THE LOST CITY

OR

THE BOY EXPLORERS IN CENTRAL ASIA

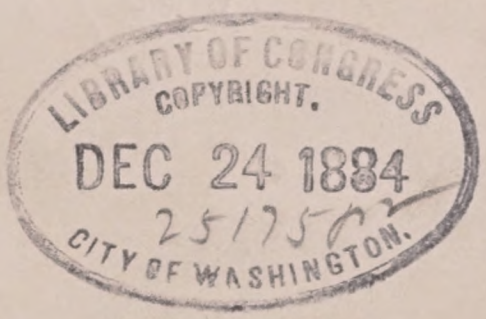
THE LOST CITY

OR

THE BOY EXPLORERS IN CENTRAL ASIA

By DAVID KER

Illustrated



NEW YORK
HARPER & BROTHERS, FRANKLIN SQUARE
1885

CONTENTS.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

THE LOST CITY;

OR,

THE BOY EXPLORERS IN CENTRAL ASIA.

Chapter I.

ACROSS THE TARTAR STEPPES.

"Look out, boys! over we go again!"

Crash! went the left wheel as he spoke, the wagon toppled over, and out into the ankle-deep dust flew two men and two boys, amid a kind of water-fall of bags, boxes, watermelons, revolvers, biscuits, flasks, and wisps of hay, all mingled together.

The spot where this "spill" occurred looked like what it was—one of the most desolate and barbaric regions on the face of the earth. The

rising sun had already thrown a broad gleam of light upon the huge rounded slopes that rose on every side like the domes of a mosque, from which the morning mists were rolling off slowly and sullenly, as the smoke rising from a battle-field. But a floating depth of purple shadow still hovered over the endless level of the great plain below, clothed with the short, yellowish grass of the Central Asian steppes, and a silence deep and solemn as the stillness of a newly created world brooded on earth and sky.

The only sound that broke this universal hush was the muffled roar of a water-fall in the shadowy depths of the gorge which the travellers had been skirting, following as best they might the windings of one of those breakneck bridle-paths which pass for roads in Central Asia. On the brow of an overhanging cliff, just above the scene of the disaster, rose the low, round tower and massive boundary wall of a genuine Eastern hill fortress, in the shadow of whose pointed archway a

dozen gaunt, swarthy Cossacks, in white frocks and red goat-skin pants, lay sleeping side by side.

The first of the overturned travellers to regain his feet was a small, wiry, black-haired lad of sixteen, in a white forage cap, linen jacket, and knee-high boots embroidered with green thread. His dark face wore the keen, self-reliant look of one used to find himself in difficult situations, and to get out of them by his own unaided courage and shrewdness. He chuckled as he helped up his comrade—a tall, good-looking young fellow, with light curly hair, who was looking ruefully at the handful of broken glass that he had just drawn from his watch-pocket.

"Never mind, Ernest, my boy; you're lucky to get through any journey in this country without breaking your neck as well as your watch-glass. Ain't that so, Bill?"

A grunt prefaced the reply of Bill—a big, square-built, powerful man, whose scarred cheek and slight limp would have shown that he had

"smelled powder," even if his hard, brick-red face, short, thick mustache, and stiff military uprightness of bearing, had not stamped him unmistakably as an English soldier.

"That's just the way with you Yankees, Mr. Tom; you'll talk agin a place fast enough yourselves, but let anybody else say a word, and you're down on 'em directly. Now I'll be bound we shall have you praising up this here country to-morrow again, just as if it wasn't the most good-for-nothing hole that a man ever clapped eyes on. When it ain't roastin' you black, it's a-blowin' dust fit to put your eyes out; and when it ain't doin' that, it's rainin'. The very thunder, 'stead of an honest round-mouthed peal like our own, makes a nasty jabbering row, as if it was a-tryin' to talk French; and the whole place is so precious flat that if you was to put your hat down and stand on it, you could sée twenty miles round."

"Bravo, Bill!" cried Ernest; "you remind me

"OVER WE GO AGAIN!"

of Colonel Campbell's story of the soldier who fell asleep on the march in India, and tumbling over a fallen tree as he was tramping on with his eyes shut, sang out, 'I say, boys, ain't this a precious country, where a man can't have a quiet nap for half an hour without breaking his head!'"

While they were speaking, the Tartar driver (who, having luckily fallen on his head, had naturally escaped unhurt) had rummaged out of the chaos a hatchet, a rope, and a strong piece of wood, indispensable articles upon any wagon journey either in Asiatic or European Russia. The fourth inside passenger, a tall, handsome, white-robed Afghan, who was looking as dignified and solemn as if he had not been sprawling head over heels a moment before, now stepped forward to assist in righting the wagon. The wheel was soon in its place again, and away they went.*

---

* The Tartars are very handy in repairing accidents of this kind. I once lost a wheel in a night journey through the Khan-

"Cheer up, Bill!" laughed Ernest Clairmont; "your troubles will soon be over now. Tashkent's* just over the hill, isn't it, Tom?"

Sure enough, a few minutes later they crowned the highest ridge, and rattled down curve after curve of rough gravelly road into the great plain of Tashkent. The city itself was still hidden by a mass of dark, glossy leaves, but the increasing number of laden carts and donkeys, sunburnt horsemen, striding camels strung out in single file, and white-turbaned, blue-robed natives trudging barefoot through the dust, with their little wallets at their backs, showed that it could not be far off.

Suddenly a huge, tunnel-like archway yawned before them, in the cool shadow of which several bearded, swarthy fellows were munching *lepeshki*

---

ate of Khokand, and within ten minutes we were going as fast as ever.

* The capital of Russian Turkestan. Its name signifies "Stone Village."—D. K.

(wheaten cakes) and slices of watermelon, while high overhead towered a massive rampart of sun-dried clay, standing out white and bare in the blistering sunshine.

"Tashkent!" shouted Tom Hilton, imitating the voice of a railway conductor; "all tickets ready, please!"

They rattled up and down three or four narrow, straggling, dirty streets, all exactly alike, scurried past General Kauffman's beautiful little park, with its toy water-falls, trim shrubberies, and steep, central ridge, crowned with the pavilion set apart for the military band, and pulled up at length before a small door in a high, mud wall. It opened at their first knock, and a long, lean, sallow Cossack greeted Tom with a military salute and a joyful grin.

"Gday otetz moi, Vaska?" (where's my father, Basil?) asked Tom, shaking hands with him heartily.

"Vot on prikhodit, Phoma Yakovitch" (here

he comes, Thomas son of James), answered the Cossack, pointing to a fine-looking man in the uniform of a Russian Colonel of Engineers, but with America clearly written in every line of his firm, intelligent face and tall, sinewy figure, who came striding across the smooth greensward to meet them.

"Welcome home, lads!" cried Colonel Hilton (for he it was), holding out a hand to each; "I've got all ready for you inside. Ernest, my dear boy, I'm very glad to have you back again; you know your father was my oldest friend."

"And as brave an officer and as kind a gentleman as you'd find in the whole British army," broke in Bill Barlow. "I was beside him, you know, Colonel, when them Afghan blackguards knocked him over; and he says to you, says he, 'Jim, be a father to my boy,' and you says to him, says you, 'I will, Harry, so help me God!' And so you have, Colonel; and I'd like to see the man as dare deny it."

