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A FREE LANCE IN A FAR LAND

*Being an account of the Singular Fortunes of
Selwyn Fyeways, of Fyeways Hall, in the
County of Gloucester, Esquire; for Seven Years
a Free Adventurer in the Kingdoms of Hindostan*

*The same abridged from the original papers and journals of
Mr. Fyeways and certain traditions in his family*

BY

HERBERT COMPTON

AUTHOR OF "A FURY IN WHITE VELVET," "A KING'S HUSSAR,"
ETC., ETC.

CHEAP EDITION.

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In Pious Memory

OF

"SELWYN FYVEWAYS"

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The First Book.

—♦—
FORTUNE LOST.

*SHOWING HOW I FLED FROM FYVEWAYS AND THE
REASON THEREOF: AND WAS TREPANNED FOR THE
EAST INDIA COMPANY'S SERVICE, AND SHIPPED
OUT TO THEIR SETTLEMENT OF BOMBAY.*

A FREE LANCE IN A FAR LAND.

CHAPTER I.

FATHER CLIFFORD.

It has been said it is a wise child that knows its own father. I can claim knowledge of mine, and yet the wisdom profited me nothing, but, on the contrary, brought me much tribulation. And if I now bear his name, and possess the estate that belonged to him, I owe these things to my own singular good fortune and the atonement of a wicked man, and not to any right of birth or inheritance.

My father was Sir Francis Fyeways, Baronet, of Fyeways Hall, in the county of Gloucester. I desire to write of his memory with decent respect, saying the least I can to disparage, and the most I can to commend. He and his sire before him were fine country gentlemen of the times they lived in, who kept open house, denied themselves nothing in reason or out of it, and never reckoned the difference between a guinea and a crown. My great-grandfather, who lived to an uncommon old age, left behind him a handsome fortune, four swinging great estates, and a family name honoured in as many counties. And yet within twenty years the whole was dissipated and squandered away, the entail cut

off slice by slice, three of the estates sold, the name become a password for prodigious extravagance, and only Fyeways left intact. This wreck was more than half accomplished when my father inherited the property; yet he made no effort to retrieve it, but plunged deeper into debt, and scattered his money as recklessly as he had seen his father do, entertaining all the country round, filling his stables with the best horses, hunting, racing, playing cards and dice, cock-fighting, wagering, gambling, dissipating, drinking, and, in short, omitting nothing that was fashionable and foolish.

My father had no brother, and but one sister, Joan, married to a certain Mr. Stephen Renfew, who had been man of business to my grandfather, and his chief agent in procuring the great sums he borrowed, in which transactions Mr. Renfew benefited himself so greatly, as to come out of them with a fortune of his own. Being an arrogant, vulgar individual, whose consuming ambition was to raise himself above his proper station, he gradually brought my grandfather into his clutches, and then used his power to obtain the hand of the daughter, much to the scandal of the county.

I know not what profession Mr. Renfew followed: some said he was a lawyer, others a Papist agent, and others, again, a London money-lender, who desired to quit that abominated course of life, and set up for a country squire. For himself, I believe, he always claimed to be a gentleman of means and at large. It is certain he was as crafty and designing as my father was rash and unsuspecting, and after

his marriage with my Aunt Joan had but one object, namely, that his wife should inherit Fyeways. This she must do if her brother died without issue, and thereafter the estates, and what was more important in Mr. Renfew's eyes, the dignity they conferred, would pass to their son Rupert; wherefore he never attempted to restrain my father in his folly, but permitted him to ruin himself without a word of warning or reasoning; and to further this base design worked himself into my father's confidence, and cunningly advanced him yet more money to be wasted in riotous living, until at last his victim was so bogged in debt, and so completely in his brother-in-law's hands, that a nod had sent him to the King's-bench.

The Fyeways were an old Roman Catholic family, who could trace their descent back for six hundred years. A curious circumstance about them was that there seldom survived to any sire more than one son, as the Family Tree that hangs in the library at Fyeways can testify; and so slender was the line of succession that my father and his sister Joan were the last two of the race. Although always accounted people of rank and consideration, the Fyeways dated their superior fortunes to the marriage of the first baronet with Joyce, granddaughter and sole-heiress of Paul Farragon, who was Cofferer to Queen Elizabeth, and a courtier of great wealth and reputation. This lady introduced the Roman Catholic religion into the Fyeways family, it being stipulated in her marriage contract that all children born of the union, whether sons or

daughters, should be brought up in that faith. When the Stuarts were on the throne the Fyveways prospered exceedingly, and were much esteemed at Court, and at the time of the Civil Wars fought as good Royalists should. I have an old letter written by His Sacred Majesty King Charles the First to one of my ancestors, acknowledging the receipt of a certain sum of money by way of loan, and binding himself and his heirs to the repayment thereof, which promise was more honoured in the breach than in the observance, unless it were acquitted by the baronetcy James the Second conferred on us. With the Revolution the Fyveways fell into disgrace, and when the Act of 1700 was passed were compelled to take the oath of allegiance and supremacy and subscribe the Declaration, in order to preserve their estates from being escheated.

After this it became dangerous for them to practise their religion except in secret, and gradually they fell away from its strict observance, and grew (I fear) into a very godless race of men. But the womenfolk always held fast to the ancient faith, (having no lands to lose) and Joan Renfew in particular was a most bigoted and intolerant woman, who regarded her father's backsliding with horror, and considered the ruin threatened to the family by his folly as the direct punishment of God for his neglect of religion. I have heard it related she constantly reproached him for his laxity and infidelity, warning him that the curse of Heaven would fall upon him and his line be brought to an end, unless it pleased Providence to raise up fresh seed from a

more worthy source to perpetuate it. Her upbraidings had no effect; only when she married Stephen Renfew it was said she did so for no love, but to raise up that fresh seed whereof she had spoken, and preserve the estate to a descendant of the old blood.

A few months before my father's death Joan Renfew and her husband came to live at the Hall, and with them a Romish priest, named Father Clifford, who belonged to the Order of the Jesuits, and was reputed to be a grandson of one of Charles the Second's bastards that had married an Italian lady. Certes his face favoured the supposition, being cast in the melancholy mould of the Stuarts. When I first saw him he was a man of about forty years of age, his features grave and classic, his complexion olive-coloured, and his eyes black and piercing. He comported himself with a distinguished air, but spoke with something of the foreign accent, and lacked the frank manner of an Englishman.

I was a posthumous child, and not born till five months after my father's death. My mother was the daughter of a yeoman farmer, whose family had been tenants at Fyeways as long as memory could reach, so that although they did not own the lands they tilled, they held their heads as high as any of their quality in the county, and were looked up to and respected by all. My mother's name was Mercy Bradnock, and she was so called till the day of her death, although she always wrote herself Mercy Fyeways, and earnestly maintained that she was my

father's lawfully-wedded wife. But therein lay her undoing and my misfortune, for she could never show her marriage lines, and I was born into the world a bastard by common repute.

Almost the first thing I can remember is connected with this mystery of my birth. It was one summer evening, when I was about four years old and walking out with my mother, that presently we came to the village church. The door stood open, and she led me inside and bade me sit quiet while she prayed. Then she fell on her knees, and remained silent so long that my patience became exhausted, and creeping out of the tall pew I wandered down the side aisle, staring with wondering eyes at the hatchments and monuments upon the walls. At last I reached one newer than the rest adorned with a fine coat-of-arms bravely carved and painted. As I stood gazing at it, open-eyed and open-mouthed, my mother (who had finished her devotions) came swiftly up behind me, and perceiving what I was looking at, caught me in her arms.

"Ah, my little Selwyn, well may you look at that," she cried. "For it is thy father's monument. And they have written there, 'The last baronet of Fyeways.'"

Then she fell to weeping, clasping me tightly to her bosom, and kissing me again and again with frenzied affection. But a moment later suddenly she stopped, and an expression came into her face as of one possessed with some bold fancy, and so stood irresolute, her mind torn with conflicting

thoughts. Then with a firm determined step she walked out of the church, and into the churchyard to a spot where she could see Fyeways Hall.

It stood about a quarter of a mile distant—a great square massive building, with tall windows in front and a huge porch jutting out upon the carriage drive. Its walls were overgrown with shaggy ivy, and round about it clustered a few old elms, with the rooks cawing and circling high above their branches.

I know not what extraordinary impulse prompted my mother, but she straightway took the road that led to the Hall, and, carrying me in her arms, walked to the porch. The doors were open, and she passed through without any hesitation, mounted the broad flight of stairs to the upper storey, and turning to the right opened the first door she came to and entered.

It was a long chamber lit by three tall windows with latticed panes. In the centre stood a great bed, its faded hangings and heavy curtains all in keeping with the sombre oaken furniture of the apartment. The walls were panelled, and had given the place a dark and gloomy air but for the western sun which streamed through the windows, its beams falling in a crimson glow upon the coverlid of the bed, which was of silk and curiously wrought. The atmosphere was close and laden; the dust lay thick on the surface of the table and obscured the slanting mirror; and there was in the room an aspect of abandonment and grim solitude that declared it long untenanted. Even as we

entered a rout of rats scampered away behind the wainscotting, and one grey old monster darted across the floor to its hole in a corner.

My mother placed me down, and leading me towards the bed, stood beside it, gazing thereon with dreamy eyes and melancholy countenance. And presently I saw two tears gather under her lids and roll down her cheeks, as her head bent lower and lower in affliction. But not a word did she speak; only once stooped forward and kissed the pillow as reverently as she might the face of the dead, and then me. Urchin though I was, her manner of doing so troubled me greatly, for it was the only time in my life she had kissed me, and I not comforted. Then she turned and, as silently as we had entered it, we left the room.

As we reached the landing halfway down the stairs, a door opposite the foot of them opened, and a man issued forth, dressed in a long black cassock. It was the Popish priest, who, when he saw my mother, gave an exclamation of amazement. But quickly recovering himself he advanced to the foot of the stairs, and extending his arm, as if to stop us, asked in a stern voice—

“What do you here, Mercy Bradnock?”

“I have shown my son, Selwyn Fyeways, the room his father died in,” answered my mother. “I have brought him here to see the heritage he has been robbed of.”

“He has been robbed of no heritage,” cried the priest in an angry voice, “and wherefore call you him Fyeways? He has no right to that name.”

“God knows, wicked priest, and you know that he was born in lawful wedlock,” exclaimed my mother, in a voice so full of vigour and spirit that I was scared and crept closer to her side, “only—alas!—I cannot prove it. But you who received me into your religion (for which may God, in His mercy, pardon a woman sore tried and put about!) and married me to my husband on his death-bed—you and Stephen Renfew know it, and John Jago, whom you have sent away. And yet not one of you will step forward to redress the wrong I have suffered, nor right this helpless child. But priest of God though you claim to be, God will punish you, and His curse shall fall on Stephen Renfew for this sin.”

“Silence, wanton!” cried the Jesuit, lifting a threatening hand; but his olive face paled at the accusation, and his eyes could not meet my mother’s. “Another word and you shall suffer for this unlawful trespass.”

“Trespass!” echoed my mother, with a fine scorn. “Who are you that dare question my son’s right to enter this mansion that should be his? A perjured priest whose cassock covers crime. A corrupted Jesuit, false to truth and conscience and your vows to God. Between you and me and this poor child, whom you have undone, may Heaven judge. Stand back!” she cried, her voice swelling to its full compass, and waving him aside with an imperious gesture of her hand—“stand back, and let Sir Selwyn Fyeways pass freely out of his father’s house—ay, even though it be for the last, as it is for the first, time.”

With slow and majestic steps she began to descend the stairs, leading me by the hand; and to my childish vision she appeared in some strange way transfigured, for methought she filled the broad flight with the stateliness of her presence. The priest made way for her in silence, but as we passed him his dark eyes fell on me, and there was something in his look so black and cruel, that I was terrified and burst out crying, calling aloud—"See! see! How he looks at me! He will hurt me."

"Ay, and remember me," said the priest, "nor fall within my power, thou baseborn Protestant cub—or thou shalt rue it!"

"Has he not rued it already?" demanded my mother, turning on him instantly, and drawing me behind her. "Think you it befits a priest—even such a priest as you!—to threaten a little helpless child?"

"It is not the child I threaten, but the false claim you propound for him."

"You know it is no false claim, cruel priest! You know that in your hands lies the proof of my marriage with his father," cried my mother passionately. Then her manner changed and she burst into tears, wringing her hands and calling out to him, "Here once more I ask of you—as how often I have asked before!—Justice. Only Justice. Will you deny it to the orphan standing in his father's house? Have you no heart to be reached, no pity to be touched?"

But the priest made no reply: only pointed to the open door.

My mother turned sorrowfully to me, "Come, Selwyn, it is but waste of time tarrying here. Thou

hast seen thy father's house that never will be thine. It must suffice. The priest is fixed in his wickedness, and the innocent must suffer."

And so, with the Jesuit frowning on us, we passed out together, she and I, from Fyeways Hall.

CHAPTER II.

FYVEWAYS.

It was not until thirteen years later that I learnt the story of my mother's marriage to my father. I was then a stout well-grown lad of seventeen, tall for my age, and always taken for older than I was. My life had been spent under my grandfather Bradnock's roof, for my mother never left her home, and it was in his house I was both born and brought up.

My grandfather's farm was situate opposite the park that surrounded Fyeways Hall, with the high road running between. The Hall itself stood on a gentle slope, nearly half a mile back from the road, with a hill rising behind it; but notwithstanding it was so close, I never entered it after that one occasion I have described. But for all that, I knew (as did everyone else in the village) there were strange doings there, and prosperity and happiness had deserted it. Mrs. Renfew died, about two years after my father, of a grievous disorder that affected her mind, during which her ravings were so wild and incessant that her husband would allow none to attend her except himself and an old deaf crone. After her death the property passed to her son Rupert, who was five years older than myself; but as the estate was greatly in debt to Stephen Renfew, he was regarded as the real Lord of the Manor and called the Squire. But although Lord and Squire, he was not the master, for when his wife was taken Father Clifford became

despot over all. Within three years he was a perfect Pope for power, controlling everyone, ordering the household, ruling the tenantry, and permitting nothing to be done without his sanction; and Mr. Renfew as meek and obedient to him as any child.

Of course such a strange subversion could not come to pass without notice, and although none knew for certain the secret of Father Clifford's extraordinary power, everybody guessed it, and many considered it as proof positive of my mother's declaration that she had been lawfully wedded to Sir Francis, and that the priest held the certificate of the marriage. For nothing else could explain why, without visible cause or reason, so crafty and determined a man as Stephen Renfew yielded up his authority to Father Clifford. The priest administered the estate chiefly for his own benefit, or that of his Order; the Hall chapel, which had been closed for nearly a century, was repaired, and large sums expended on its decoration, until it was made one of the most elegant of its kind in the West of England; and the Hall itself became a rendezvous for Romish priests, and a very Harbour of Refuge for such as were forced to fly from France on account of the Revolution. Mysterious guests were constantly arriving and departing, on what business none knew, though, as was natural, the tongue of rumour connected them with Popish plots and political conspiracies. Cowls and cassocks flitted about the long passages, like owls in the gloaming, and there were as many midnight masses and meetings as if the place had become a veritable monastery. The servants at the

Hall were as ignorant as the gossips of the village concerning the business of these Jesuits, who carried on their conversation in strange languages—French and Italian and Latin—which none could understand, and their doings and goings and comings were clothed in secrecy and mystery.

Before this Papist invasion Squire Renfew retreated and sought refuge in a wing of the Hall, wherein he fixed his abode, and from which he scarce ever stirred out. It was said he regarded the priest with a malignant hatred, but dared not show it, being too completely in his power. By degrees he ceased to transact any business whatsoever, except such as Father Clifford required of him, and in his helpless despair abandoned himself to the bottle, sitting soaking night and day in his endeavour to drown the trouble on his soul. What that trouble actually was only he knew who carried it in the closet of his conscience, and the priest who held the key of that closet.

In the priest's estimation a far more important personage than the father was the son Rupert Renfew, who was destined to be a very rich man when the Squire died. The education and rearing of this youth were entirely in the Jesuit's hands, who devoted much time and attention to training him. There were strange stories told of the lad; how he was made to fast and attend mass; to perform penance if he did wrong, which he often did, being high-spirited and self-willed as a child; and compelled to go to confession, to study hard, to rise early, and to live under the strictest rule and discipline, being severely punished

if Father Clifford considered he deserved it, with never a word of remonstrance from the Squire. He was seldom permitted to go abroad, and then only with the priest accompanying him; and it was generally believed he was being bred up for a priest himself.

Notwithstanding, he was a fine young fellow, with a pretty notion of himself, who might have grown into a gallant gentleman had he been differently reared; for the blood of the Fyveways ran strong in his veins, and he favoured his mother's stock and not his father's. But his character was moulded—or, as I should say, distorted—by his long and intimate communion with the Jesuit, and he seemed affected thereby not only in mind, but in body. For both in the expression of his face, and his quiet gait and peculiar movement, as well as in his joyless demeanour and his grave monastic pursuits, he reflected the influence to which he had been subjected all his life, and showed himself to be, what he was, a priest-reared and priest-ridden youth.

I saw him sometimes when he rode abroad, or walked in the park studying a book, as grave as any monk; but never envied him. And I am certain I would not have changed lots with him at any time during my boyhood and before I learnt our relative positions. For my home life was above all happy. My grandfather, who had been twice married, was a widower. By his first wife he had a son, Martin, and by his second my mother. My uncle Martin died when I was about three years old, leaving my aunt Mary a widow with two children, Walter and Mercy.

named after my mother. Walter was my own age, and as dear as any brother; but my cousin Mercy, who was a year younger, was my favourite, and next to my mother I loved her best in the world.

When I was about sixteen years old my mother's health, which had long been indifferent, completely failed her, and she was afflicted with constant fits of fainting. Any trifling exertion or untoward surprise would send her off, and with each recurrence of the disorder the period of unconsciousness grew longer. At last my grandfather called in a clever surgeon from Gloucester, who, having examined her, declared the heart to be affected, and warned us she might be cut off at any moment. He ordered her to be kept perfectly quiet and free from all excitement or exertion, even from mounting the stairs. After this, the best parlour was turned into a bedroom for her, and in this room she passed the last year of her life, chiefly engaged in reading the Bible or some book of religious comfort, and preparing herself for her end. About the same time I was taken away from school at Gloucester, so that I might be at home; for it was her great delight to have me by her. I helped my grandfather in the farm work, and settled down to a country life, for which I always believed myself intended, notwithstanding that, at my mother's earnest request, I had received an education superior to what was considered necessary for one of my station.

It was in the early autumn that my mother died. We were all out in the field at harvest, she and an old woman employed in the kitchen being the only

ones left in the house. We had just put the reapers into the seven-acre meadow, when we heard a shrill screaming, and saw old Gammer Mudge hobbling towards us as fast as her legs could carry her, shaking her apron violently with both hands, and calling out, with what little breath she had left, for us to come at once, for Mistress Mercy was dead.

My grandfather was mounted on his old grey cob, and without more ado galloped off home. I followed, with Aunt Mary and Mercy and Walter, but, out-running them, reached the farm by a short cut just as my grandfather was dismounting. We found my mother lying on the floor, with a pillow under her head, which Gammer Mudge had thrust there, and her two hands tightly gripping her dress over her heart. I thought she was dead, and gave a scream, but my grandfather bade me keep my senses and help him, and between us we lifted her on to the bed. Aunt Mary and Mercy, now arriving, loosened her clothes, and applied such remedies as were constantly kept at hand, till, after a long and anxious watch, it delighted us to see signs of returning life.

But the fatal mischief was done, and my dear mother never left her bed after that attack. She rallied a little, and with her accustomed brave spirit talked of getting up and going about again: but I do not think it was ever hidden from herself, or anyone else, that she would never regain her health. Her strength was exhausted by suffering, although her mind remained singularly clear and serene. Indeed, my grandfather often declared that her faculties had never been brighter, nor her affection more intense.

than during those last few fading days when she was passing from us.

The end came very suddenly. One morning she asked me to move her bed towards the open window, so that she might see Fyveways Hall; and then bade me sit down on the floor beside her, with my head against her pillow, desiring to fondle me as she used to do when I was a child. I obeyed. And soon I felt her fingers straying over my hair and cheek, warm and tender as a sunbeam.

Presently she spoke. "Turn your face away, Selwyn, so that you may not see mine. For I am going to tell you of your father, Sir Francis Fyveways."

It was the first time in thirteen years she had mentioned his name to me.

"Mother," I answered, "not if it distresses you."

"The distress is nearly past now," she whispered. "And you are my son and his, and it is right that you should know."

I turned my face away as she desired, and she began to speak, slowly and with a painful effort. And first she told me who my father was, and how he had died before I was born, and wicked people had taken advantage of her misfortune to deny her marriage, for which reason she had always been called by her maiden name, although her rightful one was Lady Mercy Fyveways, as mine was Sir Selwyn Fyveways.

Then she asked me if I remembered the day she carried me to the Hall and we met the priest. I told her I half remembered it, especially the great bed in the room, with its curious coverlid, and the high words that passed on the stairs, and above all the priest's

cruel black eyes. Whereupon she recalled the whole story (as I have described it), and pointing to the Hall in the distance, asked :

“Do you see those three upper windows on the right of the porch?”

“Yes,” I answered, they being plainly visible.

“That, Selwyn, is the room I took you into; and the room in which your father and I were married, and wherein he died. Heaven help me—all in one brief hour! The priest married us, your father lying on the bed, and I standing weeping by his side. I pray God to give me strength that my dying eyes may see those windows, and in His own good time to reveal the secret they were witness to, and that you, my dearest son, may not suffer for your mother’s sin.”

She paused a little space, and I could feel by the tremor of her hand, and the light breath that stirred about my neck, that she was silently praying. The solemnity of the moment thrilled me—ay, and even thrills me now. I stole my lips half round and kissed her finger-tips.

Last of all she showed me a letter she had written, which was hidden under her pillow, and was for me. But I was not to read it till my grandfather gave it me, which would be after she was dead and buried.

“It will tell you all,” she said. “And oh! Selwyn, my dear, dear son, never judge me hardly when I am gone. Remember only I was your mother—your mother who loved you so!”

They were her last words. Her hand still encircled

my neck, and after she spoke I thought she bent forward and kissed me. I waited and waited for her further utterance : but none came. For the lips that kissed and the hands that caressed were the lips and the hands of the dead.

CHAPTER III.

MY MOTHER'S TESTAMENT.

THE day after the funeral my grandfather gave me the letter my mother had shown me. It bore the superscription, "*For my dear son, Sir Selwyn Fyeways: to be given him by his grandfather,*" and inside, close written on three large sheets of paper, was the following history of her undoing:—

"Knowing that my life is drawing to its close, I take pen, my dear son, while yet I have the strength, to write down the circumstances under which I married your father, Sir Francis Fyeways, so that when I am gone you may know how it was your heritage was stolen from you, and your mother died a wronged and ruined woman.

"I am persuaded that when the time comes for you to read this my last Testament, you will do so in all reverence and charity. But since what I am about to relate will sound strange and even incredible, I here solemnly protest that I shall write the truth, only the truth, and the whole truth. If I was deceived by a subtle and crafty priest, if fraud and artifice were used to delude and undo me, then God punish those who wrought such wickedness according to their desert. But for myself, I have lived and shall die in the clear and steadfast belief that I was lawfully married to your father, Sir Francis Fyeways, and justified to call myself and my son by his name.

“Of the early affection your father and I bore for one another it is not becoming I should write at length. I knew him from the days of my childhood, for we were almost of an age, and were playmates together till he went away to be schooled. After that he travelled abroad and lived some years with his father in London, so that I never saw him again until he returned to Fyeways, after his father's death, to enter into his inheritance. Before he had been home a week he was down at the farm again, and then all our old love for one another revived, and he claimed me for his sweetheart, and vowed some day to make me his wife.

“But he was young and headstrong, and had learnt his father's vices, and having tasted the pleasures of the fashionable world, had no desire to settle down all at once to a sober way of country life. Moreover, there was his position to be kept up as master of Fyeways, and he cherished a foolish wrong pride to show himself as spirited a man as his father, and able to entertain as handsomely. And so he engaged in a wild course of pleasure, and before long was leader of all the most reckless young bloods in the county. Being frank and generous, open-hearted and open-handed, his companions took advantage of him, tempting him into all sorts of dissipation, and helping him to squander away his substance foolishly. Yet, who could blame him? He was but a thoughtless young man too soon come into his estates, and the way of life he pursued was that which he had seen his father follow before him.

“But there were times when he wearied of it all,

and desired to cut himself away from his wild companions and settle down. He would come and talk with me, bidding me heed nothing I heard concerning him and his doings, for he was but having a fling and sowing his wild oats, as every young man ought to do and must do. Only the sport was growing stale, he said, and he would soon bring it to a finish, and then we should be wedded and live happily at the Hall ever after. Alas! it was ever 'a little while,' and 'a little while,' and there were so many of them they grew to be a great while, his many good resolves being as speedily forgotten in the wine he had learnt to drink so much of.

"And so three years went on, until one day I received a letter from him, asking me to meet him at a certain trysting-place of ours. He came there pale and dejected, with haggard face and bloodshot eyes, and without any warning blurted out to me that it was all over with him, and he had discovered his folly too late.

"'Mercy,' he cried, 'I am a ruined man. My brother Renfew is a cunning villain, and has brought me into his debt far more than I can ever hope to repay. He has done with me as he did with my father before me, when the entail of Draysdown and Roelippe and Hursts was cut off. And now I am but a beggar on his bounty. He is my master, and, to prove it, is coming to live at Fyveways. There is nothing left for me but to submit myself to his will!'

"It was a pitiful sight to see the look of conscious shame and despair in his face as he confessed this. I

tried to comfort him, as women must the men they love, and thereupon he caught me in his arms and kissed me, vowing I was his best and only friend, and he a fool and a madman to gamble his fortune away on the speed of a horse, or colour of a card, or turn of the dice. If he had but married me when he first succeeded to the estate, all would have been well, and he free of this rogue Renfew. But now it was too late, and as he had sown, so must he reap.

“ His melancholy touched my heart, and with bent head and blushing cheeks I said that if he so wished it, I was ready to marry him at once. For, since he was poor and in distress, it only made me love him the more. Hearing which, he kissed me again and again, calling me a thousand endearing names, and cursing himself for what he had done, till I perceived from his manner there was something he was hiding from me, and asked him what. Whereupon he acknowledged, with great confusion, that at his meeting with Mr. Renfew on the previous day to settle affairs between them, he had declared his intention to marry me. Hearing which, his brother-in-law had grown most outrageously angry, and announced his determination to come and live at Fyeways Hall himself, if only to prevent any such foolish match. ‘ For,’ said he, ‘ it is necessary you should marry some lady of fortune, so that the money may be repaid which is owing me; and if you pursue another course I warn you I will protect my own interests, even though it land my wife’s brother in a debtor’s gaol.’

“ As I heard Sir Francis relate this, which he did

with much shame and hesitation, and perceived by his manner that he had yielded to Mr. Renfew's representations, my heart rebelled at the indignity put upon me, and I shrank away in disdain of him. But presently I reflected that what his brother desired seemed for his benefit, for a rich wife would certainly restore him to the position he had lost; and was I, who loved him best, to be backward in proving it or stand in the way of his welfare?

"So I told him we must part and never meet again. At this he grew distracted, protesting that now I too had deserted him in his dark hour, and he cared not what happened. And he was so distraught and reckless, threatening such dreadful things to himself, and heaping such reproaches on his own head, that my heart softened and yielded, and before he left I had promised I would see him again.

"The next day Mr. Renfew and his wife arrived at the Hall, and with them the Popish priest, Father Clifford. They were soon established there, and between them so wracked and tormented Sir Francis that he lost all spirit, gave up every hope of extricating himself from his difficulties, and became a broken and melancholy man.

"There was only one who was true to him, and I, alas! loved him too fondly. His misfortune wrung from me a devotion more deep than any I had felt for him in the days of his prosperity. He used to meet me by stealth and tell me all his troubles, and the blood drained from my heart in drops to hear him relate them. For, as he protested, he had not a friend

left in the world, nor a guinea to spend, nor a servant to depend on, nor an acre to call his own. Whatever he required he was necessitated to obtain his brother-in-law's sanction first, and might scarce take a horse from the stable without being called to book!

“But above all he complained of his sister Joan Renfew, who made his life unendurable with her preaching and reproaches, and was for ever moralising about his past follies, and calling on him to purge himself by confessing his sins to the priest. It was this that cut him to the quick, for she was of his own flesh and blood, and yet the bitterest of all against him.

“In this way some months passed, and then one morning he met with an accident out riding, being thrown from his horse and his spine injured. They carried him home to the Hall, and laid him on his bed—the very bed I showed you once, my son—from which he was never to rise again.

“I heard of the accident soon after it happened, and waited at home hour after hour, faint and sick with anxiety and fear, expecting to be summoned to his side; for I knew that if he were conscious he would instantly send for me. But that day passed, and the next, and no message came, although they said in the village that he was worse and worse. At last I could bear the suspense no longer, but determined to learn the truth for myself, and early on the morning of the third day went to the Hall and asked to see him.

“My request being taken upstairs, the reply came

back that I was on no account to be admitted. But I knew this answer was not sent by Sir Francis, and refused to accept it, and being within the hall doors, declared I would never move except to go to his side.

“The manservant, a rough fellow named Jago, who had recently been taken into service by Mr. Renfrew, when he saw me thus resolute, laid his hand upon my shoulder and bade me begone. The insult of his rude touch fired me, and exerting all my strength, I pushed him aside and darted up the stairs, he following and calling loudly to me to come back.

“The noise attracted Father Clifford, who, as I reached the upper storey, came hurriedly out of the room in which Sir Francis lay. He caught hold of me, and Jago arriving at the same moment, I saw I must be overpowered. In this extremity I lifted up my voice and called out as loudly as I could to your father.

“Lying on his bed, sick to death, he heard me, and his answer was instantly given—‘Mercy, is that you at last?’ he cried. ‘Come in, come in, dear Mercy. I have sent for you a hundred times.’

“His voice gave me strength and courage, and wrenching myself free, I entered the room. And there the first thing I saw was Sir Francis lying on his bed, pale and helpless.

“‘Why have you not come sooner, Mercy?’ he asked reproachfully. ‘I have sent for you every hour since my senses returned, and I found myself in this pass.’

“‘They never told me,’ I sobbed, sinking on my

knees by his bedside, 'or I would have come that instant.'

"'Never told you?'

"'Never.'

"As I spoke Father Clifford entered the room.

"'How now, Reverend Father?' demanded Sir Francis. 'What means this? You assured me Mercy Bradnock was called away to Gloucester. Did you lie to me, Sir Priest?'

"'I was never away,' I protested. 'I have been waiting for a message, ready to come the very instant you sent for me. Who said I was away?'

"'The priest said so. He is here to answer for himself.'

"'My son,' stammered the Jesuit, 'the surgeon gave injunctions that you should be kept quiet and on no account disturbed. What I said, I said for your good.'

"'And you kept my message from Mercy?' cried Sir Francis hotly; 'and told her not? And I might have died without seeing her?'

"'Talk not of dying, my son,' responded the priest in a smooth voice. 'It is your recovery we desire. It was to hasten it we kept you undisturbed.'

"An indignant cry from your father silenced him. 'Listen to me, Father Clifford,' he said, in loud measured tones. 'For nearly a year I have lived under your control, and that of brother and sister Renfrew. You have kept me bound hand and foot, like any slave. You have ground me down with the cursed power that money gave you over a man deep in debt and distress. I have been weak, and, to save

my name from public scorn, have yielded everything for the mockery of position you permitted me to retain in my own house. Fool that I was to hope to patch up my broken fortunes with the procrastinations of a usurer and the promises of a Jesuit! But I perceive my folly now. This calamity that has overtaken me has at least freed me from your power. For lying here, helpless and unable to move, I am, in truth, stronger than I was ere that cursed horse fell with me. My future is nothing to me—nay, but I have no future, for I know my days are numbered. I care but to accomplish one thing, and it shall be done. To Mercy Bradnock here I owe an act of reparation, and am in honour bound to right her. Sob not, sweetheart, for thy tears scald my heart, and I must be strong. I have often promised to make thee my wife; to-day that promise shall be fulfilled. Ay, even if I marry thee in my shroud, and am borne away from our wedding in my coffin!

“Hearing this, Father Clifford turned deadly pale, and held up his hands in indignant protest.

“‘Lift not up your hands, Reverend Father, nor argue,’ went on Sir Francis, ‘for it is you who must marry me to Mercy. And here. And now. Sweetheart,’ he cried, turning to me with a great and tender tremor in his voice, ‘sweetheart, ever fond and faithful, often have I vowed thou wert my wife before God. To-day I will make thee my wife before man.’

“‘But it cannot be!’ interposed Father Clifford in great agitation. ‘This woman is a Protestant—a

heretic—and thou a son of the Church. Such a union is against the law of the land, and only a dispensation from the Holy Father can effect it.’

“‘I am *in articulo mortis*. Let that suffice. Death-beds are no seasons for law and licences. They dispense with everything. Here I lie half-way in the grave, being dead flesh from the waist downwards. There stands Mercy Bradnock, who, God willing, will be the mother of my child. It is time we were wed. I am the last male of the Fyeways. The line must not die out.’

“As he heard this the priest turned wrathfully and looked at me, who was covered with shame and confusion. ‘Never!’ he cried resolutely, ‘never will I marry you to this Light o’ love!’

“‘Enough, Father Clifford; say no more!’ exclaimed Sir Francis. Then he went on slowly and earnestly, ‘If that be your decision, know mine. Here, on my death-bed, I will renounce the Romish faith. The parson of Fyeways parish shall baptise me into the Protestant Church, and marry me by its rites. There shall be no delay. As I am living and as I am dying, I swear before God this day Mercy Bradnock shall be my Lady Fyeways.’

“At this solemn declaration of intention the Jesuit crossed himself in horror. ‘My son,’ said he, ‘would you commit this deadly sin against our Holy Church on your death-bed?’

“‘Would I? Beshrew me, Reverend Father, it is no longer a case of would, but will. Time presses. The deadness is creeping up. I have but a few days, or it may be only a few hours, to live. Mine

has been a wicked and a wasted life; but my last deed shall atone for it. Once more, and for the last time, I ask you, will you marry me to Mercy Bradnock ?'

" 'Sir Francis, I may not. I cannot. The law of England does not permit it. It would not recognise the marriage if I were to unite a Protestant to a Catholic.'

" 'Then I must needs turn Protestant, if only to right Mercy and preserve the line.'

" 'Oh, pause and consider !' cried the priest, pointing upwards with his hand. 'Your forefathers have lived and died in the true faith from generation to generation. And would you in one weak moment turn apostate to your creed? Would you for a wanton woman's sake suffer eternal hell and damnation? The sin that you have sinned with her I can and will give you absolution for, if you confess and truly repent. But for this sin that you premeditate there is no pardon, no atonement. Death may be near, or it may be far. I will not hide from you that hope is small. But the nearer it is, the more awful your sin, if you change your faith without conviction. Oh, my son, I counsel you—I implore you to reflect. Remember, if you are guilty of a lie and an insult to God on your death-bed, Hell, with its red fires, yawns for you, and the torments of eternal licking flames will be your portion !'

"There was that ring of solemn warning in Father Clifford's voice which awes and commands attention. Sir Francis listened, and was silent. It was plain to see a great struggle was going on in his heart. But it

passed, and a look of fixed resolve came into his face as he cried out, with a reckless air—

“Let death and damnation come to me! I accept it, so that Mercy be made an honest woman and her child bear my name. I could not face her at the Resurrection knowing I had wronged her so foully, who loved and trusted me as she has done. I know naught of creeds. We are all infirm flesh; saints and sinners alike. Mercy here will pray for my soul when I am gone, and God will hearken to her rather than to me. That must suffice. And so, enough! The die is cast. Preach no more to me. My mind is firm fixed. Since you cannot marry Protestant to Catholic, I will turn Protestant. Mercy, sweetheart, go thou and call——’

“‘Nay, nay,’ I broke in wildly, starting to my feet in agitation; ‘a thousand times nay. Since we must be of one faith, I am of thine. For oh, my love, if death should come, I could not see thee die, knowing that thou hadst imperilled thy soul to save my honour. Kind and reverend sir,’ I cried, turning to the priest, ‘I beseech you, receive me into your Church.’

“At this unexpected request Father Clifford seemed even more confounded than he had been before. He made as if to answer me, but the words faltered and died away on his lips.

“‘Oh, sir,’ I repeated, ‘will you not receive me into your communion?’

“‘How can I?’ he stammered at last; ‘you are not earnest in your conversion. You follow the necessity of the moment. It is against the law of

our Holy Church to receive a convert for convenience sake.'

" 'A fig for your laws!' burst out Sir Francis. 'You will not marry Mercy to me because she is a Protestant, and that is against the law of the land. And you will not receive her into our faith because that is against the law of the Church. 'Tis a pretty quandary you seek to place us in. But it leaves me determined to skirt it. Mercy, since the priest fails us, we will e'en try the parson. Get thee to thy father, and bid him hurry hither with all speed. A five minutes with him, and the matter shall be arranged. I will haggle the point no longer. If I die and leave thee unrighted, my soul will assuredly be damned. If I turn Protestant and wed thee, my soul will likewise be damned. Well, better so, for at least I shall be damned doing that which my conscience tells me is right. And as for my salvation, I leave that to God, the singular Refuge of human infirmity. In my hour of stress He will not judge me hardly.'

" 'This cannot—shall not be!' cried the priest, wringing his hands in anguish; 'if married thou must be to this woman, then Heaven assoil me! But I will receive her into our Holy Church. Never shall one of my flock forsake his faith, and I stand by and permit it. Woman, he went on, turning to me, 'if thou art prepared to renounce thy faith, I will receive thee into ours.'

" 'Sir, I am ready,' I answered, trembling in every limb at the deadly sin I was about to commit.

" 'Mercy, dearest Mercy, cried Sir Francis fondly,

'you must not, you shall not make this sacrifice for me.'

" 'It is right and meet,' I answered; 'thy faith is my faith.'

"Father Clifford now left the room, wherein Sir Francis and I remained alone. I know not what I did or said during those last few precious minutes of private communion, for my heart was full to bursting as I looked at him lying there, so eager to do me justice. In my ears I heard his words of tender chiding remonstrance, but I hushed them in the utterance, and, throwing my arms around him, clasped him to my bosom, sobbing to think that I must lose him now he was going to be my very own.

"We were interrupted by the return of Father Clifford, accompanied by Stephen Renfrew, whom he had gone to summon. The latter came to the bedside, and in a voice of great perturbation attempted to reason with Sir Francis, begging him to reconsider his determination, and do nothing so rash and wrong, which he might live to regret for many years.

" 'This is no time for worldly advice, brother Renfrew,' replied Sir Francis coldly; 'nor has thy counsel always been wise and disinterested. I will have none of it now. But for thee I had been married and happy, not lying here on my death-bed. Thou didst think to secure Fyeways for thy son—but I will foil thee yet! Make room for the priest. And witnesses—we must have witnesses.' Father Clifford went outside and called to the manservant,

John Jago, who was in the hall below. Then reading some set service from a book in his hand, he received me into the Roman Catholic Church. This being done, we all gathered round Sir Francis's bedside. I hardly heard the Marriage Service, for my mind was too distracted, but I answered such responses as I was bidden, and when the time came to put the ring on my finger, Sir Francis took off his signet ring and wedded me with that. Then, as Father Clifford made the sign of the cross and gave the benediction, my husband told me to kiss him and be at ease, for I was now his lawfully wedded wife.

“‘But hasten with the writing,’ he said, turning to the priest, ‘for I feel my strength failing. It is well this is done and over. Register my marriage, and let the witnesses sign it.’

“The priest left the chamber, and returned in a few minutes with an old worm-eaten book, bound in curious black leather. It belonged to the hall chapel, but had long been disused, although there were many ancient entries recorded in it. Turning to a fresh page, he filled in the register of my marriage to Sir Francis Fyeways, at whose request he wrote underneath that the same had been solemnised without banns or licence, the bridegroom lying on his death-bed, and desiring to be wedded to Mercy Bradnock both for the love he bore her and the ease of his soul. Then my husband and I signed our names, and Stephen Renfrew and John Jago theirs as witnesses, and Father Clifford attested all. When it was completed, my husband caused the book to be held

up so that he could see it, and read every line and every word before he permitted it to be taken away.

“‘And now a copy for my Lady Fyve ways,’ he said; ‘a true and certified copy for her to keep.’

“‘She shall have a copy to-morrow,’ answered the priest.

“‘Nay, nay,’ cried my husband, with a strange, sad smile. ‘To-morrow I shall be dead. We will e’en have it now.’

“Father Clifford cast a rapid glance at Stephen Renfew, but the latter stood motionless as a statue, his arms folded, and a gloomy, despairing frown on his brow. Without another word the priest copied out the certificate, and handing it to Sir Francis, bade John Jago carry the register back to the chapel.

“My husband examined the copy as carefully as he had done the original writing, and then gave it to me, who folded it up and placed it in the bosom of my gown.

“‘And so ’tis done, Mercy!’ he cried joyfully, ‘and thou art my wife at last, and the proof of it in thy possession. Lady Fyve ways of Fyve ways—I give thee gratulation! The title is thine, if the fortune is lacking. But we will mend that. I cannot dower thee as richly as I would, or as thou deservest, but I will do the best I may. Reverend Father,’ he went on, ‘thou hast served me well this day, and I thank thee. But one favour remains to be done. Take thy pen again and write to my dictation.’

“‘Write what, my son?’

“‘My will.’

“At this word Stephen Renfrew gave a great start, and looked up at the priest, who answered—

“‘But I am no lawyer, Sir Francis.’

“‘Natheless write.’

“‘Brother,’ interposed Stephen Renfrew, in a tone of suppressed excitement, ‘you are overtaxing your strength. Is it not sufficient that you are married this day, that you must needs draw out your will as well?’

“‘Kind brother,’ replied my husband, ‘I have been married to-day, and I shall be dead to-day. It is time I was wed, and it is time I should make my will.’

“‘Then let me send to Gloucester for the lawyer.’

“‘That were a law’s delay indeed, that would see the plaintiff dead and buried before justice was done. No, no, brother Renfrew. There is no time like the present. Faith, it is the only time, for I feel this grievous numbness creeping up and gripping me under the coverlid. But my heart beats yet, and my hand is firm. Write, Reverend Father, write, “In the Name of God, Amen. I, Francis Fyeways, of Fyeways, in the County of Gloucester, a Baronet of England, being of sound mind, though sore stricken in body——” ’S Death! you are not writing. What means this?’

“‘Sir Francis,’ replied the Jesuit, folding his arms, ‘it is not my office to write.’

“‘Villain!’ shouted my husband furiously; ‘you

mean you will not write. I see it. You are in league with that rogue Renfrew there. Mercy, fetch me yonder pen and paper. Nay, sweetheart, look not so scared. We must all meet death and prepare for its coming. Thou art my wedded wife, and what care I for the dark beyond? There may yet be a little son to comfort thee when I am gone. He must be protected, else Brother Renfrew may find means to make his heritage as profitless as mine hath been. I must appoint a guardian for my unborn child, and for thee such jointure as I may, with liberty of residence at Fyeways Hall. For the reign of the Jesuit is past, and with my death the claim of the usurer is satisfied. Death, kind and generous Death, discharges my debts! And Joan is jostled out! The pen and paper—quick—quick. Confusion! how the pains seize me, and this cramp claws at my vitals. What there! Hold them not back, damned priest! Let Lady Fyeways bring them here. Nay, and thou wilt not! Then God of Heaven give these limbs of mine a brief minute's strength, and—I—I—I——'

"He made a convulsive effort to rise in his bed, and by the sheer determination of his will lifted himself into a sitting posture. But even as he did so the slender chord of life snapped, and with one loud piercing cry he fell back dead!

"I rushed to his side, only to catch his last agonised look. Then my senses deserted me, and I sank to the ground.

"When I recovered consciousness, I was being driven to my father's house. But the ring with which I had been wedded was no longer on my

finger, and the certificate of my marriage was gone from my bosom !

“ This, my dear son, is how your father and I were married, and how he died. When you read these lines you will comprehend how it is I have always been called by my maiden name and denied that of my husband. I know not who stole my marriage writings—Stephen Renfew or Father Clifford, or John Jago—but I never recovered them again. And when I claimed to be the widow of Sir Francis Fyeways, the Squire laughed in my face, and the Jesuit protested I dreamed, and produced the Fyeways register, to show that there was no such marriage recorded in it. The page, indeed, had been torn out.

“ As for John Jago, he disappeared on the night of my husband's death, and none knew whither he had gone. But he may return. He is the only man to be prevailed on to prove my marriage. He was, I doubt not, bribed to depart from Fyeways, and to stay away, for such secrets are not kept for nothing. But the villains who hold them grow dissatisfied and avaricious, and fatten on those in their power. Stephen Renfew and the priest are both in the power of this man Jago. Wherefore he may return some day to extort more by his presence than he can do from afar. Eighteen years I have looked for his coming. Do you continue to look, my son. Watch and wait for John Jago. Never give up hope. And if you should find a clue, follow it up, nor leave it till you have discovered him and won him to your side. The chance is frail, but the workings of Providence

are wonderful. God is ever just and compassionate, and the sins of the parents may be forgiven to the children after many years.

“Farewell, my dear, dear son. On my knees I have written this my Testament and my Confession. Forgive me for the wrong I have done, who am, with love and prayers and blessings, your fond, but unfortunate mother, MERCY FYVEWAYS.”

CHAPTER IV.

MURDER! MURDER!

IT was with an indignant and bitter sensation in my heart that I finished my mother's Testament. I seemed to have begun reading it a boy, and ended it a man. As I passed from page to page, the impatient blood coursed through my veins, and a burning desire seized me to avenge her wrong; and kissing the sheet whereon she had written her name, I vowed within myself that if human determination could accomplish it, I would clear her memory of the stain it bore.

My grandfather met me as I came out of the room in which he had left me to myself. "Grieve not, my lad," he said, kindly and gently; "thou knowest the worst now. There are some things done that cannot be undone, and this, I fear, is one of them. But thou art young and strong and brave, Selwyn, and must ever bear in mind it is more honourable to make an independence than inherit a fortune. Thou hast lost a fond mother and I a dear daughter. We are companions in affliction, and thou shalt never lack a friend whilst Elisha Bradnock lives."

"Grandfather," I answered, hiding my face from him—and it was the first time I had ever done so—"I covet no heritage. Could I enter into possession of my father's estate at this moment, I would willingly

barter all its lands to clear my mother's name of this reproach." Then, with a sudden resolution, I shook off my sense of shame, and turning, faced him. "And clear it I will," I cried, "God helping me! I am young and strong, as you say, and I will be brave, that I may accomplish this duty that is laid upon me. And for you, dear and honoured sir, the love you bore my mother is the measure of my gratitude to you. It can never be weighed in words or computed in phrases. But I see and know now, better than ever I did before, how true and noble a friend and protector you have been to me, who am accounted a common bastard in the eyes of all around."

"Nay, Selwyn, lad," broke in my grandfather quickly, "thou canst never be that in my eyes, but only the son of my dear daughter Mercy, God rest her! I know not of what cruel deceit or foul villainy she was a victim. All I know is that I love thee for thy mother's sake and for thine own, and will make no difference between thee and thy cousins. Thou art my grandson before the whole world, and I have ever been proud of thee."

I kissed his hand, and thanked him with such words of gratitude and affection as I could command. But, nevertheless, I told him it was now my desire to leave Fyeways, and make my living in some distant part of the country, where I should not be known. But to this, he declared, he could never consent. "There is a home for thee here, Selwyn, as long as I am alive, and when I am gone thou shalt share and share alike with thy cousins."

Again I thanked him, but said there was so great a change in my circumstances, since I had learnt the history of my birth, that I could not endure to remain at Fyeways. For every time I entered the church, or my eyes fell on the Hall, or I passed down the village, I must be reminded of the reproach, until it became unendurable.

My grandfather sighed. "Lad," said he gently, "the folk around have ever been forbearing. I understand thy feelings—for were they not mine once? But time will overcome them. Act not hastily, but have patience a little. It may be thou wilt not feel the gall as much as thou dost dread. Remember thy mother, Selwyn, how long and how bravely she bore her burden. It may help thee to bear thine."

He spoke so affectionately that I had no heart to oppose him further; so I told him I would dutifully reflect on his advice, and do nothing without his full consent.

Everyone in the house was kind to me in these sad days following my mother's death; yet none so kind and dear as my cousin Mercy, who showed in every word she spoke, in every glance she gave, and in every little office she performed, her sympathy and tenderness. When I grew gloomy and dispirited, she would call me to help her, so that I might bear her company in her daily tasks. And if I sat down moody and silent, she never failed to rouse me with some device that turned my thoughts from their troubles. Sometimes I stole away, seeking to hide

my sorrow in solitude, but presently I would hear the patter of feet, and it was my cousin Mercy come to join me. She was but sixteen years old, yet had a woman's intuition and perception, and in a hundred ways conceived my thoughts and feelings, and led me out of my melancholy into the sunshine of her brighter nature. It were a churlish heart that could long resist such sympathy; and when the first scald was over, I began gradually to grow comforted, and almost unconsciously to discard from my mind my intention of leaving home. For whenever I thought of it I remembered it would be leaving Mercy too, and she was now more dear to me than anyone else in the world.

My grandfather observed the change, and it made him happy; for oftentimes I would catch him nodding to himself with a pleased approbation as Mercy and I sat together. One day he apprised her of what I had threatened to do, inquiring if ever I mentioned such an intention to her. She told him no—for I had never had the heart to tell her I premeditated leaving Fyveways; and when we next met she taxed me with it, asking how I could bring myself to resolve on such an unkind thing.

“Is it not sorrow enough that we have lost Aunt Mercy?” she said; “and would you leave us, too, Selwyn?”

I hung my head, knowing she was ignorant of the reason why I desired to go away, and unable to explain it.

Then she came close up to me, and, taking my hand, looked into my face with her large earnest eyes,

full of tears. "Oh, Selwyn!" she cried, "promise me you will not leave us."

Something in her tone and manner touched me strangely. "Mercy," I answered her, "you have but to bid me stay, and I will never leave you."

"And do you require to be bidden, Selwyn? Will you not stay for love of me?"

She spoke as innocently as a child, and yet her speech filled my breast with strange commotions. I seemed to discover for the first time that she was no longer a child. The touch of her hand in mine thrilled me with a new sensation that sent the blood to my cheeks and my eyes faltering to the ground. "Would I not stay for love of her?" The very words awakened a fuller love within me, such as I had never felt before. And I raised her hand to my lips, and kissing it, vowed that, for love of her, I would surely stay.

Having come to this resolution, I began to order my life accordingly: that is to say, I set to work to consider how I could best fulfil the injunction laid upon me by my mother to "watch and wait for John Jago." That was her absolute command to me. The words burnt themselves into my memory; they were first in my thoughts when I awoke in the morning; they occurred to me constantly at all hours of the day; and I composed myself to sleep repeating them. He was the one witness who might be prevailed upon to prove my mother's marriage; and his discovery became the fixed object of my life. I sought to find out what manner of man he was, asking everyone who might have seen him how he looked. But he had

stayed at Fyve ways so short a time, and been gone from it so long, that no one remembered him or could describe his appearance.

But yet I felt I must watch and wait for him, for it was my mother's injunction. So I set myself to spy the Hall, observing everyone who came and everyone who left, inquiring what visitors had arrived and what were expected, and sometimes, after nightfall, stealing through the park up to the house, and peeping through the windows to see if any strangers were within.

But all manner of people, respectable and otherwise, gentlemen on horseback and vagabonds on foot, kept coming and going, as was to be expected at so notable a house in the county. And how was I to tell what manner of man this Jago was, who might be a rich knave, and ride up in his carriage, or a beggar, and creep along in rags. It was a difficult quest, as I was quickly fain to confess to myself; but it being my mother's command to watch and wait, I did so, as in duty bound.

One afternoon, about six weeks after my mother's death, I was returning home from a long walk I had taken on some business for my grandfather, when my road brought me back by the hill behind Fyve ways Hall. As I reached its crest I was able to look down upon the house and grounds beneath me. It was a warm evening in early October, and being heated I sat down to rest by a hedge that bounded a plantation. The Hall, somewhat hidden by the trees that surrounded it, stood about half a mile distant, and beyond it the roof of my grand-

father's farm was just visible topping the highway hedge.

As I sat and looked I began to recall my mother's story to my mind, and taking her Testament out of a little silken bag Mercy had worked, and wherein I always carried it about with me, I read it through, and then sat a-thinking of all the shame she must have endured during those long years when she lived within sight of what should have been her home, and yet might not enter its doors.

