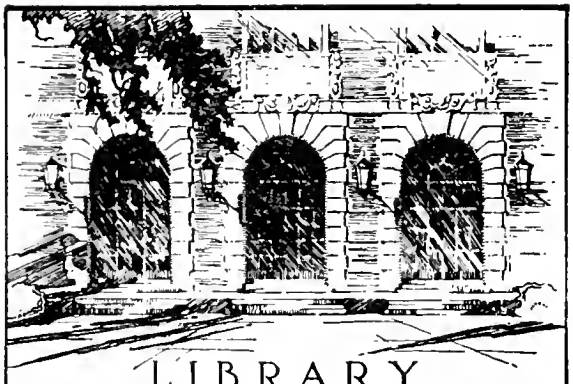

FAIRER THAN A FAIRY.

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 XLII.

THE NAIB.

My anxiety to reach Fyzabad was now intense; my life seemed to have become doubly precious to me, for on it depended the life, the liberty, and safety of Henriette Guise —the soft-eyed and gentle Henriette Guise of the dear old time that seemed so remote now —the autumn at happy Thorsgill Hall; and in this desire I had found a new object to make existence valuable.

Again would she owe her preservation to me, and eagerly I looked forward to the time of meeting her once more, and hearing from her own lips all that she had to relate; but I had one great source for surmise and perplexity—where was she concealed, and with whom?

She had omitted to mention these two circumstances in her brief note and in her haste, never doubting, perhaps, that her messengers would inform me, which they were too wily, too cunning, or too politic to do.

Her engagement with Colonel Stapleton—born of pique as it seemed, concluded perhaps in a moment of weakness or irresolution—was ended now; yet she could not know how terribly it was so.

For safety I resolved to travel by night only, and calculated that, being on foot, the fifth day would find me at Fyzabad. I intended to husband carefully my little stock of chupatties, that I might not again have to run the risk of seeking food as I had done at the village I had just quitted; and felt convinced that to-morrow would see me beyond Pertabghur.

'If I were always thinking of to-morrow I should go mad,' says a writer; and this state of mind rather applied at that time to me; I had already learned to let to-morrow take care of itself, and to think that enough for the day were the evils thereof. As I knew

that, notwithstanding my disguise, I must avoid all dwellings, baleful effects of the dews by night were my chief fear, for if I took fever, or otherwise fell ill by the way, all would then be over with Henriette Guise and with myself too.

Ere I had left the village far behind me, the gloom of a cloudy evening had given place to a brilliant starlit night. I heard thunder at times in the distance; the atmosphere was oppressively sultry; but I was thankful that, notwithstanding these remote mutterings of a storm, no rain fell.

A few miles brought me to the vicinity of Mow, a little town famous for its cotton manufactures, and as I skirted the suburbs, my chief difficulty was to get across the Sorjew river on which it is situated. By good fortune I found a small punt moored among reeds; I sprang in, slashed through the painter with my kandjur, and shoving off, paddled, or rather sculled, it across to the other side, when I soon struck upon the highway once more, and continued my way north.

Here and there were fields of stunted dhal;

then the country became black and desolate, and the roadway so undefined, that after a time I missed it and became certain that I was proceeding in a wrong direction. The faint grey light of dawn as it stole in confirmed me in this supposition, and I looked about me irresolutely. All around me was as still as death, save the howl occasionally of the inevitable jackal, the purr of the jungle cat, and the hum of insect life, all the louder because some of them were shut within the petals of closed flowers.

Before me rose a mountainous range, towards which I perceived a wayfarer journeying, and as the stranger was a woman, and to all appearance a mendicant, I hastened to overtake and question her. She told me that the path we were pursuing led to Pertabghur, and as she pointed towards the hills, I saw that both her hands had been cut off by the wrists, but evidently several years ago.

This had been the work of dacoits, she told me: they had done so for the sake of her bangles, after stabbing and leaving her for dead, as the Indian fashion of adorning

women and children with heavy silver bracelets frequently leads to cases of mutilation and murder; for it is a land full of races of men in every conceivable state or stage of civilisation, from the barbarian of the days of Alexander the Great, or later still, those of Mahmoud of Ghizni, to the polished and subtle rajah, and the commercial 'darkie' of Calcutta and our large military cantonments.

When the obscure little town of Pertabghur came in sight, I knew that I had now achieved twenty-five miles of my lonely journey, but was beginning to feel very weary after so long a night march; and thus, before the gates would be opened and the workpeople came forth to their work in the fields, I sought the shelter of a wayside thicket, a clump of trees too near the town wall and too small to be the lurking-place of any wild animal; and there I lay down to rest, and to sleep if I could.

In this thicket were two or three lovely baubool trees, or mimosas, the yellow flowers of which filled the air with delicious perfume; and high over all towered one gigantic talipot, a species of palm, the upper flower of which

is very large, and when bursting its sheath makes an explosion like the report of a musket; Thunberg says a cannon, which must be an exaggeration.

'Courage!' thought I, while casting my weary limbs among the luxuriant and feathery grass. 'I have but seventy-five miles farther to tramp, when I shall again hear the beat of an English drum.' And I prayed in my heart for strength and endurance to achieve the distance.

A flock of little parroquets and green pigeons filled the grove with life, the former by their strange chattering, and the latter by flitting to and fro; and in the towering stem of the great talipot were numerous holes, out of which crept large and glittering black lizards with scarlet throats and bright eyes, animals which the Mohammedan shepherd-boys believe to be evil spirits.

I dipped a chupattie in a runnel, and soaking it well, made my frugal breakfast; then I examined the point and edge of the dagger given to me by the old Shastree, and coiled myself under a bush to sleep. Prior to this, however, I drew forth the laced

handkerchief and the brief note, which, with the ring, a pearl hoop, were relics of Henriette; and as such I treasured them, being all I might ever see of one who in the past time had been dear indeed to me, and whom her present helplessness and peril made dear to me again; and memory went back to the old days of love and doubt and hope, before that fatal 'fairy' came; and as I looked at the handwriting of Henriette, it seemed to me in some way characteristic of her calm and purpose-like style, for she was —as Jack Dormer phrased it in his off-hand way—'a compact sensible girl, and all there.'

Then I thought of the regiment, and how, had I but twenty rank-and-file of it with me, I should march boldly through these very towns which I was now compelled to avoid and to skulk near, like a gipsy or vagrant in the thickets by the wayside.

I awoke many hours after to find that I had indulged in a sound slumber, and that the sun was now setting in all his glory beyond the town of Pertabghur, the mosque and houses of which stood in black outline

against the deep western flush. The fleecy clouds were rolling away before a gentle breeze; they were tinted with orange, gold, and crimson, hues which gradually faded away as the sun sank down.

Prior to that, seeing all the country round me quiet, and no one on the far extent of road that stretched beyond the town, and trusting, moreover, to the mode in which the Shastree had attired me, though every joint was stiff and every limb was sore, I grasped my lathee, or loaded club, and set forth once more upon my journey, intent on reaching a European dawk-bungalow, or postal station, which I knew lay ten miles beyond Pertabghur, though I greatly feared to find that the inmates had fled or were lying within it slaughtered.

I passed several persons at intervals on the way near Gospoora, but, thanks to my disguise, no particular or unpleasant notice was taken of me, and as the darkness deepened, I trod hopefully on, and in a solitary place where the road wound between two green eminences, just as the moon came forth with uncommon brilliance, I drew near

an edifice which, from a previously given description, I knew must be the dawk-bungalow—a little thatched house having two rooms for travellers to rest in, a verandah round it, and outside of that a thick prickly-pear hedge.

All was silent in and about the place; yet a light shone steadily from the curtained window of the inner room, showing that it was not without occupants. I listened intently, but heard not the slightest sound. Grasping the poniard with my left hand, and the lathee with my right, I struck on the door with the latter, and then heard the jangle of spurs and a steel scabbard.

The door was opened by a tall dark-featured fellow, a native, in the uniform of the most desperate, ferocious, and vindictive of all the mutineers — the Bengal Light Cavalry—holding a candle in one hand and his drawn sword in the other.

'I seek shelter and refreshment,' said I, drawing back a pace; 'is the bungalow occupied by troops?'

'No; I am here alone,' he replied, sheathing his sword, shooting it home into

the scabbard with a jerk. 'You are a hadji I see by your turban; enter in peace.'

'Where is the keeper of the bungalow?' I asked.

'In Jehanum, I hope, the accursed Feringhee!' he replied with a vicious grin. 'I found the place empty, and am only making a temporary halt here since sunset. There is nothing to drink but water, and nothing to eat except this candle which I found, and the rats have nearly disposed of that.'

I had now entered the bare and almost empty apartment. The place had evidently been looted, and with violence too, as some splashes of blood on the wall seemed to attest; but three chairs and a table were left. My new companion put down the candle, and we now surveyed each other with equal mistrust and curiosity, for the time was one of peril, outrage, and lawlessness.

The sowar was a tall and powerful man, a Mohammedan evidently, as nearly all the native cavalry were, for he had not the orb of Siva painted on his forehead. He had wild-looking eyes and enormous black

moustachios, so long that they nearly floated over his shoulder scales, giving him an aspect of grotesque ferocity, like the 'heavy villain' of a burlesque. He wore the uniform of the 6th Bengal Light Cavalry, silver-grey, faced with orange—a regiment which had Leswaree, Setabuldie, and Bhurtpore on its colours. His jacket was trimmed with silver lace, thereby showing that he was a Naib Rissalder, or native lieutenant.

'May I ask who you are?' he demanded, eyeing me sharply and suspiciously as I took a seat.

'Yes,' said I, pausing to consider what my name and occupation should be.

'Who and what, then?' he demanded, authoritatively.

'A hadji.'

'So I see; but where from?'

'The Hadji Hassin Khalid Ebn al Walid, from Poonah last.'

'An accursed name!' was his criticism on the cognomen that I had given myself at a venture.

'How?' I asked with pretended indignation.

'Because, as the Koran may tell you, one so called put to flight the cavalry of the Holy Prophet at the battle of Ohod.'

'If I am thus unfortunate in my name, it is not my fault. I am a dealer in wines ruined by this revolt, and so forced to journey afoot. And you?'

'I am Osman Ebn Affan, a naib of the 6th Cavalry.'

He then proceeded to tell me boastfully and exultingly of the mutinies at Nowgong, Jhansi, and Futtepore, at which latter place Mr. Tucker, an English judge, sold his life so dearly, and actually shot down sixteen of his cowardly assailants before he succumbed at last; after which his head, hands, and feet were hewn off, and held up by the kotwal, or native mayor, to the insults of the rabble.

'Your regiment, you say, is the 6th Cavalry?'

'Yes, hadji.'

'Where is it stationed?'

'At Jullundur.'

'Is all quiet there, naib?'

'Quiet enough now that we have cut off

the unclean and accursed ones root and branch,' he replied, grinding his teeth. 'I am now riding to certain stations in Rohilcund, where the troops have sworn to be true to their salt, to say that *we* will come and kill their officers for them, and save them from breaking their oaths.'

'Riding! Where is your horse?' I asked.

'At the back of the bungalow.'

This information interested me keenly, and at all hazards I resolved to possess myself of the animal. The outrages which he had witnessed in Futtepore seemed to afford him peculiar satisfaction; he recurred to them again and again, and my blood boiled while I listened.

'We took our captain sahib, and sent him to drink boiling water in hell. His children we dashed upon the stones, and his wife—ah, yes—well, ha! ha! we made fair spoil of; for what says the prophet? The women of all infidels are the lawful prey of the faithful, who are, as thou knowest, hadji, forbidden to make friends of Jews or Christians.'

Cramming his mouth and pipe with bhang,

he proceeded to tell me other atrocities, and laughed to remember how a Feringhee fool of a woman wept for her infidel baby—such a little one it was too—when he tore it from her arms, and brained it before her face.

'Why,' thought I, 'should I have the least compunction about dashing the Shastree's dagger into the heart of a wretch who thus coolly speaks to me of this infamous massacre of a poor English officer and his whole family?'

My blood was tingling; my fingers itched to clutch his throat; and once actually the idea occurred to me of suddenly stunning him by a blow of my club, binding him hand and foot with his sash, sticking the flaming candle into the dry old thatch of the bungalow, and leaving him to retributive fate.

And while these ferocious ideas were floating in my mind, he was running on thus:

'In all this we do but obey the second chapter of the blessed Koran, which tells us to kill the unbelievers "wherever ye find them, and turn them out of that whereof they have dispossessed you, for temptation to idolatry is more grievous than slaughter;"

and elsewhere "war is enjoined you against the infidels; if this is hateful to you, perchance ye hate a thing which is better for you, and ye love a thing which is worse for you, but Allah knoweth, and ye know not;"' and so he ran on for a considerable time, quoting the Koran as a plea for atrocities, just as the Jews and Puritans did the Old Testament in other times. He then wound up by an original piece of information:

'The accursed English have not been slain in Northern Rajpootana.'

'Why?' I asked.

'Because, as a dervish from there told me, they were all changed by the Prophet in a single night into apes, even as the Sabbath-breakers were; yet they shall not escape Azrail the angel of death, though they may our swords.'

'Shabash!' said I approvingly.

'Yes, it is written in the book of destiny that in the hundredth year after Palassy not one should be left alive between Lahore and Calcutta, Simla and Cape Comorin; even in Ceylon they shall be destroyed;

but what need is there to talk of these things to one who has seen the tomb of the Prophet ?'

'Yes,' said I, adopting his own strain, 'I have knelt in Mecca, in Om-el-Kora, have kissed the holy kaaba, and drunk well-nigh unto bursting of the Zem-zem well.'

'Happy thou !' exclaimed the naib, cramming more bhang into his pipe. 'When we have cut the last of the infidels' throats, I too shall go to the mother of cities by the Red Sea. But whither were you bound to-night, friend hadji ?'

'For Fyzabad.'

'Fyzabad !'

'Yes; is all quiet there?' I asked anxiously.

'As yet—as yet,' he replied drowsily, as his head nodded and the bhang began to affect him powerfully.

'Is a disturbance expected there ?'

'Yes; the 17th Native Infantry have shot all their officers; they are on the march for Fyzabad, and will be there to-morrow.'

'To-morrow !' I exclaimed; and then I thought, 'If so, alas for all my hopes of freeing, rescuing, or even of discovering where

Henriette Guise is; and if I fail to meet the fakir, what then may be her fate?'

It was now more than ever imperative that I should risk all, even life itself, to possess myself of this rascal's horse and spur on to Fyzabad, and report to Colonel Lennox, who commanded there, the tidings I had heard so opportunely.

CHAPTER XLIII.

I REACH FYZABAD.

'And you go to Rohilcund, you say, with orders concerning the destruction of the Feringhees?' said I, after a little pause.

'Yes, hadji.'

'By whose orders?' I asked, anxious to gain all the information possible; 'those of your subadar major?'

'Oh, no; he was in the interest of the infidels.'

'*Was*, say you?'

'Yes; so when we found that out, we soon finished him off.'

'How?'

'We blew him from a gun. Allah, you should have seen how high his head went into the air!'

'Then you go to Rohilcund by desire of the regiment?'

'No, hadji; you are very talkative and I am very sleepy.'

'Whose, then?' I asked, as his head began to nod and his eyes to close heavily.

'Abdul Khan of Chutneypore.'

'The scoundrel!' thought I, as my mind went back to the time when he had so often shared the hospitality of our mess-bungalow.

'When the 6th, with all the faithful, rose at Allahabad, he sent a select party to carry off a certain golden-haired Mehm Sahib, whom he was determined to place in his zenana; but she escaped with her dog of a husband into the fort; and they brought Abdul a black-haired one in her place, who, I suppose, in time would please him just as well. But now, not another word shall I say to-night,' he added, unbuckling and throwing off his sword and belt, 'for by sunrise to-morrow I must be many a coss away.'

And while the words yet hovered on his lips, his head and arms were placed upon the table, and he dozed off into a sound sleep.

I sat very still for a little time; so still that I could hear my own breathing. The golden-haired lady at Allahabad could only,

I knew, be Blanche ; but was that other who had become the prisoner of young Abdul of Chutneypore Henriette ? It almost seemed so ; but my time for reflection was past now, that for action had come, and not a moment was to be lost.

I buckled on his sword, blew out the flickering light, and softly quitting the apartment, slipped round to the back of the bungalow, where I found a troop-horse haltered to one of the posts of the verandah, and shaking its ears somewhat disconsolately from time to time. I led the animal by the bridle a little way out on the road, where I deliberately examined the girths and bit, took up a link or so of the curb-chain, adjusted the stirrup-leathers to suit myself; then I vaulted into the saddle, casting away the naib's valise as a useless incumbrance, and rode at full gallop on my journey north.

Fortunately the animal seemed tolerably fresh, and continued for many miles at a good round pace. Alone and free, on horseback now, and armed—for both the holster-pistols were double-barrelled and loaded—my spirits and my hopes rose together ; for now

I could pursue my solitary way with expedition and in comparative safety.

But for this unexpected contingency I could never have reached Fyzabad soon enough to put the troops there on their guard, and by the timely repulse of the rebellious 17th Native Infantry to keep, as I hoped, my appointment with the fakir, who was to achieve the liberty of Henriette Guise.

As I drew near the district through which the Goomtee flows, the moon became hidden in clouds; the night was very dark, but fires were burning brightly on certain eminences and hill-forts, which seemed to indicate that the people of the country were up in arms against us; hence the utmost circumspection on my part was necessary as I rode on.

I was as anxious to have the meeting with the odious and detestable Kalidasa Ram as if he was my dearest friend. If I failed in that —if protracted fighting ensued at Fyzabad, and hence there would be a difficulty in procuring the ransom—the effect might, nay must, be fatal for that poor victim of many untoward circumstances; so in my excite-

ment, I rode madly, recklessly on, with loose rein, giving the horse his head. This impatience was nearly proving fatal; for as I rushed the animal at an almost 'impossible' nullah, it came crash down with me, and threw me heavily on my head. I rolled over, but never relinquished the reins. I was most severely shaken; the accident, however, taught me caution, and I pursued my way at a more leisurely pace.

About two in the morning I rode through the town of Sultanpore on the Goomtee, a pretty place and pleasantly situated, and, all unnoticed and unquestioned, gladly left it behind me. It was the place where in 1773 the first brigade of British troops ever employed by Shuja ud Dowlah in Oude was cantoned.

It seemed an intolerable and almost incredible thing to find oneself a lurking fugitive now in British India, where once we had been lords and masters over all the land and all that was therein; and if the revolt spread, I began to fear that we should never be able to stamp it out. Though the white officers might be totally destroyed, the native

still remained; and hence the whole internal organisation of every regiment was kept intact. The native troops had all our enormous arsenals, and immense force of artillery and guns without number; and they took us by complete surprise when, by the usual Whig policy, the European force in India was at its lowest limit. More than all, they had Delhi now, with the prestige of a prince of the house of Timour seated on the peacock throne. Even had the pretended cartridge grievance never turned up at all, the sepoys would have found another excuse for revolting, and in time to come may do so again.

'We must not forget,' wrote a brother officer on this subject, 'that the natives of India are capable of combination. We used to imagine that nothing would ever serve to reconcile the Hindoos and Mohammedans to act in concert against a *third* sect. Experience has proved the fallacy of this. The antagonism of religious animosity is not irreconcileable, and though the great revolt has shown us how badly the co-operation of different bodies of rebels was managed, it has proved that different races and sects can

suppress mutual enmity when they have a common object in view.'

While reflecting on these things, a ride of fifteen miles beyond Sultanpore brought me in sight of the lights of Fyzabad while yet the morning was dark.

Fyzabad (or the City of Abundance) is in the kingdom of Oude, on the south bank of the river Dewah, and adjoins the ancient capital of the famous Hindoo demi-god Rama. It contains, as the statists tell us, the palace of Shuja ud Dowlah, wherein a thousand widows survived him, many handsome tombs, and an unfinished fortress, which he had commenced on the extensive plan of Fort William at Calcutta.

The garrison at this momentous crisis consisted of the 15th Irregular Cavalry, and the 6th Oude Infantry, the 22nd Bengal Native Infantry, and a battery of Horse Artillery.

My extreme satisfaction at having accomplished my lonely and dangerous journey with such safety and unexpected celerity was fated to be clouded by some unpleasant suspicions in a few minutes.

'Hookam durr? challenged a sentinel of the 6th Oude as I came cantering towards the gate of the fort.

'Friend!' I replied instinctively in English; on which the fellow instantly discharged his rifle, the ball from which whistled past my ear. I then called to him in Hindoostanee, and for a moment began to fear that the place was in possession of mutineers. On this he expressed his astonishment, adding that he thought from my reply I was an Englishman; and then, on seeing my disguise, he asked in a low whisper if I was a messenger from Azimghur, where the 17th were quartered.

'I am not, you scoundrel!' I said sternly; 'and the fact of your firing because I replied in English, and then believing me to be a messenger from Azimghur, implies some secret understanding among you, and this must be looked to.'

On this he had the effrontery to laugh, while coolly reloading his musket.

The report of the latter having brought the mainguard under arms, I told the officer in command that I was a fugitive from

Allahabad, and required instantly to see the commandant, Colonel Lennox, as I had an important message for him. So I passed in without more ado. In that exciting time, the mere circumstance of a sentinel firing haphazard at an individual approaching his post, seemed not worth inquiring into or making a fuss about, as we must have done had it happened at the Tower or Knightsbridge Barracks.

Having gained once more, after so many risks, the friendly shelter of a British barrack, after finding myself among comrades and friends, certain that in a few hours I should have the ransom required for Miss Guise, and have achieved a satisfactory arrangement concerning her with her captors, I could little foresee—in the uncertainty of all human affairs—that twenty-four hours later would behold the garrison of Fyzabad scattered far and wide, and myself a prisoner in the hands of the enemy, and menaced again with suffering and death.

But I am proceeding too fast.

I soon roused Colonel Lennox, who received me half dressed, for this was no time

for ceremony, and I reported the assurance I had received that the revolted 17th Native Infantry were in full march against his post from Azimghur in the province of Allahabad; with the mutiny in the city, of which he and all his officers were already cognisant; and I added, that from the conduct of the sentinel at the gate, the fraternisation with his garrison was but too probable.

The bugles were now ordered to sound the 'assembly,' and by gun-fire every officer was at his post, and all means were taken to ensure a warm reception for the 17th; and here I found in the minds of the married officers the same keen cutting doubts and harrowing anxiety concerning the faith of their men, and the safety of their wives and families. On their own lives, as soldiers, these brave fellows set but little value; yet true it is, as Byron has it,

> 'Leaving a small family at large
> Bothers the heroic in a charge.'

Food and rest I required imperatively; but ere I could take either, I applied to my friend Jones of the Horse Artillery, whom I had last seen at Dumdum, for the thousand

rupees, telling him of the greasy visitor I expected on the morrow probably, and with joy and alacrity he promised to let me have them at once. But I was never fated to require them, as events at Fyzabad, as elsewhere in Bengal, followed each other fast and furiously.

