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R A L P H   D A R N E L L



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BY

CAPTAIN MEADOWS TAYLOR, M.R.I.A.

AUTHOR OF 'TARA,' 'CONFESSIONS OF A THUG'  
ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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# RALPH DARNELL.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

IN WHICH SEVERAL IMPORTANT MATTERS ARE  
DETAILED.

THERE is little interesting to be related of any of the persons with whom we have lately been in company for several weeks, except indeed, perhaps, of Miss Constance Darnell, who not only permitted, but encouraged Mr George Elliot's attentions; and perhaps this young lady's general progress had been considerably accelerated by her visit to London. The recent outbreak of Sir Geoffrey against Ralph was not followed, as in the case of that with Mr Smithson, by placability. In many respects the Baronet, like others of his period who lived for the greater part of their lives in the country, was narrow-minded, and,

though generous and liberal in the main, obstinate to a fault ; and we have seen several sad specimens of his passion. In regard to Ralph, Mistress Grover pleaded very hard with him, as did also Constance, who, as the cause of this terrible war, was much grieved thereby ; but they could not move the old man. And on one occasion when they had combined and thought they were gaining an advantage, he burst out again into such furious oaths and execrations that the women were frightened, and believed him when he declared, if Ralph went down on his knees before him he would only kick him off. “ A lad,” he said, “ whom I, believing him to be a bastard, brought up in all love and affection, as you know, Grover, to turn on me at my own table, insult me by not drinking my own toast, and clench his fist at me afterwards ! No, no. And, if you please, Mistress Grover, I beg you will not mention him again to me, or I may forget myself to you, which would grieve me ; and all because he was fool enough to look up to Conny. Jealous, by Jove ! and of Elliot too.”

It is as equally certain that Ralph would no more have gone down on his knees to his uncle, than he would have done or said any other apologetic action or word. I can find no other phrase to express his state of mind than that it was sullen and revengeful, and perhaps vindictive also. He went moodily to his



work, did it with more assiduity than he had ever done before ; and neither Mr Sanders nor his uncle Roger, in pity to the young man, alluded to the quarrel in Soho Square. Of this transaction Sir Geoffrey had given his own account to his brother, and had been believed ; but Sir Geoffrey had not told all. What Roger Darnell most regretted was, that the doubtful position the young man occupied had not been sooner explained to him ; but that could not be helped now : and over their wine, while Sir Geoffrey was for the time perfectly calm, in speaking of Ralph, he told Roger that he could never see him again, and hoped the lad had enough Darnell spirit in him to take his own course in life. " We had better try and get him a pair of colours, I think, Roger," he said, " and we have interest enough for that." But Roger had no desire to see Ralph abandon Lombard Street ; and, legitimate or the contrary, he might make a good merchant in time.

" *I will take care of him, Geoffrey,*" he said ; " and if he won't take your new allowance, he has what belonged to his father, and some thousands saved out of the yearly payments, of which he does not know : and he will do very well. I will see that he does so, and you may be reconciled to him by-and-by ;" and hearing this, Sir Geoffrey had only shrugged his shoulders. Roger Darnell had seen his brother

through many quarrels and misapprehensions, but never knew him to be in a humour like this.

There were two persons, however, to whom Ralph's disgrace was acceptable, though in different degrees. Mr Elliot had no dislike to him, or cause of dislike—perhaps, indeed, quite the contrary; but he heard from the servants in Soho Square, to whom his largesses were liberal and manifold, that there had been a terrible quarrel about Miss Constance, and the Baronet had called Ralph a bastard, loud enough “for the whole Square to hear;” and after a few days, Mr Elliot saw that Ralph came no more. I have before praised Mr Elliot's tact and judgment. He did not press matters at all. He saw the family had been disturbed, and that they would not go out; but he was sure that calm must ensue, when his boat could glide gently into those pleasant waters. In this respect Mr Elliot displayed a knowledge of human nature beyond his years, for which he was to be honoured. He bided his time, and when he felt there could be no risk, he went one day to Sir Geoffrey, told him openly how he adored Constance; was bid to go in and win if he could, and he did win.

Mistress Grover, dear soul, saw that Constance was beginning to fret about the matter; she had taken the fever kindly, but no crisis having occurred, she had become restless and ill at ease. So one delight-

ful evening, as they all three sat at the open window looking out on the trees in the Square, when Mistress Grover suddenly remembered she had not left out tea and chocolate (Mr Roger Darnell was below with the Baronet), she left them; and Mr Elliot instinctively considered his time was come, and was not safely to be deferred, and so, dropping quietly on one knee, he——

Well, he asked Constance Darnell to marry him, and vowed he would be faithful to death to her; that is the plain English of the matter. I read constantly the most eloquent proposals, written in the most plaintive, elegant, flowing, romantic periods that it is possible to compose; and—I daresay I am very hard-hearted—I don't believe a word of them. I don't believe that any man ever proposed to any woman he loved in such set phrases; and I hope, if any one ever did such a thing, that he was refused outright. As a consequence, I do not see why any such pathetic proposals should be composed and printed; and that is the reason I do not write George Elliot's here. I believe he now sincerely loved Constance Darnell, and I am quite sure she loved him too, and acknowledged she did. So there were two very happy people sitting in the balcony when Grover came back, who told her—only what she expected—all about it; and when the Baronet

came up-stairs (he had not had too much wine) and was told also, he cried out, I think from his heart—

“God bless my heart and soul! I am glad of it, George, my boy. But for all that, I shan’t let you marry her till she has completed her eighteenth year, so don’t expect it.”

While this effect of Ralph’s disgrace had ensued to those I have mentioned—to Mrs Roger Darnell that event was positively cheering and refreshing. She gloried in her prescience. She had prophesied a hundred times, that she *knew* that “unfortunate” young man would become an affliction to his guardians; and I am afraid she quoted, as I should consider profanely, a part of the second commandment, which need not be repeated here, and rejoiced over it. In telling all she had heard to Lady Warrington, who professed herself seriously shocked at the bare idea of Ralph’s condition, Mrs Darnell said decidedly—

“And, my dear, *I* believe him, after that treatment of his uncle, capable of anything; I believe he would not hesitate at—at—murder. My husband scoffs at me when I declare Ralph Darnell should be discharged from his counting-house; but he is obstinate. As to this young man’s coming here any more—he never came with *my* consent.”

But we may well spare continuance of these remarks, which were not pleasant ones; and at which

poor dear Dorothy, who had much regard, perhaps something more, in her heart for her cousin Ralph, went up to her room and cried ever so bitterly—cried till her mother boxed her ears, and set her a whole collect, epistle and gospel, as well as two psalms of a penitential nature, to learn by heart. But we must pursue the thread of this history, as more important than the doings of Mrs Roger.

The day the Baronet was to execute the will, which Peed, Peed, & Brisbane had prepared, after necessary consultation with eminent counsel learned in such affairs, and in the draft of which every chance of a flaw had been avoided, he was to come to the office for the purpose; and Mr Roger Darnell having informed Ralph of the fact, sounded him as to any possibility of reconciliation with his brother.

“It’s very unfortunate, Ralph,” he said, kindly, “that there was concealment about this; but it was not my affair. Your uncle has not been to London since your father died, which is twenty years, and we had grown far apart till he sent you down to me; but as we can’t recall the past, we must only make the best we can of the future. I should like you both to be on the old terms, and I consider both of you wrong—both; and you, as the youngest, ought to give way.”

“And beg his pardon dutifully,” said Ralph, with

a sneer ill concealed, "for being insulted, black-guarded, and turned out of the house, because I—— No, uncle," he continued, after a gulp and a pause; "if I am not legitimate it is no fault of mine, and I can follow my own road in life, and fear no one. I can love whom I please, and honour whom I please—and you, sir, ever first. I do not consider that I am under any obligation to my uncle Geoffrey; and I protest, sir, openly and with all my heart, before you and Mr Sanders, as I would before all the world, against the execution of this will, because it contains a record of what I am not proved to be. Why was there any mention of me at all? Why——"

"It is too late, Ralph," said Mr Roger, kindly. "I am no lawyer, and Peed has taken the first advice in London, on which this will is drawn up. Peed will be here before your uncle, and, if you like, you can read it."

"Read the record, before witnesses too, of my own shame, uncle!" cried Ralph, passionately. "Do you forget that I am a Darnell—your brother's son—and that *you* have taught me to be a gentleman? No, sir, I had better go home; I would rather not see my uncle."

"I do not know, Ralph," replied Mr Darnell, looking round upon all the Darnells about him. "Nothing of this kind ever occurred before among us, and I be-

lieve—that is, I think—I hope—that your uncle, if he saw you, might even now be deterred from his purpose.”

“I am afraid not, sir,” said Ralph, firmly; “no Darnell that you have ever told me of was vacillating. I am not afraid of my uncle—I have no reason to be so; and I will wait, as you request me, till he comes. If then——”

“Say no more, Ralph; I’m sick of it all,” replied Mr Darnell. “I’ll stand by you whatever happens, and I can say no more. How do you do, Mr Peed?” he continued, as that prim gentleman entered the parlour. “Sit down. I suppose you are all ready.”

“Thank you, we are *quite* ready. Mr Wilson has the documents in his bag; and I suppose Sir Geoffrey will not be long absent now,” said Mr Peed, as he pulled out his watch; “it’s nearly two o’clock.”

Ralph had no further business in the parlour, and, taking some papers his uncle handed to him, he left the room. Wilson was sitting in the office with a heavy green bag between his legs, which he slapped significantly. “It’ll be done,” he said, in a whisper, “and they’ll expect you to-night at the old place.”

Ralph made no reply, but went to his desk. I do not think he was conscious of what he looked over. More letters from Mr Wharton, more invoices, more accounts of sales and purchases in Calcutta.

He seemed to be in a dream, a hideous dream, which it is idle to follow. A seal was to be set on his shame, and witnessed too, perhaps by some of the clerks in the office ; even Mr Sanders, who as yet knew only of Constance's refusal of him, might know this family secret ; and who at Peed's did not already ?

Ralph heard his uncle's coach drive up shortly afterwards, and saw him come in at the door, cross the office, and enter the parlour. His uncle saw him too, and made no sign—nay, he turned away his head, and the expression of his face was obstinate and defiant. Mr Wilson was summoned and went in, so also did Mr Sanders, and Ralph supposed the business had begun. The door had not closed entirely after Mr Sanders. Ralph's desk was not far from it, and he listened with his heart beating against the wood so violently, that he could scarcely breathe. Mr Peed spread out the parchments upon the table, and Ralph heard the rustling distinctly. "Would Sir Geoffrey Darnell wish to hear the paper again?" Mr Peed asked; "Mr Wilson would read it, and the witnesses should know the contents of what they signed." And it was read. What the party severally thought of those documents it is immaterial to conjecture. It is probable the opinions were of a varied character ; but the reading was soon



finished. Ralph could only hear a word here and there ; for Mr Wilson read in a lawyer's-clerk kind of professional gabble, without stops or pauses, which was inaudible except as a general murmur ; and when that had ceased, Sir Geoffrey had to sign.

"Before you write your name to that paper, think again, Geoffrey, what you are doing," said Roger Darnell, firmly. "I myself don't see the least need for it, nor for any mention of Ralph."

"I differ from you entirely ; I think there *is* need," replied the Baronet, doggedly ; "and I *quite* know what I am doing. I came to London specially to do this, and, by George, I will do it ! I'll finish it. If I had been wrong, all the lawyers in London, and Peed here would have told me so ; but they think I'm right, and I think I'm right myself. And what's more, considering what Ralph Darnell is, and what he's done to me, I'm sure I've behaved very handsomely to him—much more so than he'd any right to expect."

"I think the terms used, brother," returned Mr Darnell, "are particularly and needlessly offensive, and I would not, for poor Harry's sake, have had his son's name mentioned in the way it is."

"My dear sir," cried Mr Peed—"in law, my *dear* sir, we are obliged to use the plainest and most distinct—the most, in fact, unequivocal terms——"

“I’ll tell you what, and once for all, Roger,” exclaimed the Baronet, raising his voice, and interrupting Mr Peed, “if you don’t like to witness it, somebody else will; there are plenty of clerks in the office. But I’ll have the will as it is, and in nowise altered. If that fellow is a bastard, as I told him to his teeth already he is, and believe him to be, it’s no business of mine, and *I* can’t make him anything else, nor you either! And I can’t and won’t have any interest of Conny’s risked by delay. When I’m gone, and Constance is Mrs Elliot, as she will be, please God, the value of this will and that bastard’s pretensions will be set at rest. Now I’ve come to do, and not to talk—it’s too late for that; and I hope these gentlemen will bear me witness that I sign these papers in perfect knowledge of their contents, and consenting thereto with a calm mind.”

Then Ralph heard only the scratching of his uncle’s pen as he wrote the words we have before seen, in bold steady characters, where he was directed. Whether his uncle Roger signed as a witness he did not know; then, perhaps, it would have been of no comfort to him to understand that he did so. Mr Wilson and Mr Sanders were sufficient for all legal purposes, and Mr Darnell objected to Ralph’s secret being known to other clerks in the office.

Two expressions only of all those his uncle spoke,

appeared to ring in Ralph's ears: "bastard," and "Constance is Mrs Elliot." For a while he stood irresolute where he was; his uncle might perhaps say something kind as he passed out, and to this last hope the poor fellow clung in spite of his misery. Sir Geoffrey did not delay. He had come to do an act—a great act of his life—and he had done it. There was little more said by any one. The brothers shook hands, as Ralph saw when the door opened.

"We shall leave town after an early breakfast tomorrow; everything's packed up, Roger, and Elliot's to follow us as soon as he can," said the Baronet. "The ladies have gone to see Mrs Darnell, but I'm going there to pick them up. I only wish we were safe home again," and so he came out.

It must have been Ralph's white scared face and staring eyes that then attracted the Baronet's special notice; and Ralph could not help looking at him, for there was a kind of fascination in the fearless dogged bearing of the old man, of which you may see the foundation in Sir Joshua's striking picture.

"Don't stare at me so, sir!" he cried, stopping and striking his stick upon the floor; "don't stare at me,—d'ye hear? Go in there and see what I've done for you," and he pointed with his cane to the parlour door; "and remember it's the last I wish to know of you, whatever you may be. If ever you cross my

path again I'll kick you out of it—I will, by G——! —d'ye hear?"

"Geoffrey, Geoffrey! Here, in my office and before all my clerks; for shame sir!" exclaimed Mr Darnell.

"I don't care if it were before the king," cried the Baronet, fiercely turning round on his brother; "I'll be stared at by ne'er an impudent bastard in England. Insulted! and here too; this might at least have been prevented, Roger. I wish you a good morning, brother;" and he took off his hat, and made a stately sweep with it, departing into the hall by the door which the porter was holding open.

"Ralph, Ralph, what have you done or said?" asked Mr Darnell, anxiously; "I would not have had this happen here for a thousand pounds."

"He said nothing, Mr Darnell, I assure you," replied Mr Sanders. "Let me explain;" and they returned into the parlour and shut the door.

When they came out again to seek Ralph, for Mr Darnell had been satisfied that no offence had been given or intended, the young man was gone; a clerk said he had taken his hat and hastily walked out after Sir Geoffrey's coach drove away.

"It has been a trying scene for the poor lad to-day," said Mr Darnell, kindly, "and he will be the

better of a quiet evening at home. And I will make amends to him for this, Mr Sanders ; if one uncle has thrown him off, another will take his place, for he is the last male Darnell that remains to us, my friend : alas ! the last."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### BURY COURT, AND OTHER MATTERS RELATING TO THIS HISTORY.

WE have not to go back very far, when I remind the reader of a visit Ralph Darnell paid to Messrs Forster and Selwyn in Bury Court, St Mary Axe, when he became acquainted with the family secret now divulged. Mr Forster, as they walked home together to Mrs Morton's that night, professed a more kindly interest in Ralph than he had ever done before; and he related all that Mr Wilson had explained to him in regard to the legal nature of the will, and Ralph's position: and their collective opinion that that document ought not to be permitted to exist. Mr Forster did not state clearly by what process the will could be obtained or destroyed. If it were to be left at Peed's, it might be lost, as papers could be occasionally; but if Sir Geoffrey took it with him, some other course would have to be adopted. Ralph was in no condition to argue the matter that night,

but he was grateful to Mr Forster for his interest. And when they arrived at Mrs Morton's, and, as it happened, were let in by Sybil, Mr Forster asked kindly after her mother, and, his voice being heard, was invited to the parlour, where Mrs Morton was sitting.

It may be in the reader's memory that on one occasion Mr Forster, with Mr Wilson, had spent an evening with Mrs Morton—and very agreeably, too. Mr Forster knew poor Mrs Morton's antecedents perfectly; and though allusions to old times distressed her at first very much, yet Forster found that her interest in them, and in the present position and circumstances of the Prince and others connected with him, were still very great. On this point, therefore, Mr Forster had been, to a certain extent, communicative, and had risen to a high rank in the old lady's estimation. She well knew the family of which he was the last representative. She had often been at the old border Peel, and had seen his mother, and even remembered Mr Forster's sisters—who were both now in the Benedictine convent at Paris—when they were children. The Forsters were never rich, but they were of an old family in Northumberland; and when Mr Forster told her that the Peel still remained with some farm folk in it—that reduced fortunes and his business compelled him to live in London—she

was by no means surprised. Old Nanny, too, had much respect for Mr Forster: and had received graciously a crown or two, which had been judiciously disbursed while Ralph lay so ill.

Sybil, however, had been disturbed by Mr Forster. She had sung with him a duet of Dr Arne's, which she had learned with Ralph, and Forster sang well. He had been in Italy, and told her of music which would suit her, and had even sent her some; but though she could make no positive objection to him, she shrank intuitively from contact with him. His looks were bold and licentious, and his manner was neither courtly like Elliot's, nor frank like Ralph's, but more that of a hard man of the world—and John Forster was a hard man indeed. On this night, therefore, when her mother had called graciously to Mr Forster, Sybil could not shut the door in his face, as she would like to have done; and though he did not stay, the delight of looking, even for a short time, upon her sweet face was an intense gratification, a craving for which was growing upon him very rapidly. If he had had suspicions that Sybil cared for Ralph Darnell more than she even dared to think, that short visit would have proved it beyond a doubt. He saw how the sweet girl's countenance changed; how her eyes followed him restlessly; how she was conscious that some evil had befallen him: but he



rejoiced to observe that from Ralph there was no return. He answered her questions indifferently; sat silently in a dark corner of the room; and as Forster took his leave, he saw that Ralph wished Mrs Morton good-night, and went up-stairs. So far, then, the field was open, and he had hope; and were Ralph out of the way (for he dreaded his fearless character) there was good ground to think he might succeed, although much might have to be done. I am afraid that Mr Forster had discovered the utter weakness of that little garrison, and assured himself that if the one defender could be withdrawn, there was no one else who could fill his place.

Although Mr Wilson and Mr Selwyn had experience of human nature after their several capacities—the one as an attorney's clerk, and the other as, we will say as before, a horse-dealer—yet their knowledge was not such as could be brought to bear upon Ralph Darnell. Any deliberate roguery which Mr Wilson could have proposed, or any coarse suggestion of Mr Selwyn's, would have opened Ralph's eyes to the true character of these confederates, and he would have escaped out of their hands. Mr Forster's talents lay, however, mainly in his ability to read men's thoughts, and to act upon their passions; and to this end he had kept down his companions, and had opposed repeated invitations to Ralph.

Ralph had come several times of his own accord to Bury Court, in the interval, to ask news of Wilson, who had prohibited his calling at the "Peed's" office; and whatever there was to tell, Ralph heard from Wilson himself, or from Forster. Thus the progress of the draft, of counsel's opinion, of the engrossing, and the day of signature and execution, were duly made known to him; and without pressing their advice, all Ralph heard was but a reiteration of what had been told him at first. These men professed indifference to whatever Ralph might decide, but they were not the less sure of their game. And when Ralph, with the same wild face which had attracted his uncle Geoffrey's notice at the office, made his appearance presently at Bury Court, they knew for certain that he had, at last, voluntarily thrown himself into their power.

Ralph meanwhile had done a good deal. He had gone to Mrs Morton's; he had told them he was to accompany his grandfather, and packed up a small valise, containing a change of clothes. He then took a boat and went down among the colliers. There was no vessel to sail for three days; but he paid for a berth in one to sail on Thursday, and this was Monday. Then he returned home, leaving his valise on board the vessel, and spoke kindly to them all; and though he purposed never to return, said he

should soon be back, and they were not to fret about him. It was very hard to see their tearful faces, and the look of misery upon Sybil's. He had never seen the like of it before, and thought of it many a sad day after. When he was going, he bade Nanny put away his dress clothes in his trunk, for they would have to follow by sea, and his uncle would forward them to him. And when he had made over his little stock of trinkets to Sybil to keep, kissed Mrs Morton, and held Sybil in his arms, trembling and sobbing, full of terrible fears which she dare not express, and love at her heart which gave her deadly pain to conceal, and so left them; and Sybil threw herself on Nanny's breast, and moaned there, "that he would never come back—never, never!—that she was sure there was evil hanging over him, which he would not tell them of,"—I say, while Nanny and she sat at the window nearly all that night, shivering in their horrible apprehension, and could get no rest—the misery of that fond heart of Sybil's is quite beyond my power to describe; and even prayer—her habitual refuge—seemed denied her.

Afterwards, and when the wherry in which Ralph crossed the river turned among the shipping, and he saw the old window no more, he began to know what he had to do. Whether he received the will or not,

he could at least get to Newcastle, and to his grandfather. There, one more long search for the certificate of his mother's marriage, and if unsuccessful, the world was before him. East or west, what signified; or those foreign armies in which men won distinction or died. And was there not Colonel Clive? Even in Holland, his grandfather, he remembered, had connections; and one used to India merchant's work in London, would be sure of employment in Amsterdam.

So, as I have said, when Ralph came to Bury Court that summer evening, those there knew he was in their hands, and that the recklessness writ on his face had a source very deep in his worst passions.

Perhaps, now that he was come to them, one of the men, Forster, would rather have avoided a hurried ending to the affair; but Mr Selwyn was not to be balked of a profitable professional undertaking, and his plans were already complete.

"A sharp ride, this fine summer night, would be delightful," he said. "A pleasant day in the country to-morrow, and a pleasant fright to the ladies in the evening. Why, a journey anywhere was worth nothing without an alarm of highwaymen; and this would be such fun. He and Forster would perform the rôle of highwaymen to perfection; and I, Albany Selwyn, like Claude Duval, shall be proud to dance a measure with the beautiful Constance Darnell, the toast

of London! And then consider, Mr Ralph, the happiness of making a gallant, beautiful speech, and dismissing the party on their way—nay, escorting them, if they so wished—in their own proper character.” And when Ralph observed gravely, that his uncle was the last man to try a joke upon, and would shoot one of them to a certainty, and if they had nothing more feasible to propose than this, they had better let him go, Mr Selwyn laughed, and declared “he for one should run away if the Baronet looked wicked; and if Ralph did not like the engagement, he could stay there and wait their return. They had promised to get him the papers, and —— he should have them!”

They had been at supper all this time, and Ralph’s mood of mind, desperate and reckless from the first, had become vindictive under the wine he drank. “He would take the paper from his uncle which he had no right to keep—tear it into a thousand pieces before his eyes and his faithless cousin’s—tell Mistress Grover why he had done this, and return to London. They might follow him if they chose, do whatever they pleased, he should not care; whatever they did could not affect his future life.” There was very little sophistry in Ralph’s thoughts when the wine began its mischief. He only saw certain means to an end, in which two intimate friends would help

him as in a frolic. These were lawless times, too, when desperate men did desperate deeds, and "A 29" was unknown; when people who suffered, very often took the law into their own hands, and did as they pleased with it; and when might, to a certain, and very great degree, was right. As to Selwyn's ideas of making Constance—— Pshaw! he was a wild rake certainly, but he was a gentleman, and Forster eminently one.

While these thoughts ran through Ralph's heart, I think, had he known that a certain company of gentlemen who habitually frequented his Majesty's high-road to York by night—marked down likely prey in London—at the extremities—or wherever they might be;—who had been balked of Sir Geoffrey Darnell as he came up from the north, but were determined that family plate, and jewels of Darnell fame, should not be spared as they went back—had already made preparations for the Baronet's reception after he should pass Barnet,—I think, nay, I am sure, that Ralph would have shuddered at the precipice he so nearly approached; and would have ridden after his uncle, thrown himself in his way, and earned his gratitude and his own pardon, by declaring his danger. This was not, however, to be. A grim furious fate was on his track, driving him on under the horrible memories of insults and wrongs. Bastard! bastard! rang

in his ears. Selwyn knew him to be one, so did Forster; so did that horrible Wilson, at whom his blood crept in his veins. Coward? No! he was at least no coward. They should not do for him what he could do for himself. If his uncle drew a pistol and shot him, what matter? there would be enough life left to explain, and he could die peacefully and happily with Constance and Grover by his side, and his uncle's once kind voice ringing in his ears!

I daresay it was some such reverie as this into which Ralph had fallen, when Forster cried cheerily to him,

“What a brown study thou art fallen into, Don Ralpho! Awake, most illustrious cabalero! and to horse, if thou'rt coming at all. If not, there's Wilson, and wine as much as needs be, for we'll have enough to do, and must away—away—away!”

Ralph rose, and held out his hand. “I was only thinking,” he said.

“Pshaw!” cried his friend, “a fico for thoughts. Come, there is riding gear in the stables, and the gallant steeds are ready. No pistols? Well, nor need of them; but take a good whip. There are those on the road might take advantage of thee.”

Mr Wilson sat for a while over the good claret and a plate of nectarines, which were delicious; and was he not a privileged guest? His thoughts were of a

varied nature, and this was the cast of them, as he rose with a satisfied countenance.

“No harm will come of this—no natural harm ; and more will be paid for what John Wilson can tell, after it is over, than before ; and, besides, there is no time now to prevent anything. Selwyn has a good job in hand, and Satan is helping them all on kindly. Ha ! ha ! ha !—kindly—kindly !”



## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE JOURNEY AT NIGHT, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

WHEN Sir Geoffrey Darnell and the ladies arrived at Barnet, late in the evening of the following day, the footman who had been sent on to order rooms for the party at the Red Lion Inn, met the coach at the entrance of the little town, and communicated the unpleasant, but in those days perhaps not very uncommon intelligence, that every room was full, and that he had been equally unsuccessful at other hostelries in the place. "The landlord of the Red Lion," he said, "had sent a servant with him a' rround the toon, but there was na' a place to be had for love or money." The consequence of this communication was, that the Baronet arrived at the posting-house in very bad humour indeed.

Beginning any long journey, even in these days of perfection of locomotion, involves, very often, trials of temper. There is the last hurried packing to do,

when clothes will not fit into the trunk, and the trunk lid will not shut down, nor the key turn. There is the dread of being late for the train, and after all there is something forgotten perhaps; and yet, once the last shriek of the engine is heard, the certainty of progression is so entire and consoling, that most minor miseries are altogether forgotten. The trials of our great-grandfathers, however, must have been much more hard to endure, and Sir Geoffrey had had enough of them. The servants, I am afraid, were not quite sober, for there had been a good many very moist leave-takings, and the trunks were ill-packed. The light spring-cart which had accompanied them from the north, was found to be unsafe; and the heavy baggage was to be forwarded by a collier brig to Newcastle, in charge of one of the men. The ostler and the maid-servant were to sit on the box; and a new mantua-maker—a smart young London damsel, highly recommended by the milliner—was to sit inside with the ladies. Fortunately, the coach was very large and roomy, and held six without hoops; so that there was a comfortable corner for each, and this ought to have satisfied the Baronet; but he was not in good humour.

The last settling of accounts had been one heavy trial. Not that the Baronet troubled himself about details—Mistress Grover managed all these; but when

she added up the list in her private memorandum-book, and told Sir Geoffrey that she should require a thousand pounds to see them clear and to pay them home, I should not like to write the expletives by which he signified his astonishment of this reckless extravagance, and swore against the vanity of women and their milliners' extortions. "Had he not already twice paid the woman, by George, and here was the new account worse than any previous one!" Perhaps Mistress Grover had been foolish in allowing her beautiful pet to order what she liked; and Madame Chevri, in her admiration for Miss Darnell, had almost daily brought the *sweetest* brocades of Lyons, the richest velvets of Genoa, and lace of Mechlin and Brussels, for her inspection, which were irresistible. Then jewellers' bills for resetting diamonds, and Sir Geoffrey's own tailor's bill for dress suits, and one for Ralph, with liveries for the servants, were no trifle. In short, Sir Geoffrey had had to pay for this visit to London very much more than he anticipated, and the last straw had nearly broken the camel's back.

Therefore, when the bowing landlord met the coach at the door of the inn at Barnet, and made a thousand apologies for being full — so full that he had only his own parlour behind the bar to offer to his guests, if they would please to take some refreshment, and had begged of my Lady Beaumanoir to allow the

ladies the use of her room while they stayed—so full that he had never remembered a day like it. There was the Duke and Duchess of Beaumanoir going back to Eastshire, and Sir John Ribston and his family from Yorkshire, and——” There was no use swearing, or being violent, and Sir Geoffrey gave in.

The four horses that had brought Sir John Ribston's carriage were to return; and the landlord recommended two fresh ones, as the road was heavy, and there was a good deal of luggage. At the next stage, the landlord said, there was an excellent quiet country inn; and he had taken the liberty of sending a message by the guard of the stage-coach, that he should send on Sir Geoffrey Darnell's party, for whom rooms were to be kept ready. And with the prospect of a quiet night's rest in a quiet place, instead of the disturbance which would ensue from travellers arriving and departing at all hours of the night, Sir Geoffrey and the ladies were glad to escape from the combined odours of fried bacon, roast mutton, stale ale, and tobacco-smoke, which pervaded the landlord's own parlour behind the bar, and to breathe the sweet evening air.

Not, however, that it was cool. The heat all day had been exceedingly great, and as they entered Barnet there was a huge pile of cloud stationary, and with white round tops like a cauliflower, to the

westward, about which, in the twilight, they could see some faint lightning playing. There was not a breath of wind; and the scent from the woodbine and white lilies, stocks and gilliflowers in the inn garden, loaded the air heavily. As he bade them good-night, and wished them a safe journey, the landlord looked up and "thought there would be a shower, but it would be pleasant, and lay the dust. As to the roads—why, a girl might travel them alone at midnight, and Sir Geoffrey might save himself the trouble of opening his pistol-case. Why, they would be at —— by eleven o'clock, or even sooner, and the boys would drive fast," as, indeed, they promised to do.

So the party passed on, and Sir Geoffrey, soothed by his dinner and the excellent pint of wine the landlord had given him, fell asleep and snored audibly; the mantua-maker did the same, and Constance and Mistress Grover alone remained awake. I do not think they were very communicative either. Mistress Grover had bad thoughts at her heart about poor Ralph; and, indeed, she was very sore about him. Perhaps in that quiet corner she found a relief when her tears fell hot and fast on her hands, as she thought of old times and the boy's early days, and put up a prayer that all might come right again.

I have no doubt, on the contrary, that Mistress Constance's thoughts were as pleasant as Grover's were melancholy. There were many bright spots upon her memory. That first evening on the balcony, and many such afterwards. Many delightful rambles in the quietest nooks of Kensington Gardens; many plays, much Ranelagh, and—she was not ashamed of them—many sweet kisses too from her handsome lover. Was she not only seventeen?—and I question much whether those delicious tokens of love are ever enjoyed more rapturously than at that romantic and credulous age. Ah, when he came up to Melcepeth—

Suddenly there was a bright flash which woke the milliner, and caused her to scream, and revealed the inside of the vehicle and its crimson damask lining perfectly; then a clap of thunder, and then a deluge of rain, a flood which made the road to seethe, as it were, with large bubbles, and for the time to cover it with water. Through all this the Baronet slept and snored peacefully, and Constance and Mistress Grover kept the mantua-maker quiet. Neither of them was afraid of thunder or lightning; and, indeed, after the first clap, there was no more but some muttering growls far distant. As long as it was dry, the coach had got on very well with its six horses: but as the road became wet, the progress was not

rapid, and as the rain fell faster, was little better than a walk. Mistress Grover heard Richard, the footman on the box, calling to the driver to get on; and being assured that “t’ skoy war breekin yon’, and they’d git on preasantly; t’ ’orses wasn’t freesh—they wasn’t—but they’d do the stage.”

Presently there was a terrible jolt, which flung the Baronet forward into Mistress Grover’s lap, with an exclamation of—“God bless my heart! what’s happened?”

What, indeed, had happened? The fore wheel of the carriage had sunk into a hole up to the axle, and the hind wheel was little better. The horses refused draught, and the carriage leaned over so much that an upset appeared imminent. Mr Macadam had not been born in those days, and His Majesty’s highroads were in a very different condition then to what they are now. The footman Richard had scrambled down from the box, and opened the door; the postboys were employed in mutual recriminations, attended by hideous oaths, at having fallen into a hole, which had been visible while the road was dry, but which was now a puddle like any other; but it was too late to help what had happened, and the Baronet was consoled with assurances that when the “’osses ’ad rested a bit, they’d pull out the coach sure-ly.”

The rain had cleared off, and the stars shone out brightly. There was quite light enough to see all round the puddle, and even the road beyond; and the Baronet was urging another good pull together, and promising a guinea to drink his health, when he heard the plash of horse's feet among the water in the road, and a smothered sound as if others were advancing on the turf by the wayside; and as he looked through the mist which was rapidly rising after the rain, his view being limited by the glare of the lamps, he was hardly aware that the party was close at hand, before he saw the boy on the leaders dragged from his saddle, a man with a pistol threatening the second postilion, and himself and the carriage surrounded by others.

True to his professions, Mr Selwyn had dismounted while a confederate opened the farther carriage door; and was in the act of making the politest speech he could invent to the ladies, begging them to dismount, that the carriage might be righted, when Constance, who did not know at first the nature of Mr Selwyn's address, and could not see her father, heard distinctly the clash of swords, a few deep curses from the Baronet, and confused cries from the footman, the maid, and the drivers—and she leaped out past Mr Selwyn, followed by Mistress Grover; while the mantua-maker, dragged into the puddle



from the other door of the coach, was screaming wildly.

Now, while Mr Selwyn held his brief parley with the ladies, Mr Forster and another man had an equally brief one with Sir Geoffrey. The Baronet had drawn his sword, which (why he could never account for, except that, being in the corner of the coach, it got between his legs as he stepped out) he had in his hand, and swore lustily "that he wasn't afraid of e'er a highwayman in England, and that he'd pink one of them if they did not clear off;" and forthwith attacked Mr Forster, whose companion, having knocked down the footman, had joined Mr Selwyn. Just at this moment then, and as Mr Forster, hampered by his horse, which shied at the clash of the swords, was defending himself very feebly against Sir Geoffrey's impetuous attack, his foot slipped; and, unable to parry a thrust of the Baronet's, found himself sharply wounded in the sword-arm. It is probable Mr Forster did not intend mischief; but when he saw by the light of one of the coach-lamps that Sir Geoffrey was drawing back his arm for another thrust which could not be avoided, he drew a pocket-pistol from the breast of his coat, and fired it at his antagonist; and the Baronet, staggering back, threw up his hands with a loud cry and fell into the arms of his daughter, now

close behind him, with Mistress Grover following her.

All this happened in much less time, I believe, than I have needed to write it; and Mr Selwyn and his companions were ransacking the pockets of the coach as fast as they could, when the sound of the shot and the cry sorely disturbed their proceedings. The shout or groan of a wounded man is unmistakable; and Mr Selwyn, though no soldier, had heard many such. Who had fallen? Whoever it might be, the event was very serious and embarrassing, and he turned directly to see after it. Mr Forster was standing by his horse holding his arm, and crying out for help. He had perhaps narrowly escaped with his life; for the Baronet's rapier, grazing his breast, had passed through the fleshy part of his arm, which was bleeding profusely. It was, however, promptly tied up with a handkerchief; and, mounting their horses, the party galloped off by the way they had come. To say the truth, Mr Selwyn believed the Baronet to be dead; for as he rode away, he saw him lying against the bank, and the poor ladies sobbing and wringing their hands over him, and the servant shrieking on the box.

There was no time, however, to wait, and Mr Selwyn's curses against Forster's precipitancy were neither few nor mild; nor, indeed, were they much

modified even by that gentleman's declaration, that he should have been a dead man in another moment if he had not used his pistol in self-defence. There was, however, no time to bandy words: Mr Forster was already somewhat faint with loss of blood, and they must regain the hamlet whence they had started, and where a small tavern had been the rendezvous, in order to get some cordial and bind up the wound safely; so the party rode on at a rapid pace.

It will have been seen that, after all, Ralph Darnell had had no personal connection with this misadventure, and it is necessary to explain why he had none. Mr Selwyn was, like other great commanders, very strict in what he termed the discipline of his profession. In any actual affair of this kind, none but the boldest and most skilful of his associates ever took a share in the work itself. Any blunder by a new hand, any hot-headed violence, would, he knew, ruin the best enterprise ever planned. Robbery on the highway was not very much thought about by the magistrates; but murder was quite another thing, and brought out Bow Street runners and other very inconvenient myrmidons of the law. Now, Ralph Darnell was in a state of progressive excitement, which his friends saw was nearly at its culminating point. Were he allowed to approach the

Baronet, not only Mr Selwyn, but Forster was certain he could not be restrained: and he would assuredly do or say something by which he would be recognised and success prevented.

The confederates had ridden up a shady road which led from the hamlet to the highway, and joined it where some large oak-trees, meeting above, cast the mouth of the lane into perfect darkness. It was here that the party had agreed to wait for the coach, and dash out upon it as it passed. Perhaps Mr Selwyn's ears were keener than the others', and he had heard the rumbling of the carriage stop; for he suddenly turned to Ralph and said, in a tone of command which was unpleasant—

“You will remain here, Mr Darnell, till we return; we must reconnoitre the road;” and as Ralph resented what appeared to him a rough speech, Mr Selwyn said a few words in the flash language of the time, and pressed on, while two of the men remained, and, each seizing a rein, drew their pistols, and advised Ralph to be quiet.