By degrees my memory quickened and wandered back to the day when she had carried me, a child, to the Hall; dimly and vaguely at first, but presently clearer and more vivid, until, half out of idleness, half out of curiosity, I began to trace the path we must have followed from the church, low down on my right hand, past the glebe field and orchard, into the home meadow, and so through the side of the Park to the porch. It was passing strange how it all came back to me and grew familiar; for I found myself recalling with scarce an effort that half-forgotten room, and the great bed in the centre, with the crimson sunlight streaming on its curious coverlid; and after that the meeting with the priest on the stairs, and his evil black eyes as he looked at me and shook his finger.

So I sat musing, until suddenly my attention was attracted by a rustling in the hedge behind me, which so aroused my curiosity that I walked to the place to discover the cause thereof.

It was a poor hare, cruelly taken in a poacher's snare and unable to escape. Its leg was broken and

the skin so badly torn away by its struggles, that although at first I thought to loose it and let it go, when I perceived how it was mangled, it seemed more merciful to put it out of its suffering, and I took it in my hand and broke its neck.

At this very moment I heard footsteps approaching, and, looking up, discovered Father Clifford and young Rupert Renfew walking quickly towards me from a footpath that ran through the field. They had been taking the air, and chance brought them in my direction.

The hare was still in my hand, and the priest observed it, and spoke some words to his companion, who came to where I stood.

"What have you there?" he demanded; and then, "It is a hare, Father! The fellow is poaching. He is caught in the very act."

"I am no poacher," I retorted indignantly. "I found this poor beast struggling in a snare, with its leg broken, and killed it out of mercy to save it suffering."

Hearing this, Rupert Renfew laughed harshly. "It is the first time," he mocked, with an insolent sneer, "that ever I heard of a poacher killing a hare out of mercy! Such humanity must be required. We will inquire into it at the Hall, whither you must accompany me."

"Never!" I cried, starting back. "Never to the Hall with you. Not until you go out and I come in to claim my own."

The young man looked amazed. "Is the fellow mad?" he asked, turning to the priest. "What

means he? Never till I go out, and he comes in to claim his own?"

Father Clifford glanced at me keenly with his dark eyes, and then shook his finger in warning, just as he had done years before.

"Silence, fellow!" he cried sternly, "and ask the young squire's pardon and his forgiveness."

"I have nought to be forgiven; and it is not you who should bid me ask pardon of Stephen Renfew's son. That were a turning of the table truly!"

"What means he?" asked Rupert, in much mystery.

"The priest can answer that, if so be you are ignorant. He knows, and your father knows, and"—it was a chance shot—"and John Jago knows!"

As I spoke that name an expression of veritable terror distorted Father Clifford's countenance, usually so calm and impassive. He backed away two or three paces as he might from a spectre, and I heard him mutter to himself, "John Jago! John Jago!" He was clearly taken at a disadvantage, and I had the wit to repeat.

"Aye—John Jago knows. And shall tell!"

"Knows what?" demanded Rupert, as he looked first at the priest and then at me, and saw there was more in our meeting than he understood.

"Knows that my mother was married to Sir Francis Fyeways, and can prove it," I added boldly. "Knows that I was born in lawful wedlock,

and that Fyeways should be mine! Knows who married my parents and yet conceals the marriage. I have the story in my mother's handwriting, and there is John Jago to confirm her testimony!"

It was an idle boast; yet it had a marvellous effect.

"Seize him, Rupert!" cried the priest like a man possessed, "seize the lying young by-blow! We have caught him in the very act of poaching. This glib tongue of his must be stayed. I am witness that he confessed to killing the hare, and it was in his possession when we arrested him. He has broken the law of the land, and shall suffer accordingly."

Rupert Renfrew was too completely under the control of Father Clifford to question any command from him. Without a moment's hesitation, he came towards me with a menacing air. He was much older than I, but not so strongly built, and as I looked him up and down, I felt no fear.

"Stand off!" I cried, to give him fair warning, "for if you lay but a finger on me you shall repent it."

At this he came to a halt, and looked at the priest to know what he should do.

"He must be taken," said Father Clifford, in a voice of great apprehension. "Fear not, Rupert; the villain dare not strike!"

Hearing this, the young man again advanced, and made as if to catch me by the arm. I held a stout oaken cudgel, but I would take no mean advantage of

him, and shifting it to my left hand, I doubled my right fist, and gave him a blow in the chest that sent him reeling back.

The priest uttered a loud cry of indignation, and instantly rushed to his assistance. "It is an assault, a felonious and malicious assault, with intent. Rogue, you shall repent this in Gloucester Gaol. Come, Rupert, I must help you notwithstanding my calling. But this malignant shall never escape."

The two came towards me, one from either side, and I saw I was overmatched. There was no time to reflect; I grasped my cudgel, and lifting it up, smote Father Clifford fair across the head. His hands went up, and he tumbled to the ground without even a groan.

The next instant I faced about to meet Rupert, but he waited not for my attack; for he was running away as fast as his legs could carry him to the Hall, crying out, "Murder! Murder!"

I gave a look at the prostrate figure of the priest. He moved not. The blood gushed over his cheek, welling from a wound in the bare patch of his tonsure. I stooped and peered closer, holding my breath with fear. Then I saw distinctly his skull fractured, with the jagged edges of the bone, and, as I thought, his very brain oozing out.

It was a spectacle dreadful beyond description, and turned me sick. His countenance was already fixed, the jaw fallen, the eyes sunk in, and the olive face ghastly and livid.

And as I looked my understanding told me this was Death.

Then a frantic panic seized me, and turning round, I leaped the hedge, dashed into the plantation, tore my way quickly through it, emerged on the other side, and, setting my face eastward, fled like a felon from Fyeways!

CHAPTER V.

THE KING'S SHILLING.

OVER hedges and ditches, through thorn and thicket, across field and fell, up hill and down dale, I ran for dear life. Only once was I distressed just before my second wind came ; but after that I suffered no fatigue, fear giving me endurance as well as speed. The sun set behind me, the western sky faded from red to grey, the twilight deepened into darkness, and the mists of night began to rise like ghosts in the valleys, before I pulled up to breathe. But not to rest—it seemed to me I could never rest again—for all the time I halted, I kept listening in terror, persuaded, in the disordered state of my fancy, that I was being followed, and doubting my very senses when they told me it was only the sougning of the wind through the branches and the rustle of the fallen leaves that broke the awful quiet of the night.

Familiar though the country round Fyve ways was to me, I knew not where I had reached, having lost all reckoning in my headlong rush. But I judged by the steep nature of the ground that I must be crossing the Cotswold Hills, for I had stumbled and climbed over many an ascent in my flight, avoiding all roads, skirting the outermost boundaries of villages and hamlets, giving a wide berth to outlying farms and cottages, making my course across bleak upland downs and through shadowy valleys, and, as chance had it, not meeting a single human being the whole

way. When at last I came to a prolonged halt, it was in an orchard, and under one of its trees I sank exhausted to the ground.

After a few minutes of painful panting, my distress was somewhat abated, and I brought my mind to consider of my situation. Then the whole scene and incident of my crime rose before me in dreadful recollection, and there in the dark, plain as in the daylight, I seemed to perceive the prostrate figure of the priest, lying on the rough stubble in front of me, with his waxen face turned sideways, and the blood gushing over his cheek. Conviction told me he was dead, and conscience that I was his murderer.

In my hand I still unwittingly held the cudgel that had struck the fatal blow, and now I suddenly remembered it, and with a shudder of abhorrence flung the damned thing from me. As I heard it fall with a thud in the further darkness, a horrid trembling like an ague seized me, and I cowered down on my knees and elbows, my limbs shaking, my teeth chattering, and the cold sweat pouring from my brow. Never did any human being feel more guilty, terrified, and appalled than I. Every moment I expected to hear the shouts of men in the distance and see the gleam of torches scouring the hillside. No supposition was too wild and improbable for my disordered brain, and had a regiment of soldiers sprung from the earth and surrounded me, I should have regarded it as the ordinary concomitant of my crime. With starting eyes and strained ears I peered and peered, and listened and listened, until the tension became unendurable, and it seemed as if I must shriek out my fear. And

when the moon topped a steep cliff under which the orchard lay, and as I thought concentrated all its light upon my lurking place, so that the whole world might see me, I leapt to my feet with a sudden ungovernable impulse, and continued my blind flight, heeding not whither I went, but only seeking to increase the distance between me and that still, prostrate figure.

All through that night I travelled on, following a road which I struck by chance. As mile succeeded mile my pace grew slower and slower, and once or twice I sat down by the hedgerow, overpowered with sleep and fatigue. But the cold air and my hideous dreams soon awakened me, and I staggered to my feet again, and pushed doggedly on. I had no fixed object or destination in view; I had lost all sense of locality, and was at times haunted by a dreadful fear that peradventure my dark flight might have taken a circuitous course, and I be heading back to Fyve ways, as it is said murderers often do to the scene of their crimes, directed by the hand of outraged Providence. Wherefore it was a mighty relief to me, as dawn broke and I could discern the outlines and features of the surrounding country, to discover they were new and strange, and when sunrise tinged the eastern sky, that my course was still to the east.

With daylight came the necessity of hiding myself, and being now entirely exhausted and dispirited, I determined to seek refuge in the first suitable covert I came across. After dragging my limbs on for about a mile, I turned off the road towards a small copse or plantation on my right, but had scarce proceeded a

few yards than I was nearly driven out of my senses by hearing a gruff voice hallooing to me to halt.

In a moment all my original panic returned, and without even looking to see whence the summons came, I attempted to run and gain the covert. But I failed; my strength drained from me like water, my legs turned to lead and refused their office, and I was necessitated to come to a standstill.

Then I heard the voice again, louder and more angry.

"Halloo, you there! Halt, you young hind leg of Satan! Dog's death to you! right face and quick march here, unless you want me arter you."

I looked round and saw a man standing under a tree near the roadside, not twenty yards from me. He was preparing to cut off my escape, which from his position he could easily do. He now called to me to approach, and since it was useless to attempt to fly, I put the best face I could on the matter and walked towards him.

He was an undersized man of about forty-five years of age, dressed in an old red military coat, blue waistcoat, and white breeches, with splatter-dashes, much soiled with mud, on his feet, and a three-cornered hat on his head stuck rakishly on one side. There was a certain air of independence about him that showed he was no countryman. His complexion was exceeding brown, his hair coarse and bristly and of a violent red colour, and his sullen features in no way prepossessing. For he had a squab nose and his under-jaw protruded in a forbidding manner, like a bull-dog's, and

across his narrow forehead ran an ugly scar, extending to his left eyebrow, which gave his face a sinister expression. But strangest of all were his eyes, which were small and ferrety, and even seemed to be of a colour with his hair, there being a red glow in them like you see in a carbuncle; the whites, too, were bloodshot, as if he were recovering from a heavy debauch, and his jowl and chin thick with a beard of a week's growth.

I judged he had been sleeping under the tree, for the imprint of his form was visible in the rank grass, and a large bundle lay close to its roots, which, by the dent in it, had evidently served him for a pillow.

"Who are you a running away from, you young faggot?" he demanded, with an oath.

"I—I'm not running away," I stammered, with a fervent wish in my heart that I could.

"Not running away? Zooks! are you running to work?"

"No."

"Sink me, where are you going, then?"

"To Bristol," I answered boldly, having had some such idea in my mind.

"To Bristol? By way of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, hey? 'Tis a round-about route, and you'll be a traveller by the time you've reached your rendezvous." And he indicated with a jerk of his thumb the direction I had been following.

"I've lost my way," I admitted. "Can you direct me?"

He did not answer my question, but stood

surveying me with his red eyes, and his red head cocked on one side.

"You've been beating the hoof all night, you young swab," he observed at length. "There's fresh mud on you up to your knees"—he laid his hand heavily on my shoulder and turned me round—"and on your back. Where did you sleep last?"

"I started early this morning and sat down because I was tired."

"That's no lie. I'll take my corporal oath to that! Dog tired, by the look of ye."

"Yes. And I've a long way to go, and cannot stay."

"Can't you, now? Indeed. Any money got?"

"No."

"Any wittles?"

"No."

He satisfied himself that I was speaking the truth by the simple expedient of making me turn out my breeches pockets. They only contained a knife, which he inspected with an absent air, and then as absently slipped into his own pocket.

"Give me back my knife," I demanded indignantly.

"What knife? Your knife? You ain't big enough for to have a knife. Might cut your fingers, a green young cub like you!"

"Well, keep my knife, but let me go."

"Hurry to go—hey? Hurry to go? Why, then I smoke it! You're a-running away from home."

I did not answer, preferring he should think that than the truth.

"Dog's death to you!" he shouted, giving me a shake. "Why don't you palaver?"

"No, sir," I replied, wincing under his grasp. "I've no father and no mother. I'm only setting out to make my fortune."

His hard features relaxed on hearing this, and he seemed amused. "Where do you come from?" he asked.

"Upton," I answered. I had passed through the town once on my way to Worcester Cattle Fair.

Then, still holding me by the arm, he slowly recapitulated all I had told him, emphasising each point with a squeeze. "You're running away. And you've been hoofing it all night. And sleeping out. And you've no money and no wittles. And you're in a hurry. And frightened. Now then, out with it? Who's a-chevying you?"

I felt myself staggered by the force of this logical summing-up, but knowing I must say something, I faltered out, "A farmer, sir."

"What, furraged his orchard?" he grinned.

The hint came as a reprieve. "Yes, sir," I confessed. "You won't tell on me, will you?"

"You murdering young rogue, would you bring me in an accomplice arter the act?" he ejaculated, with well-assumed indignation. Then, as if suddenly remembering something, he added, "But what I want is a flint. Have you one about you?"

I happened to have a tinder box in my coat pocket (which he had not observed), and handed it to him.

"Glad you're good for su'thing," he observed,

somewhat mollified. "I was fearing you was gallus bad. Now take heed to this. I'll give you a chance on parole. Hunt round for some dry wood for a fire. Only be careful, and don't run, else I'll catch you and kill you."

I obeyed him, and collected an armful of twigs, while he brought three large stones, and placed them against one another in the fashion of a rude fireplace.

"Are you hungry, you young faggot?" he asked.

"Very hungry, sir."

"Well, rot me! but I'll give you a Hindostany breakfast. Only take heed, you're on your parole not to escape. Say 'So help you.'"

"So help me."

"You won't try to escape?"

"I won't try to escape."

"Better not; or you'll make the eighty-third man I've killed. It's my trade to kill men, and a kiddy like you 'ud hardly count. I just tell you that to keep you vartuous. Now *jow* and fill this *jumboo* with *pawny*, and that's water. There's a stream running under yon hedge. So help you, it is—mind. He handed me a curiously shaped brass vessel, the like of which I had never seen before, and then began to busy himself making a fire. With a breakfast in prospect and a man-killer watching me, I had mixed motives for not running away, and having filled the *jumboo*, I brought it back to him.

"*Bhote atchy*," he observed in his gibberish; "and now sit down."

Opening his bundle, he produced a frying-pan without a handle, and some flour tied up in a cloth, and squatting on his hams, like a dog, proceeded to knead a large lump of dough, working it about in the pan with his right hand, and then patting it between his palms into four thick scones, like stiff pancakes. These he carefully laid on the grass, and baked one at a time on the frying-pan, resting each as it was cooked on its end against the stones to keep it warm. He did all with a curious knack, very neat and clever, and kept singing a peculiar monotonous song over and over again, as he worked, which sounded like *Tazy-be-Tazy*. When at length all was finished, he called out:

“Ready it is. And I’ll wager it’s the first time you’ve ever seen *chowpatties* cooked! There’s your ration. Fall to.” With which he tossed a couple of the cakes towards me, and placing a small tin of salt between us, began his own meal.

We munched away at the *chowpatties*, which were very solid eating, but such was the keenness of my appetite that I enjoyed them vastly. From time to time my companion slid a glance at me as I gulped down mouthful after mouthful. “Slow does it best,” he hinted benevolently; “it’s heavy eating. I wouldn’t swallow it lumpy.” But I was too starving to mind him, and finished my cakes to the last crumb.

“Boy,” said he to me, “you’re a gormandiser, ecod you are! And you’ll want an easy arter, that I’ll take my corporal oath. Whereby I’ll indulge in one too.” With which he produced a pipe, and

began to smoke, keeping his little red ferrety eyes fixed on me all the while.

His manner did not encourage me to address him, for I had a feeling of being his prisoner. So I sat on the ground as silent as himself, resting my back against the trunk of the tree, and enjoying that sense of repletion which follows a heavy meal. Soon my eyes began to blink and my head to nod, and without knowing it, I fell asleep.

I was aroused by my companion shaking me by the shoulder. I awoke with a start, and the first idea that flashed across my mind was the remembrance of the priest, and the fear that I was being taken for his murder. A cry involuntarily escaped my lips, and my manner indicated my alarm.

"Were you a-dreaming of the farmer?" asked my companion, with a keen glance. "You've been a-groaning in your sleep like a camel at loading-up time. I thought it was the *chowpatties!*"

Just as he spoke there happened to come a couple of horsemen riding along the highway; and no sooner did I espy them than I dropped to the ground, as if I had been shot, in my anxiety to keep out of their sight.

"Rot me! but that ain't wholesome," observed my companion, with a queer laugh. "You're timid—more timid than you ought to be with only a apple on your conscience. A likely lad like you, with such broad shoulders, and a bit of a figure, too, should have more spunk."

I rose sheepishly to my feet, and hung my head abashed.

"What's your name?" he asked, suddenly.

"Selwyn——," I began, and then stopped in dismay.

"Silly Selwyn you looks like."

"No, sir. John Selwyn," I protested, recovering myself.

"Well it seems to me you're daft and all adrift, John Selwyn. It's running here, and crouching there, and groaning in your sleep, and turning white and shivery at nothing at all, it is. What are you going for to do at Bristol?"

"I want to go to sea."

"Want to go to sea! And be a sea cook's scullion! Well, I should ha' thought you'd a had more ambition in ye. I've been to sea, I have, and can tell ye su'thing about it. There's the Bo'sun's daughter: she'll scrat your back once a day. And the second mate, he'll bash ye silly once a week. And there's stinking meat and maggoty tack to eat, and scurvy to get, with all your teeth a-dropping out like dry peas out o' the pod, and night watches and no sleep, and mastheading, and keelhauling, and flogging round the fleet, and storms, and drowning, and French prisons when you're wrecked on their coast. I've been in Indy, and landed home three months ago arter one hundred and ninety-five days at sea, and never no sniff of honest land. And rot and sink me if ever I want to go to sea again! What do *you* know of the sea, now?"

"I don't know much about it."

"Then don't be such a fat-headed fool as to want to know more. A personable young man like you

should be showing off the king's scarlet, which is a genteel uniform and makes a very handsome appearance. You'd make a complete, clean, well-limbed soldier if you was dressed up. And his Majesty, God bless him, has need of soldiers."

"Has he?" I asked eagerly. "Would he take me, sir?"

"Well, I don't know. He might an' he mightn't. But anyway, I'll chance it and recommend you. I'm on the march route to London now. And you're setting out to make your fortune. Well, the Army's a fortune. For life, too. You are kindly used and honourably entertained, and there's plenty of fighting and glory thrown into the bargain. I'd back you against three Frenchmen any day, with musket in your hand, and your back to a wall. What do you want better than to fight for your king and die like a hero with your name in the dispatches? But there, it's no good chin-wagging. Come you with me, and I'll make a Gentleman Volunteer of you, and see you into the select picket. There's the offer. Do you accept it?"

It was the very thing in all the wide world I could wish for most. The one consuming fear in my mind was the murder I had committed, and how to escape from its consequences. What more favourable chance could I have than to accompany this man to London? So I accepted his offer instantly and with joy.

"*Shawbash!*" he shouted, "and that's the Moor's lingo for 'Well done.' I like a lad that leaps without spurring like you do. Dog's death to me! but you'll

be Captain John Selwyn afore your chin wants a razor. My name's Fossit. Sergeant John Fossit, invalided home from Hindostan, wounded and discharged the service with a pension. And here's my last shilling but three. It's the first you ever took from King George the Third, but, by thunder! there'll be bushels to follow, I'll be bound."

I held out my hand and accepted the shilling.

"Take heed," exclaimed Sergeant Fossit, straightening himself up to attention. "In the King's name I enlist you, John Selwyn, for his Majesty's Army."

CHAPTER VI.

SERGEANT FOSSIT.

SERGEANT FOSSIT immediately proceeded to take command of me. "Shoulder the knapsack, boy," he ordered, as he slung his bundle over my back, "and, by your left, slow march. Keep step and take time by me. And see here, take heed and give your hat a short, smart cock. 'Tis the principal ornament to a soldier's appearance, and should be very much attended to."

I did as he bade me, and we walked along for half a mile without speaking a word, which gave me leisure to collect my thoughts. I was labouring under a dreadful apprehension of being taken at any moment for the murder of the priest, and my ardent desire was to obtain a disguise. I was wearing a new suit of dark-coloured clothes, made for my mother's mourning, and it seemed to me that their peculiar fashion and colour must instantly convict me. Wherefore I wished to rid myself of them, and began to invent a plausible story to induce Sergeant Fossit to aid me.

"That farmer——" I began.

"What farmer?"

"The one whose orchard I rob—foraged, I mean."

"Well, what of him?"

"Perhaps he's after me."

"For why? For pulling a apple. Never fear."

"But it was more than an apple," I stammered.

"Halloo! What else did you *puckerow*?"

I asked him what *puckerow* meant, and he said it was Moor's language for thieving.

"I—I took a horse!"

The Sergeant came to a sudden halt, and facing round, gave me a good stare, as if misdoubting my word. But it comforted me not a little to discover more of admiration than condemnation in it.

"Zooks! stole a horse, did ye?" he cried; and then incontinently added, "Well done!"

"I didn't *steal* it," I hastened to disavow. "I was tired, and just took it for a ride and left it on the road."

"On'y took it," he answered disappointedly, evidently losing all interest in the matter. "That ain't a hanging job. And lef' it on the road. Why, it's back home again, for sure."

"But the farmer; he may raise the Hue-and-Cry!"

"Well?"

"And I should like to change my clothes—and—and——"

"And what?"

"Would you mind saying you 'listed me a week ago?"

He slapped me on the shoulder with a round oath.

"Great guns! I smoke it! An *alibi*. You're nackier than you look, John Selwyn. By thunder! you've a gumption that does credit to Upton. And, rot me! but I'll stretch a p'int of conscience in the

interest of his Majesty to keep such a smart soger lad for him."

"Thank you," I said, much relieved. "And my clothes?"

"You're over timid about them."

I acknowledged I was alarmed, having never done such a thing before, and begged him to humour me by acceding to my request. Whereupon he fingered the sleeve of my coat, which was of good stout broadcloth, and said: "I've a coat and breeches in the baggage as you can have by way of favour."

He unloosed the bundle from my shoulder, and extracted a very shabby suit of brown striped clothes.

"Tumble into these, and I'll take yours and the risk—blood or no blood on 'em."

He spoke in jest, but his words gave me a most terrible turn, and without more ado I undressed, never giving a thought to the fairness of the bargain, but only too thankful to be rid of my own damning clothes, as I squeezed into his, which were too small for me.

"Where shall I say we came from?" I asked, as we resumed our march.

"How d'ye mean?"

"Well, if you've 'listed me a week I should know where I met you. Where have you come from?"

The question seemed to anger him amazingly, for he snarled out, "From a plaguey bad place."

"I am sorry for that. But you don't say where it is."

"Rot and sink me! you're too peery. Never you mind where I've come from. That's my business—

and a nip cheese one at that. But I've stole no horse. Eyes front and proceed silent, conformably to orders."

"But if you 'listed me a week ago," I persisted, "there must be some place where you did so."

"Call it Bristol, then. There, it's pat for you. Say no more."

I was too gratified at my success to urge anything further, and Bristol born and bred I determined to be from this on.

We walked along steadily for three hours till we came to a large village, by which time I was so tired that I adventured a hope the Sergeant would not go any farther, and after a little grumbling he consented to halt for the day. But as he had not much money, he decided to try and sell my clothes, for which he got eleven shillings, much to his satisfaction.

"I paid twelve shillings for those you've got from me," he observed, "and so you owe me a shilling. Short credits make long friends. Why not discharge it, and ha' done with it?"

I pulled out the shilling he had enlisted me with, and gave it him; whereupon he was pleased to remark that I was an honest lad. Then we made our way to a small alehouse on the outskirts of the place, and ordered something to eat. The landlady eyed us rather suspiciously, but on the Sergeant producing his silver, placed some boiled pork and bread and cheese before us, and on this we fared very well. The meal being finished, Sergeant Fossit very candidly declared his intention of having a booze,

and advised me to make the most of the halt, as after this we should have long marches till we reached London.

Leaving him to his carouse, I wandered out to find a quiet corner, and was soon fast asleep in the hay-loft above the stable. Late in the afternoon I was awakened by a sound of quarrelling, and recognised the voice of Sergeant Fossit, high above the others, giving them the Moor's lingo.

Tumbling down the ladder, I made my way to the tap-room, where I found him standing at bay against the wall, armed with a great mug and surrounded by a dozen yokels, whom he was attempting to address, but gained nothing but curses, whilst the shrewish landlady was giving him a round scold in a shrill voice for creating the disturbance.

"You *chupperow*, you old *kooty*," he hiccupped out. "It's your own liquor I'm fuddled on, and it's on your own floor I'll sleep it off."

"Hey-day! There you go again with your fandangle French oaths," she cried, firing up afresh. "I'm a decent Glo'ster body, and if you can't swear in honest English I'll have none of you here. Why, sure, a quart of beer to the man who puts him out!"

Encouraged by this promise of reward, the countrymen advanced to seize Fossit, who instantly felled the two foremost ones. Whereupon those behind tumbled over them out of sheer nervousness. Unfortunately, in lunging forward the Sergeant overbalanced himself, and fell to the floor, and the next moment his opponents had thrown themselves on the top of him. A furious struggle ensued, but it ended

in their overpowering him, and after giving him a cruel drubbing (which I think sobered him), they carried him out by his extremities and hove him on to the road. It was all he could do to gather himself together, swearing all the time most prodigiously in the black language, and stagger away, followed by a volley of stones and curses.

On first entering the tap-room my idea had been to help the Sergeant, but when I saw him overpowered it seemed wiser to keep out of the unequal fray, and do that which I conceived to be my duty: namely, secure and carry off the bundle. So I caught it up, and slipping out of the back door made a detour, and joined Fossit a hundred yards further on.

"Sergeant," I cried, "here's your bundle safe! Are you a-hurt? Can I help you?"

"Hurt," he growled gloutringly, "yes. Hurt bad—in the feelings. Rot me! to think of a soldier as has fought under Lord Cornwallis a-being routed by a squad o' mutton-headed country numsculls! Dog's death to you, Volunteer Selwyn! what for didn't you strike in? If you'd a taken 'em in flank and created a divarshun, I'd have held my own, and kicked their heads in."

"I was too late. You were down and they on the top of you. And then there was your bundle," I urged; "you gave me particular charge of that."

"Well, that's true, anyway," he admitted; "and seeing as you've brought the baggage off safe and conformably to orders, I don't deny but so far you've done your duty. But you should not stick too close

to the dry letter of it when there's fighting going on. For take heed to this, there's many a battle been lost by obeying orders. Curse that old cat! where shall we find a billet now? I was fool enough to pay the score as I swigged. And now I've only a crown left to carry us to London."

We were by this time out in the country. "You slept under a tree last night," I suggested, "and it's no colder to-night."

"I was fuddled foul yesterday or I'd a-had a snugger berth. 'Tis cold comfort sleeping under a tree. The leeside of a hedge is warmer."

"There's a haystack yonder," I observed, pointing to a field hard by.

"A haystack! Glory be, but that's the snuggest bivouac of all!" cried Sergeant Fossit, quite cheerful at the discovery. "We'll make a brave night of it, arter all. And why for not?"

'Tis but in vain
For sogers to complain!

and a knock on the cokernut is better than a bullet in the bowels any day. Lead on, Volunteer Selwyn, for I'm not quite so sober as I could wish, and don't rightly see the *rendezvous*."

I guided him to the stack, and he scooped out a nest for himself under its lee and lay down. Then I wheedled a sixpence from him, and, returning to the village, bought some bread and cheese for our supper. When I rejoined him, he was sound asleep and snoring, so I did not disturb him, but ate my meal alone, and then, having nothing to do, took up my position

head to head with him, sharing the bundle as a pillow and was soon fast asleep too.

The cold awoke us at dawn, and Sergeant Fossit, after stretching himself, and cracking all the joints of his toes and fingers, kindled a small fire with hay, and kept it burning by adding a handful from time to time. Over this we crouched to warm ourselves, he consoled and contented with his pipe, but I suffering from a great depression of spirits. For my sleep had been broken with dreadful dreams, and my mind was full of the murder of the priest. I dreaded the hand of justice grabbing me at any moment, and could not dispel from my mind the fear that the law was on my track. Presently I asked my companion if he thought we were still in the county of Gloucester, and he grunted out an affirmative, increasing my apprehensions to such a degree that I several times felt an almost irresistible impulse to start up and dash away, and only restrained myself by the reflection that Sergeant Fossit had promised to swear an *alibi*, and I was probably safer with him than I should be by myself.

At last the sun rose, and my companion ordered me to make preparations for breakfast, which he cooked, and we ate in the same way as we had done on the previous morning. After which he set me to scour the frying-pan and *jumboo*, and was not satisfied till I had polished them both with ashes till they shone like plate, which took me a good hour. Meanwhile, he himself was not idle, for after overhauling the contents of his bundle, to make sure that nothing was missing, he took out a razor,

brush, comb, soap, needles, and thread, and commenced his toilet. Having carefully brushed his clothes, of which he divested himself one by one, he repaired sundry rents and tatters in them, the result of last night's fray. Then he shaved himself, with many a curse on his shaking hand, and finally passed to an operation which clearly indicated his vanity.

This was the dressing of his *queue*, or pigtail. Hitherto it had been a ragged object, for, as I now found, he required assistance to plait it properly, for want of which it had been left unkempt for a long time. Calling on me to help, he made me kneel behind him and comb and grease his hair, producing for that purpose the end of a tallow candle as a substitute for pomatum. The long red locks were tangled and bristly, and it was almost like handling a horse's tail. I was awkward at the task, but he gave me constant directions, surveying my labours in a small hand mirror, which he twisted about, and explaining to me how to tuck in the front growth, until it was intertwined and carried back to the base of the *queue*, which was then close plaited and well plastered with tallow till it hung a firm and solid lump.

When all was finished, and he had washed and dressed himself, there certainly was a vast improvement in the man, and with it I noted a change in his bearing. He no longer slouched as he had done when he was dusty, draggled, and unshorn, but straightened himself up with a soldierly air, and moved with a mechanical briskness.

"It's time to beat the general and parade in marching order," he observed. "And harkye, Volunteer Selwyn, we must take heed to this and cagg ourselves for certain. Furlough's done and discipline begun." This he said sternly and fiercely, glaring at me, but I think he was addressing the warning to himself. "It's a long road to London, and we have to pad the hoof all the way, so shoulder the duds and fall in."

"I'm used to walking," I said, "and you shan't leave me behind."

"By your left—march!" was his order, as he drew himself erect by force of habit, and took his place by my side.

Although from this on Sergeant Fossit treated me more than ever with the manner of a military superior, and required from me the performance of all the fatigues, as he called the irksome daily duties of the march, yet he leavened it with a certain salt of comradeship that was very gratifying. For instance, he was scrupulously just in the division of all that we enjoyed in the shape of food and refreshment, albeit there was not much of the latter, for by "cagging" he meant keeping without drink. Money being short, we had no regular meals, but stayed our hunger with bread (which was very dear) and a few eggs and apples foraged on the road, and once or twice a stray duck or chicken. Now and again we obtained a draught of skimmed milk from some kindly cottager or good-natured farmer's wife, and for lodging slept under any shelter we could obtain without paying for it.

Our first day's march brought us nearly to Oxford, the second to Tetsworth, and the third to Uxbridge. As we became better acquainted, Sergeant Fossit diverted me with some very pretty stories of his adventures in India, including the storming of the lines of Seringapatam under General Lord Cornwallis, in which his regiment—or, as I should rather say, one of his regiments—had taken part. For, as he told me, he had gone out to Hindostan in the Honourable East India Company's service, but having come in for a great plunder in the attack on some Nabob's fort, purchased his discharge before his time was out. Unfortunately, *arrack*, which was a liquor of the country, and the charms of the *Bayaders* and *Ramjohnnies*, or Gentoo dancing ladies, and nuns had proved too seductive for him, and reduced him to a state of destitution sooner than he had any right to expect. He then enlisted in the 74th regiment, and served several years with it, until, as he assured me with over-much emphasis, he was honourably discharged the service invalided.

Long residence in the East had familiarised him with the black language and many of the country customs, and he was always garnishing his speech with scraps of the Moor's lingo, which in the matter of abuse appeared to afford him fuller satisfaction than his mother tongue. And he had many strange habits with him, such as squatting on his hunkers or cross-legged; cracking his finger-joints the first thing in the morning; *champooing* or kneading his legs when tired with a march, while he sang the Moors' song *Tazy-be-Tazy* (which meant ever fresh and gay);

drinking water out of the hollow of his hand with a knack I could never accomplish; and, as I have shown, kindling a fire (with a wonderful dexterity) and cooking his *chowpatties* in the open air as easily as he might in a kitchen, with all the implements and utensils of the culinary craft at his disposal.

Concerning Hindostan he had much to relate and of the strange people who inhabited the country, and were divided into three classes: Gentoos, of whom many were priests; Moors, who did not disbelieve in our Lord Jesus Christ, though only accounting Him a prophet; and Pharisees, who worshipped the sun. He laid little store by the fiery heat, saying there was plenty of *arrack* and *toddy* to quench the thirst that naturally arose, and a man was blessed with the power of drinking three times as much out there as he could in England. The food, when one became accustomed to it, tickled the palate far more than our common English fare; and indeed he spoke with great feeling about the *curries* and *kitcharee*, and *kabobs* and *pullaos*, and kids stuffed with pistachio nuts, that he had eaten in his time. As for the fruits, he was never tired of praising them (especially that called the *mango*, reckoned the best tasted of any in the world); nor the women, whom he vowed he loved to excess, bating the smell of the cokernut oil, with which they anointed their hair and often their bodies, so that a man with a sound nose was sometimes at a disadvantage. Of course, there were dangers to be reckoned against, such as deadly snakes—of which the coverly capelle, or hooded serpent, was the worst—and wild beasts,

including tigers, lions, and bears; with many distempers, such as the spotted fever, the bloody flux, and the mort-de-chien, or cholera morbus, which the sentinels in grim jest called Corporal Forbes. But if a man died, he died quick and no time to grieve. If he lived, and luck was on his side, there was nothing he might not attain to, especially if he could get service with the native powers of the interior, where he might rise to be a General of Ten Thousand men, or be made a Governor over a kingdom, as he had known happen to several renegados in the service of the Nabob of the Carnatic and the Sultan of Mysore. Such men spent their *pagodas* like *fanams*, lived in palaces, with private gardens in the centre for the ladies of their seraglios, and gave themselves up to uninterrupted delight and luxury, never moving out without a splendid retinue of elephants, palankeens, mounted troops, and heralds, to call out their titles and announce their approach, nor appeared in public or attended a parade without receiving a full salute of artillery, or at least the compliment of the drum.

I passed but few dull moments during the journey, and had it not been for the constant apprehension of being captured that preyed upon my guilty mind incessantly, I should have enjoyed every mile of it. For the life was strange and free, and I was learning something new every hour.

On the fifth day we entered London, reaching Tyburn Pike toward evening. Thence we made our way through many streets of handsome houses, the names of which I do not remember, to the river.

We were several times accosted by bold-looking women, offering to find us lodgings, till a rough word from Sergeant Fossit (which they returned with abundant interest) sent them about their business, which was, he told me, inveigling the unwary and strangers from the country into their dens, and there robbing them.

At last we came to Charing Cross, and the Sergeant, turning down a small passage in the vicinity, called Johnson's Court, pulled up at a certain house and gave a peculiar knock at the door.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CRIMPING-HOUSE.

THE door was opened by a brazen-faced hussy, who peeped cautiously out before she loosed the chain with which it was fastened.

"La, Sarjint dear!" she cried, as she recognised my companion. "Is that you come back again?"

"None other, Bess," he said, somewhat morosely, as I thought.

"And where's the fortune you went for to fetch?"

"Don't talk o' that, Bess," he answered, with a scowl. "'Twas a cruel bam, and turned out but ten guineas, all told!"

The wench laughed. "What! No more than ten guineas! And what have you done with them? Sure an' you've kep one for me, Sarjint dear?"

"Dog's death to me! but I haven't. Ecod, I did what a soldier should do: drank 'em out. They're all gone, and it's as you were with me. But what odds?" he broke off, with a snap of his fingers;

"'Tis but in vain
For sogers to complain.

Or a soger's wench either. So slack off, and let's have no jobation. Where's that old hunks Shadrach?"

"Upstairs. Won't you come in? Who's this with you?"

"This, my chuck," said Fossit, drawing me

forward by the shoulder, "is a young Gentleman Volunteer of my acquaintance. His name is Master John Selwyn, and he's 'listed for the glory of it. Ask Shadrach Mandalgo to step round with me to the White Horse on *business*"—he laid peculiar emphasis on the word—"and if he and I can come to terms we'll be back to lodge."

The young woman went to the foot of the stairs and called out that Sergeant Fossit was below, and almost immediately there came down one of the most debased-looking wretches I have ever seen.

He was a stoop-backed, shrunk-shanked, shrivelled-up Jew, with a face the colour of dirty parchment, a hooked nose, a protruding under lip, and small, beady, brown eyes, sharp and shifty as a rat's. His head was covered with a shock of tously hair, but two long locks, well oiled and curled, dangled one over each ear. He was dressed in a fusty black coat, much too large for him, the skirts of which flapped about his shins as he shuffled down the stairs, whilst his progress was impeded by a pair of old ragged cloth slippers, in which his feet seemed lost.

"Ah-ha, Mr. Foshit, sho you've come back again. Vy, blesh me, I didn't fink for to see you again so shoon! Vat can I do for you, Mr. Foshit?"

"Do, Shadrach? Lend me a crown, to start with—on chopping good security"—the Jew's cunning glance instantly fell on me—"and then come and help me breach it at Mr. Carr's in Whitcombe Street. I've been cagging five days, and I'm lewd for liquor!"

"Vy, sure, Mr. Foshit. Of course, I will lend

you a crown if you vant it. But dis poor young shentleman, he looks tired. Let him stop here and resht."

"Bimeby, Shadrach, bimeby. You and me must come to terms for our lodging first. I've a little bit o' business wi' you."

"Bishnish! Oh, dat's goot, Mr. Foshit. Dat's goot. I vas alva's glad to do bishnish. Ve'll soon shettle it," answered the Jew, pulling out a greasy old night-cap, and drawing it over his head. "Dis vay, young shentleman, dis vay. You valk in front, my deary. You might get lost if you vas behind. I've known grown-up men lost in London and never seen again!"

"Damn and sink me! and so you have," grinned Fossit, as we came out of the house.

Five minutes' walk brought us to the "White Horse," a dark, foul-looking tavern in Whitcombe Street, Charing Cross. The tap-room was filled with a crowd of common men, several being soldiers in uniform, who were all drinking gin and stingo, smoking, laughing, swearing, and conversing in loud tones. Shadrach nodded to the proprietor, a burly-looking ruffian, who stood in his shirt-sleeves at the door, and, motioning Fossit and myself into an inner parlour, bade the drawer bring us three glasses of gin, which were soon placed upon the table.

I told him I would rather not have any, and Sergeant Fossit volunteered to drink my share, and bade me go and sit by the window, while he and the Jew transacted their business. They were soon deep in conversation, but spoke in such low tones that I

could only catch a portion of what they said. But I gathered this much: that the Jew was the proprietor of a licensed recruiting house, and that Fossit had formerly been in his employ and wanted to return to it. At which Shadrach professed himself highly satisfied, declaring that a corporal he had engaged to take Fossit's place was no man at all at the job, for, although there was a hot demand for recruits, both for the King's army and for the East India Company's service, and all the other houses in the business had been driving a roaring trade, Corporal Snipe allowed man after man to slip through his fingers.

I did not understand what he meant, though I was soon to learn. Recruiting was at this time a very lucrative calling, for soldiers were urgently needed, first of all to fill the ranks of the army in Holland; secondly, because of a custom in vogue whereby young men of fashion contracted with the crimping-house keepers to supply them with a stipulated number of recruits, by raising which, they could obtain a commission in the army; and thirdly, for the East India Company's service, which, although under restrictions as to its authorised places of recruiting, had its contractors in London, who worked under the King's licence, and joined in the bidding for men.

This keen competition, fostered by heavy bounties and head money paid for both soldiers and sailors, induced great numbers of abandoned men and women to take up the trade in human flesh. But the supply was limited, the harshness and severity practised in the army and the unpopularity of the war then being

waged, making military service dreaded and disliked, and it was needful to resort to the most arbitrary and unlawful measures to fill the ranks. This was well known, and no questions ever asked as to how the contractor came by his recruits, who were many of them kidnapped. The crimping-house keepers stationed decoy women in the avenues leading to town to entrap inebriated or imprudent passengers to their dens, the windows of which were often decked out with fashionable curtains or fine flowers, to give them an air of respectability, or at least of pleasure. No fish came amiss in their nets, and they often enlisted such objects, down to very cripples, as could scarce be described. In the dusk of the evening or at night they even dared to seize on decent tradesmen and persons of consideration, whom they gagged and carried to confinement, and then starved and tortured until the miserable victims submitted out of fear of their lives. They were then taken before an examining surgeon, generally in the pay of the crimps, or if an outcry was apprehended, or the man too bad to be put forward, a substitute was paraded, who was passed sound under the name of the actual recruit. After that came attestation by a "Wooden Justice," as they called a confederate dressed up in a gown and large wig, or before some unprincipled magistrate, to whom the customary fee was all the interest he had in the job. In this way many hundreds of free men were torn from their friends by force or fraud, and sold into the slavery of a soldier's life, with sixpence a day pay, and the cat-o'-nine-tails to cure complaining.

The Mutiny Act required, however, that the actual

process of enlistment should be performed by a sergeant or corporal, and it was the custom of the crimping-house keepers to engage one or the other to legalise their nefarious work. When Fossit returned from India, he was employed by the Jew in this capacity, but after serving a short time, left him to proceed to the country. He was now anxious to return to the work, and urged Shadrach to discharge the Corporal who had been engaged in his place, and take him on again.

“So I vill, Mr. Foshit, so I vill for certain!” I heard the Jew answer. “You have shust come in time. Dere’s a draft sailing for Bombay in de *Princess Amelia*, and it’s very short. Colonel Hanger sent to me yesterday to say dey would take anyfing vot looked like a man, and pay ten guineash for ’im, and never ask a shingle question! Now, dat’s a nice little shob for you. You know vot a Company’s recruit ish? A shentleman vot never comes back no more to tell no tales. And, blesh me, a bold man like you can act wid a wigour beyond the law, seeing it’s for de benefit of your King and Country.”

“I’m your man, Shadrach,” cried Fossit, slapping his hand down on the table. “On’y, take heed, on the same share as before.”

“Vy, certainly, ve couldn’t go for to offer you less, Mr. Foshit! And de young shentleman—you’ll frow him in to bind de bargain?”

“For the King’s service—yes.”

“Vy, of course for de King’s army. Ve wouldn’t waste a lad like him on de Company’s. Dere’s Captain Crumpeter—at least he’s going to be Captain—vot is

raising a fine dashing company for a commission. He's a very shenerous shentleman, ish Captain Crumpeter. 'Dam the monish!' shays he, 'on'y bring me de men.' I've sent him sheven, and dere's two more down at de Court. Dey are off to Chatham to-night. Dr. Gale has passed dem sound as kosher meat, and his Vorship is notified to attest dem dis evening at the 'Savoy.'

Hearing this, Sergeant Fossit burst out into a loud guffaw—"Haw! haw! haw! So Gale's back again at his canting tricks, is he? The nacky old cull!"

"Hush—h—h!" muttered Shadrach, glancing at me furtively with his beady eyes, and laying his skinny hand on the Sergeant's arm. I had been feigning asleep and now pretended to wake. "Vy, young shentleman, I was forgetting you. Mr. Foshit tells me you want to serve his Majesty. Dear shoy, but you'll make a splendid soger."

"Aye, that he will, Shadrach. For take heed, he's a chopping lad, and a lad o' spunk too. Dammy, he'll steal you a horse at a pinch!" and the Sergeant gave a wink which robbed me of my character off-hand. "But come, master, my belly tells me it's supper-time. Let's get over to our billet."

The Jew took us back to the house in Johnson's Court, into a large room, where the table was being spread by the wench who opened the door for us. Standing talking to her was a most confounded sour-looking fellow, whose face was disfigured with an uncommon load of small-pox. He eyed Fossit suspiciously and looked at me with contemptuous surprise.

“Good evening, comrade,” said the Sergeant, with assumed civility. “You’re Corporal Snipe, I take it?”

“I am,” growled the man. “And who are you?”

“An old thick of Bess—whereby you’ll excuse me,” was the reply as he whipped out of the room after the nasty hussey; and the next moment we heard a struggle going on in the passage, and a sound of kissing and cuddling.

Corporal Snipe turned a sort of dappled green colour, and made as if to follow, but Shadrach detained him.

“It’s all right,” he whispered, “all right, Corporal.”

“Who’s that gallus cull, and what’s he doing here?”

“Shust coming in to *lodge*,” explained the Jew, with a peculiar nod. “I’ll tell you all about him presently. But quick. Vot did Colonel Hanger say? How much vil he give?”

“Ten guineas, and no questions. But they are ordered to sail to-morrow, and the last boat leaves the ‘Savoy’ at midnight.”

The Jew reflected for a moment, and then began whispering into Snipe’s ear, so that I could not hear what he said. But I judged from the ugly smile it brought into the Corporal’s spotted face, it was something agreeable, for he kept nodding his approval, and in a little while the two left the room and went upstairs.

In about five minutes, Bess entered with a great dish of meat, which she set down upon the table.

Then spying me, she came to where I was standing, and after looking me up and down very boldly, chucked me under the chin, saying in a frolicsome voice, "Dear joy, what a charming, sweet, pretty lad! La' then, you may give me a kiss."

I turned away from her in disgust, for she reeked of gin and vice, and I thought I had never seen so loathsome a woman before. Whereupon she tossed up her nose and discharged a heap of coarse epithets at me, and would, I think, have laid a heavy hand on me, but that there came the sound of footsteps tramping down the stairs, and she moved off with an indignant vicious glance.

And now there trooped in quite a company of people. Sergeant Fossit, with another strapping wench, whom he addressed as Moll Shadrach, with a strong hulking bully, belonging to the gang, and last of all Corporal Snipe and a man, the most remarkable of all, who immediately took his seat at the head of the table.

This was Dr. Gale, the same whom the Jew had referred to at the tavern. He was stout and broadly built, with a red face, exceeding heavy eyelids, a very short neck (if indeed he had a neck at all), and an uncommonly pompous manner. He was dressed in a fine claret-coloured coat and flowered waistcoat, with white breeches, and wore a wig on his head.

"Whom have we here?" he asked, turning the upper part of his body slowly round, and surveying me.

"The young man is John Selwyn," explained Sergeant Fossit. "He has listed as a Gentleman

Volunteer. And he can read, write, and cipher," he added, as a sort of apology for my presence.

"Be sheated, young shentleman," said Shadrach. "Mr. Foshit is my goot friend, and Dr. Gale's goot friend. And ve are very glad to see any von he recommendsh; upon my shoul we are!"

"'Zooks! if ever I saw the likes o' this!" growled the Corporal. "What next I wonder?"

"Dog's death to you!" burst out Fossit, turning fiercely round on him. "What dy'e mean? Take heed, this is a free Gentleman Volunteer, and worth his wittles with bounties up to ten guineas."

"Vy, certainly," assented the Jew, signing to Snipe to hold his peace; "sho he is. De doctor allows dat. I'll take my oaf he does."

"And if I bring you a friend as a Gentleman Volunteer," blustered Fossit, "rot and sink me, but I'll see him billeted as a friend should be!"

"Quite right, Mr. Foshit, quite right. De doctor shays yes to dat."

Dr. Gale bowed his head in a pompous manner. "Let the youth stay," he said. "It is unusual, but—let him stay."

"Take heed to that," snorted Fossit, with a fiery nod of his red head towards the Corporal, "and mind your own business."

I soon perceived that Dr. Gale was a personage of very great consideration, whom everyone stood in awe of. His wants were attended to first; when he condescended to speak, all listened respectfully; and he laid down the law and comported himself like a man of parts and breeding, treating the rest with the

greatest asperity and disdain. Moreover, he fared better than the common, enjoying a special bottle to himself, which Corporal Snipe brought in for him, and from which he frequently replenished his glass. I noticed, too, what struck me as a singular proceeding, that each time after he had done so he placed the bottle under his chair for security, although I did not conceive anyone present bold enough to help himself to the Doctor's tippie if it stood on the table.

The conversation was chiefly about recruits and bounties and head-money; and although I could not understand all that was said, much being spoken in the canting language, I soon became aware I was in a crimping-house, and it was only the protection of Sergeant Fossit that secured me civil treatment. I do not know what particular reason he had for his conduct, unless it were to annoy the Corporal, but he paid me great attention during the meal, and seemed to take a pleasure in urging Snipe to wait upon my wants. This soon angered the latter to such a degree that he growled out, with many violent oaths, that it was no part of his duty to swaddy another cull's recruit, and that my proper place was "along with the others."

Presently the conversation turned upon the hot demand for men for the East India Company's service, and Colonel Hanger, their principal contractor, who was at his wits' end where to get recruits. Several very extraordinary anecdotes were told about him, and, amongst others, Dr. Gale mentioned that some time ago the Colonel had seriously proposed to

raise a regiment from convicts, and when Government declined to sanction that scheme, as gravely suggested the enrolment of a battalion of mad men from Bethlehem Hospital!

"Shust fink of it!" ejaculated Shadrach. "Don't it show vot the bishnish has come down to? De Colonel's been beating up every house in de trade to fill de draft for de *Princess Amelia*, vot sails to-night. Vot a pity, Mr. Foshit, you vasn't here sooner! Ve wanted you badly, sure. De draft is so short dey'll take anyfing wid two legs and two arms and von eye. Strike me, you might press a bishop and shend him aboard, and dey wouldn't reshpect him!"

Sergeant Fossit cast a look of unconcealed contempt at the Corporal. "Well, that queers me, Shadrach. What's your recruiting officer been doing? The pity lies with him, I'm thinking. But wait a bit. I'm an old dog at the game, and Bess and me'll show you how it's done."

He leant over to give the wench a hug, being by this time well gone in liquor. But she resented his advances, and chid him with a snappish "Have done," and "Drat the nasty man! Where are your company manners?"

"My company manners, Bess!" he hiccupped out, with a maudlin laugh. "Haw, haw! that's prime. Haven't I been a Company's sentinel, and don't I know Company's manners? Why, rot and sink me! but I could tell you some jolly stories about the pretty, skitty, little *Ramjohnnies* in Indy, with their nose-rings and their toe-rings, and their nicky-nackies, and their coffee skins, and their furbelows,

and their fandangles. It isn't 'Have done, Sergeant' and 'Drat the man' with them, Bess. I'll take my corporal oath: but '*Hitherow*' and numble scramble!"

As he spoke, he ogled her with a leer of drunken affection, and pinched her till she shrieked again.

"Drop that!" snarled out Snipe savagely, from across the table—(I saw the man was fancy, and revenge gleamed in his eye)—"Let Bess be. She's not for you."

"An' who says it?" shouted Fossit. "What, you—you bit av a beak and trail. Ecod, but Bess is meat for your master, and that's me, as you'll soon know. She's an old wench o' mine, and I'll buss her when I choose, and ask no leave of an Abram cove of a corporal like you afore I run you through the body. Here's love to you, my chuck, and to hell with Corporal Snipe—bones, beak, and all!" And Fossit filled his mug, and tossed off its contents with a cockish jerk of his head.

"Confusion to me, but I'll none o' this; I'll have his blood, I will!" cried Snipe, bounding to his feet and clenching his fist.

But Shadrach instantly interposed.

"No fighting, shentlemen, no fighting. Be sheated, Corporal; Mr. Foshit means no harin."

The fellow dropped sullenly back in his chair, and at the same instant I saw a quick signal pass between the Jew and Dr. Gale.

The latter immediately roused himself.

"Corporal Snipe, how dare you brawl here? Silence, you rascal, and don't answer me!" he roared,

with the voice of a lion, as the man opened his mouth to speak. Then he panted and glared at him, his face purple with indignation, and rapped his great fat hand on the table to enforce obedience.

It was very well acted: so well, in fact, that Fossit was too much in liquor to perceive the passion was only simulated. But the signal I had observed put me on my guard, and I knew danger was brewing.

"Sergeant," went on the Doctor, turning round to Fossit with an oily smile, "I am sorry for this. Very sorry. It is a poor welcome back to an old friend and fellow worker. But there's no offence, I hope. A glass with you to make amends."