I was now within sixty English miles of Lucknow, where my battalion of the brigade was in garrison, and where—after achieving the freedom of Henriette Guise—I resolved to make every effort to rejoin.

Jones told me of some of those incidents which I have related in their places to preserve the coherence of my narrative: the retreat from the cantonments to the fort of Allahabad; who had perished and who got shelter there; the terrible fate of Stapleton; and the departure to Lucknow of my faithless 'Fairy' and her husband, escorted by a party of Europeans under Jack Dormer.

'By Jove, you have had an adventurous time of it!' he added, as we breakfasted together in the mess bungalow of the 22nd N.I.—coffee, broiled chicken, and a tasty mess called mango-fool, composed of milk,

sugar, and green mangoes, seemed as if food for the gods after all I had undergone. 'Poor Miss Guise,' he continued, reverting to the sufferings of Henriette, 'she always seemed to me the belle-idéale of a thoroughbred English girl. With all my heart, I would to God we had her safe behind our batteries! I hope that fakir fellow will keep his appointment.'

'My perplexity and anxiety will be terrible if he fails me,' said I, rather appalled by the chance.

'As for the thousand rupees—'

'How can I ever thank you for them, Jones?'

'By not talking about them. We should have raised ten times that sum to save any European woman from the hands of wretches such as these rebels. I used to admire the girl immensely at Calcutta; have been at more than one *burra-khanna* (grand dinner) in her father's swell place at Chowringhee. But there sound our artillery trumpets! What the deuce can be up? A row likely. Well, if these niggers, Moslem and Hindoo alike, are so deuced fond of their various

paradises, we shall send a few of them there pretty sharply from the mouth of a twelve-pounder—a mode of extinction they don't fancy much.'

'Yet they nearly served me so,' I replied with a species of shudder, remembering the views of the village mob and the cannon at the Ranee's gate.

'Have a weed, Rudkin, and excuse me, for now I must be off to my troop like a bird, old fellow.'

I thankfully accepted a cigar from his proffered case; and then Jones, a tall, fair-haired, and purpose-like officer, whose naturally fair English complexion had been burned to tawny red by the Indian sun, took his sword and pith helmet, and left me.

His cigar proved indeed a luxury, such as I had not enjoyed for some time; and now, ere it was half consumed, worn out with all I had undergone, I dropped into a profound slumber on a sofa in the mess-room, and it lasted for hours, unbroken by the sounds around me, by the voices of those who clattered heedlessly in and out, with their steel scabbards dangling behind them,—

shouting for beer, soda iced, brandy-pawnee, and tiffin from the butler,—and by noises which became much more alarming in the cantonments without.

CHAPTER XLIV.

IN VAIN.

While I had slept, two companies of Native Infantry had been told off to support Jones's battery of Horse Artillery, and every precaution had been taken for defensive operations, in expectation of the arrival of the 17th. At ten in the evening an alarm was sounded in the lines of the 6th Oude Irregular Infantry, and all their drums beat. This roused me effectually, and buckling on the only weapon I possessed—the sword taken from the naib, Osman Ebn Affan—I sallied forth into the barrack-yard.

'Load with grape!' I heard Jones cry, as his battery prepared for action, and the fuses were lighted and the limbers cast off.

'Forward!' cried the senior subadar, or native captain, of the two companies ordered to support the guns. There was a flashing

of steel amid the darkness as the fuses were reflected on the blades of bayonets, and the artillery guard advancing deliberately crossed them over the touch-holes of the guns, effectually preventing their use by the gholandazees, or gunners. The white officers, in command but nominally now, felt that all was over with them and their men.

Colonel Lennox now came hurriedly on the ground, and explained that the alarm among the Oude regiment was a false and needless one, and ordered the two companies to rejoin their battalion, leaving but one sentry over each gun. We then found that a general revolt of the whole garrison was taking place by a preconcerted scheme; for in complete military order, led by their native officers — ignoring altogether the presence of the European—the 15th Irregular Cavalry took possession of the magazine, and planted patrol parties round the entire cantonments, that none might escape without permission.

Jones and I went once more to where his guns were posted, but were not permitted to approach them. Sword in hand, a

subadar named Dhuleep Sing, the prime leader of the mutiny, said:

'Sahibs, if it is necessary to guard these guns, I will take care of them. Retire to the quarter-guard, and no harm shall be offered to any of you. We will prove true to our salt.'

'But what if the 17th come in?' I asked.

The subtle villain smiled, for then he knew the work of murder would begin without delay.

At that moment I heard a native captain, a Mohammedan, who was disposed to prove faithful, cry in broken English to the Oude Irregulars,

'Tam you Hindoo pandies—you 'ave provokee dis row!'

On this a musket exploded; his brains were blown out, by whom I know not, and he fell on his face with arms outspread.

The mutineers now became dreadfully excited; but some, who were not so bad as the rest, flocked round us, and frankly urged us to fly, as they would not be answerable for our lives a moment after the 17th marched in, and they might come at any moment.

'To your ranks—fall in, men!' cried the commandant, making a last effort to preserve order.

'Oukha hookam mut mâno!' cried the subadar Dhuleep Sing, savagely shaking his sword; 'humara hookam chulte!' words which mean in English, 'Don't attend to his orders—*I* am in command!'

Finding the revolt general and hopeless, the handful of Europeans—the exact number is unknown to me—with their families and one or two native servants, hurried to the bank of the Gogra river, and embarking as best we could in native boats, shoved off into the stream about two in the morning, with the intention of making our way to Garruckpore.

My own peril did not in the least affect me; I had but one thought now—that of Henriette Guise abandoned to her fate. Too evidently now it seemed that I should never be able to succour her, and should never hear of her more. It was a conviction most sad and terrible to contemplate.

I was on board the same budgeree with Jones and two other officers; she was leaky

and heavy, and we made but little way with our four paddles, for mistrusting the natives, we could not accept the services of any. The other boats were lighter, better manned, and soon left us behind. There was no moon, which was fortunate for us, but the sky was full of brilliant stars. At a point called Adjoodea we were hailed by a patrol of the 15th Cavalry, who rode close to the water-side. They ordered us to bring to, or we should be fired on; but as this announcement only caused us to redouble our efforts in silence, a couple of carbines flashed redly out from the river's bank; and throwing up his arms wildly, poor Jones, struck by a ball in the region of the heart, staggered from his seat, fell into the water, and was swept away without a groan.

They did not fire again, and rode off in the opposite direction, uttering cries of derision; but in rounding a sandbank we had a fresh peril to encounter, for we came suddenly upon the bivouac of the whole 17th regiment.

We could see their red glaring watch-fires, their muskets piled in an orderly way in lines, by companies, glittering in the light;

we could see the dark groups moving to and fro; heard their voices, and saw others lying asleep upon the ground, for their right flank was almost within pistol-shot of us. We ceased rowing lest the sound might reach them; and as the boat most fortunately drifted close in shore, where it was completely concealed by a heavy fringe of mangrove-bushes, we urged her along for some hundred yards by grasping these with our hands. Then muffling the oars with our handkerchiefs, and feeling puzzled the while to think how the boats ahead had escaped unseen, we once more resumed our seats, and pulled with all our vigour.

I was seated in the bow; we had the stream with us, and though our powers of rowing were lessened now by the loss of poor Jones, the boat went through the water with greatly increased speed, till suddenly I felt a terrible shock, and in a moment found myself with my two companions floundering breathlessly in the deep river. Our craft had struck some sunken rock, snag, or other obstruction, and was now floating away from us on the current, hopelessly capsised.

Instinctively I struck out for the shore, which I reached in safety; but not so my unfortunate companions. Each had but time to utter a pious invocation to heaven, and after rising once or twice, they sank for ever. So accustomed was I then to danger, that this terrible catastrophe affected me less at the time than it does when I think of the whole brief scene now after the lapse of years.

On scrambling up the bank, my first reflections were that I was still near the camp of the 17th regiment, whose fires I could see; and that fortunately, as I thought, I had by chance landed on the Lucknow side of the stream, which otherwise I must have been unable to cross.

All that day and the subsequent night I lurked in an adjacent jungle, where I dried my saturated clothing as well as I could, unable to leave the place of concealment—for the dye put upon my face by the Shastree had now passed away (as the polished back of my watch, when improvised as a mirror, informed me)—while the 17th remained in camp and the patrols of the 15th Irregular Cavalry were still hovering about.

At last, to my infinite relief, they all disappeared, having no doubt marched off towards Delhi, the great centre and focus of the revolt.

Wild grapes and gourds were my sole sustenance in the jungle, and I lay there filled by the keenest anxiety to reach Lucknow, and thence, at the head of a party, to make some effort for the rescue of Henriette —the poor girl who trusted me, and who at that very time was no doubt full of anxiety and hope; then I would indulge in reverie amid the breathless heat, dreaming dreams, as I had often done before by the side of a green breezy hill in the 'bonnie north countrie,' or while gazing into the red changing embers of a sea-coal fire at home, thinking of many things that might never come to pass, hopes that were far away now, and wishes that might never be fulfilled.

One longing ever recurred to me.

Oh, to be again with the Rifles! was my incessant thought and crave. With Dormer, Lonsdale, Prior, and all those fine young fellows, who were always as happy and merry as if youth was to last for ever. How

vile, cruel, pitiful, and degrading seemed this skulking existence! Oh, to be once again at the head of my company—those hardy and gallant fellows who had gone like a whirlwind, storming up the steep rocks at Alma, who had routed the Russians again at Inkermann, and had ferreted them like rats out of the ovens and quarries; for once again to hear the merry Kentish bugles ring out the orders to 'extend' and 'advance,' to 'close' and 'form square,' from square to form line and 'charge'—to charge upon those dark and treacherous wretches, those destroyers of our women and infants, the line with levelled bayonets, our grand old British line, that has never failed in battle since God created it!

The dawn of the second morning stole into the leafy dingles of my jungly retreat. The sunlight spread over the sky, and the waters of the Gogra, which ultimately join those of the Ganges, seemed to roll as white as milk between their dark-fringed banks of foliage. The masses of cloud were edged with gold by the yet unrisen sun, the dew lay deep on every leaf and in glittering pendent drops on

the feathery jungle-grass, the golden-coloured gourds, and the sharp thorns of the prickly pears; and the little parroquets and brilliant birds of paradise were chattering and chirping as they flew from branch to branch, when I crept forth to reconnoitre, and saw that the 17th regiment had really departed, and that no trace remained but the white ashes of the watch-fires.

Stiff with cold, and nearly soaked with dew, the dread of fever compelled me now to set forth in search of another sheltering place and of food; and I resolved to travel in the direction of Lucknow, due west so far as I could, while the morning air had that delightful freshness which, in a tropical climate, is so soon evaporated by the fierce rays of a cloudless sun.

'What may happen next?' thought I, while treading along the highway, again without money or arms, unable to achieve much single-handed, and conscious that I might only be marching to my doom.

In my desperation to procure something to eat, I ventured near a very small village, where a Hindoo woman, commiserating my

forlorn aspect, gave me a draught of milk and some bread unquestioned, and directed me as to the road for Lucknow; but I had not proceeded three miles when two Mohammedan horsemen, ferocious-like fellows, armed to the teeth, overtook me from the rear. One, with a long pistol cocked in his right hand, commanded me imperiously to follow him to the camp of the 6th Oude Irregulars.

'Why?' I demanded.

'Dare you question me, accursed dog?' he cried.

'I do—why?'

'Because your head is worth a hundred rupees,' he replied; 'but you shall carry it to the camp on your own shoulders.'

'Fire, rascal, if you will; but follow you I shall not,' said I, becoming blind with fury to find myself bullied thus by a vile mutineer.

He instantly levelled the pistol at my head; but his companion, by a circular twirl of his sword, struck up the weapon, which exploded in the air, saying as he did so:

'Kill all, I say; but these infidels are too easily killed. Allah and the Prophet have not given them much life certainly; but let us take this one to the camp and make sport with him, as we have done with some of the rest.'

This 'sport' I knew could mean but lingering torture before death, and I began to conceive the idea of anticipating the latter by rushing at the speaker's throat and attempting to drag him off his horse.

'So be it,' replied his comrade with a malicious grin; 'there is one great devil in this world and many little devils; but the worst devil of all is a white-faced Feringhee in a red coat and pith helmet.'

Pulling a piece of rope from one of his holsters, he suddenly and very adroitly looped it round my arm, and making me fast to his saddle-bow, proceeded to drag me along the road in the direction of Fyzabad.

'When your head is off you will be saved the trouble of shaving,' said he, laughing, with reference to my grisly beard of many days' growth. 'I am a barber, but have now relinquished the razor for the tulwar.'

'A barber—thou!' exclaimed his comrade rather contemptuously.

'Yes, and have had under my hands and special care the sacred beard of Hafiz, the Rajah of Chutneypore—his pride and the terror of all unbelievers.'

'Bosh!' said the other; 'he has a white female slave, who pulls it, they say, whenever he displeases her.'

'True, perhaps; but then she is such a privileged gholaum, as the Holy Prophet calls a slave of the right hand. Whom have we here?' he exclaimed, as, at a sudden turn of the road, a party of twenty horse, riding by threes, clad in light-blue uniforms with scarlet turbans, armed with tasselled lances and having round gilt bucklers slung on their backs, came abruptly upon us at a trot, and on seeing me halted and surrounded us.

'Raj troops!' cried the other fellow, meaning that they were soldiers in the service of some native prince.

I concluded that it was all over with me now, believing that some man among them, who was in the mood for it, might pistol or cut me down.

'Surrender this prisoner,' said the rissaldar, a handsome young man, with aquiline features and a thick well-curved moustache.

'To whom?' demanded my captors fiercely.

'The Rajah of Chutneypore; we have orders to glean up all Europeans.'

I was immediately released, and the two horsemen galloped off in the direction of the village, swearing by the beard of the Prophet they were sorry that they had not shot me at once.

I now found that I had simply changed masters; and in total doubt of what was to follow, was marched under this formidable escort—all of whom were silent, taciturn, and would afford me no information—away by a cross road among the higher ground.

CHAPTER XLV.

IN THE CASTLE OF THE RAJAH.

The rissaldar had said that the orders of the Rajah were to glean up all Europeans; hence, from the conduct of his son, I could not doubt but that his highness of Chutneypore wished to do a little private homicide on his own account; and with this pleasant conviction, together with another that escape was hopeless, I marched silently and doggedly onward, surrounded by my escort, who went at a quick pace.

At last there rose before us a town with a few mosques and minarets, surrounded by a wall, and over it on a hill a palatial fortress of Moorish aspect, which I knew from engravings I had seen to be the city and palace of Chutneypore or Chuttneepoor, for the name is spelt in both ways.

The fort on its volcanic rocky hill over-

looked a vast extent of luxuriantly-foliaged and finely-cultivated country, rising above the dead level of the plain like a ship above the sea, to the height of five hundred feet. On passing through the narrow and tortuous streets, where, but for my Raj escort, the scowling Mohammedan population would soon have made 'kabobs' of me, and by some tanks in which alligators, brought when young from the Ganges or the Goomtee, were floating amid the flowers, ooze, and lotus-leaves, we began to ascend by a winding way the hill on which the stately dwelling of the Rajah stood.

En route we also passed the looted and defaced mansion of her Majesty's late Resident, whose skull was then hanging in a bhoosa bag at the Kotwallee, to which he had been dragged through the streets and there slain by Abdul Khan, the eldest son of Hafiz.

I knew that the latter prince was very fond of sport—of fishing and pig-shooting—and that he so loved to combine the pleasures of the chase with those of the zenana that he had a balcony built outside the wall of that

important part of his mansion overlooking a jungly thicket, and there he spent a great portion of every day with his hookah and coffee, his favourite wives about him, and a few loaded rifles and juzails, to have a quiet shot at any passing pig or other game; and as we proceeded upward we heard a shot or two in the air from the balcony in question, thus indicating that he was there.

We were soon within the walls of the guarded fortress. As we passed the embattled gate, over which two long iron 24-pounders frowned, I gave a last backward glance upon the green landscape below, and wondered if ever I should be permitted to look on Nature's fair face again.

The castle was square and lofty, with a round tower at each corner, and loopholed battlements terminated the lofty wall, on which the green banner of the Prophet was flying, for the Rajah and all his people were Moslems. The colour of the edifice was—I write in the past tense, as Colin Campbell's Highlanders blew the whole place to atoms after Lucknow—a muddy grey, somewhat like the tint of our coats after trench work

in the Crimea, as mud or clay baked hard in the hot sunshine was a great element in its construction.

Within this fortress were the white walls and terraced roofs of a mansion nicely plastered with chunam, while certain windows of the round towers at the angles, as they opened inward, indicated that they were occupied as a portion of the general dwelling, with which they were connected by galleries, and were, as I afterwards found, occupied by soldiers, servants, and gholaums. On the inner side of the banquette were cannon mounted all round on new carriages, with piles of new shot between them. Others stood loaded night and day before the gates, all serving to indicate that his highness the Rajah was prepared for any mischief or emergency.

The vast number of attendants hovering about in this large and stately place; the double relays of palkee or palanquin wallahs stretched lazily under the verandahs; the grooms with long chowries fanning pink-tailed white horses; the men leading hunting cheetahs about; the soldiers that lounged

and loitered in all quarters, smoking bhang or cleaning their arms; the tailors and other craftsmen at work in odd corners; the kit-mutgars and other Indian domestics, who were intent on doing nothing,—all e rved to show that we were within a princely dwelling, for the Rajah had an income of some hundred thousands per annum.

I asked the rissaldar, after he had halted his party, if Abdul Khan was in the palace; and was told, without any of those injurious epithets or adjectives now applied so freely to us unfortunate Kaffirs, that he was supposed to be at Allahabad.

I gathered a little relief from this answer, and reflected that I might long since have perished under merciless hands in the camp of the 6th Oude Regiment; and now hoped to find, ere the return of his son, some protection at those of the Rajah, as some return for the free exercise of our garrison hospitality to him at 'the city of Allah.'

I begged the rissaldar to bring me at once before the prince his master, as any certainty, however terrible, to an impatient spirit like mine is preferable to a harrowing suspense.

He told me politely that it was impossible just then, as his highness was among the ladies in the zenana, and could not be disturbed; but that after evening prayer he would no doubt see me, and meantine all my wants should be fully attended to.

I inquired if there were any other European prisoners in the fortress, and after a hesitation that was very marked he replied in the negative.

Hope gathered more strongly in my heart when I found myself conducted by a kit-mutgar to a comfortable apartment, where other attendants came, who, with ill-concealed aversion, gave me a bath, 'shaving-tackle,' and ere long, on a large silver tray, that which proved most welcome, dinner, Indian though it was.

There were some instances of officers and their families who had been saved from the first fury of the mutineers being protected by rajahs and zemindars or other landholders, as Rees tells us, either from a desire to propitiate government, in the event of our being successful, or in order to sell them for slaughter to the insurgent leaders, should

they continue in power, and utterly crush the East India Company; and in the end I found that his highness of Chutneypore—unlike the merciless fanatic Abdul his heir—was exactly one of those politic hypocrites, who, anxious to serve two masters, had resolved to keep friends with both parties—a fortunate circumstance in the end for more than one.

My room was a spacious one, nicely covered by a Persian carpet, with a pillow, or gaddu—a round bolster covered with rich velvet—placed at one end as a seat. The walls were all arabesqued and inscribed with sentences from the Koran; and after my dinner—which consisted of various kinds of curry and sweetmeats—was despatched, together with a couple of bottles of pale ale—the plunder doubtless of some European house, most probably that of the poor Resident—a prepared hookah was brought, and I lolled on the soft gaddu, enjoying the unusual luxury.

Overcome by all I had undergone, I was about to drop asleep, when I saw several Mohammedans in the courtyard without,

spreading their carpets and consulting prayer-compasses as to the exact direction of Mecca; then turning their tawny faces that way, they proceeded to their orisons very devoutly. I now knew that the time to see the Rajah and to learn my fate would soon be at hand, and rousing myself, began to frame the speeches I resolved to make him.

Anon I heard the clink of spurs, and the copper-coloured rissaldar came to say that 'his highness was at leisure now, and would shed the light of his august countenance upon me;' so starting from my velvet bolster, I rose and followed him with a heart whose pulses were greatly quickened.

We left our boots at the door of an apartment, and were ushered in. What was to follow this interview Heaven alone knew.

My late adventures had been so stirring, 'the *entourage* so strange,' to quote an adventurous writer, 'the people' among whom I had been thrown 'so wild, the life I led so unique, that I used to argue the point with myself whether I was the same individual, or in my normal condition; whether

perchance I had not died in one or other of my near escapes, and been born anew into a fresh planet.'

The Rajah was seated on a divan of yellow silken cushions, smoking a magnificent hookah, to which a little girl, clad in spotless white muslin, attended, with its snaky coils of gold and scarlet silk lying on the carpet round her. He was plainly attired for an Oriental of rank, as a single diamond ornament sparkled in his turban; but there was an oppressive sense of magnificence and luxury in his general surroundings. An open arcade, formed of gilded horseshoe arches, that sprang from red-marble pillars, formed one side of the apartment, showing the flowers and shrubbery of a lovely garden, in the centre of which a brazen fountain spouted and sparkled; while beyond was the zenana, with all its windows jealously closed by curtains of scented grass-cloth.

As usual, the hair, beard, and moustaches of Hafiz were carefully trimmed and oiled, and over his shoulders was a handsome shawl stamped with the Persian mark; another was round his waist, and therein was placed that

which I never saw him wear in the cantonments, a kundjar, its hilt sparkling with precious stones.

I have already said, when mentioning his appearance at Blanche's reception, that his figure was small, his face of course dark, and his eyes cunning in expression. On this occasion I regarded him earnestly, and could not determine whether he regarded me with hostility or friendship; his general air was one of Oriental stolidity and indifference.

He signed to the rissaldar to withdraw and wait outside, and from this I augured well. I bowed low when he took the amber mouthpiece from his lips, and with a little nod said:

'Sahib, you are welcome to Chutneypore. The rissaldar did not come on these budmashes who had you a moment too soon. I hope your wants have been attended to?'

This was most encouraging, so I replied, 'Thanks to your highness, yes, in every respect.'

'Shabash (that is well)!'

'We have not had the pleasure of meeting since these unhappy events came to pass;

but I trust that in you I shall find a friend,' I now ventured to say.

'You shall, sahib, so far as I can be one; but for how long it is impossible to predict.. I have not yet declared for the King of Delhi; but whether his troops or yours are the first that we shall see before our walls is unknown. We are all in the hands of Fate. Our kismet is written on our brows at the hour of our birth, and it is always there, although we see it not.'

I bowed in silence, for I knew precisely what all this meant. If the mutineers were defeated, I should be a free man; if they proved victorious, the green banner of Timour's descendant would be hoisted and short work made with me.

'I have endured great privations and encountered many perils since the revolt at Allahabad,' said I.

'*Kootch purwanni* (never mind),' he replied, smiling; 'they are all over now.'

'By the heat my organs of vision are so relaxed, that at times all things before me present but a confusion of black and white.'

'A little rest and rose-water of Ghazepore will make that all right,' said he, smiling.