"Now, boys," said the Colonel, when our heroes had done full justice to the good breakfast spread for them in a tent in the garden, "I'm sorry I can't go around with you to-day, for I've got about a dozen Russian officers coming to see me on business, one after the other; so, Tom, you'll have to pilot Ernest about the town yourself. I dare say you'll be able to show him something worth seeing."

The prophecy was soon fulfilled. To the untravelled English boy, fresh from his Rugby school life and the jog-trot civilization of England, everything that he saw in this outlandish region seemed wonderful beyond belief: camels walking about the streets just like horses at home; Afghan chiefs swaggering about with a whole arsenal of pistols and daggers in their red, silken sashes; brawny Sarts, with bulging skins of water poised on their bare, brown shoulders; full-sized melons going at three cents each, and magnificent grapes at one cent a pound; *sheets* of wheaten bread, large

enough for a man to lie down upon, being rolled up and carried off; women wrapped in gauze bed-curtains, so closely as to leave nothing visible but their eyes; gaunt, wild-eyed Turkomans in sheep-skin caps, looking covetously at the embroidered uniforms of the Russian officers; and swarthy Jews, in long dark robes, high, black, funnel-shaped hats, and broad yellow girdles.

Even the wagon that carried them was a sufficient curiosity in itself, consisting merely of one huge beam on which they sat astride. They had quite enough to do to hold on while this queer conveyance bumped and jolted along the uneven streets, now plunging into a rut almost as deep as a ditch, now rattling down a steep incline, now flying around a sharp corner, with such a jerk that they seemed to be shooting bodily off into space, while their Tartar hackman, with a glow of excitement on his greenish, narrow-eyed, beardless face, flourished his whip and screamed like a madman.

But Ernest's delight rose higher still when, quitting their conveyance, they tramped across the bridge spanning the deep, narrow gully which separates the old town from the new. To him the neat stores and smart public buildings, the spacious squares and leafy boulevards of the "Russian quarter," seemed quite commonplace compared with the straggling, ditch-like, rubbish-choked streets, the flat-roofed, mud-walled hovels, the swarm of gay-colored robes and monkey-like faces that filled the "Tartar town." And when they at length came upon a real mosque, with real domes and minarets, and a wide-paved court-yard before it (enclosing a small tank, beside which a dozen gayly dressed Mohammedans were smoking, or drinking "brick-tea," with mutton fat in it instead of milk), his exultation knew no bounds.

But his attention was suddenly attracted by mingled outcries close at hand, and the rising of a thick cloud of smoke, reddened with flame, above the roofs of the surrounding houses.

"I say!" cried he, starting, "that must be a fire!"

"To be sure it is," answered Tom, coolly; "we have one here almost every day. Come along and look at it."

A few steps round the corner brought them to the spot. A pile of grass spread to dry on the flat roof of a house, according to Central Asian custom, had caught fire, and was sending up a blaze which, but for the perfect stillness of the air, would speedily have run along the whole street, every roof being covered with heaps of grass as dry as tinder. Even as it was, a single spark might at any moment kindle a general conflagration, and Tom's quick eye saw at once that there was not an instant to lose.

"Come along, Ernest," cried he; "let's pull down that next heap before it catches. Here goes!"

So saying, he vaulted like an acrobat upon the shoulders of a big native who stood close to the

wall, and before the astounded man had time to open his mouth, scrambled off him on to the projecting corner of the roof, where he was seen the next moment flinging down huge armfuls of grass on the heads of the crowd.

But before Ernest could follow, a heave of the throng pushed him close to a tall man in a rich robe of crimson silk, with a dark, high-boned Persian face, who was forcing his way through the press as if he were some great man, letting fall his heavy whip, just as Ernest reached him, on the bare shoulders of a poor old Tartar cripple, who screamed with pain.

"Leave the poor fellow alone!" shouted Clairmont; "don't you see he's a cripple?"

For all answer the Persian struck at Clairmont himself; but this was an unlucky move. Ernest seized the uplifted arm with one hand, while he planted the other (little dreaming what that blow was to cost him) full in his enemy's lean, wolfish face, sending him reeling against the wall.

Chapter II.

WHERE IS IT?

Regaining his feet with a howl of fury, the Persian drew his long *khanjar* (dagger). But just then the two combatants were driven apart by a sudden movement of the crowd, as it opened to make way for a dozen sallow, hard-faced, white-frocked Russian soldiers, who came tramping steadily on, headed by a tall officer in uniform, in whom Ernest recognized Colonel Hilton himself.

"Come down out of that!" shouted the Colonel, as one of the bunches of grass flung from the roof by his energetic son hit him full in the face. "Come down, you young monkey, and don't go burying your own father before he's dead!"

"COME DOWN, YOU YOUNG MONKEY!"

"Is that *you*, father?" cried Tom. "Stand clear below, boys; I'm coming."

He leaped from the roof as he spoke, but the Russian grenadiers, with whom he seemed to be a prime favorite, caught him in their arms with a loud cheer, just as Ernest elbowed his way through the crowd to join them. The Persian had vanished; but Ernest afterwards remembered, with good reason, that his enemy's last glance rested not on *him*, but on Colonel Hilton, with a glare of mingled rage, fear, and hatred worthy of a wounded tiger.

The Colonel's party were not long in making their presence felt. While one of the soldiers clambered on to the flaming roof, and tore down the blazing grass with his bare hands, as unconcernedly as if he were only tossing hay, the rest formed a chain to the tank at the entrance of the street, and passing buckets nimbly from hand to hand, soon put an end to the fire. In less than a quarter of an hour all was over, and

the Colonel, having dismissed his men, had leisure to hear Ernest's story, over which he looked very grave indeed.

"You couldn't well have done anything but what you did, my boy; but I'm sorry you have quarrelled with that fellow, Kara-Goorg, for he's the most spiteful rascal I know. He owes *me* a grudge for a lesson I gave him some years ago, and he's one that'll stick at nothing to get square with anybody that he's got a spite against. Unluckily, he's very useful to the Russian government as a spy, and is always being sent on secret missions into Afghanistan; so, as he can't be got rid of, you'd better take care and not get in his way again, for he'd think no more of cutting your throat than of slicing a melon."

"So I shall, most certainly," said Ernest, rather startled at this specimen of the ways of his new home.

"And now, boys," resumed the Colonel, "before I go on to the citadel, which was what I was do-

ing when I met you, we'd better have something to eat. The Great Bazar's close by, and there we can get a real Tartar lunch."

A few minutes later, after fighting their way through a jumble of dust, dirt, camels, donkeys, prowling dogs, horrible smells, black-browed Bokhariots, long-nosed Persians, pudding-faced Tartars, baboon-like Sarts, and fat, yellow-bearded Russian merchants, they found themselves in a long, narrow, dirty passage, roofed with tattered matting, and flanked on either side by queer little narrow-mouthed stores, very much like overgrown rat-traps, and crammed with goods of every kind, from Russian tea-urns to Persian carpets and Chinese slippers.