He stooped down, and drew out a bottle from under his chair, and handed it to Bess.

"Great guns! I warrant you I'll never say no to that," cried Fossit, vastly complimented. "Bess, girl, pass the swig. The Doctor's own is noble stuff, and doesn't want for to travel to be drunk."

"Your very good health, Mr. Fossit," called out Dr. Gale, with a bow, "and—luck in our line!"

"Dash it, an' I'll toast that anyway," shouted the Sergeant hilariously, as Bess filled his glass. "Luck in our line—and I'll bring it, too, to show you the difference between a man of business and a whiff of feathers," he added, with a sneer at Snipe, who sat gnawing his nether lip in rage.

"And the youth," observed the Doctor graciously. "Let him have half a glass."

But I was suspicious and begged to be excused, protesting I had never tasted wine in my life.

"Dog's death to you, Gentleman Volunteer Selwyn,

drink!" cried Fossit, with an oath. "Take heed, it's the law in the army to drink when you're nodded to. I've seen a man shot for refusing."

"Yes, yes," put in the Jew. "Half a glash. Tashte it, young shentleman, only tashte it. It vill do you good."

I allowed my glass to be filled, and held it up as I saw Fossit doing.

"Luck in our line!" he called out again. "And off heeltaps!"

Then he put the tumbler to his lips, threw his head back, and drained it at a gulp.

I know not what juggling had taken place, but the bottle had been changed, and that which was handed round was not the one the Doctor had been drinking from. For the wine was hocused, as Sergeant Fossit discovered almost before he set his glass down.

"Damn and sink me, you gallus quean!" he shouted, turning round furiously on Bess, his eyes gleaming with a strange red glow and his face flaming like a man at the point of apoplexy. "The swig's doctored. Dog's death to me! but I'll cut the lips off of you, you gutter abness, if I can lay hold of a *chukko*."

He groped with his hand for a knife, reeling and swaying like to fall; but Bess nimbly whipped away the only one within his reach, and tripped round the table with a taunting laugh.

Then he realised he was undone, and burst into a torrent of Moor's abuse, his speech thick, broken, and spasmodic, and his eye gradually closing with the

overpowering drowsiness of one who is drugged. At last his hands began wildly to beat the air like a drowning man's, quicker and quicker, till all of an instant he lurched forward and fell with a crash upon the table, his arms hanging loosely by his side, and his red head resting among the dishes.

I had dashed my untasted glass upon the floor and risen to my feet at the beginning of this scene, indignant at the deception practised upon the Sergeant. But before I could do anything I was pinioned from behind, and Moll, the young woman on my right, snapped a pair of handcuffs on my wrists with such dexterity as to instantly render me helpless, whilst Corporal Snipe ran round to the other side of the table and did the same for Fossit.

"Zooks, he's as drunk as a sow!" he laughed out, rolling Fossit's head to and fro with a rough hand, to show how completely he was drugged. Rot him for a rascally, carrotty-pated, black Sergeant, as would chouse a Corporal of the Guards of his wench and his livelihood!"

"And this one's just as bad," cried Bess, giving me a stinging slap on the cheek. "Take that, you viper!"

"Is he quite safe—quite safe?" asked the Doctor anxiously, pointing to Fossit. "He is a powerful man."

"Safe?" grinned Snipe. "Wasn't it me who houcussed his boose—me, whose wench he cuddled? Damn him for a rum-cull; he's safe, and at your disposition for forty-eight hours, and never a 'no' in him. I'll go bail to the hangman."

The Doctor looked uncommonly relieved. Then he wagged his head sententiously. "Wine does wonders," he quoted; "does wonders every day! His Majesty has more cause to be beholden to wine for his soldiers than to his Houses of Parliament?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WOODEN JUSTICE.

“How about this young gudgeon?” asked Corporal Snipe, pointing to me after he had lifted Fossit up and dropped him into the corner of the room like a sack of meal.

“He’s for Captain Crumpeter,” explained Shadrach. ‘Doctor, vill you please make out a surgeon’s shertificate?’”

Gale nodded assent, and Snipe lugged me forward by the ear.

“Your name?” asked the Doctor, pointing at me with the end of a quill pen.

I remained silent, not choosing to obey the villain. Whereupon the Corporal fetched me a cruel cuff on the side of the head. “Have done,” he growled in a threatening voice, “and answer at once, you sly rogue, unless you want me to lambaste you. I thought you was a gentleman volunteer what ’listed for the love of fighting?”

“I volunteered with Sergeant Fossit, whom you have drugged—not with you. And I’ll do nothing except under his orders.”

“Oh, won’t you, my jolly Courtcard? You’re too cockish, and want a little o’ the paint rubbed off. Have it, then;” and the brute began drubbing me over the head and back with his heavy fist till I was necessitated to cry out for quarter.

"Now," he demanded, "what's your name?"

"John Selwyn."

Dr. Gale wrote it down. "Age?" he asked.

"Seventeen."

He glanced at me under his fat eyelids, and filled in "nineteen." "Native of?"

"Bristol."

"Vere he shtole a horse," put in the Jew with a chuckle, "vich I've heard all about it."

"I stole no horse," I denied indignantly.

"Silence!" bawled Corporal Snipe, giving me another cuff.

"What's your calling?" interrogated the Doctor.

"I enlisted for a gentleman volunteer," I answered hotly. "And I protest against this outrageous treatment."

"And a very nice young shentleman, too," observed the Jew, rubbing his hands softly together; and "gentleman" I was written down.

Then Snipe turned me round once as a matter of form, and the Doctor, without looking up, proceeded to certify that he had medically examined me, and I was in every way sound and fit to serve His Majesty the King.

"And now," I cried, as he made a sign that he had finished, "at least order these handcuffs to be taken off."

"Not shust yet, my deary—not shust yet," said the Jew.

"You villains," I exclaimed, my anger getting the better of me at this refusal, "is this the way you

treat a free man? But, I warn you, I am witness to what you have done, and——”

“Vitness, you young viper!” broke in Shadrach viciously; “people vot shtéal horses shouldn’t talk of being vitnesses. Ve have given you a goot shupper, and been very shivil to you, and no bill writ out, and you talk of being vitness. Vell! vell! shust to fink of it! Take him to de cellar, Corporal, for a sneaking Peter Spy!”

I was immediately seized by the scruff of my neck, to the great amusement of Bess and Moll, and hustled out of the room and down a steep flight of stone steps, at the bottom of which a door was opened, and I was pushed through and locked in.

The place was pitch dark, and for a moment I stood bewildered, until a groan informed me I was not alone.

“Who’s there?” I called out.

“Poor Mathew Parminter,” replied a feeble piping voice, “a respectable tradesman, who has been foully taken by crimps, and robbed and beaten and starved, and despoiled of his locks, that were his glory and as lovely as Absalom’s, and who claims your protection if you are a Christian!”

“My protection, sir, will avail you but little; for I am handcuffed, and cannot even defend myself.”

“And I am manacled to a drunken fellow here, who gives me no rest with his incessant tossings and turnings. Oh, sir, I have been most barbarously put upon and unkindly used.”

“That I can fully understand from the nature of

the villains in this house," said I, groping about to find a seat beside him on the floor. "For although I enlisted in the army of my own free will for a gentleman volunteer, I find myself treated like a common felon without cause or reason."

At this moment the third man began to jerk violently about, and Mr. Parminter begged me to try and pacify him. So I caught him by the shoulder in the dark, and shook him roughly.

"Aye, aye, sir. Turn out the watch," he mumbled. "Ready, sir—ready. Tumble up, my hearties—tumble up."

"He is a sailor, and thinks he is on board his ship. He has been pursuing his seafaring avocations in his delirium, and I have been compelled to assist him in many of them," explained Mr. Parminter in a rueful voice. "Twice has he done a damned job which he called reefing the topsail, and nearly broke my wrist in the act. And then he wanted to fight me for not serving out extra grog."

"Grog?" cried the sailor, whom the word seemed to bring to his senses. "Mother av Moses, is it grog you're spaking av? Arrah, then, I'm just witherin' for a dhrop!"

I shook him again, and told him to wake up and cease fooling. And then I heard him rubbing his eyes with his one hand that was free, and asking in a whisper, "Blood and 'ounds, where was he, and who was he married to?"

I told him in a crimping den, and chained to another in as wretched a plight as himself.

"Be Jaybers! an' I remimber now," he exclaimed.

But he looked a dacent gentleman. An' me sivin goulden guineas—where will they be?" He began searching in his pockets, and presently raised a great outcry, vowing he had been robbed, and accusing us of it.

I reasoned with him, telling him we were in the same sore straits as himself, as he must recognise, if he had any sense; and when he found we were both "married" (as he called it, meaning handcuffed), he begged our pardons, very contritely, for insulting us, and set to work bemoaning his loss in his own Irish tongue.

Mr. Parminter now asked how I came here, and I told him what had befallen me. When he heard how outrageously the gang had treated Sergeant Fossit, who might be considered one of their own kidney, he lifted up his hands and prayed God to deliver him from such abandoned villains, who were devoid even of thieves' honour.

Then, at my solicitation, he recounted his own story. He was a lady's barber by profession, and about seven o'clock two evenings back was returning home after attending to a lady of quality, when a very modest-looking young woman came up to him and asked to be directed on her way. He pointed out the road she must follow, but she declared herself a stranger in London, and afraid to adventure it alone, and with tears in her eyes earnestly besought him to accompany her, and afford her his protection. To this he consented, being, as he explained with a complacent smirk, a person of much experience and some esteem with the sex, his art bringing him into confidential

relations with dames and damsels of all degree. As they walked along he fell into conversation with the young woman, who presently, when passing a narrow court, gave a signal, and two men rushed out and seized him.

He instantly demanded by what right they did so, and was astonished to hear them answer, with impudent assurance, that they recognised him as a man who had taken the shilling from them on the yesterday to enlist, and then given them the slip. He protested loudly they were mistaken, whereupon they began to drag him towards the court. Finding he could not hope to contend with them, he called out for the watch, upon which they beat him most unmercifully over the head, until he was half-stunned, thrust a gag in his mouth to stifle his cries, and carried him into the house in which we were now confined. Here he was robbed of his purse, watch, and buckles, stripped nearly naked, and—most heartless outrage of all—his hair, which was golden in colour and exceeding long and silky in quality, was cut off close to his skull, whilst he was repeatedly struck in the face because he murmured at such barbarous treatment. Then he was cast into this cellar, and handcuffed to his fellow-prisoner, who was already lying in it insensible. And here they had been, as near as he could judge, forty-eight hours without food.

“Wurra! wurra!” wailed the sailor. “The sorrow av it. Heugh! heugh! the sorrow av it. An’ me sivin goulden guineas, sor—heard ye annything av them?”

Mr. Parminter assured him he had not, and desired

an explanation of the circumstances under which they were lost.

Upon which the Irishman told us his story. He was a free mariner by profession, and his name Patrick Barrat. A more artless, good-natured fellow one could not wish to meet, and he spoke with a simplicity that must have made us smile had we been less cruelly situated.

It appeared he was just arrived from a long sea voyage to the Southern whale fishery, and had come up to London by coach to see his sister, who lived in Greek Street, Soho. Having walked across Westminster Bridge, he was looking at a great pile of buildings on his left, when a very civil man came up to him and informed him they were the Houses of Parliament. In this way they fell into conversation, and Barrat happening to mention his sister's name and where she lived, the man declared he knew her very well, and offered to show the way to her house. This completely disarmed the sailor, and he joined company with the stranger, who made himself so friendly as they walked up Whitehall that he felt he could do nothing less than invite him to have a glass of rum.

"Since you are so obliging, sir," said the sly rogue, "I cannot refuse your request; but, as you are a stranger, you must drink at my expense, for we London folk pride ourselves on our hospitality."

To this Barrat objected, saying he had money in his pocket, and desired to stand treat; but the man would take no denial, and led the way to an ale-house, which, from its description, I judged to be the *White*

Horse, where he called for two glasses of wine. No sooner had Barrat drunk his than he lost his senses, and remembered nothing till he woke just now and found himself robbed of his seven guineas, besides some silver. He ended his tale by asking us anxiously if we thought he should ever see them again.

We were obliged to confess that there seemed little prospect of that. Whereupon he declared, very philosophically, that since his money was gone they might do what they liked with him, and he'd as lief soldier it as sailor it. But poor Mr. Parminter could display no such fortitude, and bemoaned his ill-fortune, and, above all, the loss of his beautiful hair, with many bitter groans and sighs; for, said he, when he regained his freedom, his lady customers would certainly decline to employ a bald barber, and (what hurt him more, I think) would perhaps laugh at him.

We now fell to discussing what would happen to us, and Mr. Parminter said he knew for certain we must be taken before a magistrate to be sworn, and reckoned on that opportunity to effect his release. He was also of opinion that if Barrat represented he had been robbed, and demanded a warrant and the assistance of a peace officer, he might obtain redress. But as for me, since I had by my own confession taken the shilling to enlist as a gentleman volunteer, he did not see how I could do anything but protest against the scurvy usage I had been subjected to—unless, indeed, I liked to pay my smart-money and claim my freedom.

But this I had no mind to do, desiring nothing

better than to be sent abroad to the war, or to some distant part of the country where I should be in no danger of discovery. For my mind was still weighed down with fear of being arrested, and I made sure information of the murder of the priest must have reached London, where there was probably a description of my person advertised, and offers of reward for my capture. I had heard something of the surprising skill of Townsend and Sayers and other notorious Bow Street officers, whose names and clever captures of criminals were in everyone's mouth, and it was a prodigious relief to me to feel that I was, perhaps, safer in this crimping den than anywhere else in London. Wherefore I was less troubled at my lot than my fellow-captives, since it secured me the concealment I so much desired.

After a time I began to feel drowsy, and said I would endeavour to obtain some sleep. But scarce had I composed myself than we heard the sound of footsteps descending the stairs, and the door of the cellar was flung open. It was Corporal Snipe, with a horn lanthorn in his hand, accompanied by another bully, whom he addressed as Kydd. He ordered us to get up and follow him, which we did, to the room where supper had been served. On entering it, I looked towards the corner where I had last seen Sergeant Fossit lying, but he was no longer there.

The Jew was standing by the table with his night-cap on his head, ready to go out. Directly Mr. Parminter saw him, he began to bellow and roar, demanding to be set free. Whereupon Shadrach

noded to the Corporal, who produced a gag from his pocket. At the sight of this horrid instrument Mr. Parminter turned very pale, and yelled out in terror that he would go nowhere except before a magistrate, for not only was he exempt from pressing as a respectable citizen who paid taxes, but he was unfit to serve as a soldier; which, indeed, was true, for he was a very short and puny little man.

"Not fit!" laughed the Corporal. "By my sowl, you'll be so difficult to hit, my little bantam, that you'll come safe out o' battle when all the Grenadier company is shot dead. It's not the biggest calf that makes the sweetest veal, neither. Come, stop this outcry, will ye?" And he proceeded to gag him, despite his struggles and entreaties.

Seeing the treatment served out to Mr. Parminter, Barrat and I prudently held our peace.

"Shall I bit these two up?" asked Snipe.

Shadrach nodded assent. But at this I protested with as much dignity as I could summon, saying I had enlisted of my own accord and free will, and would go along quietly if they would not ill-use me, desiring nothing better than to get out of their hands. Barrat simulated a state of stupor so well that Snipe remarked there was nothing to fear from him, and in the end we were both left unmolested, but with a warning that at the first symptom of resistance we should be silenced more effectually than Mr. Parminter was, than whom a more unhappy and uncomfortable object, as he gasped and choked with the gag in his mouth, could not be imagined.

We were now taken to a coach which was drawn up at the mouth of the court, Snipe and Kydd getting inside with us, and the Jew riding by the jarvey. After jolting along for a few minutes we reached a house in one of the narrow streets leading to the river, and were conducted into a large room on the ground floor. Here we found a man, dressed in a fine military uniform, his hair powdered and plastered into a macaroni tail behind, a pair of big whiskers on his cheeks, and under his arm a huge cheese-cutter hat of the latest fashion. He was very stout, and strode up and down the chamber in a choleric impatient manner.

"Confusion to me!" he exclaimed in an unnatural high-pitched voice, "what the devil do you mean by keeping me waiting? You deserve to have your ear pulled, fellow."

I started as I heard him speak, for his accent seemed familiar, although the intonation was strange.

"Beg pardon, your honour—humbly beg pardon," answered Snipe, with a salute. "But these here rascally recruits haven't larnt discipline yet, and are a plaguey awkward squad to handle."

"Confusion to me! how many of the ragamuffins are there to be approved?" asked the officer.

"Vy, tree, so please you, Captain Tribe," replied Shadrach, "for Captain Crumpeter's company—the shame as you passed sheven men for last week."

"Where are the surgeon's certificates?"

The Corporal produced them from the lining of his hat, and the Captain inspected the papers with

excessive care, which set me wondering if he would attach so much importance to them if he knew how they were granted. Then he put several questions to us, all of which Shadrach or Snipe answered on our behalf; for when Mr. Parminter (who had been ungagged just before we entered) ventured to protest, the corporal shook him up from behind and growled in his ear that the Captain was a terrible Turk for ordering a saucy recruit three dozen. Hearing this, we all thought it best to hold our peace till we were taken before the magistrate, and made no objection to Captain Tribe filling in the papers, which he did without any hesitation, certifying that we had been duly approved as recruits for his Majesty's service. Having signed his name, he tossed the documents to Snipe with a "Confusion to me! there you are;" and cocking his hat on his head, joined his hands under his coat-tails, and swaggered out of the room, whistling a military air.

"Such a noble offisher," chuckled the Jew as he disappeared. "Takes sho much trouble to shave trouble. Dere is no von vishes better to his Majesty's service dan Captain Tribe!"

"By thunder! he's a beautiful figure of a man," commented Snipe. "Fit for a battle pictur, blowed if he ain't, when he cocks his beaver and whistles the 'Rogue's March.'"

"I'll go and see if his Vorship de Shustice has come," said Shadrach, as he left the room.

No sooner had he gone than Snipe and Kydd drew out their pipes and proceeded to smoke (which freedom on their part astonished me not a little), but in no

way relaxing their guard over us, who were now made to sit on a bench at one end of the room. Once I attempted to whisper something to little Mr. Parminter, but the Corporal instantly threatened me with a knock over the head if I opened my mouth again. Barrat through all these proceedings had preserved a dull, listless appearance, reeling about as though still suffering from the effects of the drug; but two or three times his eye caught mine with a gleam of cunning intelligence in it that showed he was quite alive to what was going on.

After we had waited about half an hour Shadrach poked his grisly head in at the door and called out, "His Vorship has come. Bring de recruits upstairs to de Shustice-room!" and we were at once conducted to a chamber on the upper floor, dimly lighted with a single dip.

Here, sitting at a table covered with books and papers, was a stout man, robed in a great black gown and wearing a huge full-bottomed wig. His face was extraordinarily pale, and remarkable for a pair of bushy black eyebrows that almost appeared to lap over his eyes; but he stooped so much that I could not distinguish his features. He comported himself with the gravity of a judge sentencing a batch of murderers.

"Please, your Vorship," said Shadrach, cringing and bowing with great respect, "tree recruits to be sworn in."

The magistrate joined his forefingers and thumbs together, and peered at us very solemnly from under his big black eyebrows.

And now Mr. Parminter could restrain himself no longer.

"Justice, sir—justice; I demand justice!" he cried out, his shorn head bobbing up and down, and his hands clasped. "I have been kidnapped and robbed, and most shamefully used by these——"

He was stopped short in the current of his speech by Snipe smiting him across the mouth.

"The man's raving drunk, your Worship," he explained, "and very foul-mouthed. In short, he's crazy, as you can see by his shaven poll, and doesn't know what he's saying."

"I protest I'm not drunk," cried Mr. Parminter indignantly; "I'm a respectable tradesman, a Court hairdresser by profession, God help me!" (he rubbed his stubbly skull ruefully), "who has been despoiled of his locks, that were as elegant as Absalom's, by these most rascally and notorious crimps."

"There! listen him, your Worship—only listen!" interposed Snipe. "Who are you a-calling a rascally crimp? I serve his Majesty the King, and I'll be insulted with no such names by a gutter-find like you. You took the shilling, and drank yourself silly with it, and now you want for to back out."

"I took no shilling," protested Mr. Parminter. "I was hit over the head and gagged and trepanned."

"A likely story," interrupted the magistrate, in a gruff bass voice; "but I hear the same too often to believe it. If you want to cry off, pay your smart-money and begone."

Again I could have sworn the voice was familiar

to me, but before I had time to cogitate whose it was, Mr. Parminter was eagerly calling out—

“That I will—that I will! Let me but send for it!”

“And I wait here on your convenience, fellow? Do you think a magistrate of the City of London has nothing better to do than kick his heels about while every drunken recruit beats up his friends for a loan? No, no. Pay your money down at once.”

“But I have been robbed—my pockets rifled. How can I pay it down?”

“Then I must needs attest you. I am bound to do so by the law. Let him be sworn,” said the magistrate, turning to Snipe.

But now suddenly Barrat’s voice was heard.

“I smoke it—I smoke it!” he shouted. “By St. Patrick, ’tis the bould captain from downstairs. A wooden Justice—blood and ’ounds, a wooden Justice!”

“Confusion to me, silence that impudent fellow!” shouted the magistrate in an angry voice, the very passion in which revealed his identity; for in a flash the truth burst upon me—Captain and Justice were both Dr. Gale!

“It’s Dr. Gale!” I cried, unable to suppress the discovery. “Dr. Gale, who sat with me at supper!”

“I commit that man for contempt of court,” roared the impostor. “He shall be laid down for six months’ imprisonment.”

But now Shadrach came forward, evidently in great perturbation of spirits.

“No, no, your Vorship; he knows no better. He’s shust a shilly country fellow. Dey have all been drinking, and are fuddled. Shust attest dem, and have done wid it.”

Thereupon Dr. Gale seized a book and began in a nervous, agitated voice to read the Articles of War relating to mutiny and desertion, and then put the oath to us. But we all refused to take it, and Mr. Parminter, with more spirit than I had given him credit for, called out that they might do their worst, but he had plenty of friends in high quarters, the husbands and fathers of the ladies of quality whose hair he dressed, and would break up their crimping gang now that he had discovered their nefarious ways.

“Blood and fury!” shouted the Doctor, throwing off all attempt at disguise; “listen to that! This must be stopped.”

Hearing which, Corporal Snipe doubled his fists and aimed a cruel blow full at Mr. Parminter’s face, which must have finished the poor little man had it caught him clean. But I threw myself in between and partially saved him, getting an ugly knock for my pains. This brought the Corporal’s fury on me, who was in no mind to accept his ill-treatment patiently, and squaring my fists I called on Barrat to help me, and we might yet escape. We were two against four, for Mr. Parminter was on the floor, his nose bleeding and himself sickened at the sight of his own gore. We made as gallant a fight as we could, but while Snipe and Kydd held us occupied in front, Dr. Gale and Shadrach took us in rear, and a thump on the head from some mighty hard weapon brought

me to the ground, which left it easy for them to overpower Barrat, and in less than three minutes we were all handcuffed and thrust into a corner, with Kydd standing over us ready to strike at the first movement we made.

And now Dr. Gale and Shadrach fell to whispering together in an eager and excited manner, the former evidently laying some urgent injunction upon the Jew.

"But ve shall loosh monish," I heard Shadrach protest. "Ve shall loosh monish. Captain Crumpeter is such a shenerous shentleman!"

"Lose it, and confusion to you. I won't run the risk," answered Gale. "A fine kettle of fish you have made of it, allowing that cursed young horse-thief to sit down to supper. I insist on their being put away."

"But, my God, ve shall loosh monish—ve shall loosh monish!" repeated the Jew in accents of an agony.

"To the devil with the money! Do you want a mob in the court, breaking our windows and gutting the house, as they did Black Benjamin's last week? They must be put away, I tell you. I insist on it. Go and arrange it with Colonel Hanger. He is sure to be at the Savoy, and there is an hour yet before midnight."

"But ve shall loosh monish—ve shall loosh monish!" Shadrach still moaned, wringing his hands. "Captain Crumpeter is such a shenerous shentleman!"

For an answer Dr. Gale grabbed him by the arm

and hauled him out of the room, warning Snipe, as he went, to guard us carefully till they returned.

We had but a poor time of it for the next half-hour, for the Corporal did nothing but abuse us, swearing our conduct had cost him three guineas, his perquisite from Captain Crumpeter being a guinea a head for each recruit he brought. "As for you, you scheming fox," he bawled at Barrat, "if I'd a known you could sham Abram like that I'd a hocussed you silly for a month;" and he cuffed the poor sailor again and again, out of sheer spite and vexation.

"An' me sivin goulden guineas?" demanded Barrat between the thumps. "Where are me sivin goulden guineas ye robbed me av, ye thayfe?"

"I'll rob you of your sivin sines," threatened the Corporal.

"Mother av Moses, but here's one'll ride a horse foaled by an acorn, the murderin' pirate," retorted the sailor.

"If it wasn't for the head-money, I'd chance a jolly stretch of the nubbing chest for you, an' I would," cried Snipe, belabouring him all the harder.

I implored Barrat to be quiet, pointing out that he could gain nothing by his behaviour, for we were in the power of the villains.

"Arrah! blood and 'ounds, mate darling," he protested, "won't you let me have one more knock at the blackguard?"

But at last he submitted and held his tongue, whereupon Snipe, fairly fatigued, gave over. I now turned to poor Mr. Parminter, who in his fright had

squeezed his little body between me and the wall, and did my best to comfort him, wiping the blood off his face with my sleeve, and promising to protect him if it were in my power. He was dreadfully upset, sobbing and weeping like a woman; and clutching my hand, he blessed me for what I had done, and implored me to save him from being killed. I assured him there was no chance of that, so long as he held his peace and did not attempt any further resistance, which could only be useless; and with this he sat back, very quiet and scared, like a child expecting a bogey, with my hand in his, which he would not let go.

At last we heard the rumble of the coach returning, and then Shadrach and Gale hurriedly entered the room.

"Just in time!" cried the latter excitedly. "They are at the Savoy stairs, shipping the last batch to run down with the tide. See to them, Corporal. No fuss."

Snipe took three gags out of his capacious pocket, and aided by Kydd forced them into our mouths. Then we were hustled downstairs and into the coach, and driven a short way to the river, where a small knot of men were collected by the landing-stairs.

"Who goes there?" challenged a voice. "Is that you, Shadrach?"

"Yes, Colonel Hanger."

"Have you brought them?"

"All true. Two of 'em as fine sogers as any you ever clapped eyes on."

“Out with them.”

We were dragged forth and made to stand in a line, while Colonel Hanger briefly inspected us by the light of a lanthorn thrust in our faces.

“They’ll do,” he said. “Ship ’em.”

Snipe took off our handcuffs and gags, and four sailors, stepping forward, lifted us up, one by one, and hove us into a boat alongside, in the sheets of which several men were already lying in various stages of intoxication or insensibility. The officer in charge, having signed a receipt and given it to Colonel Hanger, followed, and we pushed off into the stream. And the last I saw of Shadrach Mandalgo, the Jew, was his grisly hair and vulturous face profiled against the lanthorn, as he counted the money he had received for selling us Christian folk into slavery.

The tide was running out fast, and the men pulled lustily. We soon shot London Bridge, and threaded our way through the silent shipping in the Pool. An hour later the moon arose, and as I saw it looming above the horizon my thoughts flew back to that night—less than a week ago, although it seemed as if an interval of months had intervened—when it shone down upon me in that orchard in Gloucestershire, and I cowered and tried to shrink out of its light in an agony of guilty terror.

“Thank God!” I whispered to myself, “I am safe now!”

Towards morning we hailed a large ship anchored in midstream, and a rope was thrown to us. It was the *Princess Amelia*, armed East Indiaman, bound for

Bombay. As we climbed or were carried up its sides, and with many a jeer and cuff conducted to the lower deck, I think I was the only contented being of all those miserable wretches who were being shipped out to fill the gaps made by battle and disease in the ranks of the Honourable East India Company's European battalion of infantry at Bombay.

END OF THE FIRST BOOK.

The Second Book.

—♦—
FORTUNE SOUGHT.

*CONCERNING MY ADVENTURES IN HINDOSTAN, AND
HOW I BECAME KING SOOLEEMAN OF SOOLEE-
MANPOOR.*



CHAPTER IX.

BOMBAY CASTLE.

THE week that succeeded our embarkation on the *Princess Amelia* was, I think, the most dreadful I have ever experienced, being passed in the crowded and stifling lower deck of the ship, where never a gleam of daylight penetrated, and the atmosphere was thick and rank with foulest odours. There I languished, one of a large body of drunken or drugged wretches, most of them drawn from the lowest dregs of society. Herded like pigs, amidst the filth and dark horrors below, were felons and beggars from the purlieus of London, thieves and malefactors just emerged from gaol, fugitives escaping from justice, deserters from the army and navy, cashiered officers, broken-down gamblers, runaway apprentices, and absconding debtors. But although this vagabond and misbegotten description of humanity composed the bulk of the draft, it still contained a few people of character and respectability; decent folks who had been cruelly kidnapped, like little Mr. Parminter, or trepanned by stratagem; two or three ruined gentlemen striving to hide their shame; as many young lads setting out from a love of adventure; and—most unfortunate of all, I think—some simple fellows from the country who had been deluded into enlisting by the specious advertisements of Colonel Hanger, who at special pleading of this description was as crafty as a Wapping lawyer.

A single hour below sufficed to nauseate me, and with a giddy brain and heaving stomach I crawled into a corner behind a bulkhead, feeling like to die with suffocation and the reek of the stench. Thereafter everything is fleeting and feverish in my mind. I can remember the gliding movement of the vessel as she dropped down the river, and listening in a dull despair to the many sounds that reached our prison—the tramping of feet on the main deck above our heads, the running backward and forward of the guns, the shifting of heavy packages as the last of the cargo was stowed, the orders shouted up and down the ship, the shrill piping of the boatswain's whistle, and the general noise and turmoil connected with setting out on a voyage.

By degrees the motion of the ship increased, and instinct told me we must be getting into the open sea, for the wind whistled and shrieked, and the waves rose and beat against her sides as she pitched and plunged. Then it seemed to me that I endured all the agonies of dissolution without the crowning mercy of death. I heard around me most repulsive sounds, mingled with oaths and entreaties, curses and sighs, groans and lamentations. Now and then some poor maudlin devil, not yet recovered from his debauch, would croak out a few staves of a ribald song, and, in his delirium, call for more drink; or a scuffle would ensue between two men in the dreadful dark, followed by a torrent of blasphemies as they trampled on those lying near them. The long, interminable hours crawled on, and I lost all count of night and day. In the Channel it came on to blow so hard that for twelve

hours. we were compelled to anchor; and when we made sail again to join the outward-bound fleet at Portsmouth, the hatches were battened down, and the ship going constantly about, pitched us backward and forward as she heeled over to each new tack, aggravating our horrors by making rest impossible. From time to time food and water were thrust into our prison to distribute amongst ourselves as best we could; but, saving for this, no attention was paid to us, and not a man able to sleep out of his clothes, or permitted to draw a breath of fresh air on deck.

At last, after a week of indescribable misery, we were ordered to muster, and staggered up the hatchway into the blinding sunshine, just in time to catch a last glimpse of the English coast fading away on the starboard quarter, as our convoy signalled the new course and we headed for the open sea.

Never, I suppose, was there collected together before a more foul, polluted, vermin-defiled, and abandoned-looking set of outcasts than we who now huddled in the waist of the ship, liker to wild beasts than human beings. The sailors spat at us, as if we were tainted with the plague, bidding us fall to leeward, and the mates cursed and struck us without any provocation. The captain in command of our draft stood on the poop, gazing down with a look of repugnance on his face, which was not to be wondered at; for he himself was but just recovering from the sea-sickness, and our condition was enough to turn any man with a sound nose.

Suddenly I felt a couple of hands on my shoulders pushing me back, and at the same moment,

to my amazement, recognised the voice of Sergeant Fossit.

“Take heed, you fat-headed squabs, and form line!” he shouted in a tone of authority. “Fall back there, can’t you? Dog’s death to you, what are you a-gaping at? Didn’t you hear the order for to parade and muster? Dress up, I tell you—dress up; and be damned to you for a crew of canting Abram coves!”

“Sergeant Fossit!” I cried, catching him by the arm. “How are you here?”

He turned round sharp, with a look of nervous apprehension, and shook me off roughly.

“By thunder, I’ll have no talking in the ranks. Tention and eyes front. Back there, you with the red snout and mackerel gills, and make room. Ease out to the left, I say. Form line and dress by your right—dress, you mob o’ mud-maggots.” And pulling some forward, pushing others back, by degrees he formed the men into two lines, one on each side of the deck.

It was easy to perceive he was displeased at my accosting him; but I had done so out of sheer surprise, having no idea he was on board, for during the horrors of the last week I had not thought of him once. I could only suppose he was ashamed at being recognised by one who had been witness to his recent degradation. And when I remembered how I had last seen him lying drugged and helpless in the corner of Shadrach’s room, I marvelled to find him now in nowise cast down, but smart and clean in his dress (although how he had made himself so I knew not), brisk and lively

in his speech and conduct, and bustling about with an officious air of authority, displaying the spirit of a man in monstrous good conceit with himself.

And now our captain came down from the poop to inspect us, whereupon Fossit immediately stood stiff to attention, and gave him the military salute.

“You have served before, my man?” said the officer, noticing him.

“I have, your honour. In the King’s army, from which I was discharged wounded and with a pension. And happy now to be in the Honourable Company’s.”

“How came you to enlist with us?”

Sergeant Fossit gave an awkward cough and rolled his little red eyes sheepishly about before he blurted out—

“Why, sir, it was along o’ Shadrach, the Jew crimp what keeps a recruiting house by Charing Cross, him and a gallus quean I was a-courtin’, and a bottle o’ hocussed wine, and a cod-headed corporal as is a disgrace to his Majesty’s guards. But what’s done’s done, and

‘Tis but in vain
For sogers to complain!

And so say I; for Sergeant John Fossit’s no grumble-guts, and never was!” He shook himself together, and spoke in a cheery voice, as though to show he was reconciled to his present position and determined to make the best of it.

“Your spirit does you credit, my man,” replied the Captain, “and, by George! you shall be sergeant of this draft accordingly.”

"Why now, long life to your honour, and my thanks and duty to you, sir," answered Fossit, saluting in his very best style. "And may I be flogged round the fleet if I don't do my best to deserve your kindness. I'm an old dog with recruits, sir; and, foul weather or fine, I'll take heed this draft shall give you no trouble."

The muster being taken, one man was found missing, who proved to be none other than my fellow-captive, Patrick Barrat. It was surmised he had contrived to pass himself off as one of the crew during the confusion of embarkation, and found an opportunity of swimming ashore whilst the ship was yet in the river. "Run at Gravesend" was written against his name, and I could not but reflect with pleasure on his escape, who seemed such an artless simple-minded fellow, yet proved so clever. As for little Mr. Parminter, he was carried up on deck more dead than alive; and although Sergeant Fossit protested he was malingering, and wanted to start him with a tickle from the bo'sun's daughter, the ship's surgeon, who was a very humane gentleman, ordered him to the sick bay, where he remained many weeks, a little bag of bones and groans.

We were now divided into two watches, and told off to our various duties, and with this began a routine of life that lasted for the next seven months. Every morning there were drill and instruction in such military exercises and evolutions as could be performed on the deck of a ship, and woe to the man who was a laggard in learning or presented a dirty appearance; for his dram was stopped—which was his one delight

in the twenty-four hours—and Sergeant Fossit took care to make his life a misery to him, with chiveying and extra fatigues, not to mention the shame he endured by being cruelly cursed in the black language, morning, noon, and night, on duty and off.

It is not my intention to tell the tedious tale of board-a-ship life. We met with very light trade winds and many calms that delayed us till we reached the Cape, and encountered some boisterous gales after rounding it. We suffered all the hardships inseparable from a long seavoyage, and many of the draft contracted scurvy, the putrid fever, and other abominable distempers from neglect and want of cleanliness, or broke out in boils all over the body from bad food and short allowance of water, and there were casualties caused by accident and the brutality of the mates. But nobody cared: we were but Company's recruits, and suffered the usual fate of such poor cattle. Even our own captain neglected us, spending all his time drinking and gaming in the great cabin with the other passengers, and leaving the draft entirely under Sergeant Fossit's care.

For my own part, after the first novelty of being at sea had worn off, I found nothing in it that was pleasing. It disgusted me to be brought into close contact with such men as composed the greater part of the draft, many of whom were suffering from loathsome disorders, and I never went below without a sensation of positive sickness. Sergeant Fossit treated me for some weeks as a perfect stranger, and once, when I made a reference to Johnson's Court, choked me off with a rough oath, bidding me take

heed and mind my own business, and hold my tongue about his affairs. I judged the reason of this to be his desire to conceal the fact of his having acted as a crimping-house sergeant, for that calling was as generally detested in the army as an informer's in civil life, and there were many men amongst the draft who (from the language they held on the subject of crimps) would not have hesitated to take their revenge on Fossit, had they suspected the truth. Luckily for me I had the wit to keep my own counsel, and towards the middle of the voyage the Sergeant, being satisfied of my discretion, solicited my promotion to *Lansprizado*, or Acting Corporal, and showed me several small indulgences in the way of duty which I fully appreciated.

At length one evening we sighted Bombay Castle, and entered the harbour with the next morning's tide, saluting the fort with a compliment of nine guns as we dropped anchor before its walls. At noon we were rowed ashore in batches, and marched to the king's barracks, where, after muster had been taken and three days' provisions and a quilt served out to each, we were dismissed to find our way to our quarters.

Directly we had broken off, a great crowd of soldiers of the garrison surrounded us, eager for news from England. They made themselves exceeding friendly, protesting their willingness to serve us, and especially such as had any money in their pockets. Within an hour nearly everyone was drinking, and when the *taptoo* beat at eight o'clock, there was scarce a sober man in the barracks, saving those

of the recruits whose stomachs could not stand the *pariah* or *poison arrack* which was the liquor of the country.

I think the very first man to get drunk was Sergeant Fossit. He came staggering up to me with a guglet full of arrack in each hand, and the liquor streaming out of the corners of his mouth as he hiccoughed out that he was a jolly private again and I his best and oldest thick, who must drink with him.

“Dog’s death to me!” he cried, “but you’re a lad o’ spunk and sense, as I always said of ye, John Selwyn. You knows how to keep your tongue from clacking, and, rot me! comrade, but I’m proud of ye, being in a manner a soger of my own making! By thunder! ’twas murdering mean of Shadrach to ship a chopping lad like you out here. You was a free gentleman volunteer, and deserved better treatment. Bad cess to it! I did the most for ye I could. But the best musquet misses fire at times, and, sure, so did I. Well, what odds? You’re not a lad to blubber and bellow—

‘’Tis but in vain
For sogers to complain.’

Take heed to that, and, my word on’t, it’s sound sense. So have a swig wi’ me, John Selwyn, and forget where you’re landed.”

A sniff of the poisonous stuff he held out was enough, and I thanked him civilly, but bade him keep it for himself. “No fear,” he cried, “’tain’t for no other cul!” And then, with a profound wink,

"This boose ain't doctored, neither, like that old pimp Gale's was. Ecod! I'll cut the lips off o' Gale when I gets home, so he'll suck no more red swig." And then he took another pull at the guglet, which was awkward to drink out of, and spurted the liquor over his jowl and chin, and with that lurched off, with a maudlin laugh at my fastidiousness, vowing I should soon learn to love arrack and toddy and punch and sangaree just like mother's milk, and drink neck and neck with the best of them.

For three days there was no discipline maintained amongst our draft, it being the custom to leave the men entirely to themselves on first landing. Most of the recruits had but one object in view, and that to swill down as much arrack as they could. Money, the possession of which had never been suspected on the voyage, was produced from all sorts of places of concealment; and while it lasted, there was nothing but debauch and riot. All day long the men were staggering about the bazaars, crowding into the low punch taverns and rackshops, fighting in the dens of infamy, lying like swine in the narrow streets of the black town, knocking down the Moors, cuddling the Gentoo ladies, swearing, singing, shouting, and trying by every unhallowed means in their power to forget the miseries of the last seven months. The few who did not drink, wandered about, feeding their curiosity on the strange sights around, and heedless of the blazing sun, which shone so hot as to strike many of them down.

On the fourth day we were again mustered and

told off to our various corps. Most of the recruits were sent to the European battalion of infantry, but myself and six others were selected for the artillery. This was held to be a piece of good luck, the pick of the men being sent to this branch, in which the pay was better and the position considered superior.

My company of artillery was stationed at the Fort St. George Barracks for garrison duty, and my sergeant was a hard-drinking, moist-eyed Scotchman named MacBun, than whom a more avaricious hypocritical sawny I never clapped eyes on. Amongst the gunners and matrosses he always went by the name of *Hum-ko-Dow*, which was Moors for "Give it to me," and described his character exactly. He never saw anything but he wanted it, and, if able, exacted it; and he made it worse by gospelising his discourse with quotations from the Scriptures. His first greeting to me was a demand for money; and when I told him I had none, he said he had already precognosed me in his mind for a beggarly hunk and an arrant scrub, and gave me to understand that unless I found means to render unto Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's, he would make me sorry I was ever born into this World of Sin and Woe. This threat, I am bound to say, he tried to carry out, with a vindictiveness which often left me wondering how anyone calling himself a man could descend to such low and pitiful depths of meanness.

I had always conceived a soldier's life to be one of constant activity and excitement, but I soon

found it was not so in the Company's army in peace time. The prevailing spirit in the service was idleness; for the men (except those on guard) had absolutely nothing to do after morning parade was over. In fact, I never saw them on the alert except when the grog-tubs were filled and the dram-cups clinking. Their afternoons were spent in sleeping, which was the universal custom amongst all classes in the Settlement between tiffing and dining, and the evenings in slouching about barracks if they were without money, and drinking and gambling in the bazaars if they had anything to spend. On balance-days, when they drew their pay, they generally got crazy drunk, and wound up with a riot, which landed many of them naked in the congee-house, as the guard-room was called, whilst they were ready and willing to misbehave themselves at every opportunity. They were utterly reckless of their health, and lived like men foredoomed to death, being satisfied that sooner or later the climate must carry them off. "A short life and a merry one" was their constant cry, and in endeavouring to fulfil this condition they resorted to the most bestial excesses, caring nothing and heeding nothing, all being, in the cant of the Settlement, "on the quick march for Mendham's Point," as that place was called where the first European who died at Bombay was buried.

Amidst such companions and surroundings eighteen months of my life dragged slowly on, with never a bright moment in it to tell of. It was my misfortune that the few friends I made on board the *Princess Amelia* were separated from me. Little

Mr. Parminter, after lying in hospital for many months with a bloody flux, following a violent cholicky pain, was discharged cured, and sent to the Commissariat Department, which took him into a different line of life altogether. Sergeant Fossit was detailed to do duty at Surat Castle, a place many miles up the coast, and I heard no more of him. Three or four recruits with whom I had formed an acquaintance during the voyage were posted to the infantry, and of two fine young lads of my own age who entered the artillery with me, one died in hospital of the spotted fever during the first hot season, and the other was carried off in three hours with the *mort de chien*. It was the custom of the service for the men in the artillery to keep to their own branch, but amongst my comrades there was not one I cared to make my companion. They were a hard-drinking set, who despised me because I sold my daily regulation dram of arrack, which, although many were eager to purchase, was a practice generally looked down upon. But I minded not their gibes, since it enabled me to save a few rupees, and, when the monsoon season came on, and the dram ration was doubled, to increase my small hoard considerably.

The confined life of the barrack and the low debauchery of the bazaar were detestable to me, and during the later hours of the day I preferred to wander abroad beyond the Fort walls and take the air. On the seaward side of the Settlement was a very beautiful shallow inlet called False Bay, and sloping down to it a green stretch of grass called

the Esplanade, with a windmill close to the brink of the sea, just opposite the church gate of the Fort. This windmill, so strangely misplaced amongst its Hindostany surroundings, reminded me of England; and this and the solitude of the spot, which was never much frequented till evening (when the Parsees flocked there to say their prayers to the setting sun), and the open main stretching far away in front attracted me thither. As time went on, it became my favourite resort, and scarce a day passed but I made my way there to walk up and down by the margin of the waves, or seek some quiet nook to rest in, and cast my longing eyes over the tossing ocean, wondering whether I should ever cross it again and return home.

Many a sad and mournful hour did I pass in this place, thinking of Fyeways and my grandfather's home, and my cousin Mercy, and how they were, and what they thought of me, and if they had discarded me from their affections as a wicked murderer who had fled redhanded from justice. Such bitter reflections filled me with a cruel disquiet, so that, although I was safe in body, I was often sore distressed in mind. Sometimes in my forlorn despair I would take out my mother's Testament—which I still carried next my heart, in the little green silk bag Mercy had worked for it—and read it through, but only to fold it up and put it by again with a feeling that the duty laid upon me was now impossible of accomplishment.

God and my own heart only knew how truly I repented me of what I had done; and how I

hungered for a sight of that quiet Gloucestershire village which contained all most dear and precious to me; and how my straining eyes oftentimes grew dim with tears as I gazed across the distant sea and vainly longed to recall the terrible moment of evil passion that had placed me beyond the pale of those I loved.

CHAPTER X.

ADVENTURERS ALL

IN the second year of my service at Bombay I chanced several times during my excursions to the windmill to come across a young officer named Lieutenant Hervey, of the Company's corps of engineers—a tall, proper young man, with a handsome face, fine powdered hair and queue, a charming figure, and elegant polished manners. He was very skilful in music and accomplished in every way, and, being much given to society, was well known in the Settlement and a prodigious favourite with the ladies.

It was constantly his custom of an afternoon to walk up and down between the windmill and the marine village by Old Woman's Island, doing so, I think, for the exercise it afforded him, and the good of his health. His habit was to stroll along gaily, swinging his arms and whistling a merry tune; but sometimes he would lag gloomily, with the air of a man greatly depressed. He had the reputation of being a desperate gambler, and his varying luck with the cards and dice was, I doubt not, the reason of these discordant moods.

One afternoon towards the end of the rainy season of 1796 I was seated in the shadow of the wall surrounding the windmill, when I perceived Lieutenant Hervey issue out of the fort by the church gate, and come striding down to the sea-

He passed close by without observing me, for his eyes were fixed on the ground, and his demeanour that of a man utterly dispirited. The singular pallor of his face and its haggard expression fixed my attention. He seemed to be suffering from some infirmity of mind, for he was gibbering to himself like a Bedlamite.

Walking to the brink of the sea, he stood there, rigid as a statue, his hat held in his hand, and his head flung back to catch the afternoon breeze that was just arising. Presently a wave, larger than the rest, rolled up and washed over his feet, wetting him to the knees, but he neither moved nor heeded it. So strange was his behaviour that I was tempted to make my way towards him over the soft sand, which deadened the noise of my footsteps.

I had traversed three-quarters of the distance, when suddenly, to my horror, he drew a pistol from his belt, placed it to his ear, and pulled the trigger. But, as fate willed it, the powder flashed in the pan, and his life was saved. He seemed dazed at his escape, and held out the weapon at arm's length, regarding it with a curious indignant anger in his face, and then began to prime it again, whereupon I darted forward, and wrenched it from his grasp.

Falling back a pace or two, he looked at me with a distracted astonishment. "And who are you?" he demanded at length in an exceeding haughty voice.

"John Selwyn, sir, a matross in Captain Mercer's company of artillery."

"And how dare you accost—assault me in this way?"

"I acted as my conscience dictated, and, seeing you attempt your own life, felt bound to frustrate your further endeavour."

"Bound to frustrate!" he echoed with great indignation. "'Sdeath, fellow, do you know that I am an officer, and can put you under arrest if I choose?"

"That you can and may, but it will be a scurvy return to one who wished you nothing but good."

He regarded me for a moment with a contemptuous frown, and then replied, "Return me my pistol, and leave me to my humour."

"That I cannot do, sir, with all respect," I answered; "for, were any evil to happen, I should feel your blood for ever on my head."

Hearing this, he advanced fiercely, and, as I thought, to wrest the weapon from me; so I put it behind my back to keep it safe. Whereupon, being foiled, his manner capriciously changed, and he broke out into a nervous unnatural laugh. "Zounds! mutiny it is," he cried; "rank mutiny! We want the provost-marshal here!" Then, as suddenly, he turned grave, and added, "As for my blood on your head, fellow, what harm would that do you? It is bad blood, I vow, and only fit to be spilt here, where the sea is at hand to wash the stain away. I protest, the best turn you could do me would be to shoot me. So come! Make ready! Prime! Present!"

"Your jest ill becomes you, sir," I protested. "The life you lay so little store by is at least worth preserving for your king and country. If you desire to sacrifice it, let it be in a good cause, and not by a cowardly act."

“A cowardly act! Death and damnation, nobody ever dared call James Hervey a coward yet. You are a bold hound that does so now, and—and——” He clenched his fist and ground his teeth, but restrained himself with a great effort from striking me. “Me-thinks ’tis you who are the coward to insult me knowing I may not brawl with a common centinel under penalty of being broke.”

“I called you not a coward,” I contradicted him in no civil voice. “It was the act I spoke of. And if I am but a common centinel, your generosity might have spared the taunt to an unfortunate gentleman whose only presumption was his desire to save you from yourself.”

The rebuke struck home, for he coloured with shame. “Sir,” said he, after a short silence and with a fine dignity that became him, “I ask your pardon. It was a cruel insult, which your speech and conduct do not deserve. But I was distracted; forgive me. Make allowances for a man broken down with trouble. And, believe me, I am no coward.”

The sadness of his demeanour, no less than the generosity of his apology, disarmed me instantly. “Sir,” I said, “give me leave to declare I question not the courage of Lieutenant Hervey, but I would see it expended in a good cause. There is your pistol, sir,” I went on, as I observed some Parsees approaching, “to show you I am fully satisfied you have the courage you claim.”

He took it with an abashed look, and slipped it into his belt. Then he held out his hand with a frank gesture to shake mine. “Tell me,” said he,

motioning me to walk along with him, "to whom am I beholden?"

"I enlisted as a gentleman volunteer for the King's army, but was kidnapped and pressed into the Company's by a rascally crimp, and shipped out to this Settlement against my will and consent."

"Aye, aye, like many another poor devil. But where do you come from? Who are your parents?"

"My parents are dead. I come from the West of England, where I was born and bred up to a respectable country life. But two years ago I met with a great misfortune, and journeyed up to London to become a soldier, hoping to serve his Majesty the King. But a crooked fate sent me out here to rot in this cursed island, where men die off in vice and idleness."

"That is so," he sighed; "and applies to men of all degree. But what would you have?"

"Anything that will take me away from Bombay. Fighting, for choice—if fighting is going on; or at least to serve somewhere outside the hail of a rack-shop or the brawl of a bazaar brothel."

He sighed again, and shook his head. "Friend, this India is a land of liquor and illicit love. Go where you will, the brandy and arrack flows, and the nautch girls and courtesans beckon. Curses on my head, who know it, to my shame and undoing! None keep sober or temperate here. 'Tis a little life, and easiest drunk away. And yet, after all, I know not that it differs so vastly from England—only that the racket is faster, and we die off quicker."

"But I have no wish to die," I cried vehemently.

“On the contrary, I desire to live and overcome my calamities; to make my way in my profession, doing my duty as a soldier should, and enjoying my share of active service. Only there is none of it here. Eighteen months have I stewed in this Settlement, and the only fighting I have seen has been in a dram-shop. So far as I can judge, I am like to live and die a garrison gunner, who never heard a more creditable shot fired than the boom of the twelve o'clock gun, or a salute of compliment to a gentleman of the Select Committee.”

“It is your ill fortune to have joined the service during a period of peace. Nor is there any present likelihood of war, for our masters in the Honourable Court love it not. Trade is the Alpha and Omega and all the letters between of their desire. There will be no fighting here so long as it can be avoided. And yet”—he broke off, coming to a sudden halt in his discourse, and pointing as he spake to the mountains across the harbour—“there is plenty of fighting close at hand for those who are in the luck of it. Over yonder swords are flashing and banners waving. The air is thick with the smoke of war, and filled with its martial sounds: the roll and ruffle and slam of the drum beating to quarters, and the call of the trumpet blaring for battle. Cannon are roaring and armies advancing, impatient for action; and Soldiers of Fortune are cutting their way to glory and power! I tell you, there is a world of wild adventure open to those who can pierce yon range of mountains, and find their way to the scene of strife.”

“How do you mean, sir?” I asked eagerly, not

understanding to what he alluded, yet infected with his enthusiasm and eloquence.

“I mean among the Mahrattas and other nations of Hindostan, who are continually at war with one another. Of late years they have entertained the services of many Europeans to discipline and lead their armies. There are now amongst them several brigades of regular infantry commanded by foreign officers. Have you never heard of General De Boigne or General Raymond?”

“Their names are mentioned by the men in barracks, and I have often desired to know more about them. They talk of them as White Sultauns. Who are they, sir?”