He now desired me to be seated while coffee was served. We had a curious disjointed conversation on the then state of matters in India, and I detected that he would gladly have had a thousand Europeans in his hands as hostages to Fortune. From this, I feared that I should be detained a prisoner till the termination of the war—a prisoner in secret, within so short a distance of my comrades, a thought to me altogether intolerable—and already I began to meditate an escape.

'Ah, sahib,' said he with undisguised regret, 'this revolt has been ill managed, and ruined by the impatience of the 3rd Cavalry at Meerut. Had *all* the preparations gone secretly on for one year more, by the ninety-nine attributes of Allah, you had lost every acre of India in one day!'

I felt that there was some truth in this. Warming a little, he now referred to a well-known but absurd report, then very current in Central India.

'Your Queen—who is she that she should dare propose to take our noble zemindars of

Oude and the high-caste Brahmins over the *kala-pawnee* (sea), and marry them to the chunam-faced daughters of accursed unbelievers? Excuse me, captain sahib, but are they not so?'

In vain I attempted to soothe him by saying, in his own phraseology, that this was 'an invention of the father of lies,' vowing by every stone in our mosques that it was so.

'Your mosques—*your* mosques!' said he disdainfully, and thus reminding me by his manner that I was a prisoner rather than a guest; 'you Kaffirs build places, I know, wherein you worship, as you imagine; but what says the twenty-fourth chapter of the Koran? "As for the unbelievers, their works are like a vapour in a plain, which the thirsty traveller thinketh to be water, until when he cometh thereto and findeth it to be nothing."'

All this was a little tiresome to a man whose life was hanging in the balance; but I was compelled to temporise, and thought with disdain how often at the mess of our battalion his highness, who quoted the

Koran like a Dervish or Moolah, had broken the laws of the Prophet by being bundled off in his palanquin with a good 'skinful' of sparkling hock and moselle. Remembering those times, I said to this politic Rajah:

'I trust that your highness, as a faithful subject of her Majesty, will kindly send me under military escort to Lucknow, the nearest of our posts, if possible.'

'There is likely to be plenty of rough work ere long at Lucknow,' he replied, knitting his brows at the word 'subject,' which at that moment was an unfortunate phrase; but while his eyes flashed, the real desire of his heart was betrayed.

'Feringhee, you are a fool! That which has been predicted by the Prophet must come to pass—the destruction of all unbelievers. It is at hand, and I believe your *raj* is over.'

'Not exactly yet, Rajah.'

'How—why?'

'Because that which is foretold is never rightly known until it *has* come to pass, and we are not ruined yet. Remember what Hyder Ali said after his rout at Cuddelore:

"The defeat of many will not destroy these accursed Feringhees. I may ruin their resources by land; but I cannot dry up the sea!"'

'Wah, wah—true; but we must not quarrel,' said he suddenly, as if somewhat impressed by the truth of Hyder's remark; 'I am going to shoot to-morrow—will the sahib accompany me?'

'To the fields?' I asked with mistaken eagerness, as the hope of escape dawned on me.

'No,' said he with a malicious smile, as if he divined what was passing in my thoughts; 'no, that is too much trouble in this hot season. I shall send syces to beat the woods, and we shall try our skill from the castle wall.'

'I have always heard that your highness was a splendid shot,' said I, and the remark was not flattery but truth.

'To-morrow I mean to use an English gun, and you shall see what you shall see,' he replied proudly and confident in his skill.

'And you will use the greased cartridges?' asked I with a little malice in my turn.

'The Prophet forbid, though I have some casks of them.'

'How then ?'

'You shall load it for me.'

'With pleasure,' said I.

He then made a sign that our interview was over, and trusting that something would 'turn up,' I retired with a low bow, and, weary and worn, threw myself on the charpoy provided for me.

So passed my first night in the castle of Chutneypore.

But our shooting resulted in events which, though they came about very simply, were nevertheless so strange, that the following part of my story almost resembles the coincidences of a novel.

CHAPTER XLVI.

I RIVAL THE RAJAH IN SHOOTING.

THOUGH as a soldier accustomed to sleep with ease anyhow or anywhere, and to wake without an emotion of surprise at finding myself in a strange place after a long, deep, and dreamless slumber, I must own that I *was* puzzled for a minute or two concerning my whereabouts next morning, till all the events of the preceding day flashed with coherence upon me.

'One would require more lives than a cat for Indian service now,' thought I; 'but how about getting out of this huge trap, Chutneypore?'

I have said that Hafiz was fond of sport; thus I had barely breakfasted, when the rissaldar appeared, and said that his highness with his guns and attendants awaited me; and in the early morning we joined

him at a part of the ramparts overlooking the open country, where the silvery mists were rising from the rice and paddy fields, those of corn and maize, the dark-green jungles and the shady tops of beautiful trees, the graceful palm and the blooming baubool.

I gazed earnestly along the winding road, which led, I knew, to Lucknow, where a caravan was visible proceeding in that direction, and wistfully I watched it for a moment —the quaint and wild-looking escort mounted on camels and horses, all gaily trapped, their lances, bucklers, and matchlocks of steel flashing in the sunshine, and two great elephants with scarlet howdahs towering over all.

The Rajah received me with politeness, almost cordiality, and his attendants, who had not the same reasons for acting with the policy which led him to spare the life of a solitary British officer, regarded him with surprise and me with hate and aversion in their eyes.

One of our ordinary rifle-muskets was now handed to me, and as the Raj troops of Chutneypore were all armed with the ancient

matchlock, it was considered altogether a marvel of a weapon in construction and lightness. I carefully loaded it with one of the obnoxious cartridges, and then capped it, a fresh source of wonder to the observers. The flint-musket they could understand; but the percussion-cap was quite another thing. I then handed it to Hafiz, who waited with characteristic Oriental patience for some time, till the shrill cries of the syces who were beating the thickets below the castle-wall were heard, and then a wild pig of enormous size, his bristles shining like silver in the morning sunshine, and looking among the bright green leaves as clean as if he had been daily washed and brushed; came trotting past, about a hundred yards distant. Hafiz aimed and fired instantly.

'Shabash! Shabash!' cried all his attendants, clapping their hands as usual, for he never missed, and approval of his skill was expected in the form of applause. However, in this instance these exclamations of 'Well done!' were rather inopportune; the pig only kicked out with his hind legs, as if the ball had struck the turf somewhere near him,

and then he trotted leisurely away into the wood; for Hafiz had not sighted the rifle—a process of which he knew nothing—and had fired at a fifty-yard range.

Looking rather perplexed, he knit his brows and desired me to reload, which I did in silence.

Ere long a couple of similar pigs appeared about a hundred and fifty yards off. Hafiz selected one, aimed carefully, but missed again, on which his perplexity and irritation increased. He fired repeatedly, in every instance missing, till his dark face flushed with anger, while silent wonder was very plainly expressed in those of his attendants. At last he violently threw down the rifle with contempt.

'Pah! your Feringhee gun is a bad gun,' said he, taking up one of his beautifully mounted Affghan juzails, the stock of which was elaborately inlaid with ivory, mother-of-pearl, and silver-work.

'Will your highness permit me to have a shot with the English rifle?' I asked.

'Certainly; at what will you fire?'

'Anything that is within range.'

'There is one of our syces who is beating the wood,' said the Rajah with an undisguised sneer; 'I think, however, that he will be pretty safe.'

'I beg to differ from you.'

'The man is fully five hundred yards off.'

'I could hit him easily at a thousand; still I should prefer another mark, and so I think would he, if consulted in the matter.'

Upon a piece of ruined wall there was at that moment perched one of those kind of fowls I have described as seated on the cornice of Sir Harry Calvert's house, a gigantic *argill*, or species of heron, the adjutant bird, so called by our soldiers in consequence of its erect posture and military strut. Among Brahmins, who hold it in great veneration, I dared not have selected such an object to fire at; but my spectators were all Mohammedans. The bird sat as still as if cast in bronze, being doubtless gorged with serpents, lizards, and toads, which it devours in abundance; and it was now, doubtless, dozing sleepily in the sunshine.

'Does your highness see yonder bird?' I asked.

'Barely; why it is half a coss distant.'

'Not quite so far,' said I, smiling; 'but it is fully eight hundred yards from us.'

'And you pretend that you will hit it?' he exclaimed.

'I do not pretend, but mean to do so.'

'It might as well be at Allahabad or Mecca for all the mischief you can do it,' said the Rajah, whose followers exchanged smiles of doubt and derision. 'But how do you know so well that it is eight hundred yards distant?'

'By my knowledge of distance. I have been drilled to study it, and to judge of it, for the instruction of others.'

'In Allah's name, fire, then!' said he, with a scornful laugh, in which the rest joined, alike from inclination and duty.

Feeling that, after such confident assertions, much depended on my coolness and accuracy of aim, or I should be disgraced before and derided by those who now crowded near us, I carefully loaded, capped, and adjusted the rifle, having the back-sight fully

up, and the slide on the scale placed to a nicety; but yet I knew that as I had never used this particular weapon, and that as the figuring is sometimes fallacious, I might miss after all. Having previously ascertained 'the pull' of the trigger, I took a steady aim on the Hythe principle, and restraining the breath, fired.

Bang went the rifle, ping rang the conical bullet, and then we saw the great bird rise from the ruined wall for an instant, and spread out its wings, with which, in another moment, it beat the turf as it fell, rolled over, and finally lay still.

Great was the astonishment of the Rajah at this performance, of which any one of our crack shots would think little now; but the subadars, jemidars, naicks, and so forth, of the Raj garrison, who watched me closely—for in that perilous and warlike time every trick of fence and every hint that could be given in the exciting game of homicide was valuable—now began to gaze at each other with surprise and on me with fresh aversion, while not a few muttered audibly of mantras and magic spells.

Since then I have hit many a bull's-eye at a greater distance with a breech-loader on a sweltering day at Wimbledon, or in the long breezy glen of the Braid Hills; but such weapons and feats of workmanship were unknown in the days of that bantling of the Whigs, Nana of Cawnpore.

'Shabash!' said the Rajah, patting me on the shoulder; but fearing to mortify him, the spectators remained silent. 'You shall teach me to do this.'

'With pleasure.'

'Her highness the Ranee must see you shoot, and she shall do so before sunset this evening. Meantime, we shall have a game of puchese and a pipe. Do you play puchese?'

'Yes.'

'You do everything,' said he approvingly.

'Everything but believe in the Prophet—the accursed Kaffir!' said a not unfamiliar voice; and on turning I was confronted by the savage Meah Sahib—Abdul Khan—the eldest son of Hafiz, who had just arrived.

'Silence, son,' said the Rajah; 'I have promised the sahib my protection, and he

shall have it, for he has eaten of our bread and salt.'

'So be it,' replied Abdul, with a reverence to his father; 'but, Inshallah (please God),' my time may yet come.'

Dissembling my hatred, rage, and contempt—any exhibition of which would have been as useless as unwise—I joined the Rajah in a game of puchese—twenty-five—which is not unlike backgammon, and is played upon a board with cowrie-shells and men, while with a sullen scowl the Meah—for so the eldest son is always named in a Mohammedan family—strode away to the apartments of the Ranee, his mother.

CHAPTER XLVII.

WHAT OCCURRED IN THE ZENANA.

Our game of puchese was a very protracted one; but after it and tiffin were over, the Rajah invited me to show the Ranee a specimen of my skill with the rifle, as she and other ladies were fond of overlooking his shooting from the balcony of the zenana.

The syces were once more sent into the woods below the castle rock; and though usually no male foot save those of Hafiz and Abdul might profane that *sanctum sanctorum*, the zenana, the former conducted me to the place where he usually spent some hours every day, rifle in hand, 'potting' the pigs and wild fowl in the thicket below; and I was presented as a 'burra sahib' (*i.e.* great gentleman) to the Ranee and several ladies who were closely veiled, though she showed her face, which might once have been

pleasing, but had utterly ceased to be so then.

So I was actually in the zenana, or nearly so; that wonderful place

'Where languid beauty kept her pale-faced court.'

It was rather brown-faced in this instance. I had certainly passed through the gate of it, and the balcony where the Ranee received me was outside the wall; but an arcade of open horseshoe-shaped arches showed me an apartment beyond, vaulted with Saracenic groins, a tesselated floor of black and red marble, and arched niches formed of the purest and whitest chunam, containing vases of freshly-gathered flowers; the walls were painted with beautiful arabesque foliage, interwoven with texts from the inevitable Koran, done in gold leaf.

On low divans of elegant workmanship, covered with the richest Chinese silk or Persian carpets, and attended by female servants, who fanned them when too weary to fan themselves, listlessly idle, inhaling essences or strewing about the petals of flowers, were some of those whom the

Rajah kept hidden from the world; but my sudden appearance so near their forbidden dwelling excited them at once to rouse themselves and speak.

The wife of the Rajah was never without her hand-mirror, for though old and withered, wrinkled and mummified in aspect, she was as vain as a European coquette of twenty.

'Fan my face,' I heard her say to one; 'my hands, my feet,' to others; 'some Ghazepore rose-water—quick!' to a fourth; but on my being presented, she rose from her divan and greeted me very politely.

A large yet slender ring of fine gold hung from the septum of her aquiline nose. It was partly open, with a ruby at each end. Rubies dangled from her ears, and diamonds and pearls were about her dress wherever she could place them.

To please her, I fired several shots at very long ranges, when the syces beat some wild pigs and other game across the open dingles of the wood far down below—a wood where all the barnyard fowls common to Europe were cackling or crowing—in each instance

knocking over my quarry, to the unconcealed astonishment of the Ranee and other ladies, as the performances of Hafiz had never exceeded a hundred and fifty yards, and seldom so distant as that, while I was firing at eight and nine hundred; so such shrill exclamations of 'Shabash!' ensued, that many more spectators came crowding to the archways which opened to the balcony, and among these was one whose figure startled me, as from her station and bearing I was certain she was a European, though her face was veiled, and she was muffled in one of those shapeless coils of muslin called a *saree*, consisting of many yards, usually worn by the Mohammedan women. Moreover, if farther proof were wanting, I could see that her hands were as white as snow, and, though covered with native rings, most beautiful in form and delicacy. In one she carried a *vina*, or guitar, with frets and steel and copper strings. She had golden *vullails* round her slender wrists, and a *varan malai*, or necklace, formed of nearly fifty double pagoda coins, encircling her neck; and from all this I augured that she was a favourite.

A low cry escaped her; she came swiftly towards me, and threw up her veil.

'*Henriette!*' I exclaimed, in a voice unlike my own.

At another time she might have laughed, even as Blanche would have done, at our mutual masquerade of dress; but, alas, there was no thought of laughter in us then. Indeed, I had a great lump in my throat, and a strange choking sensation there suggestive of suffocation.

So she was indeed Henriette, looking as beautiful as ever, with an expression of tender uncertainty in her timid eyes—eyes that were dark, yet full of liquid light and tears and joy—as we clasped each other's hands with a mutual warmth at meeting as if we had been rescued from the grave, which was indeed the case. Ours was not a situation for ceremony, and for some moments we were silent, with my right arm round her, and her sweet face on my breast, when she sobbed hysterically, our stolid Oriental spectators looking wonderingly on us the while, at such a scene in such an unwonted place.

The surprise of the Ranee at this sudden burst of emotion was mingled with a little indignation at what she deemed our impropriety.

'Sahib, is she your kinswoman?' she demanded of me.

'No; but the dearest of my friends.'

'So it would seem,' was her dry response.

The Rajah—who had seen much more of that which she had not, the usual intercourse of English society at Benares, Calcutta, and elsewhere, and moreover being aware of the terrible situation of the Europeans, which made them as it were all kindred at that time in India—was by no means either surprised or offended with the joy and sympathy expressed by us at a meeting so utterly unexpected; and as her head drooped on my shoulder there flashed back on my memory the strange dream I had in the verandah of the cantonments at Allahabad—the dream interrupted by poor little Azuma.

'O Captain Rudkin, Captain Rudkin, can it be reality this?' she kept repeating, with a strange intensity of expression gathering in her eyes; while I strove to reassure her,

and seated her on a divan, feeling that our shooting was over for the day. I was so excited that I could not have hit an elephant at fifty yards. An attendant, by the Rajah's order, now gave her in a crystal cup a kind of liquid sweetmeat, consisting of rose-leaves, conserved with orange-flowers, lemon, and Visna cherry. She then became a little more composed, and Hafiz, who had betaken him to his hookah, said:

'The Koompanie Bahadoor at Calcutta thinks he is powerful; so did the Sultan Ackbar; and so have all such since the days of Mahmoud of Ghisni; but beauty—beauty such as yours is more powerful than all the powers on earth!'

Though Henriette Guise did not understand a word of this, which was said in Hindostanee, the brow of the old Ranee grew black, and she fanned herself violently.

'True,' said Abdul Khan, who, unknown to me, had been looking on with a darker scowl than ever. 'She is a veritable tulip cheek; but, like the apples of Isthkather, she is sweet on one side and sour on the other.'

'What do you mean, Meah Sahib?' I asked with affected calmness, sensible that there was a more terrible necessity for temporising now.

'Sweet to you apparently but sour to *me*. So one day must end all this!' replied Abdul, grinding his teeth and twisting up his moustache, while I could see that poor blanched Henriette regarded him with a painful degree of terror.

So it was from this fortress that she had contrived to communicate with me, through Khoda Bux and the fakir, to whom she had ventured to throw her note, ring, and handkerchief over the wall of the zenana. They had told her that her message had been duly delivered to me at the house of Bulwant the Shastree; but as no answer came from Fyzabad, she believed in her heart that I had either perished there or somewhere else, and so concluded herself lost for ever beyond all hope.

'We live in a stirring and most terrible time, dearest Miss Guise,' said I, taking her hands once more in mine.

'Terrible, indeed, Captain Rudkin! Only

think, it is quite the persecution of fate with me. After having fever at Allahabad, after discovering—discovering—' she paused, and hastily added, 'to be torn from my bed to face the jaws of death, and perhaps worse than death, and now to be a prisoner here! And you—you—'

'I have risked and saved as many lives as if I had been a grimalkin, and yet every hour have a tenth to look after,' said I with a smile, to reassure her.

I begged of the Rajah permission to hear her story, which he at once accorded, and in a very few words I told her mine. She inquired eagerly about her cousin Blanche and Sir Harry Calvert. They were safe, I said, down country somewhere—saying that which I hoped to be the case.

'Thank heaven!' she exclaimed, 'for I once heard Rao Sing, your servant, say that the Mehm Sahib Calvert was destined for the zenana of Abdul Khan.'

Stapleton she never inquired about, which I thought strange; but when speaking of him she shuddered and covered her eyes with her hands, and was the first to tell me of his

dreadful fate, which Khoda Bux had related to her, in his broken English, with remarkable gusto.

While we conversed thus, Zeena the Ranee watched us with a mingled expression of fear, so much so that her husband took the amber mouthpiece of his hookah from his lips and said :

'You look at the Mehm Sahib as if she had the evil-eye !'

'Perhaps she has,' replied the Ranee sharply.

'Well, if you fear it, take it out of her,' said he, referring to an Oriental superstition that this can be removed by passing the hand over the possessed person, from head to foot, and pressing the backs of their hands against their temples ; but the Ranee only smiled disdainfully.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

BOUND TO GUN.

She told me that on the night of the mutiny at Allahabad she was lying awake in bed, full of very sad and depressing thoughts; she was thinking of other places and times—of Thorsgill Hall, and much that had happened there—when suddenly various alarming sounds startled her. She heard shouts and wild halloos; the incessant cry of *Deen!* Then the sound of bugles, of trumpets, and the frequent report of muskets in the cantonments.

Through the green jalousies of her windows the red light of a conflagration—the flaming bungalows—began to gleam; she heard the rush of many slippered feet in the verandah without; her door was dashed open, and ere she could attempt to escape, Rao Sing and Khoda Bux, followed by many other native

ruffians, rushed in. A wild and despairing shriek escaped her as she was torn from her bed, and with fiendish exultation borne away by them into the night air, and bound with a cord to a gun. In this fashion they meant to convey her into the city; but the stand made by our skirmishers drove her captors, with the gun, back to the cantonments, where, but for the timely intervention of others, a dreadful fate awaited her.

When all hope was dead, and she about to swoon, she felt herself unbound from the cannon, and lifted into a luxurious palkee, or litter, with a kubdeh, or gilded pine-apple—a sign of royalty—on its top; the rabble fled and she found herself surrounded by a party of Raj troops under Abdul Khan, who had come for the express purpose of carrying off Blanche, whose fair dazzling complexion and golden hair made her seem a veritable divinity in that land of mahogany skins; so, failing to capture one cousin, he was forced to content himself with the other.

He warned her in broken English that she should never see that land of the Feringhees, England, again, as it was to become a

province of the King of Delhi; that the raj of Jan Bool—is he a god of the Feringhees?—and of the Koompanie Bahadoor (Governor-General) was gone now—gone for ever.

'Allah Ackbar,' she heard Abdul say to the rissaldar; 'what a houri she is! I would have preferred the Mehm Sahib Calvert with the sunny hair; however, I may get her yet, as I have offered sixty gold mohurs for her.'

Sorrow and misery are often deadened or relieved by the sensation of sudden motion; but poor Henriette told me that when in the palanquin, and when the doors were closed and a pleasant breeze came through the open blinds, as the bearers trod swiftly along singing their monotonous songs, she drew the coverings over her and sank back on the pillow, with only a bewildered sense of utter horror of all that might yet be in store for her—one who was so tender, feeble, and helpless, so terrified and stricken.

She felt desolate—most desolate! The secret of Blanche and Stapleton had passed completely out of her mind. Her home, her parents and friends, never should she see them more, and they would never know

her fate. Who had escaped and who had perished at the station, where doubtless the horrors of Meerut and Delhi had been acted again? Had I, whom she considered her chief friend—how cold the word seemed now! —fallen with the rest?

Her old life seemed to have passed suddenly, but most completely, away; and a new and terrible one had come in its place. In whose hands was she now, and whither being taken—to friends or foes? Was this state of things—all she had undergone, all she dreaded—a dream, or a horrible reality? She could not fashion even a prayer, and yet her agonised heart was full of deep and prayerful thoughts. She was somewhat relieved when Abdul opened the door of the litter, and looking in admiringly, said kindly, in broken English:

'Sleep if you can, you require it, Mehm Sahib.'

The bearers were often changed during the night, for they journeyed many miles, and she could hear the monotonous tramp of her cavalry escort under Abdul and the rissaldar; but she dropped into dull deep slumber that

lasted many hours, till she was awakened by the sudden cessation of motion, the setting down of the litter, and a voice crying:

'Gosha, gosha! Murdana, murdana!'

This means 'Private, private!' the usual warning when Mohammedan ladies leave or enter a mansion; and then she found that she was in the zenana of one whom she had so often seen at Allahabad—Hafiz the Rajah of Chutneypore.

She had been treated with every kindness; the chief boredom amid her sorrow and fear being the alternate admiration and attentions of the father and son. At first she felt an emotion of deep and sincere gratitude to the latter, whose timely arrival had saved her from greater indignities, and from a fate at the thought of which her soul sickened and died within her. He had saved her honour and her life; he had treated her with every respect and kindness; yet she read a future peril in the expression of the young man's eye.

