to get up one of her old playful smiles with a sore, sore heart, but as she gazed on the pale face and heavy eyelids of her patient, it died away.

'And Henriette, my poor Henriette!' she would mutter to herself. Like me, she had long since given her over for dead, and could but pray for her, and hope that her body, once so fair and sweet and tender, had found some fitting grave at least in the land of her destroyers.

So passed the days in the fort of Allahabad, and as her husband's wounds and health progressed favourably, and fresh mutinies were occurring at Futtehpore and Fyzabad, they, with some others, thought of obtaining conveyances with a guard of Europeans under Jack Dormer, and making their way to Lucknow, where our battalion was in garrison and Sir Henry Lawrence commanded; and this they ultimately achieved in safety, though some of their companions perished of sunstroke by the way.

As a European servant, they took with them my man O'Regan, who proved to them invaluable on the journey and when there.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE SEVEN DACOITS.

The dawn was at hand, when stiff, cold, drenched with dew, sick at heart, giddy in the head, and sorely athirst, with an intense dull pain under the left ear where the mutineer had struck me down, I staggered up, and became conscious of all that had passed overnight. A cloud of smoke shrouded the entire locality of the cantonments, and amid it I could hear voices, cries, and strange noises, showing that the work of destruction and tumult still went on there, though I doubted not that every European who had not escaped must by this time have perished.

The recollection of Henriette Guise as I had last seen her came instantly upon me; Henriette, bound like the Andromeda of the classic fable, and helplessly exposed, not as

she was to one monster, but a multitude of them. Helpless as a Christian martyr in the Coliseum at Rome.

Infuriated by the cruelty and treachery of the natives, my heart became full of merciless and savage thoughts; I brooded only on destruction and revenge, for true it is that all the passions of the wildest savage may at times, and under certain impulses, be found in the breast of the most civilised European. In spite of all that preachers urge, one is tempted to think that we have our hell—our purgatory—or whatever it may be, on earth. 'Hell is not here or there,' some one has written; 'in the nether regions, or in the darkness, or the valley of Tophet. It is in the hearts of those who turn the angels of compassion and patience out of doors, and give themselves over to the fiends of furious desire and bitter anger.'

The longing I had to destroy some of those who had slain so many innocent people was fated to be terribly gratified before long.

In India, black darkness always precedes the dawn; there is no gradual twilight

stealing in with its tints and shadows, no grey daybreak; and while that blackness lasts we can hear the shrill screams of the odious jackal, as he luxuriates till the last moment on the carrion—perchance a dead corpse—that lies in the nearest nullah.

As the sunlight came flashing in, the glossy leaves of the peepul-trees shone and glittered above me, for the long jungle grass among which I had hidden overnight was on the skirts of a tope, or thicket. I had lost alike my sword and revolver; both had been taken, when or by whom I knew not.

I had but two thoughts: to be armed, and to make my way to the fort of Allahabad; but without weapons of some kind I feared my object would never be accomplished. Looking sharply and keenly about me in all directions, I saw that no one appeared to be moving near me; that I was perfectly alone and free to pursue the way that led to the fort; but in doing so I had unfortunately to pass the place where we had made the temporary stand, and where I had rescued Calvert so fatally for myself.

Several dead bodies were lying there

among the grass; six of them that were European were horribly mutilated, and in three instances headless. The corpse of a sepoy of the 6th lay across his Minié rifle, of which I hastened to possess myself. I then tossed the dead wretch over on his back, and taking his pouch with its ammunition—the famous greased cartridges—I threw the belt over my left shoulder, and, inspired with fresh courage, struck at once into the high-road, carefully loading and capping as I proceeded, and in total ignorance that the fort was at that very time beleaguered by the mutineers, who were also rioting amid rapine and outrage in the city.

What machines we had been in Allahabad, I reflected with a sigh. When not for duty, after parade, we dozed in the verandah, smoked cheroots in our shirt-sleeves, studied the thermometer, the Army List, *Allen's Indian Mail*, or the last English paper, lounged in the mess-bungalow; dinner over, it was billiards, a little loo—not always 'mild play'—devilled bones, with iced brandy-pawnee, and then to bed, to sleep if the mosquitoes would permit it; but

now, by Jove, we had all a change with a vengeance!

I had not proceeded a hundred yards between some fields of wheat and barley, when I heard a musket discharged on my right, and a half-spent bullet rolled along the dusty road past me. A distant shout followed, and I perceived seven natives, armed with knives and matchlocks, running through the grain towards me. One of them carried a European head in a *bhooza*-bag, or receptacle for chopped straw. 'Whose head might it have been?' thought I.

As the odds were against me, discretion was the better part of valour here; so there was nothing for it but to take to my heels; and with my heart burning with just indignation and rage, I ran with a speed I had never exerted in the cricket-field, and quitting the high-road, dashed into a thicket, followed by this hostile party, all of whom had but one object in pursuit—to take my life, after no doubt subjecting me to prolonged and exquisite torture; for these wretches loved to study and to play with

human agony to the last breath. I was soon beyond range of their matchlock balls; but they were more than *within* the range of my Minié rifle.

Facing about at six hundred yards' distance, and trusting to the skill I had won at Hythe and Tilbury, I levelled the barrel over the branch of a tree and picked off the nearest rascal, he who carried the human head. I saw him go down with his heels up, as he fell with a shriek, and again I resumed my flight, reloading as I went.