“Soldiers of Fortune, whom fortune has favoured. Free Lances who have won their way to the command of great armies among the native States of the interior—aye, and even the government of Provinces, so that none can estimate their power or compute their wealth. General De Boigne at Deylee keeps the Great Mogul captive, and rules over his empire: yet twelve years ago he was but a subaltern in a battalion of Madras native infantry. General Raymond, who holds Hyderabad at his mercy, came out to India a private soldier. And now these two Adventurers are commanders of tens of thousands, and rulers over great territories, and can make and unmake kings in the countries they dominate. Fighting! Free adventure! 'Sdeath, there is no lack of it over those hills there, where subalterns and centinels have become generals and viceroys.”

He spoke, as I believe, without any other intention

than to describe what had actually happened, and without remembering that he was a subaltern and I a centinel. And yet that was the thought which instantly struck me.

“I have heard of strange and wonderful things such as you mention, but never believed them,” I remarked, remembering what Sergeant Fossit had related to me, on our journey to London, of the French renegados in the service of the Nabob of the Carnatic and Tippoo Sultaun. “But, now you tell me they are true, I should like to know who raised these men to such high estate.”

“Who raised them?” he cried. “Why, zounds! their own swords and their own resolution. In short, what the world loves to call Luck, but which, I take it, is sometimes Merit.”

“Is it possible,” I asked, “to engage in such a line of life?”

He made as if to reply, but checked himself. “I had forgotten your station,” he observed after a short silence. “I cannot counsel you in such a matter. But for myself, I am free to confess it has long been in my mind to cross the frontier and make a bold bid for fame and fortune as a Military Adventurer under the Mahratta flag.”

Then, as we walked along, he fell to describing some of the Soldiers of Fortune in the service of the native Powers, concerning whom he had lately made inquiries, and learnt their histories. All of them, he assured me, were men of broken fortunes when they abandoned their employment in the Company’s army, or under the French and Dutch,

and made their way into the interior. Many, without any other recommendation than their swords, had carved out great careers for themselves, and won their way to the highest power and importance, raising and drilling troops for various chiefs and rajahs, fighting their battles, defeating their enemies, and conquering new territories for their masters. For such services they often received the most fabulous rewards in money and jewels, as well as gifts of lands and cities, and the government of rich Provinces, whose revenues they drew for the up-keep of their brigades, and wherein they lived and ruled with the actual state and power of sovereign princes.

“I have myself met two of these Adventurers,” he declared, “who came to Bombay to embark for Europe. They carried with them chests of gold and silver and jewels, and packages of costly shawls and silks, and much rare merchandise, so that you might think they were some Merchant Adventurers such as are described in the ‘Arabian Nights Entertainments,’ and notably in that excellent story of the ‘Sailor Sinbad.’ And, besides this wealth of portable property, they had great sums invested in the Company’s funds, for whatever they received from their masters they straightway sent a portion of it out of the country into British territory as quick as they could, knowing the capriciousness of the Eastern character. But what struck me as most remarkable about these men was that they were but rough, uneducated sentinels, unable even to write their own names, coarse in their speech, drunken and licentious in their habits, and with nothing to mark them as possessing

uncommon ability except their courage, their resolution, and their self-confidence, which had taught them to despise the military of the country. I am persuaded that if persons of this description could accomplish so much, a soldier of education and address should be able to do better. It was under this belief that I decided, only yesterday, to resign my commission, sell every thing I possess, pay my debts, and set forth to take my chance in such a venture. But last night, like a fool, I made one more bid for fortune, hoping to retrieve my losses. The jade turned her back on me; the brandy addled my brains; and the cursed cards went against me till morning broke, when I had lost more than I can ever hope to repay. It was the knowledge of this and the fear of disgrace that drove me here this afternoon, dreaming the crack of a pistol might cry me quits with the world. You know the rest. Your hand prevented the consummation, and confusion to me if I know whether to be glad or sorry! For here I am a ruined man, who cannot tell which way to turn or what to do!"

"Were I only in your case, sir," I answered, "I should not long remain in doubt, but make my way to where the swords are flashing you tell me of, and there are provinces to be won and ruled."

"It is in my mind still; only I am not myself this evening. I am in a manner unhinged. But an hour back I verily believe I was mad! These cursed debts seem to poison me—to stifle me. For they are debts of honour that must be discharged. He walked along a few paces, pondering gloomily, and then added: "But I have friends who will help me.

It may yet be arranged. It shall at least be attempted."

We had reached the postern gate by Granby's ravelin, and he turned to enter it.

"I must wish you good-bye, Selwyn," he said; "would that I could repay the obligation you have placed me under! But I am a ruined man. Perhaps brighter days may dawn, and then I shall hope to prove my gratitude."

"When you are a great general amongst the Mah-rattas," I answered him cheerfully, "and I have saved enough to buy myself out of the service, I will come to you for employment."

He smiled sadly. "Ah!" he sighed, "when!" And then, "Come, and you shall be welcome, I promise. For if it's ever in James Hervey's power to serve you he will surely do so."

A week later it was noised in the Settlement that Lieutenant Hervey had thrown up his commission and left Bombay to seek his fortunes in the interior. I heard of it a few hours after his departure, and, on further inquiry, learnt he had proceeded to a place called Panwell, on the other side of the harbour, whence he intended to march to Poonah, a city in the Deccan.

That afternoon I was on sentry duty on the Fort George ramparts, overlooking the harbour. As I paced up and down I could not help revolving in my mind this new career Lieutenant Hervey had entered upon. Since my meeting with him I had deeply pondered over all he told me, having been prodigiously struck with his discourse, and a hundred

times put it to myself whether it was not possible to engage in such a service as he had described, wherein subalterns and sentinels might rise to be generals of armies and governors of provinces. If other men had done such things, why should not I? Not indeed to become a general or a governor, but to lift myself above my present base condition.

I cast my eyes across the harbour to where I judged Panwell lay. The air was clear, the sea calm, and it seemed but an hour's sail to reach it. And beyond it, but a few days' march, uprose the range of mountains, their summits here and there surmounted by the castles of wild warrior chiefs, and their outlines curious and fantastic as the sunset clouds or the picturesque shapes we see in the fire.

And behind them lay the Land of Free Adventure!

And, looking, the hot blood of my youth stirred within me, and urged me to higher things. I thought of the deeds that were being done there, where every man enjoyed a perfect freedom, and fought for his own hand. I seemed, in my fancy, to hear the roll of the drums and the blare of the trumpets echoing faintly across the blue waters, and sniff the smell of battle. Had I not a hand to grasp a sword and a will to use it? Was I a slave or a bondsman that I should suffer myself to be kidnapped and sold as a chattel like any Afric negro? I contrasted my life of mean obedience with that which offered yonder until my spirit revolted, and an impulse seized me to throw off this hateful yoke of a common sentinel, and become a Free Lance in the land of Mahrattas!

Backwards and forwards I paced, considering this

new idea. I knew that to act on it meant desertion, but my conscience acquitted me of all dishonour therein. I had sworn no allegiance to the Company whose minion had pressed me into the service against my will. The crime of leaving it was, in my opinion, no greater than the crime of being trepanned into it. Of this I quickly persuaded myself, and after that the rest was easy. Whether for good or for evil, I resolved to make the attempt that night to join Lieutenant Hervey.

Directly guard was relieved I began my preparations for escape, and two hours after retreat beating slipped out of barracks, reached the northern ramparts, watched my opportunity as the sentinel passed, and dropping into the ditch, swam across it. A few yards distant stood a mosque, behind which I changed into a suit of clothes I had secreted there, and then made my way to one of the landing-stairs, where a boatman, whom I had previously bribed, was waiting for me. In another moment we cast off; a small shoulder-of-mutton sail was set, and the boat's head pointed for the opposite shore.

The passage occupied longer than I had reckoned, and not until dawn was breaking did we make the landing-place. I found, to my great satisfaction, Lieutenant Hervey's camp was pitched under a grove of mango trees, close at hand. His servants were just stirring as I reached it, and I sent one in to arouse his master.

He was out of his tent in a minute. "And who may you be?" he asked, failing to recognise me in the dim light.

“Do you not know me, Mr. Hervey?”

At the sound of my voice he started, much amazed.

“What! the soldier of the Esplanade?”

“The same, sir. John Selwyn, at your service.”

“And who sent you here?”

“No one.”

“’S death! You’ve run, then?”

“I never swore allegiance to the Company. By the same right as they deprived me of my liberty I have deprived them of my services.”

“But you must have been sworn before you were shipped?”

“On my honour, sir, no. I refused to take the oath. The attestation papers were certified by a ‘Wooden Justice’—you know what that is?—despite my urgent protestations and denial.”

“Well, Selwyn, what you have done is between yourself and your conscience. It is not for me to judge you. But I ask again—why are you here?”

“To join you, sir, if you will let me. To share in your adventures and serve under your command.”

“Zounds! my command has yet to be found. I am no further advanced than yourself.”

“Mr. Hervey,” I cried eagerly, “you said you would help me. Only let me accompany you, and I am satisfied. You shall find me both faithful and grateful.”

“Of that I am persuaded,” he answered, with some emotion; “and I cannot refuse you any request. But a week ago you rendered me a service I can never requite. Since you wish to join your fortunes to mine, so be it. There’s my hand on’t.”

“Thank you, Mr. Hervey,” I began ; but he interrupted me.

“No ‘sir’ or ‘mister’ now, John Selwyn. Henceforward you and I are comrades. For here, on Mahratta soil, we Feringees stand on equal ground—Adventurers All.”

CHAPTER XI.

UNDER THE MAHRATTA FLAG.

A FEW days later Hervey and I reached Poonah, the capital of the Peishwa of the Mahrattas. Breasting the last hill on the road, we reined in our horses and surveyed the scene below us, whilst waiting for our lagging baggage cattle to come up. The sun was declining, and its crimson rays glowed on the Temple of Parbuttee, which crowned the hill near the lake and gardens of Heerabaugh. They glittered on gorgeous palaces and gilded pagodas, on turretted walls and lofty white-terraced houses, on tapering minarets and mosques with shining domes, and on the labyrinth of red roofs, interspersed with leafy tamarind trees, of this beautiful city of the Deccan. Around it smiled fields of corn and groves of mango trees, and intersecting them the two rivers Moola and Moota meandered gracefully.

Hervey's eyes feasted on the splendid spectacle, and presently, when he turned them to me, there was a sparkle in them, such as you may observe in those of a man who has just quaffed a draught of generous wine.

"Zounds! Selwyn," he said, almost in a whisper; "this is the country of the pagoda tree."

Having inquired the way to the cantonment of

the Peishwa's Regular troops, we were directed to an outskirts of the city, which we soon reached.

"Now comes the tug of war," observed my companion. "There is an officer here, named Boyd, in command of the Peishwa's Brigade. I have been recommended to apply to him. He lives, I take it, in one of these bungalows in front of us. The question is, which one? Let us ride up to the nearest, and ask."

There was an orderly sepoy, in uniform, standing in the veranda, to whom Hervey addressed himself, inquiring what *sahib* lived there. At the sound of his voice a European came out of one of the rooms, and seemed much surprised at seeing us.

My companion saluted him courteously. "Have I the honour of addressing Colonel Boyd?" he asked.

"Sure, no. I'm Tone," answered the European, with a strong Irish brogue. "Boyd's away at Seeroor. Will I be of any service to ye?"

"You can indeed serve us, if you will, sir. We are gentlemen seeking our fortunes. I am James Hervey, who lately had the honour to hold a commission in the Company's service, which my distresses compelled me to resign. My friend, Mr. John Selwyn, has joined his fortunes to mine. We have no recommendation but our swords, and no introduction except our nationality—and our misfortunes."

"Thin, by George, come in, both of ye, an' welcome!" cried the officer heartily; adding, with a quiet

dignity, "I have known misfortune meself, sir, and can feel for those of others."

The gentleman who so kindly received us was Major William Henry Tone, the commander of a battalion in Boyd's Brigade, and a brother of Wolfe Tone, afterwards the notorious Irish rebel. He was a man of about two and thirty years of age, with an open frank countenance, a fine lofty forehead, blue Irish eyes, and an erect soldierly air. He led the way into the room, and invited us to be seated.

"And so, gentlemen," he observed, "ye have come to sake your fortunes with the Mahrattas?"

"To follow the example of the many illustrious officers in that service," replied Hervey, with a polite bow.

"Bedad! an' if you choose to count me one," responded Tone, with a half sad twinkle in his eyes and a shrug of his shoulders, "give me leave to say 'tis a modicum of dignity ye'll attain."

"Sir, you are too modest," protested Hervey. "I cannot forget how a few weeks back your published letter to Captain John Malcolm upon the present state of Mahratta politics was being discussed in Bombay, and opinions divided between the elegance of its style and the value of its information."

Major Tone coloured and looked pleased. "'Tis flattering me, ye are, Mr. Hervey! I did but relate what I saw, and as I saw it, and I'm glad it pleased ye. By the same token there's another letter I'm just after sending away." And he pointed to a

litter of papers on the table. "But let that pass. Tell me how will I serve ye?"

"We desire," said Hervey, "to find employment for our swords in the Peishwa's service."

"Ah, then! 'tis a rotten service, sir; though I say it who belong to it! 'Tis no man at all, at all, that sits upon the *guddy*, but just a shifting shadow. The Peishwa of the Mahrattas is nought but a name to conspire under. I cannot counsel ye to enter our Brigade, for its existence hangs on a thread."

"I am sorry to hear that. But there are other chiefs to serve?"

"Thru for you; Scindy for one. But King George's subjects are not in favour with him, his chief officer being Colonel Perron, a Frenchman and mighty thick with his compatriots and our inimies at Hyderabad and Mysore. Then there is Colonel Filose, a low Italian son of a swape I should be sorry to see any British officer salute. And lastly, there's ould John Hessing, a Dutchman, who has an independent party av his own. But ivery Briton stinks in his nostrils since we bate his people at the Cape. These are the only brigades Scindy has down here in the Deccan, and, faith, I don't think there's one av 'em convayniant to ye."

"Then we must seek elsewhere."

"There's only one other prince who employs Europeans, and that's Holker. But he's away at Indore, where, by the same token, his brigade is commanded by another Frenchman, named Dudrenec."

"Your information is disappointing, sir. Our troubles seem to be beginning just where I had hoped they would end."

"Ah, sir, that's throe enough. Ye want a power av hope and patience in the Mahratta Dominions, for sure it's a tazing counthry, full av procrastination and disappointment."

"Patience, sir, in my position," answered Hervey, colouring as he spoke, "is a commodity only purchasable with rupees—and it was a scarcity of them that brought me here to Poonah."

"Bedad, thin, give me lave to say ye're not the first in that predicament. A little money, an' I had not drilled troops for a black haythen. But poverty, crool poverty, conthrafted me career through life, and necessitated me to shoulder a musquet and mount guard—both av which employments I hold in detistation and abhorrence! But, gentlemen, I am forgetting myself. You must be thirsty, tired, hungry. If ye will accept the hospitability of me humble roof so long as ye remain at Poony, I shall estame it an honour. Consider yourselves my guests. A short time spent here will familiarise you with the conditions under which we Military Adventurers live and serve."

Major Tone had spoken truly when he warned us that the country we were in was one of procrastination and disappointment, for week followed week, and found us still his guests, and interview succeeded interview without bringing us any employment. We called on all the commanders and many of the battalion officers of the Maharajah Scindia's brigades,

but to no purpose: they were foreigners, and seemed surprised at our presuming to apply to them. We made our salaams to several of the country chiefs and black generals, but nothing came of it. The French influence was strong, and directed against us, and it was hinted we were agents of the Company sent to spy out the land. If it had not been for Major Tone's kindness and hospitality—and a more true and tender-hearted friend never drew breath—it must have gone hard with us; for my money was soon expended, and Hervey's resources running desperately low, with success apparently as far off as ever.

And then, one morning, Fortune, that queen of coquettes, changed, and in a twinkling laughed our anxieties away: for Tone came galloping back from his parade ground, waving his hat in the air to the danger of his plume, and shouting:

“Brave news, bhoys, brave news! The Rajah Umbajee wants to see ye, and they say the ould divil's going to raise a party av his own.”

I need not describe with what keen delight we hailed this information, and how we overwhelmed our friend with questions. We learnt from him that Umbajee was one of the Maharajah Scindia's principal country generals. Scindia, although nominally a tributary chief to the Peishwa, was the most powerful of all the Indian sovereigns, for not only did he rule over his own extensive domains in Malwa, but was master of the Empire of the Great Mogul (whom he held captive at Deylee), and paramount lord of the Hindoo kingdoms of Rajpootana.

The vast territory over which his sway extended was controlled by two great armies: one of disciplined infantry, raised by General De Boigne, who had recently departed for Europe, and was shortly after this succeeded in the command by Colonel Perron; the other of irregular country cavalry, contributed by the various chiefs in proportion to the size of the districts assigned to them in military tenure. The Rajah Umbajee was one of these feudal chiefs, and held possession of a large *jeydaad*, or territorial grant, near Gwalior, but having been long absent from it in attendance on the Maharajah, the inhabitants had revolted and the revenues fallen into arrears. Wherefore he now desired to raise a force to bring them into subjection and protect the district from the hostile depredations of his neighbours, to which it was much exposed.

That afternoon we rode off to attend Rajah Umbajee's Durbar. His palace was situated in the centre of the city, and on our arrival we were ushered into a large hall of audience, at the upper end of which the chief was seated on a pile of cushions, with a white carpet spread in front of him. He was a stout, fine-built man of about sixty years of age, with heavy, determined features and uncommonly dark complexion, its effect increased by a small white turban. Notwithstanding that he was reputed to be the richest man in Hindostan, having, it was said, no less than two hundred *lacks* of rupees hoarded (or two and a half million pounds in our English money), he was the plainest-dressed person in the room, wearing nothing but a chintz jacket, a

white cloth wrapped round his loins, and a poor red shawl flung carelessly over his shoulders, with a necklace of common wooden beads round his neck.

After touching our *nuzzurs*, or complimentary offerings, in token of having accepted them, he motioned us to be seated on the white carpet, and the usual interchange of compliments followed, all spoken in a whisper, as required by the etiquette of the country courts.

Then came a long pause, after which the chief broached the topic of the interview. He wished to raise a Campoo or brigade of infantry, similar to those in the service of his master the Maharajah Scindia, but on a smaller and much less costly scale. Umbajee was a notoriously parsimonious chief, as he soon showed, when the question of expense came to be debated; for he cut down every estimate with shameless effrontery. Although the scale of pay offered was considerably lower than the recognised rate, Hervey was too anxious to obtain employment to oppose any objection, and proved himself so amenable to Umbajee's economical views, that he was there and then engaged to proceed to the chief's country and recruit a brigade of four thousand infantry. To increase the efficiency of this force, Umbajee provided eight guns of different calibres, and also gave orders for a detachment of his Mahratta cavalry to act as our escort to the district, where Hervey was to report himself to the chief's vakeel, or local governor, a Bramin named Chimnajee, from whom he would receive his instructions.

"Ye did well and wisely," observed Tone as we rode back, "to give in to the ould Tinker. He's skinned ye—the nipcheese!—and bled ye—the thafe!—and he's happy over it. What thin? Sure it doesn't matter at all, at all. Forby you'll soon be master of four thousand foighting men, whin ye can just incrase your own pay and allowances and pay yesilf! But, 'ware that chimney swape he talks av! One word av advice to ye. Remimber always that in Mahratta land 'tis God helps those who help themselves. So don't be too foine fingered a gintleman, but help ye silf accordingly."

I could see Hervey did not altogether approve this doctrine, which was opposed to his articles of honour; but he said nothing except to thank Major Tone for all his goodness; and these thanks he repeated three days later when we bade him good-bye."

The distance from Poonah to Umbajee's country was about seven hundred miles, and our progress was much impeded by the slow march of the bullocks which dragged our eight guns, so that we were three months in completing the march. Our escort consisted of a *Paggah* of five hundred *Looties*, or Mahratta Cavalry, wild and fierce-looking fellows, dressed in white sheets, which gave them a most unmilitary appearance. Each trooper carried a long spear in his hand and a matchlock and shield slung over his shoulder. Although mounted on sorry-looking steeds, and with only a single toe stuck in each stirrup, they were most expert horsemen, using a very sharp bit, and managing their animals with

surprising dexterity. And in foraging they proved the most successful for a line of march, as we experienced to our great benefit.

Attached to the guns were eight half-bred Portuguese Topasses, or gunners, under the command of an English renegado who rejoiced in the name of Mars, a goggle-eyed, lozenge-nosed, big-whiskered ruffian, wearing on his head a dragoon's helmet that he had somehow possessed himself of, whose brass panoply and scarlet plume surmounted his brazen features and crimson face like a catafalco. He was a vagabond deserter from one of the Company's ships, having run away many years ago, and since then led a wandering life in the native states. The vagaries and volubility of this man kept us amused, albeit he was a worthless rogue, much given to blowing his own bombardo and cocking his hat, and a veritable Cromwell to his gunners, who were as sootish as Afric negroes, and scarce to be distinguished from the lowest tribes of blacks, such as washermen and scavengers, except for their European style of dress. On the strength of his white skin Sergeant-Major Mars treated them with a cruel contempt, constantly beating and abusing them when he was in his cups, which, from there being no country spirit too vile for his palate, was often the case.

Hervey was several times obliged to reprimand him, both on account of his drunkenness and his outrageous, tyrannical conduct. But Mars could never be got to mend his ways. With regard to his drams, he protested he had parted from five wives at Poonah, and feared he should never see them

again. And if it was hard for a married man to leave one spouse, how much harder must it be to leave five? Whereby if he took a little drop of comfort when he felt constrained, he hoped it might be forgiven him under the circumstances.

But as for the charge of bullying his gunners, he totally repudiated it. Did the colonel know these insolent Topasses called themselves "*Illustrissimows*" amongst each other? And where was the discipline in that? It was his business to bring them to a proper sense of their inferior position, and train them into good obedient soldiers; and if he was necessitated for to give them a lambasting now and again, it was only by way of duty.

"For, sir," he explained to me one day, being ever ready to wag his tongue when I would let him, "I'd have you observe these here teasing half-breeds haven't got the courage of a mosketow, and onless you keep 'em well in hand, by thunder! they'll run at the first sight of an enemy. 'Tis needful to make 'em more frightened of what's behind than what's in front. Goramighty! but I've seen Bloody War, and know how to handle these black mongrel *Illustrissimows*. Keep pinking 'em in the rear, sir, not deep but frequent. They'll fight like war tigers if you prod 'em up from behind."

"That's a system," said I, "which I cannot commend."

"You're new to the trade, sir," he replied blandly, "and I'm an old dog at it. You can't lead swine,

sir; they must be druv. Wasn't I at the battle of Kurdlah last year, under General John the Baptist, what commands one of Scindy's Campoos? Zooks! how we pelted General Raymond's army clean off of the field! This sabre did it"—he touched a tremendous weapon that dangled by his side, "Goramercy, the p'int was red with blood by the time I'd got all my guns into action. I was under Lieutenaut Fireworker Tyger then—a prodigious brave man! Started whistling with the bullets, and rode in front of the fighting line as if he'd been made o' *mutty* (mud). Lord, but he cursed cruel that a'ternoon because I stuck by my men. 'Give 'em a lead, Sergeant Major,' says he. 'Tis no use, sir,' says I, 'for these here Topasses are like their own guns, and have to be worked from the breech end.' He wouldn't believe me, and up he gallops and catches me by the lugg (for he were mighty masterful), and carries me along with him to the front, right in the line of fire. Of course, directly I wasn't there to stop 'em, my gunners slipped anchor and ran. 'See for yourself, Mr. Tyger,' says I, 'there they scud. And now oo's a going to work the damnation battery?' Ram! Ram! how he swore! Seemed to make the air strong with it. 'Dog's death to 'em!' he cried. 'Bring the black crabs back and work 'em your own way. On'y get the guns a-blazing!' So I chiveyed 'em, and caught 'em, and brought 'em, and manœuvred 'em from the breech end and—the battle was won! The General, he gave me a month's extra pay and *batta* for what I did, and Mr. Tyger threw in lashings of arrack. 'Sergeant-Major Mars,' says he to me, 'I'm

an old soldier, I am ; but you've taught me a trick this day as I didn't think for to larn. Where did you pick it up?' 'At sea, sir,' says I, 'where we steers a ship from the starn'—which we do, Mr. Selwyn."

"So you may. But that's not where you fight it from. I'm not surprised at Mr. Tyger being disgusted."

"Ah, sir! he wasn't no buckle and button officer, but a most violent man. Tyger by name and tiger by nature. I thought he'd ha' got the chokes. He expected every man to be a swollerin' of the bullets like cherries. A fine soldier, sir, but no science—leastways, not for country fighting. For, to be certain, he'd never handled black troops afore he joined us."

As it happened, no opportunity occurred during our long march for Sergeant-Major Mars to exhibit the merits of his system of warfare, for although our road lay through the territories of several hostile chiefs, we completed our journey to Umbajee's country without molestation.

Our head-quarters were at a place called Kalakote, which may be Englished into the Black Fort. It was a walled town, built on the side of a hill and defended by a strong castle. Here we were received by Chimnajee, the chief's vakeel, who evinced no little satisfaction at our arrival. For during the last year he had suffered severely from the exactions of Scindia's Viceroy in Malwa, a powerful chief named Luckwa Dada, whose territory ran contiguous with Umbajee's on the north, and who, regarding our

master with great jealousy as a rival, lost no opportunity of injuring him.

Hervey immediately set to work levying troops to form the new Campoo. There were, at this time, thousands of adventurers in Upper India, both Moors and Gentoos, who were soldiers by profession, and wandered about in bands whither fortune led or fancy prompted, seeking service under the various princes scattered over the country. Directly it was noised abroad we were recruiting men, we received numerous applications, for General De Boigne had raised the European character to such high esteem for justice and liberality that men readily abandoned service under native leaders to enter one commanded by a Feringee or white man.

The brigade consisted of four battalions of a thousand men each, of which two, known as *Telingas*, were armed with muskets and bayonets, and clothed in scarlet uniforms, very smart, like the Company's sepoy; and two, called *Nujeebs*, carried matchlocks and swords, and were dressed in blue quilted clothes of the country fashion. I was appointed by Hervey to the command of the first Telinga battalion, with the rank of captain-lieutenant, and three hundred rupees a month pay; and the second was given to a Gentoo named Surwar Sing, a Rajpoot by caste, and a fine, gallant, handsome fellow, with eagle eyes that seemed all afire, and great moustachios and whiskers, curled up after the custom of his tribe, giving him a very fierce and warlike appearance.

The Telinga battalions were recruited entirely from Rajpoots, brave, daring, bloody fellows, and reckoned

superior to the Nujeebs, who were raised from Rohillas and Patauns, and under the command of two Moorish captains, named Caleb Ally and Cootub Cawn. These fellows were ugly-looking desperadoes, with scowling pock-marked faces and a cut-throat appearance; but as they enjoyed considerable influence, and each introduced a great number of followers, Hervey, in his anxiety to bring the brigade up to its full strength quickly, engaged them, somewhat against his judgment.

In this way it happened that from the very beginning a racial difference was established between the Gentoo Telingas and the Moormen Nujeebs, which was destined to lead to trouble afterwards. But, on the other hand, the brigade was recruited and brought into tolerable discipline within three months, which was held to be exceeding smart work. And indeed, Hervey and I did not let the grass grow under our feet.

But there was one serious difficulty that made itself manifest at a very early date, and this was the want of money. Hervey had received from Umbajee bills on certain black bankers at Gwalior, which enabled him to purchase the arms, ammunition, and uniforms necessary for the Campoo. But this exhausted the fund, and when he applied to Chimnajee for further advances, the vakeel protested the treasury was absolutely empty, and must remain so until Hervey collected the arrears of revenue due from the district, which he urged him to set about doing as soon as possible.

Great exertions were in consequence made to take

the field, and at last we started out. But the work required of us proved very different from what our imagination had depicted. It consisted of moving about Umbajee's country, under the direction of Chinnajee, and summoning the headmen of the various forts, walled towns, and villages to pay up the arrears of tribute due from them. There was not much honest fighting, for our force was overpowering, and the vakeel would run no risks. Only a few of the places resisted, the majority yielding at once when they beheld our artillery and serried ranks advancing. It was paltry work battering down the mud walls of some wretched village to exact a bag of rupees from the three or four hundred peasantry that bravely defended it; and although on such occasions Sergeant-Major Mars was frequently in a great ferment of excitement, and talked louder than ever of his blood-curdling deeds at Kurdlah, after all was said and done, a victory over such insignificant folk carried no credit with it, and often savoured of downright oppression.

When we approached the frontiers of the district we received many reports and complaints of depredations committed by Luckwa's people, and began to congratulate ourselves accordingly, never doubting but that we should now come in for some more exciting work. But Chinnajee was cowardly as well as cautious, and would consent to no reprisals, evincing the greatest reluctance to enter into a direct conflict with Luckwa, whom he declared to be far too powerful a personage to be attacked. It was evident the only thing the vakeel cared for was the collection of

revenue, and, much to his delight, we got in a good round sum before we returned to head-quarters, leaving the peasantry to cultivate their crops in peace during the rainy season.

And now Hervey naturally looked to receive a due share of the money he had been instrumental in obtaining, to enable him to satisfy the claims of the men. But Chinnajee evaded payment by a hundred heathenish artifices, declaring at last that he had sent the bulk of the collections to Umbajee at Poonah, without whose positive orders he could advance nothing more. And so the troops received nought but a bare portion of their dues, which caused much murmuring and discontent.

I must confess that Hervey had chiefly himself to blame for this unfortunate result. He had completely neglected Major Tone's advice to "help himself," as I hold he was entirely justified to do. But being a man of the most punctilious honour, with as many scruples as Don Quixote, he conceived such a course of conduct to be inconsistent with true rectitude, and unbecoming one in his position.

"I am here," he protested, "in a situation of trust. I conceive my duty to be very clear: namely, to support the vakeel in his government. I can take nothing from him by force. We must have patience until I hear from Umbajee, to whom I have written."

The only person in the Campoo who waxed fat all this while was Sergeant-Major Mars, and though he often suffered from a teasing fever, that kept him in the rear during some of our prettiest skirmishes, he

made up for it on subsequent occasions. And indeed his glory flamed up like a beacon when he was called on to demolish the mud walls of some miserable village that Chimnaje had a spite against. Nothing delighted him more than the order to open fire. He would run his guns into position, train the biggest of them himself, strut to and fro like a pouter pigeon, bully his men, bawl out his orders, and blaze away charge after charge with prodigious great gusto. When the end was gained and the village had submitted, he swaggered about, a man too mighty altogether, his helmet cocked, his chest swelled out, and his sabre trailing at his heels, bragging of another victory won, and clearly claiming all the credit and glory of it for himself.

In this way, amongst the vulgar he achieved a vast consequence and reputation, and came to be regarded as heroic in war, for they had a great fear of artillery, and this was extended to the person who directed the guns. Mars was cunning enough to take advantage of this, and his experience of the country enabled him to feather his nest finely. He levied blackmail on the submissive villages, decreeing all the grain in them in a state of requisition for his artillery cattle; he contrived to waylay every headman who came to Chimnaje's camp, and extorted *dustoory* from him, which was a sort of country fee; he took bribes wholesale to perform things he had no intention or ability of doing; he sold promotions which were never granted; and, in short, proved himself a regular Greek in his practices. And withal, he was so deep and crafty, that although Hervey suspected him, he could never bring

any of his nefarious acts home to him. But it was very certain the renegado was making a great deal of money, for he married four more wives at Kalakote, and gave as many grand entertainments to his gunners, spending over each far more than his pay (even had it not been in arrears) could possibly admit of, and all of them drunk as dukes and merry as grigs.

The rainy season passed away, and Umbajee was still detained at Poonah, and although we were constantly assured he was on the point of starting for his country, his march was as often deferred. Many urgent applications were sent to him for money, but always to bring back the same reply: that everything should be settled as soon as he returned. In this way Hervey was put off and put off, without being able to help himself; and all he gained by his persistence was a *kharita*, or letter of thanks, couched in the most extravagant Persian language, and a *khelat*, or complimentary present, consisting of a couple of gold bangles and a costly shawl for each of us, as a mark of the chief's favour.

The receipt of these shawls provoked a jest from Hervey, who lamented we were not at the same time provided with fair companions worthy to wear them, and declared his intention of sending his to a certain lady at Bombay. Then he turned to me, and asked—

“And have you no fair one, Selwyn, at whose feet to lay your offering?”

All in an instant my thoughts flew to my cousin Mercy Bradnock, and the idea seized me of sending

my shawl to her, thinking how well it would become her. But the next moment the blood rushed into my face for shame and humiliation, as I remembered the long silence I had maintained and the reason of it.

"Why, lad, you're blushing!" cried Hervey, slapping me on the back. "Come—confide in me. Who is it?"

"Some one I cannot write to."

"And why not?"

"She is in England."

"Faith! if that is all your difficulty," he cried, "cheer up, for we'll soon settle it. There's Tone, who will do anything I ask him, as indeed he often promised. Get you your shawl packed, and leave the rest to me. I warrant it shall be delivered."

There are some things in this world which chance decides for us, and this was one of them. I was persuaded against my intention, for Hervey never ceased rallying me till I agreed, having conceived the idea that my reluctance arose from some cross in love, and I was content to let him think that rather than explain the true cause. And in the end I humoured him by pretending to be gained over by his arguments.

But there were other reasons that influenced me. It was now more than three years since I had fled from Fyeways, and time had wrought its accustomed changes. Fear for the consequences of my crime had long been lulled, and even my horror of the deed was beginning to abate. Reflection acquitted me of the grosser guilt of slaying the priest, convincing me that

the fatal blow had been struck in sudden fear and self-defence, without malice aforethought or any design to kill. It was regret rather than remorse that troubled me now, and with this complete change in my feelings and the knowledge of my perfect safety, I was able to bring myself to write to Mercy.

So I obtained pen, ink, and paper—rare commodities, and not easily procurable in that far land—and composed my letter. And first I asked Mercy to forgive me for having so long left her in ignorance of myself, begging her to believe it proceeded from no want of affection or ingratitude, but was due to the cowardice of a guilty conscience; for (as she must know) it was I who had struck down Father Clifford. But now I desired to acquaint her of how it came about, hoping to induce her to think less hardly of me if she knew the truth. And with this I gave her a short but faithful description of that evening at Fyeways; and after that, of my adventures down to the present time. In conclusion, I requested her acceptance of the shawl which accompanied my letter, and if she forgave me and would reply to it, to send her answer to care of Major Tone at Poonah, remembering to superscribe the same to Captain John Selwyn, by which name I was known in my present circumstances.

This letter and the shawl Hervey sent to the major, with a request to him to have it forwarded to one of the mercantile houses in Bombay for despatch to England. And about four or five months afterwards I received a very kind letter from Major Tone, saying he had sent the parcel

to his own agents, who were very careful and respectable people, and I might rest assured that, except for perils of the sea, the act of God, pirates, or the King's enemies, it would reach its destination in safety.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STORM OF BICKRAMPOOR.

I SERVED under Hervey for nearly two years at Kalakote, and except during the rainy season, when we were confined to our quarters in the fort by the inclement weather, spent the time chiefly in the field. We saw a great deal of active service, for the districts were subjected to the attack of several thieving banditti, whom it cost considerable effort to destroy. In the hilly country to our west lived a tribe of people called Meenas, a most ferocious and misbegotten race of robbers. They were stout, desperate fellows, armed with bows and arrows, in the use of which they were uncommonly expert, and accompanied by many dogs of a most savage yet sagacious breed. The fancy of these Meenas was to wear an exceeding high turban, with a plume of curlew feathers atop of it. They would swoop down on our villages, and in a single night carry off not only all the cattle within a compass of ten or twelve miles, but every child they could lay hands on (the girls to sell as slaves, and the boys to breed up to their own devilish trade), and then retreat to their fastnesses in the hills, where it was difficult and dangerous to pursue them.

But Hervey was no man to be set at defiance, and the pitiful complaints against the cruel violence of these robbers determined him to punish them. An expedition being arranged, we penetrated into their

country, destroyed three of their strongholds, obtained restitution of all they had plundered, released over a hundred children whom they had taken captive, and finally, exacted from them a heavy fine, with hostages surrendered for their good conduct in the future.

When these abominable foes were disposed of we were necessitated to wage war against a large army of Gosaeens, or roving military, who professed religion, but maintained themselves by plundering. They were clothed in peculiar orange-coloured raiment, and wandered about the country in great bands, and being brave soldiers, utterly despising death and wounds, were a most formidable enemy to encounter.

Early in the year 1798 a body of these Gosaeens invaded Umbajee's country, and having encamped on a spot favourable for defence, proceeded to levy contributions around. On hearing of this, Hervey made a forced march, surrounded their camp one night, and at break of day gave battle. A furious action ensued, the Gosaeens fighting with such reckless valour, that before we defeated them we lost over four hundred men killed and wounded, which so enraged our soldiery that no quarter was given and the band entirely extirpated.

In this affair I had the good fortune to save the life of Surwar Sing, who commanded the second Telinga battalion. Whilst gallantly leading his men to the attack, he pressed too far forward in his ardour, and was cut off by a sudden rush of the enemy. Being surrounded by the relentless foe, his life was in the greatest danger, when I was able to reach him just in time to save him from being cut down and killed. He

had sustained no less than five wounds, when I caught him in my arm, snapped a pistol at a fellow that was about to spear him, and cleared a circle round him with my sword, till my men drove the Gosacens back again. The gratitude of this brave fellow for what I had done surpassed all bounds, and when I visited him in his tent, after the affair, he insisted on our exchanging turbans, which was a custom of his tribe, and whereby he bound himself to me in bonds more sacred than those of brotherhood.

Altogether, I saw some very pretty fighting during my early service under the Mahratta flag, and gained a tolerable experience of the art of warfare, and especially of the tactics most proper to be employed in opposing irregular and barbarous hordes; which knowledge was to stand me in good stead at no distant date.

In Umbajee's continued absence (for the chief was still delayed in the Deccan, and was intriguing to encompass Luckwa Dada's ruin, and obtain the appointment of Viceroy of Hindostan for himself), matters went from bad to worse with us. Money was doled out by driblets, and at last our Campoo fell into such arrears that the only thing which kept the men to their allegiance was the pay owing them. It was a sorry hold to maintain discipline with, as we were soon to learn; for discontent was succeeded by treason, and Caleb Ally and Cootub Cawn, the commanders of the Nujeeb battalions, and both proud, cunning fellows, began to plot and conspire, and by bribes and promises obtained the support of the vakeel and of several of the favourites and officials

in Umbajee's court. Their object was to procure the dismissal of Hervey and the disbanding of the two Telinga battalions, and obtain the command of the Campoo for themselves. Their intrigues were successful. Umbajee's penurious soul was easily persuaded that Hervey was involving him in a greater expense than necessary, and that by entrusting the protection of the districts to the two conspirators, a considerable saving to his purse would ensue, especially if, as was basely suggested, the Telingas could be disbanded without their arrears being paid.

Such was the state of affairs when suddenly an insurrection, fermented by Luckwa Dada, broke out against Scindia's authority in some districts towards the east of ours; and, at the instigation of the conspirators, Umbajee determined to turn it to an opportunity of effecting Hervey's ruin. To which end he sent up orders for the Telinga battalions to advance against the rebels, leaving the Nujeebs to garrison Kalakote.

To a soldier of Hervey's ardent temperament the prospect of active service against a foreign foe held out the dearest hopes and ambitions, and he received with enthusiasm the order to take the offensive. But now, when the longed-for opportunity to distinguish himself had come, he was confronted by a crisis that had long been threatening. The troops were mercenaries who served for money, and had not received it, and they absolutely refused to march until their dues were discharged.

In this dilemma Hervey once more appealed to Chinnajee, but the vakeel was in the plot against

him, and all his arguments and protestations were useless. A week of growing discontent followed, Hervey endeavouring his utmost to persuade the troops to their duty, and they as stubbornly refusing to take the field until they were paid. They had fought and bled in the service, they declared, and would do so no further unless they received their money: which was certainly reasonable enough. I could see my poor friend wearing himself to death under all these difficulties, mortified beyond measure at the miserable state of affairs, haranguing the men, expostulating with the native officers, and interviewing Chimnaje every day in the vain attempt to secure a settlement.

At last, almost despairing, he determined on a most desperate expedient. There was situated in the rebel districts, about thirty-five miles from Kalakote, a town of considerable importance named Bickram-poor, wherein some rich bankers and merchants were known to reside. Hervey resolved to attempt a bold *coup* against this place, and partly by borrowing, partly by selling some of his own effects, scraped together a few thousand rupees. Then he sent for Surwar Sing and myself, and asked us to select five hundred tried men to whom to distribute the money under condition of their marching against Bickram-poor.

The task was not an easy one, for the utmost secrecy was enjoined, so that no rumour of the intended expedition might reach the enemy's ears. We succeeded in mustering the five companies, and a little before sunset Hervey rode up to the parade ground, and distributed the money amongst them;

after they had agreed to the conditions required. But as he was doing so the rest of Telingas, being apprised of it, came pouring out of their lines, angrily demanding their share.

"You shall have it to-morrow, oh, headstrong and disobedient ones!" cried Hervey. "This money is my own, and not the Rajah Umbajee's."

Then he gave the order for the force to march.

But he was immediately surrounded by the discontented soldiery, who declared they would not allow him to depart, as they suspected it was his intention never to return. He tried in vain to reason with them, but they were outrageous at the preference shown their comrades, and refused to listen to his assurances, and assuming an insolent bearing, told him they would hold him hostage till their dues were paid.

In this unforeseen predicament poor Hervey turned to me. "Selwyn," said he, "these rascals are in declared mutiny, and will not let me proceed. There is only one chance left. It is a forlorn hope. Will you take command and march against Bickrampoor, while I remain here as security for your success?"

"Oh, Hervey!" I cried, eager and delighted to serve him. "Will you trust me?"

"Trust you, my dear fellow! None better or more gladly. But it is a desperate venture. That's what troubles one."

"Do not let that trouble you. I am proud to go."

"Thank you, Selwyn. I knew you would stand by me," he answered, wringing my hand. "You have discretion, and I am satisfied to leave the conduct of

the affair to you. Try and take the town by surprise. The inhabitants believe we are stuck here—as indeed I am. Make a forced march. Push on without halt or stay, so as to reach the place by dawn. Mars will soon pound down the walls with his guns. Then rush in and storm it. And above all things, secure the main bazaar. There is a large sum of money there. Do not let your men disperse for plunder till you have made sure of it. 'Tis a desperate task, Selwyn, with such a weak force. One I had selected for myself, and would not willingly put upon another. But I know you will do your utmost. And so, go—and good luck attend you! The honour of my brigade is now in your keeping.”

He turned to the mutineers.

“Oh, shamefaced sons of sloth and faithless to your salt! I will remain with you. Sooleeman Sahib” (this was the way my name was pronounced—or, rather, contorted—by the native tongue) “has taken my place. He is going to fight for you who will not fight for yourselves. If he succeeds, you will receive your pay to-morrow; if he fails, you have me in your hands.”

There were still some murmurs of disapproval, but Surwar Sing struck in angrily.

“Dastard and impure of Rajpoot blood!” he shouted in his wrath. “Dust be on your heads who have covered us with shame! Is it not enough that your faces are blackened this day, that you should try to prevent better men than yourselves from being loyal? Suffer me and my brethren to pass, or by the great *Suttees* of our race, blood shall be spilt.”

Perceiving symptoms of hesitation on the part of the mutineers, I drew my sword, and, putting myself at the head of the column, gave the order to march; whereupon the rogues slunk back right and left, with sullen looks, and made way for us.

The sun was sinking as my little force filed out of the castle gates, and debouched into the plain below Kalakote. The men were alert and cheerful now, for their pride was touched at being selected for the expedition, and they were pleased at the unexpected payment they had received. In fact, the only man who seemed dispirited was Sergeant-Major Mars, who had paraded without any knowledge of our destination till Hervey disclosed it. All through the disturbance with the mutineers he had stood aloof, listening with a gloomy air to what was going on, and he seemed, I thought, far from happy when the difficulty of our departure was overcome.

Towards midnight he came to me, and reported that the cattle dragging the guns were jaded and required rest.

"This is not the time to halt," I told him. "We have orders to push on at all risks."

"Well, sir, it's my bounden duty to inform you of the danger of taking my guns into action with blown beasts a-dragging at 'em. There will be trouble, and more, if you attempt it. The wisest and greatest generals always take particular heed that men and cattle are in condition afore they are called on to fight."

I told him I knew nothing about the wisest and greatest generals, but that my orders were to reach

Bickrampoor by daybreak, and I intended doing so. Whereupon he began to grumble, protesting he was responsible to Rajah Umbajee for the artillery, and, if any disaster happened, would be blamed.

“Don’t croak of disaster!” I cried angrily; “and remember you are responsible to no one but me, while I am in command. That is according to the Articles of War, by which you’ll be judged. Right about face and back to your guns, and halt them again at your peril.”

My sharpness of speech sobered him, for I do not think he was prepared for it. At any rate, he returned to his station, and the march was resumed. But an hour later he sidled up to me again in the dark.

“Sir,” said he, saluting very respectfully, “have you considered well of this matter? You are going into Bloody War, and with a totally insufficient force. Are you resolved on your plan of action and how to manœuvre the men? Remember, if you are beat at first go off, there’s no reserve to help you. It is a great responsibility for a young officer, whereby I hope you’ll pardon an old veteran sliding in a word edgeways.”

He spoke with such appalling solemnity that I was somewhat taken aback. “I have a plan in my mind,” said I; “but if you choose to suggest anything, I will listen.”

“Suggest anything!” cried he. “Goramighty, sir, an old dog like me, who’s fought for twenty years in the country, under twenty commanders, is naturally chock full of suggestions. Wasn’t I at Kurdlah

under General John the Baptist, when we routed General Raymond and his twenty thousand men off of the field? But we did it by day, sir, bravely and boldly: not a-groping about in the dark, like cats, and rats, and bandicoots, and such-like, when we might be surprised and cut to pieces without time to say our prayers. The wisest and greatest generals always fight by daylight."

"The assault cannot commence before dawn. Consider it daylight, and make your proposal."

"Well, sir, there's cavalry to attack, I'm told."

"That is so. Luckwa Dada has a detachment in the place."

"And they can move faster than we can?"

"Very true. We'll make them move fast."

"Whereby, if you beat 'em, you can't catch 'em?"

"Don't say 'If!' Consider them beaten; and explain how it was done."

"Zooks, sir! there's the difficulty. Goramercy! We shall come upon this gorawallah (mounted) enemy all fresh and strong after a good night's sleep, with their bellies full o' supper and their horses a-prancing under 'em; while we"—(he groaned)—"are worn out and weary with a long march, and as for hungry, oh! Goramighty, Mr. Selwyn, sir, I'm that now. What shall I be four hours hence?"

"Consider you've had breakfast. Now disclose your plan."

"Taint possible, sir. A man with my particular kind o' gnawing in his belly can't consider it filled nohow."

I had long suspected Mars of cowardice, and his

periodic attacks of fever nothing but malingering, and I was convinced of it now. So long as he was employing his artillery at a long distance against an enemy who had none, he was, according to circumstances and the interval, anything between a hero and a man who would not run away. But now that there was a prospect before him of hand-to-hand fighting, he could not screw his courage up to the pitch, as I was determined he should.

"Resume your place," I said sternly; "and don't waste any more of my time."

He seemed mortified and disappointed, but did not retire. "I'm sorry you think I'm wasting your time, sir. But I've been in Bloody War, and know what it means to fight on an empty belly. It's bad when you're in force; but with a mere handful of troops like this, Goramerey, sir, it ain't fighting—it's being slaughtered!"

"Return to your guns!" I cried petulantly.

"Pardon me, sir, I aren't made my suggestion yet. And you ought to heed it."

"Well, I'll give you one minute to make it."

"I'm told there's a fine hill flanking this town," he began; "and not above a mile off. Now, my advice is to occupy that hill afore the enemy can seize upon it. Form a hollow square on the top, bayonets bristling all round, musquets primed, and guns in the centre p'inting four ways. If you are there first, all ready and defiant, and show a bold front, 'tis ten to one but the dogs will draw off. Then," he wound up complacently, "in you marches and takes possession."

"Your advice does not commend itself to me," I answered curtly, "and is rejected. Now, I will tell you my plan. We shall advance as close as we can to the walls: the closer the better. Then I will give you ten minutes to batter a breach. After that, you shall lead one wing and Surwar Sing the other, and race to get in first."

I could hear him shudder in the dark.

"Goramighty, Captain dear," he ejaculated, "that's suicide, and nothing else. How do you imagine five hundred men are a-going to storm a murdering big town, with walls all round it. That ain't the art and science of war, sir. Lord save us! but what d'ye want for to go and throw away your valyble life like that? You are here for to make a living, not to lose it. Your place and mine is in the rear, a-directing and a-egging on the men. The wisest and greatest generals always seek an eminence what gives 'em a full view of the bloody field of war, and then they can see how the fight rages, and where to pour in reinforcements. I beseech you, sir, take an old soldier's advice. Do nothing so rash and mad as you propose. You can't help Colonel Hervey if you're dead—and dead you'll be!"

With such a poltroon it was impossible to argue; nor was this the time to fall out with him.

"Sergeant-Major Mars," I replied, "we differ in our ideas; but, as I am in command, you will, of course, defer to mine. And I am sure that you will lead the left wing in a way that will do you credit, and sustain the reputation you earned at Kurdlah."

"But I'd as lief not lead it, sir. 'Tain't my work

—for, to be certain, I'm no climbing ape to crawl up walls; and no hoofing centinel, neither. My place is with the guns; I'll stick to 'em—I'll never desert 'em—I'll never lose 'em."

"Quite right. But, likewise, you will lead the left wing."

"No, sir, no; not me," he protested. "Goramercy, Captain Selwyn, sir, I've left four wives at Kalakote. What'll they do, poor wenches, when they're weeping widows. This infantry work is out o' my line. I'm a gunner. I'll stick to my guns—I'll never desert 'em—I'll never lose 'em. You've seen me fighting these here two years past, and you knows that. But I was not engaged to lead infantry, and I can't do it. Goramighty, 'tis against the Rights of Man to ask me."

"I don't ask you—I order you to!" I cried sternly; "and do it you shall, I strictly caution you. Even if I have to prod you from behind, like you did your own gunners at Kurdlah."

"My coffin! To think o' this! Me, Mars, a being prodded like a mongrel Illustrissimow. And that's my reward for subjugating Umbajee's country. Bobbery bob and bobbery bob! 'Tis a foul, cruel, ungrateful world." And, whining out his woes, he withdrew, and for the next three hours I heard him cursing his Portuguese, kicking his cattle in their stomachs, and clattering his sabre against the stones, to ease his wounded, indignant feelings.

About four o'clock in the morning we arrived within a mile of Bickrampoor, by which time Mars was shivering and shaking with what he called fever,

but was clearly fright. So I had to superintend the working of the guns myself, and, getting out the drag-ropes, ran them into an excellent position, quite close to the town and under cover of some sugarcane fields. Just as dawn was breaking I formed the men into two columns for the assault, but when I came to look for Mars to lead one, he was missing, and with him all his gunners, who had run directly my attention was engaged. Although I was not sorry to be rid of such worthless vagabonds, I felt enraged at their having given me the slip at the last moment.

I had now to assist in working the battery myself; and training the guns on a weak part of the defences, I started the ball with a salvo. The whole place was instantly alarmed, and the garrison directed a random matchlock fire upon us. But it was too late. We had opened so close that a few well concentrated rounds brought a great slice of the curtain crumbling down, and secured us a practicable breach.

Taking command of the right wing and appointing Surwar Sing to the left, I advanced to the storm. After doubling across the small open space that intervened, we clambered up the breach. The garrison treated us to a heavy but ill-directed fire from matchlocks and jinjals, and rained down stones, powderpots, and burning thatch, which annoyed us greatly. But, overcoming this resistance, we made good our footing on the walls, and then followed a hand to hand tussle for about ten minutes. Fortunately for us, the defenders had been taken too

completely by surprise to collect any organised opposition, and the ardour and spirit of my Telingas soon overcame the ill-regulated and ill-armed ragamuffins, whilst Luckwa Dada's detachment of cavalry never adventured to join in the fray, but made their escape by the opposite gate without striking a blow.

So far all had gone well, and the day was won. But there still remained for me the most difficult task of all, namely, to secure the treasure and prevent my men from looting it.

I had received two slight wounds, one of which set me limping, but there was no time to stop and bind them up. Calling on Surwar Sing to support me, I plunged into a labyrinth of small narrow streets and alleys to find the main bazaar. After much trouble and baffling, we emerged into it, and there came upon a large body of the enemy congregated around a particular house and engaged in carrying valuables away from it.

I immediately charged slap into them, with Surwar Sing close by my side, but only a dozen men at our heels. Encouraged by our feeble numbers, the enemy faced round to fight. Once, twice, thrice, I slashed, and felt my blade cutting through human flesh and blood, and guarded as many blows aimed at myself. Then there came a momentary lull, during which I was conscious of two swords lifted in the air against me, and that I could not parry both.