When she first came among them the darkness of her eyes and hair occasioned no comment amongst the ladies of the zenana;

but the pure whiteness of her skin was to them a perpetual source of wonder and speculation. So were the form and delicacy of her hands and feet. They were certain that she possessed some secret, some spell or charm, and were wont to roll up her sleeves to the shoulder and open the bosom of her dress to discover where the white painting ended; but these more than 'nut brown maids' sought in vain.

Ere I left her I gave her such assurances of hope as my own heart scarcely possessed, and she wept freely when the Rajah pretty plainly hinted I had been there long enough —that there could be no more shooting now; and then I retired, feeling happier and lighter of heart than I had been for many a month. Yet this new emotion of joy became blended with anxiety for the release of Henriette, whose position was full of peril —the admiration of the two gentlemen mentioned on the one hand, and the fiery jealousy of the Ranee on the other; which might prompt violence, poison, mutilation of her beauty—I knew not what—for these people were capable of anything.

Gladly would I have spent every day with her who was my old love, but that of course could not be permitted. Without full permission I could enter her guarded abode no more, and even to venture an inquiry concerning her was sufficient to make the little Rajah frown; thus I had to feign an outward bearing of indifference, while my feelings were keenly interested, during the course of that 'instruction in musketry,' through which I had now to put not only the Rajah, but also his more waspish son, from whose importunities it was becoming evident that no time was to be lost in getting Henriette away; but *how?*

> 'It is said that a lion will turn and flee
> From a maid in the pride of her purity.'

Abdul had often quailed before the calm, grave, and sometimes haughty expression of Henriette's face, and emotions of rage gathered in his heart as he felt this conviction. Moreover, he was suspicious and jealous, vulgarly jealous, of me; for he had witnessed our mutual emotion at meeting; so once he said to me in his hoarse guttural Hindostanee:

'Her voice is as sweet as the flower-bells in the Garden of the Blessed, her breath is as the roses of Irem, and her bosom as the buds thereof; but yours, Feringhee, she shall never be. I would rather see her cut into kabobs and stuck on skewers in the Kotwal!'

I could gather from the tone and bearing of the Rajah—alternately polite, even kind, or haughty and cutting—how the conflict varied in the world without; whether fresh mutinies were recurring with success, or being crushed with severity. I knew that Abdul was daily in the apartments of his mother the Ranee, and was thus too probably in the society of Henriette. This filled me with constant anxiety and fear, and these emotions increased when I learned that on the day of some great festival which was approaching, the Rajah, with all his attendants, was to proceed in procession through the streets to the great mosque, while Abdul was to remain behind, in absolute command of the fort and palace.

One great barrier to his love-making was his ignorance of English, and hers of Hindo-

stanee. Another was the frequent presence of his father, perched on a soft divan with his hookah in his mouth and an absurd leering expression of admiration in his eyes.

They knew that I alone could interpret some of her wants and wishes, so by the influence of the Ranee I was permitted to see her twice again. Bright joy filled her eyes when we met; I could see that the poor girl clung to me as friend, brother—as something dearer than either. As I was to her once, so was I fast becoming again; but my new rival's mode of pressing his suit was, to say the least of it, a singular one.

'All women taken in time of war are the slaves of those who take them,' said Abdul to me one day; 'and she shall be mine—she and many more too.'

'But Meah Sahib, she was carried off in time of peace. It is an outrage against all law,' I ventured to urge.

'Thou liest!' he hissed through his teeth; 'and but for my father I would send your head to the Kotwal in a bhoosa bag.'

'I would that you and I were out by the side of yonder wood, alone with our swords,'

said I through my clenched teeth; for it was impossible to forget how savagely he had tried to take my life in that village near Allahabad. And now for one little anecdote that will illustrate his character.

'She is a lotus-flower—Allah forgive me for using an accursed Hindoo simile!' said he. 'She is a bird of paradise then, as gentle as a humming-bird and as soft-eyed as a gazelle. I love her. Will you tell her so in your own language, sahib, and in the fashion of your own people? and I shall give you my right hand in token of amity.'

'Thanks very much,' I was about to reply, with the contempt the offer merited. 'I shall give you my hand, however,' I was beginning, willing to temporise, when I suddenly perceived that the hand of the treacherous scoundrel was armed with that which his flowing dress partly concealed—a malicious and deadly weapon (in the shape of steel tiger's-claws) which fits on the fingers, and would have torn mine to pieces.

I drew back, and pointing to this favourite old weapon of the Mahrattas, told him pretty plainly what a coward I deemed him.

'Beware of what you say, Feringhee dog!' he exclaimed sternly, menacing my face with the claws.

'Why should I beware?' I asked furiously losing all control over my temper.

'Because in three days I shall command her alone; and the tongue sometimes cuts off the head.'

With this menace he left me.

I knew well what he referred to. The third day from that was the one of the festival.

CHAPTER XLIX.

ABDUL BAFFLED.

From this period our adventures—when I say ours I mean those of Henriette Guise and myself—would fill an average-sized three-volume novel, if detailed in full. We were told of revolts and massacres at Gwalior, at Futteghur, and finally of the dreadful affair at Cawnpore. These were sources of undisguised exultation; but when tidings came of Havelock's march with his army of vengeance, the Rajah somewhat changed in tone and said:

'As for these revolters, I fear me they are like unto him who built a minaret and destroyed a city to do so, or him who sold his vineyard and bought him a wine-press.'

When he told me of the awful massacre at Cawnpore, I knew not whether to consider

the story false or true, or a mere exaggeration of sufficiently terrible realities.

I have said that I was twice again permitted to spend an hour or so with Henriette, and I found our position was becoming most perilous. We were 'on that frontier land where love and friendship approach so closely, that where the one domain ends and the other commences may well occasion mistakes.' We had strange little confidences to make; moreover, we had been lovers once. Oh, it was easy to slide into the old life again! for when a man and woman have ever been *more* to each other than mere friends, they can seldom meet as only such again.

The friendship—why so cold a word after the sweet past time?—well, the love I felt for Henriette seemed to give me a right of property in her, very different from the emotion which filled the breast of that Mohammedan toad, Abdul Khan, who generally watched us with a scowl.

The human heart must cling to something. The magic spell that she who was once 'my fairy' had thrown over me was broken now,

and all my regard for Henriette was fast returning; but circumstanced as we were, whatever my eyes said my lips were silent, lest I might seem to be taking advantage of her helpless situation. She was a clinging creature, loving, tender, and true.

Amid the terrors and uncertainty of the present time it was difficult to indulge in retrospection of the past, or in pleasant anticipations of the future—a future that might never be; and during the two other interviews I had with her, such were almost our sole recreation. Thus we almost revelled in memories of old Thorsgill Hall—where doubtless we were long since numbered with the dead—of our moonlight rambles on the terrace before it; the older ruin, with its vaulted hall and the *panier de morte;* of Rokeby's green woods; of the silvan grotto and the foaming Tees; and of all we said and did before Blanche came there; and then we spoke of the splendours and pleasures of Calcutta, which neither of us might evermore see, till the Rajah, surprised and offended at the rapidity of our utterances, and the mutual animation of our manner,

interrupted us somewhat roughly; and this drew a sudden blush to the now white face of Henriette.

'Did your highness remark how she reddened when the Rajah addressed her?' I heard a veiled woman whisper enviously to the Ranee.

'Who do you mean?' asked the latter.

'Who could I mean but the Feringhee Mehm Sahib—the white gholaum?'

'No. Are you jealous, that you watch her so?'

'I jealous of a kaffir! Allah forbid! Yet the Kaffir is a fair woman, and his highness is only a man.'

The Ranee's eyes flashed with a dusky fire. The seeds of open jealousy began to ripen in her breast, and in this I feared fresh perils for Henriette; for this evil passion now possessed father, mother, and son alike.

'She is as beautiful as the Rose of Cashmere,' continued the veiled speaker; 'and what flower in all India rivals it for brilliancy of tint or delicacy of perfume?'

'Inshallah,' muttered the Ranee, 'but

I shall find some means to end all this.'

Low though she spoke I heard her.

The Rajah did not hear this, as he was busy speaking to Henriette, who turned to me in perplexity.

'Please, dear Captain Rudkin, to tell me what he *is* saying!'

'He tells you that he will make this place to you even as Amherahad is.'

'What place is that, and where is it?'

'A city of Jhinnistawn—he calls it the City of Sweets—in Fairyland—the country of Delight.'

'Then please to tell him that my knowledge in geography never went so far; and the old fool should be ashamed of tormenting me thus.'

Though he knew not a word she was saying, something in her tone and manner offended Hafiz. His eyes sparkled with resentment; he made a sign haughtily for me to retire.

With these dangerous people I was compelled to leave her, and the farewell glance

of her soft pleading eyes—an electric glance —went like an arrow to my heart.

She might suffer at the hands of the Ranee, and I at those of Abdul, who was quite capable of having me quietly removed by poison; in which case Henriette would be lost—though in what way I could succour her, closely watched and guarded as we both were, was far from apparent then—and the dreaded day of the festival was now close at hand. However, a friend was nearer us than we could have anticipated. But it was sad for a girl so young and so gently nurtured as Henriette Guise to have her life all at once plunged into mystery and terror, suffering perplexity and the hourly terror of a horrible death at the hands of barbarous Orientals.

To me, on reflection, it seemed altogether an intolerable state of things that, in this age of progression, a young English lady should be menaced by perils suited only to the barbarous ages of the Crusades or of the Moors in Granada; yet so it was, for we were among a people totally unchanged in manners or ideas since those days, and, indeed, older times.

There was a tender and imploring sadness of expression in the dark eyes of Henriette when I left her—an expression that haunted me. They said as plainly as possible, 'When, where, how, shall we meet again?' And as I dreamed of it I recalled the words of one who wrote thus of such eyes, under circumstances that were not precisely similar: 'He remembered the old delight of them, the mystery of them; and perhaps he thought that in a little time he would be able to awaken the old light in them, and rejoice in the gladness, and be honestly and wholly in love with his future wife.'

Wife! Oh, would that, could that ever, ever be?

And now to anticipate a portion of my story which came to light afterwards, when certain prisoners were in our hands, and the business of flogging, hanging, shooting, and blowing them from the guns, if not lucrative, proceeded most briskly.

The day of the festival came, and, as he had intended to do, Abdul Khan remained in the fort. It was a Friday—which is enjoined by the Koran to be always held as a festival,

in remembrance of the Prophet having made his first entry into Medina on that day; and on that day, too, it is asserted the creation was finished; so it is styled *yawm al joma*, or the day of assembly.

Accompanied by all his attendants, the Rajah left the palatial fort in great state. First went two squadrons of his Raj horse, armed with lance, sword, and buckler, splendidly mounted and equipped; a regiment of infantry armed with matchlocks followed; then came servants of all sorts, even to his cooks and barbers, gaily attired. The Rajah was on horseback, preceded by a band whose music was more wonderful than melodious; his led horses; the Ranee and several ladies of the zenana seated in gilded howdahs, panelled with mirrors, on magnificently-caparisoned elephants, trapped in scarlet and gold. These howdahs had blinds of wire, which enabled the inmates to see without being seen. Then came many zemindars, or landholders, dressed in fine silks, satins, and kimbobs covered with jewels coarsely set in native fashion, each with a golden-hilted or silver-gilt tulwar by his side,

and pistols or blunderbuss loaded; for these men always went with their arms thus, just because their fathers did so before them. Then came four pieces of cannon, well horsed by Australian nags with the gholandazees in blue jackets, and turbans, and trousers of scarlet marching by the wheels; a white elephant gorgeously harnessed, with the green-silk banner of the Prophet floating from the mimic castle that crowned its back, and with two silver kettle-drums—an affectation of absolute royalty—swaying on each side of it; a squadron of lancers under the young rissaldar closing the rear.

The wild barbaric music, the tom-toming, roaring of gongs, the tramping of feet, the trumpeting of the elephants, and the rumbling of the artillery died away on the hot breeze, as this picturesque procession wound down the side of the green and wooded hill, through the arched gate and the tortuous streets of the city, in the direction of the great mosque; and Abdul watched it with a grim smile on his swarthy visage—a smile of gratified pride—as he thought how much grander would be the display when 'the raj

of the Koompanie was over;' and then a brighter expression spread over his face when, from the gun-battery on which he stood, he looked up to that part of the zenana where he knew that his intended victim was to be found.

'I have slain her people without mercy,' he muttered—'true; but that was only in obedience to the laws of Allah and the Prophet; and too often when thinking of her I have forgotten my duty to the one and the laws of the other—he who lies at Mecca. For her love I would forego—but that is unnecessary—my hope of that paradise which the Prophet has described in words beyond the vocabulary of every human tongue! But she is here—here on earth within my reach; while paradise, with all its dark-eyed girls reposing on couches, each hollowed out of a single pearl, with their scarfs of green and floral wreaths that breathe of the odour of heaven, may be—well, perhaps doubtful after all!'

The fort deserted by all save the guards, even by the Moollah, Abdallah Ebn Obba, who acted as his mother's chaplain; the

zenana empty of all but a few of its oldest and plainest-looking inmates; its usual attendants away with the Ranee and other occupants of the gilded howdahs,—he knew that *she* would be completely at his mercy; and at the risk of a mortal quarrel with his father, whose policy he derided and despised, he resolved to compel her to love him, even should he carry her off to the nearest post held by the rebels, and cast his lot with them for weal or woe. And who or what was she, he thought, that he should trifle with her? Though lovely beyond all the loveliness he had ever looked upon, he considered her but the outcast daughter of an alien and unbelieving race, whom he yet hoped to see exterminated from sea to sea, and from Lahore to Ceylon; a Feringhee, a prisoner, a slave taken in just war, who, but for the timely arrival of himself and the rissaldar, must long since have fed the jackals, like the white women who were now lying in scores outside the palace walls of Delhi.

To deaden all sense of pity, danger, or risk, Abdul Khan, after placing a sharp

khandjur in his shawl girdle, imbibed a strong dose of maddening bhang, while conning over for the hundredth time the tender speeches his extremely slender stock of broken English would enable him to make; speeches in which he thought to describe the depth of his love—a passion of which he had no more conception than an Ashantee. While thus engaged, he looked with grim triumph to the point of his finely-tempered khandjur, thinking it would win him, through terror of death, what he never could gain from her love; and as the fumes of the bhang mounted to his excited brain, the black and dastardly thought occurred to him, that rather than she should become the prize of another, he would ultimately destroy her, gallop to Cawnpore, and join the Nana of Bithoor, that incarnate fiend, at whose behest the terrible well of Cawnpore had been filled to the brim with the slaughtered women and children of the European residents.

With his eyes on fire now, he gave a wild and stealthy glance about him, to assure himself that he was unobserved; for there was a method in the temporary madness as

well as the general villany of the Meah Sahib, and then he took his way deliberately to the now empty apartments of the Ranee, beyond which he knew she was in one which he had never entered, as it was occupied specially by Henriette, who—when the Rajah did not command her attendance to amuse him with the vina, which she had rapidly learned to play, or to witness his shooting in the balcony—usually secluded herself there, avoiding the Ranee and all the rest, who, she knew, were openly jealous and envious of her white beauty.

The unusually voiceless silence of the place encouraged the hopes of Abdul; for he knew that hours must elapse ere the procession returned from the mosque. He paused for a moment as he softly crossed the tesselated floor; for with the usual Mohammedan courtesy he had cast aside his slippers, and already in imagination he held Henriette in his arms, rending aside her veil, covering her pale face with hot kisses that were odorous of bhang, and pressing her with frenzy to his breast.

'Another minute,' thought he, 'and all this will come to pass; but stay—I must not

alarm her; it shall be soft entreaties first, and stern coercion after. If the Feringhee slave repel me—' and at that idea he panted rather than breathed; he clenched his strong white teeth, and an expression came over his dark face and gleaming bloodshot eyes—bloodshot with the maddening drug and the fierce passion that inflamed him—an expression which it was fortunate poor Henriette could not see, as it made Abdul look so like one of his native tigers.

'Shookr Allah,' he exclaimed, 'it is time to put an end to all this! She will implore mercy in her own tongue, no doubt; but I cannot understand it.'

Above the entrance to her room was painted among beautiful arabesques of green and gold, this sentence from the thirty-seventh chapter of the Koran, describing the Mohammedan heaven:

'And near them shall lie the virgins of paradise, refraining their looks from beholding any save their spouses, having large black eyes, and skin like the eggs of an ostrich covered with feathers from the dust.'

This Abdul deemed a good omen; for

though the comparison seems strange, the Orientals think that nothing resembles the delicate skin of a woman so closely as the egg of the ostrich. He drew back the blue-silk hanging which in the little Saracenic arch-way served for a door, and as a sense of her presence within stole over him, he strove to appear calm and even smiling, adopting, as he conceived it, a winning exterior to hide alike the fierce passion and wild resolution that were agitating his lawless heart.

The apartment was small, but beautifully and tastefully decorated. Floored with alternate squares of rose-coloured and snow-white marble, it had two painted windows that opened towards the city, with vases of fresh flowers in them under the uplifted screen of scented grass-cloth. Its hangings were all of the most delicate blue silk, and in the centre was a blue-velvet divan, about four feet square and two feet high, fringed and tasselled with silver bullion, and thereon lay the pretty vina with which he had so often heard his intended victim perform.

Restraining his breathing, while dusky fire glared in his dark gleaming eyes, he looked

all round the apartment; she was not visible, but in a corner of it was her charpoy, or bed, the stead or stock of which was carved out of fine dark wood, elaborately inlaid with silver, ivory, and mother-of-pearl, and gracefully draped with white mosquito curtains, which, as they were drawn very close, he had no doubt concealed her from his view.

Weary with a sleepless night, perhaps, she was no doubt slumbering now, when a startling waking awaited her; for Abdul was certain that she was not taken by his father into the city, the festival at the great mosque being a solemn and religious one.

He drew nearer and listened. How softly the poor girl must be breathing, or how soundly asleep, the delicate folds of the curtains hung so still. He listened for a few seconds intently, and then could no longer restrain his curiosity and desire to see her asleep.

With hot and trembling hands he drew back the curtains.

The bed, like the chamber, was *empty;* there was no one there.

In his speechless astonishment at a circum-

stance so unexpected, Abdul felt the pillows; but, like the coverlet, they had evidently been undisturbed since yesterday. It would appear that during the past night it had not been slept in. Where was she concealed? where placed? He looked wildly round him. How was she spirited away, and by whom? Was she dead or alive? Had the Ranee's jealousy caused her destruction? He remembered with terror that he had observed a bright but unfathomable smile on her wrinkled visage as she had ascended into her gilt howdah that morning. To him it seemed a strange smile of malice and triumph. Perhaps the Rajah had conveyed her away to some residence unknown, fearing the blandishments and personal attractions of his worthy son and heir.

All these questions, and many more, occurred to him unanswered; one strange and unexplainable fact alone remained; she was no longer in or about the zenana. His first impulse was to grasp his khandjur; but there was neither a voice to stifle with loathsome kisses nor a white bosom to stab if she repelled him.

He hurried away to the subadar of the guard; ordered three alarm guns to be fired towards the city, and their triple boom was pealing in the sultry air when, remembering suddenly that for two days he had not seen *me*, with assassination in his heart, he rushed away in search of me, with what success a little time will show.

CHAPTER L.

I BECOME A HURKARU.

And now to explain the mystery of the last chapter. To me all chance of our escaping together from that strong and securely-guarded hill-fort seemed an impossibility, though at that terrible time all Bengal teemed with stories of strange hair-breadth escapes, too often ending in recapture and horrible death.

It was a Napoleonic saying, that 'an impossibility is only a difficulty to be surmounted;' but without aid from within, it seemed hopeless to think of getting outside our prison, and the law or doctrine of chances was no doubt against any more successful escapes for me in that land, so fruitful then of dangerous and desperate scenes; yet life is precious, and I would gladly have run the hazard again; but though I was totally

unable to assist her, my whole heart shrunk from the thought of leaving Henriette. Speedily, however, I found that there was another inmate of Chutneypore quite as anxious as myself for her absence therefrom.

This was the Ranee, who, with a woman's keen instinct in such matters—an instinct rendered all the more acute by jealousy—had shrewdly suspected that I took a deeper interest in Henriette than mere friendship required or warranted.

I have said that for two days Abdul Khan had not seen me, and my disappearance came about in this way.

On the evening of the last day I had seen her, I was lying on my charpoy, weary and full of anxious and bitter thoughts, when I was suddenly visited by the Ranee's friend, the aged Moollah, Abdallah Ebn Obba, a little attenuated man, having piercing black eyes under shaggy and impending brows that were now white with years. He wore a vast green turban and flowing robes of spotless white, with a great rosary of sandalwood, having ninety-nine beads strung thereon, dangling from his left wrist. Though of a

totally different race, there was in his aspect and bearing much that reminded me of my former protector, old Sivaji Bulwant the Shastree.

'In the name of the most Merciful!' said he, folding his hands and bowing his head.

I repeated the usual greeting, and requested him to be seated, while feeling intensely surprised by a visit so unexpected; but he lost no time in acquainting me with the object of his mission.

'I come, captain sahib, by order of her Highness the Ranee,' said he; 'and I have to ask you if you are the brother or the husband of the white lady who is the prisoner of the Rajah?'

'I am neither, most reverend Moollah,' I replied, with growing interest and wonder, and with fear of his ultimate object.

'Her lover, then—for such the Ranee thinks you?'

I shook my head, for any admission might be perilous at such a time.

'What then?'

'Her friend only—as I said once before.'

'Do friends in your country weep and embrace when they meet?'

'Consider the strange circumstances under which we did meet.'

He shrugged his shoulders with an air of contempt, as Mohammedans never manifest emotions of tenderness or surprise.

'Her great beauty,' said he, 'has roused the ready jealousy of the Ranee; but she need not fear, for the Rajah sees that the fair slave may be the cause of dissension between him and his son, the Meah Sahib, and has, I know, an intention of presenting her to the King of Delhi.'

'To the King of Delhi!' I repeated mechanically, and in a breathless voice, for this was the old wretch at whose behest forty-eight young ladies were so infamously used within the palace, and then abandoned to the rabble in the streets.

'Yes; what is there so surprising in that? The revolt is spreading fast and far, and if he is successful, Hafiz will naturally desire to win favour with a son of the House of Timour.'

'Does the Ranee know of this—this terrible intention?'

'No; hence my visit to you. She pities you and the poor white lady, and proposes to give you and her the means of escaping.'

For some seconds I was too agitated by this unexpected intelligence to speak; so the Moollah remained silent, stolidly watching the effect of his words.

'This is not a snare, I hope?' I asked, having now learned to suspect the purpose of every native.

'Snare?' replied the Moollah, with the slightest tone of indignation. 'What object has she, what object have I, in seeking to delude you? Her plan is this; that I disguise you as a Hurkaru of the Rajah, for as such you can freely pass the gates of the fort unquestioned, and come to my house beside the great mosque, where you shall learn our farther plans.'