Through this chaos the Colonel cleft his way without a halt, turning a deaf ear to the screaming salutations of the native tradesmen, till he reached a large empty booth, in one corner of which a queer little half-clad Tartar, brown and shrivelled as an over-fried sausage, was stooping

over a round black opening in the ground, very much like a tiny coal-hole.

"Sotnya pilmenn" (a measure of dumplings), cried the Colonel, stepping in.

The Tartar replied by fishing up from his "coal-hole" (which was really a native oven) a copper pan filled with tiny balls of greasy dough, not much bigger than a good-sized marble. These he emptied into a wooden bowl, poured over them a brimming ladleful of melted fat, and then, handing to each of his three customers, who had squatted themselves upon a sheet of gray felt at the back of the booth, a sharp-pointed chip of wood like a monster toothpick, signed to them to begin eating.

Ernest, rather puzzled how to do so, watched his two companions, and seeing that they were spearing the dumplings with their chips, and swallowing them after first dipping them in the hot grease, he followed their example.

"Chopped meat and onions, seemingly," re-

marked he, after his first mouthful, "and not bad stuff either. I wonder what meat it is?"

"Better not be too curious about that, Ernie," said Tom Hilton, with a grin; "it don't do to ask what things are made of in this country. You remember what the Highland gamekeeper said of his master's shooting: 'The more said, the less the better.'"

The novelty of making a real Tartar meal out of the same dish with two other people made Ernest eat pretty heartily, but he was somewhat startled to hear that he and his companions had eaten thirty-six dumplings among them, and still more so to see that the total cost of the entertainment was only thirty kopecks (twenty cents).

"Living's cheap here, it seems," laughed he. "If I ever lose all my money, which isn't very likely while *you* have the charge of it, father, I shall come and settle in Tashkent."

"You might do worse," answered his adopted

father; "but I dare say you'll have queerer fare than this when you go soldiering in India, as I suppose you will some day, since your own father wished it. Well, boys, I must be off now; but I'll be home about five o'clock, and we'll have a snug evening all to ourselves."

But that evening was destined to be more eventful than he imagined. They were still sitting over their after-dinner coffee in the Colonel's cozy little parlor, and Ernest was wondering to see, in the heart of this region of mosques, turbans, and camels, photographic albums, copies of the *Graphic* and the New York *Herald*, prints from the *Illustrated London News*, and engravings from the pictures of Frith and Landseer, when suddenly a shrill, chirping voice was heard outside the door, at the first sound of which Colonel Hilton sprang up and hurried out.

"Ha, Pavel Petrovitch!" (Paul son of Peter) "is this really *you?* Why, your last letter was dated from Moscow, and I never thought of see-

ing you again this year. Come in, come in; I'm very glad to see you."

The next moment the Colonel re-entered with a little man in a brown coat, whom he introduced as Professor Makaroff.

Ernest started as if he had been shot. Having seen this famous explorer's name celebrated in every leading English journal for exploits as daring as those of Stanley or Colonel Gordon, he had pictured to himself a grim, bearded, sun-browned giant, with a revolver at every button-hole. The man he now saw was a thin, pale-faced, quiet little fellow, with a voice like the piping of a canary, and no sign of a weapon anywhere about him.

"I see you're wondering why I've come," said the Professor, when the first greetings were over. "The fact is, our Imperial Geographical Society has offered a reward for the discovery of the lost city of Margilian, over the existence of which you and I used to fight so last year, and I'm now

hoping to settle our dispute once for all by finding the place myself."

"Have you any fresh information on the subject, then?" asked the Colonel, beginning to feel interested.

"I have indeed. A few weeks ago Hadji Murad (that Bokhariot trader, you remember, with whom I travelled along the border of Thibet in '75) sent me word that one of his Tartars had just come in from the Tien Shan,* telling a very strange story. He had got lost among the mountains, and wandered about for two days, until his food was spent and his strength almost gone, when all at once he espied a passage among the rocks, cut as smooth and even as a railway. He followed it for more than a *verst* (two-thirds of a mile), and suddenly found himself in a vast open space, right in front of a great stone temple, with

---

* Celestial Mountains—the range between Western China and Asiatic Russia.

a row of tall pillars, around which lay the ruins of many other buildings. But just then a huge shadowy figure rose from the brow of the cliff overhead, and waved one hand as if warning him back, while with the other hand he pushed over a great rock that almost crushed the poor Tartar, who fled in terror, and was picked up half fainting by a party of Khokandese merchants at the foot of a precipice."

"And you really believe all that?" asked Hilton, with a sly smile.

"I believe it so much that I telegraphed Murad to offer the man a thousand rubles" ($750) "to guide me to the spot, but it seems he's so frightened that no money can tempt him to venture again."

"Or, in other words, he don't care to hunt for a place which never existed except in his own romancing stories."

"Gently, gently, friend. With the exception of the shadowy giant (who was probably a dust-

cloud raised by a falling stone), his tale exactly fits my theory. It is well known that the turning-point of Alexander the Great's march upon China was the present site of Khodjent, and that he left there a colony of his soldiers. What is more natural than that, finding themselves within too easy range of the natives on that smooth plain, they should have retreated into the mountains, and built another city there? That they must have done so is proved by the existence of the modern town of Marghilan, which stands on the border of the very district where I suppose the lost city to be. Marghilan is obviously a corruption of Margilian, and thus it follows—"

And so on for another half-hour.

"I say, Ernie," whispered Tom, "wouldn't it be gay if we could hunt out the place ourselves, and get there before the Professor?"

The suggestion haunted Ernest that night even in his sleep. He dreamed that he was a special correspondent with the army of Alexander the

Great, taking notes with the point of an Egyptian obelisk, which kept breaking off at every other word. Alexander pointed to a distant tree, and bade him pick a better pencil from those which grew on it. But as he approached, the tree changed into his Persian enemy of the morning, who seized and hurled him into the Oxus with such a tremendous splash that he awoke, and found that he had fallen out of bed into his cold bath.

Chapter III.

A TURCOMAN DINNER-PARTY IN THE DESERT.

"Ernest Clairmont, Afghanistan, to Robert Hawkins, Rugby, sendeth greeting, this twenty-sixth day of August, 1879.

"Dear Bob,—We're in Afghanistan at last, and a funny place it is. By this time you'll have got my last letter, telling how Tom Hilton met me at Orenburg (the border town of Russia, you know), and how we went together across the desert, past the Aral Lake, and up the Jaxartes to Tashkent. It's not the Jaxartes now, though, for the natives call it 'Syr-Daria,' or Clean River, I suppose because it's the dirtiest river I ever set eyes on.

"Little enough did I ever think, old fellow, when you and I used to grind over Alexander's

crossing of the Jaxartes and the Oxus, that I should cross them myself some day; but I've seen queerer things than that since I started. What do you think of our coming to a bit of desert where all the people were living in holes under the earth? To see their heads popping up out of the ground like rabbits to look at us was the most comical sight you can imagine.

"We ought to be in Cabool the day after to-morrow, and then I'll have a chance of seeing what an Afghan capital is like. It's great fun going about in these out-of-the-way places, and seeing for one's self all the queer people that one used to read about and see pictures of at home. You remember how we thought Gibbon was stretching it, rather, when he said that the Tartars had no beards. Well, it's as true as can be; I was in among a whole camp of them the other day, and there wasn't a single beard among the lot!