I do not mean this to be any excuse for Ralph Darnell. Had the coach come up to the end of the lane, he would, had he been permitted, have demanded what he had come for, and attempted to take it by force; but this would have been impossible under any circumstances, and Mr Selwyn's rules of

procedure, which have been partially explained, had already provided, in the two men who became Ralph's surly companions, an effectual preventive of any such course of action. As they stood there, however, listening eagerly, the dull sound of a distant clamour, and afterwards of the pistol-shot, broke the stillness of the summer night, and were followed by piercing shrieks: then Ralph suddenly drove the spurs into his horse, struck down the arm of one of the men who raised his pistol as if to fire, and dashed into the highroad.

It was not a quarter of a mile from the lane to the scene of the encounter; and about half-way Ralph met the party, and pulled up. How had he escaped from the men? that was Mr Selwyn's first thought; a second, to turn Ralph.

"Come," he cried—"come with us, for your life—for your life, Mr Darnell, or you'll be taken. Here's Forster badly wounded. Come; your uncle's past help, I fear, and it's no use going there;" and Mr Selwyn tried to catch the reins of Ralph's horse; but this the young man avoided, and, dashing past the party, rode on at speed. All he heard was "London, the old place," and in a few moments more he was near the coach. It had been set up by the postboys, and was standing in the middle of the road, in a dim mist from the horses and the ground combined,

through which one of the lamps shone feebly, while the other revealed a group on the bank by the hedge, which, horror-stricken, he instantly recognised.

It was his uncle, lying pale and deathlike, supported against the bank, with Constance's arm under his head, his silvery beard, and white satin waistcoat and ruffles, dabbled with blood. Over him stooped Mistress Grover, tearing away the shirt, and striving to stanch the blood with her handkerchief, the London girl and the servants standing apart, wringing their hands, and sobbing.

The misery of those dear faces, so white, so absorbed in their terror—the figure lying there, which, as he then thought, would never move more—it had every appearance of death,—all this Ralph's eye took in at a glance; and perhaps he would have obeyed the suggestion of his instinct to go to them—never to leave them, whatever might happen—but for the footman Richard, who, having a loaded pistol in his hand, was standing by, and seeing a masked horseman appear suddenly before him, cried out—

“Eh, leddies, bit they're come agin!” and fired the pistol at Ralph without further parley.

Ralph heard the ball whizz by his head, turned, and rode away at his utmost speed. He had not the courage to look on him in death, of whose murder he believed himself to be the cause.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### SUSPENSE.

INSTEAD of following Ralph Darnell over fields and hedges in his wild ride that night, till he had struck another road to London, and reached the stables behind Bury Court by early morning; or instead of detailing, or attempting to do so, his frantic accusations of murder against Forster and Selwyn, or his fruitless and almost insane ravings, which the latter could not pacify—and Mr Forster was too weak and peevish to attempt justification of his conduct; instead, also, of relating how Ralph received that fatal will from Mr Selwyn, which had been the cause of all this misfortune, tore it in pieces fiercely, and watched them shrivel and blacken in the fire, crushing them down with his boot till they were consumed to a cinder; or of repeating Mr Selwyn's injunctions to get out of the way, as he himself intended to do, till all this was blown over;—we had, I think, in

preference, better see after Sir Geoffrey Darnell, whom we left lying under the hedge on the wet grass, and the horror-stricken ladies sobbing over him.

It was some time before the Baronet could speak at all; and his first faint cry was for water, which he drank greedily. Then Mistress Grover found a bottle of his drops in the carriage-pocket, a dose of which revived him so much that, to his daughter's and her own great joy and thankfulness, he was able to sit up, and, though very weak and confused, to bid them be comforted, for "he did not feel dying, or anything like it; and though the fellow's ball was in him somewhere, he was pretty sure he had done for *him* at any rate," and wanted to know what had become of his body. But this excited talk was, as may be supposed, attended with reaction; and presently he fainted again, and was revived with difficulty. And when the coach had been turned round—for it was a much less distance back to Barnet than to the stage where they had intended to rest—and Sir Geoffrey had been carried to it by Richard, the maid-servant, and one of the postilions, assisted by the ladies, and placed in as easy a position as possible, and the coach was set in motion—it was clear to Mrs Grover that he could not bear the jolting; and accordingly it went at a foot-pace, while Richard, taking one of the leaders, rode off at a gallop



to Barnet, as well to give the alarm, as to procure a chair or a litter, or some easier conveyance.

I daresay the consternation at the Red Lion, on Richard's arrival in the dead of night, can also better be imagined than described; but the worthy landlord was not slack in his duty. A chair which belonged to the establishment, with four stout men, was despatched at a run. Mr Burgess, the surgeon of the town, was called up, and also departed on horseback forthwith. One of the guests in the inn at once gave up his bed for the sufferer; and I am bound to record that her Grace the Duchess, and various other ladies of distinction, who were staying in the house that night, dressed themselves in wrappers, and were prepared to render such assistance as they could to Mistress Grover and Constance on their arrival, and displayed the utmost interest in, and sympathy for, the Baronet's misfortune.

And O the joy, the unspeakable thankfulness which followed Mr Burgess's first operation after the Baronet had been laid gently in his bed, in the speedy extraction of the ball! That eminent country practitioner had galloped on to meet the coach, and had stopped it till the chair came up. His presence was at once an assurance and comfort to the poor ladies; and he was assisted by them in placing Sir Geoffrey in an easy position upon the seat. Sir Geoffrey was

quite conscious, and would have thanked him, but was not permitted to speak ; while Mr Burgess examined the wound there and then, and saw it was not mortal, though severe. He found also, to his inexpressible comfort, that he had not to do with foolish hysterical women, but with two persons who, though suffering extreme anguish, were helpful and collected. Perhaps the young mantua-maker was the most difficult to manage. She had fainted at the sight of Sir Geoffrey's blood, which indeed had run out over his clothes in a great stream. Mrs Grover, who had brought her to, had almost lost patience with her ; and perhaps a downright good scolding from the doctor, who declared he would put her out of the coach there and then to be carried off by the highwaymen, if she were not quiet, induced that young lady to keep to her own corner, and snivel into her pocket-handkerchief. Altogether, Mr Burgess, by comporting himself in a cheerful, hopeful manner, instilled a good deal of courage into the ladies' minds : and had the opportunity, which he did not neglect, of paying them some pretty professional compliments. When he had seen the Baronet undressed and laid at ease on a bed, and begged to be excused for a few moments, the doctor hurried home, summoned his assistant, who brought the necessary instruments ; and when in another marvellously short space of

time he took to Constance and Mrs Grover, upon a silver salver, a very small pistol-bullet, which, as he assured them, had not penetrated very deeply, having been deadened by the stiff buckram padding of the Baronet's coat—it is impossible to conceive two more thankful hearts than those which, kneeling by the old man's bedside, poured out their gratitude for his safety, and sat watching by turns till the day broke.

There were offers in profusion of service. His Grace of Beaumanoir “ would leave servants if need be.” He had had the honour of meeting Sir Geoffrey Darnell only a few days ago at Arthur's. How shocking this was ! What were the magistrates about that the roads were not better looked to at night ! If he had only been going to London, indeed, he would have taken any message, and “ ’pon his soul ” would ride back, if —— . This, however, was unnecessary—a stout active young man, who was, he said, a commercial traveller, and who was about to depart on horseback when the party arrived, told the landlord he knew Mr Roger Darnell, and would be soonest with him ; and this being communicated to Mrs Grover, she gave a short note to be delivered to him, and requested the young man to assure Mr Darnell that, for the present, there was no danger. The consequence of this was, that Mr Roger, with the same eminent surgeon who had attended Ralph,

arrived that afternoon in a post-chaise and four, and found everything progressing satisfactorily. Mr Burgess's speedy and skilful operation was the theme of much professional congratulation by Mr —— which I may spare my readers; and his assurances that, if Sir Geoffrey were kept perfectly quiet and all excitement were avoided, the Baronet might even be able to travel again in a few days, removed all apprehension from the ladies' hearts. There was no need, he thought, for him to come again! He had—as they might have—perfect confidence in Mr Burgess's skill and care.

While Constance, with tearful eyes and a grateful heart, was accepting Dr ——'s comfort, and her dear old father was looking at her, not being allowed to utter a word, with a soft, placid, thankful smile, which bespoke his comparative freedom from pain, and pressing her hand now and then lovingly—Mr Roger Darnell and Mrs Grover were holding a very anxious conversation in that lady's bedroom, where she had taken him to be secure from interruption, and of which she had bolted the door.

Who could have done this? That was the point under discussion; and Mr Roger being a city magistrate, and accustomed to investigations of all kinds, was taking down memoranda in his notebook, of points which he intended to submit to a celebrated

Bow Street runner of the time. As soon, indeed, as he had seen his brother was safe, Mr Darnell had taken a horse, and, with the landlord, had ridden to the scene of the night's adventure. Magistrates of the neighbourhood had been there before them, and the fresh traces of horses' feet were visible enough in the half-dried mud, and on the turf by the roadside, from the place of the attack—where there was blood still on the grass and on the bank—to the mouth of the lane. It was evident the gang had come up and gone back by the lane; but no one at the hamlet, about a mile off, had heard of any mounted party.

Mr Darnell had made memoranda of all this. Now, what had been stolen? But little indeed. Mrs Grover's own purse and her watch had been given up; but she had notes in an inner pocket. Constance had no money, and had not been molested. The girl had given her ear-rings, a brooch, and her purse. What parcels there were in the coach were gone; her writing-case and the Baronet's great leather pocket-book, with a bundle of all the papers that had come from Peed's; and when Mr Darnell heard this, I am afraid he declared that, " 'pon his soul, he was glad to hear of it, and wished the thieves joy of them." There were some bank-bills in Sir Geoffrey's book for some hundreds, perhaps, but nothing more,

Mrs Grover said, and her catalogue was ended. No, she could not swear to anybody. The man who opened the door was tall, and well dressed in a dark suit, with lace, and had a very pleasant, gentlemanly address; but crape was pulled over his face. The other was a common ruffian, who swore fearful oaths, and frightened Rose, that was the mantua-maker, out of her wits when he dragged her from the coach into the puddle.

Mr Roger sat for a good while biting his pen, and jotting down what he remembered, and said nothing; and Mrs Grover was about to get up and return to Constance, when he continued, "Do you know, Bessie, that Ralph has been unaccountably absent since yesterday; I cannot trace him. Geoffrey was very hard on him again in my office, and he left it suddenly. I went to Mrs Morton's afterwards, ostensibly to see her, as she is ill, poor soul! and was told by Sybil, whose face was as full of misery as I ever saw anybody's, that Ralph had come, packed up a valise of clothes, and said he had told them I should send for the rest. And, indeed, I cannot get that sad, sad face, and the despairing cry of 'Oh, Mr Darnell, shall we ever see him again?' out of my mind. I'll tell you what, Bessie, my heart misgives me about the boy; and especially as that will's gone. You are sure he was not there disguised? Don't blink

the matter now, for it will remain for ever between you and me."

At first the scarlet flush which rushed over Mrs Grover's face and neck looked like consciousness, and Mr Darnell leaned forward anxiously to hear confirmation of what he expected; but it was caused by the suddenness and nature of the supposition, and she denied the imputation earnestly. "Ralph? No! no Ralph was there; she should have known him at once. The man whom the Baronet had wounded was as much shorter than Ralph, as he who had opened the door was taller, and there were only two others, perhaps three; and I will never believe," continued the lady, stoutly—"never, Mr Darnell, that foolish as that lad may be, he had anything to do with this. But oh, Mr Roger!" she continued, after a pause, and with another great flush of crimson over her handsome face—"suppose if it were he! what a blow to the family. My poor Conny—my darling—how would you bear it?"

"She's not fond of him, Bessie?" asked Mr Darnell, anxiously.

"No, no—not as a lover," she replied; "but the old sisterly love is stronger than ever, since that sad day in Soho Square. Mr Elliot is much attached to him—sincerely so, I believe; and I am quite certain Conny will allow her father no rest till

they are all together again at Melcepeth, or wherever it may be."

"Amen to that, I say with all my heart," said Mr Darnell, gravely; "and if those fellows have pitched my brother's will into a pond, I'm sure *I* wouldn't fish it out. I wish I were as easy about Ralph as I am about that infernal paper. I could have kicked Peed, and that snivelling clerk of his, out of my office, as they brought it. But it's no use talking—we must be doing, Bessie; and the first thing I do in the morning will be to trace this lad—ay, if I have even to pay a runner fifty guineas for it. Can he have gone to Warkworth?"

"My opinion, Mr Darnell, is, that he has gone there, and will be found with Mr Smithson, whom he saw in London; and if I were you, I should look among the Newcastle ships."

"Has Geoffrey—has my brother spoken of him at all?" asked the merchant.

"Not yet," replied Mistress Grover; "but I think there is a good deal on his mind; and I heard him muttering in his sleep, before the coach was stopped last night."

"Come to him, then, Bessie. I should be glad if he did say something kind, that I could repeat to Ralph." And they went to the Baronet's room.

They found Constance alone with her father, and



as Mistress Grover opened the door gently, the girl held up her hand warningly. The Baronet appeared to be asleep, and they waited awhile in silence. Presently he opened his eyes, and seeing Mr Darnell sitting on a stool by his bedside, put out his hand.

“I’m weak, Roger,” he said, feebly; “and the getting out of that bullet was painful enough; but I thank God it was got out. I can’t speak much, but I’ll be better soon, and I know I’m in good hands,—in the Lord’s good hands,” he continued, piously looking up. “And I’ve been doing some hard things lately, Roger—may He forgive me; and if Ralph were here now, I’d beg his pardon—I would, by George, as I do yours, brother;” and the old man pressed Roger Darnell’s hand affectionately. “Tell him so—will ye?”

“You must not agitate yourself, brother,” replied Mr Darnell, “and you must not talk. Keep him quiet between ye, and I will do all I can,” he continued to the ladies. “I shall be out again in a day or so, and hope to find you much better, Geoffrey. No, you could not be in better hands, and I’m quite easy about you.”

Very soon after that, Mr Darnell and the Doctor were again on their way to London, and arrived there before any one was stirring in the merchant’s mansion. “Please, sir,” said the sleepy footman Grimes, who let him in, and attended him to his room, “this

'ere note was left for you last night by a boy, who said there was no answer. Mrs Darnell and the young ladies was gone to bed, and I was jist a-lockin' hup when the lad came to the door."

"That will do, Grimes. Get me a cup of chocolate as soon as you can. I shall lie down here on the sofa till you're all up."

Mr Darnell opened the note, which was written evidently in a disguised hand, and looked over the page for the signature; but there was none, except "A friend of Roger Darnell & Company;" and he read as follows:—

"MR DARNELL: Sir,—The person who takes the liberty to pen these few lines to you, knows a good deal about the Gentlemen who does little jobs on the road for themselves and *their Friends*. He could tell you who attacked your Brother the night before last, *and all about it*; and if it's worth your while to know, you'll have to pay five hundred Pounds for it, sir, and it's worth your while to pay more.

"Now, sir, if you'll come to the Temple Gardens at half-past seven to-morrow evening, without anybody with you, and walk on the Terrace, you'll be met by one who'll be true to you, and give you every Information. There are people who will watch you; and if anybody else is seen with you, you'll not be

spoken to, and you'll never know more than you do now; and I remain your Obedient Servant to command,

“ A FRIEND OF ROGER DARNELL & COMPANY.

“ LONDON, *the 16th August, 1755.*”

“ Yes, I will go, whoever you are, my friend, and in good faith too,” said the merchant to himself, as he lay down on the sofa, and shut his eyes. “ After all, the Bow Street people would run up nearly as long a bill, what with journeys and so forth, and this will take me direct to the point, I think, though it loses more time than I can well spare.

“ Thank you, Grimes,” he continued, as the footman entered with a tray. “ This is very nice; you may go to bed again, if you like. I wish to be quiet for a while.” Whether Grimes did so or not is perhaps immaterial; but when Mr Darnell had taken his hot chocolate and eaten several pieces of crisp thin toast, he felt refreshed, lay down, and slept soundly till the bells in the house and a general bestirring of servants awoke him, when he went up to his dressing-room and to his wife.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

IN WHICH EVERYBODY IS VERY BUSY.

IF Sir Geoffrey Darnell and his brother could have formed the least idea that when the little colloquy about Ralph, which I have recorded, was going on, their nephew was at that moment in the stable-yard, listening to a group of ostlers and idlers of all kinds, who, on occasions like this, thronged that public place of resort, and were discussing the attack and the probability of Mr —— or Mr ——, who did things on the road, being concerned in it—I am quite sure that all that hath to be recorded in this history, would never have happened. In his mood of penitence, the good old Baronet's heart was full of forgiveness. He would have taken the boy to his arms and bid him be comforted—nay, he had inwardly determined, when Ralph did arrive, and he supposed he would come, to give him “that d—d will,” which he still supposed safe, and see him put it into the fire

with his own hands ; but they did not know it then, nor indeed for many a day afterwards. Ralph had not delayed in London. As Mr Selwyn observed, that was no place for him ; and when Ralph's anguish had fairly overcome him, he not only generously offered another horse, but told him of a small inn in a back street at Barnet which he frequented himself, and where, if he told the ostler that it was Mr Richard Smith's property, the animal would be well cared for. More than this, he insisted that Ralph should eat a broiled steak, for he was fasting ; and, above all, do nothing in a hurry. He comforted Ralph, moreover, by supposing, perhaps without much ground for it, that "that footy little tool of Forster's wouldn't kill a sparrow, and he needn't fret about his uncle." Mr Selwyn also evinced some practical knowledge of human nature when he observed that Ralph might have an opportunity of "making it up." "He was not known nor suspected. He could account for his absence from town if he were asked about it ; and neither he, Mr Selwyn, nor his men, nor Forster, would peach on him about the will."

Perhaps Ralph *was* comforted in some degree ; but if not to any very great extent, it was certain that no vindictive or passionate feeling remained. All he could see or remember was, his dear old uncle

lying under the hedge, the lamp shining dimly over him, and Constance and Bessie Grover beside him. Oh! if that shot had not been fired by Richard, a moment more would have seen him at their side, at their feet, and he would—— No matter now.

When I say that no excitement such as had lately beset the young man remained, and that his only thought was with and for his uncle, it is not to be wondered at if all fatigue was forgotten, and that he was on his road to Barnet once more, as fast as a good horse could carry him. By the way, and when, to relieve his horse, Ralph was walking on foot up a hill, Mr Roger Darnell's chaise had overtaken him; the postboys were urging on their horses, and his uncle and Dr —— were leaning back in the corners of the carriage. They did not notice him, for he was on the further side of his horse, and the chaise passed him with the horses at a gallop; but he felt, under the sight of the doctor's anxious face, that there must be danger, and he mounted again, and kept them in sight to the end. The small inn he sought was easily found, and Mr Richard Smith's horse duly put up.

“There'll be no danger, sir,” said the ostler, quietly; “and if so be as you's come out to see arter what's a-goin' on, go to the Red Lion at once; but they do say there, sir, as how the Barrinit's not much hurt

arter all, and Dr Burgess 'as got the bullet out of him all right."

What blessed news was this ! what a load of apprehension was taken off that poor, sad heart by the homely speech of the ostler at the Bull ! And when Ralph went to the tap of the Red Lion, which was at the back of that extensive hostelry, and asked for bread and cheese and a glass of ale, how heartily he ate it in comparison with Mr Selwyn's juicy steak and chocolate in the morning, which had nearly choked him ! It is on this account that I ventured to write, in the opening of this Chapter, that, had the company on the Quality side of the house known who was then at the other, there would have been a joyful meeting indeed, and everything would have been forgiven, if not forgotten. Ralph, as he lingered over his lunch in a quiet parlour off the taproom, heard various chambermaids who came to the bar declare, that the great London doctor had said there was no danger ; that *their* Dr Burgess had done quite right—bless him ! that there was no need for *him* to stay, and he was going back to town as soon as they'd had some dinner. Moreover, that the dear, sweet, lovely young lady—who was all over her father's blood when she came in, and sludge and dirt—was dressed up and looking "so bee-yue-ty-ful as never was," and had been seen "a-laughin' with

her aunt," as Mistress Grover was supposed to be, perhaps because Constance had addressed her as auntie. When, therefore, Ralph heard all this, he felt, as it were, new life and new resolution. If his uncle had been dying, he would have entreated to be admitted—he would have given himself up there and then. If he had been dead—and he shuddered at the bare thought of such a catastrophe—he would have gone to the nearest magistrate and confessed himself guilty. But now he was free—free once more to go away, to be never again seen by any one till he could establish himself as a member of the Darnell family in his proper place.

He would not, he could not, meet them now ; his pride had risen again as his passion had calmed down, and overcame him. He thought of the indignity of appearing in the light of a bastard before Constance and Mistress Grover, and of the almost certainty that with his freedom from danger the Baronet's aversion to him remained. The assurance, too, that Mr Elliot's suit was accepted and acceptable, returned on him in full force. What had he to do there—what was he to them? They had not even bid him good-bye ! And so, with the fear of danger removed from Mr Ralph's heart, I find that pride went in and dwelt there ; and all the kind thoughts of his old uncles above stairs—of his dear cousin, who



would most likely have thrown herself on his neck, and cried out all her wilfulness there—and of his almost mother, Bessie Grover, were in vain. Ralph had heard more good news than he had ever hoped to hear; and when his horse was fit to travel, and the landlady of the Bull gave him a comfortable dinner, and he had sent the ostler again, who returned with the same good accounts—he paid his reckoning, and rode quietly back to town.

Mr Selwyn was glad to see Ralph after his journey—glad to see him in good spirits—glad, and indeed inexpressibly relieved, to hear that the Baronet's wound was not dangerous; and so also we may believe was Mr Forster, whose anticipations of the result of his pistol-shot had been very much the contrary. The prospect of having a search made for them on a charge of murder by an energetic man like Roger Darnell, was extremely disagreeable, to say the least of it, to these gentlemen; and the day had been passed in contrivances for escape, or at least for a temporary seclusion from active life. Such seclusion was part of the professional tactics of Mr Selwyn, and he was seldom at a loss to effect them; but this time, it promised to be more complete and lasting than usual, and the relief from any such urgent necessity was most acceptable. They warned Ralph, however, of the need of some caution; and

when he unfolded his plans of going to the north by a collier, and of not returning to London at all, they were cordially approved of.

When, therefore, Mr Wilson arrived (he was in the habit of looking in now and then) at Bury Court, he informed Ralph and his friends that he had persuaded the landlord of the Cock to take Mr Darnell in for a few days, and a quiet room had been provided for him. Mr Wilson said indeed quite cheerfully, that old Dickiwig had confided to him that he felt "quite like a father for the young man, and that no bailiff in London would ever think of looking for him at the Cock;" and so it seemed that the worthy old waiter and the landlord, Mr Wilkins, had been led to believe that Ralph's troubles were of a pecuniary nature which, from sundry experiences, was likely to be the case. Whereupon Mr Wilkins had also declared "he might live there free, and welcome, as long as he had need; he had seen plenty of Mr Darnell's money, and knew the colour of it." To prevent any chance of being recognised, therefore, Mr Wilson proposed going there in a hackney-coach; and as soon as it was come, he was kind enough to accompany Ralph in his drive, and to see him safely put up in a very comfortable bedchamber, to which he was taken by the private door of the house, and carefully attended to, not only by Dickiwig himself, but by Mistress

Sarah Baker, who, though much concerned at Ralph's position, bid him be of good cheer, "as she know'd of a many young gentlemen who'd been in trouble for a time, and had come all right at last."

We may presume, therefore, that Mr Ralph was altogether better off than he had expected to be; and that though he cast many a wistful look to the old house across the river, and could even see Sybil sitting at the open window as the evening closed in, yet he did not attempt to go there. He was indeed very weary: body and mind had been kept on a stretch of excitement and exertion for the past two days, to which he was an utter stranger; and when, after a delicious supper of sweetbreads done by Mistress Sarah Baker with her own skilful hands, and served by the old waiter, he went to bed—Ralph slept most soundly.

It was not so comfortable a day, perhaps, with Mr Roger Darnell. In the first place, his wife, when he went up-stairs to dress, heard with an undisguisable look of vexation and dismay that Sir Geoffrey Darnell was in no danger, and would be quite recovered in a few days. Since the arrival of the news of the attack upon the Baronet, and the kindly commercial traveller's fears that, from all he could hear, he for one did not believe in a chance of Sir Geoffrey's life, Mrs Darnell had been in a fever of excitement.

She could do nothing in the house; she had gone round to several of her acquaintances in her coach; and one and all, more particularly perhaps my Lady Warrington, had congratulated her upon being speedily—and very speedily—Lady Darnell. We need not trouble ourselves about the details of those visits. *De mortuis*, &c., is an old adage, but it was not followed in this instance. To be sure, Sir Geoffrey was not dead yet; and though the old proverb applies to the dead, I cannot remember one of similar import to the living. If, therefore, Mrs Darnell transgressed it one way, she was safe as to the other; and it is on this account that I forbear to record her own opinions and those of her *dearest* friends, “as to what an im-mense relief Sir Geoffrey’s death would be to all concerned. He was a brute; he swore profane oaths; he was a rank Jacobin, and taught his daughter, who was going to marry one of the greatest rakes and profligates in London, to be as bad as himself—a little pert, stuck-up minx, who would come to no good. Not like darling Anne, who, *my dear*, was quite shocked by her cousin’s levity, who took Dorothy to the play, and *quite* corrupted her morals.”

I should not advance this history one step if I recorded a whole chapter of these visits; and my readers, who are entirely in my confidence, know

very well already Mrs Darnell's opinion of the Baronet, and the Baronet's of her, and that there was not *much* love lost between them. It will be the easier, therefore, for them to comprehend why Mrs Darnell felt the pangs of disappointment come thickly upon her, as Mr Darnell, with his face covered with lather, cried from his dressing-room—

“ Oh, he's much better, Anne, thank God! and Burgess, the doctor there, says he'll soon be on his legs again. As to ——, he told me, as we came home, that he needn't have gone up at all.”

I am afraid, though Mrs Darnell was in the habit of thanking God frequently, especially for her own state of “grace,” that she did not join in her husband's thanksgiving; and indeed Mr Darnell, when he had dressed himself, went down humbly on his knees before his Maker, and strove to say all he felt, and—— But I have no business to follow him in these sacred moments. I may however mention, that when he had told his wife what I have written, he heard several sobs, and lovingly shut the door. He did not wish to be a spy upon a weak woman's infirmity; but he guessed the reason of it perfectly; and when Dorothy hung about him after breakfast, and he told her and the younger children of what he had seen at Barnet (Anne had gone away with her mother), the whole of them had a good cry over the

relation, and were thankful, the darlings, that dear cousin Conny had not been harmed.

Mr Darnell was restless in his office that day. He had sent for Captain Abel Scrafton, who was to sail to-morrow, and told him he might have a particular service for him to do before he left, and he was at any rate to bring up a large cutter, with a strong crew, to the Tower Stairs. He should like, perhaps, just to see the good ship before she sailed—she was then lying off Greenwich—and bid good-bye to the people, and wish them a pleasant voyage; to which order the gallant Captain promised strict obedience. He had owed his rise in the world entirely to Mr Darnell; and as he said, sailor fashion, “would go to the devil for him any day if he needed.”

Then Mr Darnell went down in the afternoon to the waterside, and took a boat to Tooley Stairs, and sat a good while with Mrs Morton. Sybil was gone out with Nanny on a message, as the old lady said, which was no less than taking some embroidery to the tailors, and getting paid for it. They talked of Ralph, of course; and the widow was comforted by being assured that the allowance for him would not cease during his temporary absence. Mrs Morton guessed he had gone to the North with the Baronet; and, with, I must acknowledge, a very shameless hypocrisy, Mr Darnell pretended to agree with her.

When would Mr Ralph's clothes be wanted? Nanny and Sybil had packed them all up, and the trunks were corded. Well—Mr Darnell didn't know; perhaps to-morrow. They were to be delivered to his special order; and then he took his leave.

Thence (how idle and curious he was, to be sure, that day) he told the waterman, who knew him perfectly, to row down to the colliers. His nephew had, he thought, taken his passage on board a brig to sail soon. Now, as it happened, this very man, Frank Joliffe, was a great ally of Ralph's, and had taken him to the collier, where, as we know, he went with his valise; and as the wherry shot down the stream, the man pulled to the gangway of the *Mary of Shields*, on the shrouds of which was a board, with a chalk writing, that all "pasengers is to be on bord at seven o'clock to-morrow afternoon." Mr Darnell went on board, looked at the berth and the valise, and took it away, as more things had to be put into it, and he would tell his nephew to be in time to-morrow. He even partook of a glass of rum and a biscuit, which the skipper offered him, refusing wine. Perhaps Mr Darnell required a little stimulus for what he had farther to do.

When this was over, Mr Darnell was rowed up to the Temple Stairs, where he left the valise in the boat, and ordered the waterman to wait. He then

went into the Temple Gardens, and sat down on a bench there, looking at the stirring scene before him, and trying to shut out the thought of what was, in any case, a very disagreeable duty. I think he was hesitating whether he should prosecute or not; whether he should run down, as he could run down, the clever gang who had done this deed; but, indeed, it does not very much signify, for a man like Roger Darnell does not act so much upon previous plans, as upon conviction of necessity.

Mr Darnell had arranged his visit to the Gardens, so as to be in advance of the hour fixed by his anonymous correspondent; but the time passed very slowly. He walked down to the stairs again, and Joliffe touched his hat. "Not yet," he said; "I expect a friend, and am waiting for him." Then he came back, sat down, got up and walked about. Yes, Roger Darnell was more anxious than ever, more fidgety perhaps. The clocks chimed the half-hour, but still there was no one he could see likely to be the person who sought him. A nurserymaid with some children taking an evening walk, some quiet people reading on the benches—the usual saunterers, in fact, of the locality; and an old man who might be a Jew, who wore a long tunic, had a white beard, and limped, with a square-headed ebony stick to support him. This person, after



several turns on the terrace, came and sat down on the bench, and, taking out a book, began to read, very unconcernedly. But Mr Darnell had not long to wait. "I think," said the man in a strong Jewish accent, "dat I 'as de pleashure to shpeak wid Mister Darnell."

"I am Mr Darnell—Roger Darnell, at your service," said the merchant, decidedly.

"Glad to 'ear it, sir, very glad, becaush I is friend, yes, goot friend, to Roger Darnell & Company. You are de mosh honourable man in London city, and a've troosted you to come here."

"What the devil have you to say to me? be brief," said Mr Darnell, quickly. "Do you know what you risk in speaking to me at all?"

"I kno's, I kno's, very vell," was the reply—"I kno's vho did *dat* biznis. The old Jew kno's many a ting like *dat*, an' no fear for nobody. If you give me de monish, de faive hoondert paond, Mr Darnell, I tell you troot, an' no more."

"I have the money here," said Mr Darnell, showing his pocket-book; "but what security have I that you will tell me everything?"

"Holy Mosesh!" cried the man, "tink of dat! I poor, lame, old Jew, here alone vit you, Mr Darnell. I am best securitiss mysel—I cannot rone away, sir! You can call de porters, sir, and de

vachmen. Oh, Mr Darnell, you not see dat! Ha, ha, ha!”

The absurdity of the lame old Jew being able to escape from him, seemed to assure Mr Darnell.

“Good,” he said; “take the money,” and he counted the bills upon the seat. “No fear,” he added, “of them passing, with Roger Darnell & Company on the back.”

“Dhey’s quite good, sir, and mosh obleege,” said the man, folding them up, and putting them into a greasy pocket-book. “And now, sir, to proove I’m honest Jew, here’s four bills for fifty each, which vas in your brother’s book; they’s no use to my people, so they’ve sent them back.”

“’Pon my soul, a very honest business! You steal two hundred, and get five; I wish I could do such profitable trade, Abraham,” cried Mr Darnell, who began to think he had only one of the common receivers of stolen goods to deal with. “But stay; what of your promise to tell who did this?”

“If Roger Darnell vill give his vord of honour to me, Reuben Levi—his vord of honour, as Darnell, an’ gentilman, and vill promise to do no prosecute, I vill tell him everyting—who did it, and who didn’t.”

Perhaps Mr Darnell blushed as he gave it—the honour of a Darnell on such a bargain! but there

was a craving at his heart to know the truth about Ralph, a truth which could alone determine their future positions. He gave his hand therefore, though he shrank almost at the cold clammy touch that met it.

“I tink Mr Darnell kno’s wery vell,” said the man, with a sly wink, “but I vill tell the troot. Mr Ralph Darnell had it done, but he did not do it himself;” and the man gave a succinct relation of all that had happened.

“Damnation!” cried Mr Darnell, “this is worse and worse. Was he a coward?”

“No no! no coward, sir. He would have gone and taken de will from his oncle, you kno’s; but dey did not let him, sir, as I tell you. Mr Ralph—they not trust, sir.”

“Who?”

“Oh, I need not to maind tell you, sir; on honour, you know. Vy, dat Dicky Smeet, an’—an’—an’ their men, you know, sir. They didn’t let him do nothin’, sir—only do themselves, and sends you two hundert pound, sir, vit compliments too, and von’t do so no more!”

“Then they know you make this communication, you rascal!” cried Mr Darnell.

“Quiet, Mr Darnell—quiet, sir. On honour, sir, you remember? Ha, ha! No, sir, they don’t kno’

at all. They only give old Reuben these bills to sell; an' he can't sell 'em except to Roger Darnell & Company, coot merchants, sir," he continued, getting up, and limping off. "Coot merchants, and do verry coot business. They get true information—dat's tree hundert, and deir own bills two hundert, and dey give me five hundert; now, I give two hundert to Dicky Smeet for bills, and keep tree hundert for commission. How mosh per shent, Mr Darnell? How mosh per shent? Coot evening, sir. I mosh respect Mr Roger Darnell."

Mr Darnell looked after the man savagely. If he had only not pledged his honour! But it was too late, and what remained to be done must be done. There could be no vacillation now—least of all with Roger Darnell.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

IT was not extraordinary that Ralph Darnell saw from his chamber window the figure of Sybil Morton sitting at the open casement across the river as the evening closed in. Of course he could distinguish no features; even the figure was indistinct at that distance; but there it was without doubt. If Ralph could have seen that dear face, he would have been shocked at the misery expressed in it, and perhaps have understood more of what was lying at Sybil's heart than he had ever done before, even in the worst period of his wound. So long as Ralph was present, Sybil's love found vent in a thousand little unobtrusive services for him—in anticipating his wishes, in watching him, in speaking or in listening to him. He was there, her own glorious incarnation of manhood. A foolish, passionate, and sometimes not very well-behaved young gentleman, as we know him; but in

Sybil's sight, brave, handsome, accomplished, and manly, with a quick, but sweet and generous disposition. Had he ever said an unkind word to her? Had he ever been impatient with her errands or messages or escorts, or their quiet studies, in which he learned latterly much faster than she? Ah no! And when in that terrible fever after the wound, and weakness almost to death, he had been peevish with old Nanny, and impatient with Mrs Morton, who was ever too talkative and fussy—who to him was like Sybil? She felt that there was no one. She knew he would take neither food nor medicine from other hands, and night and day, with but short intervals, she was at her post by his bedside, working at her embroidery frame, reading to him when he was able to listen, or playing an occasional game of chess or piquet.

After his fashion, Ralph was very grateful for all this; and had his heart been free, only one result could have followed; but the reader knows already how Ralph was enamoured of his lovely cousin—how that dazzling beauty, which already had subdued the hearts of half the beaux of London, had so absorbed his that he had no thought for anything else. There is no need to repeat this, for it has already indeed combined with other affairs to lead to a serious catastrophe.

But since Ralph knew, and knew for certain, from Mistress Grover, that Constance never had, and never could have, anything but a sisterly love for him—his thoughts had turned a great deal more than before to Sybil Morton. He wanted sympathy, and he had found none except his dear old “auntie’s,” and that only partially. In her rough way old Nanny had, to be sure, told him “he’d better hae luiked afore he’d leep’d; and, puir dear laddie, he’d had a sair faa’.” And he had also been petted after her fashion, and told that the “onely body beside hersel’ that pitied him or cared for him, was darlin’ Miss Sybil, bless her! and she’d been greetin’ sair about the quarel wi’ the Barrinit. Ay,” she said, “an’ Mrs Morton didna wonder that the Barrinit had been angert, for she know’d mair than she’d like tae tell; an’ it was jist like that mad boy, first comin’ hame tipsy, then gettin wounded, and noo quarrellin’ wi’ his kind uncle.” But this homely talk did not satisfy him; Ralph Darnell did not expect sympathy from Mrs Morton, and looking all round his very narrow world of acquaintance, he saw none to be had from any one except those two, Bessie Grover and his dear Sybil, and most from Sybil.

To go to Bessie was impossible—to write to her equally so for the present. There was a great deal of stern duty to be done, of diligent search to be made, before he could approach her or his uncle

Geoffrey with any hope of success. When one's heart is sore with grief or misfortune that has passed over, sympathy is perhaps most longed for and most needed. If danger or misery be impending, there is no room in the mind for sympathy; there is impatience of it; the mind is knit to bear whatever trial is to come; and that resolution does not brook disturbance. When there is reaction, however, the case is very different. We then cling to whatever is offered, and are calmed and soothed by it. This operation was not, however, altogether of a healthy character in Ralph Darnell's mind; and as he lay awake next morning early, with the bright summer sun streaming through the chinks in his shutters, watching idly the streams of motes which whirled, tossed, sparkled, and glistened in fantastic play, his thoughts went back over the last few months, and reviewed its incidents; and as is the case with most of us perhaps, he saw among them much of his own doing that he did not approve of, and could not justify. It was a dreamy state perhaps—the consciousness of rest after physical weariness, combined with active mental employment, leading only to unpleasant results. If he had but a friend, one friend near him to whom he could tell everything, and hear a few soothing words in reply—one friend!