'And—and the lady?' said I, with an imploring voice.

'Shall be free to-morrow; but for that your aid is requisite. Do you agree?'

'Oh, can you ask me such a question?' I asked, with my hands clasped. 'But you swear to me that she shall be free?'

'What need is there of swearing? Who but you, an unbeliever, in all Oude or Rajpootana, would doubt the word or question the promise of Abdallah Ebn Obba?'

'Pardon me, reverend sir,' I was beginning, when he said curtly, while rising from the divan on which he had been seated cross-legged:

'Do you accept or decline?'

In what terms and with what broken utterances I poured forth my thanks, I know not now; but he promised to revisit me in an hour; and the frame of mind in which I passed it the reader may conceive, but I cannot describe. I remembered how at one of our interviews, when hopeless myself, I had sought to encourage hope in Henriette.

'This fort seems of vast strength, and closely guarded too,' she had said, with her eyes full of tears.

'The very idea that it is so secure may enable us to get out of it,' said I; 'do take courage, Miss Guise.'

'Here you might call me Henriette,' she replied, with a haggard smile.

'My dear friend Henriette, then?'

I had greatly dreaded the jealousies of the father, the son, and Ranee, who all three might easily have been prompted to an outrage on a being so helpless as Henriette; but this proposed transmission of her to the old tyrant at blood-stained Delhi was a new peril which I could not have anticipated, and at the hazard of my life I was more than ever ready to engage in any attempt to rescue her. I now felt that without achieving her liberty my own would be valueless; and I could not but reflect how strange was the coincidence that we were thus thrown together at Chutneypore, and that save for the mere incident of the rifle-shooting from the balcony I might never again have heard of her existence. In that case, what might have been her future? I shrank from contemplating it.

Fain would I have thanked the Ranee in person, but that was impossible. How distinctly her face came before me, with her large rolling black eyes, her small brown shrivelled features, a mass of puckers and grotesque wrinkles, her nose-ring, and her rubies!

Punctually at the stated time, the Moollah Abdallah came again, and drew from under his flowing white robes a disguise for me, a jacket and dottee, or breeches of yellow-and-black cotton, with a white turban, together with some kind of pigment sent by the Ranee to darken my complexion. I attired myself with a heart that beat lightly, and with the aid of a pair of scissors completely altered the trim of my beard and moustache. The Moollah then placed in my hand the badge, or weapon, of my office, a short stout staff, about the size of a constable's bâton, painted with alternate rings of red, yellow, and black, and having at the upper end a large cotton tuft of the same colours, from amid which there projected a lance-head as long as a bayonet of fine steel, with a point as sharp as a needle.

'Soobhan Allah (Praise God), your own mother would not know you,' said the Moollah approvingly. 'Now, as one of the Rajah's Hurkarus, or foot-messengers, no man dare stop you on the highway.'

I grasped the formidable weapon with a firm hand, and felt that I would have

extremely little compunction in using it against any one who interfered with me.

'Let us now go—we shall pass out of the fort together—ere the evening prayers begin,' said Abdallah, and I prepared with alacrity to obey him, at the same time resolving that if I failed to achieve the release of Henriette, I would return and surrender myself to Hafiz.

Dusk was closing now, and I must admit that when the subadar commanding the guard at the gate of the fort ordered the klinket, or little wicket, therein to be unbarred to let us pass out, my heart beat painfully with excitement, for every instant I might be missed and an alarm given. As we hastened down the winding way towards the gate of the town, I often turned and looked to the towering masses of the hill-fort, then tinted almost with crimson in the last light of the sun that had set, its purple shadows deepening into black where the round towers projected from the crenulated curtain-wall that connected them; and ever and anon, till we fairly entered the town, my gaze went up to that portion of the building

in which I knew the zenana was, for *she* was there; but how she was to be got out of it was as yet perfectly beyond my conception, and the taciturn old Moollah failed as yet to enlighten me.

As we passed through the darkening streets, I soon became sensible of the value of the disguise he had given me, for in my character of Hurkaru all made way for me, and without risk or molestation we reached his house beside the great mosque. It was a small but well-built edifice, like others there, having extremely small windows, so made for the double purpose of keeping the rooms cool during the hot winds and to prevent opposite neighbours from overlooking them.

Ere I would seat myself or partake of the simple refreshment he offered me, I implored the Moollah to inform me of his farther plans, which were simple indeed, and yet not without peril to be encountered. At midnight I was to return to the Rajah's fort, place myself beneath the balcony from which we used to shoot, 'and there the Mehm Sahib would be lowered down to me.' Then horses would be

given us, and we should set out on the morrow.

Still I had painful doubts, for these Mohammedans were so utterly cruel and barbarous, so given to sport with the tenderest affections of their European prisoners, that it was quite possible this poor victim might be lowered down to me without her head.

No episode was too terrible for the then state of life in Bengal.

CHAPTER LI.

HOW WE SUCCEEDED.

I LISTENED nervously to every sound in the streets without, fearing that I should be missed, pursued, and traced, but grew calmer after the dead silence and stillness peculiar to all Mohammedan towns—the barking of pariah dogs excepted, after the booths and bazaars are closed and all people indoors—fell upon Chutneypore; and a little before midnight we once more repassed the town-gates, which the guard opened to us unquestioned, and in the dark proceeded towards the appointed place, past the ruins of the Resident's house.

To avoid exciting unnecessary suspicion or attention, which might prove dangerous, after we were both missed, it was arranged that, when we had the lady with us, we should not return to Abdallah's house by the way

we had come; but that we were to cross the stream which nearly encircled the base of the hill on which the fort stands, and make our way to a little private door that led to the mosque, and of which he had the key.

'Who are to lower the lady down to us?' I asked.

'Two men-servants of the Ranee,' he replied.

'Men—men in the zenana?' I asked with surprise.

'No; in a room beneath it, to which she will be conveyed.'

The dreadful suspicion of which I have hinted again flashed upon me, so after a little pause I said,

'Is not this perilous work?'

'Very, captain sahib—perilous indeed.'

'I mean, what will prevent these men talking of this affair?'

'One very sufficient reason—neither has got a tongue in his head,' was the composed reply.

'Mutes?' I exclaimed.

'Yes; and were they in any way to

indicate what they had done, the Ranee would send their heads to the Kotwal.'

'If no light should be visible?' I suggested.

'Inshallah! in that case we can but return to my house,' was the composed reply of the Moollah, who shared neither my fears nor anxieties.

Absurd though this my second disguise, melo-dramatic though the whole enforced situation, my thoughts flashed back to the days at Thorsgill Hall, by mere contrast probably, and to the lovely close-mown lawn where I had wandered so often with Henriette ere Blanche Bingham came; and its sunny terrace, with the sweet odours of the roses, jasmine, and honeysuckle that clambered about the mullioned oriels. Should *we* ever see that place again?

Anon came memories of the regiment—of the now almost forgotten mess-table covered with gorgeous plate, some of it as old as the days of the old 95th, and with it the faces of Tom Prior, Joe Lonsdale, Jack Dormer, and others in that corps, which had been my happy, though

wandering, home. Should I ever see *them* again?

In two days, perhaps, or—never.

Had that other life, to which I looked vaguely, wonderingly back, a real existence—that life of which Henriette seemed the link—or was the horrible present a reality or a fitful nightmare?

The night was fortunately an extremely dark and moonless one. The city was still and gloomy, as if it were the abode of the dead. Not a light was visible in any part of it. After a time even the voices of the pariah dogs passed away; but the howls of a pack of jackals resounded in the wood, through which we approached the fort—the same wood into which I had shot on that, to me, most eventful day, from the balcony of the zenana. Fitfully they came to the ear, and were blown away by the passing night wind.

The sky was starry, and across it the crape-like clouds were hurrying in heavy, dark, and weird-like masses, while silent sheet-lightning lit at times the flat horizon, and then the walls and towers, the domes

and minars, or other masses of the sleeping city, were seen to flash out of the darkness that involved them, in strong black outline, for an instant, but an instant only.

As we ascended the hill-side, above us towered the tall façade of the zenana, and other buildings which Havelock's Highlanders blew to atoms after their advance to Lucknow. I looked upward with intense anxiety — with emotions more keen and exciting than I felt when, with the ladder-party, I crept up the slope at the storming of the Redan before Sebastopol.

Oh, was it really to be that Henriette Guise was to owe her safety, her life perhaps, a second time to me? There was no light visible at the place where we expected to see one; but I could discern a white female figure on the balcony outside the horse-shoe arches. Was she there? I asked; but the Moollah averred that the person we saw was the Ranee awaiting us.

Suddenly a clear white light shone out for a moment from one of the windows. It was the appointed signal, and on seeing it, the Moollah clapped his hands thrice. It was

then extinguished. All that followed now was like a dream, and passed as quickly as the events of one. I heard a faint half-stifled cry of alarm, and saw at a window below the balcony, but about twenty feet above me, another white female figure, whose garments fluttered in the wind as she was lifted out and lowered softly down by ropes attached to a chair in which she was seated, and to which she was secured by a turban cloth—an English arm-chair, no doubt part of the 'loot' of the Resident's mansion.

In another moment I had Henriette in my arms, and was hurrying her down the slope towards the river, a tributary of the Ganges. We had no time to waste on words—no time for ceremony, questions, or explanations—then. All these were reserved for a future hour; and silently, but hand in hand, we hurried on after the old Moollah Ebn Obba, who gathered up his flowing skirts and led the way with all the speed he could exert to a ford on the stream, which was fortunately somewhat shallow.

The water, however, rose nearly to my waist, when lifting Henriette in my arms I

bore her through it so carefully that not an inch of her dress was wetted.

"'O Captain Rudkin,' she said in a quick breathless voice, as her head rested for a moment on my shoulder, 'how good, how kind you are to me!'

She was sobbing now, and too excited for words.

'Goodness and kindness are but cold emotions,' I replied with a swelling heart. 'Do you not know that I would die to protect or serve you? I saved you once from fire, and do so now from water,' I added, making a feeble attempt at a jest.

'Oh, deep indeed is the debt of gratitude I owe! And that good old man too! This escape has been all his own plan. But for him—for you—'

Her voice was completely broken now, and she clung to my arm in silence as we followed the stolid and taciturn Moollah round the exterior of the town wall—a rampart of sun-baked mud—for half a mile, till we reached the private gate of which we had the key.

While her soft arm and tremulous little hand clung to me, my heart beat high with

joy and pleasure even then. Henriette and I were no more engaged than we had been at Thorsgill Hall, and yet somehow I had a feeling that we were so; though, save what the eyes said, nothing of love had passed between us, in India at least. After proceeding for some time in silence, my thoughts began to take the form of words.

'Miss Guise,' I began, in a voice that faltered; 'O Henriette—do permit me to call you so—how is all this to end with us?'

'Heaven only knows!' said she, mistaking my meaning.

'We cannot continue to be—to be—'

'What, Captain Rudkin—victims always?'

'No—friends only.'

'Why not? how?' she asked; and even then I felt her arm half withdrawn from mine.

'After our sweet past time at Thorsgill—how far off that past seems now! and after the agitating present?'

'Why not friends?'

'Why not something nearer, dearer—more tender?'

'Scarcely,' said she coldly; and then she added, in a touching voice, 'You are indeed my dearest friend; but ah, Captain Rudkin, this is not a place or time—circumstanced as I am—for you to talk thus, and to me!'

'Most true. I pray you to pardon me.'

She pressed my arm slightly, as if to assure me that it was granted; but I felt that her tiny rebuke was a correct one; and at that moment our guide opened the little gate and ushered us into a silent, empty, and narrow thoroughfare that led direct to his house. We did not reach it a moment too soon, for already the ruddy dawn was gilding the domes of the mosque, the galleries, and open cupolas of the minarets; the rich masses of the trees, yet heavy with the refreshing dews of the past night, and exhaling the fragrance of the tuberoses, orange flowers, and limes in the garden of Abdallah Ebn Obba, when all the ground gave forth that pleasant odour which is peculiar to the early Indian morning, and which, as a writer has it, 'mingles so peculiarly with every other perfume.'

A few persons were now in the streets,

hastening to the mosques rosary in hand; for already the shrill cries of the muezzins, shouting the beginning of the *azan*, or call to prayers, 'Allah ho ackbar!' (God is victorious), were echoing from every minaret in the city.

We passed the whole of that day concealed in the house of the good Moollah, as he deemed it rash to travel at a time when, if our flight were discovered, armed Raj Horse would be sent to scour the roads in every direction. All that day was spent in the sweet society of Henriette, and it passed, though anxiously, most swiftly, for we had a thousand things to talk of and notes to compare. I ventured, however, on no more love speeches. Keen anxiety gathered in my heart when I gazed on the pale and worn face of Henriette. From long suffering and continued over-excitement she seemed so nervous and agitated, that I feared she might become feverish, or fall ill on my hands, when all her strength was most required to achieve our ultimate safety.

Everything continued quiet to all appearance in the fort and city, and the morning of

the solemn festival dawned; and listening intently for every sound that might indicate alarm—the discharge of a cannon, the beating of gongs, or the tramp of searching cavalry—I sat in Abdallah's garden, watching the ruddy light tinting everything with streaks of fire—the heavier the dew, the deeper the tints; the tall rugged trunks of the talipot palms were glowing in scarlet against the pale grey of the western sky, and the stream through which I had borne Henriette had splashes of gold, amber, and even crimson, on its current, as it rolled away between groves and jungles, peepul topes, and fields of waving rice and paddy, on its way to the holy Ganges.

I then turned to meet the soft sad smile of Henriette, who held out both her hands to me.

To her I was kind, tender, and most scrupulously respectful in manner; we were so singularly, so terribly placed; so awkwardly, and yet so happily, thrown together. But how could I be otherwise? Neither of us felt quite at ease; and yet the perilous circumstances under which we were should have made us completely so.

The Ranee had provided horses for us at the house of Abdallah, with arms for me—a tulwar and brace of pistols. Henriette was disguised as a Parsee woman, to be called a daughter of Peeroo Mull, the banker at Allahabad (if we were stopped or questioned), sent by the Rajah to Lucknow in care of a Hurkaru. The horses furnished for us were Arabs; not those kicking brutes from Australia now becoming so common in British India.

Selecting a time when all in the city were rushing to see the Rajah proceeding in state to the great mosque, we quitted Chutneypore by the Moollah's private gate, and rode at full speed along the highway towards Lucknow, which we expected to reach about nightfall, making allowance for seeking shelter in some grove during the oppressive heat of the day.

We were not fated to see Lucknow quite so soon.

We had barely ridden a mile when three pieces of cannon — 24-pounders at least— boomed from the western wall of the fort, above which their thin white smoke was seen

floating upward in the morning air; and by this signal of alarm, as well as the hoisting of a scarlet flag on the zenana, we concluded justly that our double disappearance had been discovered by Abdul Khan, who for his own ends and purposes had remained in the fort and palace.

CHAPTER LII.

THE TOMB IN THE WOOD.

As I rightly conjectured that an immediate pursuit would be made along the road that led to Lucknow, I deemed it wise to make a détour, and struck into that which led, as I supposed, towards Shahabad in Oude. This of course took us somewhat out of our route; but in my character of Hurkaru, and, moreover, as I spoke Hindostanee better now than ever, I had little or no fear of our making our way safely if we could avoid the Rajah's mounted horsemen, who would be certain to examine my companion closely.

Till nearly noon we rode on without seeing a trace of pursuers, and, after getting some most necessary refreshment at a dawk-bungalow, I conducted Henriette into a dense wayside grove to avoid the sultry midday heat, under the effects of which she was

well-nigh fainting. There was an additional reason, which I did not confide to her, If pursuers came this way, and the keeper of the bungalow were questioned, the fact of her having been seen with me would cause the country to be strictly searched. I had incidentally learned that in this grove were some spacious ruins, and among these I resolved to seek shelter and concealment, perhaps till the morrow.

The wonderful luxuriance of the thicket, through which our horses made their way with extreme difficulty, greatly impressed Henriette; for there, high over the soft jungle-grass, towered canes that were sixty feet in height; oleanders, ever the pride of the Indian jungle; the flowering baubool, a pyramid of crimson and gold; while in some places the thorny and prickly shrubs, with blades like sabres and serrated like saws, the dense, dark, and impenetrable masses of wild foliage and rank luxuriant vegetation, would have opposed the march of an army, unless its van were most active pioneers.

Beneath, the brushwood was full of insect life, filling the whole air with a drowsy,

incessant, and monotonous hum ; above, the trees were alive with richly-plumaged birds, glowing in scarlet, yellow, and purple : blue jays, green pigeons, crested woodpeckers, ring-necked parroquets, the slender flycatchers, and the lovely little tailor-bird, which sew leaves together with their sharp bills, and swing therein aloft in their sweetly-scented nests.

Exclamations of delight that were almost childish in their joy escaped Henriette as we piloted our way into the heart of the jungly tope, and some that were certainly expressive of extreme satisfaction escaped me, when suddenly we came upon one of those large, massive, and ruined buildings, half temple, if not wholly—a tomb—such as may be found scattered all over India, the relics of past ages, and of the races which have conquered and succeeded each other.

Therein I resolved to find Henriette shelter for a time. On farther examination I was certain the edifice was a tomb of the Patan times, but I did not tell her so. I assisted her to alight, relaxed the girths of our horses, and knee-haltered them, and after

carefully looking to the priming of my pistols —the Ranee had provided me with a flint-lock pair—I stuck them in my girdle, and led her inside. There I hoped she would find repose—sleep if she could—while I kept guard against visitors, perhaps such as those that surprised me in the rock-hewn temple near Allahabad.

Though our perils were not yet over, nor could they be until we were within the sound of her Majesty's drums, I felt a deep and pure emotion of joy in being alone with Henriette, and in being the sole protector she could cling to. All this situation far exceeded my wildest hopes when I had been the prisoner of Hafiz, and when she and I were both in that mood of mind when any change of place or circumstances nearly—anything involving action—would have proved a relief to mind and body, and when I first hailed the plans of the Ranee with transport and gratitude, though in serving us she was to a great extent also serving herself.

The edifice was square, and externally measured about eighty feet each way, with a domed roof, having an orifice at its apex

to admit light, and was entered by an arch of Moorish form supported by twisted pillars, two on each side. Before it were two giant figures of red-stone, which had doubtless kept guard there for centuries; and now the matted weeds and jungle grew high above their knees. In many places the solid masonry was rent into great fissures by the tamarind and peepul trees that grew between the stones, and forced them asunder. In some parts the carving was elaborately beautiful, for true it is, as Bishop Heber says, 'those Patans built like giants and finished their work like jewellers.'

An altar-like block of red marble in the centre, with three steps round it, seemed to indicate that some one was interred beneath it—a contemporary, perhaps, of Mohammed Ghori; but whether a renowned warrior, a favourite beauty of the harem, an omrah of the empire, or a holy Suyd, nothing remained to show. I do not think there is a 'John Murray' for British India, otherwise I might fill a long chapter by a minute description of this edifice, for then I was more interested in Henriette Guise than an examination of

its details, and I was distressed to see her looking so weary and so pallid.

Cutting down a quantity of the soft feathery jungle-grass with my sharp tulwar, or native sword, I made therewith a couch for her in a corner, and seated myself near her on a stone. Our situation was very peculiar, in our absurdly strange costumes, together and alone in that wild and lonely place ; and so Henriette seemed to think, as she looked up at me from time to time from her pillow of grass, and always with a smile in her pale face and dark thoughtful eyes—a smile that, though sweet, was sad, yet full of brightness and a winning beauty, so different from the half-mischievous and wholly triumphant smile of Blanche.

The forest without was, I have stated, full of animal life, and teeming with noisy sounds ; but under the shadowy dome of our strange abode all was as silent as a tomb should be ; and through the circular aperture overhead one of those long rays of golden light that fell in flashing flakes athwart the trees without shone brightly and steadily down, till it faded away on the inward curve

of the otherwise dark dome, which it served but partially to illumine.

'We are lost here, like the babes in the wood,' said I.

'But I hope we won't be found like them, covered up with dead leaves,' replied Henriette, looking up at me with that smile which was so peculiarly her own, and which made the pulses of my heart to quicken.

I was beginning to feel certain that this sweet girl loved me still, though doubtless to any one—even her dearest friend—she would have denied it, and perhaps, after the delusion—the snare—into which I had fallen with her cousin, she may have felt a little anger at her own weakness; but how true it is that we cannot always control our own hearts!

Once inadvertently my hand rested on hers, and I was conscious that she did not draw it away, as on that evening in the library at Thorsgill—that particular evening on which so much depended, and which, from the many changes we had seen, and the stirring events that had surrounded us, seemed to have passed ages ago.

Unlike the rattling and flirting Blanche,

Henriette had contracted in her soft face an expression of calmness—almost of seriousness—from her habit of speaking little and thinking a great deal; yet her mind was full of enthusiasm for all that appertained to poetry and art, and her imagination was rich and active.

She knew, I hoped, my feelings towards her now; a glance of the eye, a touch of the hand, must have told her all; yet I resolved not to venture to speak of love, situated as we were then, and doubtless she appreciated this delicacy of sentiment; and though neither of us approached the subject, we were both in fancy back among the ferns of Thorsgill Chase, and in the ivied ruins by the Greta and the Tees, or in the arbours of the old garden, with its ribbon borders of verbena, calceolarias, petunias, and lobelias, with backgrounds of dahlias and rhododendron.

The hours stole on, the shadows fell westward, for evening had come apace.

We had ceased to speak; her eyelids drooped, and at last she slept. I was so happy that she did so, knowing that sleep

would restore her wasted strength; and while she slumbered softly as a child, I could gaze unwatched and unseen on the delicate beauty of her face, her closed long lashes, and, to quote a pleasant writer, 'the placid sweetness of her unkissed lips.'

CHAPTER LIII.

A LOST LINK FOUND.

Overcome by all she had undergone, Henriette slept the entire night; and during all the hours of it I watched near her with my sword and pistols beside me. The feathered tribes were all in their nests; the fire-flies alone were flashing to and fro. No sound stirred in the wood without, save when a branch, or a large leaf too heavily laden with dew, drooped, and a shower that sparkled in the moonlight flashed like sudden rain upon the jungle-grass and yellow gourds below. The still night passed on; and so, while listening to her soft breathing, and sometimes a little muttering, when she dreamed of danger, as dawn drew near it, I too, though awake, was in dreamland. There was a kind of intoxication in the sense of her silent presence, in

being so near her, and all alone with her for such a time, and in such a lonely place.

The poor girl, who should have been dreaming of a new bonnet or a new dress, was doubtless haunted by visions of sepoy mutineers and other yelling demons in the shape of Indian rebels.

The dawn came in. Between the tall trees there fell patches of golden light that gradually stole down their stems; a wild cock or hen would flash from tree to tree, and I could see the shining tail of a long green snake as it crept slowly into a bush. Rank and strong in odour was the leafy jungle then, moistened by the heavy dews of night and fostered in the sun's fierce heat by day.

At last Henriette awoke with a start, and looked about her for a moment with astonishment, till she remembered where she was.