"At first I felt just as if I'd been making friends

with a herd of monkeys; for really, with their long arms and low foreheads, and small, narrow eyes, and heads as round as skittle-balls, and flat noses and big mouths (to say nothing of their greasy cloaks of camel's-hair or sheep-skin), they might have gone right into a menagerie just as they were. But they received us very civilly, and gave me some *kumyss* (fermented mare's milk), which tasted something like ginger-beer. Tom says it's sold in New York now, and that the people there take it as medicine. And then the old khan—who must have been made chief of the tribe on the strength of his being the ugliest man in it—kindly invited me to sit down upon a newly flayed sheep-skin, with the bloody side uppermost. Out of respect for my white cotton trousers, I 'declined with thanks,' as the editor of the Rugby *Messenger* did with my first poem.

"But all this while I am forgetting to tell you what brings us here. The Russians are sending

an envoy to persuade the new Ameer of Afghanistan, Yakoob Khan, into doing something they want, and Colonel Hilton's going with him to back him up and see fair play. We've got another passenger, too, who's the best fun of all—that jolly old Russian Professor, who is hunting for the Lost City, and who thinks Cabool a likely point for his start in search of it, especially as he expects to get a guide there who knows the whole country by heart.

"Talking of Afghans, they must be a queer lot if they're all like those we've seen. Every man you meet looks as if he were pining for a chance of cutting your throat; and when I asked the Colonel what was the meaning of a lot of small round towers of dried mud, with one little hole in the side, which were dotted all over the plains, he told me they were for the people of the country to creep into whenever they saw robbers coming.*

---

* This is true also of Southern Afghanistan, where I passed more than a dozen of these towers within a few miles.—D. K.

"However, our Afghan groom, Sikander (Alexander), is as good a fellow as ever stepped; and it's great fun to hear him and old Bill Barlow arguing about the Afghan war. Bill, being an English soldier, is all for drill and precision, and thinks it too bad that the Afghans didn't 'come fairly out and fight in reg'lar horder of battle, like men.' Then Sikander laughs, and asks what's the sense of coming out and getting shot, when you can hit your man from behind a rock or a tree without showing yourself at all. Then old Bill grunts that that's work for weasels, not for men; and so they go on by the hour. The other night I found Bill trying to explain to Sikander what a railway was like, and setting up a row of stones to represent the train. The Afghan listened very attentively till it came to the laying of the rails, and then he said the English magicians must be very foolish to trouble about laying down a road for their enchanted cars, when they could just as easily make them fly through

the air; after which Bill gave him up as a bad job. However, they're always capital friends, for all that.

"And now for the best part of my story. While we were crossing the steppes before we got down to the Oxus we had an extra long march one day to reach a little stream beside which we meant to camp for the night, for in Central Asia, I can tell you, the first thing you think of is to keep within reach of water. It was late in the evening before we got to it, but as we came over a low swell of land that overlooked it, what should we see below but a dozen fires twinkling through the dusk. We also heard a sound of men talking, and horses neighing, and camels snorting and screeching, as if there were a regular camp there.

"We were rather taken aback, as you may suppose, but we hadn't long to think over it. The moment we were seen on the brow of the slope there was a great bustle and shouting in the camp, and up jumped from beside the nearest fire

some twenty wild-looking fellows with long guns in their hands, whose dark faces, and gleaming eyes, and sharp, white teeth, with the red glare of the fire upon them, made as grim a show as any 'brave of the Delawares' in Fenimore Cooper.

"Another moment and we would all have been firing and hacking away at each other without knowing why, for every stranger is an enemy in the desert. But in the very nick of time the Colonel snatched a lance from one of our Cossacks, tied a white scarf to it, and rode forward single-handed to meet them.

"'Amaun ust?' (is it peace?) he called out, as soon as he was near enough to be heard.

"'Insh' Allah, amaun ust' (please God, it is peace), answered the foremost fellow, and the Colonel went up and shook hands with him. They talked together for a minute or two, and then back came the Colonel, bringing the whole crowd along with him. There was another little talk, and then they bade us welcome, and told us

"IS IT PEACE?"

(as it's the correct thing to do here) that all they had was ours, though I don't much think they'd have approved of it if we'd taken 'em at their word.

"It seems they were a band of Turcomans on the lookout for fresh pasture for their beasts, and they had camped here only a few hours before we came up; so when they saw us they thought we were another party coming to drive them away. But everything was soon explained, and in half an hour we had our tents pitched and our horses picketed right in the middle of their camp; and the last thing I heard before I fell asleep was a Turcoman sentinel howling out an endless native song, while his voice sounded just like a dog shut out on a cold night.

"The next morning I wanted to go out and look about me, but the Colonel stopped me, saying that we must stay in the tent till they came to invite us out, or they wouldn't think anything of us at all. And so it proved; for suddenly the

tent flap was lifted, and there stood two tall, fine-looking Turcomans, in high caps of black sheep-skin, one with a wheaten cake in his hands, and the other with an earthen jar of milk.

"'Peace be with you, my lords,' said the foremost. 'Thus saith Hadji Yussuf' (Pilgrim Joseph), 'Chief of the Black Turcomans: Let the messenger of the great Czar, and the other Oorooso (Russian) princes, be pleased to light up with their presence the tent of a Turcoman warrior.'

"'The messenger of the great Czar may not cross any threshold save that of the Ameer himself,' answered the Colonel, quite majestically, 'but the ears of the Russian princes are open to the fair words of Hadji Yussuf. Let the chief of many warriors send us camels, that our feet may not soil his threshold with the desert sand.'

"So saying he dipped a piece of the cake in the milk and swallowed it, after which the worthy savages retired, looking very much impressed. In about half an hour they came back with two

camels, and the Colonel and Professor Makaroff mounted one, while Tom and I got upon the other, lying at opposite ends of a big, wooden tray girthed on the beast's back. When it first started I felt as if I were being rolled about in my berth by a squall in the Bay of Biscay; but I very soon got used to it.

"We found the chief (a grand old fellow with a long white beard) sitting cross-legged on a carpet in a big tent of gray felt. We all kicked off our shoes on going in, and the Colonel laid his sabre at the chief's feet to show that he meant no harm. The old gentleman received us very politely, and ordered in several huge wooden bowls of tea. One sip was enough for me, for what with salt instead of sugar, and rancid mutton fat instead of milk, it was the nastiest stuff I ever tasted.

"Then the old fellow drew up the tent flap, and told us to seat ourselves in the door-way. We had hardly sat down when there came a yell

that made us all jump, and a dozen horsemen came tearing out from among the tents, as if flying for their lives, with twenty more in full cry after them, firing their rifles and yelling like mad. Suddenly the hunted men wheeled round and came back upon their pursuers like a thunderbolt; and in a moment they were all mixed up together in a whirl of dust and smoke, stabbing, hacking, slashing, and pounding with the butt-ends of their pieces, the spear-heads glittering, the swords flashing, and the very horses kicking and biting most ferociously. I began to feel for my revolver, thinking the camp was attacked; but Tom whispered to me that it was only a sham fight, got up to entertain us.