The effects of the blow from the musket-butt I had received over-night now became apparent. I grew giddy while running through the long jungle grass and luxuriant undergrowth. I staggered in my pace, and more than once stumbled heavily and painfully against the stems of the trees. I then found that the six dacoits, or thieves—for such I supposed them to be—lithe, light, active, and perfectly nude—all save the cummerbunds that girt their brown and sinewy forms—were rapidly gaining upon me; and I knew but too well what my fate would be if maimed by a chance bullet, and

more than one of these began to strike the trees around me, lopping off branches and whitening the bark.

Halting again and facing about, at a place which the natives deemed consecrated—a little cleared spot, in the centre of which was a slab of stone, whereon were rudely sculptured the figure of a mounted man holding forth his hand to that of a woman on foot—for there in past times a suttee, or widow-burning, had taken place—I fired another shot at three hundred yards; and as two of my pursuers were in a line, my ball finished off both; and this summary mode of procedure rather cooled the ardour of the remaining four, who now paused for a time and uttered revengeful yells, and as they all did so in unison, I conceived it to be a signal for succour.

The thicket there was literally alive with wild monkeys, which seemed to become all the wilder when I fired the musket, as they scampered like evil spirits from tree to tree, grinned at me, mocked, jabbered, and in many instances swung downward from the branches by their tails.

Though the dacoits seemed inclined to discontinue the pursuit, they still fired at me; so, after hastening to get beyond their range, I opened upon them again. I was now sensible of one of the evils attendant on much smoking. I had not enjoyed a cheroot for many hours, and the nervous consequence of the sudden deprivation made me dread the accuracy of my aim, especially when my ammunition was so scarce, for I had but a cartridge or two left. Scarcely daring to breathe, I fired, and a fourth robber bounded upward and fell heavily on his face, for doubtless I had shot him through the brain.

The memory of all I had seen and undergone last night—of the poor victim bound to the gun-carriage — was too fresh not to inspire me with a very lust for vengeance and destruction. I missed a couple of shots, but in a minute or less had knocked over a fifth by a ball through one of his thighs. On this the remaining two fairly turned and fled. It was now my turn to pursue; and intent on revenge and punishment, I twice dropped firmly down on my right knee, and with my

left elbow planted on the left knee, taking sure and stedfast aim, shot both the rascals through the back, with as little compunction as if they had been jackals—with as little certainly as they would have felt in slaughtering me, one who had never wronged them. The black head disappeared in each instance, and a pair of bare feet, beating the air instead, showed that I had not fired in vain.

I had disposed of the whole seven.

I drew a long sigh of relief, and leaned against a tree to consider what was to be done now. I was totally without food, or the means of procuring it. Some of those fellows might perhaps have bread, fruit, or chupatties in a wallet; but fearing that one of them might only be severely wounded, or shamming dead, and shoot me if I drew near, I did not think it prudent to return and overhaul them. I once more began to penetrate into the wood, not without remembering unpleasantly that in Bengal there were other perils to encounter than armed natives, in the form of wild boars, tigers, wolves, and panthers.

On reflection, I conceived that, as the

whole country was now up in revolt, and every black man's hand was lifted against the Europeans, any attempt to reach Allahabad was vain by day, and that I must wait till nightfall, and then endeavour to make my way thither in the friendly darkness.

No man knows what he can do till he tries; and thus encouraged by my recent skirmish, victory, and escape, I was not without hope of ultimately making my way to the fort, and thanked my stars that my dark-green rifle-jacket made me by day less conspicuous in the forest than I should have been if clad in the scarlet of the Line; but my European face there was no disguising, unless by untwisting my last cartridge and mixing the powder with water as a dye; but around me there was no water to be seen.

I was oppressed by intense thirst, consequent on the exciting and harassing events of the past night and morning and the barbarous slaughter of so many friends, and so toiled on amid the jungle in search of a nullah where a runnel might be. Suddenly I found the wood becoming more open, the trees scattered and farther apart, and I

saw a portion of the roadway, which I recognised as being that which led directly to the fort; but the sights I came upon by the way — two Europeans dead, partially stripped, and minus noses and ears; and a little farther on, the body of a fair-skinned woman, though an Indo-Briton, bound to a tree by a tent rope—drove me back to the shelter of the friendly wood; and again I toiled on in search of water, oppressed by the fast-growing heat of the morning, for though the trees were lofty, the tope was far from cool, and even there the fiery sun peeled the skin off my ears and cheekbones; I could feel the burning wind—hot as the death-blast of Bundelcund—and was in terror of a sunstroke, and hence of losing my reason.

I now remembered that when on a hog-spearing expedition with Joe Lonsdale, poor Captain Birch, and some others, I had seen in this same wood a rock-hewn temple, called in Sanscrit the 'keylas,' or paradise, an old and totally deserted place, but in which there was a koond, or cistern, that was always full of pure water; and judging

from the position of the sun the direction in which it must lie, I proceeded at once in search of it, little foreseeing the perilous trap it was to prove for me.

A sudden and steep ascent in the ground soon informed me that I was near it. I trod on confidently after coming upon the traces of an ancient path, now nearly hidden by the luxuriant undergrowth, and ere long the grotesque peristyle of the temple rose before me, with the dark recess that yawned behind it—the gloomy interior of the place.

