

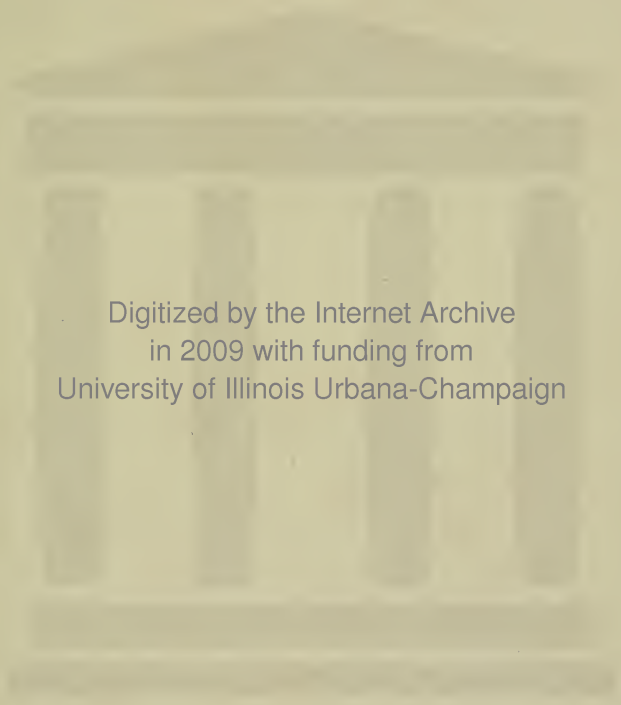


LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823

Ou8

v. 3



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2009 with funding from
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

TINSLEY BROTHERS' NEW NOVELS

AT ALL LIBRARIES.

New Novel by the Author of 'East Lynne.'

ANNE HEREFORD. The New Novel by MRS HENRY WOOD, Author of 'East Lynne,' &c. 3 vols.

The MOONSTONE. By WILKIE COLLINS. Reprinted from 'All the Year Round.' 3 vols.

FROM THE *Daily Telegraph*.

'This is a wonderful book, surpassingly clever, and absorbingly interesting. It ought to be read, and would certainly be enjoyed alike, by two very different classes—those who scarcely ever read novels, and those who spend nearly their entire life in devouring them. It would be impossible to do bare justice to Mr Wilkie Collins without going even so far as to declare that, in his own branch of art, he is almost, if not absolutely, perfect. . . . We have by no means exhausted all that we could say in praise of "The Moonstone;" and it would take us a long time to do so. We will therefore conclude by saying that anybody who omits to read it voluntarily denies himself one of the greatest mental treats in which it is possible for a man or woman to indulge.'

Notice: Now Ready, A New and Revised Edition of
CLARISSA.

CLARISSA: a Novel. By SAMUEL RICHARDSON.
Edited by E. S. DALLAS, Author of 'The Gay Science.'
3 vols.

The SEABOARD PARISH. By GEORGE MAC-DONALD,
Author of 'Robert Falconer,' 'Alec Forbes of Howglen,'
&c. 3 vols.

The OCCUPATIONS of a RETIRED LIFE. By
EDWARD GARRETT. 3 vols.

The TWO RUBIES. By the Author of 'Recommended
to Mercy,' &c. 3 vols.

DIANA GAY; or, The History of a Young Lady. By
PERCY FITZGERALD. 3 vols.

The LOST LINK. By TOM HOOD, Author of 'A
Golden Heart,' &c. 3 vols.

FRANCESCA'S LOVE. By MRS EDWARD PULLEYNE.
3 vols.

WILD as a HAWK. By MRS MACQUOID, Author of
'Charlotte Burney,' 'Hester Kirton,' &c. 3 vols.

STRANGE WORK. By THOMAS ARCHER. 3 vols.

OUT OF THE MESHES: a Story. 3 vols.

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

TINSLEYS' MAGAZINE,

AN ILLUSTRATED MONTHLY,

Price One Shilling,

CONDUCTED BY EDMUND YATES,

CONTAINS:

BREAKING a BUTTERFLY ; or, BLANCHE ELLERSLIE'S
ENDING. By the Author of 'Guy Livingstone,' &c.

A HOUSE of CARDS. A Novel. By a New Writer.

NOVELS : By EDMUND YATES, Author of 'Black Sheep,' &c.

WILLIAM HOWARD RUSSELL, LL.D., of the *Times*.

ENGLISH PHOTOGRAPHS. By an AMERICAN.

The LATEST PARIS FASHIONS. (*Illustrated.*)

&c. &c. &c.

TINSLEY BROTHERS' NEW WORKS.

The LAND of the DEAD : a New Book of Travels.
By G. A. SALA.

A New Work by 'The Journeyman Engineer.'

The GREAT UNWASHED. In one volume, uniform
with 'Some Habits and Customs of the Working Classes.'

The MARCH to MAGDALA. By G. A. HENTY,
Special Correspondent of the *Standard*. In one vol.,
8vo. 15s.

The ADVENTURES of a BRIC-A-BRAC HUNTER.
By Major BYNG HALL. In one vol., price 7s. 6d.

The GREAT COUNTRY : IMPRESSIONS of AMERICA.
By GEORGE ROSE, M.A. (Arthur Sketchley). In one
vol., 8vo.

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

G. H. Saunders
Wenington Hall

OUT OF THE MESHES.

VOL. III.

OUT OF THE MESHES.

A STORY.



' Un fonte sorge in lei, che vaghe e monde
A l'acque si, che i riguardanti asseta
Ma dentro ai freddi suoi cristalli asconde
Di tosco estran malvagita secreta
Lunge la bocca disdegnosa e schiva
Torcete voi dall' acque.'—*Tasso*.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON :
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.
1868.

[*All Rights reserved.*]

JOHN CHILDS AND SON, PRINTERS.

823

Om 8

v. 3

CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	ROUGE ET NOIR	1
II.	THAT HANDKERCHIEF !	25
III.	IN WHICH THE MAJOR LOSES A RACE BUT WINS A PRIZE	55
IV.	IN WHICH MR CHARLES SIMPKIN IS DE- MONSTRATED A GOOSE	87
V.	IN WHICH A PIG IS STUCK	115
VI.	A PUCKA COQUETTE	148
VII.	CARTRIDGES	173
VIII.	IN WHICH MR CHARLES SIMPKIN ACTS LIKE A BROTHER	201
IX.	IN WHICH SOPHY DANCES A QUADRILLE	224
X.	PUNY WHIPSTERS	247
XI.	'GOOD-BYE, ADA !'	281
XII.	HANGING AND WIVING	312

OUT OF THE MESHES.

CHAPTER I.

ROUGE ET NOIR.

MRS LIVERSEGE, in these pages, has not always appeared in a very favourable light. She was always imperious and a little unamiable, and she is now imperious to an Oriental degree. I have before remarked that circumstances in this life have been unfavourable to the lady, that is, as far as circumstances tend to the growth of moral excellence—to the rendering of a human being humble, generous, unselfish, and kind-hearted. If she had spent most of her early life in a small English town where beaux were few and pretty girls were many, if she had had

less adulation, and had found a more judicious husband, firm as well as kind, I think that even then she would have been imperious and not very amiable, for the uses of adversity do not always tend to render dispositions sweet, any more than the ugly and venomous toad is invariably found with a precious jewel in his head. But I think that such a discipline would not have been without its good, and she would not then have been quite the self-important personage we now find her, the Anglo-Indian, *Noor-Mahal*, intriguing, commanding, insolent, womanly, vain, impulsive, fond of show, fond of power, and resolute that all the affairs of men and women shall be as pliant to her will as the feeble old Mogul, on whose Peacock Throne she has installed herself.

The inflated pride of this 'light of the palace' is very shortly to exercise much influence on the events of our story. But in Mrs Liversege's favour I am bound to say that the question which tried her was one which has proved a stumbling-block to many a worthier

English matron than her—the question of match-making. Is it a fact that this passion, this feverish desire to unite the one lady to the particular gentleman your judgment or your caprice has hit on, is at bottom one of the chief causes of all the cruelty, the anger, and the injustice which are exhibited by ladies when such caprice is baulked? For it is to be remarked that when the ‘ineligible suitor’—I believe that is the technical term—has won the lady’s love, her old sordid aunt and her young bosom friend are quite as hostile as her outraged mother, when she has got such a parent. They are just as ready to declare war to the intruder, to expose and contemplate his defects with the keen intensity of a virtuous woman’s dislike; to bring to the exhuming of all the blots of his past life a perseverance and a sagacity passing that of the London Detective; to expose in all its abhorrent nakedness his one great crime, the great modern British crime of having insufficient coin of Her Majesty’s realm.

From the tendency of these remarks, and

from what you know beforehand of her character and views, it will be judged that Mrs Liversege was not at all well pleased to hear that Captain Ashleigh was engaged to be married to Miss Sophy Brabazon. It would be more correct to say that she was half frantic. Imagine the feelings of the Countess of Zany, when she hears that her daughter is engaged to the Honourable Tom Noddy instead of Lord Hoddy Doddy, his eldest brother. Fancy Mrs Mac Daft, the widow of the Glasgow millionaire, when her daughter consents to marry a painter in preference to the Honourable Captain Ninny-hammer, a sprig of Scotch nobility. Think of the wife of the Bishop of Bedlam, when her fond child has accepted the Rev. Lazarus Nizy, and jilted the portly Prebendary Dives Dunderhead? Think of plain, pious Mrs Looby, when her Hepsibah has eloped with that foreign nobleman, the Conte Badeau, instead of becoming the helpmate of the Rev. Rantipole of the United Independent Jobbernowls. I say, think of the several agonized, angry, indignant states

of feeling of those excited, warm-hearted, sage, loving mothers, and by adding them all together, I do not think you would have a sufficient conception of the feelings of Indian ladies of the stamp of Mrs Liversege, when they find out that their young ladies have preferred *rouge* to *noir*, arms to the *toga*, the subaltern's shell-jacket to the civilian's coat. Everything in India is colossal, as I have said before. A tree is a forest, a river a sea, mountains are Himalayas, a lizard an alligator, a cat a royal Bengal tiger. Therefore without wishing to suggest any associations by the mention of cats and royal Bengal tigers, I must declare that the anger of that foiled matron immeasurably surpasses the anger of all other foiled matrons; when the said military shell suddenly bursts in the middle of all her schemes, hopes, and expectations, and blows them to the winds.

And it was most unlucky that Mr Liversege had been compelled by his official duties to visit Chuckergotty, and Mrs Liversege had felt it necessary to accompany him, other-

wise, as she afterwards remarked, she would have given Captain Ashleigh his *juwaub* fast enough. Mrs Throgmorton, left to her own judgment and resources, did not know how to act. Privately she had no particular liking to Captain Ashleigh, as she had once heard him express some very dangerous opinions when cross-examined about secular Indian Public Instruction. But beyond this she knew of nothing to prevent the marriage from taking place. Sophy, in the first flush of her excitement, had prattled away in the carriage as it drove home, and had told her and Motee all that had occurred. How much and how long she had loved the Captain in secret, and how, by the greatest chance in the world, she had found him standing by her cousin's grave with his back turned towards her as she came up to him. How she had reached the little railing before he turned round, and how agitated he appeared when he first perceived her. How he had told her in a most solemn manner that she seemed to him at first like an apparition just risen up

out of the ground ; and the volatile young lady then launched forth into a flood of prayers and entreaties that Mrs Throgmorton should instantly set about obtaining her aunt's consent. Motee, a little surprised at the turn events had suddenly taken, soon became as much interested in Captain Ashleigh's happiness as Sophy herself, and joined her prayers to those of her cousin. 'She did not tell me all, but I must help her now!' The young lady remembered how reluctant she had been on her side to confess a word about Mr Charles Simpkin.

Thus Mrs Throgmorton, with two eloquent young advocates pleading hard on one side, and with no sufficient arguments to oppose them, had not known how to act when Captain Ashleigh came to the Residency at 11 o'clock ; she had, of course, previously sent off to Mrs Liversege, as had also Miss Sophy Brabazon, giving a full account of the affair. Mrs Throgmorton prayed her sister to come over at once, and calculated that she might arrive that night, or certainly the next morning. In

the mean time Captain Ashleigh was to consider the affair as all unsettled. But there he was in the house, and Mrs Throgmorton did not know what to do about him. The result of her indecision was that the Captain remained in the house all day, and even stayed to dinner. Motee gained this last important point, and moreover showed in other ways that she was not altogether the unintelligent milk-and-watery person which some folks took her for, but was very shrewd and artful, as she managed to entice away Mrs Throgmorton at least twice during the day. That strict person had considered it necessary in the interests of propriety to stand sentry over the pair of lovers.

Mrs Liversege did not arrive that night, in fact she did not get the letter until nine o'clock in the evening. Mrs Throgmorton had given orders that it should be sent by a trooper, and the trooper was a long time getting ready, and then he had a forty-miles' ride before him, but ladies like Mrs Throgmorton take no account of distances. He reached Chucker-

gotty at seven o'clock, just after Mrs Liversege had gone off to a large dinner given by the Commissioner, and thus did not get the letters until her return. On reading them her action was prompt.

‘My dear!’ she called out to her husband in a tone of voice which he quite understood, ‘I start for Nawaubgunge at once. Please to have the carriage brought round immediately.’

‘Drive to Nawaubgunge to-night, my dear! It is quite impossible!’

‘My dear, I must request you not to waste time talking. I want the carriage at once!’

‘My dear—’ said the lord and master.

‘There will be plenty of time to talk afterwards,’ said the lady with great asperity. She seemed glad to find somebody at hand to vent her feelings upon.

‘My dear,’ said Mr Liversege, meekly, ‘I am sorry you are put out!’

‘I am not put out!’ said Mrs Liversege, very tartly.

‘ My dear, this is what I must say. The road from this to Nawaubgunge is so bad that you could not possibly drive over it in safety by night, and consider there is no dawkh laid. You can’t lay a dawkh of carriage horses under at least twenty-four hours.’

‘ Oh, you always thwart me in everything,’ said the lady; and added suddenly, ‘ Well, then, if you don’t like my going by carriage, how do you wish me to go? I must go at once.’

‘ I suppose you could not go on a *Palkee*?’ said Mr Liversege, very diffidently.

‘ A *Palkee*, Mr Liversege! You surely mean to insult me!’ said the lady in a tremendous manner.

A word about the supposed insult of Mr Liversege. In some parts of India where any other mode of locomotion is almost physically impossible, a great lady even of the rank of Mrs Liversege might be asked to travel in a palkee without insult. Even the wife of a Governor-General has been known to adopt that Eastern method of travel. But the roads

near Chuckergotty, though not good, are passable in a carriage,—that may have constituted the insult of the usually well-meaning Indian officer. Certainly he himself seemed to feel he was on dangerous ground when he made his offer. Mrs Liversege having rejected her husband's proposal with contumely, eventually did actually travel by palkee to Nawaubgunge. She reflected that the business on hand would admit of no delay, and so at length she allowed Mr Liversege to make the preparations, after having fully impressed upon him that the hurt to her dignity as well as any accidents or inconveniences resulting from that style of locomotion were solely and entirely to be laid down to his account.

‘But what carries you home so soon, Maria?’ asked this gentleman at length. The eminent ‘Political’ had taken care to make every arrangement about the palkee, and its relays of bearers and torch-bearers, before he put this question.

‘A very sufficient reason, indeed, Mr Liver-

sege, I can assure you of that!’ said Mrs Liversege, still keeping up her most tremendous of manners. ‘Your niece has been good enough to engage herself to be married to some beggarly Native Infantry Officer.’

‘Who, my dear?’

‘Now, really, Mr Liversege, you seem to take a pleasure in annoying me. I repeat, he is an officer of Native Infantry. When I have said that I have said quite sufficient.’

To an ordinary traveller a palanquin has its advantages and disadvantages, its luxury and discomfort. The theory is that you undress and lie down in a moveable bed, and awake the next morning at your journey’s end. How far this theory was verified on the present occasion we will bring forward the experience of Mrs Liversege to show. We pass over that lady’s getting into the palanquin. This is a difficult task to anybody, as the door is not very wide, and the machine is already balancing on men’s shoulders, and it waggles away and begins to swing directly you make the attempt. Now if you call to mind the

circumstance that Mrs Liversege is very stout, and has on a white dressing-gown and night-cap, you will see at once that it is better to hurry over a feat which could not be performed with much dignity even by a person of the most exalted rank. At last the conveyance is clear of the station, and the good lady is jiggling and bumping along to the monotonous cadence of the labouring bearers. The night is very hot and the road very dusty indeed, and the violent bumps and jerks as the coolies stumble in ruts and holes, are particularly unpleasant just after dinner. All roads in India save one, the Grand Trunk Road, are simply execrable. Add to this, the torch-bearer possesses the fatuity of all Indian torch-bearers, that of holding up a flaring, sputtering, oily torch to windward of you, so that the smoke and bad smell of the oil come in upon you all through the night. Add to all this that if you do contrive to fall asleep, you are sure to be quickly awakened by the bearers howling for baksheesh, or clamouring because they have stumbled into an unusually

deep rut, or because you are not lying in the middle of the palanquin—all of which three situations happened to Mrs Liversege. Coolies are no respecters of persons, and when the palanquin was turned askew by the weight of Mrs Liversege, it was a heavy burden even for four muscular coolies.

I mention these little details, not to illustrate palanquin travelling in India, but to show what happened to Mrs Liversege on this particular night. She is a great lady accustomed to a much more magnificent style of locomotion, as I have more than once taken occasion to mention. She is an irascible old lady already incensed, and anything which tends to make her more angry is highly important in this crisis of my story. Along through the black thick night went that strange procession. Lit up by the yellow glare of that fluttering torch the faces of the black servants seemed weird and grim, as they peered from out of their white coverings, for each native has now wrapped himself from head to foot in a large white cloth not unlike a

winding-sheet. And that black object they hurry along, is it not like a coffin, made, it is true, for a very stout corpse? Well, our picture is a little fanciful, although a midnight palanquin procession has always a weird effect as it winds through the strange Indian scenery made still more strange in the indistinct torch-light. Here is the quaint pyramidal dome of a Hindoo temple, and now amid yon dark trees the torch suddenly reveals the grim outline of a Mussulman tomb. Here are the rude hovels of an Indian village surrounded by rice fields and a few cocoa-nut palms, and again we are in the jungle, and all is black and terrible. Meanwhile the wild distant scream of innumerable jackals falls upon the ear, and reminds us that other *beasts of prey* are also abroad, the tiger, the dacoit, the hyena, the thug. Not that these latter gave Mrs Liversege more than a moderate amount of alarm. The great political lady remembered that white faces were safe in a country controlled by one of the most perfect of civil administrations.

I repeat again that my comparison of the palanquin of the respected wife of the Resident of Nawaubgunge to a coffin is a stretch of fancy, but is there not something in that black box very nearly as repulsive as death? Groundless anger and malice and hate mixed up with the lighter elements of silly partisanship, small vanity, and baseless pride. It is in her power to inflict a great deal of pain and some harm upon two people, and in her present mood of mind she is quite resolved to do it, as she jogs along hot and irascible, funny and formidable, in a white dressing-gown and without the brown front of hair which has accidentally fallen off. And her journey to-night will be more funny yet before it is over. Alas, even the small tragedies of life have their comic side, as well as the scaffold of 'Thomas More the martyr, and the grave of Ophelia. He who showed us this last knew that it must be dug by a clown, and that a clown is hardly susceptible of a purely serious treatment. No more is this farcical old lady, if it be ever her lot to dig a grave. No more

is the dull, decorous, official, commonplace jack-pudding who dug the grave of a lady once called Ada Brabazon.

At four in the morning Mrs Liversege was awakened by the palanquin falling to the ground with a violent bump. It was an old one borrowed from the collector, and perhaps was not constructed to bear so unusual a weight, and the pole had broken. She was not hurt, but very angry with the bearers, who of all people were the least responsible for the catastrophe. What was to be done? She learned that she was twenty miles from Nawaubgunge and twenty miles from Chucker-gotty; day had dawned, and the sun would soon be up, and no food and no fresh conveyance could be procured under many hours. The name of the wild, desolate, jungly place where she now found herself was Banghy Baloo.

Suddenly one of the servants came up and announced that the tent of an English *Sahib* had been discovered, pitched within a mango grove, at not many yards' distance from the

spot where the palanquin had broken down. It was an unique tent, covered at the top with countless holes, and could belong but to one English *Sahib* in all India. Banghy Baloo! There was but one of all the many servants of the East India Company who thought this desolate, scrubby, rocky spot a complete paradise even at this hot season of the year; and this East India Company's servant, attracted by the noise, now came forward in spectacles and *sola topee*, and without a coat, and was almost felled to the earth by the violent shock he received on suddenly finding himself confronted by the great Mrs Liversege in a night-cap and in palpable grey hair—(we have explained before that this last was not the particular phenomenon commemorated by the Prisoner of Chillon). Worse than all, he found the lady of the highest rank in that part of India in a white garment which, whatever it was, was evidently only intended for the privacy of the bed-chamber.

Poor Major Pulfington Belper, he had now come out on his long-coveted bear ex-

pedition, but though he had been three days encamped at Banghy Baloo he had not found it quite the delightful spot anticipated. Major Pulfington Belper was one of the most truthful of men. He was as truthful as Bayard, Sir Henry Lawrence, or the Blameless King, but even he made one slip in perfect accuracy, and that was on this memorable expedition. He never told the truth about the bear he brought back to cantonments. It was slaughtered the evening before Mrs Liversege paid him an unexpected visit, and this is the real history of its death. The Major for the first two days toiled stoutly about without seeing any game at all, but on the morning of the third day he tracked a small bear to a cave, and after spending some hours in an ineffectual attempt to persuade him to come out again he determined to return in the evening and smoke him out with fireworks. He remembered that that expedient was often resorted to on similar occasions. Thus at six o'clock the Major found himself on a convenient pass near the mouth

of the cave with his double rifle cocked, whilst a Sepoy orderly whom he had brought out with him stood behind with a spare double-barrel gun also loaded with ball. The Major having thoroughly adjusted his spectacles, gave the word to his Classy who stood ready with the firework at a small aperture above the cave. The cracker sputtered and fizzed inside, and at length went off with an explosion which was only too effectual. Out rushed the little bear and made straight for the Major, who fired once, then again, but still the small animal came on, and the field-officer turning round found that Seetul Tewarry the orderly was at some distance off. What was to be done? The Major was a brave man, but to be hugged and mauled by so small a bear was a ridiculous as well as a useless danger. He turned round and fairly ran down the hill, pursued by the bear, who caught him up, severely lacerated and scratched him, tore his coat and trousers, and but for the opportune action of the orderly, who came and shot the

animal, might have injured him very seriously indeed. These were the true facts of the case, and they put the Major in a terrible dilemma. The bear was so small, and the expedition to Banghy Baloo had been so much talked of, that such a climax would place him in a most ridiculous light, especially at a time when he thought he had a great many sentimental reasons not to be placed in a ridiculous light. Alas for human nature, I blush to say that in the end our poor friend gave handsome baksheesh to the Sepoy and the Classy to suppress all about the pursuit; and the bear-skin was eventually paraded as a mat in his bed-room. He never actually said that he killed it, but the act of placing it amongst the other trophies of his gun and spear would, I fear, be construed by a severe moralist into constructive falsehood: *suggestio falsi*.

But we have left our friend in a very delicate position, terribly ashamed and abashed at having discovered one of the greatest ladies in India in a *robe de chambre*. The shock

was so great that it is at least a minute before he can speak, and when he does speak, this is all that he can say,

‘What—Dear me—Mrs Liversege!—I mean—I beg your pardon!’

‘Oh, it’s Major Pulfington Belper!’ said Mrs Liversege, angry and pleased.

‘Yes, it’s me—and that’s you—I mean—that’s, I had no idea—or I shouldn’t, you know—But your palkee—something has happened!’

‘Happened, indeed! Don’t you see that it is broken to pieces?’ said the lady, tartly. The major’s vague words, ‘Shouldn’t, you know,’ had brought back to Mrs Liversege, on her side, all the ridiculous and undignified details of the situation, and she transferred her unjust anger against the bearers, still more unjustly to the account of Major Pulfington Belper.

‘But you are not hurt? I mean, I hope you are not hurt?’

‘No!’

‘ And here you are in the jungle. How can you get on ? ’

And by degrees the various other requirements of the lady began to dawn upon the Major. And here another terrible dilemma presented itself to the bewildered field-officer, could he invite so great a lady into the tent all perforated with holes, the tabernacle so long the jeer of the young officers of his regiment ? There was no help for it, and the Major darted off to have it put in some sort of order, and to put on his shooting jacket before he conducted thither the wife of the Resident of Nawaub-gunge.

Mrs Liversege, on seeing the tent and its rude fittings, was more incensed than ever, and she placed every inconvenience and misadventure of the journey to the poor Major’s account ; which was most unjust, for, after all, how did the account really stand between them ?

Mrs Liversege, by an unlucky accident, suddenly had found herself without food, shelter,

or conveyance, in the middle of an Indian jungle twenty-five miles from any English dwelling-house.

The Major supplied her with shelter, tea, food, and having conducted her to his tent, he galloped off to Nawaubgunge to get her a carriage.

And knowing his habit of galloping fast when his mind is disturbed, we may be pretty sure that on the present occasion he galloped very fast indeed.

CHAPTER II.

THAT HANDKERCHIEF!

AT nine o'clock that night Mrs Liversege arrived at Nawaubgunge. She at once summoned her sister to her bed-room. Sophy wanted to see her, but she sent out word that she was too fatigued and upset by the journey and by the accident to talk with any one else that night. Directly she saw Mrs Throgmorton, however, she cross-examined her with considerable energy for one so prostrate. In ten minutes she made her sister tell her everything that had happened.

'What?' said Mrs Liversege at the conclusion of this recital, 'you do not mean to say that he has been in the house these two days?'

'My dear, I did not know how to manage about it. Poor girl, you should see how she

loves him! Of course, it was quite understood they were not engaged; but as to your feelings on the subject, of course I could not guess.'

'My feelings on the subject of *such* a marriage,' shrieked out Mrs Liversege, 'Hannah, you cannot really mean what you say?'

'But consider how she loves him.'

'She has no possible right to love him—a beggarly regimental officer!'

Prim Mrs Captain Throgmorton became much more prim and erect than usual at this contemptuous allusion to the status of regimental officer. Much as she felt the gravity of Captain Ashleigh's error on the subject of Secular Indian Instruction, the line taken by her sister was calculated to make her his warm defender.

'A regimental officer, my dear! All officers are regimental. If the mere fact of his being an officer—'

'You know very well what I mean, my dear. In our service we feel that a girl to make a good match must marry into the

Service. I don't wish to say a word against your service, for that matter—'

'I don't know!' said Mrs Throgmorton, who thought the words 'beggarly regimental officer' rather against this latter statement.

'You see, love, we must think of only one thing. Is such and such a proposed match for Sophy a good match, or is it not? You know the small allowances, the small retiring pensions, the small widows' pensions in the army, and the contrast they bear to those of the Civil Service.'

'I can't help fancying, love, that you think a *leetle* too much of worldly advantages in a state which is, after all, a vain shadow.'

'And then, of course, love, we must pay some attention to the question of position,' said Mrs Liversege, not heeding the last remark.

'Well, dear, I must say, to be the wife of a commandant of a fine regiment of Irregular Cavalry—'

'My love, you cannot have been in India all this time without being well aware of the

fact that no soldier's position is the same as that of a member of the Civil Service.'

'Why, really, Maria, I am quite shocked at you, and think that it is being quite guilty of stiff-necked pride, to think so much of pride and vainglory and the Bengal Civil Service—which, after all, I don't think a bit better than the military—'

'We won't go into that argument, my love. The wise Lord William Bentinck, whose statue, as the great Macaulay remarks, will be regarded with veneration by the latest generations of unborn Hindoos—'

'Yes, I know all that. He settled the order in which people should sit down to eat dinner, but you know there will be feasts at which the first shall be last and the last first—'

'My love, allow me to bring back the conversation to a question of much more immediate importance. This engagement must be at once broken off.'

'Take my advice, and do nothing hastily, or you may repent it. It is not religious to

trifle with a young girl's affections without sufficient cause.'

'My love,' said Mrs Liversege, tartly, 'I know my religious duties quite as well as other people, and perform them perhaps quite as strictly every Sunday—'

'At any rate, it is not religious to think so much of the mammon of unrighteousness.'

'My love, allow me to mention one thing. In making use of such expressions you show a great want of knowledge of the customs of good society—that we may not quarrel, I will not call it the *best* Indian society. The considerations of what is due to a daughter's happiness are never spoken of in such terms.'

'That is because the truth is not always palatable,' said Mrs Throgmorton, carried up into the regions of eloquence in spite of herself. 'Mark my words, you are treading on dangerous ground. She is a girl of very quick if not very strong feelings, and you don't understand her. You want her to marry this Mr Palmer Brown, who beat her cousin.'

‘That is an infamous calumny,’ said Mrs Liversege.

‘At any rate, it was believed so at the time.’

‘I am sorry you have stooped to notice such mean reports—Hannah, I thought better of you! But proceed!’

‘You want to marry her to a vain, mean, selfish trickster, who has just enough brains to hoodwink you, Maria, and I believe little more. Besides, the men’s prospects are not so unequal. Captain Ashleigh commands a fine Regiment of Cavalry!’

‘Yes, but it’s not *pucka*!’ said Mrs Liversege.

‘He is brave, unselfish, manly, and talented. Look at his conduct the other day, I am sure you thought well of him then. Don’t let some petty caprice run away with you, Maria. Professional partisanship is all very well, but courage, honesty, and justice have also their claims.’

‘Go on, love. If I wished to interrupt you, I might on my side object to the light in

which you, as a military lady, view a most worthy man. Go on, but I may as well tell you this, no violent language shall make me swerve from my duty.'

'Captain Ashleigh is brave and noble. He is loved by his brother officers. Besides, Maria, as far as position is concerned, he once held a position as high—the same post as Mr Liversege himself.'

'He acted for a short time, and was turned out for his incapacity, or worse. Government have long ago seen how unwise it was to give such appointments to such men!'

'And that girl! Take care that you don't altogether misread her. Within the last few days I have discovered that she is much less vain and frivolous than I fancied. She has a great fund of good in her, but requires great care. Mark my words, Maria, you may or may not break her heart, but you may do this—you may corrupt it.'

And Mrs Throgmorton bounced out of the room. She was flushed, excited, carried out of herself. It might be more proper to

say that she was herself. Nature sometimes proves too strong for the small chains in which crazy dogmatists would enmesh her. Mrs Liversege smiled upon her retreating sister. That smile might mean, 'I, Mrs Liversege, may or may not know anything about men—but let me, at any rate, be the best judge about Miss Sophy Brabazon!' She waited with some impatience for the morning. It came. Eight o'clock came. That was the hour she had fixed for her talk with the young lady.

Sophy came in pale and anxious. Her aunt's refusal to see her on the previous evening had alarmed her. As she kissed her aunt, she said gently,

'You know all! You know that my happiness is in your hands!'

'I hope it will prove so, Sophy!' said Mrs Liversege.

'How—you don't mean to say—' the young lady commenced to stammer, when her aunt interrupted her.

'Sophy! You are a girl of sense, but

even to girls as sensible as you, moments arrive when it is good for them that they have at their side wiser and older heads to persuade them from acting foolishly. You have been long enough in India to see what receives the deference of Indian society.'

'Oh, aunty,' interrupted the young lady. 'Please, please, don't talk like that!'

'Hear me out, Sophy. I am not going to talk to you about retiring allowances, widows' pensions, and questions which young girls cannot fully understand. There are other things which I think you have—did think you had—quite common sense enough to see.'

'Aunt!' said the young lady with calmness. 'Unfortunately you are justified in using this language to me. I will not—I cannot misunderstand it. I know I must have seemed vain, worldly, sordid to you—as I do now to myself, but you cannot read how I despise myself for it. There sometimes seem two *mes*; one worshipping all that is petty, frivolous, glittering, small; and the

other meant for better things. Since I have known Frederick Ashleigh, this fancy has become stronger and stronger. I hate my former self more and more. Assist me to escape from it, I pray, I beg you.'

'My dear, you are a great goose. This is not by any means the first time that a foolish girl has mistaken her fancy for her duty, and had her head turned by red cloth and a smooth tongue. All love an officer once in their lives—I myself;—but after all, there are higher things in the world than gold lace and animal courage.'