There was indeed one near, very near to him, had



he known then where to turn; but I am compelled to record that, in all his troubles, Ralph had never yet thought of Him save in a very casual way.

While he was ill of his wound, the family prayers, when he could hear them, had been read at his bedside; and perhaps he had heard Mrs Morton's dreary, monotonous whining perusal of them, as well as some of Sybil's "chapters," with impatience. He had grown to dread Sundays, which denied him even a game of chess or backgammon or piquet with Sybil; and after his recovery, and thanks were offered in the parish church by Mrs Morton's desire, I regret to state, that he heard them with a kind of thankfulness, that it was "all over at last." But if his heart were hard, or, more correctly perhaps, indifferent, in this respect, it was soft enough in others. It was as sensible of very much foolishness enacted, as it had been on other occasions already related in this history, and needed sympathy. Yes, he would go to Sybil; she at least would understand him. He must see them all again before he left that night, and the sooner he went the better.

It was difficult, however, for Ralph to escape the strict, though kindly meant espionage, that had been set over him. Mr Wilkins had ordered him to keep in-doors. He would not have him "arrested" there

on any consideration, and Ralph had yielded to Mr Wilson's suggestion of maintaining an innocent deception. His egress was therefore opposed; and it was only by the application of a smart *douceur* to Dickiwig, who protested he thought a little fresh air would do the young man good, that he was allowed to hail a boat and row across to the old house. As the boat approached the stairs, he saw Sybil at her accustomed place. He had watched her as he neared his destination, and had seen her looking over the river vacantly, then bending down to her work, then raising her head again, and again looking out. His old signal was a wave of his hat; and when he was near enough to be seen, he gave it, and saw the girl start up, put her hand suddenly to her side as if a sharp pain had struck her, and then sit down again. Was she ill? Poor Sybil! Mrs Morton was not there. Was she ill? He was not long in suspense: and Nanny's cheery welcome rang in his ears for many a day afterwards.

“Eh, laddie, but ye're welcome back. Whar hae ye gane thae days, an' ne'er sed a word to nane o' us? Eh, but puir Miss Sybil yon's been greetin' her eyes oot, jest haven't shey? and speirin' at a' the wherries in the river, ye ken, an' nowt I could sey till her wad she mind. Ye maun hae ane o' yer auld cracks wi' her, an' comfort her and set her richt

agen, puir lassie! Eh, Mr Rraafe, when you're gane, she's no hersel' at aalle."

Nanny had poured out her heart, or what was lying closest at it, as Ralph entered the door.

"And Mrs Morton, Nanny?" he asked.

"Well, Mr Rraafe, she's no that weel that aa'd be glad to tell ye of. She's weak, surr, the day, an' she's no up—dozin' maybe, for she didna sleep weel a' the night, an' she's had some brroth. They're vara gude, Mr Rraafe; wadna ye like a sup o' some yersel'. Aa'll bring them up presently, an' ye'll like yer bit crack wi' Miss Sybil furrst."

Ralph went up the old stairs. I think he hesitated as he knocked gently at the door, and heard the low musical "Come in" from Sybil. Ralph noticed she did not open it herself, as she had used to do once, and drag him in, with a pleasant chiding if he were late. Ah me! was she changing too? Not so to him; but the figure at the window, which looked taller and more womanly than he had ever thought it before, seemed to hesitate, to totter a little, and, as he stepped forward briskly and held out his arms, to fall very helplessly into them, then recovering, to withdraw itself suddenly and hang back, while the pale face and neck flushed with a bright colour, which faded instantly.

"You are ill, dear Sybil," said Ralph, kindly, very

kindly, for he could not mistake the happiness, the relief, he saw expressed in Sybil's face; "you have been ill?"

"I am quite well again," she said—"quite well; only your sudden departure and absence made us all very anxious, and I watched for you, Ralph, oh so wearily! My mother, too, is weak; and this, with you away, made me very very foolish and miserable, I believe. But now I am quite well, Ralph—am I not?"

That dear face! how beautiful it was as it looked up, with tears glistening on the cheeks, hastily wiped off, and lingering in the eyes, through which a bright gleam of joy was beaming! No need to answer Sybil's question; her glowing face was the reply—glowing as she looked into the great earnest eyes that met hers, and—was she wrong?—answered them. I do not think Ralph Darnell had ever thought of her beauty before, though he was proud of her; but he felt prouder than ever now, and "his own dear Sybil was so glad to see him."

"Yes," he repeated, "you are my own dear Sybil, and I tell you everything. What a fool I've been, and how badly they've used me! I've no one now, Sybil dear," he continued, with a tremulous, faltering voice, "to tell it all to, but you; and I don't care if you—if you—scold, only don't hate me

for being—for being—— Oh, don't be ashamed of me, Sybil, as everybody is, else I shall leave you too with them all, and run away. I'd better be dead, Sybbie—better be dead. No one would miss me but you."

Ralph was sobbing now, and holding out his hands to her. All that reaction which had been going on since his first relief at Barnet, had come to a crisis. Perhaps he mistook Sybil when she turned away her head and was not able to look at the young man's flushed quivering features, and the hot tears streaming out of his eyes.

"Yes, every one's ashamed of me, Sybil," he continued, as she did not speak. "I'm—I'm—I'm—only a poor devil of a—a—bastard," he cried, with a great gulp. "I haven't a right to speak even to you—even to you. Oh my darling—oh Sybbie, Sybbie, don't hate me. It's—not—it's not my fault, indeed—indeed it is not;" and he threw himself on his knees at her side, buried his face in her dress, and cried piteously, and as if his heart would break, "It's not my fault—it's not my fault."

No sympathy? If tears falling as fast as his own were proof of it; if her hand, now resting on his strong curly hair, now roving absently among it with loving touch; if the gentle cries of "No, no, Ralph, I'll never leave you—never, never, till I die.

Don't fret; they will be kind—even your dear cousin—by-and-by,”—he need have been well assured.

I think perhaps it was this allusion to Constance that roused him, for he looked up with a scared, changed face. “Why did you mention *her*, Sybbie?” he said—it was his pet name for her. “Don't you know——?”

“I know all,” she replied, hastily; “she told me herself, when I went to see her in Soho Square before they left—she was your own dear dear sister; and she took me up to her room, and we talked about our old days, and she said you were to keep all she had given you, even the last ring as well, and she'd soon have you up to Melcepeth—and I do love her so, Ralph!”

I say I think this roused and relieved him; because, after Sybil had done speaking, he got up, sat down on the sofa by her, put his arm round her after his old loving brotherly fashion, with a great sigh, and told her what had happened at the office about the will, and what he intended to do; first, to go to the North, and then to act as circumstances might require. Thank God he was at least independent, and, once of age, was his own master!

All this required a long time, how long he cared and knew not. It was perfect confidence, not love, between them, and that knew no restraint. Ralph

only concealed from her the attack on his uncle; he dare not tell that; and Sybil believed the Baronet was far on his way to Melcepeth. How she cautioned him to be careful in future to cease persecuting Constance, who thought it hard he should do so; and how many promises were made by him of speedy return, and at least of communication with her,—need not be told.

Even Nanny was satisfied, and said he might go, and ought to go, “for his ain sake, and his mither’s sake,” and Ralph took the “het brose” she had brought, and found *them* as good as ever. No, he would not stay longer. He was afraid to meet his uncle, who might come unawares. They had told him of Mr Darnell’s visit the day before, and he must leave by the collier that afternoon. He had slept at the Cock, and should wait there. Mrs Morton he only saw for a few minutes; she was weak and peevish that day, and could not be brought to understand why it was necessary he should go at all. He might do as he chose, it was no use her speaking to him.

It was hard for Sybil to let him go, hard for Ralph to leave her—very hard; but the confidence between them had given both courage and comfort. Sybil could see nothing dark in the future, and Ralph at least felt he had the will to do and suffer; that boyhood, and perhaps dependence, were gone,

and life, with independent action, was about to begin.

“One kiss,” he said, “Sybil—one only; nay, the last, for how long perhaps?”

Ay, for how long? She yielded shyly to him, but very confidently. She kissed him as she would have kissed a brother; but she had to put down rebellious thoughts before she did so. On her fair brow, on her eyes, on her lips, she felt him kiss her tenderly and lovingly.

“May God keep you, my darling!” he said; “the only true friend I have on earth, will not forget me.”

And so they parted, and she watched Joliffe row him across the river; and the man came back and said he had sent his dear love to them all.

For the rest of the day Ralph kept quiet. He was well cared for, we may be sure. We sometimes remember strange dishes, or things we have eaten in strange places, with strange relish, all our lives. I have myself a vivid recollection of a certain roasted fowl, eaten on the bank of the broad Godavery river, opposite to Nandair, and of a breakfast of fried pancakes and eggs at Ghenneh, on the Nile, cooked by an itinerant breakfast-monger, a stout Egyptian woman clad in a blue shift, and with a pleasant tattooed face, who fed my child with dainty bits with her own greasy fingers. So Ralph Darnell remembered his



dinner of soles and veal cutlets—which Dickiwig told him Mistress Baker had cooked with her own hands—and about half-past six, he had paid his reckoning, which Mr Wilkins was very loath to accept; had a pleasant flirtation with the smart young ladies in the bar, had interchanged a good deal of good-humoured “chaff,” as it would now be called, with Mistress Sarah Baker in the kitchen, chucked the pretty chambermaid under the chin, and said he’d bring a sweetheart for her, only she’d got so many already that he’d be in the way—in short, feeling pleasant, Ralph had comported himself in as pleasant and affable a manner as could be, and so came out from the wooden terrace to call a boat to take him to the Mary of Shields, which lay ready to sail with the turn of the tide, while the soft summer wind was blowing down the river, ready to fill her topsails when they should be sheeted home.

As Ralph stepped out of a side door, he saw Captain Abel Scrafton of the Valiant, standing near the bay window; and his handsome boat, with its eight oars, ready to fall, rocking at the stairs. Mr Ralph saluted the Captain in the same pleasant style he had bidden good-bye within. “When was he going to sail? This evening? Indeed! Well, he would have, he hoped, a safe and pleasant voyage.”

The gallant Captain returned Mr Ralph’s good

wishes. He had just come to clear off scores, he said, and was going now to the ship direct. Would Mr Darnell like a row down this fine evening? Mr Roger Darnell had been over the ship that day, and he had just landed him at the Tower Stairs; and a noble gentleman, indeed, he was. Should they not drink his health? No? Well, then, when they returned from the voyage they would have a jolly carouse once more at the old place;” and so chatting pleasantly, they descended the stairs together. Ralph had hailed a wherry, and it drew up within an oar’s length of the Valiant’s boat.

“You can step across my cutter,” said Captain Scrafton, politely. “Come, sir, and we’ll get out of your way.”

Ralph did not hesitate. He followed the Captain, who stood in the stern-sheets to shake hands with him as he passed; and, as he grasped the hand held out to him, felt himself tripped up, heard the Captain’s sharp cry of “Oars!” and in an instant was held down, and a strong tarpaulin fastened over him. “Give way, men, for your lives!” called out Captain Scrafton; and before Ralph could recover from his amazement, the cutter had dashed into the stream, and was sped past boats, and ships, and city, with a swiftness which only the Valiant’s picked boat’s crew could have accomplished.

Ralph struggled hard, and tried to cry out, but it was of no avail—Captain Scrafton was inexorable; and a rough, noisy chorus, sung heartily by the men, effectually prevented any of his cries being heard. When they reached the ship, a chair was lowered, into which Ralph, despite his resistance, was easily fastened, with a ship's flag and a boat-cloak tied over him. A shrill whistle, and the chair was hoisted over the ship's side; whence the Captain and several others took it up, carried it into a cabin on the poop, locked the door, and Ralph was left to unfasten himself as best he could. When he had done so, he heard the jolly chorus which accompanied the heaving of the anchor, the orders of Captain Scrafton to "sheet home the topsails," and the ripple of the waves against the gallant ship, as she bounded onwards under all sail towards the sea. Nor for many hours, nor until he was weary with fruitless endeavours to force the door, or the port in the cabin, did Captain Scrafton visit him, and then they were far out at sea, and the good ship Valiant was rolling deeply in the Channel waves.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### OUTWARD BOUND.

MY readers will most probably have accounted for this event already. Mr Darnell had no doubt whatever of the mysterious communication made to him in the Temple, for which, indeed, by Ralph's absence and other concurring testimony, he had been prepared. Ralph had not been at the office, nor at Mrs Morton's; and why should he be at the Cock except for concealment? That he was there, Mr Darnell had confirmed by Jenkins, the porter in his office, who had been sent to find out. One of the chambermaids there was a sweetheart of Mr Jenkins's, and confided to him that "them bailiffs was a'ter Mister Ralph, and missis 'ad 'id 'im away quiet, for a day or two." No doubt Mary thought the secret quite safe with Mr Jenkins, who only told it to Mr Darnell, as he entered the office punctually at his usual hour of ten o'clock.

That was to be a busy day with the merchant. When Captain Scrafton made his appearance in Lombard Street at noon exactly, as he had been desired to do, and was sent into the parlour for instructions, Mr Darnell at once opened his purpose to the commander, who, without scruple, entered cordially into his patron's views; nor was he squeamish on the project, or at all in dread of the law. I do not believe it possible for any one to make such a proposal to any captain in these days; and I look upon abductions of young gentlemen or young ladies in smuggling luggers, in yachts, or steam vessels, as stated sometimes in modern romances, to be sheer impossibilities; and therefore, that the kingdom of romance has lost one of its very valuable adjuncts of action in this respect. But in the days I write of, the sudden transmission of an obnoxious relative to his Majesty's plantations in Virginia, or to a friend in Calcutta, Madras, or Bombay, was by no means uncommon; attracted no particular attention if known; and indeed, in most cases, was considered a meritorious action; giving a young scapegrace nephew or cousin, or "*filius nullius*," a chance in life, which could not be had in England.

Mr Darnell's project, which was a very simple one, was readily understood and carried out. Captain Abel Scrafton perfectly agreed with him that

Ralph could not remain in England after what had happened. "Not, i'faith, that I think him so much to blame; but I had rather he had gone up to his uncle and demanded those papers, even if he'd had to stand a shot for it," said Mr Darnell; "but as it is, he can't remain here. Bless my heart! what would be said 'on 'Change' if it were ever known?"

So the matter was all settled in a few minutes; and as they passed out of the office, Mr Darnell said to Mr Sanders, in a sadly hypocritical manner, I fear, that he was just going to see all right on board, and if Ralph came in, that he was to wait, as there was something particular for him to do; and Mr Sanders, and some others, wished Captain Scrafton a pleasant voyage, and he and Mr Darnell went out towards the Captain's boat at the Tower Stairs. Mr Darnell knew of Ralph's clothes at Mrs Morton's; but these would not last the voyage, and Captain Scrafton knew exactly where to get others. Close to the Minories was his own provider of such necessaries; and in a marvellous short space of time, two large chests were packed, directed, and despatched to the Valiant by a two-oared wherry. Free of this necessary work, Mr Darnell went to Mrs Morton's, and Ralph's trunks there were carried off by two of the Valiant's men. The simple women had

no suspicion, and Mr Darnell said no more than the truth, when he declared they would be sent at once on board ship. Sybil asked timidly, when Ralph would return; and Mr Darnell replied, he "could not tell her; it might be a good while—it depended on so many things," &c.

Ralph had not left the house half an hour, indeed, when this happened; and if he had been looking out sharply, he might perhaps have seen the Valiant's boat dash in among the wherries at Tooley Stairs; but if he had, I think he would only have hidden himself the closer. The last thing Mr Darnell did before he bade the Captain good-bye and a safe voyage, was to deliver to him a packet of letters, tied up as a parcel, and addressed to Mr Ralph Darnell, per Valiant; and as he did so, he could hardly tell him, in a choking voice, to take care of the lad, for he was the only Darnell left, and that he was as fond of him as if he were his own son. "But after *that*, Captain Scrafton—*after that*, I could not have kept him here even were he my own son. By-and-by it may be different; but at present, he is safest and best out of the way;" and the Captain thought so too.

It was this packet of papers which Captain Scrafton took to Ralph, when he heard all quiet in the cabin. Landsmen who go to sea immediately upon a good dinner, such as Ralph had partaken of, very frequently

find it disagree with them; and our hero was no exception in this respect. As the Valiant got further out of the river, she began to display the lively character of her nature; and, under a heavy press of sail, was, to the Captain's great delight, passing ship after ship, "overhauling them," as he remarked to his chief mate, to whom he was telling, in confidence, what had happened. Perhaps the worthy Captain was enjoying too deeply the pleasant rolling of his gallant ship, and the setting of stunsel after stunsel in that glorious summer night, to attend to his passenger; but it was time he should do so, and, saying he would go and have "a jaw with him before he turned in," Captain Scrafton went to the cabin, which he unlocked and entered, with a hearty greeting and question to Ralph, of "how he was getting on?"

Perhaps, if Ralph had been at that moment possessed of his usual vigour and strength, he might, as he had sworn he would as long as he could stand, have fallen foul of the Captain, and assaulted him; but Ralph was very miserable, very wretched indeed. He was in the agonies of sea-sickness, which were severe; and if Captain Scrafton had ordered him there and then to be thrown overboard as a nuisance to all concerned in him, I do not know that the poor fellow would have objected in the least, but on the contrary would have felt positively thankful.



The Captain's cheery question was, therefore, only answered by a groan. Ralph could not lift his head from the berth where he had laid it, except to see the cabin turned upside down, Captain Scrafton swaying about on his sea legs, and everything in a state of distortion, which aggravated his malady. The Captain was a kind host, however; the steward was summoned, and a boy introduced, who was ordered to see after Ralph, and to stay in the cabin. By all these combined, too, he was undressed, and made as comfortable as could be; and the Captain, having administered a glass of "stiff hot grog," left the sufferer, telling him "he hoped he'd be all right presently. There was a jumble of a sea, to be sure, but the ship would be easier next morning, when they would be on the long waves of the ocean; and whenever he could, he'd better open his uncle's packet, and read what was written there. As for himself, he'd only obeyed orders; and after all, they'd have a pleasant voyage, depend upon it."

So Ralph lay there, not daring to lift his head or to speak a word, but grasping the packet of letters. His thoughts were not very clear certainly; but it was evident his uncle knew what he had done, or this step would not have been taken. The extreme wretchedness brought on by his malady, combined with his mental condition, was not enviable; and if he wept

a good deal that night, it was no more than what might be expected. It is probable, indeed, that he sobbed himself to sleep; for, when he awoke at a late hour the next day, he was considerably better and calmer; and could speak to Captain Scrafton, who came constantly to see "how he was getting on," and who informed him, with great satisfaction, "that the ship had beaten everything, and had a glorious breeze on her quarter. Would he like to get up? Perhaps he had better not till to-morrow. He must take something to eat, however; and it would be as well, as soon as he could, to look at the papers, which would be a relief to his mind."

It hardly needed the Captain's opinion to induce Ralph to do so. As he opened the packet, he found several letters to Mr Wharton; one to Mr Drake, the chief of the Calcutta Factory; one to Mr J. Z. Holwell; one to Robert Clive, Esq., Colonel, &c., "to be delivered in case of necessity;" and one to himself. This he opened without further delay, and it ran as follows:—

"LONDON, *the 17th August 1755.*

"NEPHEW RALPH,—If your own heart does not tell you why you are now on the way to Calcutta, it would be little need in my writing this. I know what you have done; but no one else does, and for the honour of our family, I shall keep your

secret inviolate. When opportunity offers, I shall acquaint your uncle Geoffrey with the step I have taken; and whether he approves of it or not, will be a matter of perfect indifference to me. I have acted solely upon my own judgment, as the uncle to whom you are confided; and I consider that I have in this measure, set you forward in life in a position in which you may rise to honour, and return to England with wealth. If you will look upon my act in this light, you will agree with me, and respect my motives. I have, indeed, had your going to the East Indies for a long time in my thoughts, and but for the uncertainty in which you have lived, should have put my design in execution: but I wished you to gain experience in my office, and to understand what you will have eventually to do there. Large interests will be intrusted to you; and I am quite assured that the honour and integrity of a Darnell will be proved in your conduct. I do not consider, however, that your bearing your family name would be safe or expedient; and I have introduced you to Mr Wharton, and other gentlemen, as Mr Smithson, a young man in whom I have an interest; and you will please to adopt this name—your mother's—on your arrival in India.

“During your minority, a considerable sum has accumulated in my hands, of which, as you will be of

age on the 25th of September proximo, you are entitled to the use. Enclosed is the account-current; and you will observe that the total to your credit is now £5286, 13s. 4d. This I advise you to employ in the Company's investments; and your interests here will be carefully attended to by myself and Mr Sanders. I do not doubt you, nephew Ralph; but when I say that your bills on me for only two thousand pounds sterling will be honoured, you will understand that I wish to put you to the proof, rather than that I mistrust you, and I expect you will employ your funds carefully.

“Your interest in your father's property amounts to about four hundred pounds per annum, which will suffice for a respectable maintenance in Calcutta. In the letter which I forward by you, Mr Wharton hath directions to pay you one hundred pounds on your arrival; and to arrange with you such monthly or quarterly payments as you may need there.

“You will find all your clothes on board, and an outfit for the voyage provided. If you have no money with you, Captain Sraffton will supply you with what you may wish as far as twenty pounds. All expenses of your voyage will be defrayed from your own funds, except that of your passage-money, which I, as 'twas against your will, have paid myself. And now, nephew Ralph, I make no professions, as

you know. I believe you to have courage and ability, and 'twas time you began life. I am not over sanguine either, for I know how weak you are; but I can see, under common care and honesty, a fine career open to you, and I wish you heartily success. I think you will remember that here, *as you are supposed to be*, you could have taken no position. There, even were it known, such a matter would not affect you. I shall write to you frequently, and you may believe your interests quite safe in my hands. Should the papers we all desire to see be discovered, your return home would be requisite, and no one would welcome you with more sincere joy than your uncle,

“ROGER DARNELL.

“*P.S.*—I have just heard that your uncle Geoffrey continues to improve. He hath no fever, and is pronounced out of danger, which it will be a comfort to you to know. I may also mention, that when I last saw him, he had desired to be forgiven by you in the matter of what passed at the office, and I trust that the feeling cannot fail to be mutual.”

A new life! That life, which he understood daily from Mr Sanders's descriptions and Mr Wharton's letters, he was to become a part of. That life which Mr Robert Clive, as he scanned him from head to

foot in the office parlour, asked him to adopt ; that which had begun so strangely, and so abruptly. Ralph could not doubt his uncle Roger. The letter was precise, but not upbraiding. His uncle knew the miserable error he had committed, and left the redemption of it to his own exertions in life, and his own honour. He had placed him in an independent position, and expected him to maintain it. I think if this letter had been other than it was, Ralph Darnell would have sunk in the turmoil in which he had become engulfed. As it was, he kissed it tenderly, put it to his heart, and vowed, even in his present weakness and prostration, to strike out manfully, and, as became a Darnell, to strive in life as became a gentleman. And when Captain Scrafton came next time into the cabin to ask Ralph "how he got on," the expression on the face he saw was not moody and morose, but bright, and full of hope.

And it was a pleasant voyage, and for those times a very speedy one. "We shall get in by Christmas day, and have a jolly dinner in the old Factory hall," Captain Scrafton would say ; and he was correct. They had rough and smooth weather by turns ; but the Captain was an able navigator, and on the 18th December, just four months after they saw the English coast disappear beneath the horizon, a few tall palm-trees, a low-lying shore fringed with jungle and

mangroves, appeared above it, and from a strange craft a native pilot came on board, who spoke an almost unintelligible jabber of English combined with his own tongue, which Captain Scrafton appeared to understand perfectly. Then, aided by the tide, the good ship swept up the broad river, past towns, villages, temples, and mosques, rice-fields and jungles, till the masts of English ships, the walls of a low fort, and a confused mass of white houses beyond, at the head of a noble reach of the Hoogly, showed Ralph Darnell the end of his voyage. A new life indeed had opened upon him, with a hearty welcome from Mr Wharton, and all who came to hear the last news from Home by the good ship Valiant. As the fort guns saluted her, she replied to them, the anchor dropped, and the vessel swung round to the tide which had brought her up.

I have had nothing to tell of incidents on the voyage. I do not indeed find there was anything particular to mention—nothing certainly that is worth record in this history; but in Ralph's own mind there arose gradually a change, and for the better in all respects. At first, despite the kind tone of his uncle's letter, he was often disposed to be rebellious, and to resent what had been done. He mourned after Sybil too, more perhaps than any previous intercourse with her seemed to warrant; and thoughts

of the last scene with her, what he might have told her but refrained, were often too vivid to be denied. Images also of old scenes at Melcepeth, and of his beautiful cousin Constance, and her last message by Sybil, were not unfrequent ; in short, there was a mingling of sweet and bitter memories which induced reflection, and tended in the main to healthy reaction despite his natural weakness and vacillation.

Perhaps it would serve no purpose were I to describe these, or quote passages from Ralph's diary. We have already record of some resolutions broken and of others maintained ; but his experiences of life were limited as yet by a very narrow bound, and before that could be enlarged, his strife in the world's fight must begin and be carried on. It would be too much, therefore, to expect that one thus inexperienced should make any definite resolves in respect to a future so dim and so indefinite as that which awaited him, or that if he made any they should be worth recording.

END OF PART SECOND.



PART THIRD.



# P A R T T H I R D.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### RETROSPECT.

LET us go back a hundred years. In 'Tara,' where I recorded of 1657 those fierce struggles between the Hindus and the Mahomedans in the Dekhan, when Sivaji Rajah destroyed the army of Beejapoor at his fortress capital of Pertabghur, when Tara was led forth to burn by the beautiful river-bank at Wae, the Mahomedan empire was nearly at the zenith of its power; and except the Dekhan and south of India, all else of the vast continent owned its sway. After that, subverting in succession, and annihilating as independent kingdoms, Ahmednugger, Golconda, and Beejapoor in the Dekhan, the Mogul Emperor Aurungzeeb became supreme; and the imperial Ma-

homedan standard floated from west to east, from north to south, of India, unchallenged.

I am not writing history ; and my readers will not care for instruction here which they can obtain better and in every completeness from those records of vivid romance—the histories of the period ; but some connection with the past is, I have thought, necessary, and therefore I may hope to be forgiven if I briefly, very briefly, attempt to supply it. This short chapter will, therefore, have nothing to do with my tale, and may be passed over if my readers please ; but there may be some of them, perhaps, who desire to remember how this interval from 1657 to 1757 was filled up ; and who, bearing a few prominent details in their minds, will be able to understand the position of political parties in India at the period of Ralph Darnell's arrival in it, and the Nawab Suraj-oo-Doulah's accession to his father's power, better than without them.

It was a magnificent empire truly, that of the Mogul ; but it was superficial. Looking into the core of it when at its brightest, we find a rottenness which was fast infecting the whole mass. The vast intellect, and extraordinary centralising administrative ability of Aurungzeeb, held the various portions together so long as his mind had power, and his body physical energy, for the vast task ; but as these gra-

dually failed, as he himself gradually descended into his quiet grave at Roza, and when the nine shillings (four and a half rupees) which he had earned by making caps had been expended upon his funeral, and the eighty pounds ten shillings (eight hundred and five rupees) he had also earned by writing copies of the Koran, had been given away in charity, men began to estimate how loosely the reins of the Imperial Government had been held—how speedily all those who had assisted to carry it on would strike out for themselves—and how easily they would attain their objects.

India had been parcelled out into viceroyalties; and when the sovereign who controlled them died, he left no one, with a pretence of power, to fill his place. His sons disputed the succession; and each striving for mastery, disappeared in the course of a few years, leaving a dismembered empire and independent princes, where there had been unity and able and zealous servants. There was still a nominal court at Dehli; but in 1756 only a few mean provinces around the capital remained to the Royal family, and the rest, Bengal, Oude, Central India, Goozerat, the Punjab, the Dekhan, and the Carnatic, had passed away to servants of the State, or to Mahrattas; and Nadir Shah, in 1739, while he dealt the death-blow to the Imperial Government, annexed all the

provinces which lay west of the Indus to his own kingdom.

In 1657 the destruction of the army of Afzool Khan, as I recorded in 'Tara,' had laid the foundation of the Mahratta kingdom, which, even more than the treachery of dependants, was the deepest and most virulent canker at the heart of the Mahomedan empire. Gradually, in the Rajah Sivaji's reign, the predatory power evoked by him had attained a mighty consistence which could not be repelled, and yet was so intangible that it could not be grasped. If the Mahomedans were anywhere weak, Sivaji was defiant and insulting, and destroyed them; if they were strong, he crouched for his spring till they were off their guard; or by fomenting jealousies between the Mogul and the Mahomedan kingdoms of the Dekhan so long as the latter lasted, appeared now as the ally of one, now of the other—professing allegiance to all, but giving none to any.

He died; and there were men found among these rude Hindu landholders, farmers, shepherds, and mountaineers who, with their astute Brahmin advisers, were able to direct national councils and lead armies. With the English at Bombay they negotiated and traded; while the fierce Mahratta legions, vast hordes of horse and foot, poured forth over all India in numbers which it is now surprising to contemplate,

and with a celerity, alacrity, and vigour, before which the already effete Mahomedans made but a feeble resistance, and in many localities altogether disappeared. Far away from their native Dekhan, into the Punjab, into the Carnatic, into Bengal and beyond Dehli, these armies went their annual rounds of devastation and plunder. The Mahomedans, distracted and divided, alike by situation as by local interest, saw province after province wrested from them, or burdens alike extortionate and exhaustive laid upon their independent principalities, and levied with a terrible exactitude; and their last humiliation by the Mahratta victory at Kurdlah in the Dekhan, over the Nizam, was only prevented from being converted into that universal Hindu sovereignty of India, which had been the object and aim of Sivaji Rajah, by the rise of a power which, no bigger than a man's hand, had risen out of the sea, and in the course of another century has subverted both, and overshadowed all. That power was our own, and it is with its first rise to political existence and territorial possession that I have now to do, as I had with that first struggle of the Mahrattas a hundred years before, which I tried to describe in 'Tara.'

The history of Bengal is no more than a chapter in the history of the dismemberment of the Mogul empire, or in the decay of all Mahomedan empires

which have hitherto existed—of able generals or astute administrators, appointed as viceroys of provinces, taking advantage of weakness, assuming independence, and maintaining it hereditarily.

In the year 1702, the son of a poor Dekhan Brahmin, who had been forcibly converted to Mahomedanism, and had risen to distinction by his abilities, was sent to govern Bengal; and by a singular display of energy and talent, not only consolidated his position, but maintained it against all intrigues at the capital. We read how pertinaciously he opposed the settlement of Europeans in Bengal, especially the English; and, but for a fortuitous circumstance, would have succeeded. The Emperor, from whom the English had sought protection against this viceroy of Bengal, fell ill of a disease which baffled the royal physicians; the surgeon of the embassy then at Dehli, Mr Hamilton, was called in, and under his care the royal patient recovered. He might have made his own terms for personal reward; but, following the example of Mr Boughton nearly a hundred years before, and with true patriotism, he merged them into the interests of his country, and new deeds were executed under the Imperial seal, which the Bengal viceroy dare not disobey, and under which the factories in Bengal were established on a surer basis than ever. This viceroy's family did not maintain the power of its founder,



though there were two successions in it ; and in 1740 Ali Verdy Khan, the viceroy of Behar, a neighbouring province, who had earned distinction by his repulse of the Mahrattas, became ruler of Bengal, and continued to be so, as I have recorded, till the 9th April 1756, when he died, virtually if not actually, independent ; and the prospect of any revival of Imperial power at Dehli was a remote, and, indeed, impossible contingency.

What a romance is the early history of the merchant English in Bengal !—their struggles with Imperial power, with local viceroys and delegates ; their missions, their bribes, their intrigues, their defiance, and—their perseverance. Other European colonists were there—Dutch, Danish, Netherland, and French ; but none established confidence among the people like the English, and with none was there so rapid and so lucrative a trade carried on. When we read that in the Mahratta invasion, driven back by Ali Verdy Khan, a sum of two and a half millions sterling (two and a half crores of rupees) had been extorted from the banking-house of Juggut-Seit at Moorshedabad alone by the Mahratta general, what ideas does this one act of spoliation convey to us of the local wealth of the native Bengal traders ! I have, however, no concern with these old histories, in which all who read them will find sober truth far more wonder-

ful than any fiction. I have only to do with the period I have already denoted—the rise of the English out of their heretofore capacity of merchants and the foundation of their political power.

To imagine, however, that up to this period the English had established no political status in India, would be wrong. In Bombay and Surat their influence had long been felt; and they had made treaties with Sivaji. In Madras they had begun wars, because the French, desiring to establish their own commercial power throughout the south of India, had fought against them, and at first overcome them. Afterwards, and even while the parent nations were at peace, Frenchmen and Englishmen were arrayed against each other, with varying results, in the cause of local native princes. In the Dekhan, at the court of the Nizam, Monsieur Bussy had established an authority, and possessed armies which, ostensibly belonging to the prince, were intended to be the instruments of a far wider national influence. Except in the Dekhan, the English had not only maintained their position, but had established a reputation as gallant soldiers which rivalled, if it did not surpass, that of the French, in the estimation of the people of India. It was that increasing French influence in regard to which the English governments of 1755, and subsequently, were so jealous; that which Mr Clive was burning to

overthrow when he was in England in that year, and when, as we already know, he had prayed to be intrusted with a force with which he could meet Monsieur Bussy in the Dekhan, and prove who should be master there. All this was to come afterwards, as we know ; but of the two, the French then were the popular favourites, and in Bengal were, perhaps, superior in power to the English.

Such, then, is a mere sketch of the political position of India in 1756. The Mahomedans without an imperial government except in name, and its viceroys become independent, employing their local revenues for their own aggrandisement, without any common purpose or national interest. The Mah-rattas, still extending their conquests, but respecting the English, and perhaps the French, with neither of whom they had come into collision—being, in all respects, the greatest native power in India. The English and French, struggling slowly into political existence ; but neither, except the ground on which their forts stood, or little beyond them, possessing any territorial authority. In Bengal, Ali Verdy Khan was dead ; his son, Suraj-oo-Doulah, had succeeded to his wealth and power ; and the Council of Calcutta, having given the protection of the English flag to a wealthy fugitive, were, with an army of less than two hundred Englishmen, deliberately defying a

vindictive, passionate prince, who could bring against them fifty thousand good soldiers. Since a handful of French infantry under Labourdonnais had defeated in the open field the whole native army of the Carnatic, the fame of Europeans as soldiers had spread rapidly through India; and it has often resulted since, that mere odds have had very little to do with Indian victories. For all this, it is not difficult to understand why the young Nawab of Bengal, in the first flush of his power, should have despised the English at Calcutta: or why their many native friends, marvelling at their unaccountable temerity, should have deplored an issue with the Nawab which, to their perception, could only end in ignominious discomfiture and ruin.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### SOZUN.

ON the evening of a day in March 1747, the sun, which had been blazing all the afternoon upon an arid plain in the north-west of India, was now a blood-red orb slowly descending below the horizon, where a dim grey and a dull red haze were struggling for mastery. Above, was a glory of crimson and orange clouds floating in a sea of soft purple, which faded away by pink and greenish tints into the fast deepening blue of the heavens. Here and there were a few stunted bushes and thin scraggy trees almost leafless, and there was no sign of human habitation for many miles around. Upon some open spots, where the hard earth seemed to have denied the possibility of vegetation, as well as among the thorny bushes, lay many inanimate forms of men and horses, gashed with horrible sabre-cuts, or pierced with spear or shot wounds, in all possible dis-

tortions of agony, or quiet sleep in death. Great vultures were already stalking to and fro with noiseless steps and hungry glistening eyes, while others were wheeling in the air, or alighting with a loud rustle of their heavy wings. From among the low brushwood, now and then, the sharp muzzles, keen eyes, and fox-like heads of jackals peered cautiously; and, as if impatient of delay, one or two would occasionally sally out, look around, and retire again with a sharp bark or howl, as if to advise further caution—or a snarling hyena, with his striped coat, would chase one of them for a short distance, and then stopped to sniff at a carcass lying before him. For an instant, the sun's rays flashed out of a rent in the haze upon this scene with a glare as red as the blood shed there that day, which, in broad, blackening patches, had sunk into the thirsty earth. There would be a horrible banquet that night upon men and horses, and presently the moon would rise, and shine softly and peacefully, over all.

There had been a battle there that day. Ahmed Shah Abdalli of Candahar had invaded India at the head of a horde of his Affghan subjects, and had carried fire and sword through the Punjab; but had been met at Sirhind by an army of the old Mogul chivalry from Dehli, and overthrown, and, with his people, had fled westwards.

But there were two human beings alive near the spot I mention. One was a broad-chested, strong-featured, stalwart Affghan, with a curly brown beard and blue eyes, who, that morning, ruddy with the glow of health and excitement, had ridden with his troop of comrades in the confident hope of victory, which should lead him with the rest to the Imperial city, the goal of many an Affghan freebooter's desires. He was now lying there with a gurgling in his throat, and his dim eyes already glazing in death that would soon come. He had done his work in that day's fight manfully, and had slain several of his assailants, whose bodies lay not far off; but a chance shot had killed his gallant horse, and as they fell together, a broken limb rendered him powerless to rise, and in the end, an arrow, shot by a Rajpoot bowman, had wounded him mortally. It had seemed a cowardly shot; for as the gallant fellow, little caring for himself, lay by his dead horse, he had protected with his broad shield a slight girlish form which crouched beneath it, and defended her and himself with his broad heavy sabre. Many comrades passed him by unheeded in the last charge as the victorious Mogul cavalry careered onwards, and the Affghans fled, till the last fatal shot came and left him as he was, helpless and dying.