Hewn out of the solid rock, nine gigantic caryatides, or figures half human and wholly monstrous in design, supported on their heads the cornice of the edifice, the black depths of which receded into the bowels of the sloping hill beyond. Excavated as a place of worship, it had, however, long been abandoned by the Brahmins, who told the most absurd legends and stories of its antiquity; and hence an undergrowth of jungle and luxuriant weeds—thick as the leafy labyrinth that surrounded the palace of the Sleeping Beauty, and nearly as impenetrable—grew around it now.

With great difficulty I found my way through a network of wild vines, giant yellow gourds, enormous leaves, and prickly brambles, and went straight to the sacred koond, or marble cistern—a miracle of mysterious carving—which was filled with water, that flowed from the mouth of a sculptured cow, and which stood before a grotesque and towering monstrosity in red stone, supposed to represent the sacred bull Nundee. I had no cup or drinking vessel, but in the cool, clear, delicious, and refreshing water I dipped my whole face and hands, and drank as those alone can do who are so sorely athirst as I was then. I was now about to withdraw, when the draught of pellucid water proved so alluring—more than ever had been the most sparkling iced Moselle or Clicquot—that I returned and drank again, and thought regretfully that I was without a canteen or other vessel to fill with it.

As this rock-hewn temple—like those of Elephanta, Ellora, and many others throughout India—was quite forsaken by the Hindoo priests, and, as being now the alleged abode

of a ghoul and the scene of many unholy rites and spectral appearances, was shunned by people of all creeds, it occurred to me that I could not find a safer shelter for a time; and as its interior was delightfully cool, I climbed up into a species of niche or recess in the rock-hewn wall—a wall formed out of a mass coeval with the world—and lay down to reflect on my whole situation and the chances of my ever getting to Calcutta if this wild work went on, as there was every prospect of this terrible contagion spreading over the whole peninsula.

I looked sadly back to the time when I was last in that quaint temple with Joe Lonsdale, who made its echoes ring to his favourite song, 'When we're far from the lips of those that we love,' etc., and how our companions laughed at his strange comments on the, to him, incomprehensible sculptures which covered the walls; but which were in fact the poetical history of Rama, famous for his warlike exploits, who conquered the King of Ceylon, a terrible giant who had carried off his queen and kept her prisoner in a castle. This castle Rama stormed, and slew the

giant, in commemoration of which the Hindoos hold a great festival every year, and so highly do they venerate his character, that it is their custom in saluting each other to repeat the name of Rama; but in this temple the carvings had all been defaced and blackened by order of Aurungzebe, to show his contempt for the religion of the Hindoos.

Save the voice of a bulbul, which sang long on the spray of a bush in the peristyle, all was still as death there. The notes were beautifully sweet and plaintive, but the song was short and never varied. After it ceased the silence of the place was intense and oppressive. Within the temple there was not, as in the jungly wood around it, the loud hum of the insect life that pervaded every leaf and flower. Of all the sufferings, deaths, and outrages I had seen yesterday—which now seemed an age ago—one alone haunted me beyond all the others, one was ever present, goading me to madness as I imagined all its details—Henriette bound to the gun-carriage. Ill as I know she was, I hoped at times that terror might have killed

her, terror of a situation so awful, and so have ended all her sorrows.

'There are some crimes,' says a writer on the revolt in Rajpootana, 'that have the stamp of greatness in them, for the authors or perpetrators of which we may have a feeling akin to respect; but there are others which excite only our contempt and disgust for their meanness as well as guilt, and it is in crimes of this kind that the Indian mutiny abounded.'

Weary with over-tension of the nervous system, and feeling at times half stunned from the blow of the musket-butt, I wished to sleep and bury all thought; but could not, dared not sleep—though I fell into a kind of waking doze amid which the sense of peril and sorrow was ever present.

From this uneasy kind of slumber, just as evening was closing, I was roused by something stirring near the cistern below me, and lo! there were two hyenas, a male and female, quietly taking a draught at it; after which they lay down in a corner, no doubt their accustomed lair, and proceeded to gnaw certain dry bones of a suspiciously human

appearance that were among the grass, an occupation which suggested unpleasantly that mine would prove to them a much more acceptable repast.

CHAPTER XL.

THE VILLAGE OF THE DEVIL-WORSHIPPERS.

My unwelcome visitors were of that striped species peculiar to India and Africa. All unaware that the hyena was such a coward in daylight, and was valiant only in the dark, when, if undiscovered, these two might furiously spring up and reach me, I lay still, scarcely daring to breathe, and intent only on creeping back, if I could do so unnoticed, a little way out of their sight.

This was no doubt their den, for, as Buffon tells us, the hyena is a solitary creature, and makes its lair in the caverns of mountains, in the clefts of rocks, or holes burrowed for itself in the earth. I had but one charge left; fortunately it was in the rifle, and I now regretted that in my haste I had not provided myself with the dead sepoy's bayonet.

I felt in a serious dilemma, for if I shot

one, the other might spring upon me; if I missed my aim, which at a distance so short was barely possible, or if the cap snapped, I might be assailed by both.