One blow I warded off, but simultaneously I felt a stinging sensation in my left shoulder, and heard Surwar Sing give a great shout of dismay as I fell to the ground.

A few moments of blinding confusion ensued. Above me rang out the clash of steel, as blade met blade, and blows rained down on target and chain armour. Over my body many feet trampled, the tide of battle surging backwards and forwards, to the wild music of angry shouts and impetuous yells. But at last a great cry of victory went up, and then the air suddenly cleared, and Surwar Sing was kneeling by my side, tearing up his turban to staunch the bleeding of my wound, and imploring me to tell him I was not dead.

"The treasure," I whispered, "save the treasure."

"It is safe, sahib. We have routed the dogs."

"Then bring it to me."

With a great effort I raised myself to a sitting posture, and superintended the collection of the various boxes and bags which the enemy had abandoned. These I made Surwar Sing gather together and deposit in an angle between two walls, and then drag a native bedstead in front, on which I lay me down. After which I ordered him to mount my horse and gallop back to Kalakote with news of our success, and bid Colonel Hervey come with all speed.

Despite the loss of blood and the tortures I suffered from my wounds, I managed to retain my consciousness. With a drawn sword across my knees and a pistol in my hand, I reclined, guarding the treasure that was to save the honour of Hervey's brigade. Hour after hour of the long hot day passed, and I thought my duty would never end. From time to time wandering parties of my men, lusting for loot,

passed and repassed, eyeing me askance, but they attempted no violence. So long as I was there on watch and ward they were loyal, but I felt that the first relaxation of my vigilance would offer a temptation such as no soldiery in Hindostan could resist.

At last, a little before sunset, there came a clatter of hoofs down the flagged streets of the bazaar, and Hervey and Surwar Sing dashed up on their sweating steeds.

My powers of speech were gone, for my tongue was as dry and hard as a bone in my mouth. But I met Hervey's anxious glance with a smile. Then, as I waved my hand towards the treasure, the pistol dropped from my grasp, and in an instant the world was blotted out from my view.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE REBEL CHIEF.

THE wounds I received at the storm of Bickrampoor were very severe, and necessitated my being sent back in a palankeen to Kalakote, where a very clever Huckeem, or doctor, resided, who had treated me for fever, and in whom I had great confidence. Hervey bade me farewell with many regrets and good wishes for my speedy recovery and return to duty. Alas! little did I think, as we parted, it was the last time I should see him. Poor, gallant, ill-starred gentleman, he was even now entering on that path of unmerited misfortune from which he was never to extricate himself.

The jolting of the palankeen dislodged the bandages on my wounds, which began to bleed afresh, and I had barely strength to reach home and order my servant to send for the Huckeem Abdoolah, when I fainted away. This was the beginning of an illness so severe that, had it not been for the unceasing care of my physician, I must have died. This good, benevolent man, although a bigoted follower of the false prophet, Mohammed, attended me, who was in his eyes a cursed caffre or infidel, with a humanity beyond praise, and by his skill brought me safe out of danger, after many days of delirium and fever.

My first thought, when I was strong enough to collect my senses, was for Hervey, and I asked the Huckeem how it fared with him.

Then I learnt to my sorrow and dismay that my poor friend had fallen a victim to the ingratitude of Umbajee, and the villainy of the traitors, Caleb Ally and Cootub Cawn ; for a few days after the storm of Bickrampoor he was taken at a disadvantage, his Telingas forcibly disarmed, plundered, and driven naked into the jungle, and himself compelled to fly for his life.

When Abdoolah had finished the recital of this shocking outrage, I could not restrain my indignation, and gave vent to it in loud and angry tones. Whereupon he instantly raised his finger to his lips in warning.

“The sahib,” said he, “will be wise to subdue his feelings. Give voice to no imprudent words, for listening ears and lying tongues are lurking about ready to carry them to the Rajah.”

This intimation, conveyed in a low, urgent whisper, was one I could not neglect, and, thanking the Huckeem for his solicitude, I promised to say or do nothing rash in my present helpless state.

As soon as Abdoolah had left, desiring to make him some recompense for his attention, I ordered my servant to bring the gold bangles presented me by Umbajee as a *khelat*, intending to give them to the Huckeem. Whereupon, with much confusion, the man informed me that, directly after Hervey's disaster, Sergeant-major Mars reappeared from his hiding and rifled our quarters, carrying off everything he could lay hands on, under the plea that there were arrears of pay owing to him.

This was bad enough, but worse news was yet to

follow. For now I instantly thought of my mother's Testament, and feeling in my bosom discovered it gone. I at once demanded of my servant—an honest enough slave for a Moor, and faithful withal—if he knew aught about it, whereupon he fell on his knees and confessed, with much fear and trembling, that Abdoolah had removed it when dressing my wound, and entrusted it to him for safe keeping, who, deeming it to be a charm of utmost value, locked it up in my chest, where it was unfortunately seen by the ruffian Mars, who, despite everything my servant could do, carried it away, being the more incited thereto by the eagerness displayed to save it.

The theft of such little property as I possessed was of small account, but the loss of my dear mother's Testament, the one relic that bound me to home, distressed me beyond measure. It seemed to break the only link between me and Fyeways, and extinguish the frail spark of hope I had till now dared to cherish of redressing the cruel wrong done her. Apart from the sad and solemn associations connected with the last lines her failing hands had traced, the Testament in itself was a document of evidence, which, under certain circumstances, might prove of goodly value. But now it was gone, and with it, I could not but feel, the last chance of ever proving my claim to the inheritance I had been robbed of.

The anguish of mind I suffered as I fretted over this, and my unhappiness at poor Hervey's fate, together with the troubles begotten of my truly deplorable situation, all augmented by the heat of the

weather, bore so heavily on me that my recovery was greatly retarded, and I fell into a weak, dispirited state, which often set Abdoolah shaking his head and stroking his beard with concern.

At last he declared a change of air and surroundings necessary for me, and one evening carried me off to his own house, which was situated in a pleasant garden outside the walls of the stifling fort. There I began to regain my health a little, but not so fast as to satisfy my physician.

"There is something lacking," he would often say. "There is a remedy for this disease, could I but find it."

At last an idea occurred to him, and one morning he brought a chessboard and set of pieces.

"Here," he cried triumphantly, "is a sovereign remedy for a disordered mind. It has succeeded where powders and potions have failed—aye, even the most costly nostrums and specifics, such as the powdered liver of tigers and the decoction of shredded rhinoceros-horns."

Forthwith he began to teach me the moves of the game, and, when I had mastered these, encouraged me to play with him, until little by little my interest was engaged. As my skill increased he set me sundry problems to solve, and by degrees the chessboard exercised a fascination over me, and I spent many hours poring over half a dozen pieces, eager to discover the correct checkmate.

"The sahib improves," quoth Abdoolah, after a month of this treatment. "Allah be praised therefor!"

And verily I was improving, not only at the

pastime, but in mental and bodily health. The prescription was a quaint one, but it succeeded marvellously. And the Huckeem sitting opposite me, cross-legged, with his turban awry, and his little round eyes twinkling like alley-taws, was often constrained to scratch his shaven poll in perplexity at the skill of my attack, and, when the game was finished, to stroke his beard with a very different gesture, as he exclaimed, "Shawbash!" and "Waw! Waw!"—albeit more in token of his professional pride at my recovery than in satisfaction at the result of the game.

It was a fortunate thing for me that during my long illness Umbajee was occupied in the field and never visited Kalakote. He had by this time reached the summit of his ambition, being nominated Scindia's Viceroy in Hindostan and Malwa, in succession to Luckwa Dada, who had erected the standard of rebellion. About this time a battle was fought between the two chiefs which gave a great impetus to Luckwa's cause, and everything pointed to a prolonged war, Umbajee having retreated to Agra to levy fresh troops and seek help from General Perron.

As my strength returned and I heard all these rumours of fighting that were the common talk of the bazaars, I felt impatient to join in. But the difficulty was where to find employment. I had no desire to return to Umbajee, being disgusted with his service, and I felt debarred by my nationality from applying to the Frenchman, General Perron—England and France being at war with one another. Concerning Hervey I could learn nothing, or I would gladly have

sought him out. Some said he had gone to Poonah, others into the Company's territory, whilst one rumour had it he was dead. At last, after much consideration, I made up my mind to adventure into Jyenuggur, a great country that stretched to the west and north-west of Malwa, and try my fortunes with the king of that place. And I had done so but for something which occurred to change my plans.

For as I was sitting one day in Abdoolah's garden of fruits, eating the air, as they say in the East, who should come to visit me but Surwar Sing, disguised in the habiliments of a perambulating astrologer. After our first hearty greeting, I asked him where he had been all this long time.

He looked cautiously around to satisfy himself we were alone, before answering, "With Luckwa Dada!"

"You are a bold man," I exclaimed in astonishment, "to come from that notorious rebel's camp to Umbajee's fortress! What brings you here?"

"To see you, my lord. Luckwa is collecting a great army. All that are left of Colonel Hervey's Telingas are now in his service."

This did not surprise me, it being the usage of the country for deserters and dismissed soldiery to go over to the enemy. "I am glad they are not dispersed," I said; "but who commands them now?"

"You, my lord," answered Surwar Sing.

"How?" I asked, thinking he was speaking the language of Oriental hyperbole.

"It is this very matter that has brought me hither, my lord. Luckwajee desires to raise a Campoo, and seeks a Feringee officer to discipline, and lead it.

And recently he sent for me. 'Surwar Sing,' said he, 'Umbajee has applied to General Peeroo sahib (Perron) for a Campoo commanded by a Feringee. I must have a Feringee, too, who understands their mode of warfare. Know you any such I can send to?' 'Highness,' I replied, 'is there not Captain Sooleeman sahib? If he is alive and well, he is the man you seek, being valiant in battle, and with a heart like a fighting quail, as I know who have fought by his side.' 'It is well spoken,' answered the chief. 'Bring him to me.' So here I am, my lord, obedient to that command."

I seized Surwar Sing's hand and thanked him heartily for his recollection of me. "What made you think of me, oh faithful friend, and how knew you where to find me?"

"Wherefore should I not think of my lord? Did he not save my life from the Gosaeens, and have we not exchanged turbans? I am a Rajpoot, and that pledge is as binding on me as the drinking of opium together! And as for finding my lord, I knew he had been sent wounded to Kalakote, and a few inquiries from travelling *bandjarraks* (carriers) informed me he was still here. And now my lord will accompany me—will he not?"

"Right gladly," I exclaimed. "To-morrow morning we will start. But how do you propose to travel?"

"I have a *perwannah* from Luckwa, whose writing will secure us safe passage. This disguise will carry me across Umbajee's border; and once in the country beyond, Luckwa's seal will protect us from danger and annoyance. For it is the general belief that he

will defeat Umbajee again, and none dare risk his displeasure."

When Abdoolah heard of my intention to leave him he expressed much regret, which indeed I think he felt, for we had become great friends, and he had recently been teaching me the Persian characters, and even lent me an *Alcoran* (his sacred book) to read—than which he could have given no greater proof of his esteem for an unbeliever in his creed.

"If you are wounded again, Sooleeman sahib," he said, "remember your old Huckeeem, who will always come to you, wherever you are. Woe is me that you should be going away; for Abdoolah will have none to play chess with now, whilst you, Allah be glorified! will be practising the moves with real pieces, and—who knows?—perhaps checkmating the kings of the West! And I fear much you will forget your old physician."

"Not so, O benevolent Abdoolah," I answered him with great earnestness, "for, if I do, may I wear a coronet of slippers and jackals gambol over my grave when I am gone! Verily, if fortune favours me I shall look to meet you again. And so farewell, and may your shadow increase and the peace of the Prophet make you comfortable!"

At Surwar Sing's suggestion I dressed myself in native costume for the journey, and as my visage was now much tanned and burnt, I was able to carry it off, being in truth but little fairer than some of the northern Rohillas. Our way lay first along the broad valley of the Chumbul river, and then westward across a hilly district to reach Luckwa's province of Ajmere, where Surwar Sing had left him collecting his army.

The country was wild and romantic, with many forts and castles scattered over it, and every town and village protected by stone towers and a strong wall and ditch, whilst the peasantry pursued their avocations fully armed, so that during the whole journey we never met a man who had not a spear in his hand or a sword by his side. Game was exceeding plentiful, and we often disturbed wild pigs and noble stags with great antlers, and peaceful spotted deer, with now and then wild bulls, most fierce, and thousands of peacocks and monkeys with which the jungles swarmed.

When we reached the Bunas river, which issues from the mountains of Meywar, and flows first north and then eastward, until it empties itself into the Chumbul, we received information that Luckwa had left Ajmere, and was marching south to a place called Chittore. Accordingly, we altered our course, and hugging the left bank of the stream, rode between it and some rocky ranges of hills that ran parallel. These were cut up by many ravines and small valleys, with but little cultivation visible, and only a few hamlets scattered here and there, although the soil was fertile enough, and the sides of the gorges in many places richly wooded with jungle of prodigious growth. Here bears were in plenty and many tigers and leopards said to infest the forests, and of birds a great variety, chief amongst them the *kookeroo*, or wild cock, which crowed its matins shrilly from every coign of vantage.

Built on this range of hills were many forts, amongst them the Castle of Amergurh, belonging to a Rajpoot chief, whose name may be Englished into

the "Lion of the Mountain." It stood on a great crag, almost inaccessible, being reached by a circuitous road through a dense forest. Not far from here the country debouched into a large plain, bounded on the south by a blue range of hills, whereon was situated the city of Mundalpurh, with which I was soon to become better acquainted. Following the trend of the hills, which fell away to the south-west in broken and abrupt masses and disordered heaps of granite and gigantic rocks, we rode for two days until we came up with Luckwa Dada just as he reached Chittore.

On being apprised of our arrival, the chief sent for us. His camp not being yet pitched, he was sitting under a large tree, surrounded by his leading adherents and generals. I found him a very different personage to Umbajee. He was wearing a rich dress of gold *kinco*b, with a pearl necklace and diamond earrings, notwithstanding which he was a true soldier, thin and wiry in face and body, hardy and active in his habits, expert in the use of the Mahratta spear, battle-axe and sword, short and outspoken in his manner, and liberal in his disposition. His soldiery loved and respected him, both for his uncommon generosity and his established reputation as a brave and able general. For twenty years he had been the foremost warrior in the Mahratta nation and taken a conspicuous part in the conquest of the Mogul Empire and the extension of the Deccan dominion over Hindostan and Rajpootana.

And yet, notwithstanding his undoubted courage and fine warlike qualities, he was a true Mahratta, and possessed all the national vices—namely, deceit,

love of lying, and passion for intrigue. So that although enterprising and successful in the field, he preferred where he could to gain his ends by craft and bribery.

He received me standing up, in a blunt, soldierly style, and, when I saluted him, stretched out his hand to shake mine in European fashion, which surprised me not a little.

"You are an Angraiz sahib (Englishman)," he said, "and where your nation give their hands they give their hearts. And so I take you by the hand and ask you: Will you fight for Luckwa Dada?"

"I will, highness," I answered, as I tendered my sword for him to touch the handle.

"It is well spoken. You have fought for Umbajee, who is only a miser—an ant that hoards its wealth. He does not understand what is due to a brave and faithful soldier. You shall find me a different master so long as you deserve my favour."

"And that will I deserve," I replied, captivated by his frank manner; "for I will serve you, highness, with straightforward loyalty, provided I may keep a path devoid of deceit, treachery, and lying."

A grim amused smile played on the handsome warrior face.

"By Siva and by Brahma! a Mahratta might have said it," he observed, with splendid effrontery. "My heart shall be open to you as the day. To the sons of the brave there is one common object—to meet the enemy on a fair field, and beat them by fair fighting. Luckwa has, in his time, fought fairly," he added with emphasis.

I made a suitable answer, and then asked him what work he desired me to undertake.

“The command of my Telingas. I wish you to increase them to a Campoo. Let three or four battalions be raised, trained, and brought into discipline. And lose no time over it.”

The next day the army marched to the Chittore Pass, a narrow gullet in the mountains, surmounted by a tremendous fortress, commanding the road leading to the city of Odeypore, which was the capital of the country of Meywar. Here we took up a position of great strength, half way up the hill. The many red standards and swallow-shaped ensigns of a Mahratta camp were erected, and we entrenched ourselves, menacing Scindia's territory of Malwa, which was within easy striking distance.

I was soon arduously employed selecting men from the legions of irregular infantry in the camp, organising them into battalions, and training and drilling them. Morning, noon, and night, Surwar Sing and I devoted ourselves to the work, until we had brought about fifteen hundred rank and file into fair discipline within the short period that intervened between our arrival at Chittore and the renewal of active hostilities against Umbajee.

The periodical rains were just bursting when we heard that the latter was massing his troops at Kotah, a Rajpoot state eighty miles to the eastward of us. In addition to a large force of Mahratta cavalry, the chief was accompanied by a complete brigade of 8,000 regular infantry belonging to General Perron, and was daily expecting the arrival of an army of 5,000

foot under an independent adventurer, named George Thomas, who was marching down from the north of India to join him. Concerning this remarkable man the most wonderful stories were related, which sounded more like the legends of romance than statements of actual fact. He was said to hold sovereign possession of a large country near Deyles, over which he had proclaimed his independent rule, owning allegiance to no man, and maintaining his authority by means of his army, which he often led out on plundering excursions into the neighbouring states if he wanted money. He bore a reputation for the most audacious enterprise and desperate courage, so that his name was a veritable word of terror in Hindostan. Umbajee had secured his services by the promise of a large subsidy to be paid monthly.

When Luckwa Dada realised what an overpowering force was assembling against him, he had recourse to the usual Mahratta expedients of bribery and intrigue, and sent secret agents to Scindia to try and accommodate matters; to General Perron at Deylee to gain over his influence; and to Colonel Sutherland, the officer in command of Perron's brigade with Umbajee, with whom his success was immediate, for Sutherland listened to his overtures, and marched off before a shot was fired.

Three days later we fought our first battle. General Thomas advanced against us with uncommon resolution, but scarce had fighting begun than a tremendous tropical storm came on, and by rendering our fire-arms unserviceable stopped the action. It was

renewed when the weather cleared, but, notwithstanding General Thomas's boldness, our position was too strong to be stormed, and the day ended without advantage to either party.

This was the beginning of a campaign I have no intention to describe in detail, for it would only run to a prodigious, unnecessary length, one day's fighting being so much like another (to everyone except those who are killed or wounded) that it becomes monotonous and cloying both to relate and read of. Had it not been for General Thomas we should assuredly have beaten and dispersed Umbajee's army, which we greatly outnumbered after his desertion by Colonel Sutherland. Several times we gained an advantage over him, and on one occasion entirely destroyed one of his detachments, but it always happened in the moment of our victory that General Thomas arrived on the scene to save his master.

For three months we kept up the warfare, several times shifting ground, and eventually making our way northward to the confines of Ajmere, which was Luckwa's own country. The adverse conditions told hardly on both armies. In the first place there was no money, and the troops fell heavily into arrears. Then the rain poured down, sometimes for a week without intermission, and it was weary work keeping up the spirits of the soldiery, who suffered from the quaking fever, with ague, and other distempers, and from the continued strain of incessant warfare. Day after day they were called on to fight, and when evening came their only repose was on the sodden soil, without shelter, and often without food. For the

whole country for thirty miles around had been devastated by the foraging parties of the two armies, and every village burnt and deserted. Soon the camps became crowded with sick and wounded, to whom we could afford little or no relief, and the sight of whose sufferings acted in a distressing way on their comrades. But if our plight was bad, that of the enemy was worse; for Luckwa, by his subtle intrigues, raised the whole country against them, cutting off their supplies, and plunging them into the greatest difficulty. It was only the surprising energy and invincible spirit of General Thomas that kept them up. Ever hopeful, bold, and self-reliant, he was a very tower of strength and saviour to Umbajee's army.

And he could be magnanimous as well as brave, as I myself experienced on one occasion. It was towards the end of the campaign, and Luckwa, having received information that the enemy were not only much distressed for want of provisions, but running short of ammunition, determined upon a grand concerted attack. Between their camp and ours flowed a stream in a nullah or ravine, with high banks. In this there was generally but very little water, so that you might cross it without wetting your feet. On its further bank the enemy had established a large fortified outpost, guarding the chief road crossing it, which I was ordered to storm and create a diversion, while Luckwa attacked their main camp. Just before we advanced there came on a heavy storm of rain, and the stream rose rapidly; but I cheered my men forward and led them through the torrent,

although the water in places came up to our necks, and several were swept off their feet and drowned. The outpost was garrisoned by two thousand of the enemy, but such was the terror infused by our unexpected and singular advance, that half of them became panic-struck and fled. The remainder, however, held firm, and opposed a brave resistance, so that we were necessitated to carry the place at the point of the sword, and put the majority to death before the few that survived sought safety in flight.

I now advanced to the attack of the main camp, to take it on the opposite side to Luckwa Dada; but meanwhile, unknown to me, he had been beaten off by General Thomas, so that I soon found myself in danger and compelled to sound the retreat. On reaching the banks of the stream, I urged my men to cross it. But the water was now so deep, and the torrent running so rapidly, carrying with it trunks of trees and boulders and wreckage, that the attempt was one of extreme danger, and sufficient to daunt the bravest heart. Many of the men feared to enter, and hesitated on the bank. Every moment the peril was increasing. The choice for many lay between drowning and death by the sword, and Surwar Sing was endeavouring to induce them to plunge in, and by encouraging some, and pushing others, had at last nearly succeeded.

At this moment I heard a ringing shout proceed from the direction of the enemy, quite different to the cry of the Mahrattas, and looking up saw General Thomas himself running towards me. He had just returned from the pursuit of Luckwa Dada's troops, and his sword-arm was bared to the elbow, and all

smear'd with blood. It was, as I had often heard, his custom to lead his troops on foot.

Nearer and nearer he came, with great leaps and bounds—a man of immense stature and gigantic build, high towering above his stalwart followers, notwithstanding that they were recruited from the fine fighting races of Upper India. He was dressed in a scarlet military coat, his head bare and held up like a lion scenting its prey afar, and a long queue floating behind him. But most of all I noted, though it was but in a passing glance, his handsome countenance, masterful and ferocious, filled with the lust of war, his eyes flashing, his brow aflame, and, strangest of all, upon his upper lip a pair of moustachios such as I had never seen any European wear before.

The very sight of him struck terror into my few hesitating men, and they ran and leaped into the stream, like deer flying before a hunting leopard.

Then Surwar Sing called to me: "Oh, brother—my lord!—hasten, hasten!"

General Thomas was now within twenty paces of me—thundering down, his men following close at his heels, and not far behind Umbajee's Mahratta cavalry coming up at a gallop.

"Go first!" I cried to Surwar Sing, who ran three steps and plunged in head foremost, and I after him. As I rose to the surface I saw General Thomas pull up at the very brink, and stand there puffing and panting, looking at us with a half angry, half comical expression on his face, which suddenly dissolved into a smile as he shook his fist at us.

I struck out swimming on my side with might and

main, glancing over my shoulder at every stroke. In a few seconds up dashed the Mahrattas, regular war tigers now there was no danger, and instantly a dozen had unslung their matchlocks from their backs and levelled them at Surwar Sing and myself. But, before they could fire, General Thomas was in their midst, laying about him right and left with his blood-stained fist, and knocking them out of their saddles like so many ninepins. Then he took up a position between them and the river, and held up his hand as a sign for no man to fire.

It was the noble impulse of a generous and brave spirit, and, as I believe, saved our lives.

“See—see! my lord!” cried Surwar Sing, shaking his head and blowing the water from his beard as we swept down the muddy current. “The Feringee has spared us. Now, by the great *Suttees* of my race, I swear that this is a True Man!”

CHAPTER XIV.

I TAKE FRENCH LEAVE OF THE MAHRATTAS.

LUCKWA DADA'S intrigues at Scindia's Durbar were successful, for the Maharaja, alarmed at the dimensions to which the insurrection had grown and the popular sympathy it evoked, sent letters of pardon to the rebel chief, and restored him to his former post. On being apprised of this resolution of policy, General Thomas counselled Umbajee to ignore it and not suspend hostilities; but the war was brought to a termination by the singular conduct of General Perron, whom Luckwa had gained over by bribery, and who threatened to take the field in person against Umbajee if he did not instantly yield compliance. Under such pressure, the latter, fearing that further opposition would place him in the same position as his rival had recently been, made overtures of amity to Luckwa, and the two chiefs were outwardly reconciled.

This did not please General Thomas, between whom and Luckwa a personal enmity existed, and he refused to accompany Umbajee to the meeting, but, at the chief's request, proceeded eastward to put down a local insurrection. Meanwhile, my own position was in no wise a pleasant one, for, although on the winning side, I knew Umbajee was greatly incensed against me, and feared he might do me mischief. So I removed my camp to a place four

miles distant from where the two chiefs had pitched theirs, in order if possible to avoid a meeting.

The very next day an express *harcarra* arrived from General Perron, with urgent despatches, the nature of which was kept secret from me. But, from the fact that a council of war was summoned, and Luckwa and Umbajee were long and deep in consultation, I suspected some important business was brewing.

And I was right, as I soon discovered, for Surwar Sing came secretly to my tent at midnight to confer with me. His face was very grave, and he put his finger to his lips to enjoin caution.

"Treachery, my lord," he whispered. "Treachery is abroad against the *Jehazi Sahib*." This was General Thomas's Moorish name, and meant "the Sailor."

"And Luckwa at the bottom of it," I added, completing his sentence.

"Not so, my lord. A greater than he. Peeroo Sahib himself."

"General Perron! Then truly is the danger great. Does Umbajee know? And what is he going to do to warn the General?"

An expression of contempt kindled in Surwar Sing's handsome face as he twirled his long moustachios indignantly.

"He is plotting with Luckwa to bring about the ruin of the *Jehazi Sahib*, whom he has caused to be recalled from his march under plea that war has broken out again here. The two chiefs are even now arranging an ambuscade!" Then, as if unable to

contain himself any longer, he broke vehemently out, with a ring of honest emotion in his voice, "Oh, my lord, my lord, this must not be. Whoever heard of such black villainy before? For three months the *Jehazi Sahib* has fought Umbajee's battles day and night, and now the shameless chief is in league to betray him! Remember you the day we swam the torrent, how the *Jehazi Sahib* stayed those dogs of Mahrattas that would have shot us as we struggled helpless in the flood?"

"I remember."

"Then, by the life this Feringee gave me on that day, I swear to save him now!"

"It is well spoken!"

"And you, oh, my lord?"

"Is he not my fellow-countryman?"

"And yet, my lord, Luckwa and Umbajee design to put this devilish job upon you!"

"Upon me?" I exclaimed indignantly. "Impossible! They dare not so grievously insult me."

"Nevertheless, they will do it. And do it in order that you may refuse compliance. That is what Umbajee desires, for—the gods protect my tongue from withering!—he has exchanged your life for that of the *Jehazi Sahib* with Luckwa Dada!"

"Ha! And has Luckwa agreed?"

"Even so."

"And then?"

"But listen to it. And then I—even I—am to be appointed to the command of the Campoo! The two chiefs sent a confidential vakeel to me this evening, tempting me. I saw treason in his sleek and

oily smile, and to learn their plot pretended to agree to everything that was required of me. And now the dog is back with his masters, scratching the dust with his hind legs, and bragging that he has bought over Surwar Sing to be faithless to his salt!"

I grasped the Rajpoot's hand—"Good friend," I cried, "good friend and true, I know not how to thank you!"

"And wherefore should you thank me? Am I not a Rajpoot?" he answered proudly. "And have I not eaten my lord's salt, and enjoyed his favour? Did you not save my life? And these cursed Mahratta thieves, knowing this, and that I have exchanged turbans with my lord, thought to buy Surwar Sing with silver! May their faces be blackened and themselves condemned to reside sixty thousand years in hell! But enough; this is no time for indignation. It is necessary for my lord to decide what to do."

"Let me consider," I said. "In a few moments you shall have my answer."

For ten minutes I sat there, revolving the matter in my mind. A notable crisis had come, which could not be met with half measures. Luckwa, in order to gratify his revenge against General Thomas, and ingratiate himself with General Perron, had sold me to Umbajee. My soul revolted at the indignity of being made the sport of such faithless and barbarous heathens. It rendered further service under any Mahratta flag impossible for me. And then there was General Thomas, too, he must be warned

ere he fell into the treacherous trap they were preparing.

At length my mind was made up, and I spoke.

"Surwar Sing, the time has come for me to leave this service."

"That is true. How can my lord in honour remain? But I will accompany you. Whither you go Surwar Sing follows."

"Oh, faithful one," I cried, "I desire nothing better than to have you at my side. But—hearken!—the Telingas—will they follow too?"

The Rajpoot's eyes glistened with a sudden joy, as he grasped the meaning of my question. "They *shall* follow, if my lord commands. By my beard they shall! But whither will you lead them?"

"Where fortune wills. We must find some other master to serve."

Surwar Sing reflected for a moment. "And the master is found!" he exclaimed suddenly; "here, within a stag's flight. Is not Bheem Sing, the Rana of Odeypoor, bowed down with the yoke of the Mahrattas? Will he not welcome you? And he is a Rajpoot of the Sesodia tribe, the highest of the high amongst the Twice-Born."

"Then we will go to him with our swords girt on."

"Excellent. And when, my lord?"

"To-night. This hour. Now. For to-morrow it may be too late."

"Surwar Sing is ready," he cried, springing to his feet.

"Assemble the men under arms silently and expeditiously. Assign no reason, except that we are

bound on a secret service. Select two of your kinsmen, trusty warriors of tried valour, to carry a *kareeta* (dispatch) to General Thomas. They must travel independently, so that if the one fails the other may reach. In half an hour I will be with you."

"All shall be done as my lord commands," said Surwar Sing as he withdrew.

I sat down and wrote two letters of warning to General Thomas in the Persian character, which I knew he could read. Then, after a few hurried preparations, I proceeded to the parade ground, where I found my three battalions and the six guns belonging to the Campoo ready, and Surwar Sing awaiting my arrival. With him were the two messengers, to each of whom I gave an identical letter for General Thomas, which I bade them deliver with all speed, and then make their way to the Chittore Pass, whither I intended to go. Having seen them depart, I gave the word to march, and in the silent night we passed out of the camp and headed south.

By sunrise I had placed nearly twenty miles between myself and the Mahrattas, and as I conceived my departure must by this time have been discovered, and probably a force sent in pursuit, I judged it proper to acquaint my men of my real purpose. So I drew them up into a hollow square, and notified to them that I had finally left Luckwa Dada's service, and designed to enter that of the Rana of Odeypoor.

"I have brought you here," I said, "that you may make a free choice between me and the Mahrattas.

If you are ready to follow my fortunes, I will gladly accept your allegiance, and guarantee you everything that is due. But if not, let us part good friends, for I wish you nothing but well. Go your way and I will go mine."

Directly I had finished my harangue, Surwar Sing stepped forward and saluted me.

"Sahib Bahauder," he cried, "I will follow you, for never more will I serve those rascally dogs of Mahrattas, that cannot even keep faith with those who have shed blood for them."

Then he turned round and told the men of the devilish betrayal of General Thomas and myself that had been contemplated by Luckwa Dada and Umbajee, and how the two chiefs had bartered us for one another, so that each might sate his revenge.

The races of the East, both Moors and Gentoos, are easily swayed and led, especially by the influential men of their own caste or tribe. My Telingas were all Rajpoots, and held Surwar Sing in great esteem. No sooner had he proclaimed his choice than the officers advanced, and with one accord and voice exclaimed—

"We too will serve Sooleeman Sahib Bahauder, and none other!"

And then the men shouted.

"Sooleeman Sahib Bahauder *ka jye*. He alone is our general and our master!"

In less than ten minutes a bloodless revolution had been effected, and Luckwa Dada's Campoo ceased to exist—for it had become mine.

Then I drew my sword, and holding it up aloft.

kissed its blade, and vowed to be a just and faithful leader to them so long as my arm could wield it.

Our march was now resumed, and we covered another ten miles before I called a halt and gave the word to bivouac, but not without taking precautions to throw out pickets and station sentinels around. It was fortunate I did so, for about two o'clock in the afternoon, when most of the men were asleep after their midday meal, our outposts came hurrying in to say a *pagah* of Mahratta cavalry was in sight.

I instantly beat to quarters and drew up my men in battle formation, so that when the enemy arrived we were ready for them. Halting at a respectful distance, they unslung their matchlocks, and prepared to open fire. Whereupon I ran my guns out and gave them a round of grape that sent them scampering off with precipitous haste, leaving forty or fifty of their number stretched on the plain. Then I ordered the advance of the whole line, but we could never come within musket range of the foe, who kept drawing off and hovering around us in a great circle, not daring to approach.

So I sounded the recall, and marching my troops to a position suitable for defence, posted them carefully, and awaited events. All that afternoon, and late into the evening, the Mahrattas kept us in view, from which I judged they would make an attack under cover of night. Accordingly, as soon as it was dark, I caused a company to keep up a smart firing, whilst I quickly shifted my ground half a mile to the left, and there took post, every man with his

arm in his hand, and the guns loaded with grape. It was a pitchy night, and the ruse succeeded, for the Mahrattas came blundering down upon us, and in an instant my men had levelled their muskets and poured in a murdering volley, while the guns scattered their grape into the struggling masses as they retreated. When morning broke not a sign of them was to be seen, except the corpses of their dead and the writhing bodies of their wounded, whom they had abandoned. What tale they carried back to Luckwa Dada I know not, but it is certain we were never more molested, and in five days reached Chittore, without necessity to fire another shot.

The kingdom of Odeypoor, or Meywar, as it was also called, touched the dominions of the Mahrattas at one point on the east, and Scindia claimed *chout*, or tribute from it, to the extent of one-quarter of its revenues. Umbajee had administered the northern portion of it for eight years with such cruel and pitiless rapacity that it was said the two hundred *lacks* of rupees he had amassed were all wrung from the wretched inhabitants, from whom he had extorted half the produce of their labours; and it was because of his unpopularity that Luckwa Dada had selected this as the field for the recent campaign. The southern and western half of the country was so mountainous and difficult to traverse that it had never been subdued, or even invaded, but the northern and eastern provinces were comparatively level, and the soil very friendly to all productions, and these had been the districts subjected to the depredations of the Mahrattas.

On the eastern frontier was a triangular-shaped district known as Mundalgurh, bounded on the west by the Bunas river, on the east by the territory of the Rajah of Boondee, whilst the base of the triangle rested upon Malwa. It was an outlying and unprotected province, continually harassed and overrun by the Boondee and Mahratta hordes, so that Bheem Sing, the Rana or sovereign of Odeypoor, drew little or no revenue from it, being totally unable to maintain his authority therein.

It was through this district that I had ridden with Surwar Sing on my journey from Kalakote to Chittore, and halting in it three or four times, learnt of the miserable state of anarchy in which it languished, and how no man knew whom to obey or to whom to pay his taxes, being in turns mulct and despoilt by the Rulers of Meywar and Boondee and Mahrattas. It was, in short, one of those buffers, or common harrying grounds, whereof many were to be found wedged in between the kingdoms of Hindostan, and which by their nature afforded excellent opportunities for bold and enterprising adventurers to establish themselves in territorial possession. It was now my intention to proceed to the Court of the Rana of Odeypoor, and offer to farm from him the government of the district of Mundalgurh on military tenure.

On arriving at the Chittore Pass I found it guarded by the Rana's troops, who had descended from the fort and occupied our old entrenchments on the slope of the hill. Sending forward a flag of truce, I requested a parley with the commander, and explained

to him the object of my arrival. After some hesitation he consented to allow me to proceed to the capital with a small personal escort, but refused permission for my troops to approach the pass. As this seemed reasonable, I did not push him further, but selected a strong position, entrenched and fortified it, and leaving Surwar Sing in command, with orders to hold out against all comers till my return, I set forth with a small bodyguard of ten mounted men for the city of Odeypoor.

After passing the immense fortress that crowned the pass, and which was once captured by the famous Mogul Acber, my way ran through a wild and wooded country, the road winding greatly about, now skirting some deep precipice or creeping along the base of a rocky hill, now crossing a bleak and barren ridge or plunging through black valleys, where the sun could scarce penetrate the thick jungle growth. The distance was nearly a hundred miles, and it was not until the evening of the fourth day that I came in sight of Odeypoor.

It was well worthy the arduous pilgrimage it had cost me to reach it. The city was situated in a natural basin, surrounded on three sides by great hills, but on the fourth lay a level and placid lake, with many beautiful poppy gardens and hamlets on its further margin, and charining vales and meads beyond, very green and grateful to the eye after the murdering and rugged mountains whose granite summits had frowned on me these four days past. The city itself was most pleasing in appearance, and contained several splendid residences and temples of

marble, lining the lake, their sculptural decorations exceeding elegant. The Rana's palace was a noble edifice, not less than a hundred feet high, and built on the crest of a rocky ridge overlooking lake and city and valley—the whole so picturesque that it formed a scene of surprising enchantment.

The day after my arrival I was received in durbar by the Rana Bheem Sing, an enfeebled voluptuary, who spent the most of his time under the influence of opium, or nautching and dallying it with his concubines in his resort known as the Garden of Nymphs. He was about thirty years of age, stout and sluggish, with a light complexion, and the only sign of manhood in him his bushy beard. His face was handsome enough, with the well-formed features common to the higher tribes of the Rajpoots; but his eyes had the dull, sated look of an old debauchee, and every movement seemed an effort to him.

Deficient in intellect, altogether lacking force of character, and without a single warlike attribute of his race, Bheem Sing was completely in the hands of his turbulent Oomras and Thakoors, or feudal barons. Of the former there were sixteen, amongst whom the country was apportioned out, and their tribute constituted the Rana's revenues; but, as they never paid more than a mere quota, and Bheem Sing had no means of enforcing his authority, he was always embarrassed for money and reckoned one of the poorest kings in Rajpootana, as he was certainly the most incapable and deluded.

Shut up in his remote, hill-environed capital in

the recesses of the Arravully Mountains, and cut off from all commerce with the outside world, the Rana was totally wanting in knowledge and experience of anything that happened beyond the wilds of Meywar. He had heard of Europeans, but never seen one till he set eyes on me, whom he regarded with the same nervous apprehension a man might feel when brought face to face with a tiger, which he is told is tame, but yet misdoubts. To the Rana, every *Topee Wallah*—or “hat wearer,” as Europeans are called—was a devouring conqueror, for his ideas of them were gathered from the warlike exploits of the Company’s troops, whose fame had penetrated even to his far retreat. So he sat on his throne of state in a sort of small white marble pavilion, overlooking the hall of audience, drest in the most gorgeous raiment, and with a necklace of pearls as big as peas round his neck, his courtiers cringing on either side, and his armed guards drawn up below and around him, ready for any emergency or danger.

The preliminary compliments having been exchanged, I made my proposals boldly, as befitted their audacity, informing the Rana that I had resigned the service of the Mahrattas and desired to enter his. If he accepted my sword, I was prepared to protect his eastern frontier from their incursions, and also from those of the Rajah Bishen Sing of Boondee, whom I knew to be his hereditary and particular enemy. For twenty-five years before this, Bishen Sing’s father, Ajit Sing, had foully murdered Bheem Sing’s father, the Rana Ursi, while out on a hunting expedition, since which there had

been deadly hatred and a blood feud between the two royal houses.

At the mention of Bishen Sing's name, Bheem Sing raised himself up from his lolling attitude and evinced a sudden eager interest. Not many months back the Boondee troops had inflicted a mortifying defeat on his, and the memory rankled in his breast, and was even more bitter than the old evil, for the Rana was consumed with all the insufferable pride of a high-caste Rajpoot.

"What know you, oh Feringee, of Rajah Bishen Sing of Boondee?" he asked.

"But little, Highness—saving that his country adjoins yours, and there is blood between you."

"Blood! Aye, the blood of a father treacherously murdered! And now the misbegotten dog has turned *dacoit* and is incessantly vexing my soul. Would that I could make him a clog for an elephant. My province of Mundalguh is never safe from him."

"It shall be inviolate in future if your Highness will entrust me with its protection. I will undertake to keep the Rajah Bishen Sing out of it. If he but puts his toe across the frontier I will cut it off."

"And his head?" added the Rana, with a quicker intelligence than I had given him credit for. "If that follows his toe, will you cut that off too?"

"Highness, you shall have his turban," I answered, "if he comes within reach of my sword. And if his head is not in it, it shall be because he fled bare-headed to his own hills!"

The sally delighted the Rana hugely, and he

laughed with childish ecstasy at a suggestion that implied the most deadly insult to his hereditary foe.

"Truly, his turban is better than his head!" he cried. "Disgrace is more bitter than death. Answer me, on your faith, oh Feringee, will you undertake to send me the turban of this Boondee dog?"

"If he enters the territory of your Highness and will stay to fight, may my face be blackened if I do not send you his turban!"

"*Waw! Waw!*" exclaimed the Rana, curling his beard fiercely. "It is well spoken." And immediately the whole durbar resounded with echoes of "*Ram, Ram, Maharaj!*" and similar approval.

"And what payment do you require for this service?"

"Highness," I answered, "between prince and soldier let no money stink and breed mischief. I have served for lucre, but it never brought anything but evil and disgrace. Assign me your province of Mundalpurh. I will pay you a tribute of two *lacks* of rupees a year for all your lands east of the Bunas River, and undertake to keep your frontiers free from the attacks of your enemies."

Bheem Sing was so surprised at this proposal that he turned with a vacuous stare in his lack-lustre eyes to his *Wuzeer*, or Prime Minister, to find out if he had comprehended me aright, or if his opium debauch had fuddled his brains. It was evident the *Wuzeer* approved of my proposition, for I could see his eyes glisten as he contemplated the bare prospect of two *lacks* of rupees coming into the state treasury from a source that had hitherto proved sterile. Ho

immediately began whispering to the Rana, evidently urging him to accept my offer.

Nor was there any great imprudence in doing so. The revenues of Mundalgurh were supposed to amount to about seven *lacks* of rupees a year, as I had taken care to inform myself, but in practice the Rana never received sufficient to pay the expenses of collection. If I failed him, he would be very little worse off than he was at present; if I fulfilled my pledge, he would be two *lacks* to the good each year. Under any circumstances, there would be my Campoo defending the frontier and fighting his hated enemy of Boondee and the Mahrattas.

Now, while the Rana and his *Wuzeer* were debating this matter, there suddenly and noiselessly entered the durbar hall a young girl of perhaps seven or eight years of age, of exquisite loveliness both of face and form, drest in clothes of surpassing elegance, all bespangled with gems and jewels. It seemed strange to observe such splendour in one so young; but then youth is the blossom of life, and the use of gay apparel but copying Nature, and she seldom errs.

A hum of suppressed admiration passed round the court as the child glided in from an adjoining doorway and came to a stop in the middle of the hall, close to where I was standing. It flattered me to fancy that I was the object of her visit, for she paused in front of me, regarding me long and wonderingly with her large glistening eyes, which were fringed with curling lashes, and as soft in their expression as a gazelle's.

Her beauty and innocence, dazzling and delightful beyond compare, forced from me a smile of admiration and pleasure. And as she saw it lighten up my face, she smiled too, and then, with a graceful movement of her little hands in salutation, gave me a glance of friendship. With that, she frolicked, as delicately as a fawn amongst the fallen leaves of autumn, up the marble steps to the pavilion in which the Rana sat enthroned.

She was Kishna Koomaree Bye* (which may be

* *Note by Mr. Fyveways, written on the margin of his Journal:—*

This eighth day of February, 1812, has brought me melancholy news of the tragic murder of Kishna Koomaree Bye, of Odeypoor. Little Mr. Parminter sends me a copy of the *Bombay Courier*, in which is printed a description of the sad event, communicated by Lieutenant Tod, an accomplished officer of the Honourable Company's army, who accompanied a mission to Odeypoor, where he heard the following account of the Princess's death: She lived till her sixteenth year, growing in grace and beauty, like the rose, from peerless bud to perfect blossom. The fame of her loveliness travelled far and wide, bringing many suitors for her person, and chief amongst them the Kings of Jyenuggur and Joudpoor, who both demanded her hand in marriage from her father, the Rana Bheem Sing. The suit of the King of Jyenuggur proved successful, and to him she was betrothed, and he proceeded to Odeypoor to celebrate the nuptials. But, meanwhile, the King of Joudpoor, stung to frenzy by the preference shown his rival, advanced at the head of an army to oppose his claim, and so overawed the Rana that the Jyenuggur ruler was denied admission to his bride's capital. War immediately broke out, and these three great sovereigns of Rajpootana, brothers by descent and of the noblest lineage in Hind, were soon engulfed in a fierce internecine strife that deluged their common country in blood. Many battles were fought, victory now favouring one, now the other—and the cause of this dreadful contention the fair flower of Raja'sthan! At last, it seemed as if their fatherland must be utterly ruined and desolated and the inhabitants exterminated by this frightful civil

Englished, "The Virgin Princess Kishna"), daughter of Bheem Sing, by a mother of the Chawura race, who were the ancient kings of Anhulwara. In her veins ran the noblest blood in Asia, and the name they had given her in the country, "The Flower of Raja'sthan" (or Rajpootana), proclaimed the priceless

war, and, in this hopeless pass, the leading minister of Odeypoor conceived the atrocious idea of sacrificing the life of the Princess to secure the peace of Rajpootana. More horrible still to relate, her father was brought to consent, and, to his eternal shame, the fiat went forth that Kishna Koomaree must die! But who was to perform the appalling crime? Many were ordered, but none would consent to imbrue their hands in such innocent blood, until at last a brother of the Rana was prevailed on to attempt the deed. But, when he entered the Princess's chamber to stab her to the heart, the sight of her amazing beauty, and her tender, confiding air, dashed the dagger from his hand, and he rushed out. Only in that awful moment the Princess had learnt all, for her uncle revealed to her the reason and necessity of his coming. Man and steel having failed, resource was now had to woman and the poisoned cup, and one disgrace to her sex was found to present it to the doomed maid. Her mother raved and tore her hair, calling on God to witness and to help; but Kishna Koomaree, calm and sustained by all the noble pride of her race, shed not a tear, nor displayed a single symptom of weakness. "My mother;" she only said, "why afflict yourself? It is but a shortening of the sorrows of life. I fear not to die. Let me thank my dear father; the King, I have been permitted to live so long!" Then she bowed and drank of the cup, sending up a prayer for his life and prosperity. But outraged nature, pitying this innocent, rebelled against the impious tragedy that was designed. Not once, not twice, but three times was the poison rejected, for thrice was the horrid purpose repeated and thrice it failed. Last of all, the *Kasoomba* draught was prepared, a cooling drink of herbs and flowers, into which a deadly opiate had been introduced. The Princess received it with a smile, sighed for the scene to be ended, and so drank and died! But, pure and noble, her memory remains, and shall for all ages remain, crystallised in the annals of the country she sacrificed herself to save.

esteem in which she was held by nobility and commonalty alike.

Bheem Sing was too deep engrossed in converse with his *Wuzeer* to note her entry, and it was not until she passed into the pavilion, and touched him lovingly on the arm, that he was aware of her presence.

And then, I vow, it touched me truly to observe how in an instant the dull, sated, lustful look faded from his face, like the miasma of night before the pure rays of the morning sun, and he turned to welcome her with a smile as fond as her own.

"*Meeree pceuree* (my darling)," he exclaimed, "is it thou? Wherefore hast thou come, fond sweet-heart of the lotus flower?"

"To see the white-faced warrior that has arrived from over the *kala pawnee* (black ocean)," she answered.

"And what thinkest thou of him, tiny twin of the evening star?"

"I love him," she answered artlessly. "He smiled at me as kindly as my own face reflected in the waters of our lake."

Her father passed his hand fondly across her fair brow, and looked full into her gentle eyes. "Small sister of the jessamine blossom," he said, "the Feringee desires to enter my service. Shall I entertain his request?"

"Yes, yes, my father," she answered, clapping her hands gleefully.

"And why, Kishna Koomaree?" he asked, half surprised, half amused at her eagerness.

“Because thy little daughter wishes it.”

“Then I swear it shall be so,” cried the Rana impulsively, “for Kishna Koomaree Bye has decreed it!”

And so it was.

My proposal being accepted, the district of Mundalgarh was assigned to me in what was called *Jeydaad*, or military tenure. I was to pay the stipulated tribute and utilise the surplus revenues for the upkeep of a force sufficient to protect it. Within the boundaries of the district I was invested with full civil and military control, and so long as my tribute was punctually paid none might molest or dispossess me. With a *sunnud*—or commission—to this effect, I returned to Chittore highly gratified with the result of my mission.

Here again good news awaited me. During my absence intelligence had reached Luckwa Dada and Umbajee of a threatened invasion of Hindostan by Zamaun Shaw, the king of Cabul, and they had both hurried off in hot haste with all their troops to Deylee, to aid General Perron in resisting it. Thus not a Mahratta remained in this part of Rajpootana, and for the present at least I had no danger or opposition to fear from them.

I was also rejoiced to find that both the messengers I had sent to General Thomas had succeeded in delivering my letters of warning in time, and returned safely to Chittore. They brought me a reply written by his own hand in Persian (for he could neither read nor write English), which was full of the most cordial expressions of thanks and

handsome compliments—and with it two presents. One an elegant suit of the finest chain armour, similar to one he wore himself, and made by the artificers of the northern tribes of India, who are famous for the art, and whose handiwork can turn a sabre's edge and resist a musquet bullet. The other a valuable emerald of extraordinary size and lustre, which he adjured me to wear in remembrance of him, and is kept by me to this day and much treasured as a memento of this truly great and gallant adventurer.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TRIBUTE OF THE SWORD.

THE principal place in my *Jeydaad* or territory, both in importance and strength, was Mundalgurh itself. It was situated in the centre of the district to which it gave its name, a large walled town built on the crest of a hill and defended by a citadel. By occupying this place I should be in a position to dominate all the country around, and to establish myself therein was clearly my first duty.

So thither I marched my Campoo without delay, and on arrival sent forward a herald announcing my appointment to the government, and summoning the *Kiladar* or commandant to respect the Rana's *sunnud* and deliver up possession. For a reply the contumacious fellow shut his gates, and refused to admit me on any terms.

With the natives of the East the first blow struck is the battle half won, and a vigorous example being necessary, I determined to provide one that should have a salutary effect on the district. Drawing up my troops in battle formation, I ran my guns to the front, and battered a breach in the walls, and then planted my scaling ladders and led my men to the storm. Such energetic measures were quite new to the traders of Mundalgurh, many of whom were Marwarries, a miserable and cowardly race of misers, who were accustomed to the slower methods of the

Boondee forces and the procrastinating intrigues of the Mahrattas. When shot and shell began to plunge into the very heart of the bazaar, and bring their walls of sun-dried bricks crumbling about their ears, and this uncivil introduction was followed by the impetuous advance of my Telingas, they threw down their arms in terror and surrendered at discretion. But the *Kiladar* and his rag, tag and bobtail of a garrison withdrew into the citadel and prepared for further resistance.

This place was exceeding strong, being built on the highest point of the hill, and well defended with ramparts and bastions, whereon several pieces of artillery were mounted. I foresaw a teasing siege, unless I could take it by a sudden assault, which I was minded to attempt. In order to lull the suspicions of the garrison, I withdrew my troops and encamped them at a considerable distance; but a little after midnight, silently mustering them, we advanced by a detour to the further side of the citadel, where, as I had anticipated, there was no proper guard posted. Creeping up to one of the gates, I blew it in with a bag of gunpowder, and effected an entry.

The defenders, although taken at a disadvantage, fought valiantly, but my troops were in no humour to be denied, having received promise of the pillage of the place, which was known to contain much valuable property. Half an hour put us in complete possession of it, and brought the contumacious *Kiladar* to his knees. He was a man of great wealth, and I inflicted a fine of fifty thousand rupees on him, which he paid

to secure his liberty, whilst my troops worked themselves into high good humour looting.

And so, with scarce a scratch and the loss of not above a score of men, I effected the capture of town and citadel, and on the 16th day of November, in the year 1799, hoisted my flag over the same with some pomp and parade, and proclaimed my government. I found the fort in a dilapidated condition, and my first care was to repair its defences and arrange sufficient accommodation for my troops, a battalion of whom I was determined should always garrison it. For the others I laid out a cantonment beyond the walls of the town, requisitioning all the artisans and workpeople in the place for the purpose.

My own quarters I fixed in the principal building of the citadel, in what had formerly been the palace of some chief, choosing for my residence an extensive range of upper rooms, once used as the *zenauna* or women's apartments, and from the windows and balconies of which I enjoyed an elegant view of my capital below, and the green plains stretching south and east. Underneath were many spacious chambers, one exceeding large and lofty, which I made into my great hall of audience, and the others appropriated for the various offices of my government.