'Hear me, aunt. Far from being caught by externals, I first of all took a dislike to Captain Ashleigh, and when he so nobly saved my life, I wished, I sillily wished that it had been anybody but he. At the play I was struck with the noble masculine character he represented, but it was long, long before I found out how much that character had in harmony with his own. I heard from Mrs Vesey of his past life, his worth, and the talent that so early earned for him unusual

distinction, but it was not until the moment of that terrible danger from the cavalry soldiers that I fully understood his character, and when an accident revealed that he had given his love to a silly weak girl like me, I felt that henceforth my life must be one endeavour to become worthy of so great a prize. He has never made love, aunt, and so scrupulous is he even in the commonplaces of love, that all he will say is that he honestly believes that a love once given to some one else is not transferred, but continued to me, who seem like his old love come back again from the grave.'

'Very pretty, my love, very pretty!' said Mrs Liversege, who was rather taken aback with the unlooked-for calm earnestness of the young lady. 'You have conjured up a most beautiful picture, which I should be sorry to mar with the daylight of common-sense and truth. But worldly old ladies have duties to perform, and my first is to tell you, that there are reports abroad concerning the past life of this ideal knight.'

‘Stay, aunt, stay! Anything you say against Captain Ashleigh must be based on something more authentic than Indian gossip. If you have any well-grounded charge against that gentleman, which you consider it your duty to bring against him, in my position it will of course be my duty to listen. But I tell you I think you will fail. It seems as if scales have fallen from my eyes as from the blind man we heard of last Sunday, and that I now fully understand the great soul which is modest and calm, self-reliant and unbowed in prosperity and adversity, in victory and in defeat.’

Mrs Liversege did not pursue the subject any further that morning. She was very much startled indeed to find so much unsuspected strength in her niece’s character, and saw at once the ground was very dangerous, and that she ran great risk of making a false step. This she saw clearly, that if she put her veto directly upon the marriage, the young lady might have resolution enough to marry in spite of her, and that any direct opposition

would at any rate be sure to weaken her future influence on Sophy, if not totally destroy it. She must make use of her authority to insist on delay, a six months' absence if necessary; she must find out all about the gentleman. The active lady at once wrote and sent off a number of letters to all parts of India. She resolved that there should be no flaw in the indictment, when she did produce it. It is not the mere phantasm of a diplomatist which is now opposed to the military gentleman. It is something much more formidable—a woman. Meanwhile Fuzl Ali hearing of Mrs Liversege's sudden flight from Chuckergotty, and the cause of it, has come into Nawaubgunge almost as suddenly as Mrs Liversege.

Captain Ashleigh called at the Residency that morning at half-past eleven o'clock, and found Sophy and Motee alone in the drawing-room. The latter was comforting her friend, and she left on the arrival of the Captain. Sophy passed but a few brief moments alone with her lover. On this and on similar occa-

sions there was an air of old-fashioned courtesy, almost of restraint, in his manner, but he was always very fond, very kind. He heard all that had happened, and asked many questions relating to the scene with Mrs Liversege, and her manner during that interview. He too sought to console the young lady, but his manner was anxious. His last words remained in her memory for many years afterwards. ‘Dearest,’ he said, ‘it is not to be disguised that your aunt is hostile to us, and from her position has great power, if she chooses to exert it. She may cause us a great deal of annoyance, a great deal of sorrow, but whatever weight you may consider it your duty to give to her and your uncle, you must remember she is not all powerful, for love implies the utmost patience and the utmost trust!’ His arm was round her as he finished these words, when looking into an adjoining mirror he caught the eye of Fuzl Ali fixed upon them, twinkling at once with triumph, malice, and hatred. The Captain turned sternly upon him, and the native gentleman

at once became bland and servile, according to his wont.

‘The great *Sahib* is going to marry,’ he said. ‘It is well. The Indian poets say that it is meet that the tender jessamine should cling to the sturdy sunflower. A cloud was on that flower; it darkened its life, but now it is off. The Sahib is clever, the Sahib is good, the Sahib is happy. His slave is unhappy. Will not the Sahib give his protection to his slave, with whom all has gone wrong since the Sahib decided against him in the matter of the Jaghire? What says Sadi: “When Allah giveth thee many mangoes, he giveth some to the poor!”’

Captain Ashleigh listened with some concern. He could not fail to detect some hidden meaning in all this, and at this moment Motee burst into the room,—

‘Oh, my aunt is so angry at you two being left in the room alone. She wants you immediately, Sophy, and wants also to speak a word with you, if you will kindly remain. Oh, I did not see him. Where did he come from?’

not through the ante-room, I was waiting there, and that door there leads to my uncle's study.'

The 'he' was of course Fuzl Ali. That bland gentleman took his leave with a graceful *salam*, and in another moment Captain Ashleigh was alone.

He did not wait long for Mrs Liversege. That lady came in looking very calm and cool in a pleasant fresh muslin dress, her hair beautifully arranged, and her manner as the polish of steel and the ice-brook's temper. She entirely belied recent descriptions of her, and was still more unlike the lady who with a dressing-gown and without a wig had said angry things to Major Pulfington Belper. She made a stiff courtsey to Captain Ashleigh, and pointed to a chair. She herself then sat down upon another close to the white marble table, and placed one hand upon that frigid piece of furniture. That hand played with a handkerchief, small, coquettish, adorned with rich lace and pleasantly cooled with scent, but

a handkerchief in India is sometimes a very formidable thing.

‘ You must be aware, Captain Ashleigh,’ the lady began, with a little flourish of the handkerchief, ‘ that when a young lady bestows her affections on a gentleman the friends of that young lady are naturally anxious to discover whether or not the gentleman is worthy of that affection !’

The Captain bowed.

‘ Well, to tell you the truth, Captain Ashleigh, if all I have heard is true, I do not think you are worthy to be the husband of my niece, Miss Sophy Brabazon !’

‘ I suppose, Mrs Liversege, that you will give me some explanation of what you mean by this statement,’ said the Captain.

‘ I will if you give me time, and make allowances for the difficulties I experience in approaching certain topics, which I feel are of such delicacy that Mr Liversege ought to be here now talking in my place, if he were not unfortunately detained by important business

elsewhere. Stay, how shall I begin! Supposing, for the sake of argument, that a gentleman engaged to a young lady has in his past life done something dishonourable; or if that word is considered too strong by some lax moralists, let us say done something sufficiently grave and unprincipled to prevent the friends of the young lady from ever giving their consent to the marriage. Now, tell me what would be the duty of the gentleman in such a case.'

'Supposing that it was quite certain that he had done this grave action.'

'Yes, supposing it was quite certain. If he had any of the feelings of a gentleman left, would he not think a little of the lady whose happiness he had compromised, and help her friends in every way in his power to repair the mischief as far as possible? You see, Captain Ashleigh, that if the duty of such friends is plain, there is always a certain amount of odium attached to that duty.'

It will be noticeable throughout this scene, that although the lady treated the gen-

tleman as one in whom it was utterly impossible Sophy could trust, she also treated him as one in whom she herself could trust to great lengths. He had now caught her meaning, and replied promptly,—

‘Mrs Liversege, I am a gentleman, and although I have not the most remote conception what it is you have against me,—if I plead guilty to it you may rely upon my sacrificing all other considerations to those of the young lady’s happiness.’

‘You promise then that the rupture, if rupture be necessary, will appear to come from you?’

‘I promise to think only of the young lady’s happiness!’ said Captain Ashleigh, with some haughtiness.

‘Well, sir, this is what I have against you,’ said Mrs Liversege, advancing a little the handkerchief in her hand, and making it appear rather doubtful whether the word ‘this’ referred or not to that article. ‘I am told—I sincerely trust that I am misinformed—I am told that a married lady left her hus-

band's roof and came to yours. Is this true or is it not ?'

Captain Ashleigh, whose feelings were usually so under control, that it was difficult to know what he felt, here turned very pale. Mrs Liversege waved the handkerchief with a little of triumph. After a short pause he said very slowly and very earnestly,—

'Go on! Having said thus much you must now say more!'

'Go on, sir! it is a subject very difficult to broach at all, much more to go on with. A gentleman persuades a lady to elope from her lawful husband's roof—'

'She does not know the story, after all,' muttered the Captain, between his teeth.

'Well, sir,' said the lady, after a silence of two minutes, 'what is your plain, straightforward answer to this question?'

'Mrs Liversege,' he said, 'I must first of all put a question to you. From whom did you obtain this information?'

'I decline to answer, sir.'

'Was it from anybody at Nawaubgunge?'

‘I decline to answer that also; but what does it signify? You must be a better authority yourself than my informant. Is it true or is it false?’

‘It may signify a great deal, Mrs Liversege, as you observe that the accusation is against two people. If you won’t answer my question I can’t answer yours just yet;’ and the Captain rose to go.

‘He wants time!’ thought the lady, and she rose on her side. ‘Well, sir, your answer seems plain enough. You cannot deny the charge, and now you are seeking to evade the conditions—’

‘I will return in half an hour!’ he said, without heeding her, and he left the room.

The first assistant to the Resident of Nawaubgunge is seated in his Kutcherry, a large, bare, tumble-down building, whose gate is besieged by a whole army of talookdars, omrahs, vukeels, gumashtas, zemindars, ryots, rajahs, beggars, and thieves, and defended by a proportionate force of Chuprassies, Burkin-dazes, jail guards, Sepoys, &c. The weather

is warm, and the stout secretary is without his coat. To get through all the business of each unit of the large crowd outside in one day a man would require to take his coat off. Mr Palmer Brown is seated at a table quite covered with papers, letters, and cumbrous paper-covered works on Mussulman and Hindoo law, and upon the various orders, rules, and regulations issued by the Governor-General, the Court of Directors, the Commander-in-chief, and the Board of Control, at various times, since the days of Clive ; but his feet are on another chair, and a cheroot in his fat mouth. Also the work at present studied by the Secretary has no reference to any of the difficult subjects detailed above, but is, in fact, that popular novel, ‘ Erasures ! a Tale of Forgery and Fashion ! ’

A baboo comes noiselessly in. He brings Letter No. 47, of the Correspondence between the Secretary to the Resident of Nawaubgunge and the Collector of Hokeepore, on the subject of the assessment of the village of Bindee.

‘*Jehannum Ko jao!*’ says Mr Palmer Brown. The punkah wallah is almost asleep, and it is too hot to sign a letter just now; besides, our friend is in a crisis of the story.

Another *baboo* soon comes in with another letter. ‘*Jehannum Ko jao*’ is again the remark of the Secretary, but he eventually glances over the letter, and suggests an alteration or two which make it much more pungent and much more impertinent, for this Letter, No. 25 of the Correspondence between him and the Commissioner of Imaumghur, contains a sharp reprimand, conveyed to a man considerably his senior. If Indian official correspondence is voluminous, there is no doubt that it also often contains plenty of spice.

A third native soon disturbs Mr Palmer Brown and announces that an English *Sahib* wishes to see him, and before the official gentleman can send out an angry reply Captain Ashleigh is in the room.

‘I wish to speak two words with you,’ said the Captain, curtly.

‘It is quite impossible just now, sir,’ said

Mr Palmer Brown, pointing to the tremendous volumes with paper-covers, 'you see I am in the midst of my work.'

'It is quite necessary,' returned the Captain, and the two were left alone.

'It is only one question! Our secret! Will you take your solemn oath that you have not revealed it since you have been at Nawaubgunge? Directly or indirectly—mind!'

'Really, sir, when you recollect that my word was pledged so many years ago, your question is insulting.'

'And yet I must repeat it, and insist upon a reply.'

'Sir!' said Mr Palmer Brown, grandly, 'as I said before—'

'Stay—this is better. Will you take your oath you have not revealed it since Miss Sophy Brabazon has been in India?'

'Upon my word, I don't know what you mean!' said the Secretary, becoming natural, 'I haven't breathed a syllable.'

'Strange!' said the Captain, and without

another word, to Mr Palmer Brown's great surprise, he bounced out of the room.

To the drawing-room of Mrs Liversege Captain Ashleigh promptly returned. She thought him looking paler than when he left it, but more resolute and calm.

'Mrs Liversege,' he said at once, 'I must admit this to you. It is absolutely necessary that you never talk about what we recently have talked, again. You must impose silence upon your informant, whoever he may be, and must promise on your part never to open your lips. I frankly admit that I am forced to insist on this, before all other considerations in the world.'

'Very pretty indeed, sir. I make a charge against you which I see you cannot deny,' began the lady, with a triumphant flourish of her handkerchief. She was not yet aware what was the formidable weapon the fates had given into her hands.

'I say,' said the Captain, gently, 'I frankly admit that I must consent to any conditions to bring about this result!'

‘ Ah ! now I begin to listen to reason ! ’
said Mrs Liversege, clutching the handkerchief.

‘ Having said that, I must say more. I cannot urge you too strongly to be very careful how you act. This is how the case stands. I cannot plead “ not guilty ! ” I cannot plead “ guilty ! ” I cannot talk on the subject. And you on your side are acting in an affair about which you know absolutely nothing.’

‘ Sir ! ’ said the lady.

‘ About which, I repeat, you know absolutely nothing. Furthermore, I see one thing, you are being made a tool of—’

‘ Go on, sir.’

‘ And the blow, instead of striking me, will strike the young lady : you do not see that ! ’

‘ Oh, sir, you are very unselfish and considerate,’ said Mrs Liversege with clumsy irony.

A momentary flush of indignation came over the face of the Captain, but he replied with much temper, — ‘ For me, perhaps I

have been disciplined to bear such blows, but for her—you do not understand her.’

‘Enough of this!’ said Mrs Liversege, looking as implacable as the goddess Kalee herself, ‘I now call upon you as a gentleman to fulfil your promise. I will fetch the young lady, and from your lips she must briefly learn that this engagement is at an end!’

‘Poor thing, what has she done?’ said the Captain in a musing manner, as if Mrs Liversege was only one of the many insensate and inanimate objects in the room. ‘She arrives pure, confiding, innocent, and every step downwards seems irresistible, immutable. I felt there was a fate in it from the very first; I sought her not, and that she should place the great trust of a woman’s life in me is one more of those many inscrutable things—’

‘Sir!’ interrupted Mrs Liversege, ‘I have a duty to perform, and that duty I will religiously go through!’ Of all Indian religionists the *Thugs* are, without doubt, the most scrupulous and the most devout.

‘And it is not altogether your fault,’ said

the Captain in the same tone. ‘ You too are a tool of circumstance, like everybody else. You have been taught that religion means worship and not life, and it is only the mean things and mean ambitions of the latter that you have been educated to strive for. Will Sophy Brabazon one day be like you?—Forbid it, Heaven!’

These last words were muttered to himself, and, to his surprise, the young lady in question now entered the room. Mrs Liversege, unperceived by him, had gone out during this last soliloquy and brought in Sophy, who happened to be close at hand.

‘ Here is my niece, sir,’ said the great lady, pointing her out with the everlasting *pocket-handkerchief*. ‘ Sophy, Captain Ashleigh has a few words to say to you, and he has given me to understand that they are only a few.’ This last with intention.

Captain Ashleigh stood silent for some seconds, his pale face working through its calmness with a terrible expression. At last he began very slowly,—

‘Sophy Brabazon, in this world, when those we trust prove untrustworthy, we must ever remember that there is One who is ever good, ever true.’

‘Oh! it is a moral discourse!’ said Mrs Liversege impatiently, and with a very significant look.

‘You may not trust in me any longer, Sophy,’ pursued the Captain very slowly, ‘I have come to say Good-bye to you.’

Thus they parted, and Sophy was left swooning in the arms of the lady, whom by delicate innuendo we have been lately likening to a Thug. That implacable person completed the morning’s work of her dread weapon, the *handkerchief*, by dipping it into Eau de Cologne and bathing the young lady’s temples.

The next morning at three o’clock the jingling of accoutrements and the tramp of horses broke the stillness, and a large body of turbaned horsemen defiled round the road which skirted the Residency. It was the Nawaubunge Irregulars, who were shifting their quarters to Nielgunge by Mr Liversege’s

order. Their chief rode a short distance behind them, and paused for a second at the Residency gate, as a black servant came up to him with a letter just arrived by the post. He began to read it by the light of a lanthorn, but soon crushed it impatiently in his pocket.

The letter was from Mrs Vesey, who had just heard of the engagement between the Captain and Sophy. It congratulated him in warm earnest words that a life of sorrow should at length be rewarded with happiness. Captain Ashleigh read no further than this, and the lanthorn which had shed a passing gleam on the Residency buildings and gardens was put out. The Captain rode on, and was soon shrouded in the gloom.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH THE MAJOR LOSES A RACE BUT
WINS A PRIZE.

WE must now return to the affairs of our old friend Major Pulfington Belper, for I hope that this gallant officer is by this time a friend of every reader of this little history. This most eccentric gentleman is about to commit a rash act, an act which will seriously affect his future. I have pointed¹ out how in his efforts to wear in a becoming manner the figurative big-wig of a commanding officer, he was met by one very formidable obstacle. That obstacle was Mr Chiffney Chaffney, Joint Collector and Deputy Magistrate of Chuckergotty. A rigid moralist might here trace out how an outraged moral law is promptly vindicated. The Major takes to billiards, and billiards is gaming. At billiards

he loses money to Mr Chiffney Chaffney, and becomes of necessity on most familiar terms with that young Bengal civilian. Now, too much familiarity and too many billiard losses breed a feeling by no means in harmony with the sentiment of respect which should be created by that awful functionary, a Regimental Commanding Officer. Then also Mr Chiffney Chaffney has at his command a talent for the ludicrous which he does not always subordinate to his sense of the becoming. And this is the more dangerous, as the Major's brother officers are irritated against him by his alternate fits of hysterical vigour and grotesque feebleness. For all this the comic old gentleman still plays on with Mr Chiffney Chaffney, day after day, night after night. He still loses gloves, arm-chairs, guns, cases of beer, boxes of cigars, everything but money. So often is the buggy of Mr Chiffney Chaffney at the 44th Mess-house, that I fear the affairs of the Chucker-gotty Joint Collectorate and those also of the

Deputy Magistracy must suffer from his absence.

One fine morning in the month of July, about three months after Captain Ashleigh left the station, the officers of the 44th Now-gong Native Infantry were assembled as usual to enjoy their coffee in the verandah in the cool of the morning. Mr Chiffney Chaffney was there; and also a well-known figure with light brown shooting-jacket, red nose, spectacles, and colossal bamboo club. The conversation turned upon a foot-race run the previous evening between Ensign Hodges and the young civilian at a very late hour of the night, both parties being, to a certain extent, under the stimulus of the excellent Mess Madeira.

‘Did you ever win a race at midnight, Major?’ said Mr Chiffney Chaffney, addressing his senior with his usual frankness.

‘Racing indeed! What’s a hundred yards! We used to run a mile or two in my time. That’s the distance to try the muscle and

wind. Why don't you run a mile when you're about it?'

'I hear you were very good indeed, Major. Your fame as a pedestrian has come down to us. You'll excuse the apparent personality of the remark, but when I contemplate those muscles and limbs I can't help saying that I should have liked to see you run!' A great laugh followed this remark of Mr Chiffney Chaffney's, scarcely to be accounted for by its intrinsic wit.

'Come, come, there you go again!' retorted the Major, forcing a laugh. 'I see you've got into training as funny dog to a blind man; take care that that blind man does not recover his sight and catch you and chain you up again. Hey! Hey!' The perverse officer would carry this on undeterred by even such laughs as that which followed his rival's last speech.

'I tell you what, Major, I really want to back you, if you'll run. I'll back you even against—let me see—old Liversege!'

‘Mutiny, begad, mutiny!’ chimed in the Major.

‘I’ll even give odds. Two to one! The bay two-year old Belper against the spavined old horse—’

‘Chiffney Chaffney! I’m really serious in this! You may crack your jokes at me! But the powers that be! We must really respect the powers that be!’ and the Major thought that he had here asserted the claims of authority with moderation and tact, but at the same time with firmness.

‘I said nothing against the powers that be, Major, except that I should like to see them run a foot-race, and so I should, in shorts and white stockings!’

‘Yes, but you mustn’t call the Resident of Nawaubunge a spavined old horse, at a mess-table, you know!’ said the Major.

‘I tell you what, Major!’ replied the young civilian, ‘I don’t mind backing you two to one against “Little Puffy!”’—The eminent Political Officer, Mr Palmer Brown,

was sometimes known by this disrespectful nickname.

‘I tell you what!’ said our eccentric friend, apparently goaded, if not to madness, at least to something very nearly akin. ‘With all your brag, what odds would you give me?—I’ve a good mind to give you a lesson.’

‘Half a mile in a mile!’

‘Ah, that’s the way you get out of it.’

‘I’d give you two minutes in a mile.’

‘Seriously?’

‘Seriously.’

‘For five gold mohurs?’

‘For five gold mohurs.’

‘Done!’ said the Major. This was the rashest act committed by a courageous officer in a career which boasted of many brave deeds.

The first result of this singular bet was that the Major was detected a few mornings after this running along one of the out-of-the-way roads of Nawaubgunge very much out of breath. This his young friends were

pleased to term his 'training,' and to favour him in consequence with many valuable suggestions touching the wearing of numerous great coats, the eating of underdone beef-steaks, and the anointing the body with curious oils and unguents. The race was fixed for Tuesday—that day fortnight, and as the time drew near the excitement increased marvellously.

It was hot weather for foot-races. They had reached the beginning of July; and the rainy monsoon, which ought to have begun at the end of June, was anxiously looked forward to. Not the least courageous point in the Major's resolve was undertaking to run a mile in such weather. For, in truth, India was now a burning fiery furnace, at least, so thought Mr Charles Simpkin, to whom we must now for a moment turn. Thus he describes the state of affairs about this time in a letter to one of his friends:—

'You get up at the earliest dawn—"gunfire" it is called. You are hot, damp, and as fatigued as if on the previous evening you

had just completed the celebrated wager of a thousand miles in a thousand hours. And yet the morning brings no freshness. Your bearer literally dresses you, putting on your socks for you before he wakes you up, and your Khitmutgar almost pours a cup of tea down your throat, when in the same unconscious state. You ride out, but the heat is scarcely bearable, and when the sun appears above the horizon, it is at once most powerful and insupportable. You seek shelter in your house, and remain there amusing yourself as best you can for thirteen or fourteen hours. You can of course go out calling in the day or go over to tiffin, that is, if you find life so utterly wretched that a *coup de soleil* would be almost a luxury; and this is nearly the case with the poor *Fakeer*, who, donning the holy thread and pious dust, is squatting on his haunches, and at present writing to you.

‘Say that you remain in your bungalow. As the day advances the great heat makes its way into the well-closed and well-darkened house, and though above you creaks and swings

an unsightly, huge article, the famous Indian punkah, it does not cool you, it merely disturbs the hot air, and shows you how hot that air really is. Boiling and steamy, you lounge from one easy-chair to another, sitting, if you like, on several chairs at a time, trying also the sofa, but finding chairs and sofa all insufferable. You try to read. Instantly, if the book requires the least thought, you fall asleep. You wake up hotter than ever, and with your head feeling three times its original bulk. You drink a great deal of soda-water, mixing brandy with it if you are unwise, but you are always thirsty. At last the sun sets, and every one rides or drives upon the "Course." But even this is a dubious pleasure. The air is still hot, and the hard white road retains the heat and is like an oven. Boiling and steamy you ride along, bowing to a number of melancholy, pale ladies and gentlemen as boiling and steamy as yourself. Sometimes there is a breeze, and then you understand the force of the native expression to "eat the air." In truth, you devour it hungrily, greedily.

‘My son, if a youth at college, will listen to three words of advice from one if not considerably older, at any rate *considerably wiser* than himself: I would say, *first*, Beware of love; I make no doubt you will attend to this good advice, but my next is still more important. *Secondly!* Beware of debt! I speak from bitter experience, for what with overdue Mess-bills, balls, haberdashery, tailoring, and an atrocious system they have out here called “buying steps,” I begin to owe something very formidable to the Asiatics! But, lastly, and chiefly, my son, Beware of India, that “Despotism tempered with Humbug!” as Mr Sydney Blanchard playfully calls it. The mismanagement and nepotism are even more colossal than the brag about capacity and purity in the official prints would infer, and the delicious point of all is that those soldiers who are doing soldiers’ work honestly, patiently, are constantly vilified by *owdacious* and mendacious semi-military officials, and their regiments looked upon as something between an asylum for idiots and a penitentiary where a

fraudulent staff-officer may be reclaimed by gentleness. In the saddle of Colonel Clive rides a Colonel Boshington. Some think that if things go on like this there will be a thundering row soon. What hope can you have for the immortal welfare of people who call courtesy to ladies “doing *Sammy!*” and a man of pleasing conversational powers like my Major Pulfington Belper “a *buck-stick?*” Isn’t my delicious friend fun with his marvellous race? What possible ratiocinative process in his whimsical brain could have convinced him that such a step would be desirable? A mad world! *Ram! Ram!* With the great Barber, *Je me presse de rire de tout de peur d’être obligé d’en pleurer!*

‘The fair, the chaste, the inexpressive She! There’s another of them. She certainly loved the silent, stupid, booted “Irregular,” because he was silent, or stupid, or booted, or for some other equally feminine reason. And now—I can’t make her out—she did love him—then stepped in the cruel mother. But alas, questions of caste have been in the way of true love

in India for a long time. Did not even King Dushyanta fear that the lovely Sakontala was not sprung from a caste sufficiently high to wed one of the race of *Puru*, who, you know, was sixth in descent from the moon's son, *Budha* ?'

Our young friend writes with a certain tone of bitterness, and indeed ills concrete and abstract, woes imaginary and woes of the hard real world, debts, duns, lassitude, prickly heat, the conditions of Indian advancement, the several grievances touched upon in his letter, and perhaps some others, were pressing rather hard upon this young gentleman at this period of time. This petulant spirit of his was all the more unfortunate as it caused a rupture between him and his 'delicious friend' at a very ill-timed moment—the day before the race.

The officer commanding the 44th Now-gong Native Infantry had long debated in his mind whether, in justice to the figurative big wig which I have more than once had oc-

casation to allude to, it was quite correct for him to chum with an Ensign. Simpkin was quite wrong in the matter, and thought that the Major's solicitude was entirely personal, not public; and when the senior officer, with his peruke on his head and his neck-tie round his waist, did come in to announce that they must have separate establishments, much of the irritability of the junior must be set down to this error.

'You know I like you very much, young fellow!' began the Major. 'But it isn't really the thing indeed! A commanding officer ought to have a house to himself. Don't you think so?'

'Oh, if you come to that sort of thing, Major Pulfington Belper, I can assure you that whenever the door is shown to me I always go straight out.'

'No, no, come, come, that's not the way to put it, Simpkin. You've as much right to the house as I have. If you decide to chum with some one else in it, I'll get another, you know!'

‘Oh no! You can keep the house, Major!’

‘You know,’ said the other, ‘a commanding officer of a regiment of Native Infantry has duties imposed upon him by his position! There are some things he can do and some things he cannot do. I don’t care for myself, you know, but we must be a little *pucka* in these things—a little *pucka*. Hey! You see, Simpkin, I ought to know these sort of things better than you, oughtn’t I? That’s the *dustoor*, you know. I’ve lived so much longer in India than you!’

‘You have, Major!’ said the Ensign with ever so faint a flavour of sarcasm.

‘Another thing, Simpkin!’ The Major had detected the sarcasm, and the full-bottomed peruke was now reared aloft upon the exact apex of his head, the curls all spread out and imposing, like the front of Jove himself. ‘The Mess President has brought to my notice as commanding officer, that you have not paid your Mess-bills for two months. Now this is a public matter, and the rules are strict. And I don’t like to talk of the private

affairs of the officers under my command, but a commanding officer is bound in some cases to supervise the younger officers, and I think you are going a-head too fast. Sins and debts, says the proverb, are always more than we take them to be. Hey!’ And the two officers parted in anger for the first time.

The eventful morning of the race has at length arrived, and I must say that when Major Pulfington Belper drove to the ground appointed for the match, he was perfectly startled at the concourse of people there assembled. He was driving carelessly along in his buggy with his eyes cast down, apparently counting the hairs in the old horse’s tail. He suddenly looked up, and gave quite a jump as the reality presented itself to him through the clear medium of the very powerful pebbles which he wore affixed to his nose.

Major Pulfington Belper, of the 44th Nowgong Native Infantry, had already made a reputation for himself in India. I may say, that taking the whole amount of conversation at Nawaubgunge, he absorbed as much

of it as all the other topics in the world put together. And I think the same thing might be said of him in every other place in India whilst he was in it. Every day, in every house, everybody that called had always some new story to tell of Pulfington Belper, some racy saying, some ridiculous anecdote; which possessed a delicate aroma when fresh and new, but which would no more keep than an open bottle of champagne or an opened oyster. Thus whilst the present celebrated foot-race had been the sole topic of conversation in Nawaubgunge for the last ten days, it had been almost as much discussed at Rampore, and at every one of the little Civil Stations and indigo factories within a radius of forty or fifty miles; and this morning half Rampore, and more than half the dwellers in the region round about Nawaubgunge, are assembled to witness the Major's prowess; a compliment which that renowned Field-officer did not by any means seem to expect.

‘Why, the whole station's here!’ said one of a crowd of gentlemen on horseback, col-

lected near the point which was to act at once as the starting and winning post.

‘All India, you mean!’ said another.

‘Where is *he*?’ asked a third. There is but one *he* in question to-day. The interest taken in the two champions is out of all proportion.

‘I don’t see the “Worshipper of Mammon!”’ Since the affair of Captain Ashleigh, this playful nickname had, I blush to say it, been given to Mrs Liversege by local wits.

‘No, nor old Liversege! There’s “Little Puffy!”’

‘And, by Jove, who’s this with all this ragamuffin accompaniment?’

‘Yes, nigger accompaniment, like a song at the Oxford Music-hall,—the Nabob of Nabobgunge!’

‘The more the merrier!’

‘I say, Simpkin, we must have a correct account of the “event” in the “Moffussilite!”’

‘Yes, and in all the papers in India!’

‘By Jove, here’s Chiffney Chaffney in cricketing shoes!’

‘And here *he* is!’ And when the Major, having taken off his coat and waistcoat, appeared in the well-known light brown American-drill trousers with the well-known neck-tie round his waist, and the well-known spectacles on his well-known red nose,—at a signal from Charley Simpkin a cheer was set up which shook the station, and was heard by Mrs Liversege who was driving along a distant road.

‘What’s that, I wonder?’ said the great lady.

‘I think they have the regimental races to-day!’ said Motee to both sisters; this race had always been alluded to by both Motee and Sophy as the ‘regimental races.’

‘Shall we go and see them?’ said Mr Liversege.

‘We might, at any rate, drive round that way!’ said his wife.

Mr Liversege here repeated some Hindoostanee to the coachman, and the carriage and

its four horses and its pea-green postilions and its escort of Irregular Cavalry turned about and proceeded to do unconscious honour to Major Pulfington Belper.

Directly this latter gentleman started off, he found himself encircled by a body of amateur Cavalry, who came along with him and kept up a flow of banter all the way.

‘Go it, Major!’ said one.

‘I should really recommend you to dig the spurs into him!’ said another.

‘Hush, you fellows! Don’t you see that the Major’s riding a waiting race? There’s plenty of time, Major!’

‘Here’s Chaffney coming up with a Chiffney, Major!’

‘Yes, Major! Go ahead, full steam!’ And one of them, Mr Hodges, went so far as to shock the Major’s ears with the vulgar phrase ‘Bile up a gallop!’

But the Major ran bravely on, turned at the half-mile, and was winning easily, as he was only ten yards from the goal with a good thirty yards between him and his opponent,

when suddenly he detected an unusual commotion amongst the spectators, and looking about for the cause, saw the eyes of Mrs Liversege fixed on him with an expression of intense anger and consternation. She had just arrived, and was thinking of nothing more important and interesting than a foot-race of Sepoys; when all at once she beheld the elderly gentleman whom she had selected to be the husband of her sister, running along panting for breath, without his coat, and in the presence of a large concourse of spectators, who were cheering him and bawling his name out with all the strength of their lungs. This accounts for Mrs Liversege's astonished expression of countenance.

Unfortunately this terrible glance was fatal to the Major's success. Whilst his eyes were turned aside, his foot struck against a stone, and as he was going very fast at the time, he rolled over and over in the dust. The cheers redoubled, but that experienced racing man, Mr Chiffney Chaffney, took advantage of the accident, and ran in and won.

Odd as had been the Major's undertaking to run a race at all, his mortification at losing it was still more extraordinary. I don't think that ever before in his life he was so much put out. You are aware that one of the Major's leading characteristics is an egregious vanity, which feeds itself chiefly upon his physique and his skill in billiards. But I am convinced that he believed that much more was in question besides his still youthful manliness and activity. Somehow in his whimsical old brain he had got himself to believe that he was running a race for Miss Sophy Brabazon. More of this perhaps hereafter. New troubles connected with the race were coming thick upon him, and this is the first of them. Six days after the issue, he went over to the Mess for his morning's coffee, and the 'Moffussilite' was immediately handed to him with the following article:—

SPORTING INTELLIGENCE.