Some large dry leaves that lay in the recess—drifted there probably by the wind—rustled as I moved, and then both these terrible animals raised their heads from the back of the koond and simultaneously looked at me. I felt my ears tingle at the moment, and something like cold water traverse my spine. I had never flinched before lead or steel; but the teeth and claws of two wild monsters such as these were perils of a very different kind. They looked at me steadily and showed their tusks like a dog snarling, their shaggy brownish-grey manes beginning to bristle the while, as I thought preparatory to making a spring, and I already seemed to feel by anticipation their ravenous jaws fastening on my throat; so now I cocked the rifle.

If ever the hyena laughs, it is said to do so when the intentions of mankind are baffled by its wiles; and its laugh is an old proverb, as we may find in Webster's *Duchess*

of Malfi and *As you like it;* and now each of those two, that had me trapped as it were, and at their mercy, uttered strange sounds, like the sobbing of a man combined with the lowing of a calf.

I aimed steadily at the male and softly pulled the trigger. The sharp report of the rifle rang with a hundred reverberations that seemed to rumble and echo in remote and distant recesses, leading me to suppose that the excavations of the keylas went far into the heart of the hill; and when the smoke cleared away, I saw the larger or male hyena on his back, pawing the air and writhing in the agonies of death, the ball having passed through his head and formed a silver-like star on the side of the cistern beyond, while his partner had vanished into the wood.

I now resolved to quit the place, lest the report of the rifle might bring hither certain human hyenas, whom, in my solitary and now defenceless state, I had no desire to encounter; so again I issued into the tope, when darkness was beginning to deepen about the undergrowth and stems of the trees, even while the last flush of the set

sun yet lingered redly on their topmost branches.

In a few minutes all would be involved in gloom, and night would favour me in my attempt to reach the fort. Marking well the point at which the sun had gone down, I made my way through the feathery jungle grass and matted creepers till I struck upon the roadway once more, and proceeded in that direction which I conceived to be the right one, between fields of tall Indian corn; but a sudden turn of the path brought me almost face to face with a man—too evidently a sepoy sentinel.

Shrinking down instantly, I crept slowly and stealthily into the grain for concealment. A sentinel being posted thus led me naturally to infer that an armed force under a native officer must be close at hand, and after creeping a little way farther on, by the blaze of a large fire burning in an open place, where the wild colocynth grew in great abundance, I discovered a party, evidently an out-picket of the 6th Bengal Native Infantry, muffled in their dark-blue great-coats, with their white cross-belts outside,

sitting or lying around it, chatting, laughing, and smoking or chewing betel.

Against the pitchy blackness of the as-yet-moonless sky the bright flames of the watchfire stood strongly up, and cast a ruddy light upon their dark-brown visages and gleaming eyes, and on the sombre figures of their sentinels, four in number, pacing up and down upon their short beat, the red sheen glancing like fireflies on the polished blades of their fixed bayonets ever and anon.

In the centre of the roadway, and pointing along it, was a field-piece, doubtless loaded with grape; and when I saw it the vision of poor Henriette flashed upon me, and once again my very soul seemed to shudder within me.

From scraps of their conversation I learned that this party was under a subadar; that the fort at Allahabad was completely invested by rebels and *budmashes* to the number of several thousand men; and that they had placed a guard at the bridge of the Jumna under Kureem Sing. Hence, for me to proceed in either direction was worse than

useless now. Which way was I then to turn —whither bend my steps—without money, food, or arms, in a land where all men's hands would be uplifted against me ?

Benares and Mirzapore were nearly seventy miles distant; but in both these places the troops had revolted, so I might as well remain where I was as attempt the task of reaching either. My whole situation seemed alike desperate and hopeless, yet hundreds—ay, thousands—in India were in the same predicament, and many, after long wandering and sufferings, perished miserably in the end.

In the other direction, towards Sultanpore and Fyzabad, so far as I knew, the country was still quiet; but the latter place was nearly a hundred miles distant, and in such a climate how was I to reach it on foot ?

Two things were imperative in the first place—to quit the dangerous vicinity of the sepoy picket, and to obtain food, if such could be had, by cunning or force, ere my strength failed through want of it; for, save the draught of water at the temple, nothing had passed my lips since I left the mess-

bungalow of the 6th on the preceding evening.

In that populous district I knew that some village could not be far off, and I hoped to find in an unwatched temple or wayside shrine the cakes, wine, and sweetmeats usually placed by the devout before the idol as offerings, that are often carried off by the birds of the air.

When I quitted my hiding-place among the grain, and betook me once more to the highway, the night was calm and lovely. The newly-risen moon was in the south-west, and the sky, dark before, was now studded with countless brilliant stars. Unseen insects were chirping and buzzing as if the time were noon, and the frogs were croaking themselves hoarse in the shining pools and marshes by the wayside.

The barking of dogs ere long announced my vicinity to a village, of which I soon came in sight, near the residence of some wealthy zemindar, or landholder of rank; an old fort, the round towers of which crowned a high rock close by it. The place consisted of a single street, having some fifty or so

native dwellings on each side, surrounded by a low mud wall, closed by a gate at either end, and above the roofs and trees within it I could see the little white dome of a marble temple shining in the light of the moon.