"But *the* show of the day was the concluding dinner—twelve courses at least, and everybody expected to eat heartily of each. You remember Billy Guttleton eating seventeen jam tarts at a sitting? Well, any of these Turcoman fellows would do that just to get up an appetite before

the real dinner came on at all. I had to keep my eye on a fellow opposite me, to make sure that he wasn't stuffing it all into a leathern bag inside his clothes, like Jack the Giant-killer.

"First came a kind of soup of milk and bitter herbs, not at all the sort of stuff for a rough day at sea. Then followed little square blocks of roast meat served on wooden skewers, succeeded by a mess of rice and mutton fat thick and heavy enough to choke an elephant, which the old chief scooped out of the bowl with his fingers, and crammed into my mouth. Nine or ten other dishes followed, among which Tom declared that he recognized camel; but I hope he was mistaken, for in this country they only eat such as have died of old age or disease. When I got up to go I felt as if I weighed a thousand pounds; and that night I dreamed I was a balloon, just going to burst from being overfilled with gas.

"But I must break off, for it's getting dark, and here comes Sikander to announce supper. If

you ever get this, which I doubt, for the Tartar who carries it may very likely be shot on the way, reply soon, and believe me, yours truly,

"E. CLAIRMONT."

Chapter IV.

STARTLING A KING.

"Tom, I feel as if there were something *wrong* here, somehow."

Ernest had been very quiet for some moments, and a boy of his age is not often quiet for any length of time unless something has made rather a strong impression upon him. His companion had clearly shared his misgivings, for he replied almost at once:

"Well, old fellow, I wouldn't have said that *first*, for fear you should laugh at me; but now that *you've* said it, I must confess I feel pretty bad myself, though I don't know why."

Our heroes were looking down from the balcony of a lofty Eastern house upon the motley

crowd that eddied through one of the principal streets of Cabool, in which they had spent just three days, when this conversation took place. So far, at least, they had nothing to complain of. They were lodged in a fine house in one of the best quarters of the city, not far from the Ameer's own palace. They had been shown over the fortifications of the Bala-Hissar (citadel) by the Afghan commandant in charge of it. They had been presented to Major Cavagnari, the resident agent of the English government, who received them with frank, soldier-like cordiality, and laughingly hoped that their quality as *attachés* to a Russian mission would not prevent their giving him the pleasure of their company to dinner.

Every one, in fact, had been as hospitable and friendly as possible; but neither the universal kindness shown to them, nor the wonderful panorama of new costumes and new faces that met them at every turn, nor the quaint barbaric pict-

uresqueness of the ancient city itself, could wholly banish the dim, haunting sense of coming evil, which (little inclined as either of them was to trouble himself about such fancies) weighed upon them more than they would have cared to own.

"I think it must be what my father told us about this old place that makes us feel bad," said Tom Hilton, after a pause. "You remember that yarn he spun us at Tashkent, how, when the English army was here in 1841, the Afghans rose all of a sudden and massacred them; and how poor old Burnes and Macnaghten, and a lot of the officers, were brought into the palace under promise of safeguard, and then Akbar Khan's crowd broke in and murdered 'em all. Of course that took place a long time ago. Everything is different now, and it can never happen again; but still it isn't nice to think of, is it?"

"No," said Ernest, "and so I vote we *don't* think of it. Let's start out for a walk, and see

if we can find that tomb of Baber,* which they talk so much about. Erskine's history says it stands on a low hill somewhere out yonder, about a mile from the town. Come along."

Away they went accordingly, elbowing their way through the crowd that filled the narrow, dusty lanes of the city. During the day it would have been a very easy matter for them to make their way along, but as the hour of sunset and of leaving off business approached, the highways became more and more crowded. Parties going in different directions would meet and jostle each other, and at times the boys had no little difficulty to avoid becoming separated.

Hitherto, in order to avoid any risk of losing their way or getting into trouble, the two lads had never gone out unattended by the Colonel's Afghan servant, Sikander. But to-day

* Baber, the great-grandson of the Tartar Emperor Timour, conquered Northern India in 1526, and founded the empire of the Great Mogul. He died in 1530.

Sikander was absent, no one knew where, and our heroes, not caring to wait until he came back, decided upon trying to find their way for themselves.

As they went along, almost every step brought before them some object which if seen in London or New York would have gathered a bigger crowd than any circus. Here a huge bony fellow from the deserts of Beloochistan swaggered past, with his short curved sword at his side, and his coarse black hair twisted into greasy curls which straggled from under his white turban over his long, loose frock. There a tall, fierce-looking Afghan in a pointed red cap, with the scar of an English bullet across his brown cheek, stood bargaining for an embroidered scarf with a grave, dark-robed, high-cheeked Persian from Meshid.

A leper, holding out a fingerless hand with a whining petition for alms, was all but trampled on by a laden camel which came striding up the street, led by a half-clad Turcoman as lean and

brown and shaggy as itself. The next moment a skinny Kashgarin, from beneath whose little saucer-shaped cap his huge bat-like ears stuck out a full inch on either side of his thin, narrow, *squeezed*-looking face, was rudely thrust aside by a ragged, wild-eyed dervish (religious devotee), who scowled at our heroes in passing, and muttered some polite remark about "Christian dogs."

Crossing three or four small watercourses which zigzagged among the rich level green fields outside the town, the boys at length reached the Hill of Burial. Baber's tomb sorely disappointed the enthusiastic Ernest, who could hardly believe that the two upright slabs of plain white marble could really be the sole memorial of a man whose name had shaken all Asia like a thunder-clap. But the surrounding view amply repaid him. From the summit of the hill (which was crowned with a small mosque of polished marble, inscribed "Heaven eternal is the abode of Sultan Baber") he looked down upon a wide

green plain more than twenty miles broad. Tiny streams wound their way along, and here and there the broad expanse was dotted with native forts and villages.

In the midst of all, outspread in the glory of the sunset, lay the great white city itself, with its endless panorama of flat-roofed houses, and shining domes, and tall, tapering minarets, framed in a dark circle of leafy gardens. High above it, on a bold rocky bluff, loomed the huge gray wall of the citadel. Far to the north the snowy crests of the distant mountains glimmered faintly along the darkening sky, while on the west and south rose bare, stony heights. Little could the boys have imagined that, a few months later, upon these very heights, the best soldiers of Britain were to fight a four hours' battle for life and death against ten times their number of Afghans.

The hill itself—down the sloping side of which a little rivulet went dancing and sparkling to join the Cabool River below—was one mass of

green herbage and brilliant flowers, amid which the white tombstones stood out every here and there. Beneath the overshadowing trees numerous groups of holiday-makers—some from the surrounding villages, others from Cabool itself—were already seated, puffing their long pipes, sipping coffee or sherbet, and enjoying the cool of the evening; and the gay-colored robes and turbans, glancing through the dark leaves or scattered over the grass, made the place look (as Tom Hilton remarked with a grin) "like Central Park on a Sunday afternoon."