'I have been sleeping, and now it is evening, to judge by the light,' said she, half rising from her couch of grass.

'Nay,' I replied, 'it is dawn.'

'Dawn! Have I been asleep all night?'

'Thank Heaven, you have.'

'And you—you?' she exclaimed.

'Have watched you, as a mother would her child.'

'Asleep a whole night, my dear good friend! How selfish of me!'

She held out her hand, and I took it between mine caressingly.

'My poor friend,' said she, 'how haggard you look!'

'I have been sentry all night,' I replied with a smile.

'Ah, Heaven, if you should become ill!' she exclaimed.

'Don't think of such a thing, for what would then become of you?'

As we looked in each other's eyes there suddenly came into them that expression which we see but once in life, and which there is no mistaking. Each made the other's heart to thrill, and as I drew her towards me, I could but say, in a hushed voice,

'I love you, dearest Henriette, as you know I first loved you—before—before—'

'Blanche came?' she whispered.

'Yes.'

We sat long and silent, with her head on

my breast, till she said, in a low and broken voice,

'I do not ask you how much you loved Blanche, or if you have loved another since; but I know well that you loved me then—before she came. I can only hope that—that—'

'What, darling Henriette?'

'That you love me truly now.'

'I love you more passionately and fervently, more adoringly, because you are so trustful, gentle, and true. The past has gone beyond us; we can but strive to take care of the future.'

'I knew that when Blanche came to Thorsgill Hall she would lure you from me, as she pitilessly did.'

'But,' said I, smiling, 'I once overheard you say to her, when you were together gathering roses under my window, and she asked if you would accept me, that you would certainly *not*.'

'My reply was, "Certainly not, without my papa's full consent." Had you heard all the sentence—'

'How much misery might have been averted!'

A pretty blush crossed her pale face, as she said with a coy smile,

'To me it seems that in making this admission I have proposed to you, not you to *me*.'

'In love we are equal, and it would matter little if you had done so, for I know that you—'

'Always loved you; and so I did and do, dearest Lancelot' (she had never called me by my Christian name before); 'and oh, how much do I owe you!'

And this girl—a rose without a thorn, a dove without gall—I had deserted for a showy flirt like Blanche Bingham!

'Stapleton—' she began, and paused; while at the utterance of his name, which grated unpleasantly on my ear, a kind of spasm passed over her face.

'You could never have been happy with that man—if the rumour of your engagement was a true one.'

'I was tricked into a sort of engagement by Blanche. I did not look for happiness. God alone knows what I thought. Perhaps I hoped that there was in store for me that

which a writer describes as "a chance of dropping into some sort of stagnant happiness," which might reconcile me to my life.'

'My poor Henriette! And you thought that marrying Stapleton would—'

'Put you out of my head.'

'Yes.'

'But never out of my heart,' she replied, with innocent candour. 'O Lancelot, I did love you dearly, long before that night of the fire, when I half hoped we might die together.'

'How sweet it is to hear you say that you loved me!'

'Yes, and would have married you had you asked me; but you lingered, had doubts apparently.'

'Of my success, yes.'

'Doubts which *I* could neither remove nor explain; and then Blanche came, and too speedily she eclipsed me by her mere flippancy, for such it was.'

And so, while loving me, she had engaged herself to the worthless Stapleton, and been on the verge of committing what General

Bounce calls 'that species of moral suicide which is described by the vulgar adage of cutting off one's nose to spite one's face, and which produces the most incomprehensible of all vagaries—marrying out of *pique*.'

I had loved Blanche certainly, and would have done so still, had she not proved so false and fickle a fairy; but I was glad to find that Henriette did not look upon me as a species of widower who never meant to marry again.

Heedless of the outer world, its dangers all forgotten, we sat long and happily in that old ruin. All was still around us, save the rustling leaves of the sunlit peepul-trees, as the breath of the hot Indian air stirred them, and the twittering of the gorgeously-plumed birds, which were songless; but even with lovers there comes a time when the world will force itself upon them, and I began to remember the necessity for making an attempt to reach Lucknow, which could not be very distant from where we were.

I got our horses in readiness, looked closely to girth and stirrups, gave a last glance at my pistols, swung my dear com-

panion into her saddle, and a few minutes after saw us clear of that lovely grove, and once more out upon the dusty highway,

From a wayfarer whom we passed—a pilgrim Fakir, whose left arm, as a self-imposed penance, was bound above his head, and had been so for years apparently, as it was odiously shrunken and withered up—I obtained the alarming information that a great body of insurgents were marching to Lucknow, and had actually halted within twelve miles of that place, which Sir Henry Lawrence was making every effort to defend to the last extremity.

He was, or more likely pretended to be, ignorant of the exact position of the rebel forces; thus our approach to Lucknow, from which we were then about fifteen miles distant, would require all my care and circumspection, lest we should fall in with some of their scouts or patrolling parties.

Our pilgrim informant had scarcely left us, to trudge barefooted on his long and weary way to Hurdwar, when at a place where the road went over the crest of a gentle eminence, between two fields of tall yellow Indian corn,

we suddenly saw, about a quarter of a mile distant, and in our front, a party of horse; and so keen had my eyesight become by the necessity for exerting it, that I knew them in a moment to be some of the Raj troops of Chutneypore! Their lances and bucklers were sufficient to convince me of this, and, if farther proof were wanting, the circumstance of their uttering a simultaneous shout and brandishing their weapons on seeing us was enough to convince me that we were recognised or suspected, and that their intentions were hostile.

Putting spurs to their horses they rode with increased speed towards us, and came on rapidly before I could quite decide what direction to take, as they were most unluckily between us and Lucknow, having no doubt pushed on in that direction during the night, while Henriette and I were in the ruin.

To avoid them at all hazards was imperative in the first instance, and yet the idea flashed upon me that in escaping them we might only be riding into the jaws of a greater peril — the assembled forces

of the mutineers that were menacing the station.

A road that branched off at right angles from that by which the horsemen were advancing was the only way we could take, and ere we reached it they were so close that we could hear their cries, the clatter of the hoofs, and I could distinctly make out their leader to be Abdul Khan.

'*Feringhee bong chute!*' ('You rascally English!') was their shout from time to time.

'Are they mutineers?' asked Henriette, whose face was blanched with terror.

'No, my poor darling,' said I, with a tone of intense commiseration; 'they are some of the Rajah's troops led by the Meah Sahib his son.'

'By Abdul! we are lost, lost after all! Oh, what a fate yours will be!' she exclaimed in a mournful voice.

'Think not of me, dearest Henriette; but keep a firm hand on your bridle, and we may distance them yet. Fortunately our horses are fresh after a whole night of rest.'

'On, on then! But unluckily I have neither whip nor spur.'

'See, see, yonder already are the gilded domes of Lucknow!'

I pricked her Arab in the flank with the short pike given to me as a badge of my pretended office, and the animal bounded on before me, while I rode in the rear, as the sowars had now begun firing.

'Do not be alarmed, dearest,' said I; 'even the best dragoons fail to hit when firing from the saddle. We are not yet within pistol range, and fortunately these rascals have neither carbines nor matchlocks.'

For nearly six miles our flight and their pursuit continued thus, and as yet the way before us seemed clear and the adjacent country quiet; but I became sensible on looking back that two horsemen, being better mounted than the others, had distanced them all, and were fast overtaking us. One of these two I knew to be Abdul Khan, and with this knowledge the blackest fury gathered in my heart. Was she perhaps to be torn from me after all, and after escaping so much, to suffer at his hands a fate worse

than death? My own doom, I knew, would soon be sealed.

The expression of her poor little white face, as she looked round from time to time, maddened me; its strange beauty seemed almost to have disappeared, for terror, sorrow, and horror were blended in her features now. Accustomed though we had been to so much and such incessant danger, I felt the present peril more keenly than any that had preceded it. The events of the last few hours had made life more valuable and Henriette dearer than ever to me; and then we were so close to Lucknow that protection, hope, and perfect liberty were all at hand. Was the light of a new and great joy about to be extinguished for ever?

Abdul and his companion were so close, that it was imperative on me to face about and try to rid us of one or the other; so calling to Henriette to ride on—which she did not do—I reined up my horse, wheeled him round, and in less than a minute they were close to me.

As the sowar came first, aiming at him by the eye, and judging the distance correctly,

with all the force I could exert, I launched the heavy club-like spear at him, and I think it must have buried itself in his chest, as he threw up his arms with a wild cry, tumbled back over the crupper, and rolled on the road in agony; while, with his eyes flashing out the hatred, jealousy, and triumphant malice that rankled in his cruel heart, his dark visage purple with fury, his reins loose over his left arm, a pistol in each hand, and a tulwar between his teeth, Abdul Khan came like a demon on me.

He fired both pistols at once, and then hurled them at my head, as both balls missed; but one took effect in the head of my horse, which sank under me. In a moment I was out of the stirrups and stood tulwar in hand, on my defence, resolving to kill Abdul and possess myself of his horse; but suddenly I heard a strange cry from Henriette—a cry of *delight*—and an English bugle sounding cheerily 'the advance,' on which a score of Riflemen, soldiers of my own regiment, in their dark-green uniforms, black belts, and white puggerees, started out of a thick leafy grove close by, led by Joe Lonsdale.

'Fix bayonets!' he cried. 'Come on, my lads! Go at them like bricks. If we can't beat the d — d niggers, we'll die game anyhow.'

But at the sight of them Abdul turned his horse, and fled at full gallop with all his followers, while some of the Rifles, surrounding me with their sword-bayonets fixed, proceeded to question me rather roughly, and one who actually laid his hand upon my throat proved to be Dan O'Regan!

CHAPTER LIV.

IN LUCKNOW.

I HAD barely spoken when the Riflemen recognised me.

'Hurroo! hurroo!' cried Dan O'Regan. 'By the mortial but it's the master himself, alive and hearty after all; and Miss Guise too! O to the Lord where have you been, and how have you been treated?'

Poor Dan fairly blubbered with joy, and we all shook hands heartily, he squeezing those of Henriette with such excessive good will that she evidently winced.

To describe the satisfaction of Lonsdale and my more humble comrades would be superfluous here; and after a few explanations on both sides, Joe informed me that the story of the pilgrim was quite true; that the insurgents were really within ten miles of Lucknow — of which place they had

resolved to take possession, and enjoy the luxury of another massacre such as those at Cawnpore, Meerut, and elsewhere; and that he had, most luckily for us, been sent out with a scouting party, by order of Sir Henry Lawrence, to reconnoitre and discover their exact whereabouts.

'So bravo, Lance,' he concluded; 'you have just arrived in time to share in what Marryat calls "the all-absorbing occupation of killing our fellow-creatures."'

'If those horrible sepoys can be deemed so, Mr. Lonsdale,' said Henriette, with the first genuine smile I had seen on her face for a long time, as the Rifles now began to retire towards the town, in which I was glad to hear that all friends in the regiment were well.

'You are welcome to the hospitalities of Lucknow, Miss Guise,' replied Lonsdale, looking with pleasure into her soft sweet face; 'but I fear that ere long our dinners will become a mere make-believe, like the feasts of the Barmecide. By Jove, Rudkin, what a rum turn-out this is of yours!' added Joe, with reference to my disguise. 'What

is the part you have been playing in this new cast ?'

'The character of a Hurkaru to the Rajah of Chutneypore,' said I, laughing for the first time these many, many weeks.

'It is said that old scoundrel has gone over to the enemy at last.'

'The appearance of his son here in arms this morning confirms the rumour,' said I. 'Even in this disguise I could not have escaped him but for you and your party.'

'And you, Miss Guise ?'

'Oh, I was to be passed off, if possible while veiled, as a daughter of Peeroo Mull, the Parsee banker. The costume is simple, is not it ?'

'Very,' replied Lonsdale, laughing; 'but I fear I should not like to figure in the Row even with you, or walk down Regent Street with Rudkin; but we can rig him out anew at Lucknow. I am sorry to say that there are no end of dead fellows' traps there.'

'Your own appearance is not very distingué,' said Henriette; and I was glad once more to hear her laughing outright; for by this time she had learned that her cousin

was well, and Sir Harry recovering from his wound. And, sooth to say, the attire of Joe and his party showed that they had undergone pretty severe work since the battalion quitted Allahabad. All use of the razor had long since been relinquished; their dark uniforms were patched with pieces of red cloth and other colours; by incessant use, I could see that the browning was nearly worn off the barrels of their rifles; while by constant exposure to the sun those parts of their faces that were not hidden by hair were burned to a somewhat Indian tint indeed. But Joe was as happy and in as high spirits as ever; and it was from him that I got the first really authentic information of Stapleton's terrible end.

'If the poor fellow hadn't been gobbled up,' he added, 'he'd have come in for a good pot of money on the Calcutta races, as I knew he made a heavy book against horses that were his own. Deuced clever dodge, that.'

When he spoke of Stapleton I glanced uneasily at Henriette; but she had gone a few paces before us, and was stooping from her

horse answering some questions which the soldiers were asking her with honest interest and commiseration.

'You have a rough time of it, I fear, in Lucknow,' I said surmisingly.

'Yes, we are in harness day and night—Lawrence is indefatigable. By this time I was in hopes to have cut India—the service too, perhaps.'

'How so, Lonsdale?'

'At Allahabad I spun a rupee in the air as to which of those rich girls I would propose to, and proposed, as you know. If accepted, I had resolved to go home on a medical certificate, or without it; those blessed lacs of hers would have made me independent even of the Governor-General. But now that is at an end, and it is no use crying over spilt milk,' added Joe philosophically. 'In Lucknow I was on the point of being hooked by a nice girl, daughter of the Chairman of the Poppy and Pepper Board; but she went down country, while I was left lamenting. I believe every man in this world has a wife sent into it specially meant for *him*, if he

could only find her; but as he generally picks up some other fellow's intended, hence half the mistakes in life. Where mine may be it would be hard to say—as far off, perhaps, as from the first of January to the top of St. Paul's; our great Sandhurst problem. But here we are in Lucknow; that is the Residency; yonder is the Emambara; and to the left of it lies the Bhoosa Guard.'

The expression of Henriette's face was now one of genuine brightness as we entered that which we deemed a haven of repose after perils too terrible almost to think of, and saw the red-coated sentinels at their posts, and the Union Jack flying on the summit of the Residency. All seemed to speak to our hearts of home and protection; and for the time we both forgot that the rebellion was still spreading; that help was far away, and the insurgents within ten miles of us.

Blanche was then in Lucknow, as she had been in Allahabad, before me; but it stirred now no chord in my heart to know that in less than an hour, perhaps, I should see the fair face of her who had fooled me—the woman I had so weakly allowed myself to love.

She had called that love a *flirtation*. Such merely I now deemed it must have been; for when I looked at Henriette, and tenderly lifted her from her horse when we had reached the heart of the garrison, I half imagined I had never loved before—or never loved other than her, who was now so dear to me.

This beautiful city, which was ere long to become the scene of so much terror, suffering, and disaster, is on the south bank of the Goomtee; a river which rises among the hills of Kumaon and joins the Ganges below Benares. Lucknow is a place of vast antiquity, and was long the residence of the Nabobs of Oude. Though its streets are narrow, tortuous, and irregular, it possesses many stately khans, handsome mosques with gilded domes, and Hindoo pagodas that loftily cut the sky line, especially those of the noble Emambara, which contains a mosque and the mausoleum of Asoph-ud-Dowlah. But now the whole of that building had been utilised as a hospital for sick and wounded officers. The former were generally victims of that deadly pest the

cholera, which had broken out in the garrison, together with small-pox; both of which made me tremble for Henriette. The native population at this crisis numbered fully two hundred thousand souls. From the north Lucknow is approached by a bridge of iron and another of stone, having eleven arches, thrown across the Goomtee.

Aware that the insurgents from several quarters were coming against him in great force, Sir Henry Lawrence had not been idle in Lucknow. The extensive range of buildings known as the Residency was placed in a state of defence. At every commanding point cannon had been mounted; a store of provisions was laid in; and the native troops in garrison appeared, as yet, quite as interested as ourselves in making a vigorous defence. Henriette and I had not got in an hour too soon, as a little time longer saw the city invested on every side.

The Residency was crowded with ladies and other European women, making in all three hundred and fifty helpless beings; but for whose presence our battalion and the slender 32nd, or the gallant Inglis's

Cornish lads, might soon have cut a path with the cold steel to Agra, as we were far from sanguine of succour coming from Calcutta. Thousands of coolies were employed at the batteries, stockades, and trenches, on which they worked while looking forward to the time when they should have the luxury of cutting all our throats. The treasure was buried, and all the ammunition, of which we had fortunately an ample store, was brought into the Residency ; and there, as in the Muchee Bhawn—an edifice originally the castle of the ancient Sheiks, when Lucknow was but a village—I beheld the most animated scene on entering ; for there were mingled European and Indian soldiers, gloomy prisoners in irons, hundreds of native servants and coolies carrying weights on their heads or dragging battery guns, rattling field-pieces to and fro among carts and camels, elephants, bullocks, and horses ; and there, too, was the roar of many noises and many voices, amid which the sound of a warning drum was heard occasionally, or the lively notes of a Rifle bugle, as orders were issued or detachments mustered.

The ramparts of the Muchee Bhawn commanded the stone and iron bridges on the north; the south and western parts of Lucknow had been levelled, that the fire of its guns might be unimpeded; towards the east it was commanded by the Residency, and overlooked the most populous and frequented thoroughfares. Everywhere its walls were well armed with cannon, and when these were of light calibre, jingals — immense blunderbusses moving on pivots — were placed; but these walls were old and crumbling, so that a time came when the reverberation of our guns would have shaken them to dust. However, luckily, the natives believed it to be impregnable. There Major Francis of the Bengal Native Infantry commanded, with two companies of Europeans, Captain Alexander's battery of horse artillery, a mortar battery, and the gate-gun.

The Kotwal, or mayor, had shown himself zealous in our cause; but there was every chance of the vast population rising and joining the insurgents when they came near. Moreover, the city was full of Mohammedan

fanatics, whose hatred of the Christians was never concealed.

Good old Sir Henry Lawrence was so active that he frequently lay on a pallet near the guns of the Bailey-guard Gate, that he might in person see his orders carried out; and he had organised a body of volunteer cavalry, consisting of officers whose regiments had revolted, clerks, and others, under Captains Ratliffe of the 7th Light Cavalry, and Boileau of the Oude Irregulars, in addition to a body of English Civilian Infantry; for every European had now to fight for his life, and the lives of all who were dear to him. Moreover, they had nothing else to do; business was at an end, and each man found his 'occupation gone.'

To inflame the people against us, all Oude was full of ridiculous stories, very similar to those circulated in England against the Scots Highlanders in 1745. We were alleged to be slayers of men and women alike, and that we always refreshed ourselves after a day's work by a dainty slice off a young child, and that we had amongst us wonderful specifics, made from the bones of children killed for that

purpose. But all this belongs to history rather than to my narrative.

It is needless to say how warmly we were welcomed by my colonel, by Tom Prior, Jack Dormer, by every officer and man of the battalion, as we were supposed to have perished long ago at Allahabad; and we had quite an ovation up to the gates of the Residency.

'And Lady Calvert, Jack,' said I, 'how is she?'

'Well, but not jolly,' replied her cousin; 'she has become a regular saint. She was one of those we used to call "officers' girls" —a gay and flirty rattler; now, by Jove, she has become a model of marital propriety.'

I could hear all this with indifference now.

'She is in the Residency, of course?'

'No,' replied Jack, 'in a place where she is more useful.'

'Where?'

'At the Emambara, among the sick; we'll find her there. Come, cousin Henriette, take my arm, and we shall join her.'

From the terrace of the Residency, whence

we could look down on the shining domes, the splendid mosques, and palaces, the gilded minars of the city, with its gardens, parks, and trees, we proceeded towards that which was soon to become a crowded place of suffering—the stately Emambara, where already Dr. Gargill and the medical staff were busy among the sick.

CHAPTER LV.

AT THE EMAMBARA.

Fresh congratulations, explanations, welcome, and wonder awaited us there. Blanche wept with excitement and joy; and I really believe that in her impulsive effusiveness she was about to embrace me; but I think that something in the expression of my eyes repelled her.

What a change was here in all our relations! She was still 'fairer than a fairy,' as the old general had said, but was as altered in aspect as in her surroundings. It was not with her now as it had been at her 'receptions' at Allahabad, or at the band-stand, where every man—horse, foot, and artillery, with the C. S.—hovered about her, and was led to imagine that *he* was the courted guest or favourite escort, by her

winning manner and sweet yet now conventional smile. How many men had she lured and led on in the past time, and then crushed by the announcement that she was engaged, or, to some of less consequence, married. Like those of many other ladies within the fortifications, her dress was sorely soiled and in tatters; her golden hair was no longer dressed to perfection, but its shiny and still marvellous masses were simply, as she apologetically said, 'knotted up anyhow.' Her lovely white arms were bare above the elbows now; I could remember the time when she would have 'handled' them so as to show the dimples there; but that period was past with her, and past for me too.

She whose fondest visions of earthly glory had been gaiety, balls and glitter, pleasure and splendour, carriages, horses, déjeuners and kettledrums, flirtation and adulation, was to be seen now surrounded by the sick and ailing, the wounded and the suffering, with a mob of orphaned little ones clinging to her tattered skirts. I regarded her with wonder;

and Henriette and I, as we looked at each other, seemed to ask, was this Sister of Charity—for such she had become, to all intents and purposes—this changed woman, the same Blanche Bingham we had known, and who had carried on a senseless and dangerous flirtation with Colonel Stapleton, for which we both forgave her now ?

She was in total ignorance of how much we knew of that affair ; otherwise, even in that place, and at that time, her manner would, in receiving us, have been less assured.

Her chief daily occupation had been nursing her husband, whose injuries, received in the skirmish on the night of the revolt, gave him serious alarm in a climate so warm, especially as the doctor feared they might gangrene. I found him looking rather wasted ; his fair beard grown greatly in volume, his head more bald, and his large blue eyes somewhat sunken and keen in their expression. He was lying on a charpoy, with a poor coverlet spread over him. It was near an open window, from which we

could see the enormous branches of that banana-tree which all who were then in Lucknow will remember growing close by the Emambara! and Blanche was fanning and bathing his face with Rimmel when we first entered the large, bare, and desolate-like apartment.

He held out his hands to us with genuine cordiality, and laughed at our disguises.

'I have not words to express my delight to see you both again, and in perfect safety!' he exclaimed; and added again and again, 'it's miraculous, by Jove—positively miraculous!'

'I do hope, Sir Harry, we are safe here,' said Henriette, for lack of something else to say.

'Scarcely, cousin — we are cousins, you know, Henriette,' said the *blasé* ex-guardsman, looking at her admiringly, and caressing her little hand in his huge fingers; 'but I am glad to see you look so well after all you have undergone. Well! By Jove, Henriette, you are the handsomest girl I have ever seen, bar one — my little Blanche!'

I felt now inclined to say, 'Bar none.'