That all might be quietly abed and, as I hoped, asleep, I waited patiently until the dial of my watch indicated ten o'clock ere I ventured to climb over the wall, in hope to find the temple empty and some offerings on its altar; at least, I could get a draught of pure water from its tank. Even before this dreadful revolt there was often a difficulty in obtaining water from a well, as the natives—Mussulman and Hindoo alike—will not permit the 'unbeliever' to use their lotahs or brazen drinking vessels. With the Brahmins, the sacrifice of caste is the destruction of life beyond the grave; but the sacrifice of life in this world, whether yours or theirs, is less than nothing.

All was still in the village save the sharp bark of a dog occasionally; a few lights yet lingered in some of the mud-and-bamboo-built edifices, and I approached the white-domed temple with growing confidence. Be-

fore it was a large white marble tank, amid the clear water of which there floated some leaves and flowers of the scarlet lotus, the largest and most beautiful of the nymphæas to be seen in India.

I was just about to drink, when, as my evil genius would have it, I was interrupted by the sudden appearance of a number of men and women, who issued from a side lane into the centre street, and proceeded in a kind of procession towards the adjacent gate, to perform what I afterwards learned was named a 'devil-dance.'

I shrank down behind the enclosure of the tank, and as they passed by me, remained unseen; but now I dreaded to enter the temple, and crouching near it, watched them attentively. It chanced that the village I had thus ventured into was occupied almost exclusively by a sect more peculiar to southern India than to Bengal—the *Shanars*—among whom Satan is worshipped as a deity, under various strange and uncouth names, and who have a deep reverence and regard for all exorcists, whom they deem the direct offspring of the devil, and by

general consent are allowed to be, and supposed to be, on the most friendly terms with the world of demons.

Having sold themselves to the service of the great enemy of mankind, these men are supposed to be particularly wicked; yet the lower orders firmly believe in their power as exorcists and casters-out of devils.

These persons, I saw, were about to have a fiend expelled from the person of a young woman. First marched the exorcist, a wild-looking fellow attired in a cummerbund and turban, carrying a broom, a large nail, and a hammer in his hands. Then came the young woman bearing two large stones on her head, accompanied by her relatives and friends. On reaching a few trees that grew within the gate they halted, and the exorcist said to her:

'Which is your tree?'

She indicated one in particular, but with a very faint voice.

The exorcist then took hold of her hair, which was very flowing and luxuriant. He twisted it into a knot, through which he drove the nail, during which strange process

he repeated certain *mantras*, or charms. The girl then fell down, or rather hung for a minute, half suspended by her hair, till it gradually gave way, when she sank on the ground, when all her friends began to dance frantically, hand in hand, around her, firmly believing that now the devil had been cast out, and that she was liberated from the power of the prince of evil.

I was so absorbed by their strange proceedings, that I forgot for a minute or two the prudence that was so necessary, and had half risen from behind the water-tank before the temple. The moonlight shone full upon my face, and in an instant several recognised in me one of the fated Europeans.

They rushed towards me with shouts of 'A Feringhee! a Feringhee!' But as they were all unarmed, and I instinctively held my empty rifle at the charge—and they were ignorant that it was unloaded—none of them would dare to lay hands upon me; but their noisy outcries brought a dangerous rabble out of an adjacent caravanserai, where probably they had all been asleep on felt mats and carpets, dozing off their hempseed and

bhang. They were about thirty in number. Many of them brandished only long bamboos, but some were very differently and more dangerously armed.

Their yells were horrible, and as like unto those of fiends as were their frantic gestures. They were full of mad joy and all the lust of cruelty to find one white man so completely at their mercy. Two or three pistols were fired at me; but in the very haste with which they were levelled their bullets went wide of the mark.

Among them, with disgust and rage, I recognised my late kitmutgar, Rao Sing, the small, slimy, lean, and mahogany-skinned Hindoo with the stealthy gleaming eyes—the destroyer of Azuma—whom I was yet powerless to punish, and who was now armed with a formidable tulwar. There, too, were Khoda Bux, and one who seemed the most active of my assailants, the Meah Sahib, Abdul Khan, a wretch who had more than once dined at our mess, and who in times past was a frequent lounger at the band-stand. His doubt whether my musket was loaded kept him at a little distance,

but he continued to shout, 'Get thee to hell, Kafir dog! Strike, strike! slay, slay! Bismillah, the raj of the whites is over!'

Conspicuous among them was a Mahratta horesman, clad in a quilted chintz tunic, with a light shirt of mail over it; a steel morion with a turban twisted round it. He had on steel gauntlets that reached to the elbow, and he launched his heavy Mahratta spear at me, uttering the old war-cry of his people as it stuck quivering in the earth:

'Hur, hur, O Mahadeo! the hills are on fire!'

'Let us throw him down the old dry well, as we did the Mehm Sahib,' suggested one, 'and leave him there to die; we can come and watch him daily while he lasts.'

(The Mehm Sahib! To whom did they refer? Oh, would it be Henriette!)

'Death to all the slayers of the sacred cow!' cried Khoda Bux. 'It is the orders of the King of Delhi that not one shall be spared of all the accursed Ghora-logue; so let us blow him from the cannon at the Ranee's gate.'

'But we shall then lose his head; and for

each of these the King of Delhi gives ten rupees,' said Rao Sing reflectively.

'The cannon, the cannon!' cried others, as they ran off to fetch it from the gate of the fort.