Pedestrianism. Belper and Chaffney.—
The patrons and supporters of pedestrianism

were on the *qui vive* yesterday morning as to the result of the long-expected one-mile foot-race between those celebrated 'daisy clippers,' Tom Chaffney of Chiffney and Bill Belper of Putney. The conditions of the match were eight half-crowns a side, Belper to receive two minutes' start. The ground was in capital order, and the fine morning brought a very strong muster of the beauty and fashion in their brilliant equipages. Amongst the notabilities we observed :—Kings—Nawaub-gunge; Princes of the blood—Chokra Bahador; Royal Family—Prince Broomielaw (of Ballachulish, N.B.), The Duke of Parma (Baron Brown), P.C.H., B.C.S., &c.; Nobles—Emir Fuzl Ali, Emir Growlah 'ood Dowlah, The Marquis of Pulfington, Puffy Bahador, Bheesty Bahador, Blinkin' Idolater Bahador, Lalloo Khitnutgar; Captains—Jones, Walker, St Leger, Langton; Ensigns—Hodges. T. Liversege, a trustworthy and respectable Resident of the place, kindly consented to hold the stakes and the men's coats.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MEN.

Belper of Putney stands five feet ten inches in his stocking-soles ; breadth of chest, 51 inches ; muscles hard, nerves whip-cordy, biceps colossal, countenance pleasing, whiskers sandy, limbs symmetrical. It is now many years since this veteran runner first made his bow to the pedestrian public, and defeated the one-eyed Baker of Lambeth, at the ' Pig and Whistle,' Battersea. He subsequently overcame Bodgers, Boodle, and Chorley, the bandy-legged Antelope of Hackney, Slick the American Rightaway, Bill Jowls, and Hokey the celebrated Shuffleton Tinker. Latterly we have heard little of Belper in the pedestrian world, other avocations and pursuits having no doubt occupied his time. We believe that we are violating no confidence when we reveal that Belper is now one of the very best players at ' skittles ' at present in India. On this point we will ' back our opinion,' heavily.

Belper of Putney has a heavy but free and original style of professional locomotion. It is a graceful cross between the elephantine swaggering rush of the Broadstairs Pork-butcher, and the elastic, plastic, light fantastic skip of the St Pancras Pot-boy, commonly called 'The Dancing Master,' as our readers are well aware. Upon our arrival on the ground it was evident to our 'practised eye' that he had enjoyed the advantage of a thorough and highly scientific course of training. Tom Chaffney, a well-conducted lad preparing for the stage-jockey, stable, money collecting, clown, and general utility business at a circus, had trained down much finer, but the novice was not in such thorough working order.

At the given signal, Belper started off in splendid 'form,' eliciting much cheering from the 'assembled thousands.' He had already made very good running indeed before the infant got into his perambulator. The excitement now became terrific, and a great deal of money to the tune of three to one was now

sunk in those pleasant and flowery meads which skirt the right bank of dear old Father Thames as he glides from Barnes to Battersea. The military especially patronized Belper, and many of them rode with him all the way. Indeed, it is to the encouraging and even cheerful remarks of these his young friends that he in great measure owed the splendid position which he occupied when within a few yards of the winning-post. On the other hand, several functionaries connected with the Civil Administration of India goaded on their man (Chaffney) with loud and appropriate sportsmanlike vociferations. The contest was eventually decided in favour of the latter champion, for Bill Belper tripped and fell when within a few yards of home. We need not add that a very large amount of the silver coinage of the Hon. East India Company's mint changed hands directly this result was made known.

‘Pot-house wit! Hey!’ said the Major directly he had perused this most diabolical article. And perhaps the Major was right,

and perhaps the young gentleman, its presumed author (Mr Simpkin), soon regretted the circumstance, but we have been forced to quote it at full length, as it had an immediate effect on our story, for the Major that very day called at the Residency. He was dressed in his military frock and white trousers, partly because he thought such a suit the most respectful to ladies, partly because it also suited his manly figure, and I think also a little because it enabled him to show off a pair of long brass spurs, the privilege at once and the distinction of a Field-officer. But he has to kick his heels (and the brass spurs thereunto affixed) about for some little time in Mrs Liversege's drawing-room, for that lady has given orders that she is to receive him alone the next time he calls; and, if the truth is to be told, she was taking a siesta when the Major arrived.

At last she comes in, and the Major observes that her countenance is severe, splendid, and appalling, like that of Queen Eleanor when she invades poor, fair, weak, wicked,

fluttering Rosamond. She has in her hands a copy of the 'Moffussilite.' The poor Major little knows between what airy dagger and figurative pint-beaker of laudanum his choice is very soon to lie.

Her greeting is abrupt. 'Read that, sir!' Positively it is the article describing the fatal race. The Major complies, although he knew every word of it by heart long ago.

'I hope you don't overlook that part?' she continues, with a terrible composure, placing a profusely jewelled finger of her fat but fair hand upon the ribald passage where the Resident of Nawaubgunge, without any 'Mister' before his name, is described as holding 'coats' and 'stakes.'

'That I should have lived to hear my husband called "respectable!"' said the lady, tartly.

'The license of the Indian press,' began the stammering Major.

'License—fiddlesticks! What right had you to make such an idiot of yourself, sir!' This was curious; to ladies in general, and

to Mrs Liversege in particular, there was no gentleman who showed more chivalric deference and courtesy than the Major, and to him, of all other gentlemen in India, Mrs Liversege seemed to care the least what she said.

There was a pause, during which the lady looked very stern and angry indeed. The Major looked—indeed the poor Major scarcely knew how or where to look at all.

‘Major Pulfington Belper,’ resumed the lady, at length, ‘you have very much disappointed the confidence we placed in you—that is, the confidence which Mr Liversege placed in you. You are aware perhaps that he took an interest in you, and recommended you to Government; but when he did this he could not, of course, anticipate that you would pursue such silly courses, or that your conduct would culminate in such a ridiculous act as this last one; an act which you see has not only made you a laughing-stock, but has exposed him also to the attacks of scurrilous military men in the papers, for that the article was written by a military officer, its low,

sporting tone leaves in my mind no manner of doubt.'

'It seems to imitate an English sporting-paper called Bell's Life,' explained the Major.

'And upon a graver point,' said Mrs Liversege, justly treating this palpable evasion of the Major with all the contempt it deserved.

'And upon a much graver point, Major Pulfington Belper, we must speak plainly, though the subject is a delicate one. You are disappointing the trust placed in you by some one else in this house.'

The Major stared as if this last communication had been made to him in the ancient Indian *Prakrit* tongue, or in the *patois* of one of the districts near the Lake 'Ngami.

'Suppose, sir, that one of the ladies in this house had placed trust, much trust in you. What must she think when she sees a gentleman she has tried to respect behaving so madly, so foolishly?'

The poor Major stared still more.

'At one time I thought that if I had been asked to sanction such a marriage, I could

have conscientiously done so. I thought that you were not altogether deficient in sense, and that a comfortable home and the care of a kind and steady wife might have drawn you away from the Mess-house, where you betray your folly and lose your money in gaming. But I positively think there is little hope after what has just happened, and Mr Liversege will have to consider the matter, and write again to Government.'

There was too much in these pregnant speeches for the poor Major's brain to grasp all at once. But amidst their overwhelming rebukes and tremendous threats, there was one little ray—'little hope,' were not these Mrs Liversege's very words. The enchanting garden, with its flowers, fruits, odours, music, and the beautiful fairy, might prove a reality still. Was such a thunder-cloud to show a lining as silvery as this?

'I certainly think,' pursued the lady, 'that you have behaved very badly indeed to Mrs Throgmorton.'

'Mrs Throgmorton!' said the Major, in

utter surprise. Mrs Liversege stared at him for half a minute.

‘And do you really mean to tell me, Major Pulfington Belper, that all this time you have been—trifling?’ this last word was pronounced very slowly and very distinctly indeed.

Here was a terrible dilemma for a well-meaning Field-officer to be placed in. Mrs Throgmorton! He had always thought and had maintained in public that that lady was a most worthy woman, but this was when viewed in the light of a great moral example—as a wife he had never even thought of her, and must at once put an end to this ridiculous misconception. How could so juvenile an old gentleman marry a woman only four years his junior? But then observe the tremendous consequences of the other alternative. What opinion could Mrs Liversege and the highest Government representatives at Nawaubgunge have of an officer, who was said to have trifled with the feelings of a worthy woman? This was the momentous question which presented

itself to the peculiarly constituted mind of our loyal and reverend old friend, although the coarser mind of Mrs Liversege had thought that his fears for the loss of his command with its concomitant debt and beggary would be paramount. The poor Major thought very little of this part of the question, but I am forced to admit that the prospect of walking about without the brass spurs of a Commanding-officer had some effect on him. All India soon knew the results of the Major's deliberations. First of all his *tête-à-tête* with Mrs Liversege was converted into a *tête-à-tête* with another lady; and after a certain time had elapsed, Mrs Liversege came again into the room, and knew that her scheme had proved successful.

For there was a conscious blush of innocent guilt upon the face of either lover. It lit up the cheek of the one and the nose of the other.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH MR CHARLES SIMPKIN IS DEMONSTRATED A GOOSE.

I HAVE more than once had to illustrate the fatal practice which runs riot in India of giving people nicknames. I think I may say there was hardly an officer of the 44th Nowgong Native Infantry who was known by the names which figured in his Parish Register. Christian names like 'Tom,' 'Jack,' and 'Adam,' were sometimes used, but then these were almost invariably misapplied according to military usage in like cases. 'Little Puffy,' 'The Worshipper of Mammon,' 'The Nabob of Nabobgunge,' such were the puerile titles applied to persons of distinction. Was not the late Field-Marshal Lord Clyde, G.C.B., S.I., always spoken of as 'Old *Khuberdar*?' by officers in India.

I am sorry to be obliged to record another example of this practice. Sophy is now always alluded to in Nawaubgunge as the 'Creature of Impulse.' Major Pulfington Belper, the most respectable of her lovers, gave her this nickname, quite unconsciously and with the very best intentions in all the world.

'I assure you, you are all wrong,' said the Major one morning, 'she does not mean anything by it all. She is only a Creature of Impulse!'

For gossip has lately been active in the affairs of Miss Sophy Brabazon. For tittle-tattle, give me an Indian station. Imagine a score or two of idle ladies and gentlemen with disordered digestions, with 'spleen,' with 'liver,' with 'dyspepsia,' ill-humoured, hot, impregnated with cayenne cookery, annoyed by lazy *punkah* pallers, and in an atmosphere of trumpeting venomous mosquitoes. Add to this the jealousies of 'Queen's,' and 'Company's,' civil and military, dragoons and infantry, staff and non-staff. Imagine several

dozens of *Chuprassies* and other black servants running about all day long with *chits* (written gossip). Remember also that, except during the heat of the day in the hot weather, all doors and windows are constantly open, and people live as it were in glass-houses,—and you can have some little idea of the tittle-tattle of an Indian ‘up-country’ station.

It must be recollected likewise that Sophy has excited some envy and ill-will at Nawaubunge, for she is undoubtedly prettier than the other ladies there. Mrs Peckham and Mrs and Miss Halliday (the two last, ‘Portuguese’) have been hostile to her from the very first, and so also has that cold and spiky staff-officer, young De Frise, who was expected to marry Miss Halliday, but who did not, and went home about this time on sick certificate for aggravated nervous dyspepsia. Mrs Halliday had the reputation of being a wonderfully economic housewife and designer of palatable curries and mango pickles. Miss Halliday was famous for her eyes and small feet, and the skilful use she made of both these ad-

vantages at the Nawaubgunge balls. She was the rival of Sophy, and rumour had already given her to at least a dozen subaltern officers, but she eventually became the third wife of Mr Bumpsher, a member of council who had once been assistant collector to her great-grandfather. It was said that her mother shut her up on bread and water for a fortnight before her consent was obtained. Except in her rivalry to Sophy, I don't think the young lady was unamiable, but she was certainly vain. 'She's all feathers and airs, like a peacock *punkah!*' said Major Pulfington Belper one day. Mrs Peckham was renowned for her skill in cross-examining native witnesses, especially servants. Her minute knowledge of all that occurred in every house in Nawaubgunge was very remarkable.

Well, what was it that these and other wise people were now saying of Sophy? They said that she must be a complete coquette, that if she had cared for Captain Ashleigh at all she never would have allowed Mrs Liver-

sege to break off that marriage, nor would she have got over the affair so easily. She would not now be flirting with at least half-a-dozen gentlemen at a time. Mrs Peckham had an accurate list of them, and declared the matter quite shocking. This list included Mr Chiffney Chaffney and Mr Girdlestone the Judge. More important, if true, it now included Mr Palmer Brown once again. It was said that some difference that Sophy and this latter gentleman had had in Calcutta was now made up, and that recently the Secretary had become particularly sprightly and attentive, and the young lady much more civil to him. Mrs Peckham, whose knowledge was so minute that it extended to the most secret resolves of people as soon as formed, knew it for a fact, that she had made up her mind to go the way of all coquettes, and at last sell herself to the wealthiest suitor. But this latter fact was evidently unknown just now even to Mrs Liversege, who, above all things, desired such a result.

‘I told you how it would be, Maria,’ said her sister; ‘you would do it, and now you have corrupted her.’

‘Corrupted her! Fiddlesticks! She’s a *pucka* coquette!’ which showed that Mrs Liversege was not altogether pleased with her niece.

Almost the only person who heartily defended the young lady was the most contemned but most loyal of her suitors, Major Pulfington Belper. Though he had enough on his own mind just then, poor man, he went about taking up the cudgels in her favour wherever she was discussed. Who knows what a woman feels for a man, and how can such a thing be guessed from her actions? Who knows what passed between her and Captain Ashleigh, and whether even they were ever engaged at all? It was in the nature of quick, lively girls to feel deeply when they did feel, and to hide best their feelings when they wished such feelings to be hidden. As for the long list of suitors she was supposed to have encouraged, such was

said of every pretty girl in India, simply because she was pretty, and men being allowed to call whenever they liked, did call a great deal in consequence. As for Mrs Peckham, she was one of those who see nothing in the sun but his spots. Thus argued the chivalric Major with some plausibility. 'Between a fool and a genius,' said Napoleon, 'there is but one step;' and in the case of Major Pulfington Belper did it not almost sometimes seem that this step was that peculiar see-saw movement which French dancing-masters call '*balancez!*'

This poor, loyal, ill-starred, eccentric, but not unintelligent Bengal officer, what with his late foot-race, and his betrothal to a high, stern, unbending pattern of moral female excellence, has nearly been driven frantic; indeed, but for the arrival of the second woe to counteract the first, I almost think that such a result would have at length been brought about. He had protested against being called 'Belper of Putney,' a place he had never seen, so you may be sure that this and the facile

joke about his billiard playing being 'skittles' were entirely done to death in the Mess-house. And then other accounts of the race appeared in the public journals, and at last a metrical account in the 'Delhi Sketch-book,' with a grotesque portrait of the Major running along very much out of breath. It was attributed to Mr Chiffney Chaffney, who wanted to avenge himself on his numerous satirists. The little boy in the back-ground of the picture crying 'Hooray!' from the branch of a tree was very like Simpkin, and the fat boy throwing up his hat was an exaggerated sketch of the corpulence of Mr Palmer Brown. What made the matter more repugnant to the Major's feelings was, that the verses were written in a style of bad spelling and vulgar English then popular in England; but which the Major, who was of those who could see no merit in any English literature since the days of Scott and Thomas Moore, thought utterly abominable. Several verses were devoted to his personal description, not one of them a bit genteeler than the following:—

‘ And so this gent at banging off his rifles and his
 birding guns
 He banged all hother bangers in hall Hinjee,
 S’posin’ the particklar and bespecial bangs that’s
 heard in guns
 The sole and honly bangs of Majier B.’

And the race itself was described in this unworthy manner :—

‘ And hall the gents and ladies they hall turned out
 of their ’ouses
 And in carridges and gardings they stood for to see
 This haged gent a trotting in his shirt and coting
 trowses,
 This frolicsome hold grampus of a Majier B.’

I will do the wits of Nawaubgunge the justice to say that just now they see that the Major’s betrothal is too sore a subject to jest about, at least in his presence. When he came to Mess the night of his engagement—for Mrs Throgmorton had asked for twenty-four hours to deliberate—every one saw that something had happened. The Major drank a great deal of champagne, but even that kept him silent and dull, and had furthermore the effect of disturbing his rest, for in the middle

of the night as he lay half-awake, half-asleep, a confused idea seemed to come in his head, that he had somehow got engaged to be married to Mrs Liversege, and that Mr Liversege was going to write to Government to turn him out of his command in consequence. The poor Major scarcely knew whether this horrible vision or the waking reality was the most appalling. To think that a puerile feminine misconception should bind him for life to a gloomy psalm-singing old woman, and he so young for his age. Well, well, we all pull out our pocket-handkerchiefs when a laced and scented cavalier sacrifices himself for his most gracious and mendacious Majesty King Charles I., and here is a cavalier sacrificing himself for the same principle, a little ointment which anoints the beard of authority, and is said to come from heaven. Sacred majesty. Sacred authorities. Tragic and sad is our worthy friend amongst his present *bonnes fortunes*, but he nevertheless finds time to advocate Sophy's cause with great warmth. Also it is now announced that this quaint gentleman in

the first flush of his courtship has accepted an invitation to go pig-sticking with Mr 'Indigo Jones.'

For Mr Jones, who has a factory at Nielgunge, is now constantly at Nawaubgunge. Was he also in love with Sophy? He was down on Mrs Peckham's list, and Miss Halliday, who affected military terminology, declared that his was decidedly 'a case.' I myself don't think that he was fairly enslaved. He thought the young lady very pretty no doubt, and thought also that he detected in her eyes a rich crop of deep blue, quite unattainable by any known process of boiling down in vats the young indigo plant. But he knew that the high-caste Brahmin, her aunt, would not allow her ever to think of a tiller of the earth, a *Vaiissya*, a mere third-class passenger in the Brahminical railway of life. Indigo in those years was very much down in the 'market,' and neither Mrs Liversege nor Mr Jones himself could have expected the sudden rise which was in a few years to transfer our friend to his native hills, a rich man and the owner of

Bettwys-y-Coed, Capel Curig, Llanwrst, and several other very fine, but very unpronounceable landed estates, whilst Mrs Liversege in the town of Cheltenham, in the county of Gloucestershire, was only—but we are anticipating.

‘ You’ll come too ? ’ said Mr Jones to Mr Charles Simpkin.

‘ My dear sir, ’ replied our young friend, ‘ I myself am a stuck pig ! I am turned out of my sty. I have no horse, no money, no credit, no jack-boots. How then shall I chase the flying porker ! ’

‘ Oh, I’ll mount you and give you everything, boots too—but perhaps they would not fit. ’ Mr Jones, like most indigo planters, was amongst the jovial stout men of this world.

‘ Nielgunge ! Isn’t that where the Headquarters of the Cavalry have gone ? ’

‘ Yes ! ’

‘ And Ashleigh !—He’s there too ? ’

‘ Yes, in my bungalow.—There are no houses there yet ! ’

‘ How is he ? ’

‘ Well, I can’t make him out. He’s a very nice fellow, and uncommonly plucky. But at times, I think he’s either very seedy, or very much cut up indeed ! It’s all true about him and the Creature of Impulse ! Isn’t it ? ’

‘ Yes, broken off by the Worshipper of Mammon. His coat was not of the right colour—try black—or blue—eh, Jones ? ’

‘ Not green ! ’ said Mr Jones, laughing. It was easy to get a laugh out of Mr Indigo Jones.

Charley Simpkin, although he had made many good resolutions of renunciation, was, I think, still entitled to a place on Mrs Peckham’s list. But his mode of courtship was altered. He had sold off his horse and pony, and was now embarrassed, reckless, bitter. He no longer attempted to dazzle Miss Sophy with pretty speeches and brilliant neck-ties ; sarcasm and irony had taken the place of complimentary verses in the manner of Bende-meer’s Stream. There are those who say that these tactics are often the most success-

ful with members of a perverse sex. He called at the Residency one morning about this time, and a little scene took place. The drawing-room was cleared for an expected visit of Major Pulfington Belper to his 'future,' as the French pregnantly term it. But instead of the Major, in glided the insignificant Ensign, and Sophy, who had caught sight of him, did not, of course, see the necessity of summoning Mrs Throgmorton, as this was not the particular contingency upon which that summons had been agreed upon.

'I thought it was Major Pulfington Belper,' said the young lady, who had gathered up sundry mysterious worsted balls, knitting-needles, &c. 'When he comes you'll have to march off, sir, let me tell you that!'

'Oh, he's coming, is he?—oh, of course, we will be discreet!' The Major's engagement had not been kept a secret long, and this was the first time that these two young people had met since it had been made public. Sophy laughed at Mr Simpkin's speech, but

chiefly on this account, and not because it was in any way witty.

‘It’s very funny, the whole business!’ was Sophy’s next remark.

‘Let me well consider your question,’ said Mr Simpkin, adopting at once the new method lately spoken of. ‘It is the love of a man for a woman. It is the love of a woman for a man. Yes, it is “funny;” the word is happy!’

‘Don’t be nonsensical!’

‘On the contrary, I have taken to considering every question with a rigid and exhaustive philosophical gravity, as the magazines say. By-the-by though, in pursuance of that laudable practice, I ought first of all to have asked you to define the word “funny.” Did it mean “ridiculous,” and that in that sense a man falling in love with a woman was “funny?” Did it mean “singular,” and that in that sense a woman rewarding a man’s love was “funny?” Either of these propositions has had advocates amongst the very gravest

of philosophers, so that your remark either way contains profound wisdom !’

‘ You are getting very pert, sir ; but I don’t say that you are much more tiresome than most of the people in this dull place, for they are very dull ; but let us talk a little sense for once !’

‘ Show me first where my speech is deemed deficient in sense. Pulfington Belper, a brave soldier of much susceptibility, falls in love—’

‘ Foolish old man ! But the pitcher that goes to the well—you know !’

‘ So the pitcher that goes to the well is a foolish old man ! Are all pitchers that go to the well foolish ?’

‘ Little pitchers have long ears, young gentleman !’ said the lady briskly.

‘ Whenever they expect to find truth at the bottom of a well, Miss Sophy Brabazon !’

Sophy coloured up for a minute, but replied with good humour—‘ You’re an odd boy ! But let us leave the poor Major alone, for goodness’ sake !’

‘Your will is law, but let me ask one more favour as a kind concession at once to my oddities and my boyhood. Belper, rich in a woman’s love, is “poor.” How do you get over that logical difficulty?’

‘You’re a goose!’ This was a palpable evasion of it.

‘I deny it, and wait for the proof,’ said the young gentleman, little suspecting that the said proof might be brought home to him with much more severe logic than he wished.

‘Haven’t you been acting like one lately?’ said the lady.

‘How?’

‘How! How can I tell you? We ladies hear stories of you gentlemen.’

‘The interest I take in the imaginative literature of my country induces me to ask—What stories, Miss Brabazon?’

‘Why, you see, you become vexed at once.’

‘I am not vexed.’

‘Then why are you so sarcastic?’

‘Sarcastic, am I? Well, you object so

strongly to eulogy, and a man must use one figure of speech or another. By-the-by, did you ever observe that the two intellectual processes are very nearly identical? For example! Woman's glance is like the light of a star, soft and pure, drawing man out of himself up into the heaven where it shines. Again. Woman's glance is like the light of a star whose borrowed glitter and unreal warmth lure man to pit-falls like a will-o'-the-wisp.'

'Why are you like a goose?' replied Miss Sophy, justly treating this little dissertation as beside the question. 'If you have run into debt, and got into difficulties, and all for the foolish reason you'd have us believe in—'

'What is the foolish reason, may I ask, that I'd have you all believe in?'

'Oh, you know as well as I do, Charley Simpkin!'

'I can't say you are very explicit,' he said, 'but I suppose I must make a guess. It is a feminine weakness, or rather, I should say, strength, that to one of her lovers a woman pays the compliment of attributing every one

of his actions in after life to her good or evil influence, and this steadfastness she usually accredits to the one who in the time of his courtship she valued the least. Mind, I am merely stating a general paradox which has come under my notice. Now, in my case, suppose that I have run into debt, that I have no credit, no money, and my prospects are as black as the Hindoo *Patal*. I may enjoy such a luxury if I like, I hurt nobody, and I don't really see that it is anything to you.'

'There, you see how soon you get angry. Well, well, I am sorry I spoke; but at any rate, if a young man has a right to do all this, he ought not to make his friends unhappy on his account.'

'Friends unhappy! I don't know that Major Pulfington Belper has passed many sleepless nights in consequence, and if Mrs Liversege has been much hurt on my account—'

'Come, come, you are a man now and not a boy.' Sophy here glanced at his young moustache, and he remembered with satisfac-

tion that it had grown perceptibly in recent days. ‘ You have been acting like a goose a little lately, have you not? Well, I will only say this, and put quite an ideal case : suppose a young lady took a little interest in a young gentleman. Suppose she thought he had more in him than he chose to show to the world—’

‘ The picture, like all ideal pictures, is very enchanting and very unreal.’

‘ Don’t interrupt me ! I have understood all your speeches to-day, sir. It is exactly the same thing whether a gentleman says to a lady, “ you are a coquette, heartless, false, unreal,” in half-a-dozen dull words, or fifty witty ones. Well, say that you are at liberty to think all this, may not she claim the same freedom that you demand for yourself? If I am all that you say, Charley Simpkin, is that a reason why a brave-hearted gentleman should drag himself in the mire for me? By rising, not stooping, is a woman won, if she be worthy the winning. Be a man, Charley.

Study to get on in your profession, and then remember, in after years, that the lady whom you and your friends all laughed at and insulted, gave you, at least, one good piece of advice.'

'I insult you, Miss Sophy Brabazon?'

'Oh, sir, I have heard of my pretty nickname!'

'I assure you I had nothing to do with that—believe me!'

'Well, well, let that pass, but why are you always so unkind to me now—' At this moment the screen-door, which we have noticed as a fixture to all Indian houses, opened in its usual silent manner, and Motee entered the room. She was unperceived, and was so astonished at these last words, that she seemed unable to give them notice of her presence. 'Why are you so bitter? You never speak to me now without a sneer, a taunt. If you thought me unkind formerly, consider my position; people can't please themselves always in this weary world.'

‘Sophy, what you have said forces me to put to you a straightforward question—Did you ever care for me a bit, a little bit?’

Sophy laughed, a delicious little laugh, and said poutingly, ‘That is a question, sir, that you have no right to ask; a well-brought-up girl has no right to ask herself whether she cares for anybody in this hateful land—’

Whether it was the words or the look that justified Mr Charles Simpkin in his own mind I know not, but, for answer at this point, he suddenly took the pretty young lady into his arms and gave her a burning kiss. At the same moment both discovered Motee for the first time.

This is the first remark that suggests itself on the present posture of affairs, which play-wrights would call, I believe, a ‘dramatic situation.’ How difficult seems kissing in India. Noiseless screens, and noiseless Asiatics constantly wandering about, seem to visit with instant detection every attempt at this most attractive pastime. How do engaged people manage, I wonder? The second remark I have

to make is, that Charles Simpkin almost immediately took his leave, and I think he was right. It is almost impossible to shine with any brilliancy on indifferent topics before a third party two minutes after a detection like the present one. The third remark is, that the young ladies remained very silent for some moments after he had left.

‘Where is my aunt, I wonder?’ said Sophy, at length, rising as she spoke. ‘He’s an odd, bold boy, that!’

‘I don’t know,’ said Motee, curtly.

‘What do you mean by “don’t know?”’ said Sophy.

‘Do you think any explanation is necessary now, Sophy?’

‘If you intend to charge me with the whole responsibility of Charley Simpkin’s rudeness, my love, I don’t think you display your usual justice,’ said Sophy, with a fair amount of confidence.

‘Sophy, look me in the face!’ Sophy complied with this, a wish not infrequent with the sex under excitement.

‘Do you love Charley Simpkin, or do you not?’ There was a pause.

‘My love, you are putting me through my catechism. Some questions can’t always be answered on the spur of the moment. We are always allowed some time even when the gentleman asks.’

‘Answer this, then, do you love Frederick Ashleigh, or do you not?’ There was another pause. This appeared another of those questions which can’t always be answered on the spur of the moment.

But Sophy is not a young lady to give in without a fight. She began this contest at a terrible disadvantage, we must own, but she soon recovered her balance again.

‘You are so angry and harsh, dear, just now, that I really think it would be better to talk the matter over by-and-by, when you are less excited. At the same time, I don’t know that there are not some matters which you have no right to talk about, as you had really no right to see and hear anything about them, though I believe that wasn’t your fault.’

‘ I am glad you are generous enough to give me credit for not having willingly played the eaves’-dropper, Sophy ! ’ said Motee with unwonted asperity.

‘ You see how angry you are, dear. I really don’t think it is the right moment to talk over this affair of Charley Simpkin—’

‘ I pass over a great deal that is ungenerous in your speech, Sophy. My anger does not, that I see, prevent you from answering a simple question, if you had an answer ready ? Are you prepared to marry Mr Simpkin, or are you a false girl only playing with his love ? The question is between you and him, I have nothing to do with it.’

‘ You will put things in this point-blank manner, Motee, and you taunt me with wanting to evade your questions, which is not really the case. I don’t know whether I am at this precise moment of time prepared to become Mrs Charles Simpkin. At times I think I could marry anybody to spite my aunt, and you are well aware that a marriage with an Ensign would most probably effect

that laudable object. I don't know what I wish at the present moment. I don't know what I am. Sometimes I think I am very bad, with a little good in me ; and sometimes I think I am a false girl who only plays with a man's love. Everybody used to say I was this, but you ; and now you too have joined against me. Reticence is the last thing you ought to accuse me of, dear. Well, if you want the truth, I do not love Charley, and I'll give you some more information gratuitously: I did play a little with him to-day. They play with us, why shouldn't we play with them? I've told you so a dozen times, so I don't see that you should be so hurt at the least suspicion that your anger is not entirely on his account. In point of fact, you are angry because it was Charley Simpkin ; and I don't say, dear, that you haven't a right to be angry.'

'It is all very well, Sophy, to try and turn the matter off in this light way ; but for all that, it is sufficiently grave. You are now so bent on feeding your vanity, that you are becoming worse than thoughtless, worse than self-

ish,—you are becoming false. To one or other of two true-hearted gentlemen, who are both thoroughly in earnest, as you well know,—to one of these you are treacherous, Sophy; I require no forced confidence to tell me that!’ And the little maiden bounced out of the room, her eyes flashing with unwonted fire. The contest had been brisk on both sides, and it ended in the rupture of their friendship; and Sophy is the young lady, I think, who will be the greatest loser by this.

Meanwhile the young logician who had defied Miss Sophy Brabazon to prove him a goose, was galloping on a pony, borrowed from Mr Hodges, along the hot white road. On his head was a helmet surrounded with a muslin turban, and above him was a large white umbrella, but these were quite insufficient to cool his burning cheek. ‘After all,’ he thought, ‘she is a woman, and not an insensible, stupid, histrionic representative of feminine modesty and reserve. She has passions, wit, ideas, faults, and is content to let herself appear as God made her, and

not to ape the conventional young lady of the present day, a grown-up woman with baby manners, intellect, knowledge, and ideas. She grows prettier and prettier every day—and, good Heavens, she loved me, after all. Oh, what an idiot I have been with those debts!’ And our young friend gave Mr Hodges’ pony a terrible kick—Q. E. D.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH A PIG IS STUCK.