"Except that there are no ladies here," suggested Ernest. "How is it that one never sees a woman in this part of the world? What do they do with themselves? Don't they ever go out to take the air or do any shopping like the women in our own country?"

"No, *they're* all locked up at home; and my cousin, Nellie Parsons, who's a missionary in the north of India, says they keep 'em just as close

there as here. She'd all the work in the world awhile ago to get one of her Hindoo friends to let her take his wife for a drive, and even then he was so horrified at the whole proceeding he would only let her go in a close carriage."

So amused were our heroes with all they saw that they never noticed how fast the sun was sinking until it plunged out of sight behind the western hills.

"Halloo!" cried Ernest, starting to his feet; "hurry up, Tom, for we'll never find our way back in the dark."

"Never fear," replied Tom, confidently; "there's light enough left yet, if we step out lively."

But however lively they stepped out, darkness had fairly set in before they cleared the fields and watercourses, and found themselves in the town once more. Ernest, unused as yet to the ways of Eastern cities, was startled to find the streets, which had been so crowded and noisy barely two hours before, as lonely and silent as

the grave. The very echo of their steps sounded unnaturally loud amid that ghostly stillness, and the narrow, tunnel-like streets, roofed in with matting every here and there, and almost buried between the high, gloomy, windowless houses, which in many places all but touched each other overhead, were so dark that at times our heroes had fairly to grope their way. Every winding of that gloomy maze seemed to breathe an atmosphere of treachery and midnight murder; and even Ernest's bold heart sank as he saw, by the gradual slackening of his comrade's brisk stride, and his hesitating glance around at every fresh turn, that Tom was as uncertain of their whereabouts as himself.

Suddenly the stillness was broken by a dull, muffled sound like the tramp of many feet, and the boys had barely time to draw back into the shadow of a deep archway, when there swept by them a seemingly endless train of armed men in Afghan dress, whose white turbans, and colored

robes, and shining musket-barrels glimmered spectrally through the darkness.

"There's mischief afoot, you bet," whispered Tom, as the last man disappeared. "Those are Afghan soldiers from Herat, and they wouldn't sneak in after dark this way if they weren't up to some mischief. Halloo! what's this? Hurrah! here's the garden wall of the British Residency, and we'll just go right in and get Major Cavagnari to give us a guide."

But they looked in vain along the high, earthen wall for any sign of a gate. Finally, Tom, getting impatient, bade Ernest stand close to the wall, scaled it by means of his companion's shoulders, and then helped him in turn to the top, whence both dropped into the garden below.

"I say," whispered Ernest, "are you sure this *is* the Residency garden? I don't remember seeing these thick bushes before."

"Nor I," said Tom, "and it'll be a pretty job if we've got into some Afghan fellow's grounds

by mistake. However, we are in the scrape now, and we can't turn back. At least, I don't mean to. We'll consider that we are on an exploring expedition, and we may find something worth looking at. Let's creep forward and see."

Worming their way cautiously through the bushes, they came suddenly upon a very unexpected scene. Beyond the thicket lay a wide space of open ground, flanked by a large, white building of fantastic Eastern shape, at the door of which were dimly visible the tall figures and shining weapons of a group of native guards. In the centre of the clear space two Afghan soldiers were pacing up and down, with shouldered muskets, on either side of an open pavilion of crimson silk, lighted by two colored lamps. Both wore frayed red coats (evidently cast-off English uniforms), and copied zealously what they supposed to be the bearing of a British sentry, holding their heads as stiff as a ramrod, and jerking their

feet into the air at every step, as if kicking some invisible foe.

Within the pavilion a square, thick-set fellow, with a frightfully scarred face, in the uniform of the Herat regiment which had just passed, was standing respectfully before a stout, broad-faced man in a rich dress of embroidered silk, who sat squatting on a pile of cushions.

"We're in the wrong box clearly," muttered Tom, "but I *must* hear what they're talking about, for I'm certain that there's some plot on hand against us foreigners, and that this Herat fellow and his men are at the bottom of it."

So saying, he threw himself flat on the ground, and keeping in the shadow, crawled forward to the foot of the tree that overshadowed the pavilion. Finding, however, that he could only catch a few words of the talk, he swung himself up into the branches, and crept out along a projecting limb. Before he knew it he found himself right over the tent. Ernest, who was watching

him, felt his blood run cold as he saw the nearest sentinel turn sharply round, and bring his musket to the "ready." But just then a large bird flapped away from the tree with a hoarse scream, and the Afghan, disarmed of his suspicions, resumed his measured walk.

Tom gained nothing by his venture, for at that moment the Herat officer bowed, and quitted the tent. But he was instantly replaced by a tall figure in the dress of a native priest, turning towards whom the seated man displayed the low, slanting forehead, small, narrow eyes, and thick, black mustache of Yakoob Khan, the Ameer of Afghanistan.*

Starting back in amazement, Tom lost his balance, and fell down upon the tent with a tremendous crash, tearing the canopy right across, breaking one of the poles, and bringing down the near-

* My impressions of the ex-Ameer are drawn chiefly from my late visit to his present residence at Dehra-Dhoon, in the Himalaya Mountains.—D. K.

est lamp with a run. The soldiers sprang towards the spot, but just then a stone flung by Ernest knocked over the other lamp, and all was dark. As the boys darted into the thicket, they heard the shouting and stumbling of the guards mingling with the yells of the sentries, who were scuffling together on the ground, each taking the other for the author of the disturbance.

"Pity there are no newspapers here," said Ernest, as they regained the street, "to placard all the walls with, 'Mysterious Attack on the Ameer,' 'The Criminals still Undetected.' However, all's right now."

"All's wrong, you mean," answered Tom, gravely. "Do you know who that man in the priest's dress was?"

"No; who was he?"

"*Kara-Goorg, the Persian!*"

Chapter V.

A FIGHT BY FIRE-LIGHT.

Colonel Hilton looked very grave over the story of the evening's adventures; he looked graver still when he returned from being presented to the Ameer next morning.

"He was civil enough," said he, as they sat over their mid-day meal in the curtained balcony, "but fine words and armed cutthroats don't fit well together. The fact's just this: the whole city is ready for a row, and the Ameer's doing nothing to keep it down, while the priests are doing everything to get it up."

"Yes," cried Ernest, "there was one of them speechifying to a crowd at the end of the street just now, and they were all shrieking and tossing their arms about like mad."

"And early this morning," added Tom, "a soldier of the Herat regiment went swaggering past our door, and called out to a lot of the Cabool fellows who were lounging about: 'Ha! you let yourselves be beaten by the Ugrez' (English) 'last year; they wouldn't have beaten *us* so easily.'

"'Wait a little,' says one of the Caboolis, 'and you shall see that we can kill the unbelievers as well as you.'"

"H'm!" said Professor Makaroff. "It seems to me, my friends, that the best thing you can do is just to pack your things and come with me tomorrow when I start to look for the Lost City."

"You forget, Pavel Petrovitch," replied the Colonel, "that we are now attached to the Envoy's suite, and mustn't go till *he* goes. Besides, I don't suppose they would think of attacking a Russian mission; it's their game to be friends with Russia, now that the English are threatening them again. It's poor Major Cavagnari and

his guard that they mean to butcher; but I'll go and warn him this very day."