My blood ran cold now, and for a second or two all my past life came crowding, flashing back, as it were, into memory. Death seemed very close then and inevitable. Alas for the many 'new leaves turned over,' but never made into a volume; the noble plans formed, yet never carried out; the good intentions conceived, never to be fulfilled!

They who had left the rest soon came rushing back to announce that the gun had been spiked.

They were accompanied by the naked fakir Kalidasa Ram, who was armed with a lathee, or iron-knobbed club. Their yells and injurious epithets redoubled now, and in their frantic eagerness to assail me they impeded each other, and I knocked down two or three with the butt-end of my musket.

'Dog and son of dog! thou pig and eater

of dirt!' they cried, hissing like snakes through their clenched teeth.

'Cowards,' said Kalidasa Ram, taking care, however, not to advance the while, 'do you all quail before one man? Remember that you are the subjects of the King of Delhi—that Delhi where a son of the house of Timour once more sits upon the peacock throne! Think, think, O people, if each of you were to contribute but a handful of sand, you might bury all the Europeans in India under one sand heap!'

Thus urged, Rao Sing, who had been gathering Dutch courage from a mouthful of bhang, came slowly towards me; as he did so passing a finger along the edge of his tulwar with grim significance, and grinning horribly and malevolently the while, till I sprang forward and by one blow of the clubbed rifle dashed his jaws to pieces and hurled him to the earth ten yards off.

In my blind desperation, I was about to fling myself among the rest, when suddenly an aged Hindoo, who appeared as suddenly as if he had sprung out of the ground, threw himself between us, crying:

'Toba! toba! (Shame!) Hold, for the love of Bhowani!'

'It is Sivaji Bulwant, the Shastree. Do *you* dare to interfere with us?' asked Abdul Khan furiously, for, as a Mohammedan, he despised the Hindoos.

'Remember that the mother of the murdered sleeps; but the mother of the murderer never knows sleep.'

'Poh!' said Kalidasa; 'my mother was long ago laid in the mud of Mother Gunga.'

'Hold, I command you!' continued the Shastree, with arms outspread between us.

'What stuff is this?' said Abdul Khan, appealing, sword in hand, to the Mahratta horseman; but as a Hindoo, the sudden intervention of the Shastree, though it surprised, nevertheless seemed to impress him with respect.

'By the holy mother of the gods—by Sir Mata Bhowani—I have sworn to protect him!' said the old Hindoo, whose hair was as white as the thistledown, and whose sunken eyes seemed to blaze with fire. On this the crowd, who were all Hindoos, save the lion of Chutneypore and an armed man

who seemed to be his attendant, shrank back, and began to melt away, some retiring to their dwellings and others into the caravanserai.

I was saved, though I could scarcely realize the fact. After high and fierce tension of the nervous system, there was a singular revulsion in the emotions of my heart, and I felt utterly confused, as my protector, whom they had named Sivaji Bulwant led me by the hand into his house beside the temple and carefully closed and secured the door behind me; but for more than an hour after I seemed still to hear yells and cries of the fanatic rabble, and to see their black gleaming eyeballs flashing with cruelty and ferocity.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE HOUSE OF THE SHASTREE.

I HAD undergone so many perils in such a short space of time—the fight and retreat towards the fort; the encounter in the wood with the dacoits, at all times desperate ruffians, who go in gangs and devote their lives to outrage; the meeting with the hyenas in the deserted temple; and lastly, this 'shindy' in the village, suffering all the time from a contusion in the head, without food or rest for so many hours—that the light seemed to leave my eyes, and when the old man who had saved me closed his door behind us I reeled and nearly fainted.

Sivaji Bulwant, whose protection was now accorded to me, was a Shastree—one learned in the Shastras and all the holy writings of the Brahmins, and hence was held in the deepest respect by all Hindoos. Though

aged, he was a tall, well-built, and, for a Hindostanee, fine-looking man. His forehead was both high and broad, with bushy white eyebrows over eyes that were not black, but of a dark steel-grey. Save a lock behind, his head was shaved, and a phrenologist would have marked with pleasure the prominence of all the organs of intellect and benevolence. Though a mass of wrinkles now, his brown face had evidently been handsome in youth, and though haughty in contour, his mouth expressed kindness and good-humour.

To rehearse the conversations by which I obtained a knowledge of him and his character would, from the inflated nature of his phraseology, only weary the reader; suffice it that while with him I learned that he was a man of note, and known far beyond that obscure village in Allahabad as a deep Sanscrit scholar, profound in the strange metaphysics of the Vedas, an astronomer, and a devout Brahmin, who had made many pilgrimages and shone in religious festivals at the conglomeration of villages called Conjeveram, Gya, and Nuddeah, once the

capital of Bengal, and at Benares, the grand seat and centre of all Brahminical learning.

His little dwelling, which adjoined the temple I had intended to enter, and in which he officiated, was a model of neatness and cleanness. Daily its floors of white clay were sprinkled with cool water by his female servants, and covered with designs in coloured chalks, and his usual seat, a divan, was decorated with the lotus and other flowers. The walls were covered with quaint frescoes, all religious subjects and legends; Krishnu in the tree, with the milkmaids' clothes which he stole when they were bathing in the tank; Ganesha with an elephant's head; Bhowani, the six-armed, fighting the demon Maheswur, and a host of other figures half human, half beast, and all those

'Gorgons, hydras, and chimeras dire'

in which the Indian mythology excels.