NIELGUNGE was a large native village, with the usual rags, dirt, rice, palms, smells, and houses with thick mud-walls, tiled roofs, and insufficient provision of light. In the middle of the broad street (for there was only one) was a large tamarisk tree, under the shade of which most of the inhabitants collected in the heat of the day. The Cavalry were in temporary huts a short distance outside, and their horses were picketed in an adjoining tope. Away at a distance of half-a-mile was the large bungalow of Mr Jones, and a few detached buildings and out-houses, the latter for the various processes in the manufacture of indigo. The bungalow was not handsome, but it was very comfortable. No one in India seems more determined to

enjoy life than a prosperous indigo-planter. Mr Jones's furniture, collected at many auctions of the property of deceased officers, deceased civilians, deceased brother planters, might be called miscellaneous, but you could not say that the yellow *dos a dos* was a bit less comfortable than the pea-green sofa ; and if the purple leather arm-chair (London porter pattern) did not match the scarlet ottoman in colour, it matched it or anything else in comfort, for it was bought at the sale of the effects of Colonel Podager, when that officer was ordered 'home' on sick certificate. Then there was also in the drawing-room (which we are taking the liberty of hastily sketching), a most marvellous couch, so arranged with mechanical joints that when you were lying down on it you might have your back and the upper and lower joints of your legs propped up into all sorts of grotesque and comfortable inclines, whilst at the same time delightful little pillows were placed under your head, heels, and the small of your back, a cheroot between your lips, and a cup of *almorah* tea by your

side ; and then and there Mr Jones would play to you (such was Mr Simpkin's experience) a number of tunes upon a gigantic hand organ with drum and trumpet stops, which stood in the drawing-room. The barrels of this instrument were chosen in England by Mr Jones himself, and were very numerous, including portions of the Oratorio of *Elijah*, and the sublime crashes of *Don Giovanni*, as well as *Jenny Jones*, and the ' *Perfect Cure*,' in their miscellaneous *repertoire*. Several large prints, chiefly of a racing and pig-sticking school of art, were hung around, and on the wall facing the entrance was a sheaf of jewelled scimitars, daggers, cavalry sabres, single-sticks, &c. ; and under a little glass case were four medals gained by Mr Jones at the Exhibitions of indigo produce in Calcutta. Three large silver vases, won at various Indian race-meetings, completed the furniture of the apartment.

Simpkin had ridden over early with his friend Mr Hodges. They arrived at Nielgunge at half-past six o'clock. Mr Jones,

ignorant of all the ins and outs of Nawaub-gunge society, had invited over some people who were not likely to get on very well together. He had even invited Mr Palmer Brown, but that gentleman was unable to come. As it was, there was Charley Simpkin and Major Pulfington Belper, who had been very distant to each other lately, and the former had never been friendly to Captain Ashleigh.

How Major Pulfington Belper left his future bride at this critical moment to come and attend a distant pig-sticking adventure, I cannot undertake to explain. His eccentricities are not to be reduced to rule and compass. That she gave him some sort of permission I think more than probable. That system of severe discipline which was established in their home after the marriage had not yet been commenced. Simpkin was astonished when he heard a well-known shrill nasal voice call out in characteristic Hindoostanee,

‘ Is Jones Sahib at home ? Hey ! ’

He did not know the Major was coming. The brother officers saluted each other very distantly, and the same frigid courtesy was observed when Ashleigh and Simpkin met. The former was in earnest conversation with Mr Curzon at the time. Simpkin thought him looking as calm and composed as usual, a little ill, but not nearly so cut up as he had expected from Mr Jones's description. Did he break off the marriage on his side? Was he ever engaged? Was he ever capable of a passion? Was he equal to the mighty effort of giving up the sprightly white-shouldered Miss Sophy when once she was his? Men and women are puzzles, thought our young philosopher, as he followed Mr Jones and the rest of the company to inspect the vats, boilers, press-boxes, and dyeing-houses. At the conclusion of the walk, if the Ensign had been called upon to explain the process of the manufacture of indigo from what he had just seen and heard, I think his explanations would have been a little hazy.

‘What will you drink, Major?’ said

the kind host, when the party returned to the house. ‘ Here’s tea, coffee, and “ pegs ; ” I would recommend the latter. You must set a good example to your young officers, and not make them milksops and Methodists by drinking too much tea. Now then, you youngsters, liquor up ! Simpkin, a “ peg,” you look hot ! Curzon, the same ! Call for what you like, gentlemen, only take care never to leave off calling for something. Breakfast at ten ! In an hour we’ll dress and bathe. *Khanah* and *Ghussul Khanah* ! ’ Mr Jones finished his sentence with a Hindoostanee joke, which was much appreciated by his audience. Mr Jones was fond of making Hindoostanee jokes. Each of his audience was fond of making Hindoostanee jokes. If these are allowed to figure less in the dialogues of this faithful narrative than they did in fact, it is because I think that the gentle reader having bought a novel, I have no right to fob off upon him in its place a lesson in the Hindoostanee language.

Who can understand the full meaning of

the word 'bath' until they have been to India? You might as well try to understand the full significance of the proper name 'Bass' without having felt the 'hot winds.' By 'bath' I now mean half-a-dozen red spherical pots of cool water, ranged round a pleasant red-tiled little bath-room; and allow the word to have no present reference to Turkish sudarariums, shampooings, scents, and coffee. 'Guggle, guggle, guggle!' falls pot No. 1 on the hot head of our friend Mr Simpkin, and the cool stream fizzes and splashes and hisses upon his hot skin and drenches his red bathing drawers. And then he takes up pot No. 2, and dexterously swings it up over his head, inverting the mouth of it in the motion. You must have marched twelve miles, or hunted a jackal with a *bobbery* pack, or fought an action before breakfast, or exerted yourself as he has done this morning, before you can appreciate his present feelings. In a short time he has put on a clean cool suit of clothes ('cream-coloured dittoes,' in the language of Messrs Slasher and Braidmore, Civil and Mili-

tary Tailors, Calcutta), and he joins Mr Jones and the rest of the party, who are assembled in the drawing-room. The house is now shut up and darkened, and the *punkah* plays vigorously upon the hungry guests as they devour egg curry, *Kedgeree*, fowl cutlets, potato chops, rice, hump of beef, chutney, mango pickles, guava jelly, and all the other luxuries which Mr Jones has provided.

‘Don’t take tea, Major, like a Methodist,’ a second time said that hospitable gentleman, apparently quite unable to dissociate in his mind that beverage and the Wesleyan secession. ‘The idea of its ever being too early for claret or beer! Try this *Leoville*; I assure you there’s not a headache in a hogshead. After breakfast we’ll have some billiards—*skittles* I think I ought to call it. He! He! He!’ And the convulsion of Mr Jones’s huge frame, caused by the emission of this joke, shook the cups and saucers. The pleasantry itself at Nawaubgunge had lost its first gloss of novelty, but Mr Jones, living at Nielgunge, thought it quite a new one, and perhaps it

was there. After breakfast they did have *skittles*, and after *skittles* they had *tiffin*, and after *tiffin* every one went and attired himself for the hunt. At four o'clock, when the sun had lost a little of its power, they all appeared in hunting-breeches and riding-boots, and with tremendous turbans wound round the most tremendous of hats. It was warm weather for pig-sticking, but as soldiers are at drill all the cold season, if they want to hunt they cannot always have their choice. Soon every cavalier is mounted, and the horses are restive, being excited perhaps by the jack-boots and hog-spears. Simpkin grasps one of these lent to him by Mr Jones, a long, light bamboo, with lead at the handle, and with a small sharp spear-head of the most formidable description. The owner has first attempted to explain to his inexperienced young friend the process, technically known as *jabbing*.

The party rides quietly along a road for a couple of miles to the place where the coolies have been sent. There is no chance of a hog at any nearer point. Cane-fields are

the favourite haunt of the wild boar, but at this season of the year we must get him out of the jungle. The earth is quite burnt up, and the smaller rivers and the tanks are dry. Even the wells are failing, and the rice-fields and indigo-fields are nothing but cracked and baked mud, white, hard, and burning to the feet. No cultivation is possible until the rains descend; and the poor black, rag-clad, rice-eating villagers are already sacrificing goats to the *Deota* for that result. Soon Mr Simpkin describes the group of *coolies* who are to act as beaters, standing near some low bush. These, at a signal from Mr Jones, take up their bamboo clubs and disappear within it, thrashing the branches and notifying their existence by unearthly noises. The horsemen spread along the edge of the jungle, grasp their spears, and prepare for action.

‘I thought it would be so!’ said Mr Simpkin to his nearest neighbour, Mr Hodges, when they had waited an hour without any result.

‘I knew the whole thing was *bosh!*’ retorted that plain-spoken soldier.

‘All sport in India is!’ pursued the first young gentleman.

‘Everything in India,’ said gentleman number two.

‘A month ago we all went out with old Belper and Fuzl Ali to see a *cheetah* hunt, but of course could not find a deer. Then there was that little pious fraud about falconry.’

‘All humbug!’

‘Would that her jesses—’

‘Who? What?’

‘Jesses! Hodges! A little quotation, Hodges! *Apropos* of falconry, Hodges! Pure falconry, Hodges!’

‘Ah, I knew it was some bosh. Everything in India is a humbug except the heat, and the soda and B. Pigsticking’s a humbug. Soldiering’s a humbug. We were told we were to be soldiers, and we find all Indian fighting is over for ever, and we are mere *Chowkeydars!*’

In one, at least, of these opinions Mr Hodges was quickly to be proved wrong, for the tribe of natives who had been noisy enough before, suddenly commenced a most fearful screaming and yelling, and presently there was a crashing amongst the branches, and before the two young men knew where they were out rushed a fine hog, and Mr Simpkin's horse reared and nearly threw its rider, whilst that of Mr Hodges turned and made off at the rate of forty miles an hour, taking with him the gallant spearman upon his back, and refusing to be stopped for at least a mile. Simpkin, when he could get his horse again under control, turned its head after the flying pig, and seeing that Major Pulfington Belper had also got a sight of him and was riding boldly down, he spurred and spurred furiously on, and was soon conscious of an excitement greater than his other excitements of rivalry, hate, love, despair, and Mr Jones's *Moët*,—the maddening excitement of this matchless chase.

Poor piggy has taken to the open, and the

Ensign, a light weight, is flying far ahead of the Field-officer, who also is riding in mad fury, although one would think that his love-affairs have not been sufficiently unsuccessful to justify any such desperate courses. Simpkin takes a small *bund* at a flying leap, and to his joy sees that the hog has doubled and is now close to him. The poor animal, whose life is so eagerly sought after, hardly deserves this unrelenting severity. He is shortly to reconcile some people who are not on good terms with each other, as you shall presently see.

Simpkin, riding free, is nearing the wild animal; in a few strides he flatters himself he will be 'into him.' He clutches his spear in the scientific manner pointed out by Mr Jones. There is a high *bund* ahead of the pig's present line of flight, which will soon bring him up. The ground is terribly uneven, full of holes, full of ruts, but that is nothing. The young gentleman plies his spurs and prepares for the shock, but at this critical moment the spear-point unfortunately touches the ground, there is a tremendous jerk, and

the *Griff* is sprawling on the hot, baked earth. He looks up and sees that the maddened hog has detected him. The poor animal, as it afterwards appeared, had been previously started and pricked by Mr Curzon in another part of the jungle, so now, what with the pain and the long worry, he is quite maddened. He turns round, stands still for a moment, and then charges at our young friend, with his head down.

‘Lie still, Simpkin, I’ve got him all right. This is the way that these things ought to be managed!’ The voice is that of Major Pulfington Belper, whose horse at first had refused the leap, and that gallant officer is now seen counter-charging the wild beast, who seeing himself thus intercepted, turns round, and the two brave knights, Sir Pulfington and Sir Tusky, close in mortal tourney. But the victory does not incline to either brave knight, the horse of Sir Pulfington swerves through fright at the last moment, and prevents the Major from inflicting more than a gentle scratch, and from the suddenness of the move-

ment, he loses his seat and rolls on the ground heavily, for Sir Pulfington is stout of body as well as stout of heart.

‘What, Major, you are a Field Officer in earnest, now!’ said Simpkin, looking feebly up. ‘Thanks for trying to help me. I hope he’ll take me of the two. First come, first served. Pig-sticking! Now, then, piggy, stick away!’ For all his laughter, the young man thought his end was approaching, and in the middle of his excitement a rapid thought crossed his mind that his life had been useless, and that his talent had been intrusted to him in vain. He thought that perhaps if he had to live it all over again—but now he was obliged to concentrate all his attention on the movements of the pig, who was circling round and round a short distance in front, apparently uncertain which of them he should favour. Suddenly he seemed to recognize the rank of the senior officer, and commenced another vigorous charge upon that dismounted knight.

‘Bad look-out for Putney now,’ groaned the Major; ‘begad, he’s got me, Hey!’

But at this particular moment of time there was a rushing noise and a shock, and the two officers, whose every sense was quite absorbed in the advancing pig, saw a large object meet it. Both bodies were going so fast that at the moment of contact the new object was quite indistinct. In the next second of time they saw poor piggy stone dead with a hog-spear in him above his left shoulder, and Captain Ashleigh reining in his horse at a few yards' distance in advance.

'That's saved my bacon, Hey!' said the Major curtly. He was seated quietly on the ground, his legs stretched fully out, and his hands along them rubbing Mr Jones's jack-boots. In this position he was surveying the scene through his eternal spectacles.

'By Jove, my leg's broke!' called out Simpkin, his face twisting with pain. He had just attempted to rise. He caught a glimpse of the Major, and in another instant he was laughing.

'Where do you feel the hurt?' said a

voice in kind tones. He looked up. Ashleigh had come behind him.

‘Oh, here! I dare say it’s nothing! Give me a hand, old chap, and perhaps I could rise!’

‘No, lie still! Major, help me to carry him into the shade of that tope. You catch hold of his shoulders, Major. Rest the hurt leg on the other leg; that’s it. It hurts, I know, but you’d be sure to get fever if you remained in the sun. I’ll gallop off and get a *dooly*. Major, if that tank is not quite dry, dip your pugree in cold water, and tie it round the wound.’ And the Captain again mounted his horse and galloped away. Mr Jones and the rest of the party soon afterwards came up.

‘Where’s the pig?’

‘The stuck pig! here he is, gentlemen,’ called out Mr Simpkin, smiling feebly.

‘A magnificent animal! What’s the matter? How many stone do you think—What, Simpkin, hurt? A broken leg, that’s

serious!' It was really some little time before Mr Jones, the kindest of men, could direct his attention away from the pig exclusively to the maimed young officer.

In the course of a couple of hours or so, Dr Weston arrived from Nawaubgunge to set the leg, but the sun and the excitement produced a sharp attack of fever. The young officer had been carried to a bed-room next door to Captain Ashleigh's, in Mr Jones's house; and that officer and Mr Jones between them tended him day and night. Dr Weston came over as often as he could spare time from Nawaubgunge, but he had a great deal to do there, as cholera had broken out amongst the Sepoys of the 44th Nowgong Native Infantry. Simpkin had fainted before they got him to the bed-room in a *dooly*, and for two days he was delirious.

'How's Simpkin?' said Mr Hodges, meeting Dr Weston's buggy the third day at the outskirts of cantonments.

'Well, perhaps he is a little better!'

'He's got a touch of fever?'

‘A touch of fever!’ replied the medical gentleman, nodding his head enigmatically.

‘A touch of fever! A touch of cholera!’ ’Tis thus that in India such things are talked of. We adopt a pleasing moderation of language in the matter, knowing that such touch may at any moment prove a touch even more terrible than that of the hot emaciated finger of the grim fever king. Does the constant presence of Death make people callous? At least it banishes the long faces and grave looks, the grimace of conventional sympathy and sorrow. People in reality feel more because they have more to feel, but levity is perhaps a necessary fashion. ‘Shall we be cheated of our breakfast for a mere shell?’ said some ladies during the retreat from Lucknow, when they found that an officer’s tent in which they were sitting was pitched inconveniently near an enemy’s battery. Our friend Charley was really very ill indeed, and when Mr Hodges spoke to Dr Weston the crisis was by no means past. But Mr Hodges contrived to eat a capital dinner that night

at Mess, and to give vent to a great deal of humour on the subject of the step that was probably going in the regiment. He knew all the time that the young man was really dangerously ill, and that if he himself were as ill he would be in a great fright. Moreover, he liked Charley Simpkin. And yet Mr Hodges in reality was not unfeeling.

When Charley Simpkin recovered consciousness he could not make out where he was. Strains of distant music fell on his ear, solemn yet soft, and through an open window streamed a sunset never yet seen by him in a planet which he recollected to have once inhabited. There were clouds, but each cloud was bathed in vermilion and golden light, with dark streaks of an intensity quite unknown to the artist who designed the sunsets he had been used to. Then, too, the flowers in the parterre near him seemed lovelier and smelt more sweet, novel trees were alive with wondrous birds, and even the earth

sent forth a powerful and grateful fragrance. He detected a palm-tree rustling gently, which showed that the mundane idea of paradise was not purely metaphysical; but what puzzled him most was the sight of an object near him (he felt too weak to change the position in which he was lying), and that object was certainly very like a thing that was called a cheval glass in the planet that has Luna for a satellite. Could it be that certain theories were true, and that all the arts, even the arts of a coquette, are to be perfected in another sphere? The new denizen of *behisht* felt very thirsty, and said feebly,

‘Water! *Pine ki panee!*’ Perhaps the beings of the new sphere understood earthly languages.

‘Take some lemonade!’ The word at once blew to the winds the baseless fabric of the young man’s vision. The speaker was Captain Ashleigh. The spot was Nielgunge, at the commencement of ‘the rains.’ The bed-room was Mr Jones’s, and so was the

cheval glass now. It once belonged to a Nawaubgunge beauty, and was purchased second-hand.

‘Where am I?’

‘You are not to talk, the doctor says.’

Our young friend took a good pull at the lemonade, and then dozed off again. When he awoke there were voices in the room.

‘Is he better?’ said one voice.

‘Much better!’ said another in decisive tones.

‘He was very excited, and rambled a good deal last night again!’

‘Something on his mind, perhaps,’ said the other voice.

The rest of the conversation was carried on in whispers, and the young gentleman could hear no more.

From this period Charley began steadily to mend, but slowly. Jones and Ashleigh were very kind to him, and one or other was constantly in his room. We have seen the last of his hostility to the latter. The real kindness which lay concealed under a some-

what stern exterior touched the young man, and he began soon also to wonder how it was that he had never before discovered that Captain Ashleigh was clever. As the prostration, produced by his malady, prevented him from exercising his head, the Captain used to read to him, and talk with him; and Mr Jones would solace him with tunes on the organ. In after-years these days remained indelibly fixed on his memory. He remembered how prostrate and how wretched he was. He remembered his pain, his thirst, his bed-sores, his ravenous appetite. He remembered his home-sickness, that wild craving for English green fields, and the sight of his mother and sisters. He remembered the novel phenomena of the southwest monsoon, the deluge, the lightning, the thunder, the sunsets, the flooded plains, the strong-scented earth,—the lizards, the squirrels, and the snakes that glided about the house, the white ants that built in the walls, the fire-flies, the shooting stars, and the interminable clatter of the frogs. But vivid as was the scene, one figure was there ever in the fore-

ground, a character whom then he first began earnestly to study, a character whom in those days he had learnt more and more to identify with the mysterious 'Ironside' of the Barrack-pore play.

Frederick Ashleigh was the second son of an English baronet, who was possessed of a small and somewhat encumbered estate in Berkshire. He was destined originally for the Church, but some money speculations of his father having resulted in heavy losses, at the time when the young man was keeping his terms at Cambridge, he accepted a cadetship in order that he might cease to burden his father any longer, and came out to India at the age of eighteen. His career in that country is already pretty well known to the gentle reader.

In after days when the analytical Mr Simpkin, piecing together his various deeds and words, began to try and pluck out the heart of his mystery, these are some of the conclusions which that wise gentleman came to. Captain Ashleigh's theory of human existence was

Fatalism—partly the fatalism of the popular and shallow theology of Indian pulpits, and partly that of the true believer in the Prophet of God. There is much to favour such theories in India, the land of danger, of death, of swift disease, of hair-breadth 'scapes. Captain Ashleigh was the last person in the world to allow this Mussulman Fatalism to sap up his energy; but the longer he lived the longer he seemed to feel that an inscrutable Will ordered matters here below in a mysterious way, giving the prizes of life for the most part to the undeserving. In India, especially, how often had he not seen merit in disgrace, and great services receive nothing but obloquy! Napier and Henry Lawrence were signal examples of this; whereas, on the other hand, imbecility in command had been unable to keep the British arms from victory; and the most incapable of governors had been unable to arrest the march of English domination in the East.

Charley Simpkin, perhaps a little carried away by his own theory, had also detected in

his 'Ironside' some of the asceticism of those stern warriors. The fanciful young genius did not know whether to attribute this to his long contact with Brahminism, or with the material conditions that created Brahmin asceticism. He knew that creeds react on one another, and that the Brahminical idea had not only had powerful influence over the faith of the conquering Mussulman, but also over that of native converts to a much higher creed, and upon even their proselytizers. Then also a life passed in solitudes and jungles, amid hardship and tedious mechanical duties, and amid all the bitterness of exile, of baffled hope, and of ambitions sacrificed; such a life was quite enough to account for that ascetic hardness of the Captain's disposition, which chiefly attracted the notice of Mr Charles Simpkin when he first met him.

But upon one point the 'Ironside' widely belied his party-creed. Religion with him was a man's daily life, and his dogmatic faith would have been found dangerously crude, if he had been cross-examined by a learned

doctor of any one of the Geneva Churches. Work was worship; and the Kingdom of Light was not to be sought for amongst the chalcedony and beryl cities of the Far-away. It and the baptizing fire were to be found in our dull, cloudy, sinner-breeding world. His stern conscientiousness about the minutest details of professional duty read a lesson to our young friend in after life.

‘There was I,’ he recollected, ‘in a fever of excitement because I formed one of an asylum for idiots, and because my great military talents had been overlooked; and there was he, a soldier of many battles, and real original genius, cheerfully doing Mr Hodges’s “*Chowkeydar* work.”’

And a saying of the Captain, on this very point, came back to him afterwards again and again.

‘Simpkin, you are wrong in thinking lightly of these routine duties, and no amount of staff officers and civilians ought to bias your judgment and persuade you that black is white. Soldiers’ work in India can never be

infra dig, for here we are aliens, necessarily hated, and we hold this country purely by the sword. A sleeping sentry may lose a city. We must always be under arms and ready. Thirty years ago a subaltern, a cousin of mine, in a time of profound peace, was escorting treasure, and neglected the precaution of encamping at a distance from the public road. The camp was suddenly surrounded by a gang of robbers, who came along the road in the disguise of a wedding procession bearing torches and flourishing spears. The Sepoys, who were offered quarter, refused to abandon their post or their officer, and he and they all perished—this is a fact.’

Regarding Ashleigh’s love, this is what Charley thought when in these same years he pondered over all the facts of it, many of which now at Nielgunge are unknown to him. His was one of those strong steadfast natures which unhappy love scorches up. He was a man far too quick-sighted to fail to see the faults of the first woman he loved ; but this very insight perhaps led him also to detect,

amidst all her levity and coquetry, hidden treasures. And when that little love-story had come to a tragic end, the Ironside, calm, reserved, silent, unflinching, hoarded up his remorse, his sorrow, and what remained of his passion, within his corslet of steel, until the moment when the buried lady seemed to walk once more upon the earth in pristine beauty, purity, and youth; when it came forth once more, a great love, but a wiser and sadder love,—a love that worshipped in fear and doubt.

He had watched the career of Sophy. He had read her thoroughly. He had resolved not to make any effort to link her fate with that of one whose life had been a failure—and a failure, moreover, which could never now be remedied. But then an inexorable destiny had brought them together, and the same destiny had then parted them. But he proved to Mr Simpkin, before he went away from Nielgunge, that his was not the mere idle patient *Islam* resignation.

Charley had been two months on the sick-

list, and now he was well enough to go back to his regiment. The day before he started Ashleigh had a little conversation with him.

‘ Well, Simpkin, you are off at last. Do you know that the doctor thought seriously about you at one time ? ’

‘ Did he ? ’

‘ He thought, in fact, that it wasn’t altogether a broken leg.’

‘ I’ve some sort of an idea, Ashleigh, that I did talk a lot of nonsense when I was delirious.’

‘ Well, you did not let out much that we did not know before.’

‘ What did I let out ? ’

‘ Oh, that you were a griff, and, like all griffs, had got into the banks—something of that sort.’

‘ Nothing more ? ’ said Charley, rather eagerly.

‘ Do you remember my once speaking to you at Barrackpore ? ’

‘ Oh yes, thoroughly.’

‘ You were offended then, and perhaps I

spoke on topics on which I had no right to touch.'

'Oh no, but I was a fool—a griff.'

'Well, I know you are in debt. I've seen many a good fellow sucked down for no graver fault than thoughtlessness. Now, I tell you what I wish you'd let me do. I have a little spare money lying idle. You shall borrow some of this from me; that will enable you to keep down the exorbitant interest of those Indian banks which at present paralyzes you.'

'Oh, I could not think of being your debtor.'

'Better me than Shylock. Go back to the regiment, study five hours a day, not more. Pass, and we will see if we can't get you some appointment. Another piece of advice: I think a young man should marry early.'

'Why, good heavens, Ashleigh!'

'Oh, I don't want to penetrate your secrets. All men of your age have such secrets.'

‘But I’m sure you do know all about it. And you know—that is, people said—’

‘Oh, never believe what people say,’ said the Captain, a little curtly.

‘But, you know, I saw with my own eyes.’

‘Oh, you must not trust all the inferences you draw from all you see. If they had been altogether correct, how could I be here?’ And Charley saw from the tone in which he spoke that the subject had better be dropped.

‘But you see that the young ladies at Nawaubgunge and elsewhere don’t seem to have that just appreciation of the merits of Ensigns viewed in the light of husbands, that those valuable subaltern officers deserve.’ Mr Simpkin thought it right to give a lighter and more general tone to the conversation.

‘Pooh, women are women and men are men. There is scarcely a battle ever fought in which courage and skill does not get a chance or two of victory.’

Charley saw the intention of his friend. He saw that he was to be set on his legs to fight for Miss Sophy Brabazon. Once before

Captain Ashleigh had touched on the topic, but then he was more open and explicit. For some reason he was more reserved on the present occasion.

CHAPTER VI.

A PUCKA COQUETTE.

MY story makes a jump. We have got to the celebrated luni-solar year of the Sumbut, 1914. A remarkable crisis in the history of that mighty potentate 'John Company' was, if you remember, prophesied for this year, and here it is. According to Christians we are now in January, 1857.

The present tale has advisedly avoided Indian politics as much as possible, excepting of course the great political questions connected with the Residency of Nawaubgunge. Lord Canning came out to India as Governor-General in March, 1856, but we have hitherto said little of this high functionary, for there has been little to say. According to common rumour he is a model English office-man, pale, refined, cold, laborious, common-place; who

conscientiously views all questions from every possible point of view, and decides somewhat tardily.

He is now working quietly in the Presidency, and so is the great Mr Windus, and so is the great Mr Prettijohn ; but history at present overlooks these functionaries and fixes its attention upon a man of the lowest caste, a sweeper of offal, who made himself very memorable there in this month of January.

A high-caste Brahmin Sepoy when asked for a drink of water by the said low-caste lascar refused, on the ground that his *lotah* (brass pot) would be contaminated by this man of vile duties and infamous caste.

‘Caste!’ said the lascar, ‘what is caste now-a-days? Do you not, Brahmins and Mus-sulmans, all bite cartridges smeared with beef fat and hog’s lard at this musketry school of Dumdum? Caste is over, and you are all to become Christians.’ Everybody knows now the terrible significance of this little speech.

But it is to be premised that my tale has not got to this particular landmark in the

year of the Sumbut, 1914, without some events having happened to the chief characters of my story. Charley Simpkin has returned to the station. He has taken a Momshee, Imtihan Khan. I should say rather that he has re-employed that learned professor. He studied with him during the hot season, but did not then make much progress. Mr Curzon calling one day found master, pupil, and the pupil's dog 'Billy,' at their studies. The professor was seated cross-legged and asleep in one arm-chair. The scholar was dozing on another, his head thrown back and a cheroot in his mouth. The dog Billy was asleep in a third. Thus they were in the habit of pursuing their studies in that most oppressive weather. And then a little misunderstanding arose between master and scholar. Mr Simpkin's money matters were at this time in an unfavourable state, and he got into the bad habit of keeping his native servants much in arrears. This practice, though very common with young men, is thoughtless and even cruel, for the poor black man must live, and to do

this he has to borrow money at exorbitant interest, so that the difficulties of the master are soon very unfairly extended to the man.

Imtihan Khan however refused to submit to such an arrangement, and from this resulted a breach between the two. The learned professor addressed the following letter to Mr Simpkin. It was intended to be respectful, but the various idioms used by officers, the colloquial-military, and the official, puzzle an Indian when he tries unaided to pick up the Feringhy's language.

‘ Sir,

‘ I have the honour to state that you were pleased to promise your petitioner that I shall receive my monthly pay and allowances for the month of April, videlicet C. R. 7—on the 15th of May.

‘ I beg furthermore to bring to your notice that you should make promise to your humble slave, for two months to the amount of C. R. 14, to be paid in July, for the purpose of coaching you to the prescribed examination

according to Government regulations. Rule 6, para. 15.

‘But your servant, he wait three months and no pay, I therefore humbly and respectfully request that you will not go on humbugging me any more.

‘I have the honour to be, sir,

‘Your most obedient servant,

‘IMTIHAN KHAN, MOMSHEE.’

But when Charley returned from Nielgunge this little difference was made up, and the young man began to study in earnest, and the professor received his pay with the greatest regularity. The result was, that the pupil in a few months went up and passed the prescribed examination according to Government regulations. Mr Broomielaw went up before the same committee and was again spun.

But have all the affairs of Mr Charley met with the same success? He is no longer out at elbows, but is living in the large grim house of Captain Ashleigh, and drives to the band

of an evening in that officer's buggy. He has competed, he thinks with some success, with Mr Palmer Brown and Mr Chiffney Chaffney. But the result of many a long and careful deliberation on the subject is, that he cannot yet a bit make out the young lady whom Mrs Liversege once called, if you recollect, a '*pucka* coquette.'

On this point the Major has come forward to try and assist him. A sober married man, the scales have fallen from his eyes on the subject of his former coquetries and coquettes. Since the pig-sticking adventure the Major and the Ensign are again on friendly and confidential terms. Indeed, the good officer, though a married man, still makes a confidant of every body in the station much as usual.

'About that Elegant Entangler, Simpkin, depend upon it, there is only one thing to be said,—she is a woman. That means she's like a Chinese puzzle, begad. Hey! You crack the filigree ivory ball, and then you find another puzzle inside. You crack that, and

then you come upon a third puzzle—and so on—still nothing but a puzzle as long as anything's left at all. Hey !'

The Major's marriage is an old story now, and I don't know that it is altogether a cheerful one. Having pledged his word to do a thing, he was the man to do that thing to the very best of his ability, and so he married the lady, and tried to fit himself for his new life as earnestly as a kind, loyal gentleman could do, who was at the same time Major Pulfington Belper.

The marriage was not a cheerful affair. Indeed a marriage ceremony in the rainy season never is, as is inevitable when you recollect that making a speech in a full-dress coat is one of its conditions. The Major however bore up wonderfully well, and even attempted to be funny.

'My dear, you know more about it than I do, and I shall know more about it next time!'

But this is the first and last instance of jocularly that he ever indulged in *en tête à tête* with his wife. There was something in

the presence of that severe person which quite prevented the human mind from combining dissimilar images, and discovering occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. Even the Rev. Sydney Smith would have found any such process quite impracticable.

But there were other things besides the mere absence of laughter which rendered the Major's new home dull. The game of billiards was decidedly gambling, and so that had to be quite given up ; not that the Major was a great loser by this, in one point of view. Then, again, walking about with a club and gossiping over tea in the cool of the morning came manifestly under the category of idle words which have to be accounted for hereafter. Nor could it be denied by a candid moralist that there is much that is unprofitable in modern novels and in Indian newspapers. But then, on the other hand, it could scarcely be said that the intellectual wants of a man of 48 years of age were quite supplied by the 'Pictorial Pleasant Hour,' and one or two similar prints ; and though the future history

of Rome and Turkey is no doubt engrossing, the Major might have affirmed with truth that the present of India at that particular time was not without its immediate interest ; that is, if the Major had known all we know now. A well-meaning but burdensome lady was Mrs Pulfington Belper, with her interminable sermons and psalms, her crude divinity, and her oppressive activity in favour of the eternal welfare of the Bundelcund worshippers of Siva, and Kalee his wife. Do not those misguided ascetics deny themselves food and clothing, suppress their breath, respire in a peculiar manner, smear their bodies with ashes and filth, pierce their flesh with hooks, run sharp instruments through their tongues, sit on beds of spikes, and perform foul religious orgies in the presence of a corpse ? Do not the ‘ Arm-lifters ’ extend their arms above their heads till their nails grow into their hands ? Do not the ‘ Face-raisers ’ contemplate the sky till the muscles of the neck become fixed and rigid ? Do not the ‘ Air-sitters ’ dance for ever on the top of a high bamboo platform ? Such and

similar vagaries of Hindoo compunction were authentic no doubt ; but are the ‘ Air-sitters ’ and ‘ Arm-lifters ’ confined to Bundelcund ? The celebrated dialogue between Mrs Pulfington Belper and the regimental Baboo is a pure invention of the jocular Mr Simpkin, with the whimsical result that she herself is proved to be an ascetic worshipper of Siva the Destroyer. Her sermon torture, her penitential studies, her Brahmin-worship, and the other propitiatory pains and penalties of her timorous creed, are all cited, and she is ingeniously proved to be a devout Bundelcund Hindoo. She tried to convert Fuzl Ali. She sent a tract to the Nawaub ; she tried to make the Major convert some of the Sepoys, which he stoutly refused to attempt. She did talk long and frequently to the regimental Baboo when he came on business to the Major’s house.