By his side now knelt a girl of singular appear-

ance, and even beauty, who strove to raise the drooping head and lay it on her shoulder—strove to moisten the parched white lips from the gourd which was slung at the horse's saddle-bow, and to rouse the dying man; but in vain. His mouth refused the water which he had drunk greedily at first, his lips uttered inarticulate sounds, and his breath came only by feeble gasps. He was bleeding inwardly, and to death; and the fatal barb, of which he had broken the shaft in his first agony, lay rankling near his heart. Suddenly, as the sun's red glare shone out into his dim eyes, and they gleamed with a last look of intelligence upon the girl's face, a faint smile trembled upon his features, and passed away into the majesty of death.

“Father! father!” she had said in her rough guttural Pushtoo tongue. “Father, look up! one word, but one! Ai Alla kureem! but one!” Alas! that faint dim flicker of life had been as transient as the sun's rays which then passed from the earth, and left her—with the ravening creatures around her—alone!

Alone indeed! and it was a sad story, but a very simple one, soon told. When the Affghan forces were collected by Ahmed Shah, men had flocked to his standard from all parts of his dominions. A foray into India, with Dehli to be gained, was a na-



tional honour which every warrior burned to share. Sikunder Khan had little to keep him in his mountain home of Istaliff. Two sons had died, like others, in local quarrels, fierce and bloody, and his wife, too, had died after them. There remained only Sozun, his daughter ; and when the arms were being cleaned and sharpened, and the good horse shod for the long marches, the girl had looked wistfully at these preparations, bowed herself before her rough father, and said, "Thou wilt not leave me alone, father ? I will ride with thee !" So, up to that day, the hardy girl had ridden beside him through many a weary march, through many a grim fight: doing her simple offices of cooking, and laying out the saddle-cloths when they were to rest, spreading garments over spears tied together to keep off the dew, and sleeping beside him as peacefully as she ever did in their mountain home. There was many a brave clansman in that flying rout who, if he had known her desolation, would have turned to bring her away ; but in the clamour and confusion of the Mogul charge, Sikunder Khan's fate had been unnoticed, and the wild conflict had whirled fiercely along over many a mile, and would not cease till night fell upon it.

Alone indeed ! With death in the battle-field, or among their own glorious mountains, the girl had long been familiar. Of the ghastly forms lying

around her she was in no terror, nor at first had she any clear perception of her position. But the night was falling fast; a chill wind began to sweep over the desolate plain, and to sigh among the brakes, mingling with the horrid cries about her. Several times creatures she could dimly see, came about her with flapping wings, or stealthy steps and savage snarls; and she had then snatched up her father's sword, unfastened his shield, and held it over him as he had held it over her. Often and often, so long as there was any light, she had peered into his eyes and spoken to him—perhaps he was asleep! The misery that he was dead had hardly come into her heart yet, but it could not long be repelled. As she listened with her ear to his breast, there was at last no breathing; and as the moon rose and shed its first pallid gleam over the scene, it lit upon a pale ghastly face, the expression of which could not be mistaken, and the girl cast herself upon the body with a piercing scream of agony which could not be repressed.

How long she remained there she knew not; but was roused by a rough pull at her arms, and a feeling as if she were rudely flung aside, and she started to her feet in terror. Four men and two women were before her, and one of the men seized her arms, while another bound a part of a turban about her;

pinioning them close to her body. The women were rifling her father, and two men were loosening the saddle upon the dead horse.

“Rip open the lining,” cried one of the women; “those plundering rascals carry all their gold there. Who is that you’ve got there, Mullik? a boy? Give him the knife. What use is he to you? Be quick!”

The girl heard one of the men mutter a savage oath as he drew a knife from his girdle, which flashed in the moonlight, and saw it raised to strike her. She shut her eyes, and did not shrink from the blow; death would be welcome, and she did not fear it.

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed the man, coarsely. “Come hither, Jumna; ’tis a girl I should have slain but for good mother moon yonder. Come and see.”

“A girl?” cried both the women, leaving their hideous work; “what in the name of the fiend hath brought her here? Who art thou? Speak!” exclaimed one of them in her own Pushtoo tongue; “and where hast thou come from?”

The familiar language, perhaps, more than the question, roused the girl; but all she could answer was, “My father!—oh father!” and strove again to cast herself upon his body.

“He’s dead, my lily,” said one of the women, in a

somewhat kinder voice—"he's dead, and with the blessed Lord and the Prophet now. He'll never help thee more, nor thou him; and only for us, the wolves and the jackals and the vultures would have had a tender meal to-night off thee. Thank the Prophet, who hath sent thee friends. We will take care of thee, child. Thou shalt be a daughter to me, and I will teach thee all the charms and the tricks."

"Who are you?" asked the girl, trembling. "I am Sozun."

"We? Well, men call us by many names—what signifies? and we dance, and sing, and sell charms. I'm too old for that now; but I have three daughters who do all they're taught, and thou shalt be one too, Sozun."

"She's not twelve years old," said the other woman, holding the girl's face up to the moonlight. "Allah! what eyes! what a colour! She's worth thousands."

"And here's a stout pony, sister," said one of the men, coming up, leading a strong, active "yaboo." "He wouldn't leave the bush yonder where he had been tied, though he broke the rein. Perhaps it's hers, and it will do to carry her."

Her dear old Môtee knew his mistress as he was led up, and with a low whinny put his nose to her breast and rubbed it against her. When her father

fell, Sozun had thrown herself from his back and run to his side ; but the pony had never stirred. Afterwards she had tied him to a bush ; and except that he had kicked viciously at every beast that came and sniffed at him, he had not stirred. The turmoil of the fight had swept by him, but he was unnoticed.

There was short parley about Sozun. They would not trust her arms at liberty, though they loosened their bonds. "Remove them, my child? Aha! as if I had not been at Candahar and Ghuzni, and knew how women ride there! No, no; be quiet, and we will take care of thee."

Helpless, confused, moaning in her bitter misery, little caring what became of her, Sozun, the Affghan soldier's child, was led away on her pony to a new life, which was destined to be an eventful one.

I do not think it would answer our purpose to follow it. She was then little more than eleven years old, but her figure was tall, strong, and well formed, and her face gave promise of beauty. Her eyes were glorious—great brown flashing eyes, with long sweeping eyelashes, which seemed almost coarse. Her teeth were white and very even, and sparkled in her dewy ruddy mouth as she spoke, literally like rows of pearls. To those Indian gypsies she appeared very fair; and, indeed, though

her neck and arms were embrowned by constant exposure, her skin, where it had remained covered, was white and soft.

In the whirl of a camp life, in the excitement of change of place, with new and gay associates, Sozun at last forgot the misery of that night, though the ghastly dead face of her father, the beasts of prey howling around her, and their screams and shrieks as they fought over the dead carcasses—long, very long, haunted her in many a frightful dream. When she was a year older, she was taken to Dehli and sold to the proprietress of a company of dancing-girls, to be taught her profession, begun rudely by the gypsy women in their camp. One of the crones who had found her, Jumna, had adopted Sozun as a daughter; and, though capricious in her disposition, was in the main kind. Other girls, slaves like herself, Sozun saw beaten frequently, and made to do the most menial offices in the rude tent camps of the gypsy tribes; but she was always protected, and cared for tenderly enough. She was taught to believe in her destiny; and her horoscope, cast after the fashion of gypsies in all parts of the earth, indicated such an elevation in life that she was in a manner venerated. The old woman had travelled to Bokhara, to Samarcand, and to every part of India, and knew her captive's value, the greater if the girl could be taught to

know it herself; but Sozun could not be adopted into the tribe—she could only remain a slave like others, and be used for the worst of purposes.

“I love thee, my lily,” the old woman would say—“I love thee as my life; but thou’rt too good for us, Sozun, and I will sell thee to the Padshah’s dancers when we go to Dehli for a thousand rupees. Thou wilt become very beautiful, and thy star already shineth out of thy fair forehead like a queen’s, as thou wilt be.”

“Like a queen’s, as thou wilt be,” seemed to find an echo presently in the girl’s heart; and when the dead was forgotten, and the old mountain home and her playfellows at Istaliff had faded dimly away into the past—love of fine clothes, of jewels with which she was decked, of desire to excel in the accomplishments of her profession, soon followed, and then Jumna, as I have said, sold her at Dehli, and parted from her sadly.

“I have got a good price for thee, my lily,” she said one day, “and thou must go. Chunda Kour has promised to be good to thee, and make thee a queen. She is in love with thee; and many a one will love thee as thou growest older. Come, my child, dress thyself in thy best clothes, for they are bought with thee, and I will come often to see thee!”

A new life again, a grand house to live in, in the

Chandnee Chowk of Dehli, and an imperial establishment of palankeens, elephants, and luxuries. The mountain home, the white dead face, the rough camp-life of the gypsies, went further and further away. All her young companions laid plots for future distinction—what they would do, what lovers they would have, whom they would win, what jewels, what silks, what shawls they would possess; and she did the same. With this, Sozun learned all the art of her trade quickly and gracefully, for she enjoyed it. No positions, no graces of dancing were too difficult. Her teachers were proud of her; and, as her voice grew strong and sweet, she loved to sing. She had not forgotten some of the plaintive ballads of her own country, and, as a child, had played on the lute like other girls; and these old songs, though they sometimes made her heart ache, had a strange charm for her hearers. No music was too difficult to be overcome, and the singers of the Emperor's own chamber had pleasure in teaching the Affghan girl what they would have denied to others.

She made her debut, as we should call it, at a public durbar in the palace at Selim Ghur, and was enveloped in costly shawls, her lap filled with gold pieces, and a title, which she bore ever afterwards, bestowed upon her, with a daily allowance from the Imperial treasury. As she grew up, she became beautiful—certainly very



beautiful—especially her figure, which was superb. Her Affghan origin gave her height and carriage beyond any of her associates. Her fresh colour, and healthy ruddy complexion, made her everywhere remarkable, and she felt a corresponding ambition growing upon her.

Love! ah no!—love could find no place in such a heart; and, when it did come, it was not akin to what we know of.

Chunda Kour knew her slave's value. From Dehli to Lucknow, at festivals, marriages, the durbars of princes, the merrymakings of rich bankers, even the sacred festivals of Hindu gods, and the anniversaries of Mahomedan saints, the Affghan girl danced and sang, and the gold of enraptured thousands was poured at her feet. Even the aged Ali Verdy Khan, the Nawab of Bengal, when Sozun arrived at Moorshedabad, thought no durbar complete without her; and when his favourite son, Suraj-oo-Doulah, besought him, besought his mother, to plead that Sozun might be presented to him, the girl felt her destiny was accomplished, and consented. The price demanded for her was paid, and she passed into the harem of the young prince, to be—as the gypsy astrologer had foretold—a queen? no; except in wealth and power, she could not be that, for a lawful wife was there before her; but when, on the 9th

day of April 1756, the brave old Tartar viceroy breathed his last, and Sozun was among the ladies of his family who wailed loudly for him, while the priests were chanting the last services over his body, she seemed to be on the threshold of the fulfilment of her desire.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE NAWAB AND HIS SLAVE.

“He loved her with all love, except the love  
Of men and women when they love the best.”

—TENNYSON.

“ART thou content now, my soul? or is there any desire at thy heart which I can fulfil? If there be, tell me. If it be on the world’s face, it shall be got for thee. I would not see one frown on thy brow, or hear a sigh from thy heart, Sozun, and that thou well knowest. But I am weary now, and thou must sing to me—weary of all my court, of never-ending advice and counsel, of my mother’s vain grief, of my friends and of my enemies, of all but thee, my life—my soul—for thou art ever fresh, ever beautiful! Sing to me, sweet one, one of those old mountain songs of thine, soft and low, for my brain is dizzy.” It was the Nawab who was speaking to his slave, Sozun.

“So soon weary, my lord,” said the girl, “and thy power but just begun? Were I like thee I would not be weary! Hast thou not a kingdom, a brave army,

wealth, and all newly come to thee? Wherefore, then, art thou weary?"

"Nay, nay, Sozun, no sage advice from thee," he replied. "Thou art my refuge from all this, which hath made my head throb and my heart sick. Sing to me, then, my soul, while I listen and forget."

The girl took up a small battered lute, tuned it, and began one of those old mountain airs in her own mother tongue, which still lingered in her memory. Years ago she had sung this to her mother, to her father in the camp by night, and to rough men who gathered round their little tent of spears and horse-cloths. The lute was her own, which, part of the gypsy's plunder of her dead father, she had begged for, and kept ever since. She was changed now, but the song was not changed, nor the old memories which came thick upon her as she looked upon her master, whom the soft low song had lulled to slumber. Was she happy? All she had dreamed of as belonging to wealth and power was in her grasp already, for the last obstacle to the complete possession of them had departed with the old Nawab. Was she happy with it all? I think not then, with those old memories, dim and faded as they were, but sweeter and more precious nevertheless, lying at her heart.

Suraj-oo-Doulah was asleep. "For this," said the girl, scornfully, as she cast her eyes over the recum-

bent figure—"for this I am what I am, and but a slave after all. Better free, even at the old trade, and the praise of thousands ringing in my ears and swelling my heart; and, better than all, dead—and yet not so. Can I not rule that thing, and make him serve my will?"

She put down the instrument with a heavy sigh, opened the carved window-screen gently, and looked out of the balcony. It was high above the ground, and from it she saw the broad river, with a few boats sailing lazily with the stream, which glittered in the heat. Beyond, a fair level country, dotted with villages and corn-fields, and groves of trees with heavy foliage, out of which white tops of Hindu temples with gilded spires sparkled in the sun; while all the scene trembled, as it were, under the vivid heat, fading away into a dim blue distance. No sounds broke the stillness, except the distant low of cattle bathing in the stream—the shrill whistling cry of kites which sailed and wheeled in the air, and the hum of flies as they whirled in a dizzy round about the window. Below, a company of gay horsemen and some foot-soldiers were leaving the outer court of the palace, and the town seemed asleep in the blaze of light which fell upon it, for about the streets no one was stirring.

On this day, the first great Durbar assembly of the

young prince had been held. It had been the first public declaration of his accession; and after the reception of all his courtiers, the leaders of his troops, his ministers of state, and the leading bankers and merchants of his own city, and the English factory at Cossim Bazar, it was perhaps not strange that the young Nawab was weary.

She to whom he had spoken, however, was not so, and her thoughts were very busy. Gradually she had come to understand the nature of the man to whom her destiny had linked her; and the more she knew of it the more deeply she resolved that it should not overcome her. It would be strange, perhaps, were anything of love combined with this. Of all the cautions she had received from her instructress, the most constant was, that she must shut her heart to love. She had to gain honour in her art, to gain wealth and power, but must harden her heart against all else; and hitherto these mercenary teachings had been followed with a hardness in execution which had excited Chunda Kour's perfect admiration. She had no rule of life but her own, and its precepts were hereditary. Other women might marry, might have children to love them, might love themselves; but one like her, a Tuwäif, never! To do so would be to sacrifice all, present and to come.

I say the more Sozun thought upon the figure

before her, the more rapidly all the old life memories faded out of her heart, and the rules, the hard rules of the new, entered it and abode grimly there; while the tears which had fallen fast from her eyes as she sang, dried on her flushed cheek as the hot air played upon it, and did not refresh her. The lute was still in her hand, and for a moment she was tempted to fling it away. "Thou wouldst be dashed to pieces, poor thing," she said to it, "but I could not forget thee. With thee I am as I am, and till I die thou shalt not leave me." The only bond of tenderness which linked her to the past, and to the good feelings of her nature, seemed to be that poor battered instrument; all else was hard and defiant now, as she had striven to make it.

Still he slept. That weary youth, with whom her destinies were linked, lay calmly before her. She knew him to be in her power. She believed, and believed truly, that of all about him—kindred, slaves, ministers, and creatures of his power—she alone was beloved. If in such a mind any love could exist, she had awakened and possessed it. She knew his heart to be cruel, rapacious, vindictive, insolent, and tyrannical. A coward, a profligate, and a traitor, she could not conceal from herself that he might some day turn on her unexpectedly, and destroy her as he had destroyed others. The

girl even shuddered at the idea for an instant ; but the next, had closed her teeth fiercely under the influence of the passionate thoughts which flashed through her brain. No ; whatever he was—hated, despised, dreaded—the Nawab Suraj-oo-Doulah was at least hers ; and with this assurance, a feeling of tenderness she had never before experienced—a fascination, as it were, she could not resist—had arisen slowly but surely, and was growing on her in spite of her precautions. It would be strange and unnatural indeed, if any human mind could exist without the germ of such feeling, which time and opportunity might call into action.

“Tell me,” she said, when he awoke at length, and stretched himself, holding out his arms as if to caress her—“tell me, my lord, what happened to-day in the Durbar ? Thou art my debtor for that sweet sleep, and to this old lute for playing thee to rest, and I ask payment.”

“I will tell thee, Sozun,” he said, as she seated herself by him, and his hand passed fondly over her fair cheek, “though thou wilt hardly care for our state doings and quarrels. Dost thou care, my soul ?”

“My lord’s friends are my friends, and his enemies are my enemies,” she replied, as her bosom heaved. “If his slave’s counsel is but that of a



woman, it is at least sincere and true, and may be useful, my——”

“Nay, enough, Sozun,” he replied, putting his hand on her mouth. “Who doubts thee, my pearl? Not I, by the Prophet. Thou shalt know all, and welcome. Listen. There was a servant of my father’s who held a high place, and collected and embezzled much of the revenue. He died. His son has left his post with all his wealth, and has taken refuge in the Feringi fort at Calcutta, and defies me. What wouldst thou do?”

“Do?” cried the girl, her eyes flashing—“do? Thou the Nawab of Bengal, whose bread they eat, under the shadow of whose splendour these Feringis live! and thou askest me? Do? I will tell thee. Give me thy army. I, Sozun, thy slave and a woman, will lead it to Calcutta—raze every stone of this Kaffir fort to the ground—and bring away that vile thief in defiance of them. Who are they that have eaten this abomination?”

“They are rich merchants, who bring hither stores of English goods—Kaffirs, and utter abominations to the faith of Islam; and I hate them, Sozun—I hate them because they do not fear me. One came to-day to the Durbar from the Bazaar. It was he, I know well, who sent on that thief and traitor; and he behaved insolently before

every one present. He looked round with an air of defiance, as though he were the Nawab, and I the Kaffir merchant, crouching at his feet."

"I would have had him seized and put in irons," cried the girl.

"I would rather have hanged him in the market-place, or tied him to the foot of an elephant, to have his Kaffir soul trampled out of him," he replied, savagely; "but their time is not come yet."

"Why not, my lord?" she asked; "are men afraid of these Feringis?"

He laughed bitterly. "My father was, but I am not, Sozun; I do not fear them," he said. "Men say they have received more guns from their ships, and have strengthened their fort. No, I fear them not; but, strange to say, my mother loves them! She sent for me to-day, and besought me not to quarrel with them. They were under the Emperor's protection, she said, and my father's, and she would not have the old agreements broken. I was angry with her, and I swore on the Koran which lay by her, that I would have revenge for their insulting defiance, and left her. I have written once more to Drake, who is in Calcutta, and if he gives up this thief Kissun-das, he is safe for the present; if not—Allah! he will rue it."

"Thou wilt take me with thee to see the English

Kaffirs and their ships, and the English shops! Ha, ha!" she cried, clapping her hands; "and thou shalt have thy revenge on all."

"Yes, I will have it, Sozun," he muttered through his teeth, "if I hang those cursed Feringis, every one of them, upon their own walls; and thou shalt see it, too. I swear to thee."

"And what of her, my lord?" said the girl, almost with hesitation, after a silence which she did not care to interrupt.

"Curse her!" said the Nawab, rising, and striking the cushion on which he was lying; "why did they ever marry me to her—a poor puling thing, who hates me, and whom I hate as I hate the Feringis. What of her? She is safe from thee, my rose—safe for many a day to come, I hope, and she may rot where she is, in the vault below. Thou mayest go if thou dost not believe me, and look at her. If she die soon, there will be one the less for thee to fret about."

"I do not fret about her, my lord," she replied, scornfully; "I hate her as thou dost, as I would hate anything that came between thee and me. Ah, thou lovedst her once, they tell me."

"Till I saw thee, Sozun? Never! But let that pass. What more have I to tell thee? A thousand things that vex me—of treachery, of plots, of intrigues. I

know not yet whom to trust or whom to fear; but time will show all. There are French Feringis and English Feringis, who thirst for each other's blood, and if the French will join me they might have the English Fort; but they dare not, for there is peace between their nations. I dread Meer Jaffier, with his smooth tongue and hollow heart, and he is too powerful for me to lay hands upon. I dread the Bankers and their intrigues. I dread——”

“Thou shalt fear nothing,” cried the girl, warmly —“no, not the fiend himself—while I am with thee, my lord. Strike boldly down all that oppose thee. If these English Feringis are strong, strike them down first, that men may tremble and obey. My lord is young in power yet, and needs to prove it. You said she was in the vault below: let me but see her there, and I am content till I see Calcutta blazing, and my lord victorious.”

“Go, then,” he replied. “Nasir will take thee;” and he clapped his hands.

One of the eunuchs without entered, and put up his hands, listening.

“Take him with thee,” said the Nawab; “he will show thee the place. The way is private.”

Sozun followed the man, and they descended by a private stair, which, long as she had been in the palace, she had never remarked before. When they

reached the foundation vaults, the man stopped before a door on which was a heavy padlock, unlocked it, and pushed it open. Except by a narrow loophole, above which some green leaves were waving, there was no other light. The place had a damp, dank smell; but it was swept, and on a pallet in a corner lay a slight figure, which rose as Sozun entered, and, drawing her white muslin scarf over her face more closely, asked in a gentle, girlish voice, "Who art thou? and why art thou come here?"

"Look at me," said Sozun, advancing close to her. "Thou hast heard of me, lady, enough I daresay. Thou art Suraj-oo-Doulah's wife; and I—— No matter, I am Sozun, his slave. Ah, he did not tell me how beautiful thou art! Dost thou know that I hate thee, O Begum!"

"I am very helpless," was the reply, "and wish to die. Why does he not kill me? O Allah! just and merciful, wilt thou behold such tyranny! Even as thou wilt, as thou wilt, O Lord!" and she sat down sobbing.

"He is mine, lady," resumed Sozun, in a hard voice—"mine, and cannot be thine. There is no peace between us, and if thou wert dead it would be well, or if I were dead it would be well."

"Hast thou no pity in thy heart? Why does he not let me go?" she returned.

“Pity, lady? None for thee, as thou hast none for me. No, thou canst not go hence; it would not be seemly.”

“I would not harm thee—I never harmed thee,” she replied, gently. “Let me go. What have I done to thee?”

“You would, you would!” cried Sozun, passionately. “You would drive me forth, you would trample on me if you dared, you would urge him to destroy me, as you have done before, and you know it, lady! It is my time now—why should I have pity? Have Affghans ever pity? I have none.”

“If I could only die,” said the lady, sighing dreamily, “there would be peace and rest. I have no friend but thee, O Lord!—none but thee!”

“Ameen,” returned Sozun, bitterly — “ameen! May the good God and the Prophet hear thee!”

They were both silent. The lady was sitting upon the edge of her pallet, covering her face with her muslin scarf, and sobbing piteously. The other, standing over her triumphant; a gorgeous shawl of Benares tissue, crimson and gold, floating around her head and person, beneath which a petticoat of cloth-of-gold swept to the floor. Had the lady looked up, she would have seen her own jewels displayed upon the dancer’s arms and hands, and one priceless diamond which, in the light which fell on them from the loop-

hole, flashed as the girl's bosom heaved under her excitement.

"Dost thou see these?" she cried, waving her hands and arms, on which the jewels sparkled. "Dost thou know them? They were thine, lady, and are now mine. Enough; I have seen thee, and will remember and dread thy beauty; and thou wilt not forget Sozun, the Affghan slave."

With these cruel words she turned, and when the door closed, and the clash of her anklets grew fainter and fainter, the lady bowed herself to the ground, and thanked God for the departure of her cruel enemy.

"I have seen her, my lord," said Sozun to the Nawab, when she returned to him, "and I have seen enough. Thou didst not tell me she was so lovely. By Allah! thou wert a fool to take me instead of her."

"And thou a fool to say so, Sozun," he replied, sharply; "but we need not quarrel. Is she safe, and art thou content?"

"Is she fed, my lord?"

"Surely," was the reply. "Thou wouldst not have me do murder, Sozun? and for thee?"

The girl laughed scornfully. "No," she replied, "not on her. It will be my care to feed her daintily, that she may live, and that I, Sozun, may look on her as I wish. Yes, she is safe, and I will keep her

so, even from thee, my lord—even from thee. I have taken the key. I am more to be trusted with it than Nasir perhaps.”

“Thou art a devil!” cried the young man, starting to his feet, “but so beautiful that I dare not harm thee.”

“Ah, my lord,” she replied, caressing him, “if I am as precious to thee as thou sayest I am, I need to protect myself for my lord’s sake. Thy wife is a royal lady, and I am only a poor Affghan soldier’s child. She hath friends, but I have none save myself—and thee.”



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE DURBAR AND THE DERWESH.

SOME weeks had elapsed, but the young Nawab had as yet shown no sign of offensive operations against the English. A trustworthy envoy had been despatched to Calcutta in disguise, bearing a letter to the chief of the English Factory, expressing anger at the increase of fortifications, and demanding in very peremptory terms the surrender of the vassal and servant who had taken refuge there. This emissary had not been fortunate. He had found the Factory officials alarmed and cautious, and he was not only denied admittance to the Fort, but, being dismissed beyond its boundaries as a spy, in an ignominious manner, had returned to his master, not only full of revengeful determination in regard to his own injuries, but as a very firebrand to the train already prepared to explode; for his tale fell upon willing ears. The Nawab had listened to it with a triumph

he could ill conceal, and there were few present in that evening council in the palace, who ventured to cross the young man's vindictive temper, or to point out the ultimate danger of the now meditated enterprise.

Perhaps indeed few, if any, could see its existence. The force of the English in Calcutta was accurately known, and seemed utterly insignificant. Each selfish in regard to individual ends and interests, it was not probable that any coalition of the European Factories would take place; and the Nawab knew for certain that, although the French would not openly break with him and espouse the cause of the English, they would greatly rejoice at their discomfiture. The French congratulations upon his accession had been peculiarly acceptable and submissive; and though he had received like courtesies from the English, the tone of independence which was perceptible in their letters, had appeared to him, and to his counsellors, little less than offensive arrogance. His own mind had been made up long ago; but to Sozun, the action she longed to see him engaged in, had been delayed almost past endurance.

At home there were no enemies who showed themselves. Those who had supported other pretensions, or were supposed to do so, had been dealt with summarily and vindictively; but I need not detail any of these events. What the native historians of his

own period as well as ours have depicted, Suraj-oo-Doulah had proved himself to be ; and for recent, as well as former acts, many among his own people were already weary of him, though where relief could come from was not perceptible. Time was, when the outcry of the people of a Mogul province found hearing in the Imperial Court at Dehli ; but that was past listening now : or when commanders of Imperial armies, serving in provinces, preserved the honour of the empire untarnished ; but the armies of the Nawab held no allegiance to Dehli ; they were in his own pay, and he believed them devoted to his interests. He had bestowed large largesses upon them out of his father's treasures, and every officer supposed to be unsound had been dismissed or removed. Upon those who were about him, then, the young man had strong reliance ; and it was with a company of them, and of his ordinary courtiers and officials, that he had heard that afternoon the story of his agent's disgrace, and of the implied insult to himself.

“ We are fallen somewhat low, my friends,” said the Nawab, looking round the apartment as the relation was concluded, “ when we hear that a few Kaffir Feringis have defied our power, and have sent back our messenger with a blackened face ! It seems to them, perhaps, that the glory and valour of the men of Islam has departed ; and the swords which

were red one day, that some here remember, in the blood of those infidel Mahrattas, are now washed in rose-water, sheathed, and laid by. What think ye, my friends? Is our cup full enough, or are we to have more abomination poured into it? Speak, Moulvee Sahib! you are the elder here, and have the experience of two generations. Nay, friends, be silent," he continued, as many cried out passionately; "let the holy man speak, that we may hear words of wisdom and inspiration."

Moulvee Wullee-oo-Deen was the chief priest of the great mosque at Moorshedabad; and, as his office required of him, was not only learned in all ceremonials and observances, but an intense and furious bigot, especially famous for sermons against Christians. Hindus, truly, were abominable infidels; but Christians were worse. Had they not impiously and defiantly broken the covenant which the Lord made with Abraham? They were uncircumcised dogs: and in his virulent attacks upon them, this breach of covenant was always his strong point of argument. The Moslem priest was a small, thin, sallow-faced man, with a large aquiline nose, a retreating chin, and a straggling beard, the hairs of which might be counted. His upper teeth were large and projecting, and his scraggy lean throat, barely concealed by a thin beard, seemed composed of bones and sinews

only, with a few thick veins spreading over them, which swelled out, as did those in his forehead, when he began to speak and grew excited. But the Moul-vee was already boiling over, and his sense of etiquette alone had prevented his interrupting the Nawab in the ironical speech he had just made.

“My lord! my lord!” he cried, “let the vengeance of Alla descend upon them! How often have I raised this feeble voice in vain against these detestable Ferings! First, there was one ship and a few merchants, and one nation; now there are three nations, and the ships come in fleets, like the flocks of birds at harvest time. I have no new words to speak. To my lord’s honoured father, to the lady mother, my speech hath been ever the same. Curse them! I have cried as I do now—curse them!” he continued, raising his shrill voice to a scream—“curse them, drive them into the sea, and let my land be delivered from them for ever!”

“Ameen! ameen!” rose in a low murmur round the room, as those present twisted their mustaches, and grasped the hilts of their swords.

“What say the stars, my friend? How are these infidels’ horoscopes and our own at present? Hast thou proved this, O Moulvee?” asked the Nawab.

“My lord,” cried the Priest, “I have no knowledge of this art; I only know what is written in the blessed Koran——”

“I know it too, Moulvee Sahib. May the grace of God be on the writer ; but I would fain know how the planets point in this matter. Such art is beneath your holiness, that I know ; but there may be those known to you who can assist us by it.”

“What need of the stars, my lord ?” said a burly Tartar officer, who sat near. “These are the best stars we can follow, which each of us bears by his side,” and he held up his sword.

The Moulvee turned on the speaker a scornful look as he replied, “We have holy warrant for astrology, sir, and you are ignorant to despise it.”

“I don’t know that we looked after the stars when Ali Verdy Khan told us to tighten our waistbands before we rode through those Kaffir Mahrattas,” retorted the Tartar, angrily ; “and if we had waited for them, they might have been long of coming. So may these stars of the accursed Feringis, who have thrown dirt on our beards. May their fathers burn in hell for it.”

“Peace !” cried the Nawab, interposing ; “when we know what our holy friend can tell us, we shall be the more sure ; and thou, Moulvee Sahib, must see to it forthwith.”

“I think,” replied the Priest, “that this need not long be delayed. In the cloisters of the mosque a wise man hath resided for some days past, who hath

wonderful power, my lord—wonderful! Mashalla, it is great! and he has bestowed amulets on the poor, which heal sickness as by a miracle. In your servant's family a case occurred but yesterday, in which the malice of many devils was frustrated; and yet the patient had long suffered. The Durwesh hath visited Beejapoor, and the shrine of Sofee Surmust, and that of the blessed Geesoo Duraz, at Gulbergah; and, in short, my lord, he is an apostle of charity; but he is rough and free-spoken. Will your Highness submit this matter to him? I know no other so worthy or so wise."

"Inshalla!" cried the Nawab, whose well-known superstition was at once strongly excited—"Inshalla! How say you, my friends?"

When an Eastern ruler makes a proposition, there are few perhaps in his council hardy enough to oppose it; and except the old Tartar soldier, and some Hindus present, there were none certainly there who did not desire to see the Nawab's intention forthwith carried out. One, however, honoured and trusted perhaps beyond the rest—a secretary who had risen to distinction under the Nawab's father—was sitting behind the Prince, and putting a handkerchief to his mouth, leant forward and whispered caution.

"This is no matter for public assembly, my Prince," he said. "Dismiss those that are here, and see to

this matter in private. What if the result be unfavourable?"

Suraj-oo-Doulah laughed scornfully. He was in a reckless defiant humour, and it was not safe to cross his purpose. "If any one but thee, Anwar Ali," he replied, "had said that, he should have had his tongue cut out. Be silent, and do not lose your respect. Beware, I say!" and as the man shrank back terrified and trembling, silence fell upon the courtiers, which was only broken by the Nawab himself. "Send for the man," he said—"for this holy fakeer from Beejapoor, who is thy friend, Moulvee Sahib. Let him be brought forthwith."

"God forbid!" returned the Priest, lifting his joined hands. "He is no *friend* of mine, only a poor disciple, my Prince, to whom I have imparted some mysteries of revelation. A rough fellow, my lord, and unlearned in all science, except that of his art. They say," he added in a low tone, "he was once an infidel Brahmin, but hath been converted to the faith."

"Enough!" cried the Nawab; "where are the players? we have had sufficient of this Feringi council. Let us see the Kaffirs themselves. Let them enter—they will make some fun for us."

As he spoke, four men, dressed ludicrously in English costume of the period, and with whitened faces,



preceded by others bearing a table and four chairs, with some glasses and a bottle, entered the hall: and having made their obeisance, seated themselves on the chairs, and, pretending to drink, made show of draining glass after glass, till the bottle was finished, and was replaced by another.

“Mercy of the Prophet!” exclaimed the Nawab, “no one speaks.”

“May it please your Highness,” said another man, advancing, who acted as spokesman for the players, “these Kaffirs never speak till the wine begins to get into their brains. If your Majesty will only wait.”

It was impossible to maintain gravity, and the Nawab and his courtiers burst into peals of laughter. The men, beginning to sway about in their chairs, as bottle after bottle was brought and supposed to be finished, held out their glasses to each other, clinked them together, and apparently tossed off the contents. — One after another, too, dipped his head under the table, and raised it up with his face changed from white to scarlet, and drank more furiously than before. At last one rose, and, steadying himself by the table, bawled out, “De king—hip! hip! hooray!” —and the three others, also rising, echoed, “De king—hip! hip! hooray!” and sat down again. No sooner had this been done than the first once more rose, and cried, “De Coompani—hip! hip! hooray!”

and was answered as before by a cry of, "De Coompani—hip! hip! hooray!" After that, each man in quick succession bawled out other toasts, and filled his glass, while all together began to jabber an utterly unintelligible gibberish, in which a few coarse English words and oaths were intermingled. Presently, too, one of the players pretended to quarrel with another, and was pulled back by a third; and songs which had little tune, but of which the purport could not be mistaken, were howled independently, till the clamour and riot became indescribable, and the scene ended by one after another of the men tumbling from his chair to the ground.

"Protection of God!" cried the Nawab, holding his sides, "is this the truth? The Feringis at Cossim Bazar are not like this."

"May I be your sacrifice," cried the spokesman, in an attitude of supplication, "your slaves have seen them all like this at Calcutta. There is no lie in it; and the next act is their dance, which is better still. Will my lord see it?"

"The Fakeer is present," said an attendant, "and salutes my Prince."

Suraj-oo-Doulah looked up, as a remarkable figure advanced through the Court, and stood before him without salutation.

"Salute the Nawab! salute the King!" cried many

voices, but the man looked round him disdainfully, and said in a commanding voice, "I never salute any but God,"—then turning to the mummers, part of whose performance he had unwillingly witnessed, he cried—"Begone, ye shameless, thus to defile God's image! I have seen the durbars of kings and princes of the faith from Constantinople to Dehli, but never, O Nawab, did I behold so shameless a scene as this. What dost thou require of me? Speak!" and the Fakeer drew himself up proudly, and looked around him.

A tall, gaunt figure, with matted hair twisted round his head; a long grey beard, partly turned over his ears; naked to the waist, with every bone of his attenuated body starting out under the skin in painful relief; a long purple and white cotton waist-cloth descending to his ankles, and a soft leopard skin depending from his shoulders. The Nawab had rarely beheld so weird a figure, and started at the abrupt and defiant address.

"Thou mightst use civil speech, friend," he said haughtily.

"Nay, my lord," whispered the Priest, "a holy man, and rough of speech, as I said; to be pardoned, therefore, as it is his custom. He knows no master but God."

"Tell him what I want," replied the Nawab in a

surly tone, "and let him depart in the devil's name, as soon as he has answered."

"Come hither, friend," said the Priest, blandly, "and sit down here by me," and the Moulvee sidled away a little. "His Highness hath need of thy art, and would know how the holy mysteries of thy science explain the planets in conjunction on the—on the——" and he looked to the Nawab, uncertain whether he should tell what had passed.

"My army is going to Calcutta," said the Nawab, "and I would know the result. Dost thou fear to speak?"

"Fear!" cried the man—"only slaves fear. I am the slave of God and the Prophet, and I fear not man. I will tell thee, but I will not sit in this assembly.

For a few minutes the Fakeer was silent as if in prayer. He then took some silver tablets from his girdle and consulted them.

"Speak quickly," cried the Nawab, "and the less of thy mummary the better."

"Listen," said the Fakeer, solemnly. "The conjunction of planets is good. For a year there is no change, and there will be victory to thee, O Nawab!"

"Victory!" echoed the Prince. "Do ye hear?—Victory!" and the words were taken up by all around,

till the court resounded with the cry of "Futteh-i-Nubbee! victory to the Prophet!"

"Wouldst thou know more, Prince? It is not good what thy destiny reveals to me."

"I fear not," was the hard reply; "but if thou liest, by Alla, thou hadst better never have seen me."

"O Prince! a holy man, a holy man! His speech is privileged," interposed the Moulvee, with a deprecatory gesture.

"Be silent," said the Fakeer. "If thou wilt hear, listen to what I see in the future—defeat, misery, and to thy enemies triumph."

"A lie, a lie!" shouted the Nawab; "beat him on the mouth with a shoe."

"I fear thee not," continued the man, "raving as thou art like a madman. God hears thee, impious man, and will smite thee. Beware of these Feringis, I say, and harm them not. They are true, they are charitable. When I lay sick to death at Bombay, they put me into their hospital; they fed and clothed me, and I love them. They are just and true, I say, and I honour them, and do not forget them. Enough! If they have to suffer, they have to suffer. Ameen, ameen, and the grace of God be on them!"