Over every door was an inscription in Sanscrit committing the apartment to heavenly protection; and a little private temple containing his own household gods—hideous little bronze idols—adjoined the library of the Shastree, whose female servants, when

not otherwise occupied, were generally busy with their spinning-wheels in the verandah that overlooked his garden.

It was rather a relief to find that some humanity remained in that land of blood and outrage; and old Sivaji the Shastree was indeed humane; and as he was one who had ever led a life of virtue, feeding the hungry, caring for the aged, the lame, and the blind, and relieving every kind of human suffering, he was viewed by the Hindoos as a saint, and was never known to be without the red eye of Siva on his forehead, in memory of the thousand years of darkness that befell the world when—but for a single moment—Parvati, when lying on the bosom of that god, in playfulness placed her hand upon his two eyes, and to prevent a recurrence of such a calamity, he created a third in the centre of his brow.

More enlightened and liberal that many a Christian clergyman, Sivaji maintained that though there were many religions in the world, even as there were many fruits and flowers, that all religions, if they were sincerely practised, must be acceptable to God.

I have said that I was on the verge of fainting when I entered his dwelling. The kind old Brahmin saw this, and by his orders a servant promptly brought me boiled rice, poorees, curry, soft pancakes, and other simple fare, on fresh plantain leaves, with a draught of cool water from the tank of the temple close by.

Sivaji told me that the water was blessed, and hence that it was equally good for bathing, cooking, or drinking. However, I must own that, after all that I had undergone, I thought an infusion of cognac would have improved its good qualities.

Of the European woman who had been flung down the old well, and left there to die of bruises and starvation, he could tell me nothing, as he was absent from the village at time.

'The world is great,' he added; 'but there is a short path from every part of it to heaven, so let us hope that now she is there.'

Deep indeed was the sleep that came upon me when I lay down on the thick felt matting, which was the only bed he could

give me, and the setting sun of the next day was fading on the towers of the Ranee's fort and the dome of the village temple when I awoke, to find the Shastree, with a snow-white turban round his shaven head, seated on his divan enjoying the eighth sensual delight of the Hindoos—chewing a hugh quid of betel-nut, concerning which I remembered a legend told me by Azuma when we were in the dawk-bungalow at Benares.

A nymph of heaven had fallen in love with a young Hindoo, and invited him to meet her in her celestial dwelling, when, having observed the joy-imparting virtues of the betel, then a plant peculiar to heaven alone, on bidding her adieu, he brought a sprig of it to the lower world, and hence its propagation all over India.

I awoke from my long slumber greatly refreshed, but still too weak to attempt to leave the house which sheltered me; and I remained there an entire week with the Shastree, who, though a zealot in his peculiar religion, did, not, as a Mohammedan or Christian might have done, attempt the task of converting an unbeliever, for such would

have been worse than useless, as I had no caste, even of the lowest kind, in his estimation; yet like poor Azuma, he used to talk of Aqui, god of fire; Yama, king of hell; Varuna, god of the sea; and so forth, till my brain became addled.

I was not the only Feringhee whom he had saved; for in the apartments of his women the Shastree told me that he had a little white child, sick and dying, which had been found in his garden, and whose mother was the woman that the mutineers had thrown down the dry well.

Horrible though this information was, it was some relief to me to learn that the poor victim who had perished thus was a stranger to me, and not one in whom I was so keenly interested; and yet, strange to say, it was in the house of Sivaji the Shastree I was fated to hear some certain tidings of Henriette Guise.

There I remained in safety, intent only on recovering my strength, obtaining arms, and reaching any post occupied by our troops.

The house was never molested, though more than once a few of my late assailants

assembled before it with the invariable yell of 'Deen! deen!' and a beating of tom-toms —the 'Indian drum' of the famous quartette in which I had more than once joined when at Thorsgill Hall; and now it sounded aught but pleasant in the village of the devil-worshippers.

I was glad that I had punished the villain Rao Sing so severely. The blow with the clubbed Minié rifle had probably killed him, as his face was completely smashed by it; but the encounter had brought that of his victim vividly before me, the gentle Azuma, whom I seemed to see still in the simple *saree*, or robe, of the Hindoo women, of light blue silk with white stripes, wound several times around her lithe form and over her graceful head on the left side, whence the end, with its heavy fringe of silver tissue, used to fall over her shapely back and shoulder.

On the morning of the fifth day I had been with him, Sivaji Bulwant, on returning from service at the temple, informed me that two natives wished to speak with me, and were in the court.

'But I am without weapons,' said I.

'These men are unarmed,' he replied, 'and one is a travelling fakir.'

'Then admit them, if you please.'

He clapped his hands; the curtain covering the doorway of the apartment was withdrawn, and Khoda Bux—whilom Dormer's thievish kitmutgar—and Kalidasa Ram, smeared as usual from head to foot in rancid ghee and ashes, stood before me, their dark faces rippling with smiles of insolence and malevolent triumph.

They did not speak, and for nearly a minute I remained silent, as if my tongue was loaded, and I cannot describe the utter loathing and intense hatred with which I viewed those wretches, who came so complacently before me, who had so recently menaced my life, and who were, I knew, steeped in the blood of our helpless women and children and of our unarmed civilians.