‘ Do you think that the Creator of the Universe can care for the blood of rams ? ’

‘ No, Mem Sahib — shed blood — bad. Clarified butter what he like.’

But if the misguided zeal (and worse) of

proselytizers bore terrible fruit in this year of the Sumbut 1914, you must not think that I sneer at reverence, awe, and love. Who is strong enough to do without prayer and heavenly aid? Certainly not Major Pulfington Belper and his companions in arms at this particular moment. Poor Sir Pulfington, brave, true, honest, grotesque knight, toiling a hard life away under a burning sun, warring with the Moslem and the infidel,—sharp, hard, cruel days are coming, and a fight, such as neither he nor any other crusader alive or dead has yet seen. The Moslem scimitar is being sharpened, and perhaps it is right that the crusader's sword should also be burnished. Sack-cloth and ashes, whipcords and paternosters, may not be the highest ideal of religious training, but if they make a lax crusader's armour more bright for the day of battle, the spick-and-span new red cross that he now wears on his breast is not all in vain.

Early in this month of January Captain Ashleigh called on the Resident at his office.

‘I have just heard of a very mysterious

matter, sir, which I think it right to inform you of. They are handing about *chupattees* from village to village. Jemadar Hossein, a native here, told me of it. They are supposed to come from the direction of Oude.'

'Dear me,' said the Resident, 'this is very extraordinary. Chupattees, what do they do with them?'

'They are handed on by the village Chowkeydars. And some say that it is an old Indian custom when a prince requires feudal service.'

'But, good heavens, what prince, what service, what does it mean?'

'That's what I asked the Jemadar. His answer was significant,—“We don't know yet ourselves!”'

The Captain had come back with his brave horsemen to the station. Government took into consideration Mr Liversege's proposal that there should be a cavalry station at Nielgunge, but ultimately rejected it. Since his return he has only spoken to Sophy once, and that was quite by accident and quite against

his will. He avoids as much as possible even the chance sight of her on the public roads; but perhaps knows more of her goings on than if he had her every moment under his eye.

For gossip at Nawaubgunge continues to interest itself in Sophy, and thinks it sees in her a change for the worse. How shall I describe the refinements of a subtle experienced mind like that of Mrs Peckham? The English language is poor upon this topic. What does the word 'coquette' mean? What does 'flirt' mean? These terms are quite indefinite, and India, France, and England have all different standards in the matter. In one sense Miss Sophy was a coquette when she was in her nurse's arms, for she was a daughter of Eve. In another sense, she was a coquette in Calcutta when she first revelled in the intoxication of Indian homage, and was not altogether guiltless of exciting it and keeping it alive. But now a third, tenth, perhaps fiftieth stage has been reached. As I live, I really think I shall do best to borrow

the phrase lent to me by that experienced Anglo-Indian lady, Mrs Liversege. Miss Sophy Brabazon is now a *pucka* coquette.

Mrs Peckham, also well versed in these mysteries, sees exactly how the matter at present stands. Palmer Brown, as the wealthiest and most considerable of her suitors, has the place of honour, but his success is by no means sure, because a more wealthy and more considerable suitor might at any moment pop in. Meanwhile he is kept constant by jealousy of Charley Simpkin, who is encouraged for such a purpose, and so is Mr Chiffney Chaffney, but the latter is only supernumerary *jeune premier*, in the play. The other dozen or so of suitors are merely in reserve. They are kept to their allegiance by an occasional smile when they grow cross, but just now they are only supernumeraries. It is to be feared that the worthy Mrs Peckham treats the question too subjectively. Was there much truth, any truth, in her belief that pretty ladies in general, and Sophy in particular, think of nothing but wealth, position, vanity, and show? In the

presence of so experienced and practised a lady I can say nothing. I must content myself with humbly telling my story.

And to do this properly I must go back again a little way, to the feast, or rather fast, of the Mohurram ; during which the memories of the two Imaums, Hossein and Hussein, are celebrated at Nawaubgunge with much pomp. Pious and rich Sheeahs send their banners through the streets on painted elephants, splendidly caparisoned, accompanied by tom-toms and squeaking pipes, and armed followers dressed in orthodox blue. The famous horse *Dhull-Dhull*, which had the honour of bearing and dying with the great Hossein on the field of Kurbelah, is represented in every procession, stuck over with arrows and with trappings dyed in blood. Meanwhile the *Imaum Barra* is lighted up at night, the *tazees* glitter, and the processions make their way to the sacred shrine. The pious priests chant the great deeds of the prophet, and pocket the offerings of money, the rich dresses and jewels, which are brought by the devout. The courts

and trees and fountains blaze with wax lights, and swarm with myriads of devout sight-seers. Now Mrs Liversege wanted to see the illumination, and I think also she wanted a new opportunity of parading the pomp she so much loved; no durbar or other stately spectacle having taken place for some weeks. Fuzl Ali, the prime minister at once of the king and of Mrs Liversege, informed her that this could easily be managed; and that a portion of the garden, away from the orthodox, should be set apart for the Feringhys. Mrs Liversege, who had determined to enter in a splendid procession, arrived at the gate of the Imaum Barra in her celebrated barouche with the pea-green postilions; and her escort of cavalry had hard work to clear a way through the myriads of true believers who were collected for the festival. In the doorway, and along a part of the garden, were stationed a body of native police who kept a lane clear by banging the heads of the true believers with pliant staves, like stage cudgels according to Mr Simpkin. That officer had arrived

beforehand with some of his companions, and had at once proceeded to the infidel portion of the garden ; and when Mr Liversege as the representative of English majesty was seen advancing, they huddled into a dark corner and watched the spectacle with much interest.

But after all, it was not very imposing. The Resident of Nawaubgunge laboured under the disadvantage of appearing very tired and sleepy. He happened also to have a cold in the head, and wore a shawl round his neck, one of the ends of which stuck up behind in an absurd manner. Then again, Mrs Liversege when consulted had insisted on a certain accompaniment of Eastern pomp, with which it is usual to honour great potentates when they move in state by night. This is to roll along in front of the feet of the great man lights in globular cases. These can be imagined by picturing in a spherical form the ordinary tin cover of a rush-light, and these cases are pushed along with long sticks, by tattered and half-naked black ragamuffins. Now, it is quite impossible for a man to observe

a very dignified port when advancing with such a burlesque accompaniment of tinkling tin pots; and the long line of grave officials in full dress, Major Pulfington Belper, Mr Palmer Brown, Fuzl Ali blazing with diamonds, the Burkin-dazes, the Khas Burdars with their tinselled-silver clubs, only heightened the absurdity. And when Mrs Liversege's two pea-green postilions were detected at the tail of the procession, I am sorry to say Mr Simpkin's party quite forgot the gravity of the occasion, and greeted them with most unbecoming shouts of applause. Sophy walked near Mrs Liversege on the arm of Captain Langton. Motee walked next to her on the arm of Mr Curzon, but the two young ladies had only bowed very distantly to each other on entering the garden.

They had not yet made up their quarrel. It had been a long one. Each was very angry at first, and bore severe wounds from the terrible struggle. And as they cooled each became very proud. Sophy felt that she had drawn out Mr Charles Simpkin; and Motee had been employing all the incorrect methods

of reasoning ungallantly attributed to the fair sex, to try and prove that she herself was, after all, the most in the wrong. Had she not listened to a private conversation? Was not her anger due to selfishness? Had she not allowed herself to be influenced by a secret love which she ought to have stifled? With respect to, perhaps, the main charge brought against Sophy in a moment of passion, infidelity to Captain Ashleigh; it is a very odd thing that neither young lady seemed to think of a very obvious exculpation. One would suppose that when a gentleman breaks off a marriage engagement without explanation, a lady is not bound by any strong ties to be any longer faithful to him.

But with poor little Motee the main difficulty in healing the breach was this. Any overtures on her part would seem not entirely disinterested as long as the world contained in an unmarried form a gentleman of the name of Charles Simpkin. This young man, not impeccable on all points, was the innocent cause of the continued estrangement. Motee

debated whether she could give him up, and then make advances with a clear conscience. She almost thought at times that she could. And then at others she felt that it would be too much for her strength.

With Sophy, on the other hand, the task seemed easier. She thought she had had the best of the encounter; and the wounds of the conqueror are never so galling as those of the vanquished. But then, for we must tell the exact truth, she did not know what sort of face to put on and what sort of words to use, if she should try to make it up. She had always patronized Motee a little, and did not know how to humble herself now. The darkness to-night favoured the two young persons. They were standing watching the illuminated outline of minaret and dome, when suddenly they found themselves a little apart from their companions.

‘ Motee.’

‘ Sophy !’ And there was an embrace.—
If Captain Langton and Mr Curzon had not been too intent on watching the painted

lamps they might have heard sobs and kisses.

Meanwhile the tom-toms played and the fifes shrieked, the true believers shouted, the coloured lamps glared on the boughs of the trees and quivered in the fountains. The coloured lustres at the great shrine glittered with a dazzling light which was caught by a hundred mirrors, the Mollahs chanted, and the pale luminous smoke of their sacrifice went up to heaven ; and the spectators were variously impressed with the scene according to their creeds, training, and states of mind.

‘ It’s very pretty,’ said Sophy.

‘ Lovely,’ said Motee.

‘ Plenty of lights, Hey !’ said the Major.

‘ Darkness rather,’ said Mrs Pulfington Belper.

‘ Very creditable indeed !’ said Mr Palmer Brown.

‘ Ah, if the Mussulman dogs only respected the sacred cow,’ said Soobahdar Sungeen.

‘ The Mussulman architects were no doubt true artists,’ said Mr Simpkin.

‘ Dash—niggers ! ’ said Mr Hodges.

‘ A finer Mohurrum next year, Soobahdar Sahib, and a finer Hooly too, and these cursed Christians won’t enjoy it so much,’ said Fuzl Ali to Soobahdar Sungeen, the devout Hindoo ; and he then returned to the side of Mrs Liversege and regretted that the Nawaub was too poor to entertain his English guests as befitted their rank and importance. That which Mrs Pulfington Belper had once quaintly called ‘ pride and vainglory and the Bengal Civil Service,’ had been too much for worthy Mrs Liversege. She had got by this time to believe that she was the true Resident at Nawaubgunge, and I dare say almost fancied that the shouts and music, and triumph, the lamps, and the flight of rockets which was now climbing the skies, were less in honour of the pious Imaum Hossein than in honour of her. The Englishman had conquered Islam, and was she not the master of that Englishman. Well, well, if Indian state craft consists in infinitesimal mysteries and entanglements, in microscopic etiquettes and polished scoldings,

in small squabbles for pinch-beck rank and tinsel honour, I don't really see why the female mind, in such a province, is not the fitter of the two.

And now Captain Ashleigh and Sophy were to meet once more. The Captain was looking for Major Pulfington Belper; and hearing Motee's voice, he came up to her. He knew of the quarrel between her and Sophy, and did not thus expect to find them together. The two had retired into a dark walk. The new friends had much to say, and the noise, the glare, the orgies, the mimic fights of the young men who produced the brave deeds of Hossein; their flashing eyes, gestures, and sword-blows, had rather scared the young girls. They did not know how much of the old spirit of the old Imaum was coming back upon the world in this particular year of the Hegira.

'Miss Throgmorton, can you tell me where is the Major?' And the Captain and Miss Sophy recognized each other at the same moment. The embarrassment was great on

both sides. After some hesitation he held out his hand in silence. She took it, and then Motee, like an arch conspirator, talked very fast to him, and asked him so many questions that he was quite unable to run away. She thought she could do all this with a clear conscience, as she had quite resigned her hopeless love for Charley. She even went so far as to plan an opportunity of leaving the two together in that dark walk.

‘Pray take charge of Sophy for a minute, Captain Ashleigh, I will be back at once.’

This was very embarrassing. They were left alone. They had not yet spoken a word directly, the one to the other, and there was now a long pause. And when they did speak little came of their words, little to repay the industry of Motee.

‘The lamps are very beautiful,’ said the Captain at length.

‘Yes, it is a very pretty illumination.’

‘The natives are very fond of these spectacles.’

‘ So I have heard.’

‘ Your friend has very great spirits at times.’

‘ Yes, she has at times,’ said Sophy gently.

‘ Oh, there you are, Miss Brabazon—Hey! Does not this remind you of the passage in *Lalla Rookh*, commencing’—And another character, a married but unreclaimed *chevalier des dames*, appeared upon the scene.

CHAPTER VII.

CARTRIDGES.

‘HUMBUG! It’s not true.’

‘It is indeed!’

‘Honour bright?’

‘Yes, at Berhampore—I’m not chaffing!’

‘The Nineteenth, was it?’

‘Yes, they seized their arms at ten o’clock at night, and formed up. The commandant of the station brought down the Native Cavalry and guns, but the infantry would not lodge their arms until these had retired. It’s all in the Bengal *Hurkaru*.’

‘It’s very extraordinary.’

‘They say those Barrackpore regiments are in a terrible state.’

‘A guard of the Thirty-fourth had just been to Berhampore.’

‘Why the deuce didn’t Mitchell fire on the mutineers?’

‘Suppose the cavalry and artillery had refused to act?’

‘Gentlemen, gentlemen, it’s treason to talk like this.’ The Major had now joined the party. They were seated in the Mess-verandah in the cool of the morning.

‘It’s very rum about these cartridges.’

‘But it was the old blank cartridges this time.’

‘And those chupattees.’

‘There’s somebody at the bottom of it all. The king of Oude, they say.’

‘Simpkin, I cannot really allow you to talk in that way!’

‘Well, Major, I am only repeating the gossip of the papers. I don’t of course myself believe that we shall have another massacre of Vellore, and that I shall live to see our fat friend, Mr Palmer Brown, running for his life without his coat.’

‘Or Mrs Liversege with her wig awry, like Boadicea.’

‘Abdar, you make infernally weak tea. Poison! Are you in the plot?’

‘Those Umballah fellows are very excited too.’

‘Enter two murderers! Hum. Shakespeare.’

‘Tis even so, they salute the worthy Pulfington over there, and tell him that a hundred ghurrahs per company are full, and that everything else is well.

‘What do you think? The Blinking Idolater told me yesterday that the Company’s *Raj* is over.’

‘Yes, Langton’s servants told him the same thing the other day. He sent off a letter to Colonel Boshington, who laughed on receiving it for the first, last, and only time.’

‘Mrs B. says the millennium’s to be this year. At least she said so five days ago, but she got a new book of the Doctor’s by the last mail, and says now that it is put off for three years.’

‘A bore for you, Simpkin, isn’t it, the change?’

‘Why, darling Hodges?’

‘Because young ladies will think less of money and civil allowances then!’

‘Oh, you’re a dear fellow. I wonder if there’ll be any pegs for you in the millennium, Hodges?’

‘What the deuce will they do to the Nineteenth?’

‘Hang the Nineteenth! Who’ll play billiards?’

Similar conversations were taking place all over India at this time. But there was uneasiness as well as levity. The Nineteenth mutinied on the 24th February.

Motee and Sophy were now fast friends again. Sophy had always liked Motee. Immensely! But she had not known the meaning of that word ‘immensely’ until she saw Motee still living in the same house with her; saw her kind, affectionate, sympathizing, unselfish as of yore; but knew also that she could no longer run off to that young lady’s bed-room and laugh, and pull the things about, and prattle her confidences half in

fun, half in earnest. The two young girls still shook hands and kissed each other morning and evening when people were looking on, as young girls will do even when they hate each other. But a terrible gulf was between them, and Sophy was not at all sorry when Motee went away to live with the new Mrs Pulfington Belper.

‘I was so cut up all the time, dear, I really did not appreciate you enough—before.’

‘And I—’

‘Oh, I won’t allow anybody to abuse you, even yourself;’ and a pair of plump, red lips closed Motee’s mouth in the pleasantest of manners.

‘Dearest!’ and Miss Motee, who was of an emotional turn, threw her arms round Sophy and half suffocated that more fragile young person.

‘After all, dearest, I only did it to tease Aunt Liversege; and Mr Palmer Brown, I can tease her beautifully in that way too. To think that a woman with a soul given to her by God, is to be made a puppet of, a doll. I

won't dress, dance, walk, or curtsy whenever she pulls the string. I won't be sold to the first purchaser, mind that.'

'I was much more foolish in the affair than you, but I am wiser.'

'I have quite given him up.'

'And so have I,' said Miss Motee, gently, but resolutely.

In point of fact, Mr Charles Simpkin had been made aware of this first resolution no later than yesterday.

'Boy! who do you come to make love to here?' said Sophy abruptly. She stood on no ceremony with this young gentleman.

'Well, let's see, I don't quite know that I come to make love at all, Mademoiselle.'

'Yes, you do; is it Motee?' that young lady was again in the house for a day or two.

'I can conscientiously say that it is not!'

'Then you must not come at all.'

'You have told me that so often that I am really beginning to believe you.'

‘But I am thoroughly in earnest. I dare say you think me weak, changeable, uncertain. What am I talking about? I know you think so.’

‘I—’

‘You have said it a thousand times.’

‘I was thoughtless; in fun mostly, but rude and ungentlemanly perhaps.’

‘No, Charley, I acquit you of that!’ said the young lady, forgiving him his offences with much magnanimity. ‘But I must be candid with you now. Do you think if I could really have cared that I would have minded—my aunt—the world?’

‘I have always in my soul given you credit for truth—’

‘Charley, I have tried to love you—I cannot—I never can—rest satisfied with that.’

‘Dearest girl,’ said the young man kindly. He showed great command over himself on this occasion.

‘You are a good boy. You have heard me calumniated—will perhaps hear people

talk against me again. My position is not an easy one—I sometimes pray for some one to counsel and guide me.’

‘Why, any one would do that. Have you not plenty of kind friends? What are the difficulties you complain of? Tell me as a brother.’

‘Don’t talk nonsense, sir,’ said the young lady pertly.

‘Tell me one thing. You say I have no hope—do you mean that you are not quite free—that is—that somebody else—honour bright!’ Sophy blushed up to the eyes at this last word, and remembered Barrackpore.

‘Well—I can’t say,’ she said slowly, with a little of the manner of a convicted school-girl, but she recovered herself and said quickly—‘Don’t ask any saucy questions, sir. Go away!’

Mr Simpkin had been struck with her look and the tone of the commencement of this last speech. He was silent for a moment,

and then took up his forage cap which he had left on a distant table.

‘God bless you, dearest, I will not tease you again!’ And he touched her hand gently with his lips.

‘It is quite useless!’ said the Creature of Impulse. Her proclivities are at present entirely in the right direction.

This conversation led to two others. One we have already narrated. The other took place on the shady side of the grim old building where Ashleigh and Simpkin were now living together. The Ironside had just come in from a gallop, and the two chums were sipping their tea.

‘Oh, look here,’ said Charley, when the black servant had left them quite alone, ‘some time ago at Nielgunge we had some conversation together, when you behaved like a tremendous trump.’

‘Oh, my dear fellow, it’s no use ripping up old stories.’ This was the first time they had alluded to the matter since Ashleigh had returned.

‘I don’t know, perhaps it is of use. You have pulled me out of a tremendous hobble. I have got over my examinations, and though I am not very sanguine about success in an Indian life, I still, through you, hope to be able to contend with the fates with free unfettered hands, that is, if those confounded cartridges don’t blow us all up.’

The Captain shook his head gravely. ‘That’s not so light a matter as some of you appear to think.’

‘Well, but upon the other affair. In point of fact, it has lately struck me that I have been acting very thoughtlessly.’

‘Nonsense. You seem to have studied hard. You have been successful. You are as steady as a gentleman ought to be.’

‘I mean towards you—thoughtlessly—towards you.’

‘My dear fellow, don’t allude to the subject again. It’s only a loan—I tell you it’s only—’

‘I think you misunderstand the full force

of my meaning—I mean that I have behaved very selfishly altogether.’

‘How do you mean, Simpkin?’ said the Captain with a little of the stateliness which he had before put on at Nielgunge.

‘Well, I don’t quite know how to explain. You have been awfully kind to me, but it has struck me that, perhaps, your money and all that was but a very small portion of your kindness, old fellow, and generosity; in fact, in two words—she never will care for me, I swear it, and I believe she loves you.’

‘Simpkin, on this subject please never to talk to me again,’ and the Captain quitted the verandah with some abruptness.

This oath of Mr Simpkin’s was, I think, of that guilty kind which Mr Yorick’s angel is supposed to efface with a tear. Even now there were moments when he did not think that the young lady was really indifferent about him. Such is your power, O gentle ladies, over the shrewdest and strongest of a guileless sex! But he was lately

convinced that she never would marry him ; and in his grief he had come to the conclusion that he was acting unfairly to Ashleigh. There is a sorrow which is like the fire, it softens the gold but hardens the clay. Two months ago, and he would have thought it quite impossible that he could ever have the fortitude to urge on another man to make love to beautiful Miss Sophy ; but in the silence of last night, his torn soul had formed this resolution, and he has tried to carry it out, and now he paces the verandah with quick steps, and the feathery branches of the *Peepul* near him rustle gently.

And the young man knows that in the love of man and woman there are inner depths, and that the more it approaches to sacrifice the calmer is the pleasure sent down by the author of it.

March passes and April, memorable months in this year of the Sumbut 1914, memorable now. On the 29th March at Barrackpore the celebrated Sepoy Mungul Pandy broke out

into insurrection, wounded two or three officers, and but for the prompt arrival of the brave old General Hearsay, might have then and there set India into a blaze.

‘Mind his musket, General. It’s loaded!’ said an officer present.

‘Damn his musket,’ said the General, and Mungul Pandy, after trying to destroy himself, was secured. Hearsay had long made known to the authorities in Calcutta that his men were almost in revolt. Similar communications have been made from all parts of India.

The attitude of poor Lord Canning at this particular moment of time is one that future histories will dwell on with pain. That pale, cold, refined, conscientious, model official is still contemplating all matters from all points of view. He lets five precious weeks escape before he disbands the mutinous Nineteenth, and six more precious weeks escape before he disbands the mutinous Thirty-fourth. The famous tenth of May finds him, pale, cold, calm, and conscientious, despatching the 84th Foot back to Burmah now that the 34th

and the mutiny have ceased to exist, corresponding about Education Grants, Female Schools, the Expenses of the Persian war, and the Delhi Succession—and tying up his letters no doubt with neat bows of red-tape. And when the Emperor of Delhi actually throws down the gauntlet, the pale, cold, calm, refined, conscientious, model official refuses Lord Elphinstone's offer to send the Bombay frigates to Suez for an English army. Three new European regiments, tardily raised, is all he wants from England, and he devotes a certain skill in English composition which he has inherited from George Canning, to a wordy Proclamation. It is pitiable to see the captain of a gallant ship anxious about clean jackets and symmetrical pump-handles when the fire is roaring near the magazine; but what would you? Genius is unsafe. Remember Napier. *In mediocrity tu tutissimus* is the official maxim, and so for Governor-General we have a safe man, an English statesman of position, a nobleman far above the favouritisms of Indian cliques, and we

have not got Henry Lawrence, the man whom Wellington hurried off to the Seikh war, and Hardinge wanted to bring to Sebastopol. Had he been Governor-General, he might at any rate have thrown English soldiers into the two great fortresses of Delhi and Allahabad. Had both fallen into the rebels' hands, India would now be lost.

But all this time, whilst the Windus and Boshington system is being tried in the crucible, the affairs of Nawaubgunge go on much as usual. People talk of Mungul Pandy and of the disbanding of the Thirty-fourth, of the incendiary fires at Lucknow and Umballah, and of the bone-dust native rumour, with some dim apprehensions; and then they talk of Miss Sophy Brabazon's flirtations, of the illness of Mrs Langton's little baby, of Miss Halliday jilted by young De Frise of the Commissariat, of Mrs Liversege's last rude speech, and of that never-failing object of gossip, Major Pulfington Belper and his new religious experiences. And as the month of April wears on a more absorbing topic than

any of these is broached, the Nabob's birthday ball.

Students of Indian history (and their name is Legion, for works upon this topic are always written in a light attractive style) are well aware that the Nawaub of Nawaubgunge was born on the 13th of May, and that he was in the habit of giving an annual ball to celebrate this great event in the history of the world. On that day His Majesty was weighed like one of the old Delhi emperors, and a few extra ounces of tissue were celebrated with quite a disproportionate addition to the fire-works, tom-toms, coloured lamps, and tinsel gift necklaces. The large hall of the palace was cleared for the Feringhys, and the dancers were refreshed with a splendid supper. The Nawaubgunge palace ball was known all over India. It was talked of for at least two months after it occurred, and three months before ; and now that it is so very near you may be sure that the conversation relates chiefly to the curious dress-patterns and flounces and gauzy materials which are pre-

paring for the occasion, many of which have been ordered expressly from London. Why is it that heel-kicking seems at times the most painfully frivolous of all human occupations, and that history can never forget the ghastly French beauties with their *Cols à la Victime*, or the pretty white satin shoes which jigged merrily at Brussels whilst the tumbrils of Bonaparte were rumbling upon the Sambre?

But you may also be sure that so tremendous an event as the Nawaub's ball was never allowed to draw near without all the political discussion and preparation due to so important a crisis; and on the present occasion the debates of the high authorities in the Residency were so animated and complex that at this distance of time they present an interest ludicrous, no doubt—ludicrous and tragic enough, like much else that then happened in India. Poor Mr Liversege was for putting the ball off altogether. The aspect of affairs in India generally rendered such an amusement out of place if not highly imprudent. Mrs Liversege however, aided by Mr Palmer

Brown, would not hear of any such pusillanimity. It would imply such a want of confidence generally, and show such a distrust of the Nawaub and Fuzl Ali his minister. Then Mrs Pulfington Belper chimed in on what might be called the metaphysical side of the question, and pleaded that heaven should not be tempted by so gross a transgression as the polka, at a time when a sceptical Governor-General had so far forgotten his high duties as to reprimand a Colonel for preaching to his Sepoys in the bazar. Pulfington Belper on his side was for confidence in the Sepoys and in the Company's rule, and thought that the ball ought to come off, but he expressed himself modestly, out of deference to his wife. It is needless to say that the side of Mrs Liversege prevailed. That lady, like the courtier at the death-bed of Louis XV., had no idea of inconveniencing a king for a mere proposition in divinity.

‘And you know, my dear,’ she said to her sister, ‘we have had no opportunity of making any use of the contents of that box of millinery

which came from Paris in February, and if we keep it until the rains, it will all be spoilt.'

So the ball is to take place on the 13th of May, and Sophy, by the aid of the said box of millinery, is to appear in a ball-dress such as has never been seen in India before. She runs constantly over to Motee, who is living with the Belpers, and arranges the various details of her costume with all the care they require. Motee, a novice at first in the art of dress, had showed latterly stronger creative power than her friend. She is an artist, and, but for the Petticrook chains in which it is now bound, her genius might have burst forth into one of the art-channels, and been the solace of her life. A vain, silly man cannot, as it appears, turn the heads of Cheltenham old maids without doing a certain amount of real harm in the world. Sophy is constantly at Major Pulfington Belper's house, and there she has lately frequently met—Captain Ashleigh.

Did he go there on public business? Undoubtedly he had much to say just now to

the commandant of the military. Did he go there upon other besides public business? Had the words of Charley Simpkin had any influence on him? Did the 'Ironside' for once find the task he had set himself too much, even for his strong corsleted bosom? This much is now known, that when his appointment to the Nawaubgunge Irregulars was considered in Calcutta, Mr Vesey called upon Mr Ignatius, and there learnt, to his astonishment, that Government had known all along that Mrs Palmer Brown had fled to the house of Captain Ashleigh. Some say that there is an amiable and most effective system of amateur *espionage* encouraged in India; but be this as it may, it is said that Government knows everything; the only drawback to their omniscience in some cases being that the reports of the gentlemen-*Mouchards* are a little one-sided. Thus, in the case of Captain Ashleigh the accusing spirit had lodged a very garbled account of the affair in Heaven's Chancery. He was stated to have enticed away Mrs Palmer Brown, and to have then

fought a duel in utter contempt of all Government-regulations. It was only when Mr Vesey, from his own personal knowledge, overthrew these allegations, that the Government consented to sanction the Cavalry command.

Captain Ashleigh now knew all this. He knew that his secret was gradually becoming no secret at all. But he also believed that he was still morally bound to use every exertion to keep it. Perhaps also he thought that the mischief wrought by Mrs Liversege had done its work too effectually. Certain it is that the sacrifice of Charley did no real good. Sophy was subdued and gentle at first, and then she took to teasing and coquetting. She would encourage Mr Palmer Brown outrageously. She would express the most diabolical of Mrs Liversege's sentiments. Pride, caprice, revenge, vanity, and warm feeling seemed for ever battling in that restless little bosom. What the Ironside really endured at this period can never now be known. Under it all he was outwardly as calm and quiet as usual. If this was his one moment of weakness,—if his love forced

him to come near her again in spite of the chain which the Fates in his imagination had forged around him, her alternate kindness and inconsiderate levity, her coquetry and cruelty, must have tortured to the quick his kind, uncomplaining heart. A waxen, girlish mind tossed upon a sea of vanities, with a Mephistopheles in dove-coloured satin at the helm—if she be worthy of pity, none would pity her more than the Captain. Was she nourishing that painful irony of weak woman's nature, a love that can never forget, never forgive?

It was in reference to this silly ball (and the fine ball dress) that a conversation took place between them, which Sophy in after-years much regretted. It was within two days of that event, and Ashleigh, who had been much against the ball from the very first, came over to the Major to urge him to oppose it at the last moment. There was concern upon the Captain's face, and he was terribly in earnest. Sophy and Motee were seated in the verandah when he arrived, and

Sophy affected a great deal of pettishness at the idea of the ball being delayed. The Major happening to be called away by Mrs Pulfington Belper, Motee made some excuse and left the pair together. This was unfortunate, as to-day Sophy is in an uncertain humour. The Captain was a little put out, but he remained seated in a chair not very far from that of the young lady.

‘Why do you oppose us in our ball, Captain Ashleigh? You know how much I have set my heart upon going!’ She began in this way with provoking good humour. There had been much embarrassment at their first meetings, but now they had again got to talk to each other with some freedom. Sophy was too volatile to act the implacable for too long a time at a stretch.

‘I really wish you would give it up,’ he answered gravely.

‘Yes, but I am told by every one that my wishes ought to be law, because I am a young lady.—Why are you so much against me in the affair?’

‘ I have good reasons. I have indeed ! ’

‘ I hope you don’t think there is any danger ? ’

‘ There is danger everywhere in India just now. You read the papers. You see that the troopers at Meerut openly say that the Company’s rule is at an end.’

‘ Oh, I assure you you are wrong about there being any apprehension, as far as we are concerned. Mr Palmer Brown, a better authority than you and me on such points, says that Fuzl Ali is as true as steel. After that you won’t oppose the ball any more, will you? I am really very eager indeed about the matter. It will be such a capital ball.’

‘ Sophy Brabazon,’ he replied, looking at her gravely, ‘ do you still think that I do not know you—as well perhaps as you do yourself ? ’

‘ Do you?’ she said quickly ; ‘ what do you know about me, Captain Ashleigh ? I should like to hear.’

‘ I think I know this much,’ he said

gently : ‘ you are not in earnest in much you now say to me.’ He then added in a lighter tone, ‘ You must not think I want to forbid young beauties the use of humour and sprightliness ; but seriously, if you knew all I know.’

‘ Never mind the ball now, Captain Ashleigh, I have sufficient courage to venture, and that is enough. I am obliged to infer that there is something in my conversation that does not meet your approval.’

‘ Approval ! Miss Brabazon, I never ventured—’

‘ Words and looks have a meaning, sir, and with both you certainly implied that there was that in me you saw—’

‘ I did not mean to imply more than this, that I would give worlds to see this mad ball knocked on the head.’ The Captain was surprised at the somewhat unprovoked warmth of the lady. Her irritation is certainly not the mere growth of a single hour.

‘ Answer me this,’ she said quickly ; ‘ Is it a fact that you were so kindly solicitous in

my welfare, that you sent me a gallant young lover riding your horses and spending your money?’

‘Miss Brabazon!’

‘A guide, philosopher, and friend of a somewhat giddy stamp—the grave, steady, experienced Mr Charles Simpkin, whose creditors you were good enough for the moment to beckon away.’

‘Miss Brabazon, I scarcely think that the private affairs of Mr Simpkin are open to discussion. He has done nothing unmanly.’