"And the curse of the Shaitan be on thee, O fountongued Derwesh!" cried the Nawab, savagely, with an obscene oath. "Thou hast not forgotten them?"

Ah, well, nor thou shalt not forget me. Ahmed!—some of ye, cut off his ears—there, before me as he stands.”

Before the Fakeer could resist—before he could speak—he was pinioned, dragged back a few paces, and mutilated with a sharp knife. Bleeding and faint, he was buffeted into the outer court, and thence pushed into the street, followed by mocking shouts.

“Ya, Alla!” he cried, lifting his hands—red with his own blood which had streamed over his body—to the sky, “O thou just God! wilt thou not avenge this? Enough for me that it is thy will!”

That night the Fakeer disappeared from the mosque, and was no more seen; but we may meet him again.

“And now, my friends,” said the Nawab, when the ears of the Fakeer had been displayed to him, “we would be at rest. Be ready with your troops for to-morrow. Inshalla! we will plunder the English shops at Cossim Bazar, and there will be rare booty for all.”

“What was the disturbance in the Durbar, my lord?” asked Sozun, with a scared face, when the Nawab joined her in the zenana shortly afterwards.

“A mad Fakeer was insolent to me, and I had his ears cut off: wouldst thou like to see them? Take care I do not the same to thee some day,” was the brutal reply. “Sing to me Sozun; my spirit is dis-

turbed to-night, and thou alone canst quiet it. Sing, dost thou hear? Art thou like him, insolent?"

The girl took her little lute, and sang: but there was no heart in her sad song that night; it had gone far away among the blue Affghan mountains, and would not return. "Ah me, alas!" she sighed, and burst into tears, as her master tossed restlessly on the bed where he had flung himself.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FACTORY, CALCUTTA, 1756.

WHILE these scenes were passing at Moorshedabad, we may well believe that the gentlemen of the Calcutta Factory were not without serious apprehension. When Ralph Darnell landed, indeed, there was no suspicion of probable interruption to the general prosperity. Ali Verdy Khan was alive, and his life promised to be a long one. If a few of the most experienced men then feared, when the time did come, that a new succession to the throne of Ali Verdy Khan, for it was little else, would bring fresh demands, and disturb existing rights—there were others who, despising such counsels, anticipated even greater extension of privileges, which as yet had experienced no serious interruption. Trade was very active and very prosperous; and society was in accordance with its prosperity, free and reckless, not to say licentious and immoral. Ralph, as yet, had done no more than



every fashionable man in London daily practised; but though by no means squeamish, he found, in the English society of Calcutta, harder drinking, coarser swearing, and deeper play, than he had been accustomed to, and a general tone of profligacy which belonged, as it were, to a lower grade of society altogether. I am by no means desirous of claiming any remarkable amount of virtue for Ralph Darnell, or, as we must henceforth call him, Ralph Smithson, at this period of his life; but the old injunction of his uncle, that there never had been a Darnell that was not a gentleman, came more and more vividly to his remembrance as he witnessed, and often had to share, the orgies which were enacted, if not in the official Factory hall, at least in the private houses of the members and officers of the Factory. We should gain little, I think, by records of these doings, or of the men who passed their time in the society of Mahomedan dancing-women, or their native mistresses. Money was abundant, and was freely squandered upon these parasites. It did not signify much whether a man's nominal pay were twenty pounds a-year or a hundred. All lived at the rate of thousands, and bought and sold their own investments with a boldness which Ralph gradually grew to comprehend, and in which he largely shared himself.

He had been received by Mr Wharton with great

kindness and hospitality. The worthy Captain Scrafton, and the chief officer of the Valiant, the only persons to whom his real name and history were known, had kept his secret ; and to Mr Wharton, the young well-mannered Englishman Ralph Smithson, in whom Mr Darnell "had an interest," and who came to Calcutta so well provided with money, was very welcome ; while his frank manners and cheerful disposition soon rendered him a very general favourite.

Ralph had stared about him in wonderment at the first official dinner on New-Year's Day, 1766, in the great Factory hall, where all the members of the service dined together off good old English fare of roast beef and plum-pudding, mingled with hot curries and dishes pertaining to the country, and after dinner the hookas of the guests were brought in, and with their long and richly ornamented shanks, and gold and silver mouthpieces and "chillams," deposited behind their chairs by well-dressed servants, and a general gurgling and bubbling began, and toasts were drunk in the Company's rare old Madeira—"the King," the "Honourable East India Company," and the like—at the hottest hour of the day, and the guests departed afterwards to don cooler garments and finish the evening with gambling and profligate riot,—if Ralph at first, as I say, wondered at all this, he very soon grew to be accustomed to it. One great trial and

danger of his life had passed away, and his spirits were hopeful and elastic. It was strange, perhaps, to Mr Wharton, and far stranger to young men of his own age, to see Ralph careful and prudent, and on this account he was not so popular among his young friends there as he might otherwise have been.

Perhaps Ralph's induction into gay life in England proved to be now of service to him. I am decidedly of opinion that it did; for it too often happens that those youths, sent direct from home influences and the strictest previous guidance into strange society, no sooner find themselves free from restraint, than they plunge more madly than others into excesses of all kinds. Hot, dissipated youths, who drank arrack-punch every night, gambled, and did other naughty things which I need not detail—feared, while they respected or disliked, as it might be, the young Englishman who declined to join their excesses, and, holding himself aloof from intimacy, was only courteous and kind to all.

It may hardly be supposed, either that Ralph took the place he did without opposition, or that he had no enemies. Every society, in particular one which is necessarily limited, and composed of very heterogeneous materials, has its bullies, and that of Calcutta was no exception. When rough invitations were declined civilly, or refused peremptorily, taunts had

followed, and insults. We have had already some specimens of Mr Ralph's temper, and can understand that such were resented. Duels generally ended these quarrels, and gentlemen fought with their small swords as others did in England. As there "a man of spirit" had to fight before he was known to be one, so more especially in Calcutta; and our friend had already had two affairs, in both of which he had disarmed his antagonist, who, in fact, were weak and unskilful opponents of the stout Northumbrian gentleman. Ever since he could hold a rapier, his old uncle Geoffrey had taught him the use of one; and the Baronet was beginning to say "Ralph was growing too much for him," when he was sent to London. There too, as a pupil of Mr Sutton, Ralph had not neglected his opportunities; and his style of attack and defence was, as may be supposed, infinitely superior to that of the Calcutta gentlemen. His easy conquests of those by whom he had been challenged, therefore, rendered others careful. Ralph would allow no liberties to be taken with him, and every one came to know this in course of time.

Up to the period we are arrived at, Ralph had remained with Mr Wharton as his guest. Mr Wharton would not hear of his living in the chambers of the Factory, and presently grew so attached to him that

what had been intended by Ralph as a temporary sojourn only, had now been protracted for several months, and was likely to be continued. There were two other alternatives—the one, to build a small thatched cottage or bungalow for himself; the other, to board with one of the chief clerks of the Factory who acted as book-keeper, and who lived in the native town, but at no very great distance from the fort. It was not uncommon to see two or more youths living together apart from the Factory; and any escape from the confinement of the fort was most desirable; but the style of such living did not suit Ralph—it was generally the precursor of those native attachments from which few were then free, and these in Ralph's eyes had no charm. As yet his mind was full of his sweet cousin Constance; and poor Sybil—Ah, poor Sybil! does she ever think of me? he would ask himself sometimes, and so dream away his thoughts.

No doubt, Don Gomez da Silviera, the book-keeper, could have made him very comfortable; and the "Don Sahib," as all styled him, had taken unusual notice of Ralph. Soon after he began to attend the office of the Factory, the Don found Ralph to be a good man of business, who required no teaching; who, in fact, could teach many things himself. The Don called himself a Portuguese nobleman, and

possessed a strange character of combined subservience and pride. When his noble ancestor might have come from his native Portugal to Bengal, and begun the black degenerate race of which the Don was the present representative, it is impossible to say; equally as impossible to account for the Portuguese of Bengal being, as they most frequently are, blacker than any natives. So it was in Don Gomez da Silviera's case; the Don was jealous of his pure descent from the "Don Gomez da Silviera" ancestor, and kept a family tree to prove it, and ancient Portuguese histories in which the Silvieras were mentioned as the companions and ministers of royalty. The Don was, therefore, an educated man in his degree; but his acquaintance with English literature was confined to the spelling-book of Mr Mavor and the dictionary, and had resulted in the oddest collection of English words that could well be conceived. They were fine and high-sounding, but, as he spoke them, what meaning he intended to convey by them was generally very mysterious to the hearers, and could only have been intelligible to himself by his own thoughts. The Don's wife, Donna Luisa, was a fat worthy woman, who spoke no English, and there were two daughters and two sons; the latter working as copying clerks in the Factory, and the girls growing up at home as black as their parents, but

in intense admiration of the fair, rosy-cheeked Englishman, whom they saw occasionally.

Don Gomez da Silviera had purposed to take Ralph as a boarder. He had a garden-house—that is, a house in a *campão* or compound, or enclosed space laid out as a garden—with a detached bungalow, all which Mr Smithson might have to himself; and Ralph had seen that it was very comfortable. When he proposed to move from Mr Wharton's house, however, there was such an outcry of opposition that he was forced to abandon the scheme altogether—nobody would hear of it. Mr Wharton ridiculed the idea of a covenanted servant—for Ralph's papers had followed him—living with a mere clerk. Such a thing had never before been heard of. Mr Wharton's children—he had three, two girls and a boy, whose mother was a native—burst out sobbing, and clung about him crying, scolding, and coaxing by turns, and most of all Mr Wharton's wife's silent reproaches were hardest to resist.

Mr Wharton had written to Mr Darnell that he had lately married, and Julia Wharton had not been a wife for a year when Ralph arrived. One of the first parties in which the ladies and gentlemen of the Factory assembled together after Ralph's arrival, was to celebrate their wedding-day; and a merry one it was, after Calcutta fashion, in the cold weather.

There had been jolly country-dances and reels, with here and there a minuet; and Julia Wharton had not forgotten, never would forget, one that she danced with the handsome fresh-coloured youth, dressed in the best fashion of London, and alike by his grace and manner putting to shame those whom she had assembled; nor could she forget, either, the walk afterwards through the garden, decked out with Chinese lanterns and Bengal lamps, and a glorious moon shining over all, and over the broad calm river with the ships and native boats lying there reflected in it. She had not forgotten that night, and her own heart was sorely stirred; but as yet Ralph Smithson was only her guest, a courteous and pleasant one, whom she could not part with to go to Don Gomez da Silviera and his dusky daughters.

Julia Wharton was no beauty perhaps, but she was a fresh English girl, with saucy blue eyes, a nose somewhat turned up, reddish auburn hair, a bright rosy mouth, pearly teeth, and a cheek like a peach, which even Calcutta had not yet blanched. She was very fair, with a plump figure and tiny waist, and knew how to dress herself so as to display her charms to the best advantage. Of education she had had little enough; but she could play on the harpsichord and guitar, and sing, rather theatrically perhaps, with a



good voice. There were many speculations at Calcutta as to what Miss —— had been before she came out there; but whether true or false, we have no concern with them. Young women, as well as young men, were occasionally sent to India for indiscretions in those days. She had been received by friends to whom she had been sent out; and she was in the eyes of the gentlemen of Calcutta a dazzling beauty, so there was much competition for her hand; and, finally, after a very short courtship, Mr Wharton, one of the oldest, and certainly the richest of the society, offered to settle a lac of rupees upon her, presented her with a gorgeous necklace of pearls, and having promised to put away her native predecessor, married her. This was what the girl had been sent to India for, and she had done it, as every one told her, to the best advantage. Did she think so herself? I think not; but what had been done could not be undone, and I am afraid that her predecessor and Ralph Smithson together, gave her more uneasiness than I need account for.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### DISQUIET.

TROUBLES were coming fast upon that small English settlement; and as the days passed drearily, the rumours which were hourly arriving in Calcutta were confirmed by news of overt acts on the part of the young Nawab, or Subah, as he was generally denominated, for which we have already accounted. I do not think it necessary to detail the native political events at Moorshedabad; but I may mention that, on the ostensible pretence of coercing a refractory vassal, the Subah had ordered his army to march, and had accompanied it. He did not, however, proceed to the first declared destination of his forces; but turned suddenly on the English Factory at Cossim Bazar, twenty miles below his capital, and invested the place; making prisoners of the few English gentlemen there, and appropriating all the spoils. Here was the first victory gained, and a

bloodless one too, for there were no local means of resisting an attack by fifty thousand men. The poor gentlemen had written to Calcutta in their sore strait for help; but there was none to be had, and none could have reached them in time to prevent what, indeed, was not to be averted.

After that, deprecatory letters to the young Subah were written from Calcutta, with grave remonstrances and reminders of ancient friendship and of the imperial deeds and grants of Dehli; but to very little purpose, except to confirm the Nawab's idea, that the English were, after all, helpless beggars, and thus make him resolve once for all, that their ancient arrogance was to be humbled to the dust. It was in vain that the kind old Begum, the Nawab's mother—always friendly to Englishmen—besought her son not to molest them. "She would become peacemaker," she said, "and restore the former good understanding." All she could effect, however, was to save the lives of the gentlemen who had given themselves up, trusting to her son's honour, and to preserve them, in some measure, from ill-usage and indignity.

Thais was urging on her royal lover, and his good mother's warnings were cast to the winds. Perhaps, indeed, he needed little urging. Cruel and vindictive by nature, as he had ever been, he could ill brook opposition at any time. Now, the counsels of the

Affghan girl accorded with his own. Her fierce passionate nature was developing itself, and his own had blended with it to insure the rejection of any peaceful advice. Advocacy of the English cause had been interdicted; and whosoever had dared to offer any, might well have said his last prayer, and made himself ready for death or mutilation, as he proposed it.

Under these circumstances, what booteth the English letters of remonstrance, the reiterations of no offence being intended, or the denial of new fortifications? Offence had been given; some new defences, under the apprehension of French attacks, had undoubtedly been constructed. The old system of bribery of officers to propose deprecatory offerings to their master, which had often succeeded in the days of the Empire, was now hopeless. No one would dare to propose what might result in instant death, or disgrace.

And all this having happened, the council that sat in Calcutta Factory on the 7th day of June 1756 were left in no doubt whatever as to what awaited them, when they heard direct from the Cossim Bazar Factory of what had been done there on the 2d of that month, and that the Subah's army had, for the most part, marched for Calcutta itself, under his own personal command. The bloodless victory which I have recorded had but whetted the young ruler's

appetite, and, had there been no other reason, very shame at delay would have urged him on.

“Thou wilt be less than a man,” had the Affghan girl said, “if this be abandoned. Thy people will spit at thee, and the children will cry coward in the streets. None of thy slaves in the Durbar dare tell thee this, but I fear not. If I cannot live for my own honour, I can live for thine.”

Perhaps such vehement adjuration was not needed; for the Nawab only laughed at his beautiful slave's enthusiasm, as he bid her be content, for she should see the English ships and the English treasury ere the month had passed, and she believed him now.

I have no need, then, to say that the council which sat in Calcutta that 7th of June was an anxious one. It was the end of the hot weather, and before the rain should fall the heat would be greater and greater. Those were not days of comfort in India: we Englishmen had not come to know how to live. In Calcutta, as everywhere else, it was for the most part a short life and a merry one. There were no good houses, no palaces as there are now. Some English-looking warehouses, a factory-hall and close chambers for the public servants, a barrack for the soldiers within the Fort, and a few garden-houses without, where the air was fresher and cooler, with

a church, completed "the Factory." There were few means of keeping out the heat, and little mitigation of it when it came into the houses, as it did fiercely on that 7th of June, when the English gentlemen sat in the great hall wiping their faces, and being fanned by their native servants.

What could they do? There were only a hundred and seventy-four soldiers there, many of whom were sick in hospital, and some weak convalescents. There were crews of ships to be sure, but these would be wanted on board. There was a large area to defend, and if the enemy were not checked at once, there was little hope of saving the settlement. There was great stress laid on this by the most experienced, and not without reason: for if the Subah once began to negotiate, they might hope to gain terms—hard enough perhaps—but still terms after all. What, however, if he refused all negotiation as he had hitherto done?

There was certainly no aid to be had—neither the French nor the Dutch would, if they could, aid them: as one gentleman of the period has quaintly recorded, "The French gasconaded." They offered shelter, if the English chose to leave all and come up the river to them. I believe that the French gentlemen at Chandernagore felt very easy at the prospect of their English guests; and, as war was expected

shortly, had little hope of seeing their invitation accepted. Leave Calcutta? Leave the Honourable East India Company's goods and chattels? their homes and their fort? There were the ships anchored before the Fort; and, if they pleased, if the worst came to the worst, nothing would be simpler than to get on board them and sail away as they had come: but—what would they say in England?

The question has often been asked, and answered, for the most part, in the same way. I do not believe that all were brave in Calcutta that day—there were more despairing hearts there than it was pleasant to think about; but there were enough brave men to determine to fight the place to the last in any extremity, and these were the majority, as they always will be wherever Englishmen are gathered together with any great national honour or stake to be defended, whether on the land or on the sea. So when the military gentlemen had gone over their musters again, and calculated their means of defence, they called to the butler for a bottle or two of the prime old madeira, and drank, with a cheer which made the roof ring, to the “Long life of the Company, and damnation to all Moors!” and felt their hearts stronger within them when they had done it.

When Mr Wharton and Ralph Smithson walked up to the garden-house that hot evening, some of the

preparations were in progress, some militia were being drilled, and Don Gomez, as the captain of a company, saluted them on the esplanade with a gravity worthy of a Silviera.

“Dis dam sulphurity night, gen’lemen,” he said; “I’se too much countervaluated to obligatory dreel dese men; dey won’t do regularity exercisements, nohow at all proper, because affrightenation in deir bellies, sir; ’cause of Nawab Sahib, dat is Subah we calls ’im, comin’ with two lacs of armamentation, sir; so dey say in Bazar, sir—’pon my honour, sir, by George!”

“Pooh, pooh! Don, don’t be frightened,” said Mr Wharton, laughing; “two lacs is a great many, that’s two hundred thousand, you know. God bless me! enough to eat us all up, and we’re not come to that yet. Now, you sirs, attention! Let me see what you’re made of.”

“Me frightened! Oh no, sir—not Don Gomez da Silviera. Me Portugueze, sir, service of Honourable Company, and Leften’ in Calcutta Militia. No gentleman terrified at all of dam’ black Moors; w’en dey comes, sir, we gives ’em won wolly, and den dey alls runs away, sir, by George!—and w’en de incurvation of the flightiness happen, den we runs a’ter them, sir. I tell my men all dis, Mr Smithson, but dey all indetermined to make warfare, dey says.”



“Hallo! mutiny, Don? This will not do at all. What did they say?”

“Dey says, indexically, as I may say, sir, dat dey’s no fi’tin’ men, sir. Got childer, sir, an’ women, an’ all’s got indexterity to never do no dreel. By George! Mr Wharton, sir, dey’s dam’ coward, dat’s what dey is; an’ I can’t make ’em magniloquent nohow; try all afternoon, sir, ’pon my honour, by George!”

“Well, drill them as well as you can, Don,” said Mr Wharton, good-humouredly; “if they won’t fight, they’ll do to stand on the rampart, and make the Fort look full of men, which it isn’t, more’s the pity. Good evening to you, Don Gomez; we may hear better news to-morrow.”

“Good evening, gentlemen,” returned the little Don, with a wave of his laced hat which would not have disgraced Birdcage Walk — “good evening. Now, ’tention men! Dere’s Mr Drake and Captain Minchin comin’ up, and if dey sees you with dat longanimity of physionomities, I tink will scratch your backs, an’ be dam’d to you, or put in black hole, ’pon honour, by George, dey will! So look out, you fellows. ’Tention! Shoulder armmes! Now, see you make present proper to Mr Drake.”

Leaving the Don and his company to be inspected, I shall follow Mr Wharton to his pretty house, where

he was expected anxiously. Evening was closing in, as the gentlemen, after their usual stroll on the Mall by the river-side, went on to the gate, where a native soldier stood on guard, the barrel of his bright match-lock glinting in the setting sun as it shone across the broad river in a rich yellow light, flooding the air with golden radiance, and resting upon the vanes of ships, the gilt pinnacles of Hindu temples, in glowing sparkles; while, on the cavalier of the Fort, the old British flag clung heavily to the staff. As the sun dipped behind the trees on the western bank, a puff of smoke from a bastion was followed by the sharp report of a gun, and the fort-flag and the ensigns of the ships were hauled down, as the drums and fifes in the Fort played off the retreat. It was too hot to stroll farther, and Mr Wharton was weary with his work of that day. As his children ran to meet him with a merry greeting in their native Hindustani, he put them aside; and, as his wife came forward, he said, "I must have some rest, Julia; Smithson will tell you all about it; my head aches, darling, and I will lie down till supper is ready: sit outside—there will be a breeze from the river by-and-by, and it will be cooler."

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

PERRIN'S REDOUBT, JUNE 16, 1756.

THERE is little time in the evening gloaming between light and darkness in Calcutta, and gradually, but swiftly, the objects on the further bank of the great river faded away. The broad stream itself seemed to mingle with the sky, and the gloom of night fell upon the little garden and shrubbery in front of the house which sloped down to the water's edge. Boats with lanterns twinkling from the tops of their high sterns were flitting to and fro mysteriously on the glassy surface like so many *ignes fatui*, becoming dimmer and dimmer amidst the mist which was slowly rising from the water. Then fireflies innumerable came out and whirled among the trees; and crickets and frogs by the river-side kept up an incessant concert; within the house, where the candles were lighted, the air seemed full of insects flying about the flame, scorching their wings and falling on the tablecloth. That

was no place to sit with comfort, and Mrs Wharton and her companion were better without. Occasionally, the sound of shrill native music came up on the air from the town, where lights were sparkling in the distance: else all was still, and the merry laugh of the children at play in an inner room was hardly an interruption to a silence which was growing very oppressive to both. All that happened in the council was generally known to Ralph Smithson. He had told Mrs Wharton as much of it as he could without causing her extreme alarm, and after that they were silent.

It was impossible for each not be busy with their own thoughts; it was equally impossible to shut out the conviction of danger. There were those among the reckless who met it with defiance, or sought temporary oblivion in strong drink; and there were others, too, who looked upon the crisis with a higher fortitude and resignation.

“And there is no hope of bringing the Subah to terms, Mr Smithson? has everything been tried?” asked the lady, at length.

“I believe so,” was the reply. “I am too young in rank to be admitted to the council; but Mr Wharton told me as we walked from the Fort that he feared the Subah was implacable. There are a thousand reports, madam, flying about; but what

I have heard from good authority—in fact, from Omichund, whom they have detained in the Fort—is, that the Nawab has a new favourite, and she urges him on to the sack of our poor Fort. This doth not appear openly, but all the people seem to know it, and these native bankers have always good intelligence. I have little hope, madam, if there is such an influence at work, that we can counteract it.”

“ Oh, Mr Smithson, how wicked they are !” broke out Mrs Wharton, “ these shameless creatures. You will hardly believe what I have to endure even as I am. I do not understand a word of what is said to me even by those children ; but they know I am not their mother, and—and—indeed, Mr Smithson, I cannot bear it—I cannot indeed. Oh, if I had known in time, this would never have been ; I would have died sooner—I would die now if I could. Look,” she continued, repressing a great sob—“ look into the parlour, you will not find him there ; he is gone to her : he often goes now—— Oh that I should have to bear this, and for a black woman too ! Is it fair, Mr Smithson, after all his promises ? Is it honourable ?”

Mrs Wharton need not have feared her husband's honesty if she had known what then was passing between him and the mother of his children. What have we to do with the past, or with the connections which were matters of ordinary daily life in those days in

India? There are some even now that say, we are none the better there that they do not exist; and that in losing them we loosed one of the surest ties which bound us to the country and the people. Nay, the subject is gravely treated of in serious histories. I only say Mr Wharton, when he married his wife, was faithful to her as a true English gentleman should be; but he had not lost his respect, perhaps his love, for one who had loved and had been faithful to him for many a year. She had been put away. It was only what she had foreseen must ensue sooner or later; but her tie to Mr Wharton, that of her three children, could not be altogether broken, and while he remained in India she had only implored to stay near them, that she might sometimes see them. I say, then, if Julia Wharton could have seen her husband, as ill thoughts of him flashed through her mind, and jealousy was possessing her, she would have seen no wrong that night.

He was telling a graceful native lady of middle age, who was weeping bitterly, that he believed his time had come; that he had a presentiment he should not survive the coming struggle, and had made provision for her; that, in case the Fort were attacked, she must protect her children, and was explaining to her how she was to obtain the large sum he had settled upon her, the interest of which would be paid to

her by the agent of the great native banker, Juggut Seit. All this Mr Wharton told to his wife afterwards when it was too late. Where he erred was in not doing this sooner, so as to have saved mutual misery in those sad sad days of trial.

Ralph Smithson got up and looked into the centre hall. Mr Wharton was not there. The bedchamber was beyond, open to the verandah, and a lamp burning in it. The large bed, with its blue gauze musquito-curtains, was not occupied, nor was a sofa at its foot. "Where is your master?" he asked of a servant who came to him. "He is gone to the Begum Sahib's," said the man in a low whisper, "but the Madam Sahib must not know this."

Ralph Smithson returned to his chair. All that he could say was, Mr Wharton had gone out, and would soon be back.

"I knew it!" cried his wife, with a burst of passionate weeping. "I told you where he had gone. He loves her more than me, and I will not bear it, Mr Smithson—I cannot—I, an Englishwoman, to submit to this insult! Have you no sympathy with this misery? Oh! Ralph Smithson," she continued, flinging herself upon her knees before him, "you can save me from this. You can—you can." She could not speak for the hysterical sobbing which possessed her.

“Mrs Wharton—Julia—rise, I pray you,” said the young man earnestly. “Indeed you must. I will speak to your husband——”

“No, no, no!” she exclaimed, rising and sobbing still, “not to him—not to him. If I am mad—if I am beside myself with this misery—you alone know it. I have no one, not a friend in all the world, Ralph—not one—not one but you. Those I had all forsook me when—when—they sent me out here. I thought him true, and that he would help a poor child like me, and he promised me. But he is like the rest, and I cannot bear it—indeed I cannot. Only do you be true to me, and in all the misery we may have to endure, I will not give way if I am near you. Will you pity me?”

It was no easy matter to resist that pleading face, and the hands held out to him. Ralph Smithson had no hard heart, as we know. He had no higher motive on which to fall back for help, perhaps, except that feeling of a gentleman which had held him up; but he was no profligate seducer to take advantage of a jealous woman's weakness. “I do pity you,” he said, taking her hands kindly in his and kissing them, “and I will be true to you, so long as I can help you or myself—I will indeed.”

“Enough,” said the lady. “I think I could endure any misery were I with any one to share it with me.



But he must not see these tears, Ralph. I am a weak girl before you, but to him I have not yielded yet. Sit still—I will be back presently.”

“Where is Julia?” asked Mr Wharton, as he came round the end of the house. “I thought I heard her.”

“She was here, sir, till this moment, and said she would be back directly.”

Mr Wharton sat down and sighed. “I will tell you, Ralph, some day, what I have been doing, and I’m glad it’s done. The time may come to us all when we need mutual confidence and support, and sooner than we think, perhaps. All I want you to promise me is, that if anything happens to me, you will see after her—after Julia—to the last. I was too old for her, Ralph, and I ought not—I ought not——”

Mr Wharton did not finish the sentence, for he heard his wife’s step in the verandah. “Promise me,” he said in a low tone, putting out his hand.

“I do, sir, as you wish,” replied the young man, taking it, “and with all my heart. I only hope that there may be no need.”

Mr Wharton could only press the hand he held, for the servant announced that supper was ready, so they went in together; and we may well believe that while the meal lasted, there was restraint upon all.

A few, very few, days more, and it was evident that

outlying houses could not be maintained, and they were abandoned one by one with sad hearts. The military officers of the settlement held daily consultations, and to the best of their judgment posts were arranged with a few guns on each, which, though they might afford means of a temporary check to the Subah's forces, were of too slight a nature to maintain defence against the odds they would have to meet when the real attack came. There was no news of any halt, even for refreshment, of the native forces. Day after day they were reported a march nearer; and this unusual vigour in the Nawab's proceedings presented a strange and alarming contrast to the usual marching of native armies. At the rate at which progress was reported, the enemy must reach Calcutta on the 17th or 18th of June at furthest; but on the 16th, about noon, there was no longer any doubt, for the drums and horns of the native forces were heard distinctly to the northwards, as well as a few cannon-shots, which might be signals; and those posted in a redoubt called Perrin's, which commanded the northern entrance road to Calcutta, saw the first masses of cavalry debouch from among the heavy groves of trees which had concealed them, and for a moment halt irresolutely, while some of the foremost pointed to the British Fort.

There were a few English soldiers and sailors in

that slight intrenchment; a few Portuguese and English artillerymen, and some native soldiers with matchlocks. Ralph Smithson was not in the military service, but he had volunteered to do his best, as did most of the others; and as that redoubt was the post of honour for the present, he had asked to serve there, and his companionship was gladly accepted by the officer in command of it. At anchor in the river, within musket-shot of the shore, was one of the Indiamen, the Prince George, the fire of whose guns would protect the flank of the post, and prevent its being turned. The earthwork was slight, but it was sufficient for protection and defence; and those who now garrisoned it had stout hearts. The day was insufferably hot, and light fleecy clouds sailed hither and thither in the upper air, dispersing, gathering, and changing perpetually, but without affording any shade. There had been no rain as yet, and that day the sun had blazed with a sweltering heat, from which even the natives shrank, as, with their heads tied up in heavy cloths, they crouched under the shade of the rampart, or clustered under that of a tree which overshadowed the redoubt, and spoke in low tones among themselves. Thus, from early morning till past noon, the advance of the enemy had been patiently awaited.

“The Moors! there they are!” exclaimed a burly

sailor, who, with several others, had been lounging over the parapet. "Gentlemen, the enemy!"

The officers, too, had been lounging on the grass, in a temporary shed, and under what other shade they could find—chatting with each other, as men will do, cheerfully and gaily, when danger is imminent; and they started to their feet and hurried to their posts. The guns were already loaded with grape and round-shot, and matches were lighted.

"Steady, men!" cried the captain cheerily; "no firing without orders. Our shot must not be the first, the President says. Let's see what those fellows are going to do before we fire."

The horsemen had halted, and some could be seen unslinging their matchlocks, while others careered about, wheeling and turning their horses, while their naked swords flashed brightly in the sun.

"Very pretty, Mr Smithson, is it not? I should not mind sending a round-shot among these rascals if they'd only fire," said Captain Brown, who commanded.

But there was a long pause till a party of footmen, with a green standard and a small drum beaten quickly by a drummer, arrived, and took post under some trees near the horsemen. Something more was evidently expected. Nor had they to wait long. Presently the heads of several elephants were seen

over the bushes, and then a drove of white bullocks, dragging a gun which was pushed on by the elephants.

"That means mischief, Smithson," said a companion; "we shall hear its bark by-and-by. What a fool Brown is to wait! damme! I'd have a shot into it before they could unlimber."

"Are you ready with that gun, Mr Scott?" cried the Captain to an officer of the Prince George, who was on duty there with two boats' crews; "cover that gun yonder, but don't fire till you get the word."

"I am laying her myself, sir," was the reply, "and I'll watch your signal, never fear. That's a small piece, and they won't like the long nine when it gets among them, I think, my lads. Steady now, and slew to the right, Jacobs. That's it—look out! they've lighted their match!"

There was a puff of smoke and a dull report in the heavy, heated air, and a shot passed high over the redoubt, roaring as it went.

"God save King George! Hurray!" cried the Captain, waving his hat; "three cheers, men!" and they were heartily given, while the officer at the gun touched his hat. "She's ready, sir," he said, "and I can see their gun now."

"Fire, then, Mr Scott, in the King's name!" and as he spoke Captain Brown saw the aim had been perfect. Splinters of the weak native gun-carriage

flew about, and the gun itself seemed to subside into a heap on the ground. "Now, the other, Mr Scott! That's capital, by George!" he exclaimed. "I suspect they don't like cannister, gentlemen. Look!"

Fifty heads were above the rampart looking anxiously at the scene before them. Before the round-shot had been fired, a crowd of the native soldiery had collected about their gun, and into this mass the cannister of the nine-pounder descended with terrible effect, and a dozen or more men lay prostrate, some writhing, others still in death!

"Let's dash among them," cried Ralph Smithson, waving his cutlass. "Now's our time, sir."

"Not yet, Mr Smithson—not yet," said the Captain, calmly. "For heaven's sake, sir, be cool. We'll do our best, but we can't risk this post."

He was right: the force of the attack had not yet come, for in a few minutes more they saw several other guns dragged into position, and prepared for action.

"By George, there's a woman among them!" cried the Captain, who was looking through a ship's-glass. "What can she be doing there? Don't throw away a shot, Mr Scott, and wait for my word. She's there—there on that elephant with the silk howda. Look out!"

The next discharges from the native guns were

no better aimed than the first. The shot sang harmlessly over the English fort, and was replied to by so sharp a fire from the two guns, that the adverse artillery was dragged back among the bushes, while the place they had stood on was pretty thickly covered by the dead.

“A little nearer, and we'd have done for more of the d—d niggers,” said the naval officer, wiping the sweat and powder from his face. “It's too far for the grape, Captain Brown.”

“Wait,” was the reply. “I see a body of new people forming in a mass behind the trees. Steady, men! Here they come, by George! If the ship only sees them!”

As he spoke, a mass, rather than a column of footmen, with drawn sabres glittering in the sun, and broad black shields across their bodies, advanced at a run; a man bearing a green standard, and another beating a small drum, preceding them.

“Let them come on, Mr Scott—nearer, nearer!” cried the Captain, who was standing bareheaded. “Now!”

The guns were fired almost simultaneously, and within perfect range this time, for the grape mowed lines through the mass, but did not stop it. At the same moment, a broadside from the ships took the column in flank, and did more havoc. This had not

been foreseen by the enemy ; and after an unsteady pause they broke and fled, a volley from the English muskets following them. Again Ralph Smithson and some of the men would have pursued, but were kept back.

“ We have not done with them yet, I think,” said Captain Brown. “ They think they’ll carry this post ; but, by George, gentlemen ! if you’re all of my mind, they’ll only get to Calcutta by this road over our bodies. Steady, men ! and wait ; when it’s time I’ll lead you. Does that satisfy you ?”

The enemy were now more careful, and shifted their position more to the left, while a heavier column of attack was being formed ; and a battery of rockets was opened upon the post, which, however, did no great harm. Every now and then plunging shots from the ship swept through the trees, but did not stop their advancing preparations.

“ She’s there again, sir,” cried Ralph Smithson, who had borrowed the glass. “ I see her plainly— a fair red-cheeked girl, richly dressed. What can she be ? There’s no English woman among them surely !”

No, it was no English woman ; but the Affghan girl Sozun, who, unable to contain her excitement, had been in the front on an elephant when the unlooked-for obstacle in the road appeared. It was she



who was appealing to the Rohillas of the Nawab's force to prove themselves men—to bring her the heads of the English Kaffirs, promising a shield full of rupees for every one. She was speaking to them in her own fierce Pushtoo, and reminding them of home, and what would be said there, as the English captain was reminding his men too, of dear old England.

So an hour or more passed, and a sputtering fire of matchlocks was kept up from the brushwood and hedges in front, which was galling because they had a longer range than the clumsy English musket, and by it a few men were wounded and four killed.

“Ye'll be frae the North, surr, a'm thinkin',” said a tall seaman, with greyish hair and a weather-beaten face, who belonged to the Prince George, touching his hat to Ralph Smithson. “A've heerd the burr a bit, surr, frae ye, and it's aye like music to mey.”

“I am,” he replied. “Why do you ask?” The North! ah, dear old Melcepeth! what a flood of recollections flashed through Ralph's mind at the simple question!

“Weel, surr, a' made bow'd t' speak t' ye, fur there's na tellin' wha'll be alive an' wha'll be deed the day; but if anything happens to mey, ye ken, a'd like to

think what a' have wad be sent hame to my folk, surr. A'm John Drever, surr, frae Berwick, an' a countryman——”

“Look out, Mr Scott!” was the Captain's cry again. “By George, a gallant set of fellows they are! Ready there with the guns!”

“I'll see to it,” cried Ralph to the seaman. “There's no time now for talking.”

Little time indeed; for it was a heavy column that was advancing—perhaps a thousand men. The cries and shouts of the first party were changed for a rough chorus of some mountain war-song; the faces of those that came on were as fair as the English faces in the redoubt, and they wore a sort of uniform dress of blue cotton.

“Fire!” cried Captain Brown, standing on the parapet, while balls whistled round him like hail.

The aim was the same, the result was the same: a lane of maimed and wounded; but the fair-faced men's song did not cease, and the column surged on with increased speed. It was well that the commander of the Prince George had been watching carefully what was going on. With springs on the cables, he had warped the ship nearer to the shore, and so that her broadside commanded the green space before the redoubt, and at this moment a full broadside of

grape and round-shot struck the Rohilla column on its flank, while Mr Scott's guns again vomited their deadly contents almost in their faces.

About fifty of the enemy still dashed on, and attempted to scale the breastwork, but were met by the English boarding-pikes and bayonets, and fiercely thrust back. They were all of that column which came to close quarters; the rest turned and fled, and Captain Brown, with a ringing cheer, leaped from the parapet, followed by Smithson and fifty others, in hot pursuit.

Ralph Smithson's powerful arm told well in the hand-to-hand *mêlée* which followed, and it was not a bloodless one. First in the pursuit, he had soon overtaken the hindmost of the retreating foes, and dashed among them with all the energy and passion of his race—the Darnell blood was fairly up, and he felt, for the first time, the uncontrollable excitement of actual battle. It might have fared ill with him, however, that day but for Drever the sailor, who was close at his heels.