Colonel Hilton did so, but all in vain. The brave Englishman was as kind and courteous as ever, but nothing could persuade him to take any precaution against the fatal snare which every one saw plainly except himself.

"Many thanks for your kindness, Colonel Hilton, but there's nothing to be feared from such curs as these. They may yelp and show their teeth, but they've not pluck enough for a fight. Moreover, I have been placed here by our government, and I need not tell an American officer that the last thing which should make any soldier quit his post is the fear of personal danger."

The next day Professor Makaroff, with a strong escort of Cossacks, three or four Afghans, and a Tartar guide, started on his hunt for the Lost City, with as jolly a smile upon his little round face as if he were only bound on a picnic, instead of a journey through one of the most perilous re-

gions in all Asia. When he was gone the rest of the party had leisure to notice that their Afghan servant, Sikander, had been missing nearly two days.

"That's bad," said the Colonel, shaking his head. "I can guess where he's gone, for when a row of this sort once begins, it's safe to draw in every Mohammedan within reach. He's been true as steel all the time I've had him, but one might as well try to tame a wolf as one of these Afghans."

And now the signs of the coming storm began to multiply on every side. All the bustling groups of merchants, store-keepers, porters, water-carriers, sellers of fruit or sherbet, that ordinarily crowded the streets, had vanished, and in their stead appeared a throng of wild faces and glittering weapons, while the air rang with cries of "Death to the unbelievers!" After nightfall the streets seemed deserted, as usual; but it did not escape Tom Hilton's keen eye that in every dark

corner several shadowy figures were lurking, as if awaiting some expected signal. The few European residents were never seen outside their closely shut houses, and even our thoughtless heroes felt like men standing on the deck of a burning powder-ship.

So matters went until the evening of the fourth day after the Professor's departure. Colonel Hilton had accompanied the Russian Envoy to the palace, and our two friends were together in one of the lower rooms, when the curtain of the doorway was suddenly thrown back, and the missing Sikander stood before them. But his plain dress was now replaced by the gold-fringed turban and snow-white robe of an Afghan chief, a jewelled *yataghan* (sword), and a brace of silver-mounted pistols hung at his girdle of red silk, and his once grave and stolid face was all ablaze with fierce excitement.

"Sons of a noble chief," said he, in his sonorous native tongue, "hear the words of Sikander Beg.

When my enemies drove me from my own land your father gave me shelter. I have eaten his bread and salt, and his friends are the friends of Sikander. None will harm you here, but as ye love your lives stir not forth to-night."

The curtain fell behind him, and he was gone.

Both lads sprang to their feet at once. There was no need to speak: the same thought was in the minds of both. In a moment they were wrapped in the long Afghan mantles which they had bought as mementos of Cabool, and within two minutes after being warned that it was certain death to stir out, they were hurrying towards the British Residency.

Night had already set in, and the streets through which they passed were completely deserted, while the silence was broken only by a dull, distant sound, like the moan of a far-off sea. But they were barely half-way to the Residency when a strong hand grasped Ernest's shoulder, and a familiar voice chuckled, hoarsely:

"You should always git all your men together, Mr. Ernest, afore you goes into haction. Wherever Captain Clairmont's son goes, old Bill Barlow goes too."

There was no time to argue, and a few minutes more brought the three to the Residency, at the door of which stood Major Cavagnari himself, listening, with a look of stern gravity on his handsome sun-browned face, to the distant murmur, which was gradually swelling into a deep hoarse roar. The boys told him breathlessly that the threatened attack had come at last, and were begging him to come and take refuge with them before it was too late, when their words were drowned by a trampling of countless feet and the ear-piercing yell of the Afghan war-cry, "Deen! deen!" (the faith, the faith). They had barely time to spring inside and bar the heavy gate behind them when all outside it was one roaring sea of rags, dirt, knives, struggling limbs, hideous faces, and wolfish cries.

"It's too late now, my brave lads," said Cavagnari, "and I'm only sorry you should have risked your lives for me to no purpose. Luckily, I've only three Englishmen here besides myself, so England won't lose much by *our* death."

The fearless words were answered by a crash of stones against the front of the building, while the strong gate began to echo with the blows of its assailants. At the same moment a yell from the garden showed that the mob had scaled the boundary wall, and that the house was now beset on every side.

Ernest felt his pulses tingle, and the blood rushed through his veins like living fire, as he seized a rifle and hurried to his post. He seemed to have grown up in a single moment. Yesterday he was a light-hearted boy, without a thought beyond the present instant; to-day he was taking part in events which were to change the fate of a kingdom and to live forever in history. In his excitement he hardly thought of the certain death

that awaited them all; for what chance had the twenty-five Hindoo regulars and fifty irregulars, who, with the three Englishmen above mentioned, formed Cavagnari's entire garrison, against the whole population of Cabool?

And now the battle began in earnest. A spattering fire of matchlocks and pistols ran through the crowd, lighting up their wild figures and savage faces; and showers of stones were hurled at every window, while a few of the boldest, encouraged by seeing no sign of resistance, closed in and began to batter the gate with axes and hammers.

"Fire!" shouted a stern voice overhead.

The flash and crack of the volley came as the thunder-clap follows the lightning, and the shrieks and groans that rose up out of the darkness below bore fatal witness to its effect. For one moment the wave of assault recoiled, but only to surge forward again. The firing was now incessant on both sides, and the doomed house stood

HE OPPOSED HIMSELF SINGLY TO A DOZEN OF THE ENEMY.

out against the surrounding blackness amid a dancing ring of flame, when suddenly the cracks of the rifles and the yells of the Afghans were out-thundered by a tremendous roll of musketry, which seemed to shake the very air.

"'Twas no raw hands that fired *that* volley," cried Bill Barlow, who, overjoyed already at being once more among trained soldiers, was doubly so to find a disciplined force opposed to him. "Hurrah! I never thought I'd have the luck to fight agin reg'lar troops any more!"

It was too true. The Herat regiment had just joined the assailants (thus proving that the besieged could hope for no help from the Ameer), and with it came a new and terrible enemy. Either from wanton mischief or settled purpose, the Afghans had fired the little summer-house in the garden, and the flames catching the surrounding trees and bushes, which were dry as tinder from the long heat, the whole enclosure was soon one red and roaring blaze.

Thicker and thicker rolled the smoke, hotter and hotter grew the air. Tom and Ernest, half stifled, crept out upon the balcony, hidden by the smoke—for the house itself was now on fire. But a sudden gust rent the cloud, and amid the sea of upturned faces below, which the blood-red glare threw out with ghastly clearness, they saw *one* familiar countenance turned towards them with a look of agony and horror, such as might be worn by a man who, striking at a supposed enemy, finds that he has killed his only son. It was the face of Sikander!

The next moment a shower of bullets drove them back into the burning house, and in a momentary lull of the firing they could hear the enemy bursting in below.

"Shake hands, old boy," said Tom; "it's all up now. God bless you!"