‘No, he’s a good boy, and has broken no confidence, for that matter, nor need you. I am a woman, and he could not keep a secret from me. I am a woman, and, as such, think I have a right to object to being treated like an infant, and having another infant sent to guide me amongst the pitfalls of the world, which you are all so complimentary as to fancy I am especially prone to fall into.’

‘Miss Brabazon!’

‘I should be glad to hear from your own

lips that I am unjust to you.' There was a pause. 'You come here day after day, but now it is to treat me always as a woman that is not to be trusted. I may be a weak, giddy, senseless, heartless little doll.'

'Sophy, do not!' he said very earnestly.

'But if I am, I don't know what it is to you!'

'Miss Brabazon, all this distresses me beyond measure.'

'Frederick,' she said gently, 'was it entirely of your own free will that you broke off—our engagement?'

'I alone am responsible for it,' he said slowly, and each word seemed to stick in his throat.

'If I could only hear one hint—that I am wronging you, that your hands were tied,—I think I could go down on my knees to you, and confess with tears that I have, indeed, been unjust and cruel; that I am utterly unworthy of you, that a life of repentance could never atone for the way I have used you. Frederick, a man who has once gained a

woman's love has duties to her as well as to his own manhood ; I conjure you tell me, if you can—that it was not your fault.'

He gazed at her face, lit up with more than its usual beauty by her unwonted fire. He stood a moment irresolute, and then he turned away.

' Oh God, this is too much ! ' he said slowly, and hurried away with averted eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH MR CHARLES SIMPKIN ACTS LIKE
A BROTHER.

THAT day Captain Ashleigh received the following note—

‘Mrs Liversege presents her compliments to Captain Ashleigh, and is obliged to beg that gentleman to grant her an interview at twelve o’clock, if convenient. Mrs Liversege had hoped after what had passed on a former occasion that the unpleasant subjects then discussed need never again have been referred to.

‘*The Residency, Tuesday.*’

It was in this way that at twelve o’clock Captain Ashleigh and Mrs Liversege again

found themselves in the Residency drawing-room. Mrs Liversege was grave, but there was an air of triumphant buoyancy in her gravity. She pointed to a seat, and sat down herself, as she did on the former occasion.

‘I suppose you remember, sir, what took place when I last had the honour of addressing you in this room?’

‘Perfectly!’

‘Since that time, and especially lately, things have not turned out altogether as I wished. Have I or have I not just reason to be dissatisfied?’

‘Mrs Liversege, in Nawaubgunge, and in the rest of India, things are in a very unsatisfactory state indeed, if that is what you mean.’

‘Oh, thank you,’ she said with clumsy irony; ‘I did not put you to the trouble of coming all the way here to enjoy a discussion on the general affairs of India. I thought you would have guessed my particular motive.’

‘Perhaps I do guess it, and perhaps I

think the other matters of much greater interest just now. You have heard this bazar report from Meerut ?’

‘Which you took the trouble to bring to Mr Liversege. We do not believe it. Mr Palmer Brown says there is a regiment of English infantry, another of dragoons, and several batteries of artillery. He justly argues that it would be perfectly impossible for the native troops to burn the cantonments and massacre the English officers in the face of this strong force. Besides, had anything of the sort occurred, a person of the importance of Mr Liversege would at once have been informed by telegraph.’

‘Possibly. And possibly the rumour is exaggerated, but the natives believe it, and their *bazar* reports are often wonderfully swift and wonderfully exact.’

‘Permit me to make one remark—the affairs of Nawaubgunge, whether rightly or unjustly, are intrusted to Mr Liversege. He alone is responsible for the conduct of them ;

but as he is responsible for them, would it not be better to leave them entirely to him and proceed to—'

'Pardon also an interruption on my side. The fact that he is responsible for all that is done here is what I want to bring more home to you than I think has yet been done. He is responsible, and you will perhaps be surprised to learn that his supersession has already been discussed in Government House.'

Mrs Liversege, from her manner, evidently was surprised to hear that announcement.

'Mrs Liversege, I must be frank with you. For many years you have schemed and schemed with a skill and energy not altogether blamable. You have desired, and at length attained your husband's advancement, and the gratification of your own ambition. He was made Resident of Nawaubgunge, and then you thought that you could manage everything your own way, and did; but you forgot one thing, that a high post in India may mean conspicuous incapacity and summary disgrace. You forgot that the eyes of

the disappointed claimants were upon you. Mr Prettijohn, whose friend was rejected, knows everything that has occurred since you came here, and has a long catalogue against you, including Colonel Sandboy's removal, to make way, it is stated, for your sister's new husband. Now this ball, supposing anything to occur, will be made the pretext—'

'Anything to occur! why, Colonel Boshington has just written to Mr Liversege to say that in Calcutta all fear of a mutiny has past. The 84th Foot are going back to Burmah, and Mr Prettijohn is the most severe of all on those who show a want of confidence; which we should decidedly do if we put off this ball. So you see, sir,' resumed Mrs Liversege, who had now recovered her self-possession, 'your fears about Mr Prettijohn are quite groundless.'

'Don't be too confident that their present opinions will bias them much, if anything occurs at the ball; and whatever may be the case at Calcutta there is no doubt that the natives here are scheming actively.'

‘Upon that point also we, who have better opportunity of knowing what is going on, can also reassure you.’ Mrs Liversege felt that a little extra confidence was now necessary to atone for her late subdued, I had almost said condescending, manner. ‘And now that we have discussed certain affairs, which I may say concern you only very indirectly, let us discuss certain other affairs which concern you very directly indeed.’

‘I think we had better not,’ said Captain Ashleigh, very dryly, ‘it can lead to little good.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ said Mrs Liversege, who thought she detected hesitation in the enemy’s camp; ‘but you will please to recollect that the last time we met you consented to resign your pretensions to Miss Sophy Brabazon on the one and sole condition of my forbearance—’

‘Well, perhaps you had better put it in this way. You forced me to rupture a solemn engagement, by taking a not very fair advantage of an accidental and very imperfect

piece of information. But really no good can come from the discussion of these things now.'

'I don't see that these words alter my facts. And now what has been the result of that undertaking of yours?'

'Not much good, Mrs Liversege, either to her or me. You can see the effects of your handiwork on the young lady—your handiwork, I say. But I don't come here to upbraid you. You were the creature of circumstances: I merely ask you to put off that mad ball. Do that, and I will forgive you any injury that you have ever done me!'

'Upon my word, sir, you are very forgiving,' said the lady, aghast. 'But this is mere trifling. You promised to give up that young lady, and now you have broken your word, and are making love to her.'

'Mrs Liversege, dare you say that, now?'

'Now!—what do you mean by that? You are certainly making love to her, and will force me—'

'Don't renew that threat, Mrs Liversege, *now!*' said the Captain, with solemnity.

‘Now! Again that emphasis. What does it mean?’

‘It means that I am aware that, through Mrs Throgmorton, you know all the facts of the case, why I was obliged to yield to you, why I was obliged to sacrifice the happiness of a warm-hearted girl to a terrible duty. We, on our side, have striven to maintain the honour of your family through good and evil report; you, on your side, would traffic with it.’

‘Sir,’ said Mrs Liversege, in consternation at this speech.

‘Enough. You see now, Mrs Liversege, why I am not afraid of your threats. You cannot reveal the secret, because it would utterly defeat your own cobweb plans. Those plans were based on your conviction of my truth, at a time when you affected to consider me quite untrustworthy.’ There was a pause. ‘And if it is any satisfaction to you to know it, those plans have been but too successful. They have rendered my union with Sophy impossible.’

How Mrs Throgmorton wormed out the secret from Major Pulfington Belper can be imagined if not altogether understood. Given a garrulous old gentleman and a very persistent help-mate, and the task seems easy, but it did not prove so. The poor Major would rather have died than have revealed the secret willingly, nevertheless in the end feminine curiosity was too much for him. But how Mrs Throgmorton, who at the first discovery had promised the agonized Major that she would keep the secret as sacredly as it had hitherto been kept—how she revealed it to her sister is not so easily to be imagined. Like many excellent people, she was inclined to mistake her private animosities for religious duties, and thought, I verily believe, that she was performing a very meritorious act when she first made use of it to try and awaken her sister to a sense of her worldliness. Had not that sister been very worldly in the particular affair of the Captain? Had she not neglected Mrs Throgmorton's warnings and irritated that lady in argument, if she had failed to

vanquish her? Was not her immortal soul in jeopardy, and were the fanciful punctilios of half-a-dozen carnal people to stand in the way of a sister's hereafter? And you can imagine that when once it became a question between a moral principle and a religious duty, the moral principle would have to give way. Pious sisters, this is a quaint world! The half-dozen carnal people had kept the secret for years faithfully, through evil report, through good report; and our 'precious sister'—'tis thus she is styled in her biography by the Rev. Eli Petticrook—what did she? The reverend gentleman's little work 'Piety and Palm Trees' sets forth her many virtues, her energy in idolatrous and heathen lands, her missionary activity, her Bundelcund conquests, but it fails to throw much light on this particular proceeding. She certainly made a promise to the Major; she as certainly broke it; but the conduct of zealous ladies is often perplexing. Does not Mr Fielding tell us of an old lady, who, prompted by the most pure religious motives, once stole a volume of

Tillotson's sermons; and do not many young ladies consider that when they flirt with a clergyman they are performing an act of religious duty?

The poor Major, directly he saw the evil he had done, at once told Ashleigh. That officer was very often over at his bungalow, urging him to take precautions. He even suggested the advisability of sending over the ladies to Agra, where there was a fort and English soldiers; but the Major was one of those men who would not hear a word against the loyalty of the Sepoy.

'By God, Ashleigh, it's mutiny to think of such a thing!' was his answer again and again. Ashleigh made the same proposal to the Resident when he called to tell him of the bazar report about Meerut.

'Take a seat, Ashleigh, take a seat!' said that functionary when he came in. He always received the soldier kindly in spite of family complications, for Mr Liversege, besides being a gentleman, nourished in his secret heart, in a little depositary where he kept things away

from even the wife of his bosom, a great respect for Ashleigh. And when he heard the object of the Captain's visit, he looked very grave indeed.

‘ You know all this from Meerut is terribly significant, if true.’

‘ It is indeed !’

‘ And what is the nature of the private information you have received about Fuzl Ali and the Sepoys here ?’

‘ Well, sir, it is vague, and would not perhaps be convincing to you. For plotting and secret treachery the native is not to be matched. Even after the mutiny of Vellore there was very little tangible evidence against the sons of Tippoo who got it up. Vague phrases are going about the bazar which covertly point to an approaching triumph over the Feringhy at Nawaubgunge, and I have received one or two hints from different sources to stay away myself—’

‘ And you really think the ladies ought to be sent off to Agra ?’

‘ At once. I could pick out a few trust-

worthy troopers for an escort, and a few of the youngsters might form a detachment of Volunteer Cavalry.'

'Pon my word, Ashleigh, what you say deserves attention, deserves a great deal of attention. I myself, *entre nous*, have observed for some time a very marked difference in the behaviour of the natives. By heaven, to think that India—well, we will consider all this. Let me see you again to-day, perhaps you will have learnt more. Come and dine with me.' And the Resident shook Ashleigh warmly by the hand. His kindness, his excellent intentions, and his utter helplessness touched that officer as he went away. On any other day he would have refused the dinner party; but now a straw might turn the balance and everything was at stake.

Mrs Liversege on this occasion did not think fit to cancel her husband's invitation. The first effect of her recent interview with Ashleigh had been a state of terror; terror of him, terror of the Sepoys, terror of the avenging Prettijohn; so for the first time since his

marriage was broken off, Captain Ashleigh became the guest of the Resident, and at half-past seven o'clock drove over with Mr Charles Simpkin to attend the banquet—a grim repast, as many banquets were in those days.

Charley took Motee in to dinner, and it was not without a pang that he saw Sophy link her arm within that of the fat Secretary, Mr Palmer Brown. Whilst the Emperor of Delhi, the Ex-King of Oude, the Nana, and the Nawaub of Nawaubgunge have been actively plotting their plots, two other conspirators have also been at work—our Ensign and his present partner. To do that young gentleman justice, when once he had mustered up courage to make over Miss Sophy to his friend, he pursued that resolve with heart and soul, and he entered into an alliance with Motee for that purpose. They both agreed that the pair loved each other. They both agreed that Mrs Liversege ought to be foiled. They schemed craftily, quietly ; and I may add, with no great result. The only

active step taken was taken quite against Motee's advice. To-night Sophy is flirting terribly with Mr Palmer Brown. She smiles on him, she blushes, she flashes tender glances, she sits silent, pale, sentimental, loving. Charley can stand it no longer, and half forms the resolution to speak to her as a brother.

'Don't, for goodness' sake!' says Motee horror-struck, and Charley says he will not. He has suddenly formed a great respect for that young lady's understanding, and finds that she possesses more good sense and quickness, and quiet fun too, than even he—a gifted anatomist of humanity—had any idea of. He also finds that she dresses much better than she did, and that her large eyes and rounded figure possess much real beauty—in fact, that she is a girl that a man might fall in love with, a man whose heart was free, a man who had not yet formed his ideal—in India a man grows old far too soon to form a second, when his first has been falsified.

Nothing came of their little confederate-firtation. Motee had given him up. Per-

haps he now unwittingly made that resolve of hers much more difficult than it need have been. But she persevered, or thought she did, bravely and nobly. She is worthy of our pity, you will say, but perhaps the strong souls who bear greater burdens than their fellows without flinching are worthy of something else.

After dinner the Resident and Ashleigh carried on a short conversation together in whispers.

‘Simpkin,’ said the latter, ‘will you kindly tell Mr Palmer Brown that the Resident wants to speak to him?’ That obese swain had retired into the verandah, and was whispering the gentle distress that tortured his fat frame, under the shining stars.

‘The Resident wants to speak with you, sir, at once,’ said our friend with dignified curtness.

‘With me—oh!’ stammered the conscious lover. ‘Shall I conduct you back to the drawing-room?’ said then in an undertone this *jeune premier* of five-and-forty.

‘Do, pray—or perhaps I may as well stop here. It is cooler; you won’t be long.’

Charley was rather put out at this. He had by no means bargained for a moonlight interview at this particular moment. The young lady saw his embarrassment.

‘Don’t let me keep you,’ she said, ‘if you are so anxious to get back to Motee. You have robbed me of my beau, but I won’t steal your belle.’

‘I have no belles, Miss Sophy. My fool’s-cap is becoming enough without them. I received an order and executed it, like a trustworthy Ensign—unattached.’

‘Then come and have a little flirtation with me. We haven’t had one for so long.’

‘I should be very glad to oblige you, but it is so long ago that I have quite forgotten the way.’

‘Oh, it was a very good imitation of it you were carrying on just now, I shall be quite content with that!’

‘Are you getting jealous of Motee? She has a good, true, noble heart!’

‘Bravo!’

‘Which will some day reward some one other than your humble servant. We were not piping, but plotting.’

‘Against me!’

‘Why should I always be thinking of you?’

‘I don’t know, but you are. It is a very flattering view you all have of me, that I can see my way to no good, without your all standing like a lot of sign-posts pointing out the road.’

‘Young person,’ said Mr Charles, with some feeling, ‘you do see your road plainly enough, for that matter.’

‘But don’t take it; thank you. This is all very cosy and comfortable, quite in the old style. I should have begun to think that you were indeed quite—unattached, if you had gone on much longer without saying something severe.’

‘If beauties had not the privilege of inconsistency, I should remind you that your grievance against me was of another kind.’

Don't you remember a tiresome young Ensign of Foot, whose chief mode of depreciating you was the giving up to you his life, his hope, his future? His folly was to be too much in earnest in the matter—to forget, I mean, that the play was purely comic—which was wrong in a professed humourist. 'Sophy,' he said, changing his tone, 'you have a good, true, loyal heart, don't make a fool of yourself.'

'What do you mean?'

'I speak to you, dear, as a brother. You have two suitors, a snob and a gentleman,—take the right one.'

'Upon my word, Charley—'

'You don't know all his worth. You have thought me all along a boy, and so I was, but I am now a man, and I see many things clearly enough. I see that Ashleigh is one of the finest fellows that ever walked God's earth. Also, dear girl, I see very well why you can never be mine.'

'Mr Simpkin, this language—'

'You can't be mine, because, if you are true to yourself, you will be the wife of a

good, gallant gentleman who loves you and will make you happy; and I don't say that I shan't envy him. Sophy, you love him.'

At this moment Mr Palmer Brown came up from behind. Sophy, whose emotions had been varied, and in whom the Ensign had noticed a certain harsh tone of voice in some of her earlier bantering speeches, paused for a moment, and then took the Secretary's arm.

'Every gossip in the place is prating of it!' she said to herself as she walked away pale and thoughtful. She paraded herself on the Secretary's arm in the drawing-room, and sat down with him in a quiet corner talking in whispers. She caught Captain Ashleigh's eye, and only looked more lovingly on Mr Palmer Brown. The Captain's face was pale but very sorrowful. Perhaps he knew what he had to go through. Perhaps this particular bitterness and he had been familiar acquaintances once before. The hysterical exaggerated advances of a modest girl told their story plainly enough. He said a few kind words to her at parting, but his apparent

calmness only exaggerated her anger the more. He saw the path she had chosen, he knew whither it led, and he knew nothing could arrest her.

Mr Palmer Brown darted at his rival a smile of triumph, impertinent triumph. The 'Ironside' did not avoid his glance, but met it calmly, steadily. The result of this crossing of rapiers was not altogether to the satisfaction of the fat civilian. If he could have seen anger or even the affectation of contempt in his enemy's face, he would have been contented, but he saw there nothing but indifference—as far as he, the happy suitor, was concerned, perfect indifference. Now Mr Palmer Brown was not at all the man to like being regarded as a mere pawn in the game, a feeble piece which might be important from its accidental position, but which could have no inherent influence on the conflict of the stately knights and queens. This was not gratifying to the feelings of Mr Palmer Brown.

Mrs Liversege, who had watched the affair of the evening, struck the *coup de grace*; a foul

blow, but a very effective one. She felt that when the Captain had said that his union with Sophy was impossible, he must have meant that the rupture of an oath on the part of one in a secret, by no means releases another; thus Sophy was still held asunder from him by compact as well as by the growth of adverse events. But an angry, vindictive woman is not always scrupulous. She saw that he had furnished her with a weapon in his disparagement of Sophy, but she also knew that any amount of disparaging statements retailed to a young lady as coming from the lips of her lover will not always smother love, so she thought it wiser to have recourse to a garbled version of Mrs Throgmorton's narrative, which she fancied would be much more effective, and told Sophy that night that a lady was the cause of the rupture of Captain Ashleigh's marriage engagement.

‘What lady it was, dear, I was not told. But I taxed him with it, and he said he would do anything to preserve the matter a secret. She may have been worthy, she may have

been wicked, but he must have loved her. I have no hold upon him, he openly defied me to-day in somewhat rude language. He hinted that I had corrupted you, and said that a union with you was now impossible.'

The truthful form of these false words gave the lady some comfort for the time, but this comfort did not sustain her in after-years when the grass was growing upon the 'Ironside's' grave. Thence his words came back to her again and again, cold, hard, and merciless,—

'We on our side have striven to maintain the honour of your family through good and evil report. You, on your side, would traffic with it!'

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH SOPHY DANCES A QUADRILLE.

THE Nawaub's ball came off. One of the most lamentable infatuations during the mutiny was that which prompted people to neglect all wise precaution, that they might, in the words of Mr Prettijohn, 'show confidence in the natives.' This was the secret of balls and dinners to which the gentlemen went with revolvers and the ladies with scared faces. This was the secret which seduced the Calcutta officials into allowing armed brigades to break loose over the country when such might easily have been disarmed. This is the secret which but for a few lucky accidents would have allowed the struggle to begin with all our forts and arsenals in the Sepoys' hands. Mrs Liversege, who thought of driving off with Sophy to Agra in the mid-

dle of the night, is a very good specimen of politicals of this class. Irresolute, imperious, vindictive, and panic-stricken, she could not decide upon any new course, and allowed herself to drift at last into the very worst.

A final struggle was made against the ball that very morning. The Agra newspaper had come in with the memorable telegraphic message, which was all that all India knew for at least a week of the great event that had just happened. The sister of the post-master at Meerut sent this message to her aunt at Agra:—

‘The Cavalry have risen, setting fire to their own houses, and several officers’ houses, besides having killed and wounded all European officers and soldiers they could find near the lines. If aunt intends starting to-morrow evening please detain her from doing so, as the van has been prevented from leaving the station.’

These few words printed amongst the telegrams of the ‘Moffussilite’ were read at Nawaubgunge with mingled perplexity, terror,

and doubt. They were so read in every station and cantonment in India. And then consternation began to take the place of doubt, as their meaning began gradually to dawn. It was many days indeed before their full significance was understood, and people began to know what was on fire besides the Meerut bungalows. On this particular morning many proposed that the ball should be postponed until fuller information was received, and even Mrs Liversege was bewildered as well as frightened. She was afraid of going to Agra for fear the troopers (whose former revolt she remembered with a shudder) should turn against her during the journey. She was afraid of putting off the ball for fear of offending Fuzl Ali. She did not like to give the victory into the hands of Captain Ashleigh, and yet there were moments when she almost determined to make her husband rely wholly upon his clear head and ready hand. Eventually she preferred Fuzl Ali, and having chosen her straw, woman-like, she determined

to cling to it with obstinacy when the billows should close around her.

Mr Liversege was bolder with his wife this morning than he had ever been before in his life. Ashleigh's words had made a great impression on her, but they had made a still greater impression on him. She had felt all along that she was in the presence of a different nature from that of her own, a higher nature most probably. She had known that he was a brave man, a strong man, a talented man, and in spite of the hard facts which she tried to marshal together to justify her antagonism, she felt that he was a true man. And now, he had said there was great danger in going to the ball. The man whose judgment and insight she was forced to rely on in spite of herself had become convinced of a certain fact, and she found herself bound to accept that conviction, as well as to oppose it. To such paradoxes had terror, spite, anger, admiration, and bewilderment reduced the mind of our poor, old, imperious, selfish, mean, dull

Worshipper of Mammon at this particular crisis.

Mr Liversege, on the other hand, viewed the state of affairs with other eyes besides those of the Captain. He had seen a marked change in the natives for some considerable time. A friend had written to him long ago from Delhi, that ever since a certain decision about the succession there had been settled by Government, the natives talked openly of the Palace plots. And similar rumours came from the neighbourhood of the King of Oude. The Resident had never liked Fuzl Ali, and had no confidence in him whatever; whereas, on the other hand, he had such an opinion of Captain Ashleigh's judgment that he thought he would never hazard a conclusion without just grounds. The ball must be put off. It was untimely. It was unsafe. Never in his married life was Mr Liversege more nearly becoming a free agent than now. But again the famous system of 'double government,' of checks and counter-checks, told on him; as fatally perhaps as it did upon poor Lord Can-

ning in the face of the mutinous 19th. And when Mrs Liversege found that the inspiration of her husband proceeded chiefly from Captain Ashleigh, she dexterously gave her husband a very exaggerated version of the conversation that had taken place between the Captain and herself, at least of such portions of it as she thought would set her husband against the Captain; and it must be owned that when he heard that he was represented as a shallow schemer who had climbed to a high post on the political ladder merely to make his incapacity more conspicuous, and his downfall more summary, the worthy Resident of Nawaubgunge was very much incensed indeed, and I do not think that in this he was unreasonable.

And so to-night the scared ladies put on their ball-dresses and the officers their full uniforms, and the English homes of Delhi are smoking, and the great magazine is a blackened ruin, and Willoughby, its brave defender, is no more; and frightened ladies are scouring the open country; and the officers of the ex-

piring East India Company are lying down side by side with their assassins, or hastening in harness to their last parade amid the well-known signals of burning houses and dropping musket-shots ; and Canning and Prettijohn are assuring the timorous that their fears are exaggerated ; and John Lawrence and Montgomery are preparing to paralyze half the Bengal army by a rapid stroke, and Henry Lawrence is fortifying his Residency and getting in his grain, and the empire of Clive has broken out into flames ; and the fiddles of Nawaubgunge are playing merrily, and the Nawaub's ball-room is brilliantly lighted and profusely spread with flowers ; and the Nawaub in gold embroidery and velvet is paying a Persian compliment to Liversege Sahib, the Preserver of Order and Content and Happiness ; and Fuzl Ali is drilling a body of ruffians to rush in at twelve o'clock with their swords and targes. The wily Fuzl Ali has been scheming for many months, and now it appears his schemes are ripe.

Charley Simpkin will remember that deso-

late entertainment to his dying day. He carried a loaded revolver in his breast which he found a very uncomfortable accompaniment in the waltz. Motee and Mrs Throgmorton (who had come, somehow) and Mrs Langton and the other ladies looked terribly frightened, and the looks of the men were very anxious indeed. There was very little spirit in the dances. Mr Palmer Brown danced the first waltz with Sophy, and Charley heard him engage her for the second quadrille. After the waltz she walked about on Mr Palmer Brown's arm, and Charley saw her meet Captain Ashleigh and give him a very distant salutation. She then whispered very lovingly with the stout civilian, and appeared flushed and excited and not altogether easy in her mind.

Motée and her young Ensign had to dance the next dance together. It was the first quadrille. Just before it commenced they passed near Major Pulfington Belper, who was certainly the most unconcerned and happy man in the room.

‘What, Motee, are you going to trip it on the light fantastic? Hey!’ The Major always assumed a paternal air with Motee now. He was getting very fond of that young person.

At this moment Ashleigh came up to the Major, and the quadrille partners caught these words,—

‘Major, I want to speak to you. Go out through the upper door there into the verandah. I will go out here and meet you. I don’t want to be observed!’

The Major went out and did not appear in the ball-room again all through the evening. Sophy was engaged to him for the first quadrille. She came up to Motee just before it began. She was still hanging on the arm of the Secretary to the Nawaubgunge Residency.

‘Have you seen my partner, Motee, the excellent Major Pulfington Belper?’

‘He has just gone out,’ said Mr Simpkin, who was not spoken to. The haughty young lady paid no attention to him.

‘You ought to know where he is, Motee!’

‘Why, dear?’

‘ You take such an interest in all my dancing partners, don’t you, dear ? Mr Palmer Brown, I must be on my good behaviour to-night, I assure you.’

Mr Palmer Brown smirked and looked as if he were going to say something pretty and pleasant. Simpkin listened attentively, and would have given a month’s pay for one syllable.

‘ What am I to do, dear ? ’ resumed the excited Miss Sophy, ‘ my partner has deserted me. Should I be quite in harmony with the Indian proprieties, if I danced this dance with Mr Palmer Brown ? I have danced a waltz with him already, and I am engaged to him for the second quadrille. Quadrilles don’t count as dances, do they, dear ? ’

‘ I can answer that, Miss Brabazon. I looked into the Government Regulations this morning. A young lady is allowed to dance two dances with a field-officer if invested with the Order of the Bath, three dances with a civilian if he dances out of time, one dance with a subaltern or indigo planter—beyond

that she has no right to go.' Charley did not like to see the quizzing all on one side in the quadrille, and so he hit out.

'I did not ask you, sir,' said Sophy, bowing low and forgetting her rôle of tragedy queen. 'I am sure all you military men dance out of time, for that matter. I think Major Pulfington Belper should send you all to drill. Why, what's that under your coat? It can't be a revolver?'

'No, a newly-invented instrument for marking the time in the dances.'

'I declare it is a revolver. You took this for a fancy ball. You shouldn't have done that! I don't mind, but it might have alarmed some of the ladies!'

'Mr Simpkin need not alarm the ladies,' said the Secretary blandly. 'We, who get all the secret information, can assure him—'

'That Nawaubgunge secret information is not always trustworthy, sir,' said the young man, with such intention that the Secretary looked at him curiously.

‘I think, Miss Brabazon, we ought to let your young friend dance his quadrille. He is a good dancer, and so perhaps is a little annoyed at being detained.’

‘I must really tell you, Mr Palmer Brown, that “young friend” may be parliamentary language amongst Calcutta officials, but you must recollect another time that I shall not permit Indian convention to shear me of the respect due to me.’

‘Ensign Simpkin forgets our difference in rank, Miss Brabazon—,’ began the Secretary grandly.

‘I waive it, sir; but must tell you that I am called *Mr* Simpkin in my rank of life in England.’

‘Sir—’ said the Secretary in fury, but Sophy here interposed. She was getting frightened.

‘Oh, Charley, don’t be rash. Don’t mind him, sir. He’s an old friend of my family.’

‘I say, Miss Brabazon, this gentleman must be thankful to you if, on account of that

old family friendship, I do not use the power of my position to get this insubordination punished.'

'Now don't answer, Charley; remember your respective ranks!'

'I tell you I waive mine. French equality has long shuffled together, in every drawing-room, the gentleman and the—*informer*.' He said this last word in a whisper in Mr Palmer Brown's ear. That political officer turned deadly pale.

'Oh, don't mind what he says, Mr Palmer Brown, he is beyond himself,' said Sophy. 'Don't let it go any further!'

'Oh, Mr Palmer Brown won't let it go any further, I fancy,' said the Ensign quietly. 'On account of the old family friendship,' he added, as he carried Motee away.

'What's all this, Mr Simpkin?' said that young lady, 'I'm really quite bewildered, and is there really any danger?'

'I don't know, Miss Motee, and I sincerely hope not. I wanted, at any rate, to pitch a shot into Mr Palmer Brown.'

‘ You quite frightened me, and he was terribly put out. What does it all mean? ’

‘ Oh, nothing! ’

‘ Don’t you think after all that has occurred it was not quite wise to irritate Sophy still more? At least, if Captain Ashleigh’s chances—’

‘ Ashleigh’s chances, young lady! I have learnt much since we last spoke together, as Mr Palmer Brown perhaps guesses. I can’t tell you all, but I can mention this much, that this pretty drama has been played out once before. That young woman must be true to woman’s mission, which is to reject the gold and prefer the glitter of the pinch-beck. She has what is called a woman’s susceptibility; that is, a temper that leads her to quarrel with her real lover. She has a woman’s insight; which enables her to mis-read knaves and mis-value honest men. She has woman’s courage; and will need it in the life she is now choosing. Ashleigh’s chances, what are they, dear lady? I should not wonder if she accepted Palmer Brown to-night.’

And this is what actually did happen, although 'accept' is not quite the word to describe what really did take place. Mr Palmer Brown was as much bewildered as any one with the transactions of the last few days, and I do not think that he had at all settled to propose at this ball. He was not altogether easy in his mind about the young lady's sudden enthusiasm for him, perhaps he was a little frightened at it. Instead of dancing the first quadrille they walked about, and the love-making was certainly not on the gentleman's side. The latter seemed very much put out, I had almost said scared, at something that had recently taken place. Charley Simpkin, who was but a man after all, was almost beside himself at seeing them whispering together, and did not guess what bald disjointed common-places the Secretary was really uttering.

'Are you engaged for this waltz, Miss Brabazon?' He was determined to make one more effort, so he went up to the couple and put this question to the young lady.

‘Thank you, Mr Simpkin, I do not intend to dance it!’

‘I want particularly to speak to you,’ he said to her in a low voice, ‘do give me one dance!’

‘Thank you, I think we don’t get on together. Either you or I don’t dance to the time, I think it must be me!’

‘Sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh!’ Thus Mr Simpkin.

‘I don’t understand you!’ replied the young lady.

The quadrille, which Miss Sophy was to dance, at length struck up, and she and Mr Palmer Brown took their places. I don’t know how it came about, or what words were said, but it was during this particular quadrille that Miss Sophy Brabazon settled to become Mrs Palmer Brown. At one moment Charley observed the young lady very pale, very silent, and the fat Secretary very elated and very radiant. The deed must then have been accomplished. Fuzl Ali, bland and smiling and covered with jewels, was watch-

ing them, and he now came up to Mr Palmer Brown and paid him some graceful compliments, saying that the Houris smiled on the devout, talented, and compassionate man, and made earth a heaven—when Sophy, looking up, was startled to see Captain Ashleigh walking straight up to where they were standing. His face was calm, but there was a sternness which she had never before seen there. She was so attracted by his look that she did not observe that he was attended by four cavalry troopers.

Captain Ashleigh walked straight up to Fuzl Ali, and touching him on the shoulder, said, in Hindustanee, to the soldiers, ‘Take him away!’

The soldiers immediately seized Fuzl Ali, who turned pale and green. The entrance of these men with the Captain had been observed by all in the ball-room, and the officers immediately put on their swords and produced their pistols, and the ladies grew terribly frightened and some screamed, and a great noise was heard in the principal doorway, and

a number of servants of the Nawaub appeared there all heavily armed, and talking together noisily. The moment was a very critical one.