“Hae a care, surr,” cried the man, striking down a thick-bearded fellow with his cutlass—“hae a care. Three to ane. D—n ye for cowards!”

Three men had turned, and with all their force attacked Smithson; but it was for a moment only, as he parried the cuts made at him and fell back, for

the seaman had rushed in, and others followed, and there was soon an end to the encounter.

“You’re wounded, surr,” cried the seaman. “A’ hope it’s no bad, an’ a’ve jist gotten a clink mysel’.”

Ralph Smithson had not felt the cut in his excitement: but there was a slash through his coat on the left arm, and his blood was flowing freely. It was not the first time he had seen it. Then he was sick to death, lying in a London street—now, had it not been that Captain Brown ordered them back, he would have gone on with the pursuit, little heeding his wound, perhaps beyond the bounds of prudence.

So they all returned to the redoubt, and shook hands over the affair, as stout Englishmen should do. There were a few wounds among the party hastily tied up, and four gone to their rest who could be ill spared; and with a can of grog all round, they waited for what should come next; but the “Moors” had had enough. There was an attempt made to form up more men, but a shot or two dispersed them, and presently the Englishmen heard the deep drums of the Subah’s forces beating far away to their right, the sound growing more and more distant among the trees; and the fair face on the elephant was seen no more.

Nor were they long in suspense as to future plans, for a messenger arrived shortly afterwards with a

written order for the post to withdraw to the Fort, the enemy having appeared in its vicinity, and every man being needed for its defence; and as the evening was drawing in, the garrison of "Perrin's Redoubt" was safe within the walls of Fort William, telling their tale to eager listeners, and receiving the congratulations they had so well earned.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### BESIEGED.

IN spite of his wound, which, though slight, was painful, and irritated by the great heat, Ralph Smithson had fought through the whole of the 18th of June in a battery which, as belonging to the outer defences of the Fort, was one of the most important of those positions. He had never left this post night or day, so he had little idea what was doing in the Fort, and little inclination to be amidst the wrangling and confusion which prevailed. He had seen nothing of Mr and Mrs Wharton, who, he knew, were there now; and their house was a post which, as long as it could be maintained, strengthened the line of defences to the south-east. There had come a hurried note from Mr Wharton, bidding him take care of himself; that his wife was safe; and they hoped, God willing, to see him again. But there were reports brought up to the post by men

from the Factory—reliefs when they could be sent, or parties with supplies of ammunition—that matters looked bad there, and the gentlemen had decided upon retreat to the ships in case they were pressed by the enemy, and some women and children had even been sent on board.

There was no time, however, to think of such matters. Early on the 18th, as the mist which had been lying dank and chill on the low grounds rose under the gleams of the sun, it was easy to be seen that, though the previous day had been one of comparative quiet, the Nawab's officers had not been idle. On every house from whose terraced roof part of the intrenched lines could be commanded, strong parties of matchlock-men had been posted during the night behind screens made of cotton bags, grain baskets, or such other contrivances for protection as could most readily be arranged; while in others, loopholes had been pierced with crowbars through the parapets of the terraces, and marksmen lying safely behind them could fire leisurely upon those who manned the guns at the posts, and pick off any who moved about or showed themselves at all so fast, that the officers in command were forced to keep their men under cover, and to await attack, rather than seek to anticipate it.

Nor was this confined to the outposts only. Many

of these matchlock pickets commanded the Fort itself, outside as well as in ; and though there was shelter enough for the garrison, the guns could not be worked except at great disadvantage, and the losses everywhere were constant and severe. It was no part of the enemy's tactics to come to close quarters with the defenders of the outposts, else, during that day, the whole of the outer lines might have been stormed ; the result of one attack at the redoubt had been enough to prove the mettle of Englishmen. Now, beleaguered as it was, the whole of the English garrison had, it seemed, no chance of escape. It would be an affair of time only, that complete humiliation of the English which he had decreed ; and till they were brought bound before him, asking pardon humbly, Suraj-oo-Doulah's revenge would be incomplete.

From early morning, in an upper room of a good native house, from whence, though out of range of musketry, the progress of the conflict could be watched—the young Nawab had sat at an open window with little intermission till noon. It was remarked by the English that there was a sudden cessation of firing then for about two hours for which they could not account, and in regard to which there were many speculations. The enemy might be eating, or some other movement was being



arranged; perhaps a general charge on all the outlying positions. It was not so, however. The Nawab had kept up his attention as long as he could, but there was no perceptible progress; and the puffs of smoke, and dull reports of cannon, varied by the sputtering rattle of matchlocks and muskets, became so monotonous, that he had directed the firing to cease while he rested, lay down on a bedding, and slept heavily.

But Sozun, who was by him, driving away the flies with a light fan of feathers, was not sleepy. She sat at the open window, still looking out on the plain, and on the Fort of the mysterious people of whom she had so often heard. There were their ships which had come over the ocean in voyages of many months, with their white awnings glistening in the sun, and the red English ensigns flying from their mizen-peaks. There were a few small posts on the plain, defying the whole Moslem army as the redoubt had done—where even her own countrymen had been beaten back, and her promises of shields full of rupees for every infidel head, had failed to bring one. What were these Feringis who fought so boldly, and dared to defy the hosts before them? She could only see a few men in red coats and black caps moving about the outworks. She had watched more than one drop suddenly at a gun, as it was loaded and fired

by a few, and a sharp storm of matchlock balls whistled about them, and sent them again under cover. Now, as the Nawab slept, and the silence was almost oppressive, she could see those in the nearest post (it was Ralph Smithson's) come out and look about them ; peer over the parapet of their fascine battery, and look up to the houses from whence the matchlock firing had been incessant—wondering, no doubt, as well they might, why it had ceased. Well ! she should see them nearer soon—those fair-haired ruddy Englishmen would all be captive ! And their women ? Were there any there among them, beautiful as houris—as angels of Paradise—as she had heard,—fairer than herself ? What if he should see any and take them, and cast her out, or send her to the vaults below the palace, where there were others she knew of, like the Begum, who might never see the open light of heaven again ? For this there was at least a remedy ; and while she shuddered at a possible alternative, he who might occasion it lay in his heavy sleep prostrate before her, as he had lain often before. Oh for a free life ! This was but that of a slave !—cared and indulged, truly, but to an Affghan girl a very hateful one !

Hateful indeed ! What had her own countrymen cried to her when she strove to urge them on to the attack two days before ? “ Hide your face, shame-

less one. We need no courtesan to tell us what to do. Hide your face, and begone from among honourable soldiers. Was ever an Affghan woman like you, O daughter of shame!" Ah, yes! they would not heed her protestations, or her frantic passionate cries. They bade her begone, and one had lifted his matchlock to his shoulder, as he swore a shocking oath in her own tongue, which had terrified the driver of her elephant, who had turned the noble beast and hurried her away. Had she forgotten this? What to her were the cries, the fawnings of adulation, which attended her every movement abroad, from the servile courtiers and Bengalee officers whom she despised?

In many a fight worse than that, had she ridden with her brave father, and had no terror of sharp swords or matchlock balls. What she saw now, seemed but child's play to those fierce conflicts, and to the sweeping charges of the chivalry of Dehli, as they burst through the Affghan squadrons and left her father dying in her arms on the bloody field of Sirbind! Had he but lived, she would now have been a wife in some quiet nook of the glorious valleys of Istaliff. There might have been children at her knee, and the rough choruses of her people ringing in her ears, instead of a life of shame. "Begone, O shameless one!" they had cried—"hide thy face from honest

men!" And yet she might redeem the past. There were women in her country who, clad in coarse garments, went about singing the name of Allah, or in waste places ministered to the wants of faint and weary travellers—women who had changed their life of sin, to one of good works in the love of God and the Prophet—women who were honoured while they lived, and had shrines by lone waysides raised to their memories after death. If she lived—if she lived—this might be; but for the present there could be no change—she could not fly—she must endure. And these, and a thousand whirling thoughts, went through the girl's mind as her master slept.

"Is the Fort taken? are the Feringis here?" he cried at last, starting up from his sleep. "I hear no firing. Sozun, thou hast been looking on—how is it? Have they surrendered?"

"Surrendered!" she repeated, bitterly. "No; the English, they say, never surrender. My lord slept, and there could be no noise permitted—so they told me."

"The fools!" he cried—"as if I could not sleep soundly with the roar of cannon in my ears! The fools! and they have lost hours. Ho! Ahmed! Nasir! tell them I am awake, and look on at the war."

I think the Affghan girl, with shame lying deep at her heart, which her lord knew not of, would have

gone forth there and then to her own countrymen if she had dared, and humbled herself before them, asking them to let her share their fate. She had been sorely tempted to do this many a time since she had heard their cries of shame ; but she would have thus exposed them to fearful risk, and herself to destruction. Yet there was many a tale and legend she knew, in which women of her own mountains had cheered men on to victory with shrill cries, and had even led them sword in hand—which were sung round rude fireplaces when the snow fell, or at the house-mill in the early morning, when meal was ground for the day's cakes. Her lord was impatient for victory. If she died among her people, it would not be in shame ; and as the firing recommenced suddenly, and she saw the red-coated Englishmen, who had been lounging about or lying on the grass, start to their feet and hurry to their posts—the desire to be with her countrymen in the hottest of the fray, became more and more uncontrollable.

“ There is nothing done, Sozun,” cried the Nawab at length, as he rose and seated himself at the lattice, watching, as before, the interminable puffs of smoke, and listening to the patter of musketry. “ Not even thy people, who boast they are the Feringis' masters, dare to venture out sword in hand against those few feeble Kaffirs. I tell thee, girl, there are not a hun-

dred able men among them. See, here is the list, sent me from their Fort this morning ; and yet no one dares—no one dares,” he cried loudly and bitterly, “ to go upon them.”

“ I dare, my lord,” she said firmly, rising from her seat near the next window—“ I dare. Will my lord let me lead my people ?”

“ They are cowards ! they would leave thee dead on yonder plain. My rose,” he returned, “ I could not spare thee. What tales have I not heard of Rohilla prowess, and that their plan of war was to charge sword in hand up to guns and slay the gunners ! Look ! there are but two guns in yonder post, behind some faggots which a boy might jump over, and not twenty men to defend them. And there is Noor Khan with five hundred of thy people firing volleys of shot at them and killing none. O shame, shame ! they to call themselves men !”

“ It is true, my lord—most true. I have watched this all day, and now am ready. My lord must let me go to my people ; a woman’s cry may shame them to victory. I am a soldier’s child. Oh, my lord, do not refuse this ! If I die, who will mourn ? What I can do, will be but a poor return for all my lord’s kindness and love.”

The Nawab looked at her from head to foot with a strange puzzled expression. Such a request to

come from a woman! What woman did he know—had ever known—that would dare to make it? Had ever such been before? There were a few dim Persian legends of woman's bravery and devotion which he remembered, and did not the noble wife of Humayoon the Emperor share her husband's battles and his camp life? Had not Chand Beebee of Ahmednugger fought on the breach of her own citadel hand to hand with the Mogul chivalry, and driven them back?

“By Allah! Sozun, thou mayst be right,” he exclaimed; “but would I exchange that Fort and all its wealth for thee?”

“If so poor a thing as I,” she said, “could win it for thee, my lord, and die on the rampart yonder, my death would be welcome. My people would then sing of me in the old home, that she who had lived in dishonour had redeemed herself, and was slain in fight. My lord, my lord! if thou hadst only heard their words of reproach, which still ring in my ears, which haunt me night and day—night and day—for the memory of which I cannot sleep—thou wouldst let me go, else—I shall die in my shame. If thou wilt, I may do this. If I win that place for thee, Sozun will be a thousand times dearer—if I die, a thousand, fairer than I, are to be bought as thou needst them. Let me go! It is my destiny—thine

and mine are the same. Day by day I have had the book of the stars read, since that Derwesh told it to thee, and the planets do not change. The star of my lord's victory is shining above his head and over mine. My lord, I beseech thee, let me go."

The young man seemed to catch up some of the enthusiasm of his beautiful slave, and he clapped his hands, and cried to the attendants, who answered. "Let Noor Khan be called," he said.

Noor Khan was the commander of the Affghans in the Nawab's army. He was in a house hard by, directing a heavy matchlock fire upon the redoubt in which Ralph Smithson was posted, and admiring, with a grim satisfaction, the obdurate tenacity with which the few Englishmen left there were now serving their guns, now firing from their heavy muskets, when the Nawab's messenger reached him, and he was soon in the presence.

"He is as my father," Sozun had said to the Nawab, "and I will not withdraw."

"Hear what the lady has to say to thee, Noor Khan," he said, "and be kind to her. If it is to be, it is to be."

The Affghan looked grimly at the richly-dressed girl before him, and said, in the broken patois of the country he knew,

"Men who look on the like of these are but



zenana soldiers, my lord. Pardon me; it is shameful."

"She is of thy country, Noor Khan."

"She had better have died on the field of Sirhind," said the man, "where her father died, than live thus. I know her. If we dared, we would put her to death, as we do such in our country."

"Do not speak, my lord," cried the girl, her breast heaving. "Let me—he will not refuse me." And then, in a passionate flood of her own native tongue, she told her shame; her desire of death in dishonour, or life in honour; and begged, as she cast herself before the old soldier, that her prayer might not be rejected.

"Art thou content, O my king?" said Noor Khan, when he had heard all. "If she lives, I will take her inside yonder fort to-morrow; if she dies she will be at rest, and it will be well—she will have redeemed her shame."

I do not profess to say that the young Bengal nobleman at all understood or appreciated the wild sense of honour which the girl had inherited from her race. But he knew that Sozun, having once formed the determination, would not cease to beseech or taunt him. Perhaps—I will not avouch it—he was weary already of the wild Affghan girl whom no menace could terrify, and at whose hands, if he

provoked her, he was as likely to meet death as she at his. He had been accustomed to other tempers—to women whom he could kick, or strike, or abuse, or insult at his pleasure. No doubt she was a restraint upon him, which he had never known before, and of which he was often impatient. It was only the girl's extraordinary beauty, and the fascination which she exerted upon him, that had held him faithful, or tolerant of her so long. Above all, to his superstitious mind there seemed to have entered a conviction that his destiny was in truth linked with hers; and that as she had brought him good fortune, it would continue.

“She is my pledge with thee, Khan,” he replied, “and my honour is in thy hands. See what trust I place in thee! Thou art not the Noor Khan I know, if one of these Kaffirs escape thee.”

As he spoke, he had pointed towards the plain, and an exclamation of surprise escaped him. “What are they doing?” he cried.

Noor Khan looked out upon the plain, over which the last rays of the sun before it set were streaming, upon a few parties of English soldiers here and there dragging a gun; carrying dead and wounded in blankets; some hobbling along weary and faint, holding by a comrade's shoulder; while others, covering their retreat, fired from time to time in answer to the shot which fell thicker and faster around them. All

this was quite visible to those who looked on from that window—the green plain, the red coats on it, the small sad processions, and the little puffs of smoke from the muskets and matchlocks, fired as if by children in play. Beyond, the old Fort, and the vessels behind it; the evening breeze now and then floated out the English flag, which was flying there in defiance of the hosts which beleaguered it, and flights of great storks and crows were going to their roosting places.

“Too late!” cried Noor Khan. “While I have been prating here, they have escaped me. My lord, let me go! If thou art coming, girl, be quick; but not as thou art,” and he turned to where she had been standing.

Sozun, however, had quitted the room; but as the old soldier was leading his men into the battery which Ralph Smithson had just left, a boyish figure, dressed in the blue tunic of his people, lightly armed, and with a rich handkerchief tied round the turban and mouth—overtook him, and, touching his arm, made a respectful salute; then dropping beside him, took up the hoarse war-chorus which the men were singing, as they went on at a swinging trot. Ah! it was like the dear old time when she was by her father; and the girl’s heart bounded within her with a sense of freedom and exultation to which she had long been

a stranger. There and then, had they gone across that green plain into the mouths of the English cannon, Sozun would have led them in a delirium of excitement which she could not repress—as she leaped high to the burden of the rude war-song, and waved her sword and clashed her shield with her countrymen. But for the present the Affghans' advance was soon checked, and night fell upon the scene of conflict.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### RECONCILIATION.

JUST then Ralph Smithson was entering the gate of Fort William with his men, weary, faint, and sick at heart, as well from his painful wound and hard day's fighting in the sun, as from the order to retreat, and to leave spiked the heavy gun which could not be carried away. The dead, however, had been brought, and the wounded, and such ammunition as remained. The enemy had only got one gun, spiked, and that would at least be useless. Instead of finding an orderly garrison, and the usual grave quiet of the Fort, his ears were assailed with a clamour, and his eyes fell upon a scene of confusion, which he little expected there. An order had already been given for the women to be sent on board ship, and the boats lying at the landing-place were taking in cargoes of trunks and boxes, and terrified weeping women and children. In place of an embarkation with proper

order, every one was clamouring for places as though all chance of escape was already cut off. Shrillest were the cries of the Portuguese women and children, which mingled with the hoarse oaths of English seamen and native boatmen; and it was in vain that some of the officers appeared to be endeavouring to persuade the terror-stricken people that the enemy were still far from the gates. Several boatloads of helpless persons had already been upset from the crowding in them, and the people rescued with difficulty from the stream—nay, some had even been swept away; but this did not deter the rest, and it was only when the last boatload had gone, and the water-gate was shut, that, for the night at least, confusion was stayed.

Sick, then, with heat and pain, and faint with hunger, as he might well be, for a little hard ship-biscuit and some cold ship's beef had been his only food for two days, it was with a sense of comfort, and enjoyment of safety, that Ralph Smithson sat down that night to the only comfortable meal he had eaten for several days. A plentiful cool bath had refreshed him; the surgeon had dressed his wound with a cooling plaster; the kind thoughtfulness of Mr Wharton and his native servant had provided him with a clean suit of clothes; and if any of my readers can remember having been in Ralph Smithson's straits in

India, and to have undergone cleansing and refreshing as he had done, they will acknowledge with me that, during a meal so comfortable, all previous hardship would be forgotten. After his experience of an open post, a blazing sun over him by day, and chill dank dews by night, with a rain of shot perpetually pelting into it, and an enemy shouting defiance with every volley—the quiet of the Fort, the apparent security of the walls and gates, the heavy cannon on the bastions, and a cessation from firing on the part of the enemy as the evening closed in—conveyed an assurance to his mind which, though it raised his own spirits, did not apparently affect those about him, and the Factory hall was dull indeed that night.

Supper was one of the pleasantest of the Factory public meals, at all times; a substantial hearty repast, wherein savoury curries, fresh mango and bhilsa fish almost alive from the river, and Patna, or other up-country beef and mutton, smoked on the board; and such tea from China, such coffee from Mocha or Java, as money could not purchase in England—with old madeira and punch—were freely spread out at that liberal and hospitable board. Sometimes the English ladies of the Factory spent the evening there; and not unfrequently there was a country-dance, or a minuet or cotillon, by way of wind-up among the younger folk, while the elders had their whist or

picquet, or boston, or cribbage, and played pretty deeply too. It was not here that the coarse profligacy of the settlement was to be seen. That lay at no great distance perhaps, but apart, in the private bachelor houses, in purlieus of the native city and elsewhere, where we need not seek it.

But that night the meal was eaten almost in silence, and quickly removed. The old khansaman, or butler, saw his English masters were in no good humour, and that it would be safe to get out of their way as speedily as possible; and afterwards, instead of the pleasant card-parties, men gathered into knots and spoke little above their breath. There were some who, like Ralph Smithson, had had a post to defend, and who had much to tell of what had happened there. There were some still buoyant and defiant; not boasting, as Englishmen seldom do among themselves, but saying to their own hearts, and perhaps asseverating it with an oath, that they'd fight the old Fort to the last shot, before they'd give it up to the Subah, or any d—d Nabob in the country.

And there was a group gathered round an elderly native, sitting very much as if he were extremely uncomfortable in a chair, with his naked legs tucked up in it, and his knees projecting for want of room—a man with a thin bony face, and small twinkling



eyes, who had a hooked nose, which projected over his short upper lip and thin mustache; else close shaven, with a muslin skull-cap on his head, and a broad yellow mark of Hindu caste upon his forehead. This was Omichund, the great Hindu banker, who had been seized on suspicion of intrigue, and detained in the Fort, whom the President would not release; and who, very friendly to his rich English constituents himself, was professing his willingness to go and do what he could; but at the same time expressing honestly his opinion that he feared matters had gone too far for adjustment, except by unconditional submission.

Omichund well knew the young Nawab's implacable disposition. A thousand stories of it, which concerned natives alone, were current among them. Men—the public—for there is a native public there, as we ourselves know *now*—knew how the ears of the Derwesh had been cut off in open Durbar, because he had spoken a word in favour of the English; they knew that the Nawab had witnessed a special play in which Englishmen had been personated by the vilest of buffoons; and the astute Hindu banker judged badly of the chances of the English after this. But he had been honourable; he had paid every farthing of the heavy bills of exchange drawn upon him by the house of Juggut Seit, which were, in

fact, the realisations of balances by the English Factory agents at Moorshedabad. He had done all this, but neither the Nawab's good mother, who had written to Omichund to do what he could for her English friends, nor Juggut Seit himself, powerful as he was, could turn the young Nawab from his purpose before he marched for Calcutta; and it was not likely that he, Omichund, could do anything either, now he had arrived there. He had no need to go, he said—they need not send him away. The Nawab would not hurt him, and if the Fort were soon taken, his mediation might be of use.

If the Fort were taken! Then it might be; the old Banker thought it might be. I think many others that night thought the same, because the ammunition had been inspected that day, and the disgraceful neglect of years had come to light. Men's hearts sank within them when they found the fuzes of bombs green and mouldy, and their contents wet with the damp of the magazine: where also they found round-shot and grape hardly enough for three days' defence, and the powder so damp that it hissed long before it exploded. Under all these circumstances I do not marvel that the gentlemen of the Calcutta Factory spent an unpleasant evening; or that the minds of many, ordinarily cheerful, were filled with undefinable but miserable forebodings

It had not come home to those gentlemen yet, that Calcutta was unsafe ; that the host thundering at their doors was in earnest. Such a thing had not happened since good old Job Charnock's time, and why should it be now ? Here was only a weak sensual youth, whom anybody could turn round his finger—even his women and his eunuchs—so they had been told and so believed ; but they forgot that, very often, these weak sensual youths are the strongest in obstinacy of profligate indulgence, and the hardest to be turned from their revengeful purposes.

Ralph Smithson had exchanged a few words only with Mr Wharton since his return from the outpost, but he knew where he should find him. A bastion on the river face was a favourite resort of the Whartons, as it was of others—a place where people met in the evening, where chairs were set and gossip went on while the fresh air came up from the water, and the great stream, hurrying to the sea, sent up its indefinable murmur of small breaking wavelets and the rushing of the water amidst posts and tall sedges : a place where many a love-scene, honest and dishonest, had been played out, and where many a sadly heaved sigh had been sent over the great ocean to which the river was ever hastening ; Ralph Smithson was sure they would be found there. And how had it fared with them ? Had Julia Wharton's jeal-

ousy increased, or had her husband, at last, given her his confidence ?

When Ralph Smithson had gone out to Perrin's Redoubt, to face what might be death, he had deliberately made his will. He could have no claim to his father's allowance from the estate, for that must lapse, with his life, to the Baronet or Constance. There was no need, therefore, to say anything about it; but the property of which he was the owner he had a right to dispose of as he pleased; and he had willed half of it to Mr Smithson of Warkworth, in usufruct for his life, and the other half to Mistress Sybil Morton, with the reversion of what would come from his grandfather to the same person. He had not forgotten dear old Nanny either, and she had a share too. So it will be seen that, while this will secured all he had to those he best loved, there was no clue in it to what he was, that could be understood by Mr Wharton or the other gentlemen who witnessed it. The venture he had sent home would, he knew, prove very profitable; and Mr Darnell held the rest of his property and would account for it.

When this was accomplished, Ralph Smithson felt that he had done his duty, and was the better for it. He had written, too, to his uncles; to the Baronet praying his forgiveness, and to be remembered by him and Constance kindly; and to Roger Darnell

very warmly, and out of the fulness of his heart ; a few lines to Sybil also: and so was prepared to live or die as his Lord willed.

These papers he had made up into a packet and given to Mr Wharton in his wife's presence, and had said, with a manly tear in his eyes, that if he lived he would hope to be of use to them, and if not, they should not forget him ; and he took Mr Wharton aside, and conjured him to do the same as he had done. In this time of common danger, there should be perfect confidence, and Ralph reminded him of the little scene outside the bungalow, when Mr Wharton had promised to tell him all some day. Now he was anxious to know whether that had been done or no, and it was with a swelling heart, and a gush of thankfulness, that, as he ascended the steps of the rampart, he saw the bastion empty, except of two figures, whom he knew to be his friends.

They were standing with their backs to him, looking over the great river, shimmering in a faint moonlight. Mr Wharton's arm was about his wife's small waist, and her head was lying on his shoulder quietly, with her hand in his. They were not speaking ; but the figures had an expression of confidence and love in their position which Ralph Smithson had never seen before, and he thanked God for

it. It was evident Mr Wharton had done his duty.

“Ah! is it you, Ralph?” said Mr Wharton, cheerily, turning as he heard the step. “You have found us out, and Julia has been so anxious to see you. How’s your arm, since the doctor dressed it?”

“Thank God you are safe, Mr Smithson,” cried Mrs Wharton, turning to him; “you are welcome back—oh, so welcome!”

“And I trust you got the clean clothes, Ralph. I gave them to the servant,” continued her husband. “Julia had them tied up carefully. There were all you wanted, I hope?”

“All, sir; and I feel so fresh and happy after that horrible post. I don’t think we could have held it all night, and we were right to withdraw, though we did leave a gun behind.”

“And we are glad to be here too, Mr Smithson, for we could not have remained in the dear old house; but we have done the best for our property,” added Mrs Wharton.

“All yours, and the papers, are safe on board the Daddaley yonder,” continued Mr Wharton, “and under the especial care of the captain—so we shall find them when we get on board—that is, if we have to go. I am quite prepared for *that*, Ralph, for you would have been as disgusted as myself at what

has passed here. The President has written once more to the Nabob, through the Armenians, but I very much question whether it is of any use."

"Then we should retreat, you think, sir? It's an ugly word, Mr Wharton."

"Well," replied Mr Wharton, "Job Charnock, who was a wise man in his generation, once left the Factory and came back in better plight, and so may we. However, there's no use speculating; to-morrow or next day we shall know all, and meanwhile we shall do our best, I daresay. And now I have some good news for you. I have followed your advice, and feel as if I were a far happier bridegroom than I was when I married Julia."

"And I, Mr Smithson," said his wife, "have to thank you for this. I am sure I have, sir," she added quite gaily, and with some of her usual sprightly manner. "I feel as if the Moors yonder had brought me a treasure, and I'm so happy—oh, so happy! We sat on the other side of the walls, John and I, all the afternoon, after the firing began again, and watched you. John sheltered me behind some cotton bales; and we watched you coming in from the redoubt, and prayed you might come safely, and so did he, and I thank God that you are here with us again."

"Ah yes!" said Mr Wharton, "it was all over before we left the bungalow. I told her everything,

and *she* came at Julia's request, and — and — no matter now, Ralph, it is happily over, and the children are safest with *her*."

"And he forgave me all my waywardness and foolish jealousy, Ralph. Oh, it was so good of him, wasn't it?"

I don't think Ralph Smithson could say much in reply—perhaps his heart was too full. Had he not known what it was to be jealous, and what had come of it? He could only take their hands and press them together in both his own, and they all sat down, and, without speaking much, looked out on the great river and its current, running swiftly to the sea.



## CHAPTER XXXIX.

EVENING, JUNE 19, 1756.

I OFTEN think, as I write these pages, of other very sore straits into which our countrymen have fallen in that distant Indian land; and it is a strange but awful lesson in human bravery, endurance, and ghastly suffering, to compare what happened in Fort William on the next day, Saturday, the 19th of June 1756, with the occurrences of the same day a hundred years later, in the saddest of all memorials in India—the barrack intrenchment at Cawnpore. But there is hardly a parallel.

In the one, as many Englishmen as there were in Calcutta, beneath a fiercer and more burning sun, without cover save a slight breastwork, were fighting day and night, without relief and without rest, with a few poor field-pieces, and some light guns, fowling-pieces, and rifles, against a more cruel enemy than Suraj-oo-Doulah's Rohillas —

cowards and traitors who dare not show themselves in fair fight, but skulked behind the buildings which screened their heavy guns, whose fire ceased not day or night. Those few English soldiers, railway constructors, shopkeepers, and clerks, were defending frail roofless buildings, riddled with heavy shot and shell; and a motley assemblage of helpless women and children were sitting within them in groups, huddled upon the bare floors, grown careless of the cannon-shot which whistled over them, or crashed through the tottering walls, or of shells which often burst among them—envying the happy fate of any whom they struck, or of others who, in disease or very weakness, sank gently to their eternal rest.

We who live in the happy homes of England, secure and peaceful, can have but a very faint idea of so terrible a reality; of its aggravation by lack of food and of water—of the scorching sun by day and chill dews by night—of the dawn and the sunset following each other without a change in that fearful strife—each day succeeding the last only to differ from it in intensity and augmentation of suffering—of the conviction that there was no retreat, and no alternative but to fight on to the last and die, if happily death might come fighting, and not by foul treachery. We know how all that ended;

and pray God in His mercy that His glorious host of heaven may never witness the like again.

It was not thus in Fort William on the day of which I write. The morning broke calm and beautiful, and the fresh breeze curled the great river, and blew out the red English flags defiantly before the Indian host. The Fort was still secure. There was no slight parapet, as at Cawnpore, with scores of yawning breaches; but a strong fort wall and shelter enough. There was no artillery used against it which could breach such a wall, and there were no bombshells to descend from above, and, bursting, scatter their horrible fragments far and wide. There were ships lying in the stream, on board of which most of the helpless women and children had already gone, and more were following. From them at least there would be no hindrance, no unmanning of brave hearts by contemplation of their sufferings; and yet we know by the sad record of history, and by the testimony of men who shared and survived that trial, that—it is hard to write it—there was panic, and its inevitable accompaniment, cowardice. “O for Mr Clive!” had been the cry of many a brave sorrowing heart, as boatload after boatload of men and officers who, having the responsibility of the defence, were now terror-stricken—abandoning the Fort, and flying shamefully to the ships.

“As soon,” writes one of the officers, “as it was known that the Governor had left the Factory, the gate towards the river was immediately locked to prevent further desertion, and the general voice of the garrison called for Mr Holwell to take the charge of the defence upon him;” and, like a gallant Englishman as he was, he thenceforth did his best. There were no craven hearts in the Fort now, and there were no means of retreat; no boat, English or native, approached the doomed Fort. The English ships had dropped down the stream, but not to any distance; they could see among them the signals which Mr Holwell made for them to come up again to their anchorage, or to send boats for the garrison, but nothing stirred. As the tide turned, and the south wind blew gently from the sea, the garrison looked for a moment for one ship, one sloop, one pinnace, to come up and help them in their great need, but none came. I can believe this to have been no little aggravation of their misery—one which, amidst all their horrible varieties of suffering, the Cawnpore people were at least spared.

There, no hope of succour had ever existed; for it was soon known that those at Lucknow, from whence help alone could come, were in as great strait as themselves; and so, in the grim calm energy of despair, they fought on. But here, in Fort William, their

very friends had deserted the garrison, and had grown callous to what they might suffer, so their own more precious selves were safe. I feel that this must have been a most frightful aggravation of suffering, because a wound in the tenderest part of all true Englishmen's hearts, national honour. "What would they say in England if we were to give up these shattered walls now we hold them?" said the brave fellows at Cawnpore, at Lucknow, and Arrah, as others had once said at Jellalabad, when mighty Indian hosts were encamped against them. At least we who live on, know what they have said, and will ever say—and hope, that the poor fellows who were taken away, have heard from awful lips that, like gallant British men—they did their duty.

And those in Fort William were minded now to do it too. They had still one hope in the good ship Prince George, which lay above at the redoubt, and was ordered down. I believe that worthy Captain Hague, if he could, would have come down in the teeth of the enemy's shot; and as he weighed anchor, and sailed slowly under his topsails, there was many an eager eye looking to his manœuvres, and many a beating heart expecting him; and it must have been a sore pang to the brave fellow when, as we read, "his ship was run on a shoal, either by the 'Pilate's' treachery or want of skill, and his good ship stuck

fast, never to be moved again." And so the last hope of the Fort garrison was blasted, and with many a heavy sigh, perhaps, but with clenched teeth and grim, defiant hearts, they set themselves—to do their duty.

And bravely, too, while they could, they did it, as history tells us, and as we can well believe. As the morning advanced, the Nawab's army closed rapidly round the Fort ; the firing was heavy and constant, and their approaches grew nearer and nearer. The church without the walls, the offices and warehouses, were carried one by one, while the defenders plied their musketry and cannon, and sheltered themselves as well as they could with parapets of cotton bales, and packages of stout Yorkshire broadcloths. Many were killed, and many were sorely hurt ; but the evening came, and with it the rest which night gave—for the young Nawab slept, and it was death to disturb his slumbers.

All that day had the Affghan girl urged on her people, and well had they answered her call. She had seemed to them to bear a charmed life ; and superstition, as well as admiration of her bravery—it might have been called desperation—had already won for her the fame she had coveted. They had told her she would be sung of in the bazaars of Cabool, in the mountains of Istaliff, in the royal fort of

Ghuzni. They—those wild rude fellows—had bowed themselves before her, and touched reverently her hands and her feet. Where she led they would follow; and among them, some of the burliest and bravest had formed themselves into a body-guard, and placed their shields before her when the English balls came hottest. She had won her fame, even did she survive; but I think the girl, in the fierce enthusiasm of her nature, rather longed for death, that she might live for ever in her people's memories.

So, too, fighting on the north-west bastion, all that day, were Ralph Smithson and Mr Wharton. The few men that could be spared to them were weary and sick, some wounded too, and some fell occasionally; but none left the post alive, and Julia Wharton, utterly refusing shelter within the buildings, shared the danger with them. Perhaps this one day, of all that siege, might be likened in some wise to the corresponding day of June in the Cawnpore intrenchment—and yet hardly. Great as was this peril and misery, there was still the hope that ships might come up, or that the garrison might be able to hold out. There was not the weariness of fruitless fighting which was falling on the others; or that dull, leaden despair which contemplated grimly the few sacks of meal left, the empty provision-tins, and

the gaunt, sun-scorched faces of hollow-eyed women and children.

So one more night of rest from shot ensued, and yet less peace than before. Though the Nawab slept, and scarce a shot was fired, the enemy were not idle. As the night advanced, fires broke out in various houses beyond the walls. Mr Wharton's had been safe up to this time, and they had watched, with a curious interest, the proceedings of the first body of native soldiers which took possession of it. Would it be destroyed? They were not long in doubt. As they sat there on the floor of the bastion, behind their cotton bales, eating what their native servants had been able to cook for them, and truly enjoying the repast more heartily perhaps than they had done many a costly dinner—a sudden glare fell upon the little group which told its own tale, and a fierce roaring and crackling of the dry thatch and bamboos quickly completed the ruin. So on, through the night—the marine-yard, with all its stores of timber, tar, and pitch—many houses—the church—burst one by one into flames, and lit up, with a frightful glare, the Fort, the white houses of Calcutta, the trees and the river, and rested far away on the masts and sails of the faithless English ships, which lay in safety. I do not think the thoughts of those who were in them could have been enviable that night, and,



though death in all its most horrible forms was before them, those in the Fort were perhaps the happier.

I daresay many a last strange tale or wish was told by English soldiers, one to another, that night, in their last watch, while the glare of conflagration around them lighted up every nook and corner of the Fort, and vast forked tongues of flame darted to the sky, sending up showers of lighted embers and brilliant sparks ; but I have no concern with them. It was impossible to sleep, and our friends sat together on the bastion, where Mr Wharton and Ralph Smithson had to watch by turns until the morning. They had nothing new to tell—nothing new to request—all that was needed had been already arranged. In a quiet bivouac or picket, with the soft stars twinkling in a dewy sky, the men might have told each other of their lives ; but this was not a time for such confidences. It signified very little, death seemed so near, what had passed beforehand, and their thoughts were involuntarily solemn ; and when Julia Wharton took from her pocket her small prayer-book, and began to read in her sweet voice, by the light of the glare beyond the walls, the Psalms for the evening of the nineteenth day of the month—many of the soldiers gathered round and listened bareheaded, and devoutly, to what I hope we all remember, while the girl's voice grew stronger as she proceeded—

“ ‘ O sing unto the Lord a new song, for He hath done marvellous things. With His own right hand, and with His holy arm, hath He gotten us the victory.’ ”

Ah yes ! Even in that sore strait they hoped and prayed for it, and reverently commended themselves to Him in whose hands the issues lay. And we know that all those in Cawnpore, daily and nightly, did the same.

## CHAPTER XL.

### THE STORM, AND WHO SURVIVED IT.

DAWN broke again, and the horrid stifling smell of burnt houses, the smoke of still blazing timber, had taken the place of the sweet dewy morning breath which ought to have been there. In place of trim garden-houses and the quiet of the English settlement, there were groups of smoking ruins and hosts of the native army, and roughly-constructed batteries, armed with cannon ready for the day's work. As the drums and fifes of the Portuguese musicians of the Fort beat off a quavering "reveillé," they were answered by defiant blasts of shrill native pipes and horns and the deep bass drums of the Nawab's nobut.