With the first honest and genuine emotion I had seen in her eyes since we had met in India, Blanche now said to me, while taking my hand in a burst of warmth between both her own, which trembled as she drew me a little way apart,

'You saved my Harry on that dreadful night, at the risk of your life, and with the loss of your liberty. And I—I—' she spoke in a low and broken voice—'I thank you with a fervour known to God alone! Never, never can I sufficiently tell you, Captain Rudkin—'

'I was Lance once,' said I, smiling.

'Well, then, my dearest friend Lancelot Rudkin, how am I to express my gratitude?'

'By not speaking of it,' I replied in a low tone, 'I did but my duty—or as he would have done for me.'

'You had no jealousy?'

'None—that emotion, if I ever had it, was dead, I beg you to be assured.'

'It was noble of you!'

'Why the devil should I have come out

here to soldier?' said Sir Harry querulously. 'I have a fine old place in the midland counties—a stately house, a lovely park, twenty thousand a year when what I owe the twelve tribes is paid, money in the funds, and timber worth thirty thousand more. I was a lunatic ever to come to India.'

'But for which,' said his golden-haired wife coyly, 'you would never have met *me*.'

'True, dear little Blanche,' he replied, and with that conviction the fair-whiskered giant was consoled.

'You will soon be well—quite well—you dear, dear, delightful old thing!' said Blanche, with something of her old manner; and the burly Saxon smiled and caressed her. Well, I thought, as I have said, that he was looking older and more grizzled; service and wounds had not improved the 'Brighton plunger' of her letter to Thorsgill, her 'first love,' as she had assured Jack Dormer he was. Drawing me aside again,

'Did you see Stapleton perish?' she asked, in a voice so low as to be heard by me alone.

'No,' said I coldly and curtly.

'It was a horrible death!' said she sighing.

'Most horrible; but,' I added, looking straight into eyes that once were so much to me, 'it did not occur a moment too soon.'

'How?'

'For your happiness,' said I pointedly.

'My happiness!' she repeated in a breathless voice, while growing so painfully pale that—remembering the change that had come over her nature—I pitied her, and hastened to speak of something else.

There was a time when I could little have imagined that I should ever come to have merely a platonic friendship pure and simple with my dazzling little fairy, and that there was *another* who would be dearer still; but to this state of the heart may we be brought, by attraction on one hand and repulsion on the other.

Ignorant of all this, and of the change that had come over me and 'the spirit of my dream,' Jack Dormer, thinking the regard she showed for Calvert might annoy me, resolved to cut short the interview, and

carried me off to the mess-bungalow. So ended this most unexpected meeting—this disjointed conversation and extraordinary visit.

'I've good news for you fellows to-day,' said Joe Lonsdale, as we entered; 'our messman has actually contrived to get a sheep, though it seems to have had deuced hard times of it before this; so we'll have some dinner to-day, and that, I may tell you, Rudkin, is not a frequent meal now with the Prince Consort's Own in Lucknow, and we are glad to eat our meat without even that *one* sauce which Voltaire said the English only possessed, though they had three hundred and sixty-five religions. I have contrived to collar a bottle of Clicquot, so we'll have a drink, Rudkin—you can't have had much tipple since that row at Allahabad. You'll like this. I have tried all kinds of fruit squeezed into champagne, and think that a sliced apple—a good Devonshire pippin if you can get it—is the best after all.'

'We have only one glass among three of us,' said Dormer; 'a ten-inch shell exploded

in the butler's pantry, so we have scarcely a utensil left.'

'Well,' added Joe, 'we can use it by turns, like a spooney pair at a pic-nic; and what's the odds so long as you're happy?'

'Seen the garrison-orders to-day, Joe?'

'No—anything up, Jack?'

'Yes, we are detailed for this affair at Chinhutt to-morrow.'

'The devil we are!'

'Fact, my dear boy; and every one says it may prove a general engagement perhaps.'

'Are these pandy devils in possession of Chinhutt?'

'Yes; and we must drive them out—go at them like old boots!'

'It seems that some of the Volunteer Cavalry under Lieutenant Campbell were scouting, and on seeing a body of eighteen mutinous sowars break from a wood, made a dash at them, so great was their ardour; and on pursuing them for some distance, till they had to retire, they found the whole enemy's force in possession of Chinhutt, and had to come back without having achieved the real

object of their expedition—which was to ascertain the probable strength of the enemy.'

'So, Rudkin, you are like to enjoy a little shooting to-morrow,' said Joe with a sigh as we finished the bottle.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE BATTLE OF CHINHUTT.

At half-past three next morning, ere the rising sun had gilded the domes and minarets of Lucknow, while the dew lay deep on every herb and tree, and the guns and shot piles on the batteries glistened as if they had been rained on; when all, as yet, was still in the populous city below, and calmly the dark blue Goomtee, which is there about a hundred yards in breadth, was flowing under its bridges, our warning bugles sounded, and then the drums of H.M. 32nd Regiment; and 'rigged out,' as Lonsdale phrased it in the uniform and accoutrements of one of ours who had died some time ago, I hastened to join my company.

Prior to do doing so, I went to the Emambara, to take farewell of Henriette,

who, having heard that some fighting was likely to ensue, was up and attired to receive me. She had now relinquished the fantastic, though for a time most necessary, costume of yesterday. A cool and simple dress of light brown-holland, trimmed with rose-coloured ribbons displayed her handsome figure, as the loose, wide sleeves did her shapely arms, for cuffs and collars were luxuries unknown in Lucknow then.

Her fine dark hair was now dressed as of old, and I thought she never looked more beautiful than on this morning, when, after all we had undergone, we might be parting to meet no more!

Her lips were quivering, she began to weep the moment she saw me, and when I drew her to my breast, she looked up at me with eyes that though dark, were soft as the star-light of the Indian summer; love unspeakable was in their expression. What delight it was to think that those eyes and their proprietor were all mine!

'I am going to the front with the regiment, darling,' said I with a smile to

reassure her; 'to the front for a little time.'

'To the front—will—do you think there will be any fighting?' she asked in a husky whisper.

'Most likely, we must knock some of those fellows on the head, to keep them out of Lucknow.'

'May God protect you, dearest!' she said imploringly.

'I trust He will for your sake; we have escaped so many perils before, that I'm confident I shan't be hit now, darling.'

'But you may be taken prisoner.'

'Never!'

'How so?'

'I shall die first! Abdul Khan is among those fellows; only think of my falling into his hands!'

She buried her face in my breast, till the very marks of the thick black braid on my jacket were impressed on her soft cheek and delicate brow.

'You are to be my wife, Henriette—take courage.'

'Oh, this is no time or place for marrying or giving in marriage,' she urged piteously.

'That I know—but you promise.'

'Yes,' said the poor little hushed voice.

'Trust to me, and be mine—I mean in the time to come!'

'Trust you!' she said in a low earnest voice, while her eyes were full of eloquence, 'well do you know how I love and trust you.'

'By the first dawk-boat down country, I shall write to your father concerning our engagement—'

'Our engagement—how new—how strange it sounds?'

'And seek his permission, my darling.'

Money considerations, fear of 'Papa's views,' and of his proverbial 'pumping in the study,' were all forgotten now or cast to the winds. We had been so much and so strangely thrown together! Had I not twice saved her life, and was she thus not doubly my own, even had she loved me less than she did. A spasm crossed her face, for again the bugles sounded, and I knew that

the men were 'falling in,' and that we must part at last.

'How red and sunken your eyes are, Henriette!'

'Oh, Lancelot dearest, dearest Lance—I have spent, for months past, many a sleepless night—nights of tossing from side to side—of wide-eyed, weary longing for the morning, though it might only bring me fresh sorrow and danger; but never have I spent such a night as the last.'

'Why, my love?'

'I knew that the orders were out—that you were going to fight; was not that more than cause enough for me?'

'It is my "occupation," as it was Othello's,' said I, smiling.

'But, oh! I love you so much—so much—and if—if—'

Her little lips quivered and her voice died away again.

'Tush!' said I laughing; 'there are some fellows who are very hard to kill, and I begin to think that I am one of them. Take her, Blanche, and be kind to her till I return,'

said I to Lady Calvert, for *she* was standing unnoticed, but observantly by, with a half smile on her face; and as I hastened away the eyes of her cousin followed me, with an expression in which love, sorrow, and worship were singularly combined, and which haunted me during the operations of this eventful day.

Our colonel was already on horseback in front of the battalion. He was a brave and fearless fellow, and had the conviction, after many most hairbreadth escapes in the Crimea, the Gwalior and Sikh campaigns, that he would never meet his death either by shot or steel—a comfortable state of mind to attain at that time in India.

'Fall in the Rifles!' (how welcome a sound was his voice of old authority.) 'Gentlemen, have your companies quickly proved, and the ammunition cast loose in the pouches—we have not a moment to waste.'

These orders were rapidly obeyed, and the battalion wheeled into line.

'Fours—right!' followed, and from the right, away we went at a swinging double for

a time, with rifles at the trail, and in less than half-an-hour our dark-green uniforms were changed in hue by the white sand, which in hot weather is there driven about by the wind, and pervades everything.

It was exactly four in the morning when we moved off. We were accompanied by the 32nd (Queen's), only two hundred and fifty strong; one hundred Sikh cavalry; thirty-five Gentlemen Volunteers on horseback; a few of the 13th N.I., who as yet remained loyal, a body of armed native police; an 8-inch howitzer drawn by an elephant, and ten horsed field-pieces worked by native gholandazees. The morning was close and suffocating. Even the elephant seemed oppressed, and lumbered slowly along, but after a march of five hours we reached the village of Ishmaelgunge, and formed in order of battle on the Chinhutt road, under the immediate orders of Sir Henry Lawrence, a resolute-looking man, having prominent cheek-bones, a long straight nose, a moustache, and long goatee beard, but no whiskers.

The few men of the 13th were thrown to

the front as skirmishers; we, with the 32nd, lay in the hollow of the road to the left under the village; in the centre were the mortars and cannon, and the Sikhs were on the extreme right of all. We were fainting with heat. Rum, water, and biscuits were with the baggage; but no refreshments were offered to our men, who after a long march, buckled and accoutred, were already beaten by the morning sun which glared, like a furnace, right into their faces.

We knew that the enemy were in Chinhutt, a large village situated on the edge of a spacious lake, near a hunting-seat of a former king of the district; but we were fatally ignorant that they were not about four thousand strong, as some treacherous spies had represented, but mustering *sixteen thousand* men, with seven batteries of thirty-six pieces of cannon; so we had fallen into a perilous trap!

One of their chief commanders was the Meah Sahib Abdul Khan, who had so fully committed himself by the murder of our Resident at Chutneypore, and aiding in the

siege of Allahabad, that to think of forgiveness from our government was hopeless, so most of his father's Raj forces were posted in Chinhutt against us.

We opened fire with a nine-pound gun, and as the report rang in my ears, my thoughts flashed back to the pale face of her who loved me, and I did pray earnestly in my heart to be spared for her sake.

Then a shell from our 8-inch howitzer, thrown at a range of 1300 yards, burst right over the heads of the enemy's principal column. On this, their guns opened fire all at once, and the booming roar of them on the ambient air of the echoing valley soon became awful. They were splendidly worked, and hence the slaughter among us became terrible.

Steadily we kept closing up, ignorant as yet of their numbers, knowing only that their guns were very numerous, that we must quickly grapple and have it out with them; so steadily and shoulder-to-shoulder, the slender, though grand old British line went on. Much is said about the necessity now

for loose formation and so forth; but I am weak enough to believe in the magnetic influence of the 'touch of the elbow,' the 'shoulder-to-shoulder' of the old Highland toast.

As we scrambled forward over very broken ground, to my surprise I saw an European—an English woman, who had rashly followed the troops thus far, looking after us with eager and haggard eyes.

'Can I serve you, my poor woman?' I asked.

'No you can't, sir, thank you, kindly, I am only looking for my poor Tom,' she replied in a broken voice.

'Where is he?'

'In number two company of the 32nd; I see the company, but, oh, I can't see my own Tom. I only know he's there, and—'

Ere she could utter another word she was torn in pieces by a cannon shot, and I turned away sick at heart.

Again I was under fire! Again I heard the fierce hum of the round shot; the crash as it struck some solid object, or the awful *squash*

of a human body; again I heard, as in the Crimea, the vicious *ping* of the conical rifle-bullet, so different from the whistle made in air by old Brown Bess's ball; but I had been in the Crimea, so the feeling of a quicker beating of the heart, the dread of a sudden death, or worse still of a dreadful mutilation, did not haunt me now. I had also got over that propensity for the frequent and involuntary change of position, so usual in some men when they are for the *first* time under fire.

The little village of Ishmaelgunge being filled with the enemy's sharpshooters, a fierce, but sputtering fire of musketry was maintained by them from among the green compounds, the houses and trees, till white smoke hid the whole position in that quarter.

Colonel William Case at the head of the 32nd gallantly led them up to it, but fell, struck by a bullet. It is supposed that had he lived he would have succeeded in clearing the village at the bayonet's point, but his death seemed suddenly to dishearten his men, who paused and lay down under shelter of a green ridge, from whence they fired on the

enemy as fast as they could cast about and load. On seeing the colonel fall Captain Bassano rushed to his assistance. He was choking in his blood and breathing heavily.

'Captain Bassano,' said the colonel faintly but firmly, 'leave me to die. I have no need of assistance now, and your place is at the head of your company.'

A few minutes afterwards he expired. Meanwhile Major Bruère, with a few of the 13th Native Infantry, and Lieutenant Birch, with the Sikhs, on the right of our force, replied to the fire of the enemy with great spirit; but that fire was simply overwhelming. Splendidly drilled and skilfully handled by their own native officers, the manœuvres of the sepoy rebels were admirable; and it has been confidently asserted that had their leader obeyed his instructions to the letter, not a man of our force would ever have reached Lucknow to tell the story of the fight.

As our battalion went forward in extended order by alternate files, the light puffs of smoke from the enemy's muskets floated up

from every rugged ravine, green bush, and the tall waving jungle grass, as we gave them shot for shot; but ere long our bugles sounded to close to the centre, as they were coming on against us regiment after regiment, in quarter distance columns, and all with their colours flying in the proper places. The police force we had brought with us, deserted *en masse*, and then wheeling about, opened fire upon us. The rascally native gunners next cut the traces of their horses and began to abandon the cannon, and accompanied by a few terrified Sikh cavalry, the elephant with the howitzer was trotting leisurely home along the Lucknow road.

To make matters still more serious, a vast force of the enemy's cavalry, all clad in the Company's silver grey with red facings, and led—as my field-glass enabled me to see—by Abdul Khan and his friend the young rissaldar, came pouring on in one unceasing tide towards our right, in the direction of Lucknow, with the view of cutting us entirely off.

The whole ground between Ishmaelgunge

and Chinhutt was now covered by one moving mass of men, whose steel ramrods, bayonets and musket-barrels were flashing in the blazing sunshine, amid the white rolling clouds of smoke. In a few minutes one body of cavalry, led by the rissaldar, and fully five hundred strong, was so close to our flank, that the colonel had to throw back two companies on the wheel to prevent them from encircling us.

'As somebody has it,' said Joe, 'I am a good average Christian if you don't push my Christianity too far, but hang me if I don't put that pandy's pipe out!'

As he spoke he took up a short rifle, whose owner was lying on his back mortally wounded in the chest, and blowing balls of bloody foam from his lips, while his eyes were glazing fast in the hot sunshine.

Quietly adjusting the sight, Lonsdale took a steady aim at the rissaldar, who, turning in his saddle, was calling on his men to follow him, while he brandished his sabre aloft. The ball pierced his lungs; he fell on his horse's neck, and then rolled heavily over

on the turf below; on this his men reined up irresolutely.

'Devil burn me,' exclaimed O'Regan, 'but that rapparee is knocked over and past praying for. Shouting on the Prophet too—well, may every nigger go to the devil his own way.'

To us it was a moment of awful suspense, for our battalion was thinning fast. With the front rank kneeling, the two companies referred to poured in a concentrated volley, which made the horses plunge, swerve, and recoil, while the column trembled as if a single object; and now a dashing deed was done.

Amid the dense smoke that enveloped us, for in the hot, still, breathless air, it ceased to rise or melt away, I heard a voice cry,

'Threes right—trot!' And out from among some trees came our little band of *thirty-five* volunteer cavalry led by Captain Ratcliffe of the 7th; 'Front form—forward—charge!' followed rapidly, and these brave fellows, who but a few weeks before had been

seated quietly at their desks in the city, dashed on at full speed with flashing swords uplifted.

The mutineers never bided the shock; threes about they went, and fled at the gallop. 'Five hundred cavalry and two guns to be hunted by thirty-five sabres,' said one of the latter; 'it was a miserable fact!'

For a minute the ground in our front was thus clear, and remembering that the rissaldar had not been unkind to me when in Chutneypore, though I had never learned his name, but only knew him by his rank as leader of a *Rissala*, or troop of Independent Horse, I went over to where he lay on his back dying, with his teeth clenched and tufts of grass clutched fatuously in his fingers. He prayed me to get him water for the love of Allah when he recognised me; but not a drop was there to cool the parched tongue of any man in the field.

'I am dying I know, sahib—and your turn will come in its time,' said he faintly; 'the people of each religion go to heaven their own road, even as they tread on through

time, for generations and generations, their own way.'

His right sleeve had been rolled up above the elbow, to enable him to use his sword more freely, and I perceived that there was bound about his arm a band of fine silk, which had been rent in his fall, and I saw within it a metal amulet, and a scrap of parchment, with some Arabic words written thereon; but this talisman had failed to save him from Joe Lonsdale's bullet. He asked of me if the Meah Sahib had escaped? and when I replied in the affirmative, he told me that Abdul had sworn seven times by every vow a Mohammedan deems most holy, to enter Lucknow at the point of the sword, and to possess himself of my head and of the Feringhee lady of whom I had robbed him.

Our bugles were now sounding to retire, and we had not a moment to lose, as the strength of the enemy was beyond our power to pierce or drive back. We retreated with all speed, yet having incessantly to face about and fire on the yelling columns that followed us. I passed close to where poor Colonel

Case of the 32nd was still lying by the side of the road, with his sword grasped and his sightless eyes wide open, with the corpses of his men around him. There too lay Lieutenant Brackenbury of the same regiment dead, and Thompson the adjutant mortally wounded. Bassano had a leg broken, but got away by the assistance of a soldier.

Many of our poor fellows were so severely wounded as to be unable to rise; yet while retiring, we could see them fighting, some on their knees—fighting like true British bulldogs to the last, till they were finally slaughtered. Many more, parched with thirst and worn with fatigue, fell down exhausted and were sabred by Abdul's cavalry. Others were struck by apoplexy.

Captain Stevens of ours had a leg wounded, and after limping with us for five miles fell a little to the rear, and was instantly destroyed.

Throughout all that most disastrous day the brave old Sir Henry Lawrence was seen riding about in the most exposed places, amid a terrific fire of round shot, grape, and

musketry; and when at last—sorely pressed by the enemy, both horse and foot—we reached to Kokrail bridge over the Goomtee, he wrung his hands in the agony of his mind, and exclaimed,

'My God! oh, my God! my poor soldiers; and I have brought you to this!'

At the bridge men, women, and children of all ranks crowded around us with vessels containing water, of which we all drank with a thirst that seemed savage. Among them I saw poor Mrs. Case, looking wildly into the ranks of the 32nd for her husband, who was lying dead at Chinhutt. We effectually prevented the pursuers from crossing the iron bridge; but the daring Abdul with his cavalry forded the river below it, and in the hope perhaps of fulfilling his double vow, actually entered Lucknow near the Motymahal, and rode to the gates of the Khas Bazaar, scouring the whole south and east part of the city.

The guns on the Muchee Bhawn, worked by a few officers alone, drove the foe from the stone bridge, and from that day the siege

of Lucknow, which might never have been but for our luckless expedition to Chinhutt, virtually commenced; and how it was to end —unless in the destruction of us all—not one in the city could then foresee!

CHAPTER LVII.

ABDUL FULFILS HIS VOW.

For five long months Lucknow was fated to be, as some one has phrased it, 'our wretched harassed home,' ere the final crisis came; and the last home it proved for many.

To recapitulate the succession of scenes and sights of horror and agony—of death by the bullet, by the bayonet, by small-pox and cholera, would but weary and appal the reader, while I am compelled to admit that no human pen is adequate to depict them: and many a gay fellow, who, when lounging in the windows of 'the Rag,' was particular to a degree about his kid gloves, satin ties, and bandolined moustache, and who would lispingly condemn this, that, or the other thing as 'dooced bad form,' was now fain to

darn his own pantaloons, or patch his boots, if, fortunately, he had a pair to patch. While fair, gentle, and highly-bred women, once accustomed to all the luxuries and refined elegances of Anglo-Indian life—to have every thought, wish, and want attended to by a horde of native servants—were now reduced to serve themselves and others who were unable to do so.

Amid all this my heart bled most for them; and for one in particular, my tender and dove-like Henriette, like others, now compelled to attendance on the wounded, and to almost menial drudgery.

The letter which I had proposed to write to her father was never written; for, blockaded as we were on every hand, there were no means of despatching it; and, I may here state, that ever since her disappearance after the revolt at Allahabad, her whole family, believing that she had perished, wore mourning.

By the thousands of the foe without, the slender 'handful' of British in Lucknow were most thoroughly hemmed in, and soon made

to feel sensible of the horror and peril of their completely isolated situation. The whole city became suddenly alive with shot and shell. All the prisoners who had been released from jail, and all the native servants, deserted to the enemy; after which all Europeans crowded into the fortifications, where many who had been accustomed to dwell in magnificent mansions, were glad to content them with the most miserable little huts. After the first attack, Sir Henry Lawrence decided that the Muchee Bhawn must be abandoned, but the greatest difficulty was how to convey his wish to the officer commanding there. I volunteered to leave the security of the Residency and make the attempt, but he declined, saying, 'there is no chance of success.'

Our rough telegraph worked ill. Some time elapsed ere we could attract the attention of the little garrison in the Muchee Bhawn, and when that was achieved, a dreadful fire was opened on the flat roof of the Residency where the telegraph was being worked; and the order to blow up the fort

and retreat to us had barely been accomplished, ere the whole machinery was torn to pieces by grape.

Twelve at night was the appointed time, and most anxiously we awaited it, for every advantage was on the side of the mutineers, and every European life was most valuable. To distract the attention of the besiegers we opened a heavy fire upon them as the hour drew nigh, and this had the desired effect; so the whole force, with their guns and treasure, came safely in. The explosion followed after the last man fired the train. I felt the earth shake beneath my feet; a volume of fire seemed to fill the entire Muchee Bhawn; there was a dreadful sound as if the world was uplifting, and an immense cloud of black smoke that obscured the stars, announced to the city that 240 barrels of gunpowder, and 594,000 rounds of ball and gun ammunition had destroyed the ancient fortress.

Our last shelter now was the Residency and its adjacent buildings, all of which had been connected by earth-works and impro-

vised as a fortress. The former was a beautiful and well-built mansion, with lofty apartments, shady verandahs, and stately porticoes. It contained three floors in addition to the *tyekhana*, or handsome underground rooms, built as a refuge from the extreme heat in summer. In this edifice were crowded about a thousand persons; officers with their wives and families. Fresh air might be taken on the flat roof, but it was far from being a safe promenade, although high above all the other buildings.