‘Bring in those men, Mr Jones!’ called out the Captain in a sharp clear voice, and a party of Irregular Cavalry, in all about forty, marched into the room, and were halted, facing the natives at the doorway, whose numbers and excitement kept rapidly increasing. The troopers were armed with their carbines.

Captain Ashleigh now walked up to the crowd of natives in the doorway, taking with him Ressaldar Sheikh Khoda Bux and four troopers. He selected two or three of the natives there, and gave them also in charge to the soldiers. His calm, collected manner awed the attendants of the Nawaub, and they made no resistance, but the moment was one of the intensest excitement to all concerned in it.

‘What is the meaning of this, Mr Liversege, and have you got up this scene to surprise us?’ Mrs Liversege was not in the main room when all this was going on, and this was her first question on coming into it.

‘ My love, I know nothing about it ! ’ said the great functionary thus addressed.

‘ But I suppose you have been informed by whose authority this scene has been enacted, and who has given orders that the ladies should be frightened in this way ? ’

And now Fuzl Ali, who had been quite abashed and irresolute, plucked up a little courage, and said to Mr Palmer Brown,

‘ Why am I seized like a malefactor ? If there is no charge against me, give orders that these men may release their hold, as they hurt my shoulders. ’

Mr Palmer Brown spoke a few words in a low voice to Mr Liversege ; he then asked Captain Ashleigh how it was that this important step had been taken without the authority of the Resident of Nawaubgunge, and whilst he was putting his question, the Captain rather unceremoniously turned, and made a signal to Mr Jones the Adjutant. Immediately Fuzl Ali and the other prisoners were marched out, placed in a carriage, and driven off under an escort to the Cavalry lines.

Captain Ashleigh then walked up to Mr Liversege and said to him,

‘Those natives, sir, are arrested by the order of the military commandant of the station, on a charge of treason.’

‘Dear me,’ said Mr Liversege, ‘this is very serious. We had better send the ladies home.’

‘Stop,’ said the great lady, ‘I think the proceedings have been most unusual.’

‘My love,’ interrupted Mr Liversege, ‘I think we men had better discuss these important matters.’

An animated conversation here seemed to arise between Mr Liversege and his wife. It was carried on in whispers, and the Resident was observed to deprecate by gestures a great deal that the lady was urging. At last she said out loud,

‘You are the Resident of the station. You allow a most important step to be taken without your sanction. You allow an eminent native to be hurried away in a carriage. I think you ought at once to give orders that

that eminent native should be brought back, and you should not let him be taken away again, at least until you hear what there is against him !’

Captain Ashleigh here chimed in, firmly, ‘That native Fuzl Ali is thus sent off by the order of the chief military authority. I must obey my orders, and produce him to-morrow morning when required.’

‘But should you receive a counter-order from a higher authority?’ said Mr Palmer Brown.

‘No higher authority would think of doing so, and if he did I should think that it was absolutely necessary to refuse to obey him !’

‘I think, sir,’ said Mr Liversege sternly, ‘that you are, then, taking a little too much upon yourself.’

‘I am glad you see that at last, my dear,’ said Mrs Liversege in a high key.

But here Mr Girdlestone the judge, Mr Indigo Jones, and some of the other gentlemen of weight and standing, went up and

remonstrated quietly with Mr Liversege. They represented that the crisis was very serious, and that it would be best to get the ladies at once back again to cantonments, those who had witnessed the whole scene being very scared and frightened. Eventually even Mrs Liversege was got into a carriage, and the line of conveyances was escorted by officers armed with revolvers, and patrols of Cavalry were observed at intervals all along the road. The barouche was open as the night was hot, and Sophy was glad of a little fresh air, as she felt almost choked with her various emotions. She had seen the glaring looks and menacing gestures of the natives in the door-way, and felt very frightened indeed. She scarcely heeded the half-blustering, half-frightened remarks which Mrs Liversege was making to her husband in the carriage. There was no moon, and no star to be seen in the heavens, and the air was choky and the road dusty. The solitary torch of a cavalry picket here and there lit up the surrounding gloom. What had she done at the ball, and how was

it all to end? The figure of a turbaned horseman, a glimpse of which she caught at one of the pickets, complicated this question that night as she tossed upon her sleepless pillow.

CHAPTER X.

PUNY WHIPSTERS.

THE gentle reader must have been astonished at the daring order issued by Major Pulfington Belper, quite in the teeth apparently of his strong faith in the Bengal Sepoy and the Nawaubgunge political authorities; and, to tell you the truth, in the calm coolness of the next morning no one was more astonished and shocked at the Major's exceptional audacity than Major Pulfington Belper himself.

He had gone out into the verandah in obedience to Captain Ashleigh's summons, and that gentleman's energy and pertinacity had at length compelled the poor Major most reluctantly to accede to all that he required. From one point of view the task mapped out for our quaint old friend seemed easy enough.

It was simply to allow his name to be used, and to go himself quietly off to the Captain's bungalow, in fact, to keep completely out of the way, for fear that his presence might ruin all.

‘But — but — you know this is very serious, Ashleigh — a most important step. They'll say why didn't I consult with the Resident.’

‘Why really, Major, how can you? He's in the hands of that silly old woman.’

‘Mrs Liversege—you mean!’ said the military commandant, as a point of duty.

‘Besides, it's touch and go. There's no time!’

‘But don't you see, it's all very well for you, Ashleigh! You are satisfied that you have evidence that the Sepoys will break out to-night, but I have none. To-morrow morning when I am asked—’

‘Oh, throw it all on me. I'll take the responsibility.’

‘Yes—yes, that's very well—’

‘Look here, Major! There's not a mo-

ment to be lost. You are out of the way. They can't question you. You have heard that Fuzl Ali and others have prepared an outbreak for twelve o'clock to-night whilst the English guests are at supper. You order me to go down and arrest Fuzl Ali, whilst you look after your men. You have done all you can, and to-morrow morning the whole burden of producing evidence of the plot falls upon me. Do go off! I have a hundred picked troopers ready, chiefly Seikhs.'

'Yes, but I ought to be on the spot as the chief military authority.'

'Do you wish to see the throats of all the ladies cut?'

'Hang it, Ashleigh, you must not talk like that.'

'What would you do when that woman in her blind trust of Fuzl Ali ordered his release? You would give in. I won't.'

'But I really don't see my way. What are your proofs that the Sepoys will break out?'

'Is there time to talk of such things? I have

already arrested three of the ringleaders in my lines, and Soobahdar Seetul Tewarry of your regiment. We may cow them for a time, and when they hear that Fuzl Ali is taken, it may stave off the evil day until we can get the ladies to Agra. For God's sake, let us settle it all before it is too late.'

'But really—'

'I may arrest them in your name, then? I have your orders to carry the ringleaders to the Cavalry lines!'

'Well, it is an immense responsibility, Ashleigh!'

'And you'll go off to my bungalow, so that they cannot find you if they want to set them free.'

'But I can't see why it is so absolutely necessary that I should be out of the way.' And this was the question which puzzled the Major most all through the night. It struck him as very humiliating that a brave *Chevalier des dames* could best assist them in a great crisis by a daring act of absence. And then what were the ladies doing at the palace?

How was it all to end? And as the morning neared the terrible spectacle of a great personage armed with all the power and dignity of the Indian Government became more and more prominent. How was he possibly to explain to the satisfaction of that great inquisitor how it was that, much against his private convictions and wishes, he had outrageously braved this tremendous authority? Morning came, and the scene was even more terrible than the Major's heated imagination had pictured it. Mrs Liversege had fretted all through the night at the indignity which she thought had been offered to the status of Resident. Very early Major Pulfington Belper received a summons, and Captain Ashleigh, who had been in the saddle patrolling half the night, went with him to the Residency.

Mr Liversege was stern and excited. He too had passed a boisterous night. He had vainly endeavoured to persuade his spouse to go off with the other ladies to Agra.

'They will say, love, that you are not equal to the crisis if you do anything of the sort!'

Her fears of the Irregular Cavalry had returned. Mr Liversege was at last persuaded to carry matters with a high hand in the matter of the arrest of Fuzl Ali without his authority. Mr Palmer Brown was to be present on the occasion. Did Mrs Liversege expect him to incite by his presence the lukewarm Resident?

‘This is a very serious business,’ that grave officer began. ‘You took upon yourself a very great responsibility indeed, Major Pulfington Belper. By arresting the principal personages of this native court you have created the very gravest difficulties. And you have done all this without any reference to the authority of the officials in whose hands the political power is invested by the paramount Government.’

‘Well, sir,’ stammered the poor Major, ‘I received information that a grave danger was hanging over us—and was obliged to act—at least, was advised—’

‘Yes, sir, I advised Major Pulfington Bel-

per—' said Captain Ashleigh, and he was at once interrupted by Mr Palmer Brown.

'Stop, sir, Major Pulfington Belper is making his explanations to the Resident of Nawaubgunge, we cannot listen to anybody else.'

'Yes,' said the Resident, 'we require Major Pulfington Belper himself to make his explanation.'

Mr Liversege had not forgotten that he had been considered a schemer who had climbed up the political ladder in order to make his incapacity more conspicuous and his downfall more summary, and his manner to the Captain was stern.

'Well, sir, I received information that Fuzl Ali had planned a rising—'

'That is important, Major Pulfington Belper,' said Mr Liversege; 'what proofs did you receive of all this?'

'Well, sir, I can't say that I had exactly any proofs—'

'What! you had no proofs at all, and you

took this tremendous responsibility upon yourself without any reference to me? I fear I shall be obliged to take upon myself the responsibility of depriving you of your command.'

But here Captain Ashleigh chimed in again, and would not be interrupted any more. This was fortunate for the Major, as the scene was getting too bewildering.

'The fact is, sir, no one can give you all the particulars except me. I gave certain information to Major Pulfington Belper, but could only give him very little, as immediate action was absolutely necessary for the safety of the station. The two regiments were to break out at twelve o'clock when you were all at the ball. I immediately took upon myself the responsibility of arresting three of the ringleaders in my own regiment, and Soobahdar Seetul Tewarry of the 44th, and I came down at once to the palace with a picked body of cavalry and pointed out to Major Pulfington Belper that there was not a moment to be lost, and that he must immediately look after his own men, which he went off to do,

appointing to me the task of at once arresting Fuzl Ali and his accomplices. As I took the initiative upon information which I could only partially explain in my hurry, I consider that the whole responsibility rests with me.'

And Captain Ashleigh then spoke of the many hints which he had received from old soldiers and old natives of the place, that Fuzl Ali had long been tampering with the regiments, and of the more direct warnings from the same sources that the *Sahib Logue* would do well to be vigilant at the moment of the ball. But the information on which he chiefly acted was from a native who had told him positively that Fuzl Ali had actually formed a plan for the two regiments to rise whilst the *Sahibs* were at supper at the ball. A few of the most daring soldiers were to rush through the regimental lines with loaded muskets, and surprise and fear would cause the bulk of their comrades to join them. When Captain Ashleigh however was pressed by Mr Palmer Brown for the name of his informant, and for the reasons why he placed such reliance upon

his testimony, he refused positively to give up either.

‘I had every reason to trust his statement, and I now know that it was a true one, but his life would not be worth five minutes’ purchase if it were known that he had been called up and examined. Besides, I have given him a solemn promise, so my giving his name up is quite out of the question.’

Mr Liversege was really very much disturbed at the news, and felt it was true, but when Mr Palmer Brown brought his first-class powers of lucid official obfuscation to bear on the question, and show that there was not a single iota of what could be really called evidence adduced,—that the hints and warnings were of the vaguest, and the testimony of this one unknown witness, however reliable it might seem to the untrained judgment of a regimental officer, was not of a weight sufficient to affix the grave crime of treason upon some of the most exalted natives of India, the Ex-Judge of the Sudder Dewany Adawlut was compelled to admit, that from a Sudder-

Dewany Adawlut point of view the Secretary was right.

‘ And when were you first satisfied by this unknown, this mysterious, this unproducible witness, that a revolt was a certainty ? ’ Thus Mr Palmer Brown.

‘ The night of the ball ! ’

‘ About what hour—five, seven, ten ? ’

‘ About six o’clock ! ’

‘ Oh, about six o’clock ; that gave you, surely, some time to communicate with the recognized authorities—had you so wished it ! ’

‘ Not much time ! ’

‘ Not much time, perhaps, but surely some time. Why did you not inform those authorities ? ’

‘ Well, you see I had no evidence to satisfy you legal gentlemen, and I wanted to save all your lives.’

Mr Liversege here fired up.

‘ Captain Ashleigh, I must say that in that you went beyond, much beyond your authority. I must say that you there exhibited a con-

tempt of the recognized authorities which is most grave, so much so that I scarcely know how to mark sufficiently strongly my sense of your conduct.'

'I feel it my duty, sir,' said Mr Palmer Brown, 'at a moment when regimental insubordination is producing such bitter fruits in India,—I really feel it my duty, sir, to counsel you to place this insubordinate officer under arrest, as an example to others.'

'I really think I must, sir; however much I may regret it,' said Mr Liversege gravely.

'You cannot really mean it:' the Captain's pale face seemed much moved. 'We have just escaped from a great danger, and you choose this moment—'

'I repeat it, sir,' said the Resident; 'I must call upon Major Pulfington Belper to put you under arrest, and deprive you of your sword.'

'Come, Ashleigh,' said the Major, thus appealed to, 'I have no choice but to demand your sword.'

The Captain drew the sword that was

dangling at his side. It was a sharp native tulwar, and was pronounced by his troopers (who were excellent judges) to be of the very purest Damascus steel. He was about to present it to Major Pulfington Belper, but he suddenly paused, and holding it out before him, said to Mr Liversege,

‘This sword, sir, was given to me at the close of the battle of Moodkee, my first battle, by an old officer who was mortally wounded on that day. It saw thirty years’ campaigning with him, and has been present on very nearly every important Indian field since that time. I must say that I had hoped some day to pass it on without a stain—’

‘Sir,’ said Mr Palmer Brown, ‘you can understand that this is scarcely an occasion on which we can listen to an appeal to the feelings.’

‘And all I can say is,’ resumed the ‘Iron-side’ to Mr Liversege, quite heedless of this charge of sentiment, ‘you seem to me to be acting very unwisely in the step you are taking. In a few days the doubt of last night

will be changed into certainty, and your present act will only draw the attention of Government to the ill-timed ball, and to what it very nearly resulted in. Believe me, Mr Liversege, I know enough of what is going on in Calcutta to tell you you will rue this act !’

‘ I think, sir,’ said Mr Liversege, ‘ I should deserve all you threaten me with if I allowed myself to be thus intimidated from inflicting upon you the disgrace—’

‘ So you think *my* disgrace will be the result of your act,’ said the Captain in a curious tone. ‘ You little know what you are doing,—by Heaven, you don’t.’

And Captain Ashleigh was deprived of his sword, and Fuzl Ali was released from arrest.

At six o’clock the same morning half-a-dozen people were talking in the verandah of Captain Langton’s house.

‘ What ! Colonel Finnis of the 11th shot on the parade ?’ said Captain St Leger.

‘ Yes, and Mac Nab of the 3rd Cavalry, and

'Taylor and Macdonald of the 20th,' said Langton.

'They burnt the whole of Meerut almost. They were to have risen when every one was at church. Mrs Chambers, the Adjutant's wife, was killed in the compound of the house. They set her clothes on fire first of all.'

'They say they did worse than that in some of the houses. For God's sake, keep the "Moffussilite" from the ladies.'

'How is Mrs Langton?'

'Pretty well, thank you, Simpkin! The ladies were terribly frightened, and will be more so when they read to-day's news.'

'Ashleigh behaved like a trump. I wonder how old Belper became so wonderfully energetic all of a sudden—and whether he believes in Meerut now.'

'Seen the bad news, gentlemen?' here called out Mr Girdlestone the judge, who was riding by with Mr Indigo Jones. The two entered the compound.

'Yes, we've got the "Moffussilite," with the whole of the account of the Meerut affair.'

‘ But you’ve also got the “ Extra ? ” ’

‘ No ! ’

‘ Oh, then you have only heard half the bad news, I am sorry to say. The brutes got away to Delhi. Somehow they were only pursued a short way by the Cavalry and Horse Artillery. The Delhi Sepoys fired in the air, and then left their officers on the road to be cut to pieces by the troopers of the 3rd Cavalry. Willoughby sprung the magazine, but Delhi is now in the hands of the rebels.’

‘ Yes,’ said Mr Indigo Jones, ‘ and the Commissioner Mr Frazer, and Captain Douglas, and two ladies, were murdered in the palace. Numbers of others were killed in the bazar. The atrocities were something frightful.’

‘ What is this, dear ? ’ and the figure of a pale lady dressed in white and holding two little children appeared at one of the doors of the drawing-room.

‘ Nothing, love,’ said Captain Langton. ‘ There are some more rumours from Meerut.

I will tell you by-and-by,' and he rose to take his wife by the hand and lead her back to an inner room.

'I want some *meh tai*, saucy-wollah!' said the little girl, breaking away and climbing up Mr Charley Simpkin's knees and searching that officer's pockets.

'I'll bring some in the afternoon, it is too early now. The shops are not open!'

'What, haven't you got any? Oh, you are very Nutkhut;' and the children were led away.

'After the morning's news, I suppose the Resident will send the ladies to Agra without delay?' said Mr Girdlestone.

'I hope to goodness he will.'

'I was at the telegraph office just now,' said Mr Jones. 'Anson is coming down from the hills. By-the-by, the baboo had a curious telegram to Mr Vesey at Calcutta, just sent to the office by Ashleigh. He asked me to decipher it. These were the words: "Pulled through. Worse and worse. In arrest. Accepted."''

‘Have you heard the news?’ said Mr Hodges, riding into the compound.

‘I should think so,—Delhi! Meerut! Poor Hodges is always behind time.’

‘Not that. Ashleigh is under arrest, and Fuzl Ali is released.’

‘Good heavens! you don’t mean it?’ said Mr Girdlestone.

‘Fact.’

‘Oh, some of us must go to the Resident at once,—Jones, Langton. He is going daft. We must see what can be done!’

‘Come on!’ said Mr Indigo Jones.

Mr Liversege was unencumbered with his aides-de-camp when the three gentlemen came in. He also had just read the terrible news of the morning, and when Mr Girdlestone, to whose opinion he attached great weight, told him that it was the opinion of all the English officers and most of the natives, that, on the preceding evening, they had all escaped a terrible calamity, the poor, weak

old gentleman was driven into a state of immense excitement. Why had this dangerous Fuzl Ali been released? If the Resident of Nawaubgunge had had entirely his own way, I don't think such an event would ever have happened.

Mr Liversege agreed that it was now quite necessary that the ladies should go off to Agra that very night. He asked Mr Girdlestone and his friends to go round at once and get the ladies to make their preparations for the journey. Ashleigh's plan was in part selected, and it was hastily arranged that at sunset the ladies should all drive off escorted by a few Seikhs, and by Mr Girdlestone, Mr Indigo Jones, Mr Chiffney Chaffney, and a few of the junior officers. The senior officers actually belonging to the station would have, of course, to remain at their posts. It was hoped that the check which the rebel plotters had received last night would keep them quiet for at least a day or two. But Mr Liversege positively refused to release Captain Ashleigh from arrest. His confinement, he said,

was quite disconnected with the truth or falsehood of the supposed insurrection.

So the poor scared ladies were informed that they were to depart that evening, and long before the morning was half over they all knew the terrible tidings from Meerut and Delhi, and that in spite of every precaution. Charley Simpkin went galloping about from house to house for fear that some might not have been warned. He saw Mrs Peckham packing away like an old campaigner. He saw Mrs Halliday, and Miss Halliday, and the latter, although she had usually treated him as one of the hostile camp, looked kindly on him to-day. He went over again to the Langtons to see if he could be of any use; Langton was out, and Mrs Langton, who was collecting together the few poor valuables she intended to carry off, gave him the children, *Missy* and *Baboo*, to keep quiet during the operation.

‘I hope there will be a nice battle. Do you think this sword is big enough to kill a mutineer?’ said valiant Mr *Baboo*.

‘Oh, you know it is naughty to say that,’ said the more pacific Missy. ‘You know that the wicked Sepoys burnt a lady in her compound, setting fire to her dress. They might do the same to dear mamma.’ The children knew everything, and it appears that the native servants had already discussed with them contingencies like the latter. Quaintly did prattling innocence play with terrors in these grim days, as the Lucknow infants at marbles with the hot musket-bullets of the enemy.

Mrs Langton now came in again, and suddenly cross-examined Mr Charley with much energy.

‘There is really danger, Mr Simpkin, very great danger, is there not?’

‘There is some danger, Mrs Langton, but I trust it will soon be over.’

‘Do you think the Sepoys will really revolt? I know Henry is much more anxious than he says he is.’

‘I don’t think they will just yet. You will soon be on your road, and if they did they

think most of plunder at first. In Agra you will be quite safe.'

'But Henry and all of you that remain behind—'

'Oh, we are soldiers,' said the young man, with a smile. 'Besides, Ashleigh is putting up sandbags, and getting in ammunition and stores into our big house, but keep this a secret.'

'But you have to lie down with the Sepoys at night now, have you not?'

'We must do our duty, Mrs Langton,—we must remain at our posts and trust in God!'

'Who's that frightening my wife?' said Captain Langton, coming in at the moment.

'Oh, it's only Mr Simpkin,' said the lady, 'he is so brave, and has given me so much confidence. He says that Ashleigh is fortifying his house as a refuge for you all.'

'And are you still very good and brave?' said the husband fondly.

'Oh, very brave indeed!' said the wife with a smile. She flew into his arms, a tall,

pale, worn-out, still handsome, brown-haired woman. He folded his strong arms round her and caressed her cheek. He was a robust, big-whiskered, broad-shouldered man of seven-and-thirty. Simpkin remembered the scene for many a day. There were many such strong, sad embraces now.

When his wife had left the room the manner of the Captain changed.

‘All must go wrong. There is a fate about it all. That idiotic old woman has countermanded the departure of the ladies.’

‘What, Mrs Liversege !’

‘Nobody knows why. She has fixed it for to-morrow evening instead, at the same hour.’

‘Old Liversege ought to be superseded.’

‘Mrs Liversege ought to be hanged.’

And so the ladies of Nawaubgunge had to pass another terrible night in fear and trembling.

‘What is it ? Has anything happened ?’ said Mrs Langton in terror. She had dozed off at midnight, and woke up to find her hus-

band up and dressed. He was putting a revolver into his belt by the light of the coconut oil night-light.

‘No, love, go to sleep. There’s a good child. It is my turn for patrol duty.’ And Simpkin and the stalwart Broomielaw and Mr Indigo Jones, who were waiting at a turn of the road, accompanied the Captain through the bazar and round the lines, and past the various guards. . There were many other watchers wide awake in Nawaubunge that night. Simpkin patrolled three times. The saddle, the steed, and the revolver were a support in those terrible days.

‘It would be better to die like a soldier than like a dog!’ thought the young man as he rode silently by his companions.

It was not until the afternoon of the next day that the cause of the new delay was made out. Mrs Liversege then wrote over to Mrs Pulfington Belper to come to the Residency at five o’clock:

Affairs seemed so uncertain that they had thought it advisable to get Sophy married be-

fore the departure of the ladies to Agra. Mr Liversege as Resident was empowered in certain cases to witness the civil contract, and the Rev. Saunders M. Causland, a missionary who had just come in from the district with other fugitives, had consented to read the religious service. Would Motee be bridesmaid? It was thus that even amid her terror Mrs Liversege found opportunity of gratifying her malice. Mrs Pulfington Belper and Motee got into their carriage and went over at once to the Residency, there was no time to be lost. The marriage was fixed for five o'clock, and it was now past four. Mrs Liversege was in her bed-room, her sister followed her thither. Sophy was in the drawing-room, and Motee went to her.

‘Sophy, is this your doing?’ said Motee kindly but very gravely.

‘My doing, love,’ said Sophy.

‘Yes, your doing. Is it entirely your own will that is consulted in the engagement and also in this very hasty marriage?’

‘Why, as to the marriage just now, that

was first of all my aunt's idea. As to the engagement, love, I don't quite know what you mean. Of course such things are entirely one's own free act—'

'But reflect, dear. Such acts are sometimes done in a moment of bewilderment, of irritation, of anger, of who knows what transient emotion. Pause and consider this ere it be too late. Are you quite sure you love Mr Palmer Brown?'

'Do I love him? Not perhaps in the sense that you attach to the word. That sort of love reads very well in a novel, but it does not enter over frequently into the marriages that are made up in the hard matter-of-fact world—made up in India. Few girls marry in this life the individual they once really loved, or fancied they did, which is the same thing.' Sophy was as calm and collected as usual, a trifle paler perhaps, and a little restless at times.

'Do you love him at all?' said Motee bluntly.

‘What a question! Why, to-day he is to be my husband!’ said Sophy complacently.

‘Sophy!’ said Motee, seizing her friend in a warm embrace, ‘we once settled that we were to have no secrets the one from the other. We were friends, real friends in those days, and although we have since drifted away, far far away from that period of our lives, I think at heart that we are friends still, and this emboldens me to speak plainly with you when I find you now so different from your former self, so hard, so cold. Sophy, being your friend, I have long guessed and shared your secret and its sorrow.’

‘Don’t talk on such subjects, love!’ said Sophy eagerly.

‘Ought I not to stretch out a hand to save you from a precipice, if I know that you love him?’

‘Hush, dear, you must not talk like that. I once did give him my love—but not perhaps to the extent you fancy. He released me from my engagement of his own free will.

I don't blame him, though, if you knew all—'

'Silly girl. If you knew all, indeed!' said a voice at the end of the room, and Mrs Pulfington Belper appeared stern and scared, but with a terrible earnestness. 'Silly, vain child! Are you quite out of your senses? The soldier is worth fifty of the other. He is a noble heart, and you ought to go down on your knees and thank God Almighty for the love of such a man; whilst the other—'

'Mrs Pulfington Belper, not a word, please, of Mr Palmer Brown,' said Miss Sophy, with dignity. 'Recollect that in less than an hour he will be my husband!'

'Why did you let them blind you? You little know what you are doing! Silly, silly girl, you little know whither they are leading you blindfold. My sister ought to be ashamed of herself.'

'Perhaps I know a great deal more than you think, Mrs Pulfington Belper.'

'No, you don't, child, or you would be utterly heartless, which you are not. You are

selfish and worldly, but you have still a heart. Listen. Once upon a time there was a young girl in India, like you in many points,—with much frivolity and some feeling—frivolity which her foolish parents fostered with all the vain pleasures of the world—feeling which they did their best to stifle. She fell in love with a brave, loyal gentleman, and might have been happy if her vanity had not driven him away from her. In pique she married a man whom she did not care for—a civilian.’

‘I don’t know that this has much to do with my story,’ said Sophy, with affected indifference.

‘Don’t you, love? you will find that it has!’ said Mrs Pulfington Belper drily. ‘The civilian ill-treated his wife—beat her.’

‘Oh, I see; these are some of the old calumnies about Mr Palmer Brown and my cousin.’

‘She fled to the house of her old lover,—his name was—Frederick Ashleigh.’

‘Fled—to the house of Frederick Ashleigh!’ said Sophy, in great surprise. And Mrs Pulfington Belper poured out into her aston-

ished ear the story with which the reader is already acquainted, the story of Ashleigh's sacrifice and Mrs Liversege's cruel abuse of it. She was impressive, excited, eloquent. Recent events had softened this stern lady and rendered her more human. Sophy received the recital in absolute consternation. She was silent, bewildered, beaten down. Before Mrs Pulfington Belper had quite done, Mrs Liversege came in to announce that the bridegroom and Mr M. Causland were waiting in the Resident's study.

'There will be no marriage to-day, my dear,' said Mrs Pulfington Belper with emphasis.

'No marriage! What do you mean?'

'We have had some conversation about past events, Sophy and I—'

But here, to the great bewilderment of Motee and Mrs Pulfington Belper, Sophy came forward and expressed herself willing to go on with the ceremony. Her words were low and faint. Her manner was scared. Her face was deadly pale! But she mustered up

strength enough to lead the way to Mr Liversege's study.

'She's a thoroughly bad girl!' said Mrs Pulfington Belper as she followed to watch events.

A rude awakening for poor Sophy had the last half-hour of time brought along with it. As clearly and curtly the story of Ashleigh, the heart of his mystery, the key of his life—and hers—was disclosed to her, she listened as one asleep. The chief figure seemed familiar, changed, infinitely improved, but still to belong partly to her dreams; and yet simultaneously the panorama of the past seemed to unfold itself in clear outline, and she remembered how nobly and consistently in every little action he had played his difficult part; and how she had played hers, before his eyes, ever since she landed in India. And then she felt a violent craving for some bitter expiation, some cloak for her shame, and a strange resolution suggested itself. Mr Palmer Brown. Should she, like her poor cousin, allow her folly to march on to its

bitter consequences? After her last cruel speech with Ashleigh, she felt she could never look him in the face again. Would it not be a relief to her, if at any cost to herself, she could trample out his love, his hope at once and for ever, by showing him the vain, unworthy object of it in exaggerated but still true colours? Then it was that, nerving herself to the effort, our poor bewildered little heroine, in the first burst of her exaggerated remorse, walked down into her uncle's study and took her stand by Mr Palmer Brown and the Rev. M. Causland.

There was some delay in commencing the solemn service, but when every one had taken his place, including Major Pulfington Belper, who was in waiting below, the clergyman opened the book, but he had not read far when the congregation was interrupted by a sound as of distant musketry.

‘I beg your pardon,’ said Mr Liversege, ‘but what is that?’

‘It sounded like a few dropping shots,’ said the Major.

‘It seems to have stopped,’ said Mr Palmer Brown, and the reading proceeded, but the hearers looked scared, and before the Rev. gentleman had come to the portion of the service where the man is asked if he will take the woman for wife, a clanking sound was heard outside, and Charley Simpkin entered in haste, with a pale scared face.

He walked straight up to Mr Liversege and whispered with him for a minute. The excitement of the congregation was painful.

‘Collecting together! Bless me!’ said the worthy Resident.

‘What means this interruption?’ said the great lady.

‘It is thought necessary, love, as a precautionary measure, that we should all collect in one house.’

‘Nonsense, finish the service first. There is no chance of anything commencing.’

‘None, madam,’ said Mr Simpkin dryly, ‘it has commenced!’

‘Commenced!’

‘Yes, listen to the musketry:’ a sound of

distinct volley-firing here broke upon the ear. 'There is however no alarm. The ladies must get at once into the carriages. We will form the escort, and a small party of Seikhs has also been sent. I am ordered to bring you to the rendezvous. The rest of the station is already collecting.'

'Where, sir? They must come here, sir.'

'In Captain Ashleigh's house. Those are the orders.'

'Orders, sir! Whose orders?' said Mrs Liversege.

'Yes, whose orders?' said Mr Liversege.

'The orders, sir, of the new Resident of Nawaubgunge!'

CHAPTER XI.

‘GOOD-BYE, ADA!’

THE four ladies were stowed away in Major Pulfington Belper's landau, which had brought over the ladies from his house. Mr Liversege got on the box. The remaining gentlemen mounted their horses and buckled on their revolvers and swords. The musketry was very distinct in various parts of the native lines, and a column of white smoke which was rising into the sky showed that the burning of English houses was progressing. Ten Seikh horsemen were drawn up in the compound of the Residency. These were joined by the small detachment of amateur cavalry, and the whole body rode out together, and preceded the carriage into the bazar. Here, with the exception of an occasional black look, the demeanour of the natives was much the same as

usual. Soon the party took a sharp turn to the right; by that means an open road was reached which led, though circuitously, to the Captain's house, which was situated at the right of the officers' lines, but a little apart.

'There, now it's all clear,' said Simpkin, urging the coachman not to spare his whip. 'There is a bit of bazar close to the house. If we pass that we are all right.'

'But, goodness gracious,' said Major Pulfington Belper, who was cantering along with a very bewildered face, 'how did it all happen? What has happened?'

'They broke out about half-past four. They came to your house first, Major. Lucky you were away. Ashleigh learnt they were going to break out about four, and sent about to collect the ladies at once. I couldn't get to the Residency the ordinary way, and had to come round, hence the delay. I hope to goodness all the other ladies are now safe!'

'But this new piece of news—about the Residency?'

'The telegram has only just arrived. It

is a long story. Vesey has wanted to get him made Resident for a long time, but he refused, partly on her account, and partly on account of this secret, which, by-the-by, is very little secret now. But when he was put under arrest he saw no other way of saving the station, and sent a telegram to Calcutta.'

'Resident of Nawaubgunge! You know I wouldn't have put him under arrest if I'd known—'

'Yes, Major, that was serious,' said the young man with a smile. 'But console yourself. If you put a Resident under arrest, without you he could not have been Resident.'