'Well, you scoundrels—you infamous assassins—what do you want with me?' I demanded sternly.

'The sahib will not learn much if he speaks to us thus,' retorted Kalidasa Ram.

'You, wretch, were cognisant of the death of the girl Azuma in the cantonments,' said I.

'She was about to reveal to you the secrets of our people. What mattered her death? A few years more and she would have been too old for marriage, and must have been shaven and degraded, or married to a khanjur,' replied the fakir, referring to the form of devoting women to the temple, when their right hand is wedded to a dagger.

'To the point—your business, and then begone.'

'We know where the Mehm Sahib Geeze is; she whom we took from the house of Calvert Sahib,' said the fakir with a grin, which expanded to a laugh when he saw how agitated I became by his reference to Henriette.

'She is alive?' I asked breathlessly.

'Yes, and safe, or was so yesterday morning.'

'You have seen her, then?'

'I saw her at sunrise yesterday,' replied the fakir, for Khoda Bux spoke but little.

'She is near us then?' said I eagerly.

'Farther off than you think.'

'Where is she kept a prisoner?' I demanded, making a step nearer my inodorous visitor.

'That is our secret.'

'Speak out, wretch, or by the heaven above us I will strangle you!'

'Nothing would be won by that save your own death, accursed Feringhee!' hissed the fakir through his teeth, while his eyes glared with hate.

'Could she escape from her place of confinement?'

'Not alone.'

'With your aid, then?' said I, willing to temporise with these men.

'Yes.'

'And what is the price of your services?'

'A thousand rupees, sahib,' said Khoda Bux, who had not yet spoken.

'I have not even an ana; but if you will come to me at Fyzabad you shall receive the money, which I will pay you with gratitude,' I replied, with a voice that broke in emotion. For I rejoiced to think that Henriette yet lived, and that she might be saved by my

means; but anon my soul sickened at imagination of all she *might* have undergone in hands so merciless. Then a natural suspicion occurred to me, and I said:

'How am I to know that you are not deceiving me?'

'See, sahib,' said Khoda Bux, drawing from the pocket of his chintz coat a handkerchief and ring which I thought I had seen Henriette Guise wear, and in a corner of the former was her name written by herself.

'You will leave me these?'

'Oh, yes, sahib,' replied the ex-kitmutgar.

I placed them in my breast-pocket, and then said, with growing sternness and suspicion:

'What proof have I that rascals such as you did not steal them?'

'This,' said Khoda, presenting to me that which he really seemed to have forgotten, a little note written in the native ink with the point of a reed, and from Henriette.

'My dear Captain Rudkin,' it ran briefly, 'the bearer says that he knows where you are, and that you can ransom me. My

sufferings have been dreadful—maddening! Yet I am safe now, though a prisoner here.'

'Here—where?' I asked.

'Does she not tell you?'

'No.'

'Then, as I have said, that must be our secret. In eight days hence,' said the fakir, 'I shall come or send Khoda to Fyzabad for the thousand rupees, and if he does not return in safety she shall be cut into kabobs.'

'What proof have I that you will keep your part of the bargain and restore her?'

Then the fakir swore by the most sacred oath that can bind a Hindoo that he would convey her thither himself in a palkee, and with this promise I was forced to be content, and we parted; leaving me all eagerness to reach Fyzabad, where I knew we had a garrison, and I should find no difficulty in raising the money among the officers; but Fyzabad was a hundred English miles distant, and how was I to reach it on foot?

The Shastree had gone to his temple for mid-day prayer, and I was left for a time to my own reflections. To speculate on where or with whom Henriette was proved alike vain

and perplexing; and I sat like one in a dream reading over and over again the few words her hand had traced but yesterday. How intensely I longed to see her and hear from her own lips all she had undergone!

Many horrible stories incident to the mutiny now occurred to me. We have been told of officers shooting their own wives to save them from falling into the hands of the revolters alive; and though I do not believe there is one authenticated instance of any such tragedy taking place, the awful indignities and atrocities heaped upon the ladies at Delhi and in many other places were true beyond all doubt. Investigations made upon the spot have proved this, though the result of these painful inquiries will never be known to the world, and it is as well that it should not be.

When Sivaji the Shastree returned, and I told him of my anxiety to reach Fyzabad and of the absolute necessity there was for my making the attempt at all risks, he consented to assist me with all his heart.

He dyed my face, neck, and hands with the juice of some herb, which darkened and

made my eyes smart as if vinegar had been spirted into them, and fortunately for me, they, with my hair and beard—the latter now of several days' growth—were dark. He supplied me with such a plain dress as might be worn by a native merchant, with the green turban of a hadji, some chupatties and ghee; a drinking vessel for water I slung over my shoulder. The only weapons he could give me were a kandjur, which I stuck in my girdle, and a lathee, or loaded club; and after sunset next day, I prepared to depart, with gratitude in my heart to this good old man, who in that land of utter heathendom had already attained that idea of human brotherhood wherein, as Sextius said of old, 'each man should feel himself the care-taker of all men under God.'

He indicated to me the route I was to pursue, and as soon as the darkness closed, and before the gates were shut, I stole out upon the highway and turned my back for ever upon the hateful village of the devil-worshippers.

END OF VOL. II.

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