Whilst these works and alterations were in progress, I made several expeditions to different places in my district, to acquaint myself with its geography and resources and demonstrate to the people I was at hand to enforce my authority, and as there were between three and four hundred towns and villages in it, besides many bheel warries or hamlets, this was

an inspection of no small labour. But for the present I refrained from exacting any taxes, the state of anarchy in which the country had existed for many years past having impoverished it to such an extent that the inhabitants lived from hand to mouth, and were never in a position to pay anything except at harvest times, which were the seasons the Mahrattas and Rajah of Boondee selected for their incursions. The latter had, indeed, just drawn off from one when I entered into my government, and I took an early opportunity of sending an ambassador to him, informing him of my accession to power, and notifying that if any of his troops crossed the boundary I should consider it as a declaration of war and act accordingly. The Rajah was very indignant at this warning, and inquisitive withal, for he had many questions to ask about the strength of my army and the conditions under which I held my *Jeydaad*. He found but cold comfort in the answers my ambassador gave him, which did not err on the side of underestimating either my power or my importance.

When the cold season's crops were nearly ripe for harvest I set out to collect my revenues. Being determined before all things to be just in my dealings with my peasantry, I entered on the collection with moderation and circumspection. My experience in Umbajee's district made the work familiar to me, and I was cognisant of most of the artifices practised to evade payment. At each town and village I summoned the *Potails* or headmen, and the *Bhomias*, or feudal freeholders, to my presence, and informed them my desire was to treat them fairly and with

every consideration so long as they were obedient, but that if any resisted my authority they would surely suffer for it. Having fixed what I held to be a fair amount for them to pay, either by way of revenue or in commutation of their feudal obligations, I remitted half of it for the current collection as a set off against the losses they had suffered, but told them that in future they would be protected against such depredations, and that at my next coming I should require the full assessment.

This treatment speedily gained their confidence, and I obtained what was due with very little trouble from most of the places around Mundalgruh. But in the north of my territory, where the country was very hilly and the inhabitants exceeding independent, and incited to resist by two or three Thakoors or chiefs, notably by the Mountain Lion of Amergruh (whose teeth I drew and claws I pared before I had done with him), I had some trouble; in fact, I was necessitated on several occasions to resort to arms. Whenever a village was recalcitrant, I attacked it instantly and exacted the full revenue by way of punishment, and for the forts or castles, of which there were plenty, bombarded them until they were untenable, not having been built to resist the fire of artillery. This had a proper effect on the neighbouring strongholds and villages, who wisely submitted at once rather than bring upon themselves such prompt punishment.

In the large towns, and especially in my capital of Mundalgruh, I experienced considerable trouble, for the traders and shopkeepers were far more crafty

and cunning than the simple peasant folk. They hid their goods on my approach, assumed garments of great poverty, and gave me entirely false information about their means. But I entertained an able establishment of *Jassooos* or spies, and informers were not wanting, so that I quickly discovered their reprehensible trickery and brought it home to the evil-doers, whom I took care, on conviction, to punish with extra severity; and here and there, where their conduct was very outrageous, I levied a fine from the whole community by way of a public warning and example.

In order to reach the pockets of the trading classes, so that they might bear their due share in the cost of government, I created special taxes and three state monopolies for the sale of opium, salt, and spirits, which I farmed out. But, on the other hand, I freed the merchants and shopkeepers from many vexatious and arbitrary imposts under which they had hitherto suffered, and notably from the blackmail formerly levied in the shape of transit dues, much to the detriment of trade. These I entirely abolished. I was careful to let each section of the community know exactly what it was liable for, and equally careful not to exact from it more than the stipulated amount. In this way a fair and equal system of taxation was created, and when the people grew accustomed to it they found their business improved, instead of being hampered, and both commerce and agriculture benefited by the changes.

Whilst guarding the welfare of my population, I did not neglect that of my army, on which alone my

rule and the protection of my country depended. My troops numbered 2,000 men, 1,500 being infantry, 250 newly raised cavalry for my bodyguard, and 250 artillery. The cavalry were all chosen men of tried valour, well armed with lances and short blunderbusses, and serviceably mounted; and I was very particular in the selection of the cattle to drag my guns, now increased to twelve by the capture of those in the citadel of Mundalpurh, which I mounted on carriages and adapted for field work.

To the command of my army I promoted Surwar Sing, with the rank, pay, and allowances of a colonel, as a reward for his fidelity and meritorious services, and also made him my Deputy Governor with a special salary attached. The troops were well paid and well housed, and allowed every indulgence consistent with the maintenance of perfect discipline. I established an arsenal for the manufacture and repair of small arms, and a factory to supply me with gunpowder and render me independent of the traders, from whom I had previously been obliged to purchase ammunition that was often so bad as to prove almost worthless. I tempted skilled workmen and mechanics into my service from Scindia's arsenals at Oojein and Gwalior, by the promise of increased pay, and they turned me out excellent musquets and sound side-arms, so that I was able to gradually re-arm the whole of my force, and bring its equipment into such a high state of efficiency as to equal that of any soldiery in India.

Of course, all these matters which I have briefly written down were not accomplished without the

expenditure of considerable time, patience, trouble and money. But I felt that I was now working on my own behoof, and not for a faithless Mahratta master, and my labour was one of love. It delighted me to see my province increasing in prosperity, and watch the fields growing green and golden twice a year with crops of opium, sugarcane, cotton, indigo, tobacco, sesamum, rice, jewarry, wheat, barley, gram and Indian corn; to see the fruit ripening on the trees—mangoes, custard apples, peaches, oranges, almonds and figs; and to mark how my capital was beginning to be the resort of traders and merchants from other countries.

Nor must I omit to mention that I was scrupulously punctual in the payment of my tribute to the Rana of Odeypoor, being determined that there should be no default on my part, and directly the revenues of my first two harvests were paid into the treasury I sent him a *lack* of rupees for each half-year.

In my foreign relations I was singularly fortunate. The Rajah of Boondee became embroiled in a quarrel with his neighbour of Kotah, and made no attempt to cross my boundary; whilst the Mahrattas were detained in the north of Hindostan under apprehensions of invasion, and when Zamaun Shaw's advance was stopped by an insurrection in his own dominion, fresh disputes broke out between Scindia and Luckwa Dada, who went into rebellion again. Whereupon Umbajee was once more appointed Viceroy of Hindostan and Malwa, and took the field against his old rival, and for many months the two were engaged in opposing each other in Bundelcund, where matters became so critical

that all Scindia's troops were withdrawn from the districts adjoining Meywar and hurried up to the north.

And so, by an uncommon series of fortuitous events, I was left free to establish myself in my little country, without let or hindrance, and I made the most of the golden year of peace that I enjoyed. So that, in the emblematic language of the land used to describe a state of prosperity, the lotus showed its face on the waters.

But the waters were not to be always smooth, and first of all I fell out with the Rajah of Boondee, who having adjusted matters with his enemy of Kotah, turned hungry eyes on my territory. Between his country and mine there lay a narrow strip of lilly ground, with a few impoverished villages and mango groves, to which we both laid claim. He now made a descent upon it, but failing to collect any revenue, drove off the cattle of the wretched inhabitants, who at once appealed to me for protection. I sent a company of infantry to guard the place, and instructed the officer in command, an uncommonly able fellow, to retaliate on the Boondee villages across the frontier whenever an opportunity arose, and capture sufficient cattle to compensate my peasantry for their losses. This he presently did, and in a small skirmish that ensued gave the Rajah's troops a handsome thrashing. For some little time after this I was prepared for an outbreak of hostilities and strengthened the force; but matters seemed gradually to settle down of their own accord, and everything being reported quiet, I presently withdrew my detachment to headquarters.

A short time after this I was called to the northernmost point of my country to punish the Mountain Lion of Amergurh, who was stirring up evil there. Whilst encamped before a certain castle, an express *harcarra* arrived to inform me that the Boondee Rajah had suddenly crossed the boundary at the head of his army, occupied the disputed tract of land, and was levying contributions on several of my most prosperous villages.

This news reached me at three o'clock one afternoon, and the man who brought it had ridden forty miles in five hours. As Bishen Sing had only pitched his camp that morning, I felt certain that he would remain in the same place till the next, and knowing the value of prompt and energetic action, determined to surprise him and give him a scare he would not forget for many a long day. He knew where I was, and that I could not, under ordinary circumstances, get back to oppose him under a couple of days, and it was doubtless this fancied immunity from immediate attack that gave him confidence to cross the boundary. But the present I held to be an extraordinary occasion, being the first on which a foreign invader had put foot in my country, and I was resolved to make an extraordinary effort to meet it.

So I immediately gave the word for the troops to fall in under arms, and within an hour we were well on our way, covering the ground at a swinging march, the men in high order, being both eager and excited at the prospect of a fight. Such was their ardour and spirit, that, with only two short halts, they covered

the entire distance of forty miles in thirteen hours, reaching Bishen Sing's camp just before daybreak, the most favourable moment to attack a Rajpoot enemy, since their chiefs are then certain to be sleeping off the effects of their nightly opium debauch.

Forming my force into three columns, I attacked the camp simultaneously from as many different points; but the unfortunate accidental discharge of a musquet gave the alarm before we came to close quarters, and prevented a total surprise. I was exceedingly anxious to capture the Rajah, and placing myself at the head of my squadron of cavalry, attempted to force my way into the centre of the encampment to surround his tent. But in the dark our horses stumbled and bungled over the tent ropes, and, many of them falling, the troop was thrown into confusion, which allowed the Rajah time to effect his escape, but (as I was afterwards informed) in the clothes he slept in and bareheaded. His whole army—panic-struck at being hemmed in, as they imagined—abandoned their arms and baggage and followed their Prince's example, leaving us complete masters of the camp.

My troops were too fatigued to attempt any pursuit, and when the sun rose and all danger of a rally was over, I permitted them to disperse for plunder, reserving to myself the Rajah's *Deoree* or court tents, which I had been the first to enter, and claimed by right of priority of capture. Herein I found a great store of glorious plunder in clothes, jewellery, trinkets, silks, kincobs or gold embroidery, instruments of music, and arms, together with several

golden idols, the whole amounting in value to above one *lack* of rupees.

Having selected a handsome turban and sword of state, I despatched them to the Rana of Odeypoor with a letter of compliment, and for this honourable mission deputed Colonel Surwar Sing. He was received at Bheem Sing's capital with the greatest pomp and consideration at a grand durbar held for the purpose. The Rana's gratification passed all bounds, and he loaded my envoy with favours and many valuable presents, including a fine embroidered palankeen and an *aurenee* or umbrella of state, and entrusted him with a *khelat* for me consisting of a gold-handled sword, several costly shawls, a pair of jewelled bracelets, and a fine-paced horse of the Kattywar breed, marked with the true cross on its back like a donkey.

As for the Boondee Rajah and his discomfited army, they never ceased their flight till they were safe back again in their own capital in the hills, where he was attacked with a raging distemper—the result of shame and mortification. And when, a little later, he heard that his sword and turban had been sent to the Rana of Odeypoor and subjected to public scorn and derision in his enemy's capital, he ordered the immediate execution of his chief astrologer, who had predicted victory for him when he left Boondee on that fatal expedition, and then shut himself up in his *zenauna*, shaved his face as a sign of mourning, and never appeared in public for three months.

My signal defeat of Bishen Sing put the crowning

touch to my position at Mundalpurh, and thereafter the population was not only satisfied I could rule them, but that I could protect them as well. Confidence in my government was completely established, the revenues were punctually paid, commerce improved, agriculture was extended, the general prosperity increased, merchants were attracted from far and wide, and the country began to acquire an extraordinary reputation for peace, security, and just government.

And then, in the midst of all this, there happened an extraordinary thing—one of those sudden and eccentric freaks of politics characteristic of Oriental potentates. The Rana of Odeypoor, seeing how I prospered, repented him of the bargain he had made with me, and put forward a demand for an increased tribute. I replied that a bargain was a bargain in my country, and must be so in his, and since my success was the result of my own exertions, and due to no assistance from him, I must decline to accede to his request.

Whereupon, with the infatuation of his opium-soddened brain, what must Bheem Sing determine to do but try and resume possession of my district by force of arms. But first he sent an ultimatum ordering me in insolent tones to surrender it. This was language I was not used to and could not entertain, and I answered him as insolently to come and take it. Whereupon he despatched his army against Mundalpurh, with orders to capture it and conduct me to his presence. So his vagabond cavalry came filing through the Chittore Pass, to a great banging of *nagaras* or war drums, and braying

of *tooteries* or horns, and flaunting of banners, and other signs of warlike intention. I permitted them to approach within a few miles of my capital, when their general sent forward to summon me to yield up my *jeйдаad* to his lord and master. I told him he should receive my reply by sunrise the next morning—at which hour he had it in the shape of a round of grape from my guns. The deluded man had actually persuaded himself it was my intention to surrender, and made no disposition whatever to fight. A few discharges from my artillery, followed by the resolute sally of my Telingas, decided him to carry my reply back to the Rana, my little squadron of cavalry accelerating his despatch. It was the most ridiculous battle I was ever engaged in, for the enemy never showed the semblance of a fight, but only a mighty desire to get back to their master with news of my uncivil treatment of them.

And now what should Bheem Sing do but despatch a plenipotentiary to me with many noble gifts and prodigious compliments, to explain that the recent attack had been all a mistake and carried out entirely against his orders and wishes. In proof whereof, he sent his Prime Minister and *buxy*, or Commander-in-chief, with chains about their necks, for me to do with as I listed. And, sure enough, there were the poor wretches, loaded with irons, and shivering under apprehension of immediate execution.

I ordered them to stand aside while I questioned the Rana's ambassador as to the ulterior object of his mission. After some hesitation, he confessed that Bheem Sing desired to assure me he was

perfectly contented with the original *sunnud*, and confirmed it in every particular. And as it was now nearly the season for the next instalment of my tribute to be paid, he hoped I would send it back as a sign that peace and amity continued between us.

I rose from my cushion of state, and standing up in my great hall of audience, called for my sword. Whereupon the Prime Minister and Commander-in-chief fell on their marrow-bones, and with many piteous groans and supplications besought me to spare their lives, protesting, in the extremity of their distress, that they had only acted as their master himself directed, and he was now basely sacrificing his faithful and obedient servants to protect himself.

"That I know," I said; "it needs not your declaration to convince me. Bheem Sing is a cowardly and a cruel prince, with whom no Feringee can hold communion. I have fought his battles and avenged him on his enemies. I have protected his frontiers and paid him the agreed-on tribute to the uttermost dam. And this is his return!"

Then I took the sword, and drawing it from its sheath, bent the scabbard across my knee to render it useless, and cast it aside. But the naked blade I flung at the feet of Rana Bheem Sing's ambassador, the point towards him.

"That, and that only," I cried, "is the tribute I will pay your master. Return and tell him I have renounced my allegiance, and am no longer vassal of his. From this hour forth, I proclaim myself independent ruler of these territories. In token,

this town of Mundalgurh shall be henceforth known as the city of Sooleeman the Feringee. And all the lands from the Bunas in the west to Boondee in the east, from the confines of Jyenuggur in the north to the dominion of the Mahrattas in the south, shall be called the country of Sooleemanpoor. Whereof I, Sooleeman Sahib, am this day and henceforward Lord and King !”

CHAPTER XVI.

LORD OF MY OWN.

CONCEIVE me now the Rajah Sooleeman of Soolemanpoor, which was the designation my subjects bestowed on me after my proclamation of independence, and thereby recognised my right to the title of king. For if the powers of life and death, of making laws and issuing edicts, of raising taxes and levying troops, of awarding honours and pardoning crimes, of waging war and decreeing peace—if these are regal attributes and evidence of sovereign rank and authority, these I wielded, and was indeed become, in plain English, King Selwyn of Selwyn's Land.

I must confess I was at first surprised at my own temerity in usurping the government of Mundalгурh, or Sooleemanpoor, as I must henceforth call it; and more so at the ease with which all was effected. I had simply said "I will be King," and I was King! My people rejoiced, for, there being no tribute to pay, I straightway remitted a portion of their taxes. But beyond a certain elated fluttering constantly present in my breast, there was little apparent change in the order or manner of my life. Perhaps I held my head a trifle higher as I rode through my capital and received the salutations of my subjects! Peradventure I issued my commands in a tone of prouder authority, or bestowed my favours with an extra touch of condescension. But if I did, it was only in human

nature; and the man who has raised himself from the condition of a subject to that of a sovereign may be excused the exercise of a little vanity and pardoned the parade of a little pomp. Indeed, in my case it was politic to live up to my new rank, and show my people, who were ever much guided by outward appearances, that I, their Rajah, was no effete potentate, but a free and independent chief, owning allegiance to no man, conscious and proud of my dignity, able and determined to maintain it, and, in short, Lord of my Own.

And, while I am dwelling on these personal matters, I take occasion to mention that I had long since adopted the dress of the country, there being no tailors at Sooleemanpoor equal to the business of fitting me with clothes of European shape, nor any hatter to furnish me with the head-covering in fashion with my fellow-countrymen. And so I garbed myself in such wise as I found convenient and comfortable, and perchance comely: to wit, a *cabay* or coat of russet green, bound about the waist with a red *cummerband* or winding girdle, a pair of Mogul breeches or long drawers, very loose and cool, a turban on my head of scarlet silk adorned with gold *kincobs*, and embroidered shoes for my feet, their toes turned up, the whole costume very fine and imposing. I suffered, too, the hair to grow on my upper lip, and twisted up the ends as I saw the young Rajpoot bloods do. But, lest it should be thought vanity has led me into this description of my person, I must observe that the fact of my wearing the country dress, and permitting my moustachios to

grow, coupled with the singular corruption of my name into Sooleeman (which was one common enough among the Moors), led many to suppose that I was a Moorish and not an English adventurer, and had its effect on my fortunes, as will be seen hereafter.

Bheem Sing, after my rebellion, made three or four ineffectual efforts to regain his authority, but he was such a weak, spiritless ruler, and so incapable of infusing courage into his followers, that he achieved nothing of importance. From time to time his cavalry descended from the Chittore Pass and made a half-hearted raid through the southern part of my territory, to sweep off a few cattle; or one of his Oomrahs, more daring than the rest, crossed the Bunas river and endeavoured to exact revenue from my peasantry settled on its banks—but always to be driven back again, sometimes by the inhabitants themselves, who had no mind to pay taxes to two masters, or else by my own troops, if ever those of Odeypoor waited for them to come up. An invasion in force was never attempted, and after half-a-dozen meetings and as many acts of reprisal, these incursions ceased, and so far as the Rana was concerned I was left in undisturbed possession of the district I had taken from him.

Freed from continual disquiet and devastation (notwithstanding the terrible famine of the year 1802), Sooleemanpoor, blessed now with a firm and stable government, prospered and throve amazingly. I sought to deal justly with those I ruled, always giving ear to their complaints, and where they were well founded removing the cause. I contented

myself with a moderate revenue, or at least one that was reckoned moderate when judged by the standard of native governments, and so long as it was punctually rendered never increased taxation because my people prospered. I paid my troops liberally, but never relaxed discipline, taking particular care they did not oppress the peasantry, as was the universal custom in the neighbouring states. I established courts of justice for civil and criminal proceedings, and for chief *Cauzy*, or Judge, appointed my old friend and physician Abdoolah, who was hugely delighted to accept the office when I sent him the offer of it to Kalacote. He was a man not only skilled in medicine but learned in the law, both Moorish and Gentoo, and, as I believe, very honest and upright, so that, although called upon to administer justice to people not of his own faith, I never received a complaint against him. I erected a jail for the incarceration of evil-doers and a gallows to hang them on, and made criminals labour for the public weal, instead of punishing them by cutting off their hands, or ears, or noses for simple offences, as was the system before, or in more heinous cases blowing them up by rockets or flaying and sun-roasting them, or crushing their heads with tent mallets. I assured every man the usufruct of his land and the profit of his own labours so long as he conducted himself as a good citizen. Property was protected, and I allowed no raids or lawless acts to go unpunished, and when the guilty parties were discovered compelled them to make full restitution to all who had suffered at their hands. Simple as

these measures were, they proved entirely new in this barbarous and uncivilised country, where, until my coming, every man's hand had been lifted against his neighbour to rob or slay.

It was astonishing how the fame of Sooleemampoor was noised abroad, and the numbers of settlers it attracted from the neighbouring states who desired to enjoy under my rule immunity from oppression. Large tracts of waste land were taken up and brought under cultivation, and my capital became an emporium of commerce, where bills of exchange might be obtained on most of the chief cities of Hindostan and the Deccan, and whither the traders of Joudpoor and Jyenuggur resorted, bringing their products to barter for the commodities my merchants imported, many of them foreign goods from the seaboard to the south-west.

Of course, with such an influx of population and trade, my revenues grew greater and greater, and this without any additional burden laid upon the population: until presently there was a handsome surplus of incomings over my expenses, and I began to put away savings in my treasury and account myself a rich man.

My heart was so much in my work and my time so taken up with the toils and duties of government, that I minded not my almost complete isolation from the outer world, the affairs of which seldom engaged my attention. From time to time tidings reached me of what was going on at Deylee, where General Perron was become a King of Prussia for power. But that which interested me most of all the news I

heard were the strange and marvellous accounts concerning General George Thomas, now engaged in fighting his neighbours the Seiks, a singular nation who inhabited a country called the Penjab, or Land of the Five Rivers, lying between the Mogul Empire and the dominion of Zamaun Shaw, the King of Caubul. An extravagant love of fame was General Thomas's ruling passion and the chief end of all his pursuits. Descriptions of his extraordinary and wild exploits found their way to every corner of Hindostan, and the tales of his dauntless daring and surprising enterprise gathered volume as they passed from mouth to mouth, until his feats resembled the legendary adventures of the heroes of a mythical age. But, without giving credit to what was unreasonable or unnatural, I was able, having seen him, to believe the truth of many of his wonderful deeds related, being persuaded he was one of those men born to great achievements. It often pleased me to fancy that he might crown his career with a decisive victory over General Perron's arms on the blood-stained plains of Pawnypoot, and add a fourth great lustre to that brilliant scene of conquest. It was indeed once (as I have since learnt from Major Ferdinand Smith's elegant book) in his power to do so, for he defeated the Frenchman's troops in a bloody and violent battle not fifty miles distant from that historic spot; but, in the moment when he should have been greatest, he fell from his high estate into the lowest depths of self-abandonment, a victim to a vulgar intemperance, and by his lamentable folly lost that claim which he might assuredly

have established of ranking amongst the notable conquerors of Hindostan.

I must not omit to mention poor Hervey's sad fate, of which I heard within a year of my taking over the government of Mundalghurh. After many months of fruitless seeking after employment, he was necessitated by his misfortunes to enter Umbajee's service again. Not as a commander of his own brigade this time, but only as a battalion officer under an adventurer named Shepherd—a gallant, industrious man, plain and honest I believe, but wholly without parts or breeding. How mortifying this must have been to poor Hervey I was often pained to consider, although he did not suffer the humiliation long. But it set me thinking of what he had told me that day we met by the windmill at Bombay, when he protested that a gentleman of education and address should certainly succeed much better than one without these advantages. It was on this very point that he was wrecked; for he lacked those vulgar qualities which were requisite in dealing with the Mahrattas, being too prejudiced in his conduct and too scrupulous in his code of honour to have any fair chance with them. And so he failed, and fell into evil days, his heart broken with all his troubles and disappointments. When hostilities were resumed between Luckwa Dada and Umbajee, he met a soldier's death, being shot through the heart at the storm of Sounda in Bundelcund. And so perished in the blossom of his youth one of the finest and most gallant adventurers that ever sought service under the native powers in Hindostan. I lost in him a friend I loved, admired

and esteemed for his many frank and amiable qualities, and I mourn his untimely death to this day.

The mention of poor Hervey's fate brings me to speak about Major Tone, to whom I despatched several *harcarras* in the hope that he might have received a letter from my cousin Mercy. Once I heard from him and was disappointed to learn that nothing had come to his care. After that he lost his employ, and none of the messengers I subsequently sent could find him. He was engaged in the defence of Sounda, being then in command of a small party of two hundred seapoys, and it was actually in storming the position he defended that poor Hervey was shot—a truly pathetic fatality, for the two were amazing dear friends at Poonah. Tone himself was killed not long after, whilst leading on his men to the attack of a place called Maheshwur; but long before this I had given up all hope of receiving through him any letter from my cousin Mercy, being satisfied that if such had ever reached him he would have found means to send it to me.

I was, indeed, by this time fully persuaded she had no intention of answering my letter, nor did I wonder at it. For how could I expect her to write to one who was accounted a murderer? And so I endeavoured to steel my heart to all memory of home and realise that with the loss of my poor mother's Testament I had broken the last link that connected me with Fyeways. But it cost me many a pang to do so. For, amidst all my present material prosperity, with its joys of victory, its kingly power and its increasing wealth there was ever a something wanting that

nothing could compensate for. I might be a Free Lance, lording it in a far land, but in that far land I felt myself foredoomed to die an exile from my own. Between me and England there flowed not only ten thousand miles of sea—that indeed could be crossed—but a narrow streak of blood which might never be bridged. And whenever in an absent or weak moment I allowed my mind to wander to that little Gloucestershire village and the fond familiar scenes of my childhood—the woods and dales and hills and meads round Fyveways Hall—lo! in front of my mental landscape there ever arose the pallid phantom of the murdered priest, warning me, with lifted hand, away from the home of my fathers!

END OF THE SECOND BOOK.

The Third Book.



FORTUNE FOUND.

*OF THE ATONEMENT OF JOHN JAGO AND THE
RESTITUTION OF FATHER CLIFFORD.*

CHAPTER XVII.

WHITE DEVIL.

I MUST now pass over a considerable period and bring my story to the spring of the year 1803, by which time I had been two and a half years King of Sooleemanpoor. Everything had gone well with me, except that my prosperity raised me up many enemies, and subjected me to hostile predatory attacks, which oftentimes necessitated me to sally out and repel the raids of robber tribes, such as Meenas and Gosaeens, the whom I have described, and a certain very devilish people, called Pindarries, followers of the Mahratta chief Holker, who came and went like a whirlwind, scattering everything in their way, and sweeping off all that could be lifted on to their saddle-bows or driven in front of them.

But of all my foes the most bitter and relentless was the Rajah Bishen Sing of Boondee, who was for ever vowing vengeance against me for the disgrace I had inflicted on him. Only he dared not to risk a face to face encounter, having a most uncommon dread of the fighting qualities of my Campoo, against which his ill-conditioned rabble had no stomach to match themselves. But when my government began to attract great numbers of his subjects to settle in Sooleemanpoor, he bestirred himself to discover a way of stopping that which deprived him of both

population and taxes, and if possible of ridding himself of a neighbour he feared and hated.

Although there had long been an embargo laid on the commerce between my country and Boondee, and all inter-communication strictly prohibited by Bishen Sing, I employed a secret agent in his capital, who kept me informed of what was going on. From whom one day I learnt that the Rajah had engaged a European to raise and drill a Campoo of infantry, and soon this was followed by reports of a most incredible character about this individual.

In the first place the name the natives had given him was *Feringee Shaitaun*, or White Devil, which in itself betokened a man of ardent and terrible temperament. Then he was said to have a face flaming with fire like the goddess Calee, so that the livers of those that looked on it were burnt and shrivelled up. He possessed, however, the very mundane fault of never being sober, and this perhaps accounted for his drilling his troops with a bamboo whacking-stick in his hand, which he applied to their backs at the slightest fault. But he was well acquainted with his duties, and never shirked them, however drunk, and was fast bringing the raw levies of Boondee into a state of uncommon good discipline, and Bishen Sing holding constant reviews, with a vast firing of guns, musquets and rockets, and abundance of salutes. So that, despite the White Devil's love of liquor and his merciless severity to his men, the Rajah supported him in his authority, believing him to be the mighty man of war he claimed, who had fought on a hundred battlefields in Hindostan, and giving ear to his vaunts

that, as soon as his levies were ready to take the field, he would conquer me, bind me in chains and conduct me captive to Boondee.

So long as I was kept duly informed of what was progressing in Bishen Sing's capital I was satisfied to take such precautions as I thought necessary to safeguard myself against surprise; but when suddenly I ceased to receive my usual reports, and then learnt that my unfortunate agent had been discovered and put to a cruel death, the life being crushed out of him by an elephant, I began to consider it time to take action.

I entertained in my service a band of very able spies, chiefly Bheels belonging to the wild jungle tribes of the mountainous tracts, under a leader named Jummoo—a little wiry man, who always stooped and carried his head low, and was as black as a coal, with a hide that could resist the thorns of the forest (through which he went naked) and the smallest snake-like eyes that saw everything, though you might never tell in which direction he was looking. He was an exceedingly cunning and clever spy, and had rendered me signal service on many occasions, especially in scouting and bringing warning of intended incursions of the Pindarries.

Jummoo had a most bestial passion for strong liquors, and it was chiefly to gratify the same that he took service with me, for his nature was to love idleness and do no work but hunting in the jungles. I paid him well, and when his information was good, above the common, gave him a bottle of arrack and a holiday to drink it off. Then he would disappear for

a couple of days, and return looking as miserable and mournful as if he had just been evicted from Heaven, which, in metaphor, it might be said he had been, for these occasions constituted a heaven upon earth for him.

I sent for this man now, and began by asking him if he would like a couple of bottles of arrack.

The pupils of his little yellow eyeballs glistened with excitement, and he joined his hands together in an attitude of supplication: "Yes! yes! Protector of this pig! For behold it is the very spirit of life. It makes this dog of a dog feel young again and want to marry more wives."

"Three fine wives thou shalt have, oh Jummoo, young and plump as quails at harvest time, with arrack in plenty to make you young again if you serve me well."

"Oh, Eater of mountains and Swallower of rivers, speak! Jummoo is his Rajah's unclean beast and will obey."

Whereupon I explained to him that I wished to find out what was transpiring at Boondee, and particularly whether the *Feringee Shaitain* and his Campoo were preparing for war. Jummoo, squatting on his haunches, listened very attentively to all I said, and then, touching my feet with his fingers and carrying them to his forehead, promised to bring me the information I required within a week.

He was as good as his word, and on the evening of the seventh day limped into the fort and was conducted to my presence.

"What news?" I asked.

"Oh, Cherisher of this outcast! *Árry! árry!* This pig has been cruelly kicked," he replied with a groan, as he showed me proof of it on his thighs.

"Tell me your woes. Whatsoever you have suffered in my service you shall be liberally compensated for."

Whereupon he related his adventures as follows:—

Having made his way to Boondee, he found the *Feringee Shaitaun's* Campoo had marched on the previous day to the south. So he followed and came up with it near a town called Phulkee, about thirty miles distant. The Feringee being very drunk, and drinking the blood of every one who came near him, Jummoo had no desire to approach, but made his way to a *warry* or hamlet of his tribe, which was near at hand, and, borrowing a net, went a-fishing and caught a fine string. The next day he took his fish to the *Feringee's* camp, as if to sell; and just as he got there an express *Hoontwallah* arrived with a letter for the Sahib. Jummoo at once addressed himself to the runner, and ingratiating himself by the gift of a fine fish, learnt he had come with despatches of urgent importance from a great General Sahib who was in command of a brigade of troops at Oojein.

A few minutes later the *Feringee Shaitaun* came out of the tent and sent for his vakeel to read the letter to him. Jummoo took the opportunity of approaching with his fish, and the Sahib, selecting the best, ordered them to be cooked for his dinner, and then withdrew into his tent again, while the spy sat down and waited. About an hour later the vakeel was dismissed, and Jummoo, watching his chance, put on an oafish look, and entered the tent. Bowing his

head to the ground, he crawled up to the Sahib and asked for *buxees*, or a reward for the fish. The *Feringee* was by this time very drunk, lolling in a chair by the table, with a letter in one hand and a glass of brandy in the other. Observing Jummoo, he tossed the letter carelessly upon the table, and came staggering towards him, crying out:

“Dog of a Bheel! what do you want?”

“Oh my father and my mother!” answered Jummoo, his tongue becoming parched and glued to his palate. “You have deigned to accept my fish. May your Mightiness grow fat on it! But bestow upon your useless lizard a little *buxees* to encourage him to persevere in his fishing.”

“That I surely will,” roared the *Feringee Shaitawn* in a voice like a *musth* elephant. “Bamboo *buxees*, you black hind leg of a bandicoot!” and therewith—*árry! árry!*—caught him a cuff on the head, and set to work kicking him. Jummoo at once pretended to fall, but in a way which caused the *Feringee* to stumble over him and measure his length on the ground, and in the twinkling of an eye the spy had leapt to his feet, seized the letter from the table without being observed, and slipped out of the back of the tent, and, thanks to his tutelary idol, made good his escape.

“And the letter, Jummoo?” I asked eagerly.

“Here it is, my lord,” he answered jubilantly and proudly, as he untied a knot in the corner of his dirty loincloth and produced it.

It was a *kareeta*, or official despatch, written in Persian, enclosed in a crimson silk bag, and fastened

with a golden cord sealed with scarlet wax. I saw at once it was a document of importance.

“You have done well, Jummo,” I said. “Your belly shall rumble with delight. But for the present withdraw and wait outside ready to obey my summons if I have further need of you.”

Then I sat down to decipher the letter. It had evidently been both composed and written by a Moorish scribe, although at its foot it bore a scrawling signature in the Roman character.

Freely Englished, it read as follows :—

In the name of the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate !

To the Distinguished and Exalted in Rank, the Colonel Sahib Behaudur Mars, Valiant in War, Commander in Chief of the Campoo of His Highness the Rajah of Boondee.

Salutation.

The Fame of your urbanity ; your observance of faith and sincerity ; and your regard for the attachment of faithful friends (which is a laudable practice) have reached the ears of that veritable Roostum in valour the General Sahib Behaudur Jaun Tyger, Commander of Ten Thousand, in the service of His Highness, the World-Illuminating-Sun the Maharajah Dowlut Rao Scindia. May his regard be perpetual and Paradise his portion ! Ameen.

Concerning those matters whereof this friendly pen has already informed you, namely, of the Alliance entered into by His Highness the heaven born, the Rana of Odeypoor, and His Highness the

surprisingly excellent, the Rajah of Boondee, and that Kibleh of prosperity, His Highness the Maharajah Dowlut Rao Scindia, to expel the utterly shameless impostor, wrongfully styling himself the Rajah Sooleeman (may his shadow shrink and vanish!) from the territory of Mundalgurh, wherein, upon the insurrection of some disaffected persons, he has dared to raise a rebellion and usurp the government:

Knowing then that I am about to march to the country of Mundalgurh, with horse, foot, and artillery, in number as the leaves of the tamarind tree, to give battle to this impostor (may his face be blackened and his beard burnt!) and drive him to Jehannum.

Wherefore I request you to meet me on the day of the full moon at the town of Phulkee, which is in your Rajah's territory, with all the troops that you can muster.

To-morrow I leave the city of Oojein, and in ten days shall arrive at Phulkee. I count upon your presence there. To urge more would be an impertinence.

Written at Oojein, in the year of the Higerá of the Prophet (the peace of the Most High God be upon him!) 1218, on the fourth day of the month Mohurrum.

JOHN TYGER,
General of Brigade.

Eureka! The *Feringee Shaitaun* was none other than Sergeant-Major Mars! As I discovered this I abused my own stupidity at not having guessed it before. But who was this General John Tyger? Puzzling over his name (and it somehow seemed

familiar to me), I suddenly recollected how Mars had once told me of a certain Lieutenant Fireworker Tyger, of General Baptist's Brigade, under whom he had fought at the Battle of Kurdlah. This was probably the same man, and, if so, it accounted for the unhallowed alliance of these two illiterate renegades, who were necessitated to conduct their correspondence through the medium of a Moorish munshi.

And this Mars was the base thief that had stolen my mother's Testament! As I remembered it, I rejoiced exceedingly at the idea of punishing him. For, unless I strangely misjudged his valour and ability, this man of wind was now delivered into my hand, seeing there was ample time to reach and defeat him before he was joined by General Tyger. Every consideration of politics, as well as personal inclination, prompted me to attack him, and make the utmost of the opportunity afforded me of fighting my enemies in detail.

I sent for Colonel Surwar Sing and gave him my orders. One battalion and half the guns were to remain behind to garrison Sooleemanpoor, and the other two battalions, with all the cavalry and the remainder of the guns, dragged by double teams of cattle, to accompany me, with the spy Jummoo as our guide.

We began our march at midday, my troops in the highest spirits at the prospect of another brush with their enemy of Boondee. I rode in their van with Surwar Sing, whilst Jummoo trotted along at my side, his head bent low, his little eyes roving the country, in his hand a spear, and on his back a bow and sheaf

of arrows. Late that evening we encamped near a village built on the banks of a large tank, and pushing on again the following morning, arrived about noon within two miles of where Mars was encamped, our approach being covered by a belt of thickly wooded country.

Here I ordered a halt and gave my men an hour's rest, whilst I rode forward with Jummoo to reconnoitre. He led me to a spot where I was able to get a complete view of the Boondee camp, and having acquainted myself with the nature of the ground surrounding it, and decided on my plan of attack, I returned to where my troops were halted.

But on the way I took occasion to warn Jummoo I should require him to keep close to me, and, when the time came, point out the whereabouts of the *Feringee Shaitaun*. "For," said I, "you have quick sight, and must take care he does not escape in the confusion."

"Does my lord wish him killed?" asked Jummoo eagerly, his little snake-like eyes gleaming evilly, and his hand fumbling at the bruise where Mars had kicked him.

"On no account. I wish him captured alive, if you can help do it."

"If," echoed Jummoo, with the first look of contempt I had ever seen in his debased face. "Oh Rajah of this rat! I have snared the tiger in my nets, and brought down the stag of the jungles with my arrow. I have outwitted the lynx of the plains, and speared the wild elk that never shows its face to man. And shall a *Feringee Shaitaun*, with boots on

his feet and as fat as a Brahminy bull, escape me? *Árry! úrry!* He can only do so if I linger by my lord's side. Suffer this sole of your shoe to pursue him in his own fashion, and he shall be taken."

"So be it," I said; "go your own way, but see he escapes not."

"Let my throat answer," replied Junmoo, as he bent low and slipped into the jungle, looking for all the world like some uncouth beast of the forest as he glided away.

Forming my troops into two columns, I led them through the wooded land, and drew them up in a line of battle on the other side, and then advanced into the open in full view of the Boondee camp. It was instantly a scene of direst panic and confusion. My guns opened fire, and as shot and shell tore into their encampment, ricochetting, and cutting arbitrary avenues through the lines of tents, I saw the enemy hurrying hither and thither in wildest alarm, and devoid of all discipline or control. A few feeble shots were returned from their cannon, but as the smoke drifted away it discovered their cavalry in full flight, and their infantry following after.

In ten minutes we were in the midst of the camp, where the scene of consternation was complete. The soldiery were streaming off in a great struggling mass, abandoning their guns and baggage in their flight. There was no one to direct them or issue orders, and when my men came up with their rear they threw down their arms and begged for quarter.

As soon as I was assured the day was won, I made my way to a large tent in the centre of the camp,

which I judged to belong to Mars. At its door I met Jummo, grinning from ear to ear.

"Where is the *Feringee Shaitawn*?" I asked.

"Within, my lord." Then he led the way, calling out like a *chobdar*, "Make way for the Eater of mountains and the Swallower of rivers!"

I entered, but could see no signs of anyone, till Jummo pointed to a great heap in the corner that looked like a bundle of bedclothes, only that there now began to issue from it the most heartrending groans of "*Ram! Ram!*" and "*Bobbery Bob!*"

"I hid him here," explained Jummo, "fearing he might be killed if my lord's war tigers came upon him."

The spy dived into the heap, and there was a great scuffle, like of a sheep being fetched up for shearing, and then he dragged out Mars by one leg. The fellow bellowed and roared as he lay on the ground, but made no attempt to run.

"And so, you rogue," I cried, "I have got you in my power at last, you wisest and greatest of the generals of Boondee!"

At the sound of my voice he stopped his clamour instantly, and opening his eyes wide looked at me in great astonishment. Then he burst out:

"Goramighty, Mr. Selwyn. Dear sir, is that you? Glory be, for you're a Christian gentleman as I've been proud to serve under. And this heathen Moor is a murdering of me, and I claims your protection. Mr. Selwyn, dear sir, I'm a dead man. *Bobbery Bob! Bobbery Bob!* There's four feet of rusty steel and a knobby bamboo skewered through my witals, and, by

my soul and salvation, seven poor widows at Boondee will be weeping afore set of sun."

"Where are you wounded?" I asked.

"Goramercy, Mr. Selwyn, dear sir, it ain't where am I wounded, but where aren't I wounded. I feel stinging and flayed all over, dear sir. And as for legs, blood and 'ounds, I'm clean flounded!"

I stooped and examined him, but his trunk discovered no visible hurt. "You're dreaming you're wounded," I said contemptuously, thinking it was as like as not to be the case."

"Dreaming, dear sir?" There's no such horrible dreaming as this. I'd as lief be dead. It's me lower limbs, dear sir, as that murdering savage what's done it knows!"

I turned him over and found he was speaking the truth. For Jummo had hamstrung him. The wound was painful, but only fleshy.

"You'll live long enough to be hung, thank God," I observed.

"Hung, Mr. Selwyn, dear sir?" he gasped, his teeth chattering with terror, and his eyes starting out of his face, which had turned purple at the threat. "Me hung, Mr. Selwyn? Goramighty, dear sir, but I'd have you know I'm a Christian, and a Colonel, and a prisoner of war. And you've no jurisdiction for to do that."

"Jurisdiction is a long word, and hanging a short process," I answered grimly. "The last time I saw you, you deserted in the face of the enemy, and the punishment for that is death."

"My God! Mr. Selwyn, dear sir, have mercy on

me," he wept. "On'y consider my poor widows. Would you cut off one what wins bread for seven? I claim your clemency as a Christian and a fellow-countryman."

"And then, you low, despicable wretch," I went on, "you looted Colonel Hervey's quarters and mine, when I was lying at Kalakote insensible from my wounds."

"Dear sir, I thought as you was dead; and that's the Gospel truth; or flogging to me if I'd ha' touched a single thing!"

"But you did; and now you shall suffer for it."

"Dear sir—dear sir, I'll make restitootion! S'help me, I've got every blessed thing as I took. In this tent—in this very tent, here! See now, I'll make 'em back to you at once, according to muster!"

Hearing this, which I had never expected, I could not restrain my agitation. Was the man speaking the truth? My heart beat quickly, and I felt my face pale as I asked him the next question.

"Everything? Mind what you are saying. There was a document—a document of the utmost value—in a green silk bag."

"I've got it, dear sir—God be glorified!—I've got it safe and sound!" he shouted eagerly, as he guessed the importance I attached to its recovery. "I never destroyed nothing, least of all that! I can't read, and I don't know what it is; but your servant said it was a charm, and so I kep' it safe for you, dear sir, truly intending to return it if ever I saw you again!"

It was a prodigious lie; but I heeded not that.

"Where is it?" I demanded. "If it's not in my

hand under a minute, I'll turn you off from the ridge pole above you."

He pointed to a box that was stowed away under his bed, and gave me the key to open it.

"On'y look, dear sir, and you'll see Mars ain't a man to lie!"

The chest was filled with valuables—silks and shawls, *kincocks* and embroidered petticoats, female *pyjamas*, and women's gear of all kinds. I turned them out on the floor, and at the bottom came upon a small iron-bound box or casket.

"'Tis in that, dear sir," groaned Mars, in sore anguish at what was coming.

As I lifted the cover my eyes fell upon an extraordinary profusion of gold and silver jewellery—*bajoo bund* or bangles, toe-rings, *nuths* or nose-rings, finger-rings, *toolsee* or necklaces, *boogria* or ear-pendants, anklets, hair ornaments and the like, with several large loose pearls, which I tossed one after another on to the floor.

"It is not here," I exclaimed angrily. "Whereby God help you!"

"Down at the bottom, dear sir! By the Holy Cow! *Such bola! such bola!*" he yelled, in a terrible fright. "Under the paper at the bottom, dear sir! On'y look; I put it there with these hands!"

He spoke the truth, for the bottom of the casket was lined with a sheet of country paper, and under it, lying snug and flat, the little green silk bag I remembered so well.

I drew it out with eager, trembling hands and examined its contents. They were all safe and intact.

Then in my joy and thankfulness I put it to my lips and kissed it.

"Go!" said I briefly to Mars, for I felt I could not punish him, holding what I did in my hand.

"Oh, dear sir!" said he, "my little bit o' property! You'll give me a safe escort for that, and send it along wi' me to Oojein, dear sir?"

"Not a cownie of it. It is all the spoil of war, as you can see." I tossed the gold and silver ornaments and kicked the women's apparel towards Jummoo. "That is your reward, Jummoo," I said; "and as for the rest of the things, I will appoint a prize agent to distribute them."

Whereupon Mars began making a prodigious outcry, screeching and blubbering like a man demented, and swearing I was depriving him of the entire savings of his service, and he was ruined.

"For, to be certain, Mr. Selwyn, dear sir," he protested, "I never had no intention for to fight against you. I went to Boondee to become a *Lingum*, but the Rajah he made me a General instead. I was only waiting till General Tyger came to make over the command of my Campoo to him. And then I was a-going back to Poonah. I can't a-bear Bloody War, dear sir, never since I served under Major Pinto, what lost his life and a leg in battle by my side." He shuddered, and then added: "I've done with soldiering. I'll be a compradore, that's what I'll be, and sell fish. You wouldn't consider me a enemy after that, you as I served under and fought under in Rajah Umbajee's country."

"That decides me, you coward," I cried. "If you'd

had the pluck to fight me I might have reconsidered of it. But you've settled your own hash by your confession. And now I warn you to make good your retreat while you have the chance and before my patience is overtaxed."

He saw I meant what I said, and made a shift to crawl out of the tent, using his arms like a seal its flappers, and was presently sent back to Boondee by some of his own men whom we had taken prisoners, and whose backs still bore the marks of his whacking-stick. And the last I ever heard or saw of Sergeant-Major Mars, he was slung in a blanket tied to a bamboo and screaming and crying like a child.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FALL OF SOOLEEMANPOOR.

AND now my great catastrophe overtook me. In my dash upon Mars I had relied solely on the information contained in General Tyger's letter, which Jummoo had purloined, and reckoned there were still two days before his brigade could reach Phulkee. But, as it happened, he had hastened his march, and was within ten miles of me when I captured the Boondee camp. The short duration of the firing, and the reports of some of the fugitives who had fled in his direction, convinced General Tyger it was useless trying to rally Mars' Campoo, and so, instead of attacking me, he resorted to much more effective tactics: for he passed me by and swept down upon Sooleemanpoor, thereby cutting me off from my capital and base.

I was apprised of this late in the afternoon by *harcarras* despatched by the headmen of some of my villages, past which General Tyger had marched. The intelligence gave me a rude shock, for I found myself threatened with the very trap I had laid for my enemies—namely, to be taken and cut off in detail—and cursed my blundering folly that had omitted proper soldierly precautions and neglected to acquaint myself of the whereabouts of the foe.

But it was no time for lament or self-jobation. The

mischief was done and had to be mended, and I instantly took counsel with Surwar Sing as to the best course to follow, giving it as my opinion that a bold-spirited conduct was the surest way to retrieve the error. In this he entirely agreed, holding my language to mean an immediate pursuit and attack upon General Tyger, and applauding it loudly.

“But,” said I, after a little reflection, “the men are weary with two days’ marching, fighting, and plundering. Can we get them to move briskly?”

“Can we, my lord?” echoed Surwar Sing with great spirit. “The rascals would march twenty *pucca cos*, if the necessity arose of putting their plunder into a place of safety—aye, and, if needs be, run like *chinkara* all the way. Wherefore shall they not do so now? Are they not in duty bound to succour their brethren in the fort, and my lord’s capital and country? In such a cause every soldier should exert the power of the many-armed Vishnu! This General Tyger has but three or four hours’ start of us; peradventure, if all goes well, we will overtake him before he reaches Sooleemanpoor, and give him battle before he expects it.”

“Then beat the assembly for all ranks to fall in,” I said. “We will at least make the attempt.”

My soldiery were scattered over the Boondee camp, searching for any loot that might have been overlooked in the first snatch, and dividing what they had secured amongst themselves. It required some little tact and persuasion to collect them and get them under arms, and, although they behaved with a very proper spirit, it was plain to see they were

affected by the fatigue and excitement of their recent exertions.

By the time Surwar Sing reported all present I had more fully considered my situation, and reflection convinced me it would be imprudent to risk a battle, and wiser to try and reach my capital and find shelter behind its walls until my men had recruited their strength. To effect this it was above all things important that the battalion in the citadel should make a forward movement to cover the arrival of my jaded followers. But this would be a business of great responsibility and danger, and I feared to entrust it to anyone but Surwar Sing; and this I told him.

"And who else shall do it?" he asked proudly, tugging at his long moustachios and toying restlessly with the handle of his sword, as he accepted my reconsidered decision with the unquestioning obedience of a true soldier. "It is my right. That day I summoned Hervey Sahib to Bickrampoor, when my lord was wounded, I rode a hundred and five miles between the setting of two suns, and shall I fail to cover this mere forty-five between here and our fort? The moon is bright, the road plain, and a short detour will take me in safety past General Tyger's army. Before day breaks I will be in Soolee-manpoor, and town and citadel shall be put in a state of complete defence, and everything ready for my lord."

"Oh, tried and trusty friend," I exclaimed, "it is well said. With such a lieutenant as you, anything and everything can be achieved! General Tyger

will make for the Chittore gate of the city, since he expects assistance from Rana Bheem Sing. I will take a more northerly route, and endeavour to make good my entry by the Boondee gate. When, from the look-out tower of the citadel, you espy me coming, sally forth to form a junction with me over against the village of Toda, three miles to the east, where the rocky ridge rises above the Gunda river. If we must fight to get in, we will at least do so from favourable ground, and none can be better than that."

"Rest satisfied your honour's commands shall be obeyed," he answered. "Great is your prosperity, oh my lord, and your *nusseeb* has ever been favourable. By the great *Suttees*, these dogs of Mahrattas shall be confounded, as when the shadow of the Abdally startles their horses drinking. Their heads shall be covered with dust. They shall ride, face to the tail, on asses, with their foreheads blackened and a festoon of shoes around their necks!"

He bound his shawl, as he was speaking, round his head and under his chin, after the manner of the Gentoos when they travel abroad at night; tightened his girdle; saw to the security of his sword-belt; looked that his saddle was firmly girted on; bent his horse's knees, hocks, and fetlocks back to make them supple; and then, vaulting into his seat, gave me a military salute, and galloped out into the night, which was just beginning to fall.

Then I put myself at the head of my men, and marched to save my capital and government from

the most formidable enemy I had yet contended with.

It was the month of May, and the hot season near its height. The night was warm and close, with not a whisper of breeze abroad. The moon shone with a brilliant splendour, bathing the whole country in a great dazzle, and, as I fancied, diffusing warmth in its beams. My men trudged stoutly along in silence, having need of all their breath to waste any of it in idle talking. Their shuffling feet and those of the cattle dragging the guns churned up foul clouds of thick impalpable dust, that hung in the air like smoke and would not settle, so that we never seemed to be out of its stifling influence. Thrice we crossed small streams, wherein my men bathed their faces and laved their hands and feet, and all drank and were refreshed—myself as eager as any, for I had marched along on foot, deeming the value of the example to greatly outweigh the inconvenience it cost me.

About midnight we crossed a range of hills, which tried us sorely, the road being steep and stony. This caused several men to fall out, and on the further side I halted the force for half an hour to allow stragglers to come up, and addressed a few words of encouragement to them before starting again.

Day broke at length, and its grey light revealed to me the faces of my followers, grimed with dust and perspiration, their features haggard, and their labouring march showing how distressed they were. But, notwithstanding, there was a certain resolution

in their dogged stride and a determination in their firm-set lips which cheered me vastly.

At sunrise the citadel of Sooleemanpoor came into view, with the white stones of my palace shining in the slanting rays; and underneath its castellated ramparts floated a blue mist—the smoke of the city hidden from our view by the intervening rocky ridge.

I drew my sword and pointed towards it. “Onward and courage!” I cried. “See! the smoke goes up from many hearths where food is preparing for you. Two hours more and we shall reach it!”

“Two hours more and we shall reach it!” echoed my weary men, quickening their pace.

But it was not to be. Destiny had already set its seal upon us. Scarce had we proceeded an arrow’s flight than there appeared in front of us a small *pagah* of Mahratta horsemen, out scouting. No sooner had they espied us than they set spurs to their steeds and dashed off to give the alarm. Then I knew we should have to fight our way to gain Sooleemanpoor.

Three miles in front of us rose the ridge of hills by the Gunda river where I had directed Surwar Sing to form a junction with me. The Mahrattas had retired towards it, and I feared the enemy were in force between him and me.

Halting my men, I sent my orderly to climb a tall tree and spy the country in advance of us. He mounted it like an ape, much assisted by his toes, and soon called out to me that there was a great army marching about four miles to our advanced

left, and towards which the Mahratta picket was hastening its way.