As the firing was incessant, deaths by the bullet, and the not less deadly pestilence, were also incessant; but no man's loss was so universally regretted as that of Sir Henry Lawrence, who was mortally wounded one morning by a shell which fell into the Residency and burst near his bed, in which he lay weary and worn, and in the act of dictating some orders to Captain Wilson. An enormous fragment smashed his left thigh, and two days subsequently he expired in the greatest agony; after which the command fell to Brigadier (afterwards Sir John) Inglis,

of the 32nd Regiment. Deep was the despondency that sunk upon us all when Sir Henry died, and many said aloud that our last hope was gone.

Some days we underwent a perfect hurricane of shot from jingals, cannon, and muskets; often there were more than ten thousand of the latter blazing on the Residency at once. No place was safe, and many unfortunate ladies were killed or wounded in their apartments. Ere long the rebels took to firing billets of wood, pieces of iron and telegraph wire, copper coins and bullocks' horns—anything that was calculated to slay or mutilate. At an average our loss was ten men per day.

Hourly we watched the direction in which we hoped to see the gleam of bayonets announce that succour was coming, for rumours had reached us of old Colin Campbell and his hardy Highlanders; but the hours became days, and weeks, and months, during which we lived and toiled in the midst of death and suffering.

Among all the women in Lucknow, Blanche

was now a bright example—as veritable a Sister of Charity as little Sister Louise Marie, who nursed me so tenderly at Bulganack. Doubtless she thought of the fate of Stapleton with horror, and with sorrow too, and how greatly a longer intimacy with him might have perilled herself; and how much of selfish folly and coquetry there had been in her past life; and so, perhaps, amid the suffering she witnessed daily, some tears of contrition and self-abasement may have escaped her. She who, as a child, had been full of childish fear in the darkness of night at Thorsgill Hall, now saw shells bursting and cannon shot crashing through the solid masonry, and could ere long look at them quietly.

'No fear of me,' said she, more than once; 'I shall be brave for my Harry's sake.'

But his illness seemed a very lingering one, and truly the atmosphere of the place was not calculated to restore health rapidly. The heat was intense; dead bodies were decomposing in every direction; the church-

yard graves were shallow and full; the air was pestilential, and we were pestered by clouds of great, cold, and clammy flies, that had been feeding on the unburied corpses which abounded within the range of our guns outside the works.

By natives whom we thought we could trust, letters enclosed in quills were despatched to General Havelock, then on his march to Cawnpore, imploring aid; no less than twenty of these were sent by twenty different men, who must have proved faithless, as the succour did not come. I began to wonder how much longer this kind of thing could continue, our numbers were diminishing so fast. How long should I escape for *her* sake? Would a time come, when, like so many others, I might be knocked on the head, wrapped in a rug, thrust into a dhooley, and borne to a shallow hole in which some other corpses lay? Then I would thrust the thought aside; and taking my place in an embrasure among my own privates, would blaze away with a rifle, till the barrel grew too hot for the hand.

So fatal were the bullets of the enemy, that the wounded were fewer than the killed; and now came a fatal night, when I was to lose one of my best friends. My company, with one of the 32nd, was detailed for a night sortie; and just as evening was closing, I paid a visit to my friends at Calvert's rooms, in the Emambara, without hinting, however, of the additional peril I had to encounter.

I found Henriette with a little orphan girl, whose parents had perished, seated on her knee, and nestling in her soft neck. She was endeavouring to brighten the child by her smiles; but the latter was struck by the anxious expression in her sweet face, and said:

'Mamma smiled at me just so.'

'When, darling?'

'Just before those terrible sepoys tore her from papa's arms at Allahabad, and I have never seen either of them since.'

Little sobs followed, for she scarcely knew what she referred to.

The face of Blanche seemed, like that of

Henriette, sorely worn; her rosy lips, 'once made for saucy speeches and sunny smiles,' were quite blanched.

'You have done too much nursing to-day, I fear,' said I, taking her hands kindly in mine.

'Yes; I fear so.'

'You have become very good and kind.'

'Would that I were better! I have been so silly and frivolous; a foolish little thing, Lancelot.'

'Oh—I am Lancelot again, am I?' said I, laughing, in spite of myself.

'Yes; you are to marry Henriette. She was the wife nature intended for you, not a giddy thing like me.'

'And now I must go,' said I, 'being wanted at the batteries as usual.'

Henriette looked at me with anxiety; but she had become so used to see me come and go, that on this occasion she had no special fear when I bade her adieu, and went forth with a strong confidence in my heart, knowing that it was in her tender keeping, and feeling for the nonce a bold trust in the

future, with a certainty that succour would come. I felt so happy in the earnest love of Henriette, a love without cloud or doubt, that the air around me seemed actually full of musical sounds; yet what were they? The whistle of the red shell soaring high in air; the thundering crash of its explosion; the whizzing of grape; the heavy thud of the round shot, as it buried itself in the earth, or tore down a mass of brickwork; yells, cheers, groans, and the last sighs of the dying!

Oh, such a medley of anything but sweet sounds we had in Lucknow then; and one sound there was more exciting than all—the occasional shout of 'A mine!'

And she thought I was going forth to the batteries 'as usual,' perhaps to Ommaney's, from whence I so often saw the lights in those rooms of Calvert's in the Emambara which I knew were occupied by her and Blanche. How different from the time when I had so often watched her bedroom light from the terrace of ivied Thorsgill Hall!

The object of this little sortie was to destroy, with its occupants, a house belonging

to a merchant. It had been taken by the enemy, and from the windows of it they picked off our men by dozens. There was in particular one deadly marksman among them whom our soldiers named 'Bob the Nailer,' an African eunuch of the late King of Oude, whose double-barrelled rifle was becoming a source of terror, so Brigadier Inglis came to the resolution of destroying the place, if possible, and all that were in it.

'I have been almost without food to-day,' said Joe Lonsdale, as he and I proceeded to the muster-place together; 'matters can't go on this way for another month!'

'Shall we be on the face of the earth then?' asked Tom Prior, our second-lieutenant.

'In it more likely,' said I gloomily, as I thought of all that Henriette was compelled to risk and endure.

'Duck down—down—here comes a shell!' cried Joe, and describing a fiery arc in the air, a large bomb, with its fuse burning clearly, came whistling over our heads, and exploded with a mighty crash at a little dis-

tance. For an instant we could see each others' faces in the darkness, and while lying nearly flat on the ground I felt a fragment pass over me; 'this is one of the trifles incident to life in our Indian mundane sphere,' commented Joe; 'a close shave this was for all of us; well, this kind of work pays off my darkie creditors at Allahabad, and saves me the bother of taking arms against a sea of troubles, and all that sort of thing.'

Joe gave a little sigh, as if he gathered satisfaction from the reflection, and carefully lit a cigar while the men fell in. Uniforms few nor none of us had now, or if we had could we have worn them, the heat was so intense by night as well as by day. We, the three officers, were in dark jersey shirts and flannel trousers, over which we wore our sword and pouch belts and revolver cases; and often when counter-mining the latter weapon was wanted on a moment's notice to scatter some wretch's brains against the earthen wall, when a sudden fall of the soil brought us instantly face to face with the

foe. We had with us a party of the 32nd Regiment, under Lieutenant M'Cabe, a brave fellow, who had served in all the battles of the Affghan campaign, in China, and elsewhere, and who had won his commission at Mooltan, where he was the first man to plant the British standard on the ramparts.

Quietly and silently we loaded, fixed bayonets, and stole out of Lucknow towards the house, which we reached unseen in the gloom of the night, though it was full of the enemy. The time was one of keen excitement as we got close under the walls of it; every moment I expected to hear a shout of alarm, and a blaze of musketry opened on us from the windows, for at that very time 'Bob-the-Nailer' was perched on the flat roof of it busy with his rifle, returning the fire which Jack Dormer and other of our officers, were maintaining against him from the top of the Residency in the dark, solely to divert his attention.

By a rifle-shot we blew the door open, and rushing in burst all over the place. In every room we found sepoys asleep, overwhelmed

by fatigue, bhang, and other excesses, and all undisturbed by the incessant report of the African's rifle ringing overhead, or the occasional shelling that was going on elsewhere. Every man we came upon was instantly bayoneted, and Dan O'Regan made his way to the roof, where he shot and threw over the terrace the terrible African who had put to death so many brave Europeans.

This was all achieved without our losing a man; but as we were returning—the distance to the trenches being only seven hundred yards—a random shot from a three-gun battery, which the enemy had in an adjacent garden, struck poor Joe Lonsdale on the right hip-joint, and literally smashed his whole body! The strange sound made by the ball as it fairly doubled him up was dreadful to hear.

'Rudkin—Lance, old fellow,' said he in a voice like a sigh, 'you'll write to mother—and—and tell her all about it—that I died game—and the regiment too.'

I could only clasp his hand, which was beginning to feel cold already, as the blood

was gushing from every artery and vein in torrents.

'God bless you, Lance—good by, lads,' said he in a voice that was barely heard. His head turned to the right side, and all was over. My poor jovial friend was gone; gone to that unknown shore which is washed by the waves of eternity.

His body was so mutilated that it was with difficulty we could get it conveyed, athwart three rifles, across the space between the Brigade Mess and Deprat's house, and by daylight next morning he was laid in his last home. A foot or two of difference in our positions would have made his fate mine. I sorrowed for him long and deeply, at least as deeply as men may do who are situated as we were then, and ever face to face with death and calamity.

The great Mohammedan festival of the Mohurrum was now at hand, and as the observers thereof are more than usually fanatical and bloodthirsty, our prospects were fast becoming desperate; for, as a writer says, we 'knew only too well that every indi-

vidual drop of blood in our veins, every eye, nerve, and bone, would be considered a graceful offering in the cause of Islam.' This festival lasts forty days, and when the ninth has expired comes the Night of Butchery, when a massacre of goats paves the Moslem's path to heaven; and we never doubted but that a most furious and combined attack upon the riddled and shot-riven Residency would be deemed a more acceptable substitute.

Thus with growing and gnawing anxiety did we look for those succours from without, by which the wretched survivors in Lucknow could alone be saved. The absolute terror of the ladies for the lives of their husbands and children was more than ever painful to see. We had many widows among us now, and many fatherless little ones, and every day's strife added to the number; but why protract this portion of my story!

After our partial relief by the gallant Havelock, we still remained blocked up in that fatal place, though we could better defend ourselves; but November came and

found us still besieged, and still starving and fighting in Lucknow. Prior to that we had tasted a little of the sweets of revenge.

One dark night a sudden and furious attack was made by a strong force of the enemy upon a portion of our trenches, and while our attention was attracted by a mine sprung in another quarter, they actually carried a part of the works by the bayonet, led by a man of undoubted bravery, whom I heard shouting from time to time—

'*Leea! leea! jalloo bahadour!*' (meaning 'the entrenchment is taken—advance, my braves!')

To enable us to direct our fire and distinguish friend from foe, an officer of Engineers lit two or three gigantic blue lights on an angle of the works. Steadily these burned in the airless Indian night, and most strange, weird and wild was the ghastly effect on the dreadful scene in the stormed trench, where our men in broken masses grappled fiercely and furiously with the enemy—all of whom were duly maddened by bhang—stabbing with the flashing and gory bayonet, or brain-

ing them by the butt-end whirled upon their skulls at full swing.

The red gleams of the musketry at times, the flashing of swords and tulwars were all visible as if at noon, and the brown faces of the sepoys, their black sparkling eyes and white glistening teeth, tinted blue by the glare, resembled those of incarnate fiends, or the demons of a Christmas pantomime.

Illuminated by the same weird lustre rose the masses of the buildings in the Sikh square and the Brigade Mess, and I could even see the walls of the Kaiserbagh, half a mile distant, shining in the wondrous gleam.

Brief but desperate was the struggle, and long ere the lights died out, we had completely repelled the attack by the bayonet chiefly, and had scoured the trenches, moreover taking several prisoners, among others their leader, whom Tom Prior disarmed and actually dragged in by the throat. It was on this occasion that I saw a very remarkable effect from a wound inflicted on a subadar of the 17th Bengal Infantry. A grapeshot tore

away his bowels, and actually wreathed them round a rose-bush that grew in an angle of the trench. He rose instantly, grinned in my face, and then fell dead, for the vertebræ had been uninjured—at least so Doctor Gargill afterwards told me.

Tom's prisoner proved to be no other than the Meah Sahib, Abdul Khan of Chutneypore, whose atrocities the Brigadier resolved to punish without an hour's delay after dawn. With Nusseer-ood-deen, a sowar of the 3rd Cavalry, Khoda Bux (Dormer's ex-kitmutgar), and two others whose names I have forgotten, he was tried by a drumhead court-martial. They were all sentenced to be blown from the guns; and it is but justice to say, that they met this revolting death with a heroism worthy of a better cause.

The bearing of Abdul was grave without effrontery, and as he was bound to the field-piece with the muzzle planted between his shoulders, and his arms bent by ropes behind him to the wheels, he repeated aloud that part of the Koran which is always read to the dying, and which ends thus: 'When the

blast of the trumpet shall sound, all that is in heaven and on the earth shall be smitten with terror, except the chosen of the Lord, all men shall appear before Him, humbly and prostrate.'

The portfires fell on the vents of the five guns; the salvo rung; the group vanished in smoke, and a shower of gory human fragments ascended into the air to fall in a horrid shower upon the earth!

Thus was Abdul's vow, that he would get into Lucknow or die in the attempt, fulfilled —fulfilled to the letter!

CHAPTER LVIII.

HOW THE SIEGE ENDED.

My narrative is drawing to a close. After this striking episode, in which from personal reasons I felt an interest so deep, we had to return to the daily work of fighting the enemy, and being battered by them in return —starving, often hungry and sorely athirst— and hoping almost against hope that relief would come to us ere long.

From the daily task of facing death and enduring toil—my sword-belt never off—it was nevertheless delightful to be able to turn from time to time to the sweet gentle face of Henriette; so that at last I began to feel as if I endured it all for her alone. Though it was the chance of war and duty that made me one of the defenders of Lucknow, I identified the fact with the necessity for her pro-

tection, and in this view of the matter I seemed to be fighting for her alone.

At last there came a day which I shall never forget—the 16th of November.

I had left Henriette with strange and vague forebodings of evil in my mind, and had gone to my post at the Bailey Guard Gate, with Dormer, Prior, and a strong party of ours, to work a large gun which was placed there, in opposition to two which the enemy had at the Clock Tower, four hundred yards distant. The long months of over-excitement the girl had undergone was telling upon her health and appearance now; and though there was no change in her firm white arms and dimpled hands, no hollow to spoil the oval of her cheeks, her pallor alarmed, and the general expression of her face haunted me, and while telling off my men to their places by the Lancaster gun, I had on my lips an unuttered prayer that succour might soon come, were it but for her sake alone!

We were all becoming dreadfully emaciated and worn out by want of food and by excess of toil; while the deadly work in which we

had been engaged so long, and the savage emotions with which we regarded the merciless foe, had gradually imparted a wild kind of hawk-like glare to our eyes, and a grim knitted expression to the muscles of the forehead.

'Even the little children in Lucknow began now to think like soldiers,' says one who has written on the Siege, 'and they became, as it were, fond of the "game of war." I heard one urchin of five years say to another, "You fire round shot, and I'll return shell from *my* battery!" Another, on getting into a rage with his playmates, said, "I hope you may be *shot* by the enemy." Others (playing with grape shot in lieu of marbles) would be heard to say, "that is clean through his lungs;" or, "this wants more *elevation*," for these young scamps picked up all the expressions of the artillery, and made use of them in their games.'

We knew that succour was coming now; but knew not precisely from what point or *when* it would come; our great dread being that it might only arrive too late.

On this day a desultory fire of cannon, and occasionally of musketry, was going on all round the Residency as usual; but the enemy were redoubling their efforts at some points, and hence at the Bailey Guard we had hard work of it to keep our ground against the two guns opposed to our one; while the Clock-tower above them was manned by a few picked marksmen, so much ducking and dodging were necessary as we fired the piece and dragged it back when recoiling, to reload.

'I wish we had some bitter beer here,' said Prior with a genuine sigh, as he took off his pith-helmet for a moment to wipe the heavy perspiration from his temples; 'working this Lancaster gun under a blazing sky makes one's clay want moistening inwardly. I never thought to turn artilleryman; but what's the odds, and so forth, as poor Joe used to say.'

We had barely been in the battery ten minutes when casualties began to occur.

One poor fellow of ours, a corporal, working like the rest in his shirt and trousers,

with sleeves rolled above the elbow, while in the act of charging home the gun, was struck by a bullet through the embrasure, and after reeling away for some yards like a drunken man, fell heavily on his back, with the blood deluging his shirt and spirting from a wound in his breast on which he placed his finger, his eyes looking wildly upwards the while. Then one of his comrades bent kindly over him and raised his head.

'That bullet has finished me,' said the wounded man in a low voice; 'they have hit me twice before—but—but have done for me at last! I'm dying, Jack—I feel it.'

'Pray to God then, comrade,' said the other with more fervour that we usually found in Lucknow.

'I have too long forgotten Him, Jack,' replied the corporal despondingly.

'But He ain't a-forgotten you—be assured of that.'

What further passed I know not, as it was my turn to level the gun, and when again I looked round all was over. The corporal was lying dead with Jack's coat spread over his

face; and a few yards farther off lay poor Jack himself expiring with a canister-shot in his throat.

'How strange it is,' said Dormer, 'as some one says, that life should go out of our organism when lead goes in!'

'Not at all strange,' said I; 'but one or two more of our poor fellows are over their troubles at last.'

'Yea, sir, verily,' said a quaint-looking old Scripture Reader who had been attached to the 6th B. N. Infantry, but had not made many proselytes in that distinguished regiment, and who had now perched himself under the shelter of a deep sand-bag rampart very near us; 'they are indeed over their sorrows; but has not the House of Ahab always suffered for his sin from the time of Elijah, whom the ravens fed, until now?'

'Very likely,' replied Tom Prior; 'but stand clear of the gun, old fellow, or you'll have the recoil on your reverend toes.'

Suddenly we heard an increased sound of cannon and of musketry too, but in a quarter where all had been hitherto still, and each

man looked inquiringly in his comrade's face, while every eye grew brighter.

'That firing is in *rear* of the enemy,' said I; 'the sound comes from the direction of Secunderbagh!'

'Can these pandy devils be fighting among themselves?' suggested Dormer; 'the Mohammedans against the Hindoos?'

'Scarcely, though that may come when they have finally settled us,' said I.

'God!' exclaimed a veteran sergeant; 'if it should be the relieving force!'

The firing grew manifestly nearer and nearer, and inquiries and suggestions rained thick on all sides as to what it could portend; and so interested were we, that we ceased to handle the gun, and crouching close to the parapet listened, with our hearts beating thick and fast.

Anon the firing lulled a little, and then there was wafted towards us on the soft Indian breeze another sound—that strange wild cadence, of which so much has been made in many melo-dramatic versions of our story.

It was the *pipes* of the steadily advancing Highlanders!

Then we knew that relief had come, and that we were saved at last—that old Colin Campbell—Campbell the brave, the resolute and the prompt—he who when asked by the Premier when he could start for India, replied, 'to-morrow,'—was bursting at the bayonet's point through the enemy's rear, and breaking for ever that zone of fire which had begirt us so long!

Next we heard the bugles of the 64th—the Staffordshire—cheerily sounding the 'advance.' For a moment a great hush fell upon all in the batteries, as if each man mistrusted his organs of hearing; then there rose a universal shout, mingled with a hearty hurrah, and cries of—

'They are coming! they are coming round from the Alambagh!'

Then as the glad tidings spread like wildfire, many a mother wept when she embraced her rescued little ones, and many a husband clasped his wife to his breast—as I did Henriette—with a new joy never known till now.

'To the Lancaster gun again, my lads!' cried I; 'and now to silence those beggars in the Clock-tower.'

Inspired by new fervour and fury, we worked the heavy gun like madmen—handling it as if it were a mere toy—and long ere we could see the red coats, the green tartans of the Highlanders, and the fluttering pennons of the Lancers, or the rest of that force which was breaking through the enemy, the guns in the Clock-tower were silenced, abandoned by all but the dead, and we were left in quiet possession of the Bailey Guard.

To relate how Campbell advanced from Cawnpore to Lucknow with a slender force, whose hearts were maddened by the sight of the Nana's slaughter-house; how he stormed the Dilkhousa or Hunting Palace; carried the strongly garrisoned Secunderbagh after a most dreadful struggle, as every sepoy fought with a halter round his neck; how Peel's Naval Brigade disposed his 68-pounders, 'very much as if he were laying the Shannon alongside an enemy's frigate;' how Wolsley, of Ashanti fame, stormed the Mess-house at

the head of a company of the Perthshire, would be to include here facts that belong to history.

Suffice it to say that resistance was everywhere vain. Mercy was never given, and never asked. Like a flash of lightning, the bayonet's deadly thrust was followed by the shout of 'Cawnpore—remember Cawnpore;' hence in the Secunderbagh alone more than two thousand wretches met their well-earned doom.

Need I say that the joy of those the victors saved was too deep for words—too deep for aught but tears?

* * * * *

CONCLUSION.

I HAVE said that Lucknow was relieved on the 16th of November.

On that day three months Henriette and I were married, and had left Chowringhee on board a stately P. and O. Liner, doubly happy amid our joy that we were quitting India for ever, after all we had undergone—our cross-purposes, mistakes, and deadly perils.

She it was who in reality had stirred all the depth of my heart; who had made my existence a part of her own, and had taught me that affection is love and passion is not!

The great steamer was crowded; many were going home with us now, also sick of the land we were leaving; broken in health, in spirit, and in heart; for many were the widows and orphans of the fallen; but I felt myself the happiest man on board, when with Henriette and the Calverts I watched

the low and dark-green jungles of marshy Saugor sinking in the blue evening sea.

Thus Henriette was mine after all, so strangely do the wheels of Life and Fortune turn!

In the *Libro d'Oro*, where such names are to be found, that of my 'once Fairy' still figures with those of a brood of little Calverts. At —— Hall, Sir Harry has long since become a hearty country-gentleman, learned in mysterious powders for fattening pheasants or physicking harriers; a great enemy of poachers, and curious in the crossing and breeding of all manner of cattle and pigs; while, mindful of the terrible lessons taught her in the Emambara, Blanche and the Vicar's wife go hand-in-hand in the matter of parish schools and Dorcas charities, blankets, coals, and soup; a promoter of the associations for clothing the young Ashantees and Fiji Islanders, and for the evangelisation of every place but England.

Since the dark and stormy days of the Indian Mutiny all has been happiness with *us*; but ever and anon my mind goes back to

its stirring events, and to the faces of those who perished.

Far away from 'God's Acre,' they lie in the hideous battle trenches; yet the brave hearts that moulder there might serve to consecrate the city of the Sultan or the desert of Sahara.

THE END.

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