'How?'

'Why, you have unconsciously brought a secret to light.'

'What—which?'

'Palmer Brown was afraid of you for some reason; so much we have known all along. Well, one day in despair of all other means, I appealed to Mrs Pulfington Belper to save Sophy from the civilian, as I knew she loved Ashleigh. Then bit by bit she let out the

whole affair about the cousin, and I, who had long been putting things together to try and find out what was the pull that Palmer Brown thought you had over him, got luckily by a fluke on the right track.'

'But I had no pull over him.—What do do you mean? Hey?' said the bewildered Major.

'He thought you had, which is the same thing. I telegraphed to Vesey, and he saw the thing in a moment. He went to Mr Ignatius, and there, sure enough, he found a letter from Mr Palmer Brown, kept amongst the secret correspondencè, giving a very unfair account of the proceedings of that eventful night; and there, in answer to a communication from Government calling upon him for evidence of what he had adduced, was another letter in which he pointed out that his communication was of that amiable kind called "semi-official" (which means slander without its responsibility); that all parties concerned wished now to have the matter hushed up, as the honour of a lady was at stake; that he

preferred to withdraw his letter rather than have it known he had written it; but if they wished to make private inquiry into the facts of the case, Captain Pulfington Belper was the chum of Ashleigh, living in the same house, and could give them every information. Palmer Brown was afraid afterwards to catechise you, and never learnt that Ashleigh on his side had quashed all inquiry, which prevented Government from appealing to you.'

'Well, but—'

'Well, you see it was evident that the first letter was written *after* the oath had been taken by all of you, so the compact was no longer binding on Ashleigh with reference to Government, but he judged it still morally binding with reference to the rest of the world. Good heavens, the bazar a-head is full of *budmashes*, we are lost!'

'What is to be done?' The gentlemen had huddled together and the carriage was stopped.

'We might put on a bold front and surround the carriage with our horses, and then

ride straight through them at once, and without hesitation,' said Simpkin, 'that is our only chance!'

But Mr Palmer Brown proposed to turn the head of the carriage round again and make for Agra at once, a distance of forty miles. The ladies were terribly frightened, Mrs Pulfington Belper and Mrs Liversege most, Sophy least. The latter seemed scarcely to realize the situation, or to be occupied with the things of the present world in the slightest degree. She had taken in the fact that the road between them and their house of refuge was barred. She had cast her eye along the glaring white road, and had seen the mud-houses of the bazar at a distance of about three hundred yards. She saw an occasional red coat of a Sepoy, or the black indistinct form of some other native, appear for a minute at the head of the street. She saw the gentlemen conversing in whispers, and observed their anxious faces. She heard the more timorous counsels of the man who, but for an accident, would now be her husband. And

then she heard the others suddenly say that such a scheme must be given up, and watching the direction of their glances of apprehension, saw the cause plainly enough. A number of troopers in the village had mounted their horses and had debouched at the entrance of it. It would be utterly impossible to escape from them. She saw Charley whisper a word to Major Pulfington Belper, and then take out his revolver and fire three shots in the air, and then Mrs Liversege began to scream, and worse than that, some of the Sepoys at the village began to fire off their muskets, and bullets began to hiss around. Sophy prayed that one of them might find its way to her poor little bosom and finish its term of sorrow there and then.

There was a considerable delay in the movement of the enemy's troopers. At first they formed quickly in a line across the road, they brandished their swords, commenced shouting, and seemed resolved to make at once short work of the feeble little party, which had also drawn up in line across the road to oppose

them. They were in all about forty, and an equal number of infantry soldiers were sprinkled about the village, their musket-barrels glittering distinctly in the rays of the sun. Sophy, who now, in spite of herself, was watching their movements with intense interest, saw the troopers break up their ranks as if some fresh delay had occurred in their advance. Her faculties were so intensified by the excitement that she could see every figure and every horse, every palm-tree, every thatched roof, with great distinctness. Her poor scared aunts were mumbling their prayers, and Motee was very pale, but Sophy could at present attend to nothing except the sight at the bend of the village. There suddenly a new excitement seemed to have seized the Sepoys. They gesticulated one to another, and presently the Infantry soldiers clutched their muskets, and the dismounted horsemen sprung on their horses.

‘They are coming!’ she said in a terrible whisper.

‘God have mercy upon us in this great

tribulation,' said poor Mrs Pulfington Belper.

'No, they are not coming!' said Sophy. She perceived that the Infantry had hastened up in the direction of the other end of the village, and the troopers soon followed their example. Soon there was a confused noise; then shouts followed by a discharge of musketry; then more shots and shouting.

'Let us take advantage of their absence to be off!' said Mr Palmer Brown.

'Stay,' said Simpkin, sternly.

Soon the din and shouting increased, and seemed near the head of the village; then a confused mass of men became visible, moving on at a rapid pace, horse mingled with foot.

'Attention!' said Major Pulfington Belper to the little band. He did not wish all the honour and glory to be appropriated by young Simpkin. He thought, moreover, his last hour was come; but Sophy, who was still straining her eyes, could now distinctly see other horsemen mingled with the first horsemen. She felt her head swim and her heart

beat violently in her breast, for there in the front were some English faces plainly visible. The natives were broken, and fugitives; and the others were plying their sabres in victorious pursuit. Ahead of the rest she had at once detected and recognized a well-known figure and a well-known white horse.

‘He has saved us!’ she screamed out, flinging herself, half-fainting, on to little Motee’s breast.

The fugitives, instead of taking the line of the road, broke off to the right and left on clearing the village. The largest body went off to the right, and Ashleigh and his Sikh Cavalry wheeled round after them to prevent them from recovering their panic and re-forming. Charley, whose maiden fingers were itching for the fray, here thought it would be a capital opportunity of striking a blow on his side; so wheeling round his men, he called out ‘Charge!’ at the top of his voice, and galloped off after the left body of fugitives, closely followed by the boyish, hot, elderly gentleman who was sitting on horse-back at his side.

‘ For God’s sake, don’t leave the ladies. Are you mad ! ’ shouted Mr Palmer Brown. The semi-bridegroom may be pardoned if on this day his love gave way to his military ardour; and the political officer, being left alone with Mr Liversege and the ladies, thought that now the coast was clear he could do nothing better in their interest, and perhaps in his own, than push on the carriage through the bazar, and deposit its precious charge in the fortified house.

‘ Drive on, O coachman, ’ he said in Hindoostanee, ‘ those crack-brained young soldiers have forgotten all about the ladies. We must think of them ; ’ and the carriage drove rapidly on, and passed half-way through the bazar, which showed evidences of the late encounter, well calculated to sicken delicate ladies, to whom such grim sights were luckily novel.

‘ It will be over in a minute ! ’ said the new commandant in a reassuring manner. ‘ We have only fifty yards more to go. Don’t stop, drive over all that ! ’

But the ‘ all that ’ proved a confused heap

in the middle of the road which it was very difficult to get the horses to go over, and whilst the driver was endeavouring so to do, the wisdom of Mr Palmer Brown was vindicated for the last, I had almost said for the first, time also in this story. It was very imprudent of Simpkin to leave the ladies alone. Suddenly half-a-dozen ruffians, who had been concealed about the village, rushed out and seized the horses' heads, the coachman was dragged from his box, and three men rushed at Mr Palmer Brown, but that inconsistent protector of the fair was too quick for them, and galloped off as if he were in training for the 'Covenanted Handicap.' A whistling musket bullet which one of them sent after him went unpleasantly near his head, and, if anything, accelerated his movements.

'Great Mem Sahib, have no fear. Quite safe with me. Burra Resident too—who give order that poor man be released from prison!' Mr Liversege here recognized the voice; the speaker was Fuzl Ali.

‘The road is clear. We will drive off to the Rajah’s palace. There more safe.’ The prime minister spoke with a sneering nasal intonation which made Mr Liversege clutch the handle of a little pistol he held in his pocket. For three seconds it was doubtful whether its bullet would pass through the brains of the native or those of Mr Liversege’s own wife. By great good luck the Ex-Resident (a man not wanting in pluck) had presence of mind enough to cock it quietly in his pocket and then to pull it out suddenly and snap it near the shoulder of one of the carriage-horses. The poor brute kicked and plunged, and all the efforts of the natives were required to hold him in his struggles.

‘Tie up the old fool, and knock him on the head if he moves again, but quiet the horse, whatever you do,’ but the poor brute’s minutes were numbered. He fell down and refused to rise any more.

‘Take him out!’ screamed Fuzl Ali in a towering passion, ‘unharness him quickly, sons

of pigs, and put another in his place. These Kaffir dogs are about; we must get the carriage away.'

The saddle was quickly taken off one of the riding horses, and the harness off the dying horse.

'Make the coachman, rascal, work, and give him a prick with your bayonet if he is not quick. Great Resident Sahib, I am sorry to see you with your hands tied; the Governor-General Sahib will soon be in the same plight; Delhi Emperor Bahawda had his hands tied until now. Beautiful ladies are frightened, their faces are pale, their lips are bloodless, their eyes are full of tears. No cause of fear, they will go to the palace, there more safe. The remainder of the Bahador Sepoys will be here directly, I have sent for them, and Ashleigh Sahib's house will be dangerous, dangerous if they dare to resist. Ah, now the carriage is ready. We will come along.'

But the delay was fatal to the worthy prime minister's plans.

'There they are, the brutes! Give it to

them ! ' cried a voice in broad Scotch, and the barrels of two revolvers were all fired off with immense rapidity, Fuzl Ali and the natives scampering away.

During the operation the former took a very bad shot at Mr Liversege with a pistol before he started. The shots from the revolvers were also very harmless. The shooters were Mr Broomielaw and Mr Charles Simpkin. Judge Girdlestone and Mr Indigo Jones (both got up in a semi-piratical costume, all pistols and dirks and sabres) came up immediately afterwards. They cut the cords which bound Mr Liversege.

' Come along,' said the Judge, ' here is some brandy. Have any of the ladies fainted? There is no time to be lost. They had better get out of the carriage. The sortie has brought down the whole swarm upon us. They are surrounding us fast. Ashleigh has frightened them a bit, and they are keeping at a respectful distance, but we must get the ladies in as fast as possible. Come along, it's

only a hundred yards.' And the ladies were got out of the carriage and assisted through the bazar, and outside of it they met the rest of the party and the Cavalry troopers who had remained faithful. A line of these was now formed on each side to protect the ladies from the dropping shots. Half-a-dozen officers with their double rifles were taking occasional aim and firing on either side to keep the enemy at a distance. In this way the space was quickly traversed which separated the house from the bazar. During the last part of the way Mr Girdlestone hurried the ladies, and the cause of this was evident to Sophy at the very moment she entered the garden of Ashleigh's house. Then her eye caught a glimpse of a large body of the enemy who were clustering together in the open at a distance of about four hundred yards. Suddenly they raised a loud shout.

'What is that?' cried a voice from the other side of the wall. The speaker was Captain Ashleigh himself.

'They have got a prisoner, an Englishman,

and are dancing about and exhibiting him in triumph. Good God, who can he be?' Mr Curzon, who now spoke, was looking through a glass. The ladies, who were now relieved of their immediate fears, paused a moment out of curiosity. Captain Ashleigh took the telescope from his friend.

'It is Mr Palmer Brown!' he said, closing the glass.

'How, in the name of goodness, did he get there?' said Mr Curzon.

'It is very awkward,' said the Captain. He had been standing at a breach in the wall of his garden close to the gate. It was at this particular moment of time that he turned round, and noticed for the first time that the ladies had come in.

'Thank God for that!' he said. 'Ladies, you have had a perilous time of it. I wish we could have given you warning sooner. I think we have every reason to hope that the rebels in a day or two will leave Nawaubgunge, and that your confinement will not be for long. The orders from Delhi are that all

Sepoys are at once to go there to oppose General Anson and the English soldiers.' He advanced to shake each lady by the hand, but Mrs Liversege, the nearest, drew herself up and refused the proffered cordiality.

'I cannot shake hands, sir, with a man who has in an underhand way supplanted my husband.' Her malice was returning with her confidence.

'My dear,' said Mr Liversege, deprecatingly.

'Also, I think, that if you want any honest man or woman ever to shake you by the hand again, you will not, from a base feeling of disappointed rivalry, let a brave civil servant miserably perish without an effort to save him.'

'My dear,' said Mr Liversege, 'this gentleman is Resident of Nawaubgunge, I positively forbid you speaking to him in this wild, outrageous way.'

'Look, sir,' said the angry lady, not heeding her husband, 'this young lady, less than half an hour ago, stood at the altar of God

to make an honest man her husband. She had just heard the long romantic, I had almost said romancing, story which you and your friends have got up,—and her presence there showed in what spirit she had received it. She preferred Mr Palmer Brown to you, and loved him, for he was open, generous, and true. He scorned all underhand baseness. He was not amongst those who are ready to sacrifice their rivals to their own private malice. You loved that young lady, once at least you told me you did, and now, if you would not have her look upon you with loathing for the rest of your life, you will be a man and make an effort to save her husband—for they are as good as man and wife.’ Mrs Liversege knew that what she proposed was mad and hazardous in the extreme. But she felt that her words put her greatest enemy in an awkward position. Infuriated at seeing him exalted and her husband deposed, she sought for the first weapon that came to her spite, and she flung it.

Captain Ashleigh was very calm during all this outburst, but when mention was made

of the feelings of the young lady on the subject, his eyes glanced towards her for one moment. She would have given worlds to have been able to cry out, to utter even the most incoherent protest against the sentiments put into her mouth, but she could not open her lips. It was not pride, or shame, or want of words, but a physical inability to articulate.

‘Perhaps it was my fate!’ she would murmur, in after years, when she remembered that last, mute, gentle, appealing look.

Mrs Liversege now hurried across the tangled garden, which was all in confusion, being strewed with the miscellaneous valuables that the poor fugitives had been able to collect in their rapid flight. Trunks, writing-desks, *pittaraks*, pictures, jewel-cases, baby-necessaries, and all sorts of unexpected articles of property, gave evidence, at once grotesque and touching, of the various emotions that were predominant in various minds in the sudden emergency. Inside the house the confusion was still greater. In addition to a

still more varied collection, made apparently on still more original rules of selection, there were the incongruous goods and chattels of two Indian bachelor officers. Almost every room was full of ladies and gentlemen, ayahs and children, who had come hastily attired and with sinking courage to attend the dismal reunion. Mrs Liversege insisted on having a room to herself, and she and Motee and Mrs Pulfington Belper and Sophy at last found themselves in a tolerably cool, airy apartment in which was a subaltern's bed, a couple of arm-chairs, a brass basin, a triangle suspending forage caps and pith hats, a pair of foils crossed on the wall, and a dandy punkah. These were tolerably certain evidences that it was used occasionally as a sleeping apartment; and so it was by no less a person than Mr Charles Simpkin. The party sat themselves down in silence, Sophy and Motee in each other's arms at the foot of the bed. The former was very uneasy and restless. She had turned her head round just before entering the house, and had seen

a group of gentlemen eagerly conversing with Captain Ashleigh. From their manner he had evidently made some proposal which had startled and alarmed them.

Outside was the sound of the cracking of rifles, answered by the more distant but ceaseless patter of the enemy's musketry. Mrs Pulfington Belper being very fatigued and overcome, the young ladies laid her down on the bed and sat at her feet. Motee had snatched up a volume of the Church Service before leaving the Residency, and at her mother's request she began reading the brave, strong words of the Psalmist's trust, a fit song for the music which was roaring outside. By-and-by a Kitmutgar came and offered the ladies wine and refreshment, and when Mrs Pulfington Belper demanded tea, he went and made a little impromptu earthen fire-place outside and boiled the kettle. A somewhat unfairly-used race is the Bengal black servant. Did he not boil his kettle for months and months amid the bursting shells of Lucknow? Did he not often run the gauntlet of the

Nana's sharp-shooters to get water for the last poor cups of tea ever to be drunk by the English ladies at Cawnpore? *Kabob Malik* (in the service of — Simpkin, Esquire) by-and-by came in with four cups of fragrant Almorah tea, which in his poor mind had a decidedly gunpowder flavour, as bullets were singing round him during its composition quite as merrily as his kettle. As he was serving the last cup to Mrs Liversege he gave a great start. There was a crashing noise in the green Venetian blind, and a bullet flattened itself on the opposite wall. Mrs Liversege sprung up in the greatest alarm.

‘They have left us in a post of danger. We shall be murdered.’ And she rushed away into an inner room.

In this room was the figure of a lady crouched on a sofa in the corner. An Ayah was trying to amuse with playthings and sweets two little children who were crying bitterly.

‘What a noise!’ said Mrs Liversege, not heeding the crouching figure. Motee touched

her on the arm and pointed to it deprecatingly.

‘My dear,’ said Mrs Liversege, ‘it is a Christian duty to bear up on these occasions, and military ladies should not set a bad example, and give way to unavailing fears. Couldn’t you keep your children quiet, madam?’ she added insolently—addressing the crouching lady.

The latter immediately sat up, her pale, wet face suffused with indignation.

‘They have just lost their father, madam, and they are not without feeling!’ The lady was Mrs Langton.

‘Oh, I didn’t know—’ began Mrs Liversege by way of apology. She was rather taken aback.

‘Perhaps not, and yet you ought to have known, for all that. Can you give him back to those little children? It is through you that they have lost him. Had you allowed the ladies to proceed in safety at the hour arranged he would now have been safe. You allowed your vindictiveness full scope, and

unfortunately the blow has fallen on those two little ones, and they cry, and you are annoyed.'

'Madam, I had nothing to do with the loss you have sustained. I feel for you. I pardon this strong language, which I am willing to set down to the irritation of the moment—'

'Have you nothing to do with the other losses which by this time must have been sustained by many other members of this little garrison?'

'What do you mean, madam?'

'Had you nothing to do with the mad charge which the gentlemen and the Seikh horsemen are now making against an enemy of twenty times their strength, in order that it may not be said that no effort was made to save a civilian—who, by-the-by, ran away and was captured through his own pusillanimity? They are riding to death and destruction, and few of them will probably return. You can hear their shouts in the distance, and if you open that window you will see them, if the sight is any satisfaction to you. I am told that it is

due entirely to your coarse taunts, madam ; am I misinformed ?’

‘ Are you mad, madam, or are they mad ? ’ said Mrs Liversege in terror ; ‘ do you mean to tell me that they have actually left us here to perish unprotected, and have ridden all away ? ’

‘ Oh, it is you who are afraid now ! We have nothing to live for, madam, and therefore have little merit in not being afraid of death. He is gone, boy, he is gone ! would to God we could all go to him—’ And the indignation which had sustained her here giving way, she flung herself down in an agony of tears, which little Motee strove in vain to arrest. Sophy was spell-bound at the window, looking out over the plain.

She could make out very little at first. An open plain stretched away before her, and on the verge of it she saw a large crowd of men apparently in confusion, and rendered still more indistinct by the dust and smoke. She wondered whether the charge had been made, and if so whether it had failed. Presently she saw the huge crowd scatter to the

right and left and make a gap in the centre. By-and-by, through this she observed the heads of horsemen apparently galloping, but there was an immense cloud of dust and she could see little very distinctly. Soon they became much more distinct, and Sophy's heart beat quicker and quicker. It was the gallant little band cutting its way a second time through the large mass opposed to it, and returning in safety. Soon the garden-wall concealed them from view, but Sophy could hear the tremendous cheering and shouts which they interchanged with the garrison, and the noise rolled nearer and nearer, until at last Pulfington Belper rushed into the room to inform them that Mr Palmer Brown had been rescued, and by a happy accident Fuzl Ali had been taken. The Major himself had been foremost in the charge, and had borne himself like a paladin.

‘And I hope nobody has been hurt?’ said Motee.

Here the Major's countenance fell, and after a great deal of cross-examination he was

compelled to admit that Captain St Leger and nine Seikhs had been killed, and that the number of wounded was very much greater.

‘He is hurt!’ said Sophy firmly, taking the Major aside and whispering in his ear.

‘He— You mean—?’

‘Frederick.’

The Major was forced to admit that Captain Ashleigh had received a bullet wound, but he hoped he would soon get over it.

‘He will never get over it,’ said Sophy despondingly.

And the poor little maiden was right. All through that long night she tossed upon the heap of rugs and cloaks that did duty for her bed. She heard the challenges of the sentries, the various noises inside the house, the firing and cries of the enemy outside, and towards morning a deathlike stillness which lasted some hours. About day-break came a gentle knock at the door. She rose and opened it quietly, not to awake the other ladies in the room. She put her head out, and found out that it was Charley Simpkin.

‘I beg your pardon,’ he said, ‘I thought you might like to be informed that the whole body of the Sepoys has gone off to Delhi. They started two hours ago.’

‘Charley,’ she answered, scarcely heeding the joyful news, ‘he is dying?’

‘I am afraid he is very ill,’ said Charley Simpkin gravely.

‘Charley, you must do me one favour, if ever you cared for me in the least degree. Get me to speak with him once again.’

‘I am afraid it can’t be done now. He is delirious, and the doctor said that he must be kept as quiet as possible. The bullet has grazed the brain.’

‘Where is he?’ The young man pointed to a room from whence issued a feeble light.

‘There!’

‘I will see him. Take me there. Do you think any one can be more careful of him than I can?’ Her manner was so determined that the young man gave way.

A feeble cocoa-nut wick shed a faint light round the room, and on a charpoy lay a figure

very indistinct in the dimness. Pulfington Belper and Ressaldar Sheikh Khoda Bux were keeping watch by the bedside. She sat down on a chair near the bed, and all remained perfectly silent for nearly a quarter of an hour, when the sick man awoke and made a slight gesture of impatience. He was very weak.

‘He wants water,’ said the old native.

Charley Simpkin filled up a glass of lemonade. He was going to carry it to him, when he felt the light touch of Sophy upon his arm.

‘Give it me,’ she said in a whisper. He lifted up the cocoa-nut light, and she handed the lemonade to the Captain. He took it listlessly, and as the light shone upon his bloodless, worn, bandaged head, she was quite startled at the change a few hours had made. He drank the lemonade and feebly gave back the glass, when suddenly his vacant look was changed into a faint smile, and his hand was again raised feebly up. She took it and pressed it to her lips.

He uttered these words in a low voice, the last he ever spoke upon earth—

‘ Good-bye, *Ada!* ’

CHAPTER XII.

HANGING AND WIVING.

MY history adjourns to the county of Gloucestershire, to the town of Cheltenham—the termination of many an Indian history.

A bright city of leafy promenades, snug crescents, and flowery villas. A chalybeate city, where, summer after summer in days gone by, rank enjoyed its pleasure jaunts and fashion its iron springs. A city where in the extreme sunshine of its history even Royalty enjoyed its valetudinarian ambles and saline tumblers. A city of rejoicing and water-drinking, riot and cards—how comes it that its holiday character has been totally changed, and by what strange concatenation of circumstances has it become the sedate refuge of the Anglo-Indian and the great Puritan party!

For the place is changed, and a philoso-

pher who loves to muse upon departed greatness may wander about hour after hour and find endless matter for reflection at every turn of the road. Queen Charlotte's Spa! Behold, it is tenanted now by a photographic artist who executes *cartes de visite* at the moderate charge of nine shillings a dozen. Cobourg Spa! See, it has been dexterously converted into the portico of 'Bundelcund Villa,' the winter residence of Lieutenant-Colonel Pulfington Belper — Bengal retired list! Cauliflower stalks and oyster-shells have taken the place of lords and ladies in the fine shady avenue of the 'Old Well.' The pump-room echoes but to the pumps of a dancing-master, and the shops on the gay Promenade appear to the hasty glance of the visitor to be chiefly devoted to Calvinistic literature and antibilious pills. The statue of the great and good George (the third of that name) stands mouldy and melancholy in a dirty cabbage-garden. And another memorial which card-shuffling Cheltenham once appropriately designed for its royal visitor—where, where is

that? You shall note perchance under a glass-case in the drawing-room of yon red-brick mansion some half-dozen gilt card-markers struck off in the royal honour—a drawing-room which once echoed with royal snores, and at times with the music of Handel and the sympathetic voice of Sarah Siddons.

Yes, Cheltenham is changed, but it is still snug and prosperous under the domination of the Reverend Eli Petticrook, and the rupee-filterings of Ormus and of Ind. Anglo-Indians flourish and lead comfortable sedate lives (as do the bulk of its residents), and their names, we may be sure, are properly recorded in the competitive charity pamphlets. Anglo-Indians are born there; Anglo-Indians, storm-tattered and weary, come home to die there; and the two stages of infancy jostle each other on the elm-fringed Promenade in perambulators of disproportionate size. Anglo-Indians flock on Sunday to hear life is a battle—under memorials of other Anglo-Indian bat-tlers whose victories are recorded. Anglo-

Indians translate Sophocles at the Cheltenham college, and seek to defend wickets from the dexterous bowling of Mr James Lillywhite. Anglo-Indians creep like snails unwillingly to the hop-scotch and motherly attention of Miss Delectus and her preparatory seminary. Anglo-Indians learn geography and piano torture at Miss Primrose's. They learn also trigonometry, I am told, and mental philosophy, and the use of the globes and of high-heeled white satin boots in the 'Spring Waltz.' Indians (still *Angli*) hunt, shoot, play billiards, and give bachelor balls. Indians (*non Angli sed Angeli!*) make gay the fashionable pavement with bright parasols and bonnets, and a beauty that you will not beat in any other county of the United Kingdom. Anglo-Indians eat and drink, and laugh and sing, and (without benefit of clergy) some go to 'Penny Readings' and to dances. Some, they say, flirt too;—and what is this? As I live, it is Bill the ostler, travestied in tops and sky-blue jacket, bobbing up and down between two old fly horses, and causing to rumble along a

decayed old yellow chariot which the statue of great George seems to wink at as an old friend. It is carrying away Anglo-Indian Captain Curzon and Anglo-Indian Mrs Curzon (life, like the pantomime, has its Transformation Scene from fairy land to the small matter-of-fact world of butchers and cooks and nurses), bearing them off to Malvern *en route* for Anglo-India. They too will by-and-by encourage the trade in silver mugs and perambulators, cricket-bats and *Nocturnes*, dress-coats and white satin boots. They will return sun-burnt, grizzled, dinner-giving, pensioned, respectable. There are certain functionaries in Cheltenham, who (like the poor hungry actors in the realms of prophet-king Petticrook) play many parts—and every one with much civility and attention,—functionaries who must find much matter for philosophical moralizing, if such be the bent of these grave men. On Saturday, in Berlin gloves, they will serve you dish after dish at the hospitable table of Colonel Sandboy, C. B.,—and with good old Madeira (may it and its gallant

owner long be preserved!) warm up old schemes, old deeds, old friendships, old memories, and the clatter and roar and bustle of many an old Indian battle. On Sunday they will usher you politely into a pew,—and a sermon from the Reverend Eli Petticrook will set you meditating whether or not the main scheme of the new dispensation was to control the depraved instincts of human legs, and restrain them from moving in measured cadence to the tickling of a violin. On Monday at 12 p.m. (or Tuesday at 1 a.m.) they will flit round a supper table and re-invigorate with a fresh bottle of champagne both you and your dancing partner, Miss Blushrose—who in this, like most young ladies, sadly neglects her spiritual director. After all, perhaps there is no great harm in young men and maidens laughing and dancing in the sunshine of life. True, dancing leads to flirtation, and flirtation to imprudent marriages,—and imprudent marriages—not Cheltenham alone can tell you into what day-forgotten icy *crevasses* such thoughtless climbers may tumble from sunny peaks of

the Delectable Mountains. On Wednesday our sober functionaries adorn their chests with hemispheres of white satin ribbon as big as kettle-drums. On Thursday, it may be, they walk slowly along the pavement with hats and shoulders profuse with sympathy and black silk. Well, well, they see and we see human life in its festival and its finis—an organ strain with moans and quaking thunder and squeaks, and groans as well as gentle notes of music and joy. Anglo-Indian life especially is stormy and cheerless, long blanks of monotonous exile, sprinkled at times with stirring heroisms. It is useful, enduring, plodding, self-restrained. Sickly of body, stout of soul—doing the State some service with scanty acknowledgment. And if the sunset of a dull life is a little dim, it is not without soft comforting rays and here and there a gleam of glory.

The mighty storm has swept by, carrying down with it many a stout ship, sparing others, and leaving some water-logged and disabled.

Of the latter sort was poor Mr Liversege, ship-wrecked and tattered. He was brought home to Cheltenham, and his wife tried to contend against the fates with the best means at her disposal. She took a grand house. She gave grand dinners. The wolf-skin of her coachman was the most flaring thing on the Promenade, and the gamboge of her chariot eclipsed in tone even that of Colonel Yellowhammer; but it was bitter to enter the lists with mere retired Colonels, and more bitter still to be worsted in the social war. Human greatness, alas! is a thing of vicissitudes. A sudden rise in the market sent home Mr Indigo Jones with a colossal fortune. He took a house close to that of Mrs Liversege, but five times as big—and his hot-houses, his dinners, his equipages were the talk of Cheltenham. Mr Liversege by-and-by came down from a yellow chariot to a Bath chair, but fortune dealt kindly with the disgraced old gentleman, and he became senile and silly.

Motee, the pearl, married Captain Curzon

four years after the events recorded in the last chapter. He is in the Military Police somewhere in Oude. She lost her mother six months after the mutiny.

Mr Chiffney Chaffney of the Bengal Civil Service is getting on in his profession, and so, I believe, is Mr Palmer Brown—blessed as he is with scheming mediocrity.

Of Fuzl Ali and Judge Girdlestone all we have to say is, that the former came across the latter in his professional capacity, and with some other mutineers suffered at Nauwaub-gunge.

Pulfington Belper was evidently fore-ordained for Cheltenham. At the club,—in the reading-room when ‘Times’ or ‘India News’ are expected,—in the billiard-room,—on the Promenade, what face so popular or so well known? A jolly widower, he subscribes to all the bachelors’ balls, and some think he will some day change his condition again. Who can tell? In the mean time he hunts occasionally in the vale of White Horse, and trudges along Cheltenham roads with a bam-

boo stick, not far from a club in magnitude. He fights his old battles over again, he slays his pigs, and down drop once more phantom mountain-pheasants and stags shot from the deadly level of his gun. Young men, too, are told stories of his exploits as a pedestrian in old days, stories which have become confused in their issues from too frequent repetition. On sunny days this is his greeting,—‘Finer summer weather than this at Cawnpore and Nawaubgunge. Hey!’

Cynics distrust radical and sudden changes in human character and action, professing to see development rather than metamorphosis in the coquette who dresses up priests and altars, or in the toothless old dowager who prepares, with her old blind energy, to push her way in another world. But there are now and then in the universe agonies like the Indian convulsion which baptize with fire. A face pale and sorrowful was seen at Cheltenham in these days, not on the gaudy promenades, except when it accompanied the chair of Mr Liversege—a sad nun, bringing her vows of mercy

amongst her equals, and her sacrifice into humdrum life. Major Pulfington Belper would salute this face respectfully as it passed him on its way to the abodes of squalor and suffering, for the shrewd philosopher knew that this was no conventional *dévoté*, but one who had been taught human compassion by a mighty grief.

Twice Sophy received letters from Mr Charles Simpkin in India, and twice she wrote to him that her love was buried in the past. Seven years after the mutiny Charley came home on furlough, and, lo and behold, the Cheltenham Promenade was one day honoured and adorned with his intelligent but sun-burnt phiz. My long story must be cut short.

‘Did you keep it bright, sir?’

These words passed in a darkened drawing-room of Mrs Liversege’s house two months after his arrival. Charley, on his way to the bachelors’ ball, had been asked to come in and show himself in the uniform of ‘Ashleigh’s Seikhs.’ Bearded and bronzed, he

wore a medal and V. C. for the terrific assault of Delhi, a medal for China ; and all traces of the conceited pert boy seemed to have been singed out of his countenance by many battles and thoughts and cares. The conversation had turned upon the subject of Ashleigh's sword, which Charley had used ever since. It was the first time since his death that Sophy had ever alluded to him.

‘ Beloved, I did.’

When next they spoke of him they were riding amongst the deserted ruins and charred houses of the old cantonments of Nawaubgunge—torn old scenes of a theatre where loves and hopes and heroisms and cares had figured and passed away. The new cantonments are two miles and a half to the west of the old ones, on higher ground.

‘ A heart of gold,’ said Charley, and his wife threw down some roses. They were standing under the old mimosa which now covered two graves — whose enfranchised spirits, if they ever revisit the old scenes of crawling ambitions, and hates and wiles and

baffled longings and petty embroilments, must do so, methinks, by reason of undying pity and remembered endurances. For such alone would they quit abodes where friends smile away their frowns and severed loves unite in the pearly evening.

THE END.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 055268772