Now, as he was speaking, I observed a curious thing: a little gust of wind came and blew out the ends of his turban. Wind at such a season of the year was most unusual in my country, and always betokened a *toofaun* or dust-storm. So I hailed him to observe the horizon, and see if there were any signs of a tempest brewing. Shading his eyes with his hand, he looked towards the east and south, and presently answered that, without a doubt, there was a windy look in the sky.

It is a notorious fact in Hindostan that in the dry season of the year, in all actions and pitched battles, the army that fights from the windward position has an exceeding great advantage; for, the soil being light and easily stirred, its approach, and certainly its numbers, are often entirely hid by the dust it raises: whilst, so soon as the firing begins the smoke drives down and covers the foe, disabling them from taking aim with precision.

The question I now had to decide was, whether to advance and seize possession of the ridge, which must bring on an immediate action, or let the enemy occupy it, and, waiting for the storm to come up, attack them from the windward, with all the advantage it would give me, and either cut my way through, or, if the dust was very thick, slip past one of their flanks unperceived.

The first thing to consider was the certainty of the storm arising; so I called out for such of my men as were reputed to be weather-wise to step

forward, and three Telingas were at once pushed to the front by their comrades. One, in particular, was declared to be so clever at foretelling rain as to have gained for himself the nickname of "The Frog" (which reptiles do, by their croaking, infallibly give notice of the approach of the monsoon season); and I at once ordered him to climb the tree and give his opinion about the weather.

He made his way to the loftiest branch that would bear his weight, and, edging out to the end of it, stood sniffing with his open nostrils. "My lord," he called down to me, "there is both wind and dust coming—much wind—much dust. I can smell it sour in the air. There will be a *toofuun* within two hours."

He spoke with such confidence that I was satisfied. But now to think of Surwar Sing. Had he espied my approach from the look-out tower of the citadel, and was he advancing to meet me? Or had he been held in check by the sight of General Tyger's army? I called to the orderly in the tree to discover, if he could, any signs of our reinforcements, but he said the ridge prevented him from seeing.

If Surwar Sing was approaching, it would be in the teeth of the coming storm, and when it arose and blew, he was certainly too old and experienced a soldier to advance against it. Moreover, there would be behind him an easy retreat. So I did not hesitate to leave him to his own devices, whilst I occupied myself in securing the safety of my force. And my determination being fixed to trust to the

storm coming on, I gave the order for the men to rest.

Meanwhile my two look-out sentries were keeping me informed—one of the movements of the enemy, the other of the aspect of the welkin. As I had predicted, the former made for the ridge that lay between me and Sooleemanpoor; and for the latter there came from time to time little stray, angry gusts of wind, at uncertain intervals, rising out of and dying into nothing, like ghosts—as may be observed at such times.

In about an hour the firmament grew overcast, and I gave the order to form line of battle, and began my advance, the guns in the centre, my cavalry in the rear, and a battalion of infantry on each flank. But as to how I should act later on—whether to attack, or whether to try and slip past the enemy—this I left till I could see the density of the coming storm and the angle at which it struck us.

And now there crept on a deathly silence in the air, for the birds ceased singing and the insects stopped their accustomed babel, and the atmosphere grew heavy and oppressive. As we neared the ridge the enemy extended their line and crowned its heights. Their appearance was very formidable; their front ranks having bayonets couched, their rear with matchlocks and musquets pointed. Their infantry greatly outnumbered ours, and on their flanks hovered two large bodies of cavalry, one of Mahrattas, and the other, as I judged, belonging to the Rana of Odeypoor.

With the steadiness and precision of the parade ground, my *Campoo* advanced until we came within cannon shot. The storm had still to overtake us; but the sky behind was brown-coloured and curiously streaked, the air closer and heavier than that deep down in a well, and the signs of the bursting of the tempest imminent.

I halted the line, and gave orders to unlimber the guns and open fire. The command was executed with uncommon alacrity, and a salvo blazed out. The enemy at once responded, and I soon perceived their metal was heavier than mine, for their shot came screaming through our ranks, and their artillery rockaded our horses and cattle, killing and wounding many of my men and beasts, whilst ours scarce more than skipped into their line. It was a duel I could not hope to sustain for long.

Suddenly, in a protracted interval of the cannonade, there burst from my men a universal cry of warning, and each held his breath and listened. Behind us we heard a dread roaring, humming sound, like that of a great fire drawing in a furnace. And then, with a rush, the *toofaun* was upon us. In a moment the whole air was brown with dust, as the scorching blast whistled and whipped up everything in its path, carrying turbans, drums, drag-ropes, blankets, and forage-nets high into the air, like straws, whilst so violent was its force that the men with the greatest difficulty kept their legs. As the fierce gust beat upon the backs of our necks and unprotected hands, it was like the heated air issuing from an oven, intolerably painful.

The storm had taken as from the due east, which was what I had desired; for it offered a chance of detouring round the enemy's left flank, which I could not have ventured with safety had its direction been more from the south. By dint of violent vociferation I got the guns limbered up, and, right facing, essayed the manœuvre.

But at this moment, when success seemed nearly won, there came a great mischance of war to ruin me. The enemy had found the range, and now redoubled their fire, and also opened with their small arms by way of precaution, in case we might be advancing to the assault. It was an awful and astounding scene! While the elements warred above, man warred below. The lurid flashes of the cannon gleamed dully through the thick yellow atmosphere, like summer lightning, and yet their roar was muffled by the gale and carried away from us, so that it seemed as if the musquet bullets that dropped at our feet or pattered in our front, and the shot and shell that came hurtling and screaming over our heads and through our ranks, were fired by a silent phantom foe.

Suddenly one devil-directed shot hit a tumbrel of ammunition, and instantly there followed a great roar and flash, as it and four others near at hand exploded. I felt something strike me on the head with great force, and simultaneously the concussion of the air span me round and round, and dashed me violently to the earth. And the last thing I remember, before my senses forsook me, was the scorching blast raging overhead, and the air filled

with the dreadful shrieks of wounded and dying men.

The sun was long past mid-heaven when I came to myself, and the sky calm and blue. Not a sign of the recent storm remained. My brain reeled and my head ached, as well it might, for there was a lump as big as an apple on one side of it where a splinter had struck me. But for the rest I was unhurt, which I could not but consider a very providential escape.

I sat up, and, with dazed eyes, tried to look around me. And the first thing I saw were several Moorish Telingas in the uniform of General Tyger's brigade standing on guard.

Close at hand lay the wreck of my artillery. Five of my tumbrels had been exploded and blown to pieces, and all the guns disabled. The ground was strewn with the carcasses of cattle, and the corpses of my poor gunners, torn and mangled beyond recognition, their headless trunks and shattered limbs mingled together. The sight was a sickening one, and I turned my face away.

And now, one of the sentinels approaching, I asked him where my troops were.

He waved his hand with an extensive sweep that comprehended the whole horizon. "Anywhere! Everywhere!" he replied. "It is three hours since they fled like a flight of quail."

"And General Tyger's army?"

"Is in Mundalghur. And cursed be our fate who are left here to guard these useless guns—may outcasts defile the graves of those who cast them!—

instead of joining in the plunder of the city. But, Allah be praised, here comes our Captain Sahib at last!"

Looking up, I saw a half-caste officer of dark complexion riding towards me. He had observed me speaking to the sentinel, and, coming up, enquired in the Moor's tongue, "Where is he they call the Rajah Sooleeman? Some of the prisoners tell me he was by the tumbrels when they exploded."

"I am he," I answered in English.

He seemed greatly astonished and asked, "And where did you learn English?"

"In England."

"What! you are an Englishman then?"

"What else, sir?"

He dismounted at once, and coming up shook my hand very cordially and frankly. "My father was an Englishman," he said, with evident pride, "and I'm sorry for you, Mr. Sooleeman. If we had known you were a British subject General Tyger would have spared your private property. But by your name and reputation we all conceived you to be a Moor, and when we effected our entry into your capital the order was given for a general pillage, and no exception. From what I have seen I am afraid your effects have not been spared."

"And is my castle taken, too?" I exclaimed, bewildered at the bad news. "Did they not defend it?"

"There were no troops in the place. The garrison had marched out, and when the *toofaun* blew over, which it did with uncommon rapidity, our cavalry

were able to head them off and prevent their getting back."

"And what became of them?"

"I believe they made good their escape to the north. Our rascals were too hot for the loot to be prevailed on to follow them: for, when they once saw the city gates thrown open, nothing would restrain them, and they dashed for it like wolves!"

"And my own force?"

"Is scattered and fled. Our cavalry cut up a few, but a great many must have got away."

"Thank you, sir, for your courtesy," I said resignedly. "And now I am at your disposition."

"I'm sorry for you, Mr. Sooleeman," repeated the officer kindly. "Confusion to me, and that I am! But General Tyger is a good man and will assist you. Come, we'll go to him."

A spare horse was brought and I accompanied my captor, whose name was Saffy, to Sooleemanpoor. As we crested the ridge and obtained a full view of the city, a glance showed me the Mahratta flag floating above it. On nearing our destination it was plain to see the place was given over to plunder, for the inhabitants were flying in all directions, and the red uniforms of General Tyger's Telingas were visible in fitful glints of crimson, burrowing their way through the streets and bazaars.

On nearing the Chittore gate we were stopped by an extraordinary individual, a European of immense size and girth, with a very fat red face, an enormous nose and mouth, and very round, big, pale blue eyes, and no eyebrows whatever, which made him look

like the picture of the moon-man. On his head he wore a round black hat, with a tremendous curled ostrich feather in it, and he was arrayed in a uniform covered with a prodigious amount of gilt and *kincob*, so that he something resembled a gingerbread soldier at St. Bartholomew's Fair.

"Oo-haf-you-dar?" he asked, snapping his fingers in a strange way between each word, and winding up with a shrill whistle.

"Sooleeman Sahib himself, Major Derlick," answered Saffy; "and, confusion to me, sir, but he's an Englishman!"

"By—dam—he—moost—be—kip—safe. De—Sheneral—is—vooned. I—haf—coomand." This he got out slowly and with much labour, pausing at every word and then emitting it with many snaps of his fingers and much whistling. "Tak—Mynheer Sooleeman—to—de—Fort. Shot—eem—oop. I—sharge—you—vid—hees—costidy." He snapped his fingers again, and whistled, and then proceeded on his business at a jog-trot.

"Plague on old Pieter!" exclaimed Saffy, as the Major passed out of hearing. "If General Tyger is wounded and Derlick in command, you'll have the benefit of the Articles of War, and naught else. I had hoped to secure you your liberty. As it is, I can only obey the Major."

I bowed my acquiescence.

"You know the place better than I do," he went on, "so I leave you to show me where you would like to be confined. That is the least—and most—I can do for you."

I thanked him for his consideration, and told him that a certain small chamber in the look-out tower would relieve him of all apprehension as to my escape; and that for my part I cared not where I was incarcerated, one prison being as agreeable as another. So thither we wended our way.

Distressing was the spectacle of riot run loose that met my eyes as we entered the citadel. My palace and treasury were filled with plundering vagabonds, who were pouring out laden with spoil. Everything of value was being dragged into the open courtyard in front, where the excited soldiery were quarrelling over the division. I recognised numerous articles of my property in their hands, and observed at least a score of them stealing away with the treasury bags, in which I stored my money, under their arms.

Captain Saffy conducted me to the chamber in the look-out tower. "Confusion to me, I'm damned sorry for you, sir," he repeated for at least the twentieth time before he left me. "And I'll go and see if I cannot get some amelioration of this severity from the General. You have suffered enough already, without being locked up like a common sentinel in a congee house. But lock you up I must, for it is Major Derlick's orders." With which he shut the door, and I heard him turn the key and withdraw it from the outside.

Conceive my feelings as I stood in that little cell, a prisoner and confined in my own castle, where, until this morning, I had been King over all! My head was throbbing with pain, and I moved to the

slit in the wall, which did duty for a window, to catch a breath of air. As I sat there and looked out, I could see my city of Sooleemanpoor below me, and the scene of dreadful pillage. The Mahrattas were in outrageous riot, and sacking the place furiously. Their different parties were swarming hither and thither, like vultures and jackals when cattle are dying of murrain, entering and issuing from the different shops and buildings, pulling out their contents, strewing them in the streets, selecting what took their fancy and leaving the residue; passing from spot to spot till every house was gutted. The main bazaar, once so busy and teeming with life, was now utterly deserted by its inhabitants, and a prey to the bands of marauders who trooped up and down it, destroying its contents in wanton malice. After the first hurried search a more systematic one was begun for buried treasure and hidden property. Walls were knocked down, wooden pillars hacked in two, floors torn up, roofs pulled off, and the courtyards and gardens excavated in the hunt for anything of value.

As night drew on torches were lighted and the whole city was alive with flambeaux; and about midnight, either by accident or design, a conflagration broke out, and the flames spreading with great rapidity, soon enveloped the whole place in a blaze.

And so I saw my capital plundered, devastated, and, finally, burnt before my eyes; and when morning broke all that remained of the once flourishing and happy city was a dismal black waste of charred and roofless walls.

Wearied out, I turned to lie down. And as I threw off my *choga* and loosened my under-clothing, my hand came in contact with my mother's Testament, back again in its old place next my heart.

It was the only possession left to me in the world.

CHAPTER XIX.

GENERAL TYGER.

ABOUT ten o'clock Captain Saffy came to say that General Tyger desired to see me.

"He has been very badly wounded," he observed, "by a stray bullet when the troops began the loot, and was insensible through the night. But about half an hour ago he came round, and when he heard you were taken prisoner sent a message to me to have you brought before him."

Horses were waiting for us at the gateway of the fort, and we rode to the Mahratta camp, which was pitched outside the city walls. General Tyger's tents stood in the centre, and one, very large and elegant, had evidently been captured from some prince or rajah, for it was heavily decorated in the Hindostany fashion with embroidery and crimson velvet. A score of troopers in uniforms of green and silver mounted guard, and many servants in gorgeous liveries occupied themselves with their allotted duties, or loitered about the precincts. But everyone's face wore a concerned and troubled air.

Captain Saffy conducted me into the durbar tent and sent to apprise the General of my arrival. I had often heard of the pomp and parade in which the commanders of Scindia's Campoos were accustomed to live, and had myself at Poonah observed something of the state they kept up, and their luxury

and profusion. But what now met my eyes surpassed anything I had ever witnessed, and the truly magnificent equipment of the interior would have commanded the fixed attention of any observer. It was one glittering mass of gilt and silver and glass. The walls were hung with fine brocaded curtains; the floors carpeted with costly rugs, into which the foot sank ankle-deep; the furniture rich and elegant; silver lamps, set off with glass lustres and drops, were suspended from the ceiling or affixed to the poles; and mirrors reflected the image everywhere. The scene was, in short, one of Oriental splendour, such as could not have been excelled in the travelling court of a rajah or the imperial camp of the great Mogul himself.

In a few minutes two *chobdars*, bearing their silver sticks of office, came to acquaint me that my presence was required, and I followed them into an adjoining tent. The light within was very dim, but at one end a curtain was looped back, and by it, on a pile of cushions, lay a European.

His face was turned from the light and partially hidden by the peacock-feather fans, which two attendants were slowly moving over him. At the foot of his bed stood Cauzee Abdoolah, whose fame as a learned physician had caused him to be summoned to attend the wounded General.

I advanced slowly, for this meeting with my conqueror was not one to afford me any satisfaction, and I desired to comport myself with proper dignity and reserve.

As I approached, one of the slaves whispered to him, and he lifted up his face. And then, all in an

instant, I recognised him! The scarred forehead, the bulldog under-jaw, the small ferrety eyes, with the peculiar red gleam in them, the coarse bristly hair—only red no longer, for it had turned to grey—there could be no mistake, no deception. They were all familiar to me. I knew the man—General Tyger was none other than Sergeant Fossit!

He looked at me curiously, but without recognition. It was eight years since we had parted, and I was greatly changed. Moreover, the turban I wore and my moustachios and Moorish costume served to complete my disguise.

“*Salaam*, Solomon Sahib,” he said, addressing me in the black language, and evidently mistaking me for a Moor. “The peace of the Prophet be with you!”

I smiled at the pious quaintness of his salutation.

“Thank you, Sergeant Fossit,” I replied in good honest English.

With a stifled cry of surprise he raised himself upon his elbow, before Abdoolah could intervene to hinder him.

“Eh? Eh? How’s that? Who told you of Sergeant Fossit? And you speak English? Why now, an’ I’ve heard your voice afore. Who are you, man? Damn and sink me, but I never knew a Solomon as I can remember. Be you Jew, Gentile or Moorman?”

“Solomon or Sooleeman is but my country name,” I answered. “It is the way the Moors pronounce my own, which is Selwyn—John Selwyn. And you should know me, Sergeant Fossit, for it was you who ’listed me for the King’s army.”

He seemed thunderstruck, and stared long and

hard at me, as if I had been a ghost, and pushed Abdoolah aside, who was trying to coax him to lie down again.

"John Selwyn?" he repeated at length in a dazed tone. "God's eyes! Did you say John Selwyn? Him as Shadrach Mandalgo trepanned and sent out along o' me in the *Princess Amelia*?"

"The same. Perhaps this will help you to recognise me?" And I took off my turban and stood before him bareheaded.

"Ecod! an' it is John Selwyn, with whiskers under his nose! The very same, by thunder! On'y to think of it! John Selwyn as I tramped to London with. Your hand, comrade! Glory be we've met."

Observing this turn of affairs, Captain Saffy stepped forward, and, saluting Fossit, took occasion to say that although Major Derlick had ordered me under close arrest, he presumed, under the circumstances, parole was granted, and he might withdraw.

"Solomon in close arrest!" exclaimed Fossit indignantly. "Go you and tell that snapping toortle of a whistling Dutchman as how Mr. Selwyn is an Englishman, and an old comrade of mine, and free of the camp and this country, to go or come just as he pleases. Take heed, that's my order. See it's respected."

Captain Saffy saluted and withdrew, and Fossit turned to me again.

"Zooks! now, if this isn't the third time we've tumbled together, you and I. There's luck in numbers, and I tell ye I was just grizzling and glouting to clap eyes on a fellow-countryman, being thundering sick

all through the night, and seeing nothing but visions and such like. Dog's death to me! but I'm mortal satisfied to see ye. Saffy's no sort of an Englishman at all. And a white face with a friend on to it is a precious glad sight in this murdering desert."

A fit of coughing seized him as he spoke, followed by a violent paroxysm of pain.

"My lord, my lord!" cried Abdoolah to me, "persuade the Sahib to lie down. It is death to him to sit up. He is wounded in the stomach, and there is peril of fresh bleeding, and then there will be inflammation and fever, and"—he stopped and added piously, "the will of the most high God."

I knelt down, and between us we laid Fossit back on the cushions, and whilst Abdoolah re-adjusted the bandages on his wound, I took the fans from the slaves and dismissed them.

"That'll do, Huckleemjee!" he whispered in a husky voice, "I'm better now. The cough shook me up. I forgot I had a bullet-hole through my belly. But 'tis dear joy to see a comrade again, and this here Sooleeman Sahib is an old thick of mine. So let be, and squat ye down, Huckleemjee, while I palaver with him."

Abdoolah returned to his post, and I took a seat on the floor by Fossit's side and began fanning him.

"Zooks! John Selwyn, but this regular queers me! 'Tis the strangest meeting I ever heard on! I should never ha' smoked you to be Solomon. Ecod! King Solomon of Solomonpoor. We always thought by your name you was a Sooleemaunee or Afghaun, or at least a renegado half-caste. Down at Oojein they said

you was a Rohilly. How long now might you ha' been king in this country?"

"Nearly three years."

"Nearly three years! Take heed o' that, and well done for you. 'Taint many as could ha' held their own so long. Zooks! say it again. On'y to think of it: John Selwyn, as I 'listed a country golumpus, agrowed and swelled into King Solomon. Damn it for me! but I always said you was a lad o' spunk, though I never thought for to see you a King in Hindostan. My respects to you, King Solomon—you and all your glory." And he chuckled and salaamed to me as he lay there.

"Not much glory now," I answered grimly, "with my army dispersed, my capital burnt, and my country captured."

Fossit's face fell. "Dog's death to me! but I'm sorry for it. I didn't know, John Selwyn, as it was you what ruled in this country, or I'd ha' swung sooner than trained a gun or levelled a musquet against ye. Not for anything that old hunks Umbajee could have offered—and it were him as set me on to the job."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Sergeant Fossit."

He grinned as he heard the old name.

"Fossit's been out o' fashion with me these many years past," he said. "They call me Tyger. General John Tyger of Tyger's Campoo. 'Twas the Moors gave me the name. They said I was a war-tiger for fighting. 'Tyger I'll be,' says I. And Tyger I became according."

"I forgot," I apologised; "and strangely enough

I heard of you once, some years ago, when you were Lieutenant Fireworker Tiger."

"Aye, aye, so I were! In General Baptist's party afore I became colonel and raised my own Campoo. But who told ye?"

"A man named Mars. Sergeant-Major Mars, who was in——"

"The mud maggot!" broke in Fossit. "Why, that's the very same sly rogue as you cut up two days ago at Phulkee."

"Yes, I know. And I don't think he'll want to go to war again."

"He never wanted to go afore. Oh! he was a canting cull to sham Abram, with a ague about him he could parade offhand, teeth a-chattering, limbs a-shaking, carcass a-shivering, fit to queer a ship's surgeon. He was to have come with me on this campaign, but, knowing the man, I never set no store by him. It was in my mind to make a divarshun when the firing began atween you and him, on'y you finished him off so soon like there was no time. But your tactics was wrong, for, take heed to this, you should never ha' left your fort. 'Twas courting defeat. But there! 'tain't no use talking o' that. Tell me about yourself, John Selwyn. Did you run from Bombay?"

I gave him a brief account of my adventures from entering Umbajee's service up to the present time.

"And you've been nigh three years here at Solomonpoor? Why then, I take it, you must be a rich man. How much might you ha' got put away in the Company's funds?"

“Nothing.”

He gave a low whistle of incredulous astonishment.

“What, nothing! D’ye mean to say ye’ve risked your all here? How much?”

“It might have been seven or eight *lacks*; but, whatever it was, it’s all gone.”

“Deary, deary! on’y seven *lacks*! An’ you King Solomon o’ Solomonpoor for three years! And a country of your own to squeeze. Damn and sink me! John Selwyn, but you ain’t acted clever.”

“I did not care for money; I only wanted to see my people prosperous.”

“Worse and worse. For why? For to bring your neighbours down on you! You was wrong there again. A prosperous country is a plaguey bad property in Hindostan.”

“So it seems. But such was my fancy, and I’ve suffered for it. Least said soonest mended. But how has Fortune treated you all these years?”

“Soft and kind—soft and kind! When I run from Surat in ’ninety-five I hoofed it along the Tapy river till I tumbled across General Baptist, as was a-marching down to Poonah, and took service with him in his artillery. Soon arter that came a big battle, but mighty little bloodshed, at a place called Kurdlah, where that maggot Mars shammed Abram according, and ran away with all his black gunners. We was nearly put out of action for want o’ men to work the pieces, but I loaded ’em and trained ’em mostly myself, and we was heaven lucky and won the day. Whereby General Baptist promoted me to Lieutenant Fireworker. Then somehow Scindy heard

o' me, and sent and gave me a command in his grand park of artillery. Well, I fattened up the cattle and polished up the carronades and howitzers, and the Maharajy took thick wi' me and told me to raise a sort o' bodyguard for him. I plays my cards well, and the bodyguard becomes a battalion, and the battalion grows into two, and the two swells into a Campoo, and me a colonel, with off reckonings as couldn't be reckoned, and the pay and picking of six thousand flesh and paper men filtering through my fingers. Then I was sent up to Oojein to garrison the place, and what with guarding the gates and overhauling everything as come in, and keeping the peace, and collecting the taxes, and being *Cutwaul* of the city—which was sort of old full-bottomed over the Gentoos—why, strike me blind, but I've hatched out all my eggs. And I might ha' been home in England if I'd ha' had the sense!"

"What a pity you did not go!"

"Well, I'm going directly this 'ound o' mine gets healed. I was silly for to start on this expedition. But who's you to preach wisdom? How is it you ain't in England?"

"It's no use talking of that," I answered with a sigh; "wishing won't do any good; for my chance, if ever I had one, is gone."

Fossit looked at me intently for a moment, and then burst out impulsively:

"No, it hasn't! For why? For because I'm a-going to carry you to England with me. Take heed to this, John Selwyn, lad; General Tyger's not the man for to desart an old comrade in this gallus land.

Damn me!" he cried bluffly but kindly, "I'll constitoot you my aidy-camp. Rot me if I don't! And see you safe into Company's territory, and through it, and home to England."

"You're too good to think of such a thing, Fossit; but——"

"Too good!" he broke in; "what d'ye call too good? I ain't been good to you, John Selwyn, measure it how you will. Wasn't it me as caused you to be kidnapped and sent out to Bombay? And isn't it your city and country as I've took away from ye, thinking you was a Moorman, and let my Telingas plunder ye dry? An' you a fellow-countryman and a comrade old! Sink me, that ain't fair among Englishmen! Ecod! we're here to help one another, not to do otherwise. And if I've done ye a injury, John Selwyn, s'help me, I'll undo it. Just for old times sake, when you an' me was thick. For, dog's death to me, I always liked ye, an' that's true!"

He spoke bluntly and roughly, but with an exceeding great kindness of spirit and intention that truly touched me.

"Fossit," I said, "believe me, I feel grateful to you; but I cannot accept your help. It is the fortune of war."

"And why not? Don't be no fool, lad. For, see here, I'll settle ye comfor'ble—*comfor'ble*, mind; I will! So home to England you goes wi' me, comrade old!"

"Kindness can't mend what's wrong with me, Fossit," I said, still holding to the old name from force of habit, "for return to England I cannot!"

"No; and why not?" he asked sharply.

"I left it in trouble, and there's the truth. With my name in the *Hue and Cry*."

He looked at me with a queer twinkle in his little red, carbuncle eyes.

"Zooks! and had you really stole a horse that time I tumbled across ye, when I was hoofing it back from Fyeways?"

"Fyeways!" I shouted, springing to my feet as if I had been shot.

"Yes, Fyeways. Halloo, comrade! you ain't took bad, are ye? You looks dodman white."

"What do you know of Fyeways?" I asked him huskily, and with a strange feeling of presentiment in my soul. "Speak—for God's sake, speak quick!"

"Speak? Quick? What's all this here? Why, it's a matter of twenty-five years and more sin' I was at Fyeways Hall. Servant there in the young Barrownite's time."

Like an inspiration the truth flashed upon me.

"Man!" I cried, pointing down at him, my finger within a foot of his face, "you are John Jago!"

CHAPTER XX.

JOHN JAGO'S CONFESSION.

As I uttered the name "John Jago," a weird cry, half of consternation, half of bewilderment, burst from Sergeant Fossit's throat, and he started into a sitting posture with the violent action of an affrighted man. The Huckeem immediately sprang forward, crying out in the greatest alarm :

"My lord—my lord! there is mortal danger in this! I beseech you, calm yourself."

But Fossit heeded him not. His face had turned an ashen hue, and was contorted with an expression of superstitious astonishment. He stared at me with his little, ferrety red eyes twitching timorously, and it was some moments before he found speech to ask in a scared whisper :

"Body of God! An' who are you?"

"The son of Sir Francis Fyveways. My mother was Mercy Bradnock."

"The son of Sir Francis! Strike me dead, but I never knew he had a son. When was you born?"

"Five months after my father's death."

His eyes opened wider and wider in his amazement.

"After his death!" he ejaculated. "Why, sink me, then you're——. But no—no; 'tain't possible! 'Tain't true!" he broke off suddenly and convincedly.

"Here is the proof," I answered, as I drew out my mother's Testament.

"What's that?" he demanded, with nervous apprehension.

"The history of my mother's marriage to Sir Francis Fyeways on his death-bed. Of which you, John Jago, were a witness. Superscribed to me, her son, Sir Selwyn Fyeways. Signed in her own true name—Mercy Fyeways."

I held it up for him to convince himself, and he stared blankly at the ragged, bloodstained paper for a few moments.

"Damn and sink me!" he cried, with a peevish discontent, "but I'm no scholar. What does it say?"

"My lord," interrupted Abdoolah, gravely, "I will not answer for your life if you do not lie down."

He threw himself back on his cushion with an air of irritation.

"Let be, Huckeem. Don't mollycoddle me. Here's su'thing enough to start the dead out o' their graves. Read on, John Selwyn, whatever's wrote in that paper, I'll judge ye by it."

I read aloud to him the latter portion of my mother's Testament, which described my father's accident and his death-bed marriage. Jago lay and listened spellbound, as though a voice from the tomb was recording judgment against him. And wonderful as the changing clouds at sunset were the shifting expressions on his face. It almost seemed as if he were in his mind acting over again his share in the tragedy. As he followed the incidents of the story, "God's truth!" he cried from time to time, when something struck him vividly, and "True as death!"

and when I came to the end he turned his head aside and groaned.

"Man!" I cried, "Jago—Fossit—Tyger—I know not what your real name is."

"Jago's right. John Jago, fathered, born, and christened."

"Then Jago be it. I appeal to you to bear witness. Was my mother married to Sir Francis Fyveways?"

"She was."

"And what is written here is true?"

"Holy Gospel truth. Every word of it."

"Then where is the marriage certificate you stole?"

"No, no! Mr. Selwyn—Mr. Fyveways! Death to me, but not for that," he protested earnestly. "S'help me God! it wasn't me as took it. 'Twas Mrs. Renfew. She was lurking outside the door a-eavesdropping. I nigh ran over her when I took the register back. And when the young master died, and the girl fainted, and they rang the bell for me, I got in just as Mrs. Renfew was tending her, and saw her take the paper from the bosom of her dress, when she unloosed it for to give her air."

"Then you were witness to this wicked crime, and yet held your peace?"

"I didn't rightly understand at the time what she was doing. There was a great outcry going on over Sir Francis, and the priest a-shouting out to send for the surgeon. I was but a servant, and what could I do? Still, to confess the truth, Mr. Selwyn, I did adventure that evening to say su'thing to Mrs.

Renfew. But she picked me up cruel quick. 'Jago,' says she, 'you've been drinking, and dreaming a bad dream. And I've been dreaming too, and thought I saw a hempen halter round your neck, and the hangman waiting ready for to turn you off for stealing Sir Francis Fyeways' ring.' She stared at me very stern and shrewish, and then goes on, 'But bad dreams are best forgot. I'll forget mine if you'll forget yours. And I'll give you a hundred pounds to go away and never come back again. Only you must go now—to-night—this very instant.'" He paused, and then added, "A hundred pounds was a mighty great sum o' money to me in those days. My wages was only two pounds five shillings by the quarter. And so—so I took it."

"And the ring—did you steal that?"

He turned his face away from me, looking thoroughly ashamed of himself. Then he confessed: "Yes—I had it. 'Twas too big for the girl's finger, and had slipped off on to the floor, and I trod upon it. And findings being keepings, I kep' it for many a year, till it was stole from me at the storm of Sultaun Tippoo's camp at Seringapatnam, when I was a-lying in the ditch with my head cut open, and the *looty-wallahs* thick as flies around."

I looked at him reproachfully. "And so, for a paltry hundred pounds, you allowed a poor woman who had done you no harm to be ruined?"

"I did, Mr. Selwyn. 'Tis no good for me to lie to you. God forgive me for it, but I did. But I didn't know as there was a child to be born. You can give tick for that! Lord, if I on'y had, think now what

a hold it would ha' given me over them schemers! Think of the hush-money in it! But, with just a pretty country chuck kissed and cuddled, as I thought, and Sir Francis dead, wasn't a hundred pound a thundering good heap to make out o' the job? And yet I see now 'twas black work, and I'm sorry for it—main and mortal sorry. Rot me! but I'd give for half o' what I've got to have it off of my conscience. Aye, that I would!"

Despite the ingrain of rascality that he could not conceal, there was still a ring of what seemed to me like regret in his words.

"Jago," I cried bitterly, "you blasted my mother's life, and you have blasted mine! And—man, man, cruel man—we never harmed you!"

"Dog's death to me—no!" he admitted, remorsefully; "that's just where it pinks me. For you're a lad I've liked. It's just the contrariness of my luck, I'm thinking. Seems you an' me was never to meet without me a-doing su'thing to injure you. Whoever heard the like of it afore? Only consider of it! Who puts you in the rut o' getting crimped by Shadrach? Call it a accident, but done it was by me. Who beats you in battle and takes your city of Solomonpoor? 'Twasn't against you, but done it was by me. And now it turns out as it was me who——" He paused to collect his ideas and frame them into language.

"Who helped to rob me of my birthright," I went on for him, "and my fair inheritance, and my name. Whose silence has branded me as a bastard?"

The frankness of my accusation seemed to bring

his iniquity home to him. "No, no, Selwyn—Mr. Fyeways," he cried out all in a tremble, "don't say that! Can't it be mended? Danin and sink me, I'll go to Fyeways, even if I swing for it, and swear you right again! Dog's death to me, but I'll swear it right to you! Lands—title—everything shall be yours—if—if——" He broke off, and a look of weird terror came into his face as he added, with spasmodic utterance, "if—ever—I—get—back—to—England—again!"

His hand was moving under the sheet as he spoke.

"Huckeemjee," said he faintly, "there's su'thing wrong here. I'm all wet an' weak." He drew his hand out. It was covered with blood.

Abdoolah threw the sheet back. The bandages on Jago's wound were newly encrimsoned. It had burst out bleeding again.

An exclamation of alarm escaped from the Huckeem's lips, and as I looked at him I could see by the expression of his face that the hurt was mortal. He pressed his hand to the wound, and called out in a loud voice for more bandages.

"Selwyn," said Jago to me in a scared whisper, "here's red ruin! For God's sake get me su'thing to stop this bleeding. Don't leave me, comrade! Stand by and see the black doctor treats me fair. Don't let him kill me. He's one of your men. But remember I've got to swear you right. If I dies my evidence dies with me. Hai! hai! but the clutching is a-coming on again. Shoot me, but living man can't stand this an' live. My God, Selwyn, am I a-dying? Tell me, am I a-dying? Don't press so hard, Huckeem.

"Tis like a burning iron. There was some stuff you gave me afore to deaden it. More of it! More of it! Quick! Quick!"

Abdoolah pointed to a phial. "It is opium," he said to me, "and will soothe the Sahib's pain, and send him to sleep. If he had kept quiet, as I implored him, this might have been avoided."

I poured out a dose and gave it to Jago.

"Don't desart me, comrade," he moaned; "remember I've got to swear you right. Promise me you won't desart me. Hai! hai! there it is again. Sorrow to me, my Dark Hour's come! And I must die. I'm all giddy and my brain swimming round and round in widening circles, like when you chucks a stone into the water. Where are you? I can't see you now! He's hocussed me, has the black Huckeem. Give me your hand. Squeeze mine. Keep a-squeezing of it to show you're there. There's a sort of comfort in the feel of you. Harder! I tell you I can't feel you doin' of it at all!"

His eyes had closed, and a few indistinct words escaped him, till gradually, his hand still gripping mine, he succumbed to the influence of the narcotic.

"Will he ever wake again?" I asked Abdoolah, fearfully.

"I think so, my lord. But not for long. There is no hope left—no cure for such a hæmorrhage as this."

Nevertheless, he set to work to apply some salve to the wound, and then bandaged it with great care, and shifted the cushions.

A few minutes later Captain Saffy came in with Major Derlick, having been apprised of Jago's critical

state, which was soon noised abroad by the servants. All the Dutchman did was to snap his fingers softly several times and whistle and walk out again, which was his method of expressing his feelings. For he knew nothing of the Moor language, and but very little English, and being slow of speech, had invented this peculiar system of communicating his meaning and directing his servants. Captain Saffy, who was acquainted with his eccentricities, surprised me not a little by informing me that his tokens toward me were friendly, which I should not otherwise have understood.

All through the long, hot day Jago remained in an unconscious state, and I beside him. And, seated there, I could not help reflecting how strange and fateful had been my connection with this man who lay senseless at my feet. Here I was tending the very enemy that had held and concealed the secret of my poor mother's marriage for so many years, and left her to be wronged and ruined. He had been the one of all others in the world I desired to track, and thrice had we been thrown together without my discovering his true identity till this hour, when it was too late! And stranger still, now that it was revealed to me, I found that he whom I had ever in my mind loathed as a depraved and abandoned villain, was a man not only professing regard for me, but anxious to prove it, and in a way and with such language as had compelled my gratitude this very day. Was ever such contrariness in the world before? Here he lay dying in front of me—the evil genius of my mother's life and mine—and yet my heart harboured not one

bitter or revengeful feeling against him, but only thought of him with pity and sorrow.

About five o'clock in the evening Jago began to stir. Abdoolah felt his pulse; it was beating quickly, and fever was coming on. After a little he moved again, and then opened his eyes and asked, "Where am I?" and called for something to drink. I put a cup of milk to his lips, and as his flinched glance met mine, recollection came back to him.

"Then it wasn't a dream," he whispered. "I remember now. You're Selwyn—Selwyn Fyveaways."

The milk refreshed him, and he closed his eyes and lay silent for a few minutes. Presently he turned to Abdoolah and asked—

"Huckeemjee, how long have I to live?"

"My lord's fortune is propitious. By the blessing of Allah he may live many years."

"Damn him, he's lying to me! 'Tis ever the way with these black Moors. I'm mortal bad, and there's no many years for me. Selwyn, lad, an' you've forgiven me, tell me the God's truth. Am I a dead man?"

"You're in great danger, Jago."

"Aye, that's so," he answered with a hopeless sigh. "I'm a-going to die and be buried out here in this murdering desert. It'll be dog's death with me, after all." Then, after a little pause, "There's not much time for chin-wagging. I want to put a few things fair and square. I've su'thing to settle. How can I do it?"

"You know best, Jago."

"Well then, is there anything you want told?"

"There is much I should like to learn, but I do not wish to distress you."

"Tain't no great distress," he answered, in words strangely like those my dear mother had once used, as I recollected with a curious quickness. "What can I tell you?"

"What did you do after leaving Fyeways?"

"First of all I went to London, and lived a romping life till my money was all gone. Then I got into a bit o' trouble—never mind what—and had to 'list in the Company's Service to get out of the country safe."

"Did you communicate with Fyeways?"

"No. I was over-timid, and never wrote or set eyes on it till I come back in 'ninety-four. Then I thought the little matter of the ring would ha' been forgotten, having heard Mrs. Renfew was dead, and that I might squeeze out a bit o' hush money. So I goes down to Gloucestershire, and late one evening makes my way to the Hall, and asks to see Mr. Renfew. They told me as the Squire never saw no one, and takes me into Father Clifford's room. You'll be knowing him, I make no doubt?"

"I knew him. He is dead."

"Dead! Aye now, but that's mean luck for you. For he could ha' sworn you right. But halloo! this queers me. How came you to know he's dead? He must ha' kicked the bucket mighty sudden. For I'll take my corporal oath you was with me ten days arter I saw him plaguey strong and sound."

"He was killed by—by an accident just before I left home."

“Killed—hey? And by an accident? And you left home in trouble? And can't go back again?” He asked the questions in quick succession, and without waiting for an answer, just in the same short snapping way as he had cross-questioned me that day we first met. “I smoke it! But there—say no more. Dog's death to him! but he desarved all he got, get it how he did.”

I felt my face grow pale and crimson in turns, but I never said a word to commit myself, nor did Jago press the topic further, but just continued his story.

“The priest beckons me into his room and shuts the door, and stands looking at me with them hellish keen eyes of his'n. ‘So you've come back again, have you, John Jago?’ he says, cool and calm as a icicle. ‘What's made you chance Fyveways?’

“‘To see Mr. Renfew,’ says I.

“‘What for?’ asked he, his black eyes boring into me like gimlets.

“‘As an old servant,’ says I ‘for to get a little help.’

“‘Oh,’ says he, ‘a little help. Well, I can't recommend him to give you any.’

“‘I'm sorry for that,’ says I. ‘Consequently must go where I can.’ And I looked him back as cockish as I could.

“‘And where may that be?’ asks he.

“‘To her as should be Lady Fyveways.’

“‘Indeed,’ he sneers, ‘and who's that, pray?’

“‘You should know,’ says I, ‘since you married her to Sir Francis. Farmer Bradnock's daughter as was.’

“‘Why,’ says he, with one of his cold, steel smiles, ‘if you step round to the churchyard you'll find her,

for she died five weeks ago.' Then seeing me turn very dry, 'You rascal,' says he, 'you've over-reached yourself, and if you're not out of this county of Gloucester in twenty-four hours I'll have you laid down for twelve months in gaol for a common rogue and vagabond.'

"'I'm no rogue,' I cried, 'but a soldier as has fought and bled for his country in Hindostan.'

"'Pooh, fellow, none o' that nonsense with me,' says he angrily, 'you've come here to extort money by threats and menaces, and that's a criminal offence.'

"'So is hiding a marriage,' I told him.

"'Very true,' says he, damnation calm and dangerous, 'so it is, if it could be proven. But it would take a lot o' swearing for a ragged rascal like you to be believed. And since Sir Francis Fyeways is dead, and Mercy Bradnock is dead, what are you a-going to swear to, and who for?'

"Just see the brazen cunning of that dog-fox of a priest, Mr. Selwyn! And you alive all the time and the rightful heir—on'y I'd never heard of you. And so had no answer to give.

"'And so,' says he for the second time, 'you've over-reached yourself, you rascal, waiting to rake up a scandal about a dead man as has been in his grave eighteen years. Was ever such iniquity?'

"What could I say? Nothing. And stood there like a leg o' mutton a-roasting, with the cook basting it.

"'And now,' says he all of a sudden, 'how about Sir Francis Fyeways' ring as you stole?'

"That gave me quite a wonderful turn. 'Sir,' says I, humble like, 'give me a trifle, and let me go.

If I'd a matter of ten guineas to start with I could earn a honest livelihood.'

"He looks at me peculiar nasty for some time. 'You're a rōgue and a thief to boot,' says he; 'and don't deserve it, but I'll give you a chance to repent your wickedness. There's an order for ten guineas on my banker at Gloucester, to be cashed between ten o'clock and noon to-morrow. And now get you gone, and if ever I see or hear of you in Fyeways again, with your obscene slanders about dead men and women, you shall rue the day.'

"Thankful I was to get the money, and out of the place. I walked into Gloucester, and lay there boozing like a hog for a week, and then started for London. And the next morning you and I met—and you knows what happened arter that."

He had been speaking with a voice growing weaker and weaker, and I feared his strength would fail. "Jago," I said, "I want you to let me write down your testimony, and you to sign it."

"I see," he said. "A sort of Last Dying Confession—hey?"

"Call it a confession if you will. A declaration that will confirm the truth of my mother's Testament."

"Very good, comrade old, set to and write it."

I called one of his servants and procured materials, and drafted out a short declaration, in which Jago confirmed the fact that my mother and Sir Francis Fyeways had been married by Father Clifford, and that he and Mr. Stephen Renfrew were witnesses to the ceremony, and finally that what was recorded in my mother's Testament was true in every particular.

"Well, I'm glad it's off of my mind," said Jago, with a sigh of relief. "And now send for Derlick and Saffy to witness it."

When they arrived I explained briefly the nature of the document, which Jago signed in their presence (for he could fashion some hieroglyphics which passed for his signature), and his two officers witnessed it.

Then I bent down, and taking him by the hand, thanked him for the amends he had made, and told him, so far as I was concerned, I freely forgave him. At which he seemed, I thought, much affected, and also a little comforted, for I felt his hand trembling in mine, and then press it gratefully.

Soon after this he spoke again—"There's another bit o' writing I should like done. And, Saffy, you'll do it for me I know, being a bit of a scholar, and it's better you nor Selwyn."

Saffy took up the pen and prepared to write. "What is it you wish, General?" he asked.

"My will," he answered in a shaky voice. "I've a bit o' property—at Bombay—in Tingey's House. I want Selwyn here—to have it. 'Tis all—I can do—to show him I'm—sorry. I ain't no—pettifogger in the law. You concoct it—an'—I'll sign it."

There was a change visible in him, and without doubt he was sinking. Saffy asked my assistance, and at Jago's earnest request I helped him to draft out a short will as follows:

"This is the last Will and Testament of me, John Jago, otherwise known as General John Tyger, of the

Maharajah Dowlut Rao Scindia's service. I give, will, devise and bequeath all my property and money, in the hands of the House of Tingey and Company at Bombay, to Selwyn Fyeways, otherwise known as John Selwyn, and I appoint him executor of this my last Will."

Saffy read it to Jago, and at his special request added the words:

"And this I do to make atonement for the wicked injury I have done the said John Selwyn and his mother."

Then he appended his name "John Jago, otherwise known as John Tyger," and also set his seal, saying that the House of Tingey could honour it without question if they saw that affixed, it being one they had caused to be specially engraved for the purpose of authenticating his crude signature.

Major Derlick, who throughout these proceedings had been noiselessly going through the motion of snapping his fingers and whistling under his breath, now appended his signature as witness, as did Saffy, and then Jago took the document from him and handed it to me, saying:

"There, Selwyn—comrade old and liked—'tis yours—whatever it is. And may you profit by it more than I have done! They're honest folks in the House of Tingey, and'll keep nothing back. And when you spend it, think sometimes—not o' John Jago—but of your old thick, Sergeant Fossit.

Then he turned to Derlick and Saffy. "Pieter Derlick," he said, "take heed, I leave the command of

the Campoo to you. And you and Saffy must divide my property here and at Oojein atween you. You've been good officers to me, and I'd like you to have a little su'thing to remember General Tyger by." With that he shook them both by the hand and bade them a solemn farewell. Saffy was truly affected, having an uncommon soft heart under his brown skin, and Derlick managed to snap out:

"Neffe—say—die—Sheneral. Haf hop—haf hop," (meaning hope), but Jago shook his head mournfully, and the Dutchman saluted him, and whistled himself out of the tent at a slow march.

And now that all his final arrangements were settled, Jago's strength seemed suddenly to fail. A little brandy poured down his throat revived him, but not for long; for presently he fell into a fever, which brought on a raging delirium. About nine at night he was seized with another paroxysm of pain, and the violent contortions of his body brought on the bleeding afresh. We plied him with opium, but it had no longer its usual effect, and only seemed to add to the intensity of his delirium, for he began wandering more and more, sometimes shouting out, sometimes singing a stanza or two of a song, anon talking of the past in a broken, quavering voice, with many a cruel groan and shriek as each recurring pang caught and tortured him.

For three hours we sat and watched him dying—dying as hard as he had lived. To the last he fought and wrestled for life with all the tenacity of his stubborn nature. It was a weird scene. Derlick, Saffy and I were gathered round the cushions on

which he lay, our shadows grouped like great black spectres against the walls of the dimly lighted tent. Abdoolah, white bearded and anxious, bent over him, administering drugs from time to time; and the scared faces of a score of dusky servants peered in at the doorways.

The end came as the camp gong was sounding the hour of midnight; when, as if in grim irony, the cry of the sentinels rang out "All's well." Three times Jago called out in a loud voice, "Dog's death to me it is—arter all!" Then he turned his head away from the light, and lay breathing hard and grinding his teeth, his fingers clawing at the sheet. Less and less fierce the struggle grew, until at last he seemed almost at ease. For I fancied I heard him croon out, very softly—

"Tis but in vain
For sogers to complain!"

And with that he stretched himself out, like a tired man, and only the click of his jaw as it dropped in the darkness, told me John Jago was dead.

CHAPTER XXI.

LITTLE MR. PARMINTER.

WE buried Jago the next day under a grove of date trees, in a little valley about a mile to the west of Sooleemanpoor, and, after firing three volleys over his grave, erected a great cairn of stones to protect it from the ravages of hyænas and jackals. It fell to me to give him a funeral service, but all I could do was to recite the Lord's Prayer, the Belief, and the Ten Commandments (at Saffy's suggestion, though I question if they did Jago any good); whilst Pieter Derlick, who acted as chief mourner, snapped his fat fingers in a melancholy way, and whistled *Amens* mournfully, but out of place. When all was done we rode back to camp, leaving poor Jago alone in the murdering desert.

Hardly were we back than an express *harcarra* arrived on his trotting camel, with urgent despatches for General Tyger, which, of course, Major Derlick opened. They contained the most startling information. A dispute had broken out between Scindia and the Company which seemed likely to lead to war. The Campoo was ordered to return with all speed to Boorhaunpoor, whither the Maharajah had gone to meet the British Resident, Colonel Collins, and where he was collecting an army and forming alliances with the Berar Rajah, Holker, and other Mahratta chiefs.

In consequence of this, immediate orders were given for the Brigade to march on the morrow for the Deccan, leaving Sooleemanpoor in possession of the Rana of Odeypoor's troops; and a little later in the afternoon Major Derlick sent Captain Saffy to communicate his orders to me.

"I have to notify to you," said Saffy, "that Major Derlick requires you to accompany us on our march to-morrow; for, although General Tyger restored you to perfect liberty, the Major could not reconcile it with his duty to leave you here in a country of which we were ordered to dispossess you, and where the authority of the Rana of Odeypoor is but imperfectly established, and might be successfully opposed after our departure."

I told him I could urge no opposition to his commander's wishes, and, at his request, passed my parole to accompany the force the Boorhaunpoor. My mind had been so occupied with other matters that Major Derlick's apprehensions came upon me as a surprise, for I had completely persuaded myself that my country was clean lost, and it never occurred to me it was possible to regain it—as how should it be, with my army broken and dispersed, and not a dam left to me to re-establish my fortunes? But now I began to wonder where Surwar Sing was, and whether any of my troops were still with him. But there was little to be gained by such speculation now that my parole was passed.

As a fact, Major Derlick had been acting on information received by him, and which he very properly kept secret from me. But, nevertheless, I learnt it

within a very short time, for that night, about two hours after I had retired to rest, I was awakened by a gentle pressure upon my feet, and, starting up half asleep, was on the point of calling out to give an alarm, when a whispered warning checked me.

"Who is it?" I demanded.

"Jummoo the *jassooos*, my lord!"

"Jummoo! What brings you here?"

"Oh, Rajah of my father and mother, your owl has come from Surwar Sing."

"What news of him?"

"He awaits my lord outside the camp."

"Awaits me! What for?"

"Accompany this poor beast, my lord, and you shall learn. What should a tailless bullock know except that he is sent to petition your honour to come?"

I considered in my mind whether I could do this consistently with my parole, and, after weighing the matter well, judged it in the affirmative. For it would not militate against my fulfilling my obligation, which was simply to accompany Major Derlick to Boorhaunpoor. And so I made up mind to go, being most anxious to say farewell to my faithful lieutenant ere I left this country, it might be for ever.

Dressing myself, I bade Jummoo lead the way. He guided me with wonderful dexterity, that could only be likened to the instinct of an animal, through the sleeping camp, avoiding the groups of slumbering servants that lay stretched around the tent, traversing the midst of the intricate encampment, all

now wrapped in silence, pointing out every obstacle in the path that might cause me to stumble in the dark, and finally conveyed me in safety past the sentries without creating any suspicion or alarm, or even evoking a challenge.

Then we struck downhill to the plain below, and presently arrived at a ruined *Sutty* cenotaph, close by which a solitary figure was standing.

It was Surwar Sing!

As, by the light of the rising moon, he saw me approaching, the Rajpoot came towards me with bowed head, and the handle of his sword held forward for me to touch. It was the homage of a faithful soldier to his fallen chief.

I gently put his sword aside and grasped his hand.

"Old friend and comrade in arms," I cried, "put up your sword. It may not be drawn again for Sooleeman the Feringee."

"Oh, my lord," he answered in startled concern, "what words are these? I have rallied and collected your army. And praise to Siva and Brahma, it is ready to fight my lord's battles again. This afternoon I have heard that these dogs of Mahrattas are returning to their own country, and leaving Sooleemanpoor to the Rana Bheem Sing. Shall we not then regain our own again? Who is there to say us nay?"

"It is too late," I answered. "I have given my parole to quit this country, and cannot remain. To-morrow I start for the Deccan."

Surwar Sing bowed his head in grief at hearing this. "Oh, my lord," he cried, "I have not slept, nor

eaten, nor rested these three days past. My mouth is dried up with anxiety, and my liver shrivelled with mortification. One thought only have I cherished, to raise again the standard of my master and exalt it above his enemies. Is it for nothing I have striven to serve my lord? Will he no longer lead us to battle? Will he never again sit in durbar to listen to the petitions of his people? They have been sorely scourged for their sins. They cry to their Rajah to protect them."

"It cannot be. For the rule of the Rajah Sooleeman is finished. But—praise be to the Gods of Rajasthan!—I can bestow my title on another. And who more worthy of it than thou, oh gallant Surwar Sing?"

Then I unbuckled my sword and slipped off from my finger the signet ring with which I had always certified my Proclamations of State.

"These are yours, oh honourable lieutenant," I cried, handing sword and ring to him. "Behold! here is my title to the Government of this country. I constitute you my successor. Here is the Command of my army. I invest you with it. And now, you, oh Surwar Sing, *Behauder*, are Rajah of Sooleemanpoor."