It was a Sabbath dawn. Far away in their dear England the church-bells on that bright summer day would ring out mellow chimes of invitation to prayer, and the soft south-west wind would bear them

over fragrant bean-fields, over meadows strewn with sweet fresh hay, through avenues of lime-trees full of the murmur of bees, loading itself with perfume till it could carry no more. There, many a homely, bright-dressed group would wander leisurely by field-paths, and through green shady lanes, to hear the Sabbath service. Children would gather bright wild-flowers by hedgerows, and ancient men and dames would sit by cottage-doors basking in the warm sun, and looking on at harmless play. There, too, Coquet would be in its beauty, fretting over many a mossy rock and stone with a plashing murmur, or gliding through deep brown pools overhung by dipping woods, with the trout leaping in them. In many a house of God the holy message of peace and goodwill towards men would be read and preached, and many a choir raise melodious hymns and psalms to the glory of the Most High.

But this Sabbath-day, the 20th June 1756, was to be very different to those who remained in Fort William. As the day broke, those who had been able to snatch a few hours' sleep hurried again to their posts, and joined their comrades who had been watching. Behind their little barricade of cotton bales, our friends and a few soldiers were assembled; and as soon as she could see, they all heard, reverently, the sweet voice of Julia Wharton read out the

psalms for the day. Who does not remember them, and that sad, pitiful, cry for help?—

“Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my crying come unto Thee!

“Hide not Thy face from me in the time of my trouble, incline Thine ear unto me when I call; O hear me, and that right soon.”

Passing into the exultant song—

“Praise the Lord, O my soul! And all that is within me, praise His holy name.

“Praise the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, Thou art become exceeding glorious!”

While they listened, the enemy were gathering quickly in every post, which became thick with turbaned heads; and as daylight advanced, and the sun rose through the eastern mist and clouds, a fire more rapid and more deadly than any the English garrison had yet experienced, burst upon them on every side—from cannon, from wall-pieces, and from matchlocks it poured thick and fast—and a heavy column of men were soon seen forming towards the north-west bastion, with the evident intention of storming it.

Snatching a few hasty mouthfuls of food such as they could get, Mr Wharton and Ralph Smithson hurried to the point of danger, and, with such of their men as could be assembled there, strove to

check the progress of a body of blue-coated assailants who, with an energy and bravery they had not yet seen attempted, charged up to the foot of the works and attempted to scale them. It was here that Ralph Smithson noticed a slight active figure foremost in every charge, shouting the war-cry of those people, urging them forward, and using passionate gestures of reproach and entreaty as time after time they were hurled back by discharges of grape and musketry, and by bayonets and boarding-pikes, wherever escalade was attempted. They marvelled who this could be, so young and so fair: for the ruddy features could be easily seen, and looked almost English.

“Before he sleeps—before he sleeps at noon,” had that Affghan girl cried to her countrymen, and so had led charge after charge in the name of Allah and the Prophet. But noon came, and the mysterious silence which they had always noticed at this hour fell again upon the native host, and once more there was to be temporary rest for all while the Nawab slept.

It was but a faint hope; but men in such straits will cling to any, while it was evident to all that another attack made with such resolution could not be withstood; so Mr Holwell requested the banker Omichund again to write to the Nawab’s minister, and as the messenger with the letter was allowed to pass, there was hope for a while.

But not for long, though the cessation of firing had been of greater duration than usual. The letter had reached its destination ; but with such a prize almost within his grasp, the Nawab was little likely to abandon his determination of revenge. Many a brave Moslem soldier had been shot down ; the priest of the mosque, aided by other priests, had been busy all day preaching a holy war against the infidels, and the army burned to revenge those who had already fallen. Above all, Sozun had sent message after message to her lord to encourage his obstinacy of purpose, and his belief in her destiny now surpassed all other motives for persistence.

There was no answer, therefore ; and presently, as they watched the enemy, the preparations of several heavy storming parties could be easily seen, and the already exhausted garrison viewed them with a grim dismay. Before those thousands thirsting for their blood, without the possibility of defending or even watching the whole of the walls, there was no hope, and yet surrender was not yet spoken of among them. Even at that late hour, had the recreants in the ships below riding safely at their anchors—witnessing the strife, yet giving no aid—moved up a few vessels, the Fort might have been saved ; but Mr Holwell, as he went to the south-east bastion to judge whether he were justified, under the circum-

stances, in prolonging the defence, saw no movement among them ; not a boat was lowered, nor was one near by which any message might be sent, while the enemy were crowding up the defences in numbers which he had no hope of resisting. It was then that, seizing a flag, he waved it as one of truce ; but the only reply was a volley of shot, and fiercer and hoarser cries from the men below. Then, on each other's shoulders—by ladders, clinging to pieces of broken walls—the Moslem soldiers gained the rampart, and, as he yielded his sword to a native officer, Mr Holwell found himself a captive, while the few soldiers who still resisted died at their posts.

It was just before this that the Nawab's Rohillas, before whom ran and leaped the same youthful active figure which had been seen in the morning, came on in serried array, and at a rapid trot, holding their shields before their bodies to turn the English bullets, and reached the foot of the north-west bastion. There were fewer there now to receive them than before. Many of the militia—who, despite the Don's predictions, had fought well—now cowed and terrified, were sheltering themselves below. A few English soldiers, Mr Wharton, Ralph Smithson, and the Don, prepared to do what men could ; and behind a screen of cotton bales Julia Wharton was loading muskets, and handing them to be fired. I do not think any of them



spoke ; death seemed very near now, but amidst that fierce strife it was little thought of. As the Rohillas climbed up, hewing fiercely at pikes and bayonets with their broad sabres and sharp battle-axes, Ralph was at last face to face with the person he had so often watched ; that fair glowing face with its flashing eyes and a sword between its set teeth, the slight womanish hands clutching at the broken masonry, with a pile of dead beneath—was being raised up and covered with their shields. The Englishman's and the Affghan girl's eyes met for a moment as Ralph Smithson raised his cutlass for a blow which must have cloven her head to the teeth ; but he could not strike.

“It is a woman,” he cried, as he dropped his sword point. “God help me, I cannot strike her.” The next moment he heard a sharp scream from Julia Wharton, and rushed to the spot. A glance told the story—her husband lay writhing in mortal pain. She was striving to raise his head, and as she heard his faint cry for water, to pour some into his mouth.

Ralph Smithson laid down his bloody weapon, useless now, for the Rohillas had crowded up the wall, and were spreading themselves on every side, as he reached his friends—all but Sozun and an old officer, who were arrested by the group before them.

“Strike him not,” she had cried to some of her men, who had lifted their swords to cut down Smithson as he knelt over Mr Wharton.

“He has killed our brethren. We have marked him these two days,” shouted some of them, savagely.

“He is mine,” she said. “Away with ye to plunder!” and Smithson and Mrs Wharton were saved.

Ralph heeded not the action, or thought of the blood-stained weapons lifted over him. There lay one he loved gasping out a last few trembling words, and amidst the din of strife he was listening with intense eagerness.

“I’m going, . . . Julia—fast now. . . It’s very dark, darling. Where, where . . . are you? Where’s Ralph? . . . Don’t, don’t forget . . . mother—mother! . . .”

A last great sob, a quick convulsion, and Henry Wharton, like many another, had gone to his rest, with his mother’s name last on his lips, spoken as it had been in days of childhood long gone by. The convulsion left no painful trace—there was a sweet smile of triumph on his sallow wasted face, a flush of almost bright colour upon his cheek; but the blue eye was set in death, and a great majesty of expression was settling upon the strong handsome features.

“Oh, Ralph, he is not dead! Lift him up,” she said, faintly.

“He is gone, Julia—gone for ever to his rest.”

She threw herself upon the body with a passionate wailing cry. To have him snatched away in death, whom she had only begun to love within these last three weary days!—he, too, who had been spared through all previous danger. It was too quick a revulsion, and she had fainted.

“Raise her up, sir,” said Sozun, who, fascinated by the scene of grief, so natural—so terrible—had remained. “Raise her up—I can protect her, and Affghans do not war against women or helpless men.”

“Art thou a woman?” said Ralph Smithson.

“No matter,” said the girl, “what I am. Raise her up, and give her some water, else she will die.”

Between them, they raised Julia Wharton, and Sozun filled an earthen cup from a pitcher which stood there. “Drink,” she said, as the English-woman’s bosom heaved, and she sighed—“drink, and rouse thyself. He is dead—what canst thou do for him? Dost thou understand me?”

“I do,” said Ralph Smithson. “Who art thou?”

“I told thee, Feringi, it does not matter; she is my care, and I can protect ye both. Take her up, and follow me. I hear the Nawab’s procession. He is coming.”

The sun was setting, and a blaze of light shone upon the bastion, the blood-stained breastwork of cot-

ton bales, and the white upturned face of him who lay at rest there. Perhaps the Affghan girl remembered the white face of her dead father as the sun had gleamed upon it that evening on the field of Sirhind, for it was like an act of veneration, when she went, touched lightly the eyes and the lips of the dead, and then her own heart and forehead. "The peace and the blessing of God be upon him—he has died a soldier's death," she said, gently, and turned away. "Come, sir, if thou canst carry her—she is safe nowhere but with me. I am a woman, and can protect her and thee. Art thou her brother? Oh, she is very beautiful!"

"I was his friend in life," Ralph Smithson replied to the girl—"no more. She was his wife. Julia, we must go. I dare not leave you. Come; I will see to him afterwards. Come, this person can help us; she is a woman, and will save you from violence."

"O Ralph," cried the sobbing girl, falling upon his shoulder, "I have none left but you—no one. O my God! no one but you; do not leave me now."

So they descended the steps of the bastion, as the Nawab's palankeen was set down in the area of the Fort, and a concourse of people had crowded about it. "He must not see her," said the girl quickly; "it will be her death, or worse. Can you

not conceal her, till I can make her safe? Thou canst understand me?"

"Perfectly," said Ralph, in good Hindustani. He had soon learned the colloquial dialect. "Is there danger?"

"I tell you, sir," she said, "upon a woman's honour, and I swear to you by my dead father, if he sees her she will be seized for his zenana, and then—God help her."

"Who art thou?" cried Smithson, quickly.

"I am his slave and his mistress," she replied; "do as I bid ye, else she is lost."

"She is right, Julia," said Smithson; "come here, it is the last place they will seek you in—the black-hole. It's dark there, and you will not be seen. Crouch down by the window, and I will come for you as soon as I can."

"Yes, she will be safe there," said Sozun. "Keep quiet, lady, and for your life's sake do not show yourself."

There was a group round the Nawab's palankeen, in which he was sitting speaking to Mr Holwell, whom he was questioning as to the amount of treasure in the Factory. Men were loosing Mr Holwell's hands which were tied, and he was telling the young prince that there was not much money in the treasury. Whatever there was should be looked after.

There was no violence offered to Mr Holwell; and others, who were looking on, augured well from that. The Affghan girl went and stood behind the Nawab's palankeen, and, except her countrymen, no one there knew her. The Nawab was inquiring who had climbed into the Fort first, and was holding in his hand a heavy gold necklace to bestow upon the person. Several soldiers had stepped forward, among them the officer to whom Mr Holwell had given up his sword, and who appealed to that gentleman for corroboration of what he said.

"Nawab Sahib," said Mr Holwell, "if I may speak, this man was the first beside me; but it was not till I saw the bastion beyond me full of Rohillas that I surrendered. One of them was the first."

"Let me speak, Nawab Sahib," said Ralph Smithson, stepping forward. "The first upon my post was a mere youth; I could have slain him, but he looked so like a woman that I could not strike."

"I am here, my lord," whispered the girl, bending down to him, "but take no notice of me for your honour's sake. Enough, that I have done what I needed."

"Nay, thou hast earned it, darling," whispered the young man, throwing the jewel about her neck, "and wilt not refuse it; now begone, I will follow directly. Come hither Noor Khan," he continued to the chief

of the Rohillas—"well hast thou earned this, as well by thy bravery as," he whispered, as he tied a gorgeous ornament of rubies and emeralds into the old Affghan's turban, "by thy care of her; nor shall your men be forgotten."

Sozun waited to see the decoration bestowed upon her countryman; and was satisfied, when the old officer's eyes met her own, that he was content now. She had redeemed much, but not all. Could she but save that fair Englishwoman! Ah, should he but see her! It was hopeless to attempt it then, and till to-morrow they would all be safe; and, giving a sign to one of the eunuchs, she stepped into a litter, and was carried rapidly away.

There was little more to be done that evening. The Nawab's heart was following his slave. How beautiful had she looked with the flush of victory on her face. Again and again the Fort was searched, and plunderers and Portuguese driven out. The Nawab's seal was put on the treasury; "he would come," he said, "and count the money in the morning." Then guards were set, and there was quiet. The English gentlemen and soldiers, many of them wounded, were sitting about the court in groups, speculating as to where they would be put for the night. That was the barrack-square, close and hot enough; and many, faint and weary, were lying down. The

barrack-rooms were at least open and airy, and the platform where the men slept especially so. Perhaps they would get something to eat; and the quiet, the relief from constant excitement of battle, had already sent some to sleep, and relieved the rest from all immediate apprehension.

Then, as the time for prayer came, the Nawab and all his people prepared for it, and carpets or scarfs were spread to kneel upon. There was no minaret; but a muezzin ascended a terrace hard by, and began to chaunt the Azan—"Prayer is better than sleep, O ye faithful! Prayer is better than sleep. God is victorious, God is victorious!"—and the cry "Ulla hu Akbar," was taken up by a thousand hoarse voices. Thus, as the chronicle hath it, "the Moors sang a great psalm for their victory, and the Nawab with them." True, indeed, was the prophesy of the Derwesh, "There would be victory."

A few more directions as to the safe custody of the prisoners; a few last orders to the governor nominated, in regard to the treasury, that it was not to be opened till he came in the morning; a few assurances to Mr Holwell that he would be well taken care of; and the English captives saw the Nawab's palankeen taken up, and, attended by his courtiers and soldiery, set out for the town; and they heard the matchlock shots and the great drums



which accompanied his progress, till the sound grew fainter and fainter with the distance, and so ceased. It was almost dark now, and men with torches ran hither and thither exploring the Fort, for a safe place into which to put the captives. At last one cried, "There is the prison, it will hold them all."

Ralph Smithson had taken Mrs Wharton a jar of water, and she was drinking it eagerly and thankfully, and put it down carelessly by the window. "It is so hot and close here," she said; "may I not come out, Ralph? they are all gone."

"Not yet," he replied. "After the Nawab is gone I will seek a safe place for you," and he went out again into the court. Some of his friends were sitting sadly, weary and sick with the day's fighting, and their losses; others were chatting together cheerfully. "The Nawab had been kind, and to-morrow the ships would be up again." "If John Company had to pay a swinging ransom, what matter? he was rich enough." Some of the soldiers, English and Dutch, had got to the arrack stores, and were roaring in drunken mirth, while others were trying to keep them quiet. Gradually all saw the soldiers of the Nawab close round them and drive them forward, while men stood at the prison door with torches to light them in. Ralph Smithson sprang forward to get Julia Wharton out of a place which he knew

would not be fit for her, but he was too late. Those after him—some laughing, some shrieking in drunken madness, some protesting—came on in a dense mass, blocking up the doorway, while blows and pricks of swords and spears from behind urged on the rest. Then closer and closer the mass within pressed together and occupied all the standing room, till the last man was thrust in, and the door was shut and locked.

## CHAPTER XLI.

THE BLACK HOLE—SUNDAY NIGHT, JUNE 20, 1756.

It did not need many moments to reveal to the prisoners the frightful situation in which they had been placed. It was indeed impossible for any one to move now, so closely was the mass wedged together; and had it been standing in the open air, the weakest must have inevitably fallen and been trampled down to death. This was a room but eighteen feet square, and into it one hundred and forty-five people had been crammed. On three sides there was a dead wall of brick without any aperture, which indeed formed part of the Fort. In the fourth side, which opened to the barrack courtyard, were two windows which had iron bars, and by these, whatever air could reach the interior found entrance; but what was it in comparison with the frightful need? "This is for life or death, Julia," whispered Ralph Smithson to the terrified woman, who had seen the throng troop

by her with frantic cries and gestures. "Kneel down, keep your face to the bars, I will stand over you while I have life and strength! and I will yield to no other. Here, Mr Holwell, there is room by us; come quick, and stay by me; you are weak, and I am strong."

"You are wounded, Mr Smithson, and need a better place than I," replied the brave generous man; "I shall do very well; we have others to look to, and must not forsake them."

There was little spoken, as men took the places in which they were to live or die that night.

"Eh, Captin Smithson!" said a rough but weak voice behind him, "ye'll no forget Drrever, surr; that's the man fraa Berrick, ye ken; a'm vara weak, surr, an' if ye'll let me pit ma heed a'tween yer legs, surr, a'll no disturb ye, surr; a'll be vara patien'. Eh, Captin, but it's vara terrible a' this; the Lord be gude to uz."

"Be quiet, then," said Ralph Smithson; "lie still, and take care of yourself—I cannot help you."

"It hardly matters, surr, if a' live or dee, it's jist the Lorr'd's will; but if a'm deed in the mornin', jist send aale I ha' aboot me to ma folk at Berrick; there's a wee bit goud I've gotten, an'——"

"Don't talk," cried Ralph, sternly; "keep still, I'll see to you, if we're alive."

Julia Wharton dared not speak. She knelt there

between Ralph Smithson's strong arms and knees, safe from any crush from without, her white face pressed against the bars, breathing, but almost unconscious then. Every now and then she heard a cheering word from her protector; and Mr Holwell, and others standing and kneeling by her, tried to soothe her as best they could. Occasionally, when the pressure was heaviest, Ralph Smithson passed his arm round her waist, and held her up for a little to breathe more freely; and once, when those without had brought a torch to the window, he saw her turn round her head and smile at him. I think, if she had dared to speak, it would have been some passionate avowal of gratitude for his care. But she was better silent.

There were men who, in that awful time, comported themselves with fortitude and resignation only known to Him to whom their spirits had gone before morning dawned; and there were others as brave who were spared; but among all that hideous mass of suffering, there was perhaps no calmer heart than Julia Wharton's. To live or to die, who could tell? and she waited patiently for the issue. For a time the mass stood up quietly and patiently, and an order to strip off their upper garments was obeyed by most. Then they tried to sit down and get up at word of command; but this soon became impossible, for many

who sat down could rise no more, and fell under foot to die; and the heat and stench were momentarily increasing, and becoming intolerable even to those in the foremost ranks. Who can tell of what passed further back? Even those who came out alive the next morning, and have left their records for us to read, could only guess. To look back into that thick darkness was impossible, for the steam of men's bodies increased the gloom; and when a torch was held up to the window by those outside, all that could be seen was a dim surging mass of naked men—English, Dutch, Portuguese, and natives—rising, falling, climbing on each other's slippery shoulders, only to drop between and be at once trodden to death.

Out of that horrible, seething mass came cries of "Water, water! open the door!" intermingled with prayers, wild and incoherent ravings, the shrieks of drunken men, to whom their intoxication gave temporary energy—fearful oaths and curses in English and Dutch—in a Babel of languages—and among them the groans and sobs of the dying.

So passed one hour—two hours—and many were already dead, and more were dying. There was now greater space within, but existence was more difficult and impossible every moment. Some gave up the struggle at the windows for air, and wandered over the dead, lying down in corners; and, if they had

sense or consciousness, breathing a last prayer, and so dying. Was there no pity among their guards? At first, under the heartless intoxication of victory, the native soldiers crowded round the windows, and looked through them by the light of torches, jeering in horrid exultation, and mocking the shrieks and turmoil within; while the heat, the glare, and the smoke and smell of burning oil aggravated the general suffering. Even these hard men could not long bear this sight, and turned from it with horrible loathing. Water! water!—would no one bring any to the dying, for the sake of the Lord Jesus and his mother Mary?

They brought it at last plentifully, and dashed it in the faces of those who clung to the bars, while hats were held out from inside, and filled from the cool waterskins, and so passed on behind. Some fainting wretches got a little, but most was spilled in the frightful struggles for it; and after a time came no more.

“A thousand rupees to any one who will open the door and let us out,” cried Mr Holwell. “Ye all know me. I will answer with my life to the Nawab. We cannot escape—we will be quiet outside; and many are already dead. Oh! by your mothers, by your children, by the Prophet, do not look on at suffering like this, and deny us mercy!”

“Let them fire on us, Mr Holwell,” shouted many a voice; “better we should be shot down and put out of our misery than endure this.”

Ah yes! it would have been better—an easier death than that horrible choking for lack of air; but no one fired.

“We dare not let you out,” said a native officer, who had been roused by the tumult, and who came to see what it was; “but I will go and see what can be done.”

It was but a mockery of hope. Again and again the man sent his dread message that all the Feringis would be dead ere morning if they were not liberated; but to no purpose.

“Two thousand—anything—ten thousand!” again besought Mr Holwell, Ralph Smithson, and others who could speak the native language. “Go to the Nawab. He did not desire this; and ye will have to answer for it.”

“We dare not wake him, gentlemen,” said another superior officer, who had a compassionate face; “we dare not indeed.”

Wake him! who dare do so now? In a luxurious apartment, on the softest of cushions, the windows open to admit the night wind, Suraj-oo-Doulah slept tranquilly, and his lovely slave, Sozun, restless and wakeful, now sat leaning out of the lattice, now with



stealthy step moved near her lord, and gently fanned him. All her excitement was gone ; there was only one thought at her heart—that if the lovely English-woman were but seen, her reign was over. Yet she must be seen. Her lord would waken early, and the prisoners would be called before him. She must appear with the rest—and then ?

Could nothing be done ? It was a desperate resolution. Could she go ? The clothes she had worn were in the next room. She could but attempt it, and die if she failed——

But even this was impossible. As she went out of her lord's chamber, and drew the curtain which separated it from a corridor without, she saw a group of the eunuchs sitting there awake, their swords drawn and resting on their knees, who looked up at her with their bleared, red eyes. They at least were watchful and faithful.

“What is it, lady ?” said one, rising. “It is but just midnight, and you are awake. Can we get anything, or call the women-servants ?”

“Nothing, Nasir,” said the girl. “My lord is resting quietly ; but I am anxious, and could not sleep.”

“Anxious !” said the man, respectfully ; “we are all here—there is no fear. Go and rest yourself, lady.”

Should she tell him ? He was one she trusted

more than the others, and it was her only hope. If she could but get the Englishwoman into her own keeping, she would answer for the rest.

“Listen,” she said, beckoning him to her, and speaking in a low tone. “There is an Englishwoman among those prisoners ; take a palankeen and go for her. I would not have her escape in the morning—she is so beautiful. Go!—here is my lord’s ring. Bring her here by the back way, and let me know when she arrives. She will need clothes and—and—no matter. Bring her hither, and to me.”

“On my head and eyes !” said the man, whispering, “I will do it.” And so he left her.

Sozun returned to the window and looked out. A heavy sultry night it was, without a star visible, and a dull oppressive weight seemed to hang in the air. All about was still ; but over the plain before the Fort troops of jackals began to scream their midnight cry, and their unearthly howling seemed to be taken up from all sides by packs fighting over the dead. She drew the muslin scarf about her more closely, shuddered, and still watched. She saw torches moving over the plain, and a heavy litter borne rapidly along by men, and presently the torchlight gleamed upon the Fort wall and gate, and disappeared within it. Would she come ? The girl’s heart beat fast, as she strained her eyes to pierce the gloom of night ; but there were

no torches, nor any sign of movement over the black plain ; and so she sat watching till the fresher air of morning warned her that daybreak was nigh. Then she sadly gave up hope, and went and lay down beside him whom she had often dreaded, and never more than then.

I do not say that Ralph Smithson never moved from his first position. It was nearly impossible to maintain it at all times ; and nothing but his strong bony frame and great muscular power enabled him to remain where he was, and to repel the surging masses of men which assailed him from behind, climbing on his shoulders, and striving to drag his hands from the bars, to which he held with an almost iron grasp. Again and again he had fiercely and desperately struck down the poor wretches who thus assailed him. There was little pity between man and man that night. Often had he thought, if Julia Wharton died, he would go back among the crowd and die too. But she lived, and she was his—for that night at least. The poor seaman, Drever, too, held fast, and every now and then spoke cheerily.

“ Eh! dinna ye lit go, Captin Smithson, else we’ll a’ be deed men. An’ the leddy, surr—my! but she’s a brave lassie—an’ the drooth’s sair. Ye’ll keep a brave heart, my leddy !”

“ Julia, do you hear what he says?—that brave

fellow behind you? Keep a stout heart. If we die, we shall but follow him," said Smithson, cheerily.

"I will, Ralph, I will. I do not fear so long as you are by. This water that you brought me so kindly, with God's help is keeping me alive. I dip my handkerchief in it, and suck it. Will you have some?"

"I will not take a drop, Julia. I have had plenty from the window, and Mr Holwell says our shirt sleeves are the best. Mine are wet enough."

"How quiet they are!" she said, after a long silence; "there are few speaking now behind us."

Few indeed! He only dreaded that she might look back and see the ghastly heaps there, for a torch before them shed a lurid light into the room, and revealed all its horrors; but he did not allow her to turn her head. "Yes," he said, "they are quiet, but do not speak—it will increase your thirst."

"If the leddy'd like some of the Psaalms, Captin Smithson? Mither used to sing them, and a'll try if they'll come till mey. It's better than this dead silence. Eh, but it's vara awfu', surr! Ye wadna mind, mem?" and he began in a low quavering voice, weak from suffering—

" ' Since I have placed my trrust in God,  
A rrefuge aaways nigh,  
Why should I like a tim'rous burrd  
To distant mountains fly ?'

Eh, Mr Smithson, but if the bonny Cheviots was nigh us, an' we could get a brrreath o' the pure air, surr, an' a smell o' the brrright bonnie heather, instead o' this horrid stench—or maybe the fresh roar o' Coquet or Wansbeck, surr, an' no thae skirrls an' grrroans o' dyin' crratures, surr, we'd be happy! Ye'll mind thae rrrivers? Eh me! eh me! but a'll niver see them nae mair—but it's the Lord's will, surr! . . . Ay, mem," he continued after a while, "that's the eleventh Psaalm, ye ken, an' a' mind mair o't—

‘ Behold, the wicked bend their bow,  
And ready bend their darrrt;  
Lurrking in ambush to destrroy——’

. . . A' mind nae mair, my leddy, an' a' canna sing—a'm too drey, mem, an' a sair dwam's comin' ower me——”

“Here, take this handkerchief and suck it,” said Mrs Wharton in a low voice. “Give it back to me,—I've more here for you.”

“God's blessing on ye, my leddy, but you've the noblest heart I ever seed in a womin. A' know'd anither ance. Eh! but she was a bewty too, like yersel', mem. But this is nae place for tellin' o' stories, mem——”

“Don't talk, Drever,” cried Ralph Smithson, sternly. “You'll die of thirst if you do.”

“'Deed, then, a'm reddy to dee, surr, if it's the gude

Lorrd's will, an' a'll no talk nae mair. Only if I could mind anither hymn or psalm. Listen! wha's that?"

It was a hollow voice at the far end of the room, and it cried with a great moan—

“‘When the Lord turneth again the captivity of Sion, then were we like them that dream.’”

The words had an awful unearthly sound as they came from among the heaps of dead, and silence fell upon all. After a pause, as if striving to recollect, it said again, in a louder and more hollow tone—

“‘Turn our captivity, O Lord, as the rivers in the south. . . . They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. . . . He that now goeth on his way weeping, and beareth forth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him.’”

Then there was a brief muttering of prayer, which died away into a hollow broken murmur, and again silence fell upon all. One more of that ghastly company had passed to his eternal rest; and there were some of the survivors who, like Ralph Smithson, never forgot those last solemn words of hope and trust, and felt even in that hour of horrible trial as though the peace of God were coming upon them.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### RELEASED.

So they remained enduring, and speaking little now. Except an occasional moan, the sufferers were quiet. It was past midnight when a messenger came to the bars of the windows.

“There’s a woman among you!” cried a shrill voice. “This is no place for her; she is to go to the Nawab’s. Come out!”

Ralph Smithson instantly remembered the warning words of the Affghan girl; but Julia did not at first understand that the message brought regarded her.

“Let her go, Smithson,” said Mr Holwell; “she will be well cared for; we cannot save her. Mrs Wharton, go—save your life—we shall all die before morning.”

“Oh no, no, no!” she cried—“oh no, no! Kill me here—I am ready to die; but do not send me

away! It would be horrible! Ralph! Mr Smithson! I will not leave you—indeed I will not!”

She had struggled to her feet, and beheld, by the torchlight which streamed in, what Ralph had hitherto kept from her sight. Strong and resolute as she was, the sickening reality was more than she could bear, and she fainted.

“She is dead!” he said to the man. “You have killed her! Look!”

The eunuch shrugged his shoulders. “Open the door,” he cried, “and let her out; she will recover in the air.”

But it could not be opened. The few chinks in it, and the openings underneath and beside the door-posts, had been so many air-holes, and men had fought for these, and died there in a heap; now no one could stir the door within or without.

Presently Mrs Wharton revived. There was now water in plenty, and Ralph Smithson poured some into her mouth and upon her face. The soldiers without were trying to open the door, and did not perceive that the lady had rallied.

“Keep close down, Julia,” he whispered; “hide yourself if you can under me. Drever, look to the lady if you are able.”

“I will, Ralph—I will do all you tell me,” she said, faintly. “But do not give me to them—oh, pro-



mise you will not! I had better die than that. How many are dead, and yet my worthless life is spared!"

She said this in broken sentences, and he could not reply. His assuring arm round her waist, as he held her up with his still great strength, was proof enough that he would be true to her.

"If she can't be got out," said Nasir, to one of the native officers present, "she can't run away. Perhaps she is dead; are there many dead? I must wait till dawn."

"All," replied the man, with a sigh—"all except those round the windows. I wish it were daylight."

There were more than he who wished for daylight. Of those at that window, Mr Holwell among the rest, some left it frequently, and wandered back into the room to die. Those who lived, struggled to their old places, and, with another terrible fight for air, lived on. But Ralph Smithson never quitted his hold on the bars. His left arm was much swelled, his wound had become exquisitely painful, and his right arm and hand, his legs and back, were bruised in every part. He was often faint and sick; but still the true endurance of his Darnell blood, and his awakening hope in an Almighty Providence, kept him up amidst that ghastly company. He had had much communing with himself that night; and felt,

if he were spared he might do better things hereafter, and be thankful if his life were saved.

At last the morning broke, and a Moslim priest, ascending the rampart above them, chanted the Azān, and its close—Ulla hu Akbar! Ulla hu Akbar!—God is victorious!—with more than usual solemnity and energy. Then the captives knew that their time had come either for deliverance or death. The fresher morning air had already revived some who could stand nearest the bars, and behind there was space enough now. Presently a message was brought from the Nawab that Mr Holwell should come to him, and in no anxiety; but the door could not be opened, nor was it till after a weary labour, by the already exhausted survivors, that its ghastly obstruction could be cleared away. Then twenty-two men and one woman, weak, pallid, utterly exhausted in mind and body, staggered forth into the open air, and sat down helplessly—some weeping, some sobbing hysterically, some praying and thanking God aloud, and others, not seeming to comprehend that they were in existence, tottering here and there, buffeted by the rough soldiers.

“You are to come to the Nawab, Holwell Sahib,” said a native officer he knew, who took him kindly by the arm and led him on—“you and the four next to you in rank. Come, sirs, and fear not. The

Nawab is sorry for all this, and will be kind to you."

No time was allowed for parley. There were some litters ready, and the poor gentlemen, bareheaded, and burning with the fever produced by the sudden reaction to life, were hurried away at once. No one seemed to care for the sick.

Ralph Smithson had supported Mrs Wharton out of the prison, and had seated her in a chair on the shady side of the court. He thought Drever the sailor, whom he had seen as the dead were dragged away from the door, had showed signs of life, and he returned to carry him out if he were alive. Just then, the eunuch Nasir, who had remained on the watch, and had carefully scanned every figure as it passed out of the prison door, had the litter brought up, and ere she was aware of his purpose, Julia Wharton found herself lifted by several stout men into the palankeen; then the doors were shut to, and a cloth fastened round them, and, followed by Nasir and a guard of soldiers, it was borne forward at the utmost speed of the bearers.

Ralph Smithson, as he came forth carrying the almost insensible sailor, saw the litter and the soldiers turning out of the barrack-yard, but hardly noticed it further, and for the time the poor fellow he had brought out received all the care he could afford.

But this was not needed when he was rapidly reviving and could sit up. Then Smithson turned to the place where he had left Julia Wharton, but she was gone. "She will have gone to him," he thought, and went towards the steps which led to the bastion where Mr Wharton had died.

"You cannot pass up here, Sahib," cried a sturdy native soldier, presenting his piece.

"Did a woman go up?" asked Smithson, hastily.

"A woman? No; there was one taken away in a palankeen by the eunuchs from the chair yonder—was that she whom you seek? They were the Nawab's people, and could not be stopped."

Ralph Smithson turned away, sick at heart. "Would that she had died in my arms!" he said, bitterly. "Would to God she had died rather than live a future life of shame! Was nothing possible to rescue her?"

Mr Holwell and several other gentlemen had been taken away, and did not return. The sun was already high. Ralph felt very faint and weak, and sat down in hopeless exhaustion of mind and body. It was not that he loved the woman whom he had protected through that fearful night, but the thought of her probable future fate was very shocking. Could nothing be done, even to ascertain it? Rousing himself again from the strange chill languor that seemed

to be rapidly spreading over him, he addressed himself to a group of the Nawab's officers who were present, and by them his worst fears were confirmed. "One of the Prince's most confidential eunuchs had come with special orders at night," they said, "and had just taken away the English lady; by this time she would be in the royal harem, and who dare follow her? No, they could give no help, no counsel. He was free to do as he pleased; but to approach the Nawab at all in his present humour, least of all in regard to Mrs Wharton, would be madness." He felt this to be true, and again sat down in despair, sick and giddy, as he had never felt before.

A friendly touch on his shoulder caused him to look up. It was the Don, who, with other Portuguese, as the Nawab entered the Fort the evening before, had escaped to his home, little thinking how the night would be spent by his masters, or what he should find in the morning. The little Don's face was wet with tears, and he could scarce speak from convulsive sobbing.

"Come, Mr Smithson," said the little man, as Ralph looked up at him with a gaunt face and hollow eyes. "Come, sir—my house. . . . You ver ill, sir—come. Will die if stay here. All go w'ere dey like now; and dey take away poor Mr Holwell and some more gentilmens. Oh dear! Oh dear! What for not

take you, sir? I tank Almighty benefactions for you, sir; an' I got all Honorable Company's books safe, sir—lock up; and here de key all safe, sir, 'pon my honor. Come, sir, no good stay here. Dese dam Moor bury poor Mr Wharton with dead men, sir, in night. *Requiescat in pace,*" he continued, pausing and looking up reverently—"Amen; and I will get masses said, sir—by my Padre Sahib—Catolik Church, sir; never mind orthodoxation of comprehendings, Mr Smithson—all quite good, sir, 'pon my honor! Come 'way, sir; I fritin to see debelopments of corpses out of dat dam Black Hole. Let 'em go into big pit, sir. Ugh! bah! Come 'way, Mr Smithson, you very ill. I see you shiver, an' you gettin' fever. Doña Luisa glad to see you—'cuse me, but we's humblest people, sir, only truthfulness of Honorable Company servants—and—King George. You not trust me, Mr Smithson? I got all books safe, by George—no lie, sir, 'pon my honor! Come, sir, I insist—you gettin' worse every minit. If you lie down now you never get up. Here Cassim, help up your master," he continued, decisively, in Hindustani, to Ralph's native servant, who had just entered the court; and between them they dragged Smithson to his feet, and led him away.

In truth, the Don's long speech could hardly be followed by the young man. He felt he was grow-

ing worse every moment ; and as it is recorded in history that many of the survivors of the Black Hole died of a putrid fever afterwards, I think he would have shared their fate, but for the skill and kind care of those who tended him. He could never remember perfectly how he got to Don Gomez's house, nor what befell him there ; but when consciousness, accompanied by almost a child's weakness, returned to him, he found himself in the small bungalow which had been offered to him at first in the Don's garden—the cool wind playing over him and rustling in the trees above—unable to rise from his bed indeed ; but, as the worthy Don and a Portuguese doctor informed him with thankful tears in their eyes, safe and convalescent. Then, too, he heard gradually that the Nawab had already left Calcutta, taking with him as prisoners Mr Holwell and the other gentlemen ; but of Mrs Wharton's fate no traces had been discoverable.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### SOZUN'S PLOT.

IN her terrible impatience, the interval between the despatch of the eunuch and the last sight of the little procession as it passed into the Fort gate, was hardly endurable by Sozun, as she sat at the window watching. How long would it take to secure the Englishwoman and bring her forth?—had she escaped?—was she with the rest of the prisoners, who were, she had heard, locked up for the night, or was she with other women, hiding where she could? If she could be brought away at night, she might be hidden and saved; but once seen by day, there was no hope—she was far too beautiful to escape *his* notice. And at the remembrance of the misery of the English girl's face, bending over her dead husband, the best portion of Sozun's nature was touched to the quick—an honourable wife, she thought, who had loved him who lay there white and still in death.



Had they children? If so, where were they? She had seen none. Hidden away, perhaps, out of the battle. So, chasing each other, as it were, thoughts of the scene on the bastion, and of her warning to Ralph Smithson, came thick and fast into her mind; and still she watched.

Who was he? She had not forgotten the stern, excited face and flashing eyes which met hers as she was being lifted over the dead up to the bastion he was defending, nor her thrill of expected death as the young man's bloody sword was raised above her head for a moment and then dropped. He had said something in English—what was it? Did he then know her to be a woman? or was it the English girl's cry which had stayed his hand? How grand he had looked as her countrymen had crowded round him, and he held them at bay by the dead Englishman till she bade them begone. She had never seen one like him. Beside him, what was the miserable being lying there—tossing in an uneasy sleep—muttering words she could not distinguish? She crept near to him to listen; but he was at rest again, and sleeping heavily, and having trimmed the lamp, she returned to the window.