He knelt and took the emblems from my hand, and carried both sword and ring to his forehead with reverent obeisance.

Then he drew himself up erect to his full height, lifted his handsome face up into the moonlight, and saluted me. But his lips quivered, and his whole frame shook with emotion.

“Man that I have loved,” I cried, as I once more grasped his hand, “farewell.”

“Oh, my brother—my lord,” he gasped in a choking voice.

And as I turned and left him, the strong man, with his great fierce bearded face, was sobbing like a woman.

We started on our march the next morning, and reached Boorhaunpoor in due time, where we found everything in a great ferment, with constant interviews taking place between the Maharajah Scindia and Colonel Collins, the British Resident, and many indications of war. Two days after we arrived Scindia issued an order summarily dismissing from his service all British subjects, which threw about a dozen officers, English and half-caste, in the different Brigades out of employ.

These companions in misfortune, having no appeal from this harsh and arbitrary treatment, and being but improvident fellows and ill prepared to meet the ruin that had overtaken them, came together to decide what was best to be done, and I attended the meeting. At least half of them were deserters from the Company's Service, which made it perilous for them to seek an asylum in British territory; and in this dilemma it was agreed to form a band and offer their services to whomsoever of the native chiefs would accept them.

For my own part I was in as great a difficulty as they, for I, too, was a deserter from the Company's Service, and liable to arrest directly I came within its

jurisdiction. My desire was to visit Bombay to prove Jago's will, and take possession of what he might have left me, though I knew not whether it was much or little. Judging from his property at Oojein, that Derlick and Saffy had divided as we passed through the city, and the value of which was considerably less than they had anticipated, I did not think there could be any very large amount standing to his credit with the house of Tingey and Company at Bombay. But such as it was I desired to claim it, being entirely without means.

An unexpected stroke of good fortune came to land us all out of our difficulties, for Colonel Collins, happening to hear what Scindia's dismissed officers were hatching, sent for them to attend him, and I accompanied them as one of their body.

The British Resident was quartered in an encampment of extraordinary magnificence, wherein he kept up a great state. The escort of Company's troops that guarded him was exceeding strong, and he retained in his service a brigade of field artillery, worked by natives—chiefly, it was said, for the purpose of firing salutes, he being very partial to martial parade and military compliments. In fact, such was his delight in semi-regal display, so brusque his manners, and so excessive the dignity he assumed and maintained as representative of the Company, that he had earned for himself the sobriquet of King Collins.

He received us with an air of insolent superiority, which did not accord with his personal appearance, for he was a most insignificant looking, shrivelled up, little Nabob, dressed in an old-fashioned cut-

away coat, white silk breeches, sky-blue stockings, and enormous glaring buckles on his shoes. His hair was highly powdered, and behind him hung a pig-tail of prodigious length, while atop of all was a round black silk hat with an ostrich feather waving over it. He looked for all the world like a monkey dressed up for a fair. And yet, strange as it may seem, this fandangle vanity of his was instantly forgotten when one caught a look from his eyes, which were small and coal black, with great eyebrows (like Dr. Gale's in his Justice character) hanging over them, and shot out such glances of fire and determination as instantly counterbalanced the eccentricity and frivolity of his general appearance, and made the extraordinary influence he exercised over the native character understandable.

He lost no time in coming to the point, and told us in a few curt sentences that "his" government were anxious for the immediate withdrawal of all Europeans from the service of the native powers, and to such as were disposed to "submit" he offered a free pardon for past offences, a safe escort into Company's territory, and a small compensation for the loss of their recent employment.

These terms, however autocratically offered, were too liberal not to be very readily embraced. Whereupon he dismissed us with a grandiose wave of his hand, and the next day sent to say that the arrangements were ready for our journey to Poonah, which was now garrisoned by an English army under Major-General the Honourable Arthur Wellesley, who was soon to distinguish himself at the glorious battle

of Assaye, and win that great reputation which he is now so nobly sustaining on the plains of Spain against the Corsican Monster.

We duly reached the Deccan capital under escort of two companies of sepoy, just before the breaking out of the Mahratta War, and the communications between Poonah and Bombay being open, had no difficulty in making our way to the settlement.

Almost exactly seven years had passed since I left Bombay to join Hervey at Panwell, and it was here that I now took boat to cross the harbour. As we sailed over and I recognised the familiar landmarks and saw the grim walls of the fort frowning above the water, recollection brought the past vividly back to my mind. And then my thoughts wandered to the seven years that had intervened since I left this place as a young lad, and all the adventures I had experienced in Hindostan. Many dangers, many vicissitudes had been mine, and their incidents came crowding one upon another. For I had seen, in poor Hervey's words, swords flashing and banners waving—had heard the roll of the drum beating to quarters and the trumpets blaring for battle! Aye, and had attained to the Government of a great province. And was I not blessed who was returning from out that far land with health and strength unimpaired? Many men had gone into it, only to leave their bones bleaching there. Poor Hervey, with all his buoyant hopes, was dead; dead was General George Thomas, with his soaring ambition. Tone of the tender heart had found a soldier's grave, and Jago slept under the lonely date-grove where I had helped to lay him. All

were dust of the dust. And long, long the roll of others who had shared the same hard fate, penetrating, even as I had done, into this region of Adventure, only to fail—to fall—to be forgotten!

Such were the melancholy reflections that occupied my mind as we crossed Bombay harbour. The monsoon was not yet over, and the gale soughed in from the sea, and the grey storm-clouds rolled up. Our tall lateen sail drew taut and hummed to the blast, the cordage strained and creaked, winds whistled and waters splashed. New sights and sounds for eyes and ears that had long been in exile in the interior! I looked to windward, where the white-crested waves tumbled and tossed to the far horizon. And then I wondered—even as I had wondered seven years ago—should I ever cross that ocean again and return to England?

And, speculating, the past came back to me as it was ever wont to do—and against the blood-red sunset sky there seemed to interpose the figure of the murdered priest, warning me off. The fatal blow I had struck in my mad passion was recoiling on my own head. I had discovered Jago, but to what profit? He had confessed the secret of my mother's marriage, but he did not hold the proof. The proof had lain in the hands of the priest, and him I had killed. If, peradventure, it had passed into those of Stephen Renfrew, what hope remained to me of ever dragging it to light? For did he not hold a greater power over me than ever the possession of that writing could give him? My own crime, my own act, barred the way to my own inheritance.

It was evening when we reached Bombay, and, obedient to Colonel Collins' orders, reported our arrival to the proper authorities, and procured the licences which all interlopers were required to hold to enable them to reside in the Company's territory. It was then too late to do anything except secure a lodging, which Saffy and I did at a tavern in the Fort Bazaar.

Early the next morning I went to the house of Tingey and Company to give notice of Jago's death (having provided myself with a certificate attested by Major Derliek), and to discover what property he had left in his agents' hands. On stating my business, I was requested to ascend to a spacious room in the upper floor and see the senior partner.

And when I got there, who, to my exceeding surprise, should this prove to be but little Mr. Parminter, my fellow-captive in the dungeon of Shadrach's crimping house! He was but little changed, except that his beautiful flossy golden hair had turned to snow-white, and was worn in curls of surpassing elegance, and that he was more wizen and thinner, and his complexion yellow as a guinea. But for the rest he was the same little bag of bones only more dapper and sprightly.

"Why, Mr. Parminter," I cried, "this is a strange meeting!"

He stared at me, very puzzled, and replied solemnly:

"You have the advantage of me, Mr. Fyeways" (which was the name I had given). "I do not remember to have met you before."

“And yet,” I laughed, “we came out fellow-recruits in the same ship!”

The little man looked a little mortified.

“That is a time, sir, I cannot look back to with any pleasure, and strive to forget,” he answered with some haughtiness.

“In that matter, sir, you have only yourself to please and consult,” I answered him as coldly, “and I will respect your wishes—though once we were very good friends.”

“And pray, sir, who are you?” he asked.

“My name is Fyeways; but you knew me as John Selwyn.”

“John Selwyn!” he ejaculated. “The young man who shielded me from the brutality of that blood-thirsty crimp’s bully?”

“I have no desire to remind you of it, sir?” said I.

“Forgive me, Mr. Selwyn,” he cried, skipping towards me with a quaint agility and seizing my hand in his. “That is something I could never wish to forget. I have often desired—aye, and tried to find you—to prove my gratitude for your humanity towards me. Had I known it was you—but there! you call yourself Fyeways, and are grown from a boy to a man, and you must acquit me. For, verily, this meeting pleases me more than I can express.” He wrung my hands with amazing effusion, and showed by his cordial manner that his words were sincerely meant. “And I hope,” he added, “that I see you in prosperous circumstances.”

“That remains to be proven,” I said. “But, at any rate, the world appears to have treated you well; for

I was bidden to step up and see the senior partner of the House of Tingey."

He rubbed his hands and skipped back into his high chair, where he sat enthroned as merry as a little elf.

"Fortune *has* smiled upon me," he confessed with a beaming face. "I always had the gift of making myself attractive and agreeable to the sex—being part of my former profession to gain their good graces. I was sent into the Commissariat, as you doubtless remember. Well, the Commissary General had a young wife—not pretty; no, I don't hold her to have been pretty; but she had a tolerable head of hair and was a woman of fascinating affability. I was able to be of service to her; in short, my art enabled her to extinguish all the other ladies in the Settlement, of whom my genius made her the envy. She was a religious woman, untainted with any pernicious principles, and constantly bestowed on me very admirable and orthodox treatises of devotion, such as 'Baxter's Shove to a Heavy-breeched Christian,' whereof I committed a great portion to memory, and that truly excellent 'Heelpiece to a Limping Sinner,' than which John Bunyan never wrote anything more comforting. As I dressed my lady's hair we discussed these and kindred works of sanctity, and soon she conceived me to be a person very religiously inclined, and worthy to be conscientiously recommended. The great are not often grateful; but she was. When the war broke out with Tippoo Sultaun, she interested herself on my behalf, and her worthy husband sent me down the coast to Bancoot to buy bullocks for the army at

Seringapatnam, and I sailed in the *Endeavour*, Captain Eastwick—as fine a seaman as ever stepped a deck—to take up a cargo.” He paused, and twiddled his fingers in a sort of luscious retrospect. Then he went on in a whisper, as if to himself: “It was a very lucrative business. And there, Mr. Selwyn, you have my success in a nutshell. If the war had only lasted another year I should have been a Nabob in England, like Mr. Hastings, without the persecution. As it is, I am a partner in this firm, which is not nearly so profitable as buying bullocks for Government. Still we have had luck in Respondentias, and I have not much to grumble at. And now may I ask to what happy fortune I am indebted for the pleasure of this visit? To complete that pleasure you have only to say I can be of some service to you.”

“That you can. Of very great service.”

“I truly rejoice to hear it. Pray call upon me.”

“I think you are the agents of General John Tyger, of Scindia’s service?”

“Why, of course we are. He is one of our most valued clients.”

“Alas!—not now. For he is dead.”

“Dead!” cried Mr. Parminter. “General Tyger dead! Dally! dally! This is very sad and serious news.”

“And I am his heir!”

Little Mr. Parminter sprang at least seven inches off his chair. “You! His heir! Oh, Mr. Fyeways, just think of that.”

“Here is his will, which I desire to get proven, and probate granted. And here is a certificate of

his death, signed by Major Pieter Derlick, who succeeded to his command." (I did not think it necessary to mention that General Tyger and Sergeant Fossit were the same, as Mr. Parminter seemed ignorant of that fact.)

Mr. Parminter took the will and read it through very slowly and carefully. Then he laid it down on the table, and refreshed himself with a pinch of snuff. Next he read the certificate of death, and refreshed himself with a second pinch of snuff; and finally, the will once more, and a third pinch of snuff. He did it in perfect, almost funereal, silence, and withal so solemnly and mysteriously, and with such a sober, business air, that I felt a little uneasy, fearing something was wrong or irregular. But he allayed my fears by starting up suddenly, and making me a very elaborate bow.

"Give me leave, Mr. Fyeways, to congratulate you on having succeeded to a very handsome fortune."

"Why, then, and how much might it be?"

"Roughly speaking, a matter of thirty to thirty-two *lacks* of rupees."

"Thirty to thirty-two *lacks* of rupees!" I cried, scarce daring to believe my senses, for he spoke so drily and in such a matter-of-fact voice that I doubted whether I had not misheard him.

"Thirty to thirty-two *lacks*," he repeated; "about four hundred thousand pounds sterling, the rupee being two-and-sixpence."

"Mr. Parminter," I said, all of a tremble, "this is a little sudden."

Perceiving my agitation, he poured out a glass of brandy *shraub pawnny*, which steadied me.

“And how did General Tyger die?” he asked.

“He was wounded in battle, or rather after it, by a chance shot, when entering a hostile city, and it carried him off the next day.”

“And the witnesses of the will?”

“One of them is here at Bombay, lodging at the same tavern as myself. He is a son of a respectable officer in the Settlement, Ensign Saffy of the Invalid Establishment. The other is Major Derlick, who is now in command of General Tyger's Brigade at Boorhaunpoor or elsewhere.”

“Everything seems in order. Give me leave to compliment you on your business capacity. We are agents for many of the gentlemen in the country service—it is, indeed, a line of business for which we have laid ourselves out. And we find when they die—which they do very often and very unexpectedly, and very inconsiderately, and in all sorts of inconvenient places—that we are put to great trouble to administer their estates. Now, there's Colonel Tone for instance——”

“Colonel Tone, did you say?” I interrupted instantly.

“Yes, Colonel William Henry Tone, of Holker's service.”

“Were you his agents?” I asked eagerly.

“We were.”

“Have you any undelivered letters of his?”

“A packet of them.”

“I was expecting a letter to his care. It was very

long ago ; but perhaps you would not mind looking just on the chance ? ”

“ Why, what a zany I am ! Of course there are some letters for Captain Selwyn. But I never dreamt that was you. Come with me.”

He took me into the office below to a large almirah, from which he extracted a teakwood box with “ Colonel Tone ” printed on it. Opening it, he brought out a small bundle of letters tied round with red tape, and rapidly running his eyes through them, threw out three, saying—

“ There you are : ‘ Captain John Selwyn, these to the care of Major Tone, at Poonah, in the country of the Mahrattas, East Indies. ’ We have not been able to deliver them, for he left Poonah in 1800, and was campaigning till his death.”

I seized the letters in my nervous fingers, and a single glance was sufficient to send my heart throbbing like thunder-peals in my breast. For—one—two—three—they were all from my dear cousin, Mercy Bradnock !

CHAPTER XXII.

MERCY'S LETTERS.

MY impulse, as I left Mr. Parminter's place of business, was to seek some quiet corner wherein I might read Mercy's letters, and I directed my steps to the tavern I was lodging at. But suddenly I remembered my old resort on the Esplanade, and no sooner was it thought of than thither I determined to go. It pleased me to find the spot but little changed. The Windmill still remained, and, although several new marine bungalows and garden houses had been built near it, I was able to choose a shady nook, where nothing seemed likely to disturb me.

But now, when the moment came for me to open my letters, a foolish apprehension seized me, so that I sat there for some minutes dreading to do so. What evil news might they not contain? What dreadful confirmation of my crime? What tidings of shame and sorrow suffered by those at home through my wickedness? What upbraidings? What reproachings? It seemed as if I held my very fate in my hand, and dared not put it to the touch. But at length, summoning up resolution, I broke the seals.

And then the very first page lifted from my mind the dull weight that had oppressed it these ten years past, for almost the opening words that Mercy wrote were that Father Clifford was alive, and not dead!

What that assurance meant for me, none but such as have endured my pangs, and borne my burden, can know; and I confess my eyes filled with tears of thankfulness, my heart expanded with an unutterable relief, and a great gasp of gladness burst from my breast, as I realised that I was purged from the curse of Cain, and need no longer hug the grim secret of blood-guiltiness.

The letter unfolded a strange and marvellous history; but that it may be the easier read and more conveniently written, I purpose to relate it, not altogether as Mercy wrote it, but in a brief narrative, partly of my own, the account expanded and completed from inquiries made by me after my return to Fyeways, but the story carried down to no further than the time of my now learning of it—namely, the month of September, in the year 1803.

To begin, then, at the beginning—that is to say, from the very day I fled from home. The first information they received at the farm of my encounter with the priest was two hours after its occurrence. They were waiting supper for me, my grandfather somewhat anxious at my prolonged absence, when his alarm was greatly augmented by the arrival, shortly after sunset, of Mr. Renfew's bailiff and a peace officer, who came inquiring urgently for me. Finding me absent, they informed my grandfather of what I had done, and commanded him, in the King's name, to detain me if I returned, and give instant notice so that I might be taken.

My grandfather's feelings at hearing this sudden and dreadful news were as distressing and pitiable

as can be conceived, and nothing Mercy, or my aunt Mary, or Walter, could say or do was able to comfort him. Notwithstanding that my guilt seemed clear, they yet believed I should return home, and all that night waited up, expecting me to come in at any moment. As hour after hour passed and I did not arrive, their fear and anxiety increased, and found a climax when the bailiff and peace officer returned in the morning to make a search of the house and all the farm buildings. But, failing to discover me, the latter rode off to Gloucester to lay an information, and men were sent out in all directions to scour the country, for it was never doubted I must be lurking in concealment near at hand.

Concerning Father Clifford there were the most alarming rumours advertised. He was said to be lying at the point of death, and two surgeons from Gloucester attending him night and day. Nothing, it was believed, could save his life, and people shook their heads and said it must end in a verdict of Wilful Murder against me, and that I should be convicted and turned off; for Rupert Renfew was vowing the bitterest vengeance, and had resolved to swear away my life directly I was apprehended.

In this way a week passed, the search very hot and the hue and cry gone to all the adjoining counties, with a full description of my person and a handsome reward offered for my capture. My grandfather and Mercy lived in shame and terror, as every day made the case look blacker against me, and my continued absence was held to confirm the general conjecture that I had sought to take revenge

on the priest for the evil he was reputed to have done my mother, and struck him down in cold blood with that deliberate intent.

To make matters worse, Rupert Renfrew, on being pressed by the Justices who assembled to inquire into the matter, began to enlarge on his original story, declaring now that I had rushed at Father Clifford without so much as a word of warning, and felled him with a huge club, and would have done the same for Rupert, only that he armed himself with a great stone and stood forth valiantly prepared to defend the priest's life and his own. It was a fine story, all in his own favour, with no one to contradict it, and made people praise his brave conduct, and especially his modesty in not acknowledging to all he had done until he was pressed and questioned. He might, indeed, have achieved a great fame and reputation, but for a singular accident that set up a contradiction and brought him to shame.

For about a month after the affair a certain poacher, named Dark Evans, was one night taken by Mr. Renfrew's gamekeepers for trespassing, and ordered to prison for six months. Exasperated at the severity of the sentence, Dark Evans called out, boastingly, that he might as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb, and could, an' he wished, discover the real truth about the attack on the Popish priest which he had witnessed.

Now, the assault on the priest had created such public curiosity and excitement that everybody was teasing to know more about it, and in consequence it

was held proper to take Dark Evans's evidence. Whereupon he told the true story of what had happened, acknowledging that the hare I had stooped to unloose had been taken in one of his own snares, and he at the very time concealed in the plantation within a few yards of the spot. He narrated how, directly I had mentioned the name of John Jago, Rupert Renfrew attacked me at the urgent instance of the priest, and when I had beaten him off Father Clifford himself came to his assistance, and both advanced against me, so that I was necessitated to defend myself manfully, and did so, if I would not lose my liberty. Then he described the blow I had given the priest, and how Mr. Rupert did nothing but run away, crying out "Murder! Murder!"—and finally the manner of my own flight. "Young Bradnock," said he (that being the name I was known by) "never had no intention to kill the priest. What he did was done in fear and self-defence, being accused of a crime he was innocent of, and yet unable to prove it."

Had Rupert Renfrew boldly and totally denied the truth of what Dark Evans related, which was all in opposition to his own story, his word would have been accepted before that of a common poacher. But his guilty conscience proved his undoing. He grew pale and confused, contradicted himself foolishly, and, in short, behaved in such a manner that the poacher's evidence remained unshaken, and everyone believed he had spoken nothing but the truth.

Now, it happened my grandfather was present, having been hastily sent for directly the enquiry was decided on, and he asked Dark Evans whose name it

was I mentioned that made the priest so angry. "John Jago," repeated the poacher. Being questioned if he knew who John Jago was, he replied he had never heard of him before that afternoon, which was perfectly true, for Evans had only come to Fyfeways from Wales about three years previously, and could not have known of such a man as Jago. Then my grandfather desired to acquaint the Justices who this Jago was, and how I had but recently heard about him, and why it was likely I should mention his name to the priest; and so began to launch into the story of my mother's marriage. But their Worships said that was not a matter before them, and declined to listen (being in a way friends of Mr. Renfew), and closed the hearing. But it was generally agreed that Dark Evans's reference to John Jago was an additional proof that his statement was true, and public opinion entirely acquitted me of the graver crime of deliberate attempt to murder.

After this, little suspecting that I was already far away on my Adventure to India, many hoped I would come back to face it out, especially as about this time a man who was apprehended for robbing a priest in Worcester was discharged out of court by proclamation, there being a grievous prejudice against Roman Catholics, and few of that faith, notably priests, caring to prosecute. But Squire Renfew was so disturbed by the enquiry, and the raking up of a whispered story that had been dead and buried for nearly twenty years—namely, my mother's marriage to Sir Francis Fyfeways—that he discountenanced all further attempts to find me; whilst his son was so frightened

at what he learnt about my reputed parentage, and so mortified at his own exposure, that he scarce showed his face abroad for a good six months.

By this time, the priest, in spite of all predictings to the contrary, had recovered from his wound. But herein came the most strange and extraordinary part of the story. For the injury he received acted in some peculiar way on his brain, so that, although restored to health, his memory was clean gone, and the past blotted out of his life as if he had never lived it. Yet in every other degree he retained his faculties—could see, hear, speak, read, discourse, and even study. Only he never conducted mass at the chapel again, but continued to reside at the Hall, an invalid pensioner on the bounty of Squire Renfew.

At first this curious and startling affliction was held to be a temporary one, consequent on the weakness of the priest's general health, and the surgeons were of opinion that when he grew strong in body his mind would recover. But time went on, and no change was apparent, for he continued in the same condition, with his life behind him utterly dead and forgotten.

Almost as strange as the priest's loss of memory, and perhaps more surprising, was Squire Renfew's conduct. When he first heard of the calamity he seemed to take no heed, treating it as something that would presently be cured, and probably, as the surgeon opined, and all held likely, under such circumstances as a sudden shock or startle, or perhaps of its own accord, as men are said to recover of a wind stroke or the moon-madness. But when a year passed away,

and Father Clifford remained in exactly the same state, the Squire began to examine into the case with a peculiar curiosity and an uncanny interest, constantly asking if he were any better or had shown any signs of recovery. Then he fell into a way of visiting the priest unexpectedly or privily in his chamber, and holding converse with him, asking him all manner of questions concerning what had happened in the past. But all he obtained in reply was a blank look, that had in it something of pain and something of anger, as Father Clifford nodded his head mournfully, with a bewildered lost expression on his face, and his eyes wandering restlessly round and round the room, searching, as it might be, for a key or clue to the forgotten past.

The Squire was at first sore perplexed, and even inclined to misdoubt the priest, suspecting him of counterfeiting a part, and setting many traps to catch him. For in every other matter, saving this, Father Clifford was sane and sound in mind and body. It was a shrewd sight, said they who saw it, to observe Mr. Renfew question and cross-question the Jesuit, just like a schoolmaster seeking to entrap a child at the hearing over, and going on with it, notwithstanding that he received no answer at all! At last Mr. Renfew appeared to be persuaded that the affliction was real and not feigned, and having once satisfied himself of this, there followed an extraordinary change in his conduct. For he was now often hugely pleased without any reason, laughing immoderately to himself, and was sometimes wildly excited, rubbing his hands together, and talking at a great rate under his breath.

His demeanour was that of a man suddenly let loose, and hardly to be accounted for even by the wine that he drank to great excess. Next he sent for many clever surgeons to examine the priest, some even from London itself, sparing no expense in doing so; and as each came and gave his opinion that there was no known cure for this remarkable affliction, the Squire, instead of displaying any concern, seemed more and more satisfied. The malady, they declared, was a prodigy of nature, and could only be cured by a similar freak, being one of those cases in which like cures like. But as to how it might come to pass, or when, they could never explain, nor even hold out any certain prospect of its taking place at all.

Not to carry the story too far, during all these ten years I was away Father Clifford never recovered his lost memory. The only change visible in him was that he aged very quickly, and his hair grew snowy white, so that, while he was a man of perhaps sixty-five, he looked twenty years older. He became feeble, too, and after the first year seldom stirred out of his room, which he had always occupied—the same one at the foot of the staircase that I had seen him issue from when I was a child. It was a dark oak-panelled chamber looking towards the north, with a small room adjoining that served him for sleeping in, and it had the character of being haunted—strange noises sounded there in the night, occasioned, doubtless, by the rats with which the old Hall was infested, but by the vulgar attributed to supernatural causes.

Once, and only once, the Squire, for some reason of his own, attempted to remove Father Clifford from

his chamber to another in the west wing of the building. But hereupon the priest made a most unaccountable resistance, resolutely refusing to budge. There was some strange trouble over this attempted eviction, never rightly explained, but the story ran that the Squire proceeded to the room with three of his men-servants, resolved to effect his purpose. Whereupon the priest caught up his crucifix, and standing in the farther corner, vowed he would never leave that chamber except he was carried out dead.

And then, in a loud troubled voice, lifting the crucifix to heaven, he called to God to restore to him that of which he had been deprived, and in a manner so troubled and distraught, that the men feared he would have a stroke; and the Squire, in great perturbation, hurriedly bade them desist from their endeavours and leave the room. Never again did he attempt to meddle with the priest's residence therein, fearing, as all said, he might receive that shock which would quicken his dead memory.

These were two surprising matters that had happened in my absence, namely, the affliction suffered by the priest, and Squire Renfew's extraordinary conduct. And yet they were not the only strange things that occurred. For equally wonderful was another change, and it related to Rupert Renfew. He had been brought up under the guidance and strict control of Father Clifford, and intended for the priesthood. But now, being freed from the Jesuit's influence, a difference was manifested in his behaviour. All through his youth

he had been kept in grave and dolorous discipline, never allowed to do anything without the priest's sanction, and compelled to lead a pious, orderly and austere life. Then suddenly the restraint was removed, and the young man his own master. It was like the loosing of a bird taken from its nest, and long detained in a cage. At first it feels its wings, little by little, attempts a short flight, and settles on the nearest bough to look round. Presently it gathers courage, flies on again further afield, until it is lost in the welkin, to become the prey and victim of others. So it was with Rupert Renfew: he began to try his wings, doubtfully and slowly at set-off, but soon, gaining confidence, with more enquiry. He who had never tasted wine learnt in a few months to share a bottle with his father, who made no attempt to control him, all his time and the few wits left him being taken up in watching Father Clifford. Next, this priest-ridden youth, that had never dared to let his glance fall on a woman, must begin making eyes at half the girls in the village, till soon some pretty scandals were gossiped. After which he journeyed up to London to see a little of town life, and returned a great blood and sport, and, as the elder folk of the village declared, a regular Fyveways of the old stock. Having plenty of money, he did not lack for friends, for, as the birds of the air recognise one of their species that has been caged, and gather round it to devour it, so there were many young men of his own kidney and age to gather round Rupert Renfew and teach him to become a dissipated

profligate and as devil-may-care, reckless a young buck as any in the county.

With his father he soon learnt to do as he pleased, for years of secret drinking had besotted the Squire's brain, and he was no longer able to exercise any authority over his son. In short, the young man was master now and had it all his own way, whilst his father, so far from being displeased, seemed delighted at the change in his son's character and conduct. "Live and be merry while you can!" he was often heard to say to Rupert. "Who knows but the Jesuit's cursed memory may come back to him, and then——." But here he always broke off with a scared, apprehensive look, and was silent.

But Rupert Renfew could guess what he would have added. He had heard the story of my mother's marriage, and knew that, should the priest ever be cured of his affliction, he would immediately apply himself to his old design of securing the estate for his Order, under threat of dispossessing those who wrongfully held it.

Such was the history of what had happened at Fyeways during the last nine years, the outlines of which were notified to me in my cousin Mercy's letters. For the rest, I need but briefly mention that they conveyed the sad intelligence of the death of her mother, my aunt Mary, which took place in 1799, and certain other news of friends in the village not needful to mention. Mercy wrote with all her old affection for me undiminished, considering I had been more than sufficiently punished for what I had done, and anxious to assure me of the sorrow and

sympathy they felt for me at home, and their longing for my return. My letter, indeed, had come to them when they had almost mourned for me as dead, and filled them with new hope and joy.

Alas! when I read them, these words had been written more than three years previously, for the latest of the letters was dated in the summer of the year 1800, and it pained me bitterly to reflect that I had never communicated with them again to ease their further anxiety, so that a longer silence had ensued since my letter reached them than before. At which I reproached myself for leaving undone that which I should have done, despite the many doubts and fears under which I had laboured.

For of course it was easy now, when all the air had cleared, to be wise and see wherein my duty lay. And yet how hard when everything loomed so black and hopeless! But it is ever so in this world of ours. Blind are we mortals to that which is very simple and plain when finally discovered to us, either by accomplished fact or revelation. The priest was living when I judged him dead—and yet from the very moment that I saw him lying there on the stubble, with (as it appeared to me) his very brain oozing out of his fractured skull, no shadow of a doubt ever crossed my mind but that I had killed him. And so it was with Sergeant Fossit, who had turned out to be John Jago. One idle word dropped by him unthinkingly when we first met might have given me the clue. But it took me nine years to find out that the man into whose very arms Fate had thrice thrust me was the one of all

others that I sought vigilantly and most desired to find. Verily, we, in this planet of ours, are little and weak and undiscerning; toiling and moiling where we might take our ease; fighting when no fighting is required; fearing what need frighten none; and blindly groping according to our dull lights, when, if we but knew it, all is plain and clear as day.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOME.

THANKS to little Mr. Parminter, who had become a man of great rank and figure in the Settlement, and whose gratitude to me for the slight protection I had once afforded him was in no way diminished with time, I was able to prove Jago's will, and transfer the investment standing in his name in the Company's ten per cent. loan to mine. Even when this was actually accomplished I could hardly realise it was true. For the fortune I had come into was an immense one, and made me rich beyond the dreams of avarice. How Jago accumulated it I could never learn. And perhaps it was better so, for I doubt not he shook the pagoda-tree with a rough hand, being one of those who stick at nothing; and had I known how he came by his riches, my inheritance of them might have brought me both uneasiness of mind and distress of conscience. As it was, I felt I had as just a claim as any to his testamentary generosity, knowing that he had made me his heir by way of atonement for the grievous wrong he had done me and my mother.

Before the month was out I took passage in the *Barwell Castle*, East Indiaman, homeward bound; and¹³ after a prosperous voyage, secured from any

fears of attack at the hands of hostile cruisers or privateers by the Treaty of Amiens, which had recently been concluded with the French, I reached England in the month of May, 1804. My business affairs in London detained me for a few days, and having satisfactorily arranged them, I booked a seat by the Western Counties coach, starting from the "Swan with Two Necks" in Lad Lane, and was set down the next morning at the "Bell Inn," Gloucester, where I hired a chaise and drove to Fyveways at a good hearty pace.

An hour brought me to the hill overlooking the village, where there was an old posting-inn called the "George." Here I left my baggage and set out to walk to my grandfather's farm, about half a mile distant.

But before I began the descent of the hill I stood awhile on the brow viewing the village beneath. The well-remembered scenes of my boyhood came back to me strangely familiar after all these years of exile. It seemed as though scarce a new house had been built, or a tree felled, or any change made whatever. The country was bursting with the velvet beauty of summer; the birds singing in the woods and fields; the roses and honeysuckle all a-bloom, scenting the air with fragrance; everything was bright and contented. And so was I. For it was, indeed, that same peaceful little Gloucestershire village I had so often thought upon and dreamt of in my far wanderings, and longed to see again. There was the church, with its square tower of grey lichen-covered stone, and a little beyond it Fyveways

Hall, half hidden in its ivy robe, and the tall elm-trees around, with the very rooks cawing and circling in the air. Behind it uprose the hill, and I could discern the identical field, close by the plantation, wherein I had met and struck down the priest, from which one quick glance carried me to the spot that was dearest of all—the red brick walls and thatched roof of my grandfather's farm—my cousin Mercy's home.

This is no tale of romance or sentimental story—being in truth only a sober relation of certain matters told as they came to pass, without any embellishments—else I might spin a yarn (as the sailors say) of how I was received by my grandfather and Mercy and Cousin Walter, and their exceeding great surprise and joy at seeing me, and the warm and loving welcome they gave me. But in making of books there is much weariness, and my desire thereto draweth to its end, and I must prick my Pegasus and make him gallop to the finish.

The uncommon affection my dear grandsire displayed towards me, as, with tears in his eyes and his voice all a-tremble, he laid his hand upon my head and solemnly blessed me, bent me lower than the accolade of a King could have done. The grasp of Walter's hand was as that of a brother. And for Mercy—what can I say? Is she not my wife now, and prone to look over my shoulder as I write this journal, and shall I praise the wicked young baggage to her very face? Yet let justice be done—and no more. She was the Cousin Mercy I remembered, only more womanly and (as I thought) more

worshipful! Her countenance was engaging and animated, her figure comely and elegant, and though dressed in a plain country gown, without a frill or furbelow to set it off, I could have vowed her clothes were better fancied and better put on than any woman's I have ever seen. It has been said that women love nothing but silk and scandal; but for Mercy I must protest that, while her mind was endowed with a true sensibility, many gay charms, and winning graces, she possessed in addition a solidity of reason and a determination of character such as I have seldom observed in any female of her age.

All that day of our meeting we held high revel and felicity, and I know not whether they or I had most to relate. But, for my own story, I cut it short with the discovery of Jago, and mentioned nothing of the great fortune he had left me. For I desired to be welcomed home for my own sake, and not that of the gold I had brought with me.

Great was my grandfather's astonishment when I told him about Jago, and he read the confession with a devouring interest; only his eyes fell when he learnt it was Joan Renfew who had stolen my mother's marriage certificate, and that it had yet to be discovered.

"I fear me," he said, shaking his head gloomily, "this confession will not stand thee in much stead. 'Tis the marriage lines themselves are needed to establish thy claim. Alas, the pity of it! For thou dost favour thy father strangely, Selwyn, and as I look upon thee his very self seems to rise in front of

me. Thou art grown a Fyeways of the true breed, and, God knows, I hunger to see thee at the Hall before I die!"

"Perhaps you shall do so yet," I answered. "But, even if not, it is assuredly a great blessing and satisfaction of mind to know my dear mother was truly married. Nor do I despair of being Master at the Hall in due time."

This I said because of what they had told me. My first question to them, on my arrival, was to ask whether any danger was to be apprehended on my coming back. They declared none whatever, for Rupert Renfew was recently dead, the priest in the same state as I have described, and Black Evans shipped out to Botany Bay in New Holland for a murderous assault, so that no witnesses remained to bear testimony for or against me.

The manner of Rupert Renfew's death was dreadful beyond description. For the last two years he had fallen deeper and deeper into vice and dissipation, having taken up his residence in London, where he squandered his living in drinking, devilry, and similar diabolical riots and disorders. His father's fortune had passed entirely under his control, and on plea of investing it at great interest amongst lords and ladies of high rank and reputation, he had wheedled it out of the old dotard and gambled it away. So long as it lasted, his command of money carried him into the most fashionable quality, and amongst the hottest bucks and bloods of the town, who indulged in gaming to excess. He gained a reputation for being

a most reckless sporting man, and achieved the distinction of losing five thousand pounds at a sitting to Mr. Pitt.

But such a life could not last long, and he soon ran through his father's money, and was then necessitated to borrow in order to find fuel to feed his profligate folly. Fyeways he mortgaged to the very hilt, and his notes of hand were flying about all over the town. Then came the crash—he sank lower and lower, till fortune made a Broken Merchant of him, and he was driven to consort with pimps, demireps, and Greeks, and being at last sued by his tradesmen for their long-owing accounts, was landed in the Rules of the Bench, where, in a despairing moment, afraid to confess to his father, whom he had engulfed in utter ruin, he took his own life by hanging.

This happened only a few weeks before my return. The estate of Fyeways had passed to Mr. Renfew, as heir to his son, but so burdened with debt that it was nothing worth. The news of Rupert's death and the manner of it, together with the intelligence of the absolute loss of his own fortune, affected Stephen Renfew's feeble brain in such a degree, that he was totally unable to transact any business, which was the only thing that delayed the parties to whom Fyeways had been mortgaged from acquiring possession of the property.

This was what I heard, and hearing it, rejoiced. For Fyeways was in the market for sale, and I returned with a fortune and able to buy it. And this I determined to do, since it was plain to see that,

with the priest in his present afflicted state, there was no chance of proving my mother's marriage in a way that could satisfy the law and establish my claim to the estate and title.

Wherefore I began to make inquiries, but with great circumspection, so that my design might not be suspected; and learnt to whom the place was mortgaged, and the amount advanced. Then I journeyed up to London and employed a clever attorney, who, after some negotiation, arranged for me to take the mortgage over; for I preferred this method of securing the property to having any commerce with Stephen Renfew, even had he been competent to transact business. And while in London I settled another matter, which was to assume, by poll-deed, duly licensed, the name of Fyveways, so that I might call myself by the same without let or hindrance, or anyone to challenge my right thereto.

All which affairs being completed, and the title-deeds of the estate in my possession, I returned home again, after my man of business had given Mr. Renfew formal notice of foreclosing the mortgage.

But this could not be brought to an issue all of an instant, and meanwhile I had an occupation that made the time pass quickly, and this was the courtship of my cousin Mercy Bradnock. But my love-suit sped faster than my law-suit, for in less than a month I had spoken the word and Mercy the answer, and we were pledged and promised to each other for man and wife.

Mightily delighted was our dear old grandsire when we asked his consent and blessing.

"Why, now," he protested, "this is what I have ever wished and wanted from the day thy poor mother died, Selwyn, and thou didst threaten to leave us and go away. And here is Mercy named after her, and as like her as ever niece to aunt. And, God be praised! she will stay in the family now and never go out of it. That is what makes me so happy! I always said thou shouldst share and share alike, and now this match is made, and what could be better?"

"What could be better?" I echoed, feeling ready to fight the man who suggested anything as such.

"And sure," went on my grandfather, "when I see you two standing together side by side, I mind me of thy father, Sir Francis, and my dear daughter that is gone, and fancy the whole story is repeating itself. Only we'll have a happier ending on't this time."

"Aye, that we will," I cried; "as you shall see."

"You and Walter shall have the farm," he proceeded, not noticing my remark, "and I'll just take my seat in the chimney-corner and look on. I've a stocking put by—no great fortune, but enough to live decently independent, with a bit to spare. And you and Walter shall be partners, and take up another two hundred acres, and, by George! I'll stock it for ye."

"Grandfather," said I, determined now to tell him all, "this cannot be. Walter must be your

heir. He bears the good old Bradnock name, and I am a Fyveways now by licence of the King."

"Walter my heir—and why not thee, Selwyn, lad?" he asked, both astonished and hurt. "Have I not loved thee? Have I not ever wished it so, and said it should be so? And now thou hast come back to marry my Mercy, the most winsome lass in broad Gloucestershire, why, where else shouldst thou live but here, in the old home thou wert born and brought up in?"

"Where else? At Fyveways Hall."

"At Fyveways Hall?" he exclaimed, not rightly comprehending.

"Yes; at the Hall. It is mine at last!"

"What! what! Hast thou found thy mother's marriage lines? Art thou Sir Selwyn Fyveways truly, and come into thy own?"

"No, grandfather," I answered; "Fate has not been so kind to me as that. Nathless, most kind; for John Jago left me all his fortune, and it was an exceeding great one, and I am become a very rich man. I have hidden this from you because I desired to creep back to the dear old home, and be welcomed for myself—such as I am—and not for the wealth I brought with me from the Indies, being, indeed, what they term a Nabob. And I have taken over the mortgage on Fyveways, which to all intents and purposes is now mine own. There shall I live, and there shall Mercy live, and the cosiest corner in the grandest room shall be kept for you. Forgive me if I have held this news back. I confess to you I did not mean to disclose it until I was married, but,

oh, sir! your generosity and kindness have wrung it from me."

"Now God be praised!" said the old man, very solemnly. "Only, would that my dear daughter had lived to see this day!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PRIEST'S ROOM.

Two months later I married my cousin Mercy, and then for the first time carried her to Fyeways Hall, whose threshold, as yet, even I had not passed.

For I experienced a certain repugnance, both to being under the same roof as Stephen Renfrew, and to seeming to glory over his downfall. He could not be evicted till certain formalities were gone through, and it wanted but four days of our wedding before he actually quitted the Hall. And so I restrained my own impatience for that short time, determined to make a red-letter day of it, by marrying Mercy and entering into possession of my property all in the same morning.

Nor must I omit to mention that when Stephen Renfrew left, it was as a melancholy madman; for, at the last, the wreck of his reason gave way, and they carried him out grimacing and gibbering like a Bedlamite. Not a friend remained to him, nor a relation, except myself, who was his nephew by marriage. Wherefore, out of compassion, and for respect of the family, I sent him to be cared for by a respectable county apothecary, who received patients afflicted with his disorder, rather than to the horrors of a common madhouse.

Father Clifford still remained at the Hall, for by no manner of inducement could he be persuaded to

leave his room. It had been my desire to procure a retreat for him as well, for I could never forget it was I who had brought the grievous calamity upon him under which he languished. But nothing could prevail on him to move, although the endeavours to that end, and the presence of the many workpeople engaged in repairing and doing up the Hall, aroused him out of the lethargic state into which he had previously fallen, so that he several times made inquiries as to what was going on, and seemed much moved that "Mr. Fyeways was coming to reside at the Hall," repeating the name constantly to himself with the air of a man trying to capture a lost idea.

It was a fine bright sunny day in September that Mercy and I left our grandfather Bradnock's farm, after the wedding breakfast, and rode in the old family coach to Fyeways Hall. As we pulled up under the great porch, and the servants came hurrying forward to let down the steps and give us respectful welcome, with smiling, eager faces, I could not help contrasting in my mind this reception to that stolen visit paid with my mother, nearly a quarter of a century before, to the room in which my father died.

And out of a fond, foolish feeling, I determined now that room should be the first I would visit, and whispering my intention to Mercy, led her up the broad flight of stairs to the desolate chamber.

It was in no way altered, for I had given strict injunctions nothing in it should be disturbed, and it showed as silent and deserted as ever. I recognised the very spot in the pattern of the carpet where long

years ago my mother and I had stood, and the curious coverlid of the bed, on which now, as then, the afternoon sun glowed redly down.

After lingering here a few sad moments I turned to leave. There was the whole house to be explored, which was new to both of us, with all its brave decorations and improvements recently made. And first of all we decided to view the lower apartments, and began to descend the stair to reach them.

And then happened a most wonderful thing! For just as I reached the very landing on the staircase, where I and my mother had been stopped by the priest, who should issue out of his room at the foot of the stairs but that same priest himself!

It was a great shock to me to come thus suddenly upon him; for I had imagined him bedridden. But there he stood, woefully aged and altered—a thin, feeble, white-haired old man, with stooping shoulders, bent head, and hands shaking dolorously with the palsy. But his eyes were still black—still, in a manner, piercing; and in them some suspicion of the old fire smouldering, to remind me of him whom I had once shrunk from in terror, and later, in the prime of his life and intellect, had struck down in a moment of evil passion, and brought to this mental wreck and decrepitude.

Mersey, as she perceived him, instinctively clutched at my hand, and there, on the landing, we came to a complete standstill.

The priest peered at us, slowly, curiously, weirdly. And presently his eyes became fixed in a sort of fascination, and I saw him, in his amazement, draw

his bowed frame up erect, and hold his two quivering hands aloft in mute wonder.

And in that pregnant moment his sight and intellect quickened. Like a cloud passing from the face of the sun, the lost expression on his features cleared away, and an extraordinary instant look of recognition came into them.

"Welcome, Sir Francis," he quavered out in a shrill, courtly voice, "and you, my Lady Fyveways, welcome! Your honeymoon has been a long one truly. My blessing on your home-coming!"

He bowed low as he spoke, with something of the fine foreign manner he had once affected.

"What does he mean?" whispered Mercy to me. "What shall we do?"

"He mistakes me for my father and you for my mother," I answered her back in a low voice. "Command yourself, I beseech you. He will not hurt you. We must act this part, for by heaven! I have an inspiration it will be to our exceeding benefit."

Then I descended the stairs and approached the priest with extended hand.

"My thanks and Lady Fyveways' for your welcome, Reverend Father. I have been ill or would have returned sooner."

He started and looked me searchingly in the face.

"Ah, yes—you *were* ill!" he muttered, passing his palsied hands over his brow. "I *remember*—oh, God!—I REMEMBER!" He voiced that word with such an accent of adoring gratitude as must have echoed musically in heaven. "Strange—strange," he went on, waving his hands backwards and forwards

in front of his face, as if seeking to dispel some cloud or mist, "that it should come back to me as you speak—not before! Eh? What else—what else? Tell on, Sir Francis, tell on; and peradventure I shall remember all! Oh, God! merciful and mighty!" he cried in an imploring voice, "have pity on Thy servant! Have pity on me! Help Thou to tear this hideous veil away, and restore to me the past, clear and bright again! . . . You were ill, Sir Francis; yes—yes, I remember. What else?"

His words gave me the miraculous clue. I beckoned to Mercy to descend, and, taking her hand, pressed it in warning.

"And Lady Fyveways—Mercy Bradnock that was—whom you baptised into the Church?"

He stared into my wife's face with an expression of distrust.

"Daughter," he asked, "wert thou sincere in thy conversion?"

"She craves thy blessing, Father," I interposed. "Wilt thou not bless her on her home-coming?"

"Surely, surely," he replied, with exceeding sweetness and gentleness of voice and manner, "if she so desires. Protestant or Catholic, an old man's blessing cannot do her harm!" and he made the sign of the Holy Cross, and murmured a few words of benediction in the Latin tongue.

Seeing him thus suddenly and strangely softened and tempered, I determined to put it all to the touch, and stand or fall by the next question.

"And our marriage certificate, Father! Have you got that ready as you promised?"

He turned instantly on me, his black eyes flitting fitfully like phantom lights at sea, and his manner grievously agitated.

"What did I promise?" he asked in a wailing voice. "*I—remember—no—promise.*"

"The marriage certificate!" I repeated, and I felt my face turning pale and my heart almost stop its beating, while Mercy was trembling like an aspen-leaf at my side. "You have got that ready, Father?"

I could have screamed aloud as I saw the vacant, lost look coming back into his face again, and heard him mournfully repeat in a troubled whisper:

"But the promise! What did I promise? 'Tis blank; all—all—blank—again!"

"Nay, then, if you have not got the certificate, Father, I will not press you," was all I could think to say.

"The certificate!" he caught me up eagerly, joyfully, triumphantly. "Ah, yes—yes! The certificate! *I remember that!*" And then: "My son, I have got it safe."

Oh, gracious and benevolent Providence, to consider of it! After all these years, that it should be still in existence, and this man admitting its possession!

"May I have it, Father?" I asked him in a low voice.

"It is here, my son. Have I not kept it for thee? Wherefore shouldst thou ask 'May I have it?' Come with me, and I will give it thee."

He turned to enter his room, and then, for the first time, I observed that, despite the bright glitter quickening his eyes in the broad light of the staircase

window, he was, in truth, very dim of sight, for he had to grope for the handle of the door, and as he shuffled along his hands were stretched out in front of him like a blind man's.

Mercy and I followed into the room. It was plain to see no servant's or workman's hand had been there, for the cobwebs clustered thick in the corners of the ceiling, the windows were foul and grimy, and the furniture betokened long neglect. But directly the priest passed the threshold a certain confidence came into his decrepit footsteps, and he made his way without halt or hesitation to the further corner of the chamber.

Then, as in a dream, I observed him with his feeble hands drag a chair forward and set it against the wall, and mounting upon it begin to feel and fumble at a certain panel. He might have been so engaged a minute, but verily it seemed an hour before he spoke.

"My son, it is safe deposited here; but my eyes are dim, and my hand infirm, and the spring is cunningly hid, and I cannot find it."

"Let me help you, Father," said I, drawing a second chair beside his. "Where should this cunning spring you wot of be?"

"Here!" he answered decisively, as he drummed with his fingers upon a certain spot. "Within six inches of this. Hark! it sounds hollow. That is the *caché*; and the spring is to the right of it. The secret is to push it with an upward pressure—like this—like this."

The spot he indicated was about eight feet from

the ground, but the dark grain of the old oak and its coating of thick dust and the sombre light in the room prevented me from examining it. So I called to Mercy to light a taper that stood on the table and hand it to me, and she did so.

Then I took my knife and began scraping away the dust, and tapping all over the place the priest indicated, while he felt after me with his feeble fingers.

Suddenly he uttered an exclamation of discovery, and at the same instant I saw his thumb appear to sink into the woodwork, and a portion of the panel start out an inch or two, with a little grating sound.

"Enough, my son," he said. "It is found!"

He had opened the door of the secret recess and was groping inside with his hand. I slipped from my chair to the ground and stood ready to aid him down. Then he stretched his left hand towards me to be holpen, whilst his right grasped something which I could not discern until he held it out to me, saying:

"There, my son, is your marriage certificate. And now my trust is acquitted."

And what was it he gave me?

A handful of nibbled pieces of paper, not one of them larger than a pea, and all stained and discoloured and emitting a pungent musky odour! A rat had made its home in the priest's *caché*, and used my mother's marriage lines for the materials for its nest!

For a moment I felt that same despairing sensation as when the two Mahratta swords were poised above me in that crisis of conflict at the siege of Bickram-poor. But with a great effort I was enabled to retain

my presence of mind, and say to Mercy in a natural tone of voice :

“ Preserve this carefully, and thank the good Father for it ! ”

She wrapped the fragments up in her kerchief and spoke a few words of acknowledgment to the priest. Then, as he expressed his satisfaction, I turned to him again and adventured :

“ Know you, Father, where that copy of this certificate is, which Joan Renfew had ? ”

Instantly he threw up his arms, like a man who has a stroke, and staggered back three or four paces.

“ My God ! My God ! ” he exclaimed. “ How heard you of that ? ”

“ It is known to me, Father. Do not let it distress you. No harm can come of it now. But, since she is dead, it would be well to find it ? ”

“ Find it ! ” he wailed mournfully, shaking his head with a pathetic despair. “ Would to heaven I could ! Did I not search for it, night and day, for years and years ? I know not whether she kept it or destroyed it. That secret she carried to her grave. Not even Stephen Renfew knows it, who bent over her as she breathed her last breath to learn whether she had hidden it or I. But Stephen ! ” he exclaimed as sudden recollection stirred him, “ where is Stephen ? I have not seen him this week past. What have you done with him, Sir Francis ? Stay—stay—*are* you Sir Francis ? Is not Sir Francis dead ? Who are you ? Speak,” he demanded, catching me by the hand with a vehemence frightful in one so old. “ Speak and tell me who you are ? ”

"Father," said I—and in that solemn moment all the dark mental horror, all the hopeless despair, all the endless suffering of the calamity brought upon him by that fatal blow struck by the very hand he now grasped in his—all these things, I say, rose before me and overwhelmed me with pity and remorse—"Father—let me, I beseech you, remain Sir Francis to you! Forgive me my trespass, even as your trespass has been forgiven! As I have offended so would I have your pardon. Your pardon and your blessing, Father—I crave them both!"

And with that I knelt upon my knees before this enemy of mine, whose life I had turned into darkness and delusion.

* * * * *

He lived with us for three years after that, and always called me "Sir Francis" or "my son" and Mercy "Lady Fyeways." God knows what indistinct imaginings flitted through that poor desolate brain of his; but if one so sorely afflicted could ever be deemed happy, I think we made him so.

For I endeavoured by such means as lay in my power to atone to him for the evil I had wrought, even as he, in his strange phantasy of mind, had tried to make restitution to me!

As for my mother's marriage certificate which he had restored, it was nothing worth! For the half of it had been devoured or utterly destroyed, and in the fragment that remained the ink was so faded scarce a letter could be traced!

But Mercy has a fancy to keep them, and they are treasured in a sealed glass jar, and locked up in a

cabinet that stands under the pedigree of the Fyve-ways in our library at the Hall.

She lives in hope that some day the copy of the certificate, which Joan Renfew stole from my mother, may be brought to light ; and indeed, I believe, diligently searches for the same (in private), protesting her complete belief that it is hidden away somewhere in the old house.

But for my part, from the moment that Father Clifford held out those fragments to me, and I realised what they were, I surrendered all hope of ever proving my mother's marriage to satisfy the law of the land. Only on the marble tombstone I caused to be erected over her remains I have had engraved the inscription :

HERE RESTS
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RELICT OF
SIR FRANCIS,
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