She was weary with the day's work and the fierce excitement; but no sleep came to her heavy eyes. Though her limbs ached, she scarcely stretched

them out to rest. Without she could see nothing but the dark plain, the river glimmering faintly beyond it, and the mass of the Fort and ruined warehouses, from among which dull fires gleamed, and light wreaths of smoke from smouldering embers rose occasionally into the air. Far away to the west, lightning was flickering among the clouds on the horizon; and she watched it vacantly, now brightly flashing, now glowing with a dull coppery gleam, and disappearing altogether. There was perfect stillness over all, except now and then the faint, distant cry of a sentinel, or the beat of a hollow-sounding drum and blast of a shrill horn, where a new watch was being set.

Still the eunuch did not return; and to her perception the danger had much increased. What if the woman were dead? Did Englishwomen, like other infidels she had heard tales of, sacrifice themselves to their husband's memory? Had she escaped to the ships, and Nasir feared to return without her? If she came, what was to be done? Where could she be lodged in safety, away from the Nawab? Would Nasir be faithful? and if not?— She had no attendant on whom she could depend for aid. There were crowds about her, but they were the Nawab's creatures—not one of them would dare to brave his anger, with the memories of many a tortured, muti-

lated wretch vividly in their remembrance. No, there was no help there; whatever was to be done she must do herself. The palankeen, whenever it did come, must be brought into the inner court of the house where they were staying. It was true she had told Nasir to await her orders, and he might be obedient; but it was a fearful risk, nevertheless.

Then her memory went back to the young Englishman. She shut her eyes and thought of him—so beautiful, yet so terrible. She thought of him, too, as he might be—tender and gracious; as she had seen him when he spoke to the woman, full of pity, with tears flowing from his eyes as he comforted her and led her away. Would she have gone like her? Ah yes! They said—even her own people said—he was a hero, and no one would have harmed him.

A strange watch indeed, and with stranger thoughts for company. Where had they not wandered in those weary hours, back from childhood, from the deadly field of Sirhind, through a life of false triumph and of shame—down to this? Was it enough to have lived for? A life without a tie, a life without love such as she had dreamed of in spite of evil influences! Yet one of splendour and of power such as she had hardly dared to imagine! She could not retract now—she durst not. Among her people she

had won honour, but her shame remained—could she leave that, hang grave-clothes about her neck, and go forth a humble devotee of God? It was the only alternative she knew of, but one she dared not attempt. Would the Nawab let her go? Never with life; to be detected in flight would be attended with mutilation or death. But she was yet secure; and as she turned to her lord's couch, memories of kindness, of many a fond caress, of the only love he had given to any one, came back upon her heart, and for the time softened it. "He might wrong me, he might even strike me," she said; "but I could bear it: I could not leave him but for God's service, and I am not fit for that yet. So long as may be my destiny I will live with him—or die, true even in death. See, he calls me, and I was in his thoughts as he in mine."

"Sozun, Sozun!" It was a moaning plaintive cry in his sleep, and she went again to his side. "Sozun! ah, girl, do not leave me! I have only you—only you," and he stretched out his arms, while she saw by the dim lamp that his face was sorely troubled.

It is some uneasy dream, she thought, I had best wake him. "I am here, my lord," she said, gently taking his hand; "Sozun is here, why didst thou call? I have not left thee."

The Nawab started up and pushed away her hand apparently in terror. "Where am I?" he cried; "that Derwesh! save me from him, O save me, Sozun!" and as he hid his face in her lap, she felt that he trembled.

"My lord, my lord! Let me take the evil off thee: what was the dream?" she said, soothing him. "There was no Derwesh near thee—there is no one but me. I could not sleep, and was watching thee, my lord. It is but a dream—let it pass."

"His eyes, his eyes! Oh, Sozun! they gleamed at me, as they did once in life. That dream! Ah! girl, that would frighten thee—even thee. Yes, let it pass. Is there yet much of the night?"

"I think not," she said; "the dawn is almost breaking. Wilt thou sleep again?"

"No," he said, "not now. I should dream again of him, perhaps. Sit by me, and tell me of the fight."

"Thou hast won Calcutta," she said; "is not that enough? For no one yet dared to attack the Feringis but thee. Did not the Derwesh—did I not tell thee thou wouldst be victorious?"

"But for thee, my life, I should have lost it. Now, what my father dared not do, I have done. But for thee, I should have been like him, afraid of a few white faces and a few guns. Now these Feringis fear

me, and, Inshalla! they shall do so hereafter. I promised thee the plunder of Calcutta Fort, and thou hast won it, girl; and while I dispose of these Feringis, who have so long defied me, thou canst go there and do thy will."

"Be as merciful, my lord," she said, pleadingly, "as thou hast been victorious; they cannot hurt thee now. Be merciful, for Sozun's sake."

"I will," he replied; "but the Priest thirsts for their blood, the blood of Kafirs who deny the Prophet, and he hath inflamed men's minds."

"The blood shed yesterday was enough surely to satisfy him, my prince?"

"I fear not, Sozun; but I will not yield. Ah! there is dawn, and the music begins. Get thee to sleep for a while—thou art weary, and thine eyes are heavy. I shall not see thee all day, my life; but in the evening thou shalt sing me to sleep;" and he passed out of the chamber to his attendants.

It was like a reprieve to Sozun to hear this: she would then be alone, and there was a better chance of success than she had dared to hope for. Sleep was out of the question, for her faculties were more than ever excited. Would the Englishwoman be brought? When she came could she understand her, and if not, what should she do? There were

servants in Calcutta who spoke English—could one be sent for? Ah! why was she delayed?”

Sozun seated herself again at the window. The morning breeze blew fresh and cool then, driving before it the heavy mist which had rested on the river in that close sultry night, and she watched the sails of boats gliding to and fro on the river. People were thronging towards the Fort, and some of the burned buildings were still smoking. Presently she saw the Nawab's retinue assemble below, and it was shortly in motion towards his tents, which were pitched in the camp. No one moved from the Fort as yet; but after a time some soldiers issued from the gate, then a few mean litters and men on foot, and she watched their progress to the camp; presently, too, a royal palanquin—she well knew its scarlet cloth covering—and Nasir mounted on his piebald palfrey urging on the bearers behind.

“It is she—it is she!” the girl exclaimed, clasping her hands; “and he is true.” Ere many minutes had elapsed, footsteps were heard on the private stair which opened into an adjoining room, and she went to receive her strange visitor.

“She is here, lady,” said Nasir, who first entered; “but she has come out of the mouth of death, and is in sore plight. They all died last night but her and a few others—but she may be saved. Look!”

It was indeed as he had said. Julia Wharton—clothes wet, torn, and dirty, her hair dishevelled, her face haggard, and her eyes swollen with weeping and misery—the lovely Englishwoman Sozun had seen the evening before, could hardly have been recognised. “Thou art welcome, sister,” she said, as Julia Wharton, weeping and trembling with terror, sank down before her, and was raised with cheering words of genuine compassion. “What can I do for thee? Dost thou understand me?” But the lady could not reply; in her terror and misery she was as one distraught.

“Some one must be brought who can speak her strange tongue. Canst thou get such a one, Nasir?”

“I will try,” he said, “but it is dangerous. What wilt thou do with her, lady? Is she for him?—thy gift to him?”

“No, no!” she returned fiercely, stamping her foot. “Why do you ask?”

“I beg pardon,” replied the man, humbly; “I will see for an ayah,” and he left them together.

As he passed out there was a woman sitting alone by the steps of the house, weeping bitterly. “Who art thou?” he asked.

“I am Missy Baba’s servant,” she said, “and she has been taken here. Oh, sir, let me go to her; I have followed her.”



How lucky, thought the eunuch. "Come with me," he said; "she is safe;" and they returned through the private court.

"Missy—oh, Missy Baba!" cried the faithful creature, as she entered the room and cast herself at the feet of her mistress; "come 'way—come my house; you no to stop here; dis no good place; come, I take you—come," and she tried to drag Mrs Wharton to her feet.

"Let her alone," said Sozun; "she hath hardly sense to hear thee. Peace! ye are with a friend; speak to her, for she doth not understand me, and tell her not to be afraid."

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### JULIA'S CHANCE.

“MISSY not know Anna?” cried the woman. “Oh, look up, and no fear for any ting; dis lady kind lady, an’ Anna come to help. Oh, Missis safe; and, I tank God, no dead in Black Hole.”

Julia Wharton’s great blue eyes opened, and she looked up. It was the only act of consciousness she had evinced since her entrance. With whom was she? Who were the man and woman—that English girl in disguise, as she had thought Sozun? Where was she? She tried to speak, but all that Anna could understand was, Water.

“Water—she wants water, lady,” said Anna, anxiously. “Ah, lady, my mistress was in the prison all night, and hundreds died around her. She will be better presently; pardon her.”

“And her husband was killed beside her,” added Sozun. “I saw him lying dead on the bastion:

would she had died too! Art thou a Moslimin?"

"Oh no!" cried the woman. "I am a Christian, Portuguese, and her servant. They told me she was in the Nawab's palankeen, and I followed it."

"It does not matter, if thou canst be faithful," replied Sozun. "Take of this water freely; there are no distinctions in such grief. Drink, lady."

"Oh Missy, drink some cool water, you will be better soon, and safe; dis lady goot lady, but I was afraid at first," said the servant.

"Who is she, and where am I?" asked Julia Wharton, after an eager drink.

"Me not know," replied Anna, "but me here wit you, dat's 'nough. Now lie down, Missy—poor Missy—but will be well presently;" and raising her mistress she supported her to a carpet which was spread near them; while Sozun fetched pillows which she arranged carefully under the poor aching head.

"Be quiet now, lady," said Anna in a whisper; "she may sleep;" and they sat down silently beside her.

Julia Wharton was weary, even to death she thought. Her senses were confused and stunned; she could remember nothing but portions of the fearful night she had passed, and shut her eyes shuddering,

as the cries and groans of the dying seemed again to fill her ears.

“Ah, you not tremble so, Missy—me wit you? Anna not go 'way now, never no more;” and she took her mistress's head on her bosom, and put away the dishevelled hair, while Sozun chafed her hands. Presently they saw a faint colour come into the wan cheeks: and as the girl grew calmer, tears welled from her eyes. “Do not leave me, Anna,” she said softly; “they are all gone but you—all dead—all dead!”

“Me never leave poor Missy Baba no more,” said the woman, herself bursting into tears—“never no more. Now, go to sleep, that's a dear lady, me watchin' by Missis;” and she began to sing a low crooning lullaby of the country, such as is sung to children. Gradually they saw the eyelids drooping more heavily, and the fair girl's countenance relax from the expression of terror; and they sat and watched her silently. The frame was utterly worn out, and kind nature was applying the only remedy for its restoration.

“Couldst thou conceal her—hide her away?” asked Sozun, after a while, in a low whisper. “Dost thou wish to save her?”

“From what?” answered the woman. “You are kind, why should she fear? She is not a man that

the Nawab should desire her blood. Has he not destroyed them all?"

"It is because she is a woman that I fear for her," returned Sozun. "It is because she is beautiful that I have had her brought to me. Who dare conceal her but me? Were he to know of this, dost thou think my life or her honour would be safe? canst thou understand what I have dared—to—to save her?"

"Who art thou, lady?" asked the servant, tremblingly. "His wife?"

"Ah, no," she said, "I am not his wife: and if she remained he would hate me, and forsake me for her: Look! her beauty is returning. Why did she not die?"

True, it was returning, for her sleep was peaceful and refreshing. As they looked upon the girl, there was a soft smile upon her mouth; the rosy lips were partly open, and disclosed the pearly teeth, and the cheek was flushed with the beautiful colour habitual to it, even in India.

"Look!" continued Sozun, "is she not beautiful? Such may be the Houris of Paradise they tell of, but not women amongst us. Dost thou comprehend now why I fear?"

The servant's mind was a poor one, blunted perhaps by service and a rough striving life; but it was

a woman's, and could comprehend jealousy and its accompanying dread and terror, which, in the fair face of Sozun, were fast increasing.

"I understand," she replied: "thou art not her enemy, lady?"

"If I were," returned Sozun, "I would take my lord by the hand and bring him to look on her. Even thus—as she lies, weary and faint—she is more lovely than he hath ever dreamed of; and what would she be were she attired as I am? Ah, no—she or I—she or I: and I would save her."

"An English woman would not be the wife of the Emperor of Dehli," said the servant, proudly. "Why do you fear for her?"

"I fear thou, too, art a fool," returned Sozun, quickly. "His wife! No, but worse; the slave of his humour, to be cast away to perish when he was weary of her. Dost thou not understand? If thou canst not, wilt thou make her do so?"

"Where could I take her?" said the woman, drearily, passing her hand across her eyes; "who could now protect her? Even Don Gomez dare not, and the Nawab would hear of her, and hang him. Oh, lady, why was she brought at all?"

"That she might be saved," was the reply. "None but I could save her, or can save her. If thou hast any wits thou wilt not fail me. Think again; the

Nawab will not stay many days—any hut, any cabin—what matter? If she once knows her own danger, she will save herself, or die. Does she fear death more than dishonour?”

“I cannot tell,” said the woman, despairingly. “When she wakes we must tell her. There is one—yes, one—the Begum, who might——”

“What Begum? Tell me, quick!—I can send for her.”

“No, no, lady, she would not come; she is hiding herself, but I know where. She lived with her husband, with Missy's husband, many years, and his children are with her.”

“I bless thee, O Allah Kureem! that there is hope. She would not refuse her?”

“No, I think not now. Before the Fort was attacked they met, and fell on each other's necks. I could take Missy there at night if you would give her clothes.”

“Surely, surely. Ya Allah, I vow thanksgivings to thee at every shrine. Yes, till night. Before then she shall be bathed and refreshed, she shall eat, and be strong. O that it were night! Till then—be thou but merciful, O Lord! See, the door there is fastened; no one can enter. I shall order water for the bath, which is beyond, and I shall tell them I bathe in private to-day. Yes, it will do,” continued

the girl to herself, quickly; "there is no fear; and when my food comes, she can eat of it with me. Fear not to be alone, I will soon rejoin thee." Would Nasir be faithful? That was her only dread now.

He met her at the anteroom-door of the Nawab's chamber. "I have been watching," he said, "and no one suspects as yet. But if he discover this, lady, we must both die. Why didst thou risk it? Had I but known thy intention, I would not have gone for the woman—no, even for thee; why not give the Feringi to him?"

"There is no fear," she replied, with all the calmness she could command, but she well knew the truth of his word, and trembled—was it worth the risk after all? Might not she trust her lord, and send the English girl there and then into the street? Give her to him? Ah, no! The sharp old pang of jealousy once more shot through her heart, as she stood irresolute for a moment; and she who had not feared death as the Englishman's sword quivered over her head, did not fear it now. "She or I," she muttered—"she or I."

"As you will, lady," continued the man; "what will be, will be. Thou hast not eaten yet?"

"Tell them to make the bath ready, and to send little Janum to me; she will do what I need,



Nasir. If there be danger, tell me of it, and keep watch."

"It is too late," said the man moodily to himself as he bowed and left her—"too late."

All day the house had been still, and Julia Wharton slept on her heavy sleep. When she woke, her eyes first fell upon Anna, who had never left her. A moment afterwards, as all the events of the night rushed upon her memory, she flung her arms round her servant in a paroxysm of terror. "Come away," she cried,—“come away, Anna; why do we stay here?"

"Ah Missy!" said the woman, "where you go now? Got no house, no Fort, no nothin'; where you go, my darlin'? best to stay here till night, then go 'way to Begum Sahib; she will keep you safe."

Perhaps it was then only that her utter desolation was understood. Last night, even in the fearful death-prison, Ralph Smithson's stout arm was about her; and there were Mr Holwell and other friends near; why was she not with them? "Where are the gentlemen?" she asked.

"I tell by-and-by every ting. Missy now bathe and eat something, then will be more stronger. I get clean clothes, native clothes Missis wear, cause nobody not find out Missis."

"Who was with me at first, Anna?" she con-

tinued. "I think I saw some European woman disguised in native clothes ; but, indeed, I was very confused."

"Ah, she good lady dat! she send Missis away to-night, den bad Nawab not get her."

"The Nawab! then I am in his power," she gasped. "O Anna, I remember now how they seized me, and carried me here when I had fainted."

"Lady will tell all when come; now be quiet an' wait. Me not dare go out, but Missis get bath and eat; then get plenty strong, and night-time dey send away safe; Missis understand?—safe to Begum Sahiba."

I do not think Julia Wharton could then comprehend the danger of her position. She thought some compassionate native lady might have protected her, and she understood that she must go out at night to be safe. She was no coward; and if there was ever a moment of her life in which all her presence of mind was needed it was this. It was clear to her that she was alone, and that none of her English friends were near; but those who lived through the night must be alive, and if she could get to the Begum she would soon find means to communicate with them. With this thought her spirit rose, and she prayed fervently for help.

“I will do what you wish,” she said; “and oh, Anna! how can I repay what you are doing—what you have done for me?”

“Missis, never mind dat,” said the woman joyfully. “I very glad to help my darlin’ Missy Baba. Now we take off dem dirty clothes, an’ make pretty Musulmani girl of my lady. Den rest quite all day; and I pray good Virgin Mary she keep you safe. Dere’s no helpin’ w’at’s been done neider. Dat’s God’s will, an’ holy Virgin.”

Sozun was right. It would have been little use overwhelming an already scared and nearly unconscious woman with a prospect of imminent danger; but when she herself and Anna, aided by the little slave, had bathed the fair stranger, Sozun’s exclamations at her beauty could hardly be restrained. When all the dishevelled hair had been combed out and braided; when, refreshed more than she could have thought possible, she was dressed in a plain suit of Sozun’s travelling clothes,—the metamorphosis from the haggard draggled woman who had been brought in the morning, to the lovely being who sat before her, blushing at the strange attire in which she found herself dressed, was more wonderful than Sozun could have imagined. She pressed her guest to eat, and Julia Wharton was strengthened by what

she took. She had only one object now—to escape thence; and though it was no easy matter for Anna to interpret the rapid impetuous speech of the Affghan girl, Julia soon comprehended what she had to do, and the reason why it should be done.

## CHAPTER XLV.

### HOPELESS.

I QUESTION which of the two women was the bravest—the Affghan who had gone to battle in a fierce desire of winning back the honour among her people which her evil life had forfeited—or the English girl who, with a calm brow and now serene beauty, heard what her fate might be, and in the purity of her faith looked up to Him to whose protecting care she committed herself. Sozun had expected tears, wailings, helplessness—which might mar her project altogether, or increase the difficulty of its execution. Instead of this, she saw a girl, hardly older than herself, who had already endured horrors such as she could not imagine—a stranger in a foreign land, far away from her people—undismayed, trusting in God, and prepared to do her best in whatever might follow. “Ah, yes!” she thought, “such are the mothers of those men whom we have feared; such was the

mother of him who spared me ! What marvel if, hereafter, they be our conquerors !”

From time to time Sozun had anxiously sent for news of the Nawab ; and it promised well for the success of her enterprise that there were messages in reply from him that he was delayed—that he might be late—that it might even be night before he returned. The English gentlemen had to be examined as to their treasures ; the agents of Juggut Seit, Omichund, and other bankers, as to the monies lodged with them ; the amount of advances made for purchases ; and the stocks of goods in hand. Weary, unrefreshed, stunned by the calamity which had fallen on them, Mr Holwell and his fellow-captives yet bore themselves stoutly that day ; and the abuse and execrations of the Nawab, on his disappointment at not finding the treasure-hoards he had expected, were bravely endured. But I have no concern with them ; nor can I follow them in their wretched captivity and distress afterwards, when they were taken up to Moorshedabad in an open boat, their bodies covered with boils and ulcers—the effect of the poisonous miasma of that horrible night in the prison — nor relate how at last they were released, and rejoined their countrymen in safety, after all their perils.

Nasir had not relaxed in his vigilance. In his

heart he had disapproved of the child Janum having been admitted, yet he dared not cross the humour of the Nawab's favourite. He had now left his post, and had been able to lock up the door of the small court by which the Englishwoman had entered, and thus to prevent intrusion there; still it was almost impossible to believe that she could be long concealed. His fellow-servants were in their usual places: but some were in attendance on the Nawab, and brought occasional messages from him to Sozun. These were sometimes delivered by Nasir himself, sometimes by others; in short, there was a perpetual going to and fro, which could not be prevented. It was next to impossible, also, to keep the ordinary women-servants out of the private apartments without exciting suspicion, and he had several times, with dread at his heart, observed them whispering together, especially as the afternoon advanced; and once or twice, Chandbee, the head of the female attendants, tried the padlock of the closed door, wondered why it was shut, declared she must break it open if the key were not found, and was promised by Nasir as often that he would look for it.

Now the little Janum, who was a child of six or thereabouts, though passionately devoted to her kind mistress, whose pet she was, was also the general pet and plaything of the eunuchs on guard, and

in particular of one of them, Juma, a negro of gigantic stature, a good-natured fellow, who was an especial favourite of his master's; and as the three women were speaking in the inner chamber, Janum had been bid to carry out the plates from which Julia Wharton and Anna had eaten, with injunctions to set them down and speak to no one. Probably, had she seen nobody she would have done her errand faithfully, though the longing to tell of the beautiful English-woman was burning at her heart; but as she went out, Juma, who was sitting, his sword across his knees, as usual in the corridor, caught her, and held her fast.

"Let me go, let me go," she cried; "I cannot stay."

"No; I have caught you," he said playfully; "and till you tell me what the lady is doing, I won't let you go."

"She is tired with yesterday's fighting, and is asleep," said the child.

"Ah, Janum, that's a lie! Who ate all the pilao and the kabobs that I brought up?" said the man, laughing.

"Let me go!" cried the child.

"Who ate the kabobs, I say?" continued the man, again lifting her up, dishes and all, into the air.

"Tell me, and I'll set you down."

"I won't tell you, Juma."



“Tell me,” he persisted, “and I’ll give you such good julaybees.”

“I won’t—let me go.”

“Very well ; then I won’t let you go.”

“Will you promise not to tell any one, if I tell you ? Nasir would kill me if he knew, and so would mother.”

“I will ;” and he set her down.

“Swear on my neck, Juma.”

He put his hand on her neck, with mock gravity.

“I swear,” he said.

“Oh, she is so beautiful !” whispered the child.

“She—who ?”

“The Feringi ; and we took off all her dirty clothes, and oh ! she was as white as milk all over, and——”

“Ph-e-w !” whistled the negro to himself ; “what strange creatures these women are ! Here is one, a prime favourite, thinking to gain more favour by bringing in another. But it doesn’t answer, and they don’t see it. A Feringi, too ! Perhaps if I were——”

“And the julaybees, Juma ?” cried the child, stroking his cheek.

“I will go and get them from the shop close by, my darling. When I knock, come out again, and thou shalt have them,” he said ; and the child vanished.

Juma was not a bright character, but he was as

faithful as a dog to his master. "She wants to surprise him," he said, "but I'll give him the first news. If the Feringi hath bathed and eaten, she is quite ready. I can but go and see. I am on my way to the Durbar with a message," he said, as he passed out; "one of you must take my place," and he went on.

The Durbar tents were full of people. All the State officers were there; and several of the English gentlemen were sitting in a corner on the ground, haggard, dirty, and weary. The native bankers of the city were huddled in groups near them, with dread plainly impressed on their countenances. There were several Persian writers busily making up an account, and a heap of money lying upon the carpet.

"It is impossible," cried the Nawab, angrily. "Fifty thousand rupees only! Am I a child to believe that you great Feringi merchants traded upon fifty thousand rupees? Beware, I say, lest I put you to the torture."

"Your highness can do as you please," said one of the Englishmen, rising; "there is no more, and the Persian cash-book of yesterday proves it," and he sat down again.

What did Juma care for the cash-book? He took his place behind the Nawab's seat, and, watching an opportunity, bent down and whispered a few words in his ear.

The assembly saw the Nawab start, but were too polite to notice it, and after a moment he resumed his questions.

But it was clear to those who knew him best, that he was now uneasy, and men in whispers asked why he should be so. It was already dusk in the tent, for the evening was cloudy, and threatened rain. The scribes, writing on their knees, shifted their positions to get more light, and one even asked for a lamp. The Nawab would perhaps have continued his work; he was by no means satisfied with what he had done; he was baffled altogether in his spoil; he had expected millions, and after all there were but a few thousands. But who was this Feringi woman, so beautiful, for Juma's description was an exaggeration of what he had heard from the child? On the one hand was the craving for gold, on the other a fast arising lust; and such men as he obey the stronger passion. "Put the Feringis in irons, and take them to camp," he cried. "We will hear more to-morrow. The Durbar is closed."

"Durbar burkhast! Durbar burkhast!" roared the silver macemen. "Depart! depart!"

"Quick!" cried the Nawab, as he entered his palankeen—"quick to the house!" and he leaned back, smiling at the anticipation of what he should find ready for him.

The room where the women sat was already gloomy, and it seemed as though night were closing in. "It will soon be dark, lady," said Sozun, who had been looking out from time to time, "and the Nawab will stay till past the evening prayer. She is not afraid?" she asked of the servant.

"Missy Baba my lady has no fear," was the reply. "May we go?"

"What does she say, Anna? may we go?" asked Julia Wharton, rising.

"Nearly time to go, mem; when man come, then go. Missy not be 'fraid, I go with her."

A few minutes after, Sozun went to the door of the small staircase; a man's footsteps were ascending it, and she stood there trembling.

"Lady, it is I," said Nasir, in a low voice. "Here is a blanket for her; come—there is no one without."

"Now we go, Missy, darlin'," cried Anna, joyfully. "Come along, an' I take you safe to Begum Sahib."

Mrs Wharton stretched out her hand to Sozun, who took it and kissed it reverently. "May Allah be kind to thee," she said; "do not forget me when you are happy in your dear country."

Julia did not understand the words, but the action could not be mistaken. She put her arms round the girl's neck and kissed her.

“Come, come quickly!” cried the eunuch. “Why do you delay?”

So they went on, and Sozun followed them, weeping. It was a short stair, which ended in a small court, and Nasir led them into it. But they were too late. As he opened the door which led into the street, and they stepped out, there was a sudden blaze of torches, and the Nawab, hurrying on on foot to the private entrance, saw the group before him pause irresolutely; then he cried to Juma and others with him, “Seize them instantly. Who come out of my zenana disguised and muffled? Nasir, who are these?”

An instant more, and the coverings were torn from the now shrieking women, and the bright torchlight revealed the English girl’s fair face and white arms, as she waved them wildly in the air struggling with Juma, who took her up like a child and carried her in.

“She would have escaped,” cried the Nawab, foaming with rage, “and thou, Nasir, aiding her. Hew him down!”

“Spare me, O prince!” exclaimed the man, frantically, falling at his feet. “Oh, have pity! it was not I—not I!”

“It was my order!” cried Sozun, who had turned when she heard the shrieks. “It was mine only; he is beneath thy notice. I, Sozun, would have sent

her away. What is she, a poor Feringi woman, to thee?"

A fearful execration burst from the Nawab as he drew a dagger from his girdle and aimed a furious blow at her. The girl evaded it, but did not quail; she feared death too little.

"Strike," she cried, "if thou darest, one whose only crime is loving thee!"

The Nawab's uplifted arm fell to his side. "Thou art a witch," he said, gloomily; "and I am captive in thy devilish arts. Bind her!" he cried, to other eunuchs, whom the disturbance had collected. "Put her in irons, and take her away to Moorshedabad. Now, now! she is in thy charge, Roostum," he continued, to one of the men, "and thy life shall answer for her. Listen," he added rapidly, in a whisper—"let her lie with the Begum in the vault;" and he passed on up the narrow staircase, where Juma, bearing the shrieking English girl, had already gone, driving Anna before him.

"Come, lady," said the eunuch to Sozun, as he dashed tears from his eyes—"come; it is thy destiny, and thou knowest we dare not delay."

"Yes, it is my destiny," she said, calmly, "and thy will, O Allah!" and she bowed her head and followed them out.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### A LETTER FROM ENGLAND.

I DO not think that the details of a recovery from a severe illness present any matters for particular record in this history; and it is probable that the worthy Don's magniloquence, and the wonderful English addresses which he composed for Mr Smithson, might be wearying to our readers. Nor perhaps would they care to know how Mr Smithson comported himself to Doñas Caterina and Maria in their kind attendance upon him; nor how the worthy Doña Luisa hoped perhaps for a while that Caterina's budding charms might make a due impression on the handsome Englishman, and was sharply reprov'd by her husband for her foolishness. As to Maria, she was yet a child, and there was no danger for her; but I question very much whether she ever forgot those delicious days with the sufferer, when as yet too weak to do anything for himself. She was his devoted

attendant, and was repaid by what she most craved for—details of English life, to which she would listen for hours. I say, then, let all this pass—we have no need to record it; and after some days' weakness, as we know, a strong constitution threw off the languor of fever, and grew to be vigorous as ever. Then Ralph Smithson and the Don held consultations as to the best way of getting to the ships, and found there was but little difficulty. The English gentlemen had had too many native friends to be without means of helping themselves; and though they were no longer masters of Calcutta, any who remained there were not ill used or distressed once the Nawab's forces marched on their return. Although Ralph Smithson was not then aware of the exact nature of Julia Wharton's fate, and only heard it long afterwards in a manner we shall come to understand ourselves, yet he made all the endeavour in his power to ascertain the truth; and, indeed, it was generally known that the lady who was found alive on the morning of the 21st June had been taken by the Nawab to Moorshedabad as one of his mistresses; and we can easily believe that out of his seraglio, very little information that could be relied upon ever transpired. There she might live or die, and nothing more be heard of her.

It may be recorded also that the little Whartons



came often, and when he was able to walk there, Ralph Smithson went to the house, and conversed with their mother, who sat behind a screen. She was of respectable people, and did not want for native friends ; but there was much to do in regard to Mr Wharton's property and the funds settled on herself and her children, and I need hardly mention that Ralph, as one of the executors, promised his hearty assistance when the Factory should be reinstated.

There was no one, except perhaps the Nawab himself, deluded by his flatterers and courtiers, who did not believe in the speedy restoration of the English. Already there were parties earnestly at work in their favour. The great Hindu bankers knew the value of their presence, and that the country itself would languish without the trade they followed. Even the Dutch and French trembled in their factories ; and thought if the stout English could not beat back the Nawab, how easily they, in their turn, might be overwhelmed ; and now, therefore, their mistrust of him increased. It is true that M. Law sent expresses to M. Bussy that the English influence in Calcutta and in Bengal was for the present destroyed, and urged him to press on to join the Nawab and strengthen him for good ; but the monsoon had set in—for months to come the country would be impassable by any regular army—and nothing could be effected.

Don Gomez was no indifferent observer of events. "Wen you ready help yourselves, Mister Smithson," he said, as he bid his guest farewell, "den plenty people's ready help you; dat's my opinion. An' you come soon too, sir, if God will, an' blessed Virgin; an' all the books safe, sir, an' I got key too. Honorable Company not lose one cowry of advance, sir, 'pon my honor. You tell dat, please, Mister Drake, an' be d—d to him. Good-bye, Mr Smithson, an' wish you well sincerity, sir, an' soon come back; den we have intensification of jollification in Factory, and drink de King's health and Honorable Company, by George!"

This was said in the little cabin of a budgerow, at a village somewhat below the Fort. The head boatman was an old friend of Mr Smithson's, and had promised to take him safe to the ships, and he did so. All there had heard of his illness, for they kept up a constant communication with Juggut Seit's house, Omichund, and other bankers, and that he was safe with Don Gomez; and as his boat next day ran alongside the Daddaley, then lying with the fleet at Fultah, and many of the old familiar faces looked over the ship's side, I am quite sure that Ralph Smithson's heart was grateful at the wonderful preservation he had experienced.

There was much to do: a committee sat upon Mr

Wharton's effects, and his will was opened. Provision had been made for the Begum and his children very munificently, and the latter were to be sent to England by-and-by ; but excepting some legacies to friends, his wife Julia was made residuary legatee over and above all that had already been settled upon her. Nothing, however, could be done in that matter, and it was a sad subject altogether. Several ships were expected, and they dropped in one by one from England. Ralph Smithson had hoped to receive letters by every ship for several months past ; but, though there were kind messages to him from Mr Darnell, none had arrived. It was not probable, he thought, that his uncle or Mr Sanders would write to him direct till they had heard news of his arrival in India. A year had not elapsed since he left them, and he might not hear for six months more ; but to his great joy the ship that reached them late in July, brought a packet addressed to Mr Wharton, and enclosed in it were two letters, one from Mr Darnell and one from Mr Sanders ; and being in India ourselves at present, we may like to hear what has been doing in the dear old country since we left it in Ralph Smithson's company. It was evident that though the letter had been begun on Christmas eve, it had not been finished for some time afterwards.

*“ Private.*

LOMBARD STREET, *Christmas Eve, 1755.*

“DEAR NEPHEW,—It would be hard, for all that is past, if I didn’t remember you at this season ; and as I cannot be here to-morrow, I will begin, and trust it may find you as well as it leaves me. I cannot expect to hear of you for several months to come ; and though I have sent messages to you, which I trust have been delivered, I have delayed to write, for in truth there was little to tell you of that you would care to hear. I will, however, begin at the period which followed your departure, and bring it up to the last date I can detain the letter, but not to-day. This is only to say, I do not forget you ; and Dolly and I, whatever madam and the rest may do, will drink your health to-morrow in the Company’s Madeira, and wish you a merrier Christmas than we have ourselves. I doubt not, also, they will drink your health at Melcepeth ; for I am rejoiced to tell you your uncle hath quite forgiven you now. When you were fairly at sea, and past recall, I went to him and told him what I had done, and why ; and at first he was sore wroth with me, and swore at me bad enough ; but the doctor came in and stopped him, and presently he got calm, and we talked it over, and he was brought round to my opinion. Mistress Grover and I had much ado, however, to set him right. He

would have not only forgiven thee, but had thee to Melcepeth again; and swore he deserved his wound for his hard-heartedness. What if thou *wast* lawful heir of Melcepeth, after all, how should he forgive himself? But enow of this—enow to satisfy thee that thou art forgiven—the best news I can give thee on the eve of that day when He was born, who will, as we hope, forgive us our sins.

. . . . .

“ It is well known to you that I have never interfered with your uncle’s plans for Constance; and I had no mind to be, as I may say, a spy upon Mr Elliot, nor to find out what he had, or what he hadn’t, as Grover would have had me to. I told her she might even find out for herself; but it seems there was no long doubt on the matter. Although most of the people to whom he owed money were willing enow to let my gentleman follow the rich heiress, yet one of them clapt him into a sponging-house, and kept him there; and however Peed came to know of it I can’t find out, but he wrote to the Baronet, telling him what had happened, and why; and this set my brother inquiring of Braithwaite, and other Alnwick and Wooler attorneys, and all came out—viz., that he had made ducks and drakes of a pretty property, and there was no recovery or chance thereof; and when my gentleman made his

appearance at Melcepeth, I daresay the Baronet was cool to him, and Mistress Grover too, whatever sweet Mistress Constance might have been; and the end of all was, that the gentlemen quarrelled over their wine, and Elliot got his *cong * faster than he expected. Peed is delighted at his good work, and saith, moreover, that there is more to be found out, and, as usual, a woman's at the bottom of it all. He talks mysteriously about some one privately married to this spark, or seduced, and gone to the East Indies. Have you ever heard aught of him or her among your folks there? Well, we have no business with him or her; only, you will be glad to hear, though he was an old friend of thine, that Mistress Constance is well shut of him. Grover hath written me pages of her grief; but the lass, I warrant, hath sound sense under all, and the hint of the other woman hath, I fancy, quite cured her.

. . . . .

“You will grieve to hear that poor Mrs Morton is much declined in health, and Sybil hath but small hopes of her now. One Mr Forster, also an old friend of yours I think, hath been courting Miss Morton, and her mother and Nanny Keene advise her to take him; but she won't listen to them, which I consider foolish, because Mrs Morton's little annuity dies with her, and, in event of her death, I don't

know what is to become of Sybil. They have no friends or relatives that I can discover; but God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb; and though, according to my poor judgment, I tried to persuade the girl to settle herself honourably, and satisfy her mother's anxieties, I could make no impression on her; and faith, she fell into such a passion of weeping that I was thankful to get away, and have heard no more since.

“*Feb. 26, 1756.*”

“I have writ you a business letter separate, and you will get more advice about your investments from Mr Sanders. I see he is not easy about political matters, especially if we have war again with the French; but I confess I have no such anxieties as he hath, nor, indeed, doth any one here believe in what I call his croaking. And now I have writ enough. I am longing to hear from you, dear nephew; for whatever hath passed, you are the same as ever to your affectionate uncle,

“ROGER DARNELL.”

Perhaps I need not record the mingled feelings of joy and anxiety with which Ralph Smithson again and again read this letter. My readers who know his antecedents will be able to follow them very

easily. Constance was free again, and Sybil, poor dear Sybil, in trouble; but she would be firm against Forster, and even if Mrs Morton died, his uncles would not forget her, and he would send her ample funds as soon as he could. No, he had no fear of her. Then he was forgiven freely and amply, and his dear old uncle loved him still. Ah! on that burning July day, with the sweltering heat beating through the ship's awnings, his thoughts were far away in the Melcepeth woods, and Constance—still his own Constance—free from Elliot's wiles, beside him. No wonder, I think, if hot tears—tears of mingled thankfulness and regret—were fast falling upon the paper before him. Was Elliot then married?—and who could the woman be who was in India? Pshaw! It would be an idle task, indeed, to trace any of Elliot's amours; and, thank God! his dear cousin was safe from him.

Upon the contents of the despatches which had reached the fleet by the ship that morning, an anxious council had since been sitting in the cuddy of the Daddaley. I need not trouble my readers with any detail of its deliberations. But when Ralph Smithson was summoned to it, and told by Mr Drake that the council, in the fullest reliance upon his ability and judgment, had resolved to send him to Madras—to represent there the affairs of the settle-



ment, and to give all the information necessary for the assemblage of a powerful armament—to Mr Clive and Admiral Watson, the young man's heart fairly bounded within him, and the honourable mission was indeed joyfully accepted.

END OF PART THIRD.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



















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