All that followed was like a troubled dream. Ernest was dimly aware of the door falling inward before a rush of shrieking Afghans, of Bill

CARRIED AWAY TO THE MOUNTAINS.

felling the foremost with his clubbed rifle, and being himself thrown down the next moment. He saw Tom stagger back against the wall, and sprang in front of him. Then he opposed himself singly to a dozen of the enemy, firing his revolver right in their faces. Then came a heavy shock, a pang of sharp pain, and all was a blank.

Chapter VI.

IN A ROBBER VILLAGE.

When Ernest opened his eyes he hardly knew whether he was dreaming or awake. The darkness, the uproar, the flames, the raging mob, the domes and minarets of Cabool, had vanished like shadows, and he was lying under the shade of a tent, in a smooth green valley shut in by low hills, upon which the mid-day sun was shining in all its splendor. There was a bandage around his left arm, and another around his head, which ached terribly; and altogether he felt weak and dizzy, as if he had just recovered from a long illness.

He was still gazing round him, when a well-known voice said:

"Awake at last, Ernie? How do you feel now?"

Turning upon his elbow—for he was still too weak to rise—Ernest beheld Tom Hilton lying on the other side of the tent, very pale, and with a strip of blood-stained linen across his forehead, but with the true American look of fearless self-reliance still bright in his sunken eyes.

"Is that you, Tom? Where are we?"

"Talk French, old fellow," answered Tom, in that language. "There's always *one* man among these fellows who knows English, and he'll be set to watch us, you may be sure. Poor Cavagnari's killed, and all his men, and we're prisoners. Luckily the Afghans don't know that I understand Pushtu [the language of Afghanistan], and I've gathered from their talk that they belong to an independent hill tribe, over which the Ameer has no power; and now that the fight's done they'd be glad to get home at once, if *we* didn't hinder 'em."

"*We!*" echoed Ernest, amazed. "How's that?"

"Why, it seems that half a dozen of them have been hired to take us alive, I suppose with the idea that we were somebody of consequence for whom they might get a big ransom. But just as they were slipping away with us, up came a party of the same tribe, who stopped them short, and insisted upon a share of the ransom if there was one. It's never very difficult for six-and-twenty armed men to persuade six, so at last they agreed to camp here, twelve miles from Cabool, until this mysterious 'chief' turns up who hired the fellows that took us, and then it'll be settled what's to be done with us."

"Can it be Sikander who's done it to save our lives?" asked Ernest, quickly.

"I'm afraid not. We'd be all right in *his* hands, but he's told me all about his own tribe, and these fellows don't fit the description at all. However, when he comes we'll soon see whether he's Sikander or not."

"And this'll be he coming now, I suppose," said Ernest, as a general shout and a tramping of horses' hoofs announced some new arrival in the camp.

The next moment a group of horsemen rode into the open space within the circle of tents, headed by a man whose face our heroes could not see, but whose height and figure certainly reminded them of Sikander. He leaped from his horse and came straight towards the tent. In another instant the prisoners saw scowling down upon them the lean, dark, wolfish face of their Persian enemy, Kara-Goorg!

In a moment the whole truth burst upon the unhappy boys. Kara-Goorg, while obeying the orders of his Russian employers—for they could no longer doubt that his real "mission" in Cabool was to stir up the tumult which had ended so fatally—had gratified his own private hatred by bribing the Afghans to kidnap them in the general confusion. Their attempt to save Cava-

gnari had made the treacherous design easy, and they were now at the mercy of one to whom mercy was unknown.

"Ha!" cried the Persian, with a mocking grin, speaking in English that Ernest might understand him, "fine Master come low down now, eh? How he like when he get sold for slave? how he like when Tartar whip him with horsewhip, and put out his eyes if he try run away? What Colonel say when he hear his son wash feet of Afghan chief? Fine Master strike 'Persian dog'—but Persian dog turn and bite!"

And he kicked Ernest fiercely in the side.

Such an insult, offered by such a man, roused Ernest's English blood to a pitch of fury which, for the moment, gave back all his lost strength. He sprang to his feet, and in another instant would have been at the throat of the Persian had not Tom Hilton caught his arm.

Tom's watchful eye had noticed several Afghans standing listening at the tent door, and

turning to them, he addressed them in Persian—for even at that critical moment his American shrewdness warned him to conceal his knowledge of their native tongue.

"Sons of the mountain! we are the captives of Afghan warriors, and the shadow of an Afghan's tent should be sacred. Whose dog is this Persian coward that he should dare to lord it among valiant Afghans and good Mussulmans as if their camp were his own? I am the son of a chief and a warrior, whose riches are great and whose hands are open; and if I must die, let me die by the hands of brave Mohammedans, and not be barked to death by a Persian cur whose fathers were slaves to the slaves of *your* fathers."

Tom's skilful allusion to the ancient hatred between Persia and Afghanistan, and his hint about his father's wealth and generosity, were not lost upon his hearers. A murmur of approval followed his words, and Kara-Goorg, who had half drawn his Persian dagger, with a growl of fury,

which our hero's complimentary remarks fully justified, sheathed it again, and began to look uncomfortable.

And well he might. Ignorant of Tom's knowledge of Persian, he had asserted (in the belief that his prisoners would have no chance of contradicting him) that they were persons of inferior rank, whom he meant to sell for slaves as a punishment for having affronted him. To the Afghans hired to kidnap them the story seemed perfectly natural, and the moderate reward quite sufficient for such a service, while their comrades, in demanding a share of the profits, were actuated rather by a belief that the captives were likely to fetch a good price than by any suspicion of their real rank.

But now the tables were turned. The kidnappers learned for the first time that they had been cheated (and that, too, by a Persian), while their companions discovered that the prize in their hands was much more valuable than they

had supposed. Neither discovery boded good to Kara-Goorg's plans, and that worthy thought it high time to cut the conversation short.

"Why should these dogs laugh at the beards of Afghan warriors, and make them eat dirt?" he cried. "Do we not know that lies run from an unbeliever's tongue like water from a burst water-skin, and that every rogue will boast himself a descendant of many princes, though in his own land he is but a porter or a seller of figs? The sun is sinking, and I have far to go. Ho! Badja [children], carry forth these sons of burned fathers, and bind them upon your horses."

But as his attendants outside came forward to obey, the Afghan chief—a handsome young giant of six feet three, with hair and eyes as black as the loose trousers of embroidered velvet which he wore below his snow-white tunic and crimson sash—haughtily waved them back.

"Is it not said," he observed, in a slightly mocking tone, "that 'hurry belongs to Shaitaun?'

[the Evil One]. Why is our Persian guest in such haste to depart? His words are as wise as those of Lokman the Sage; but would porters or fruit-sellers tempt us to keep them prisoners in the hope of a ransom (and perhaps to kill them in our wrath at being balked of it), when they might go free at once by proclaiming who they are?"

The Persian's jaw dropped at this shrewd retort, and a lurking grin flickered over the grave faces of the Afghan warriors.

"That chief wasn't born on the 1st of April—that's a fact," chuckled Tom, translating the speech to Ernest: "he's been there before."

"But why not tell them at once that Sikander's our friend?"

"Not *much*. These hill tribes are always quarrelling, and Sikander may have killed this man's father, for all we know. Gently's the word."

Meanwhile the young chief called up one of his men who had served for some time among the

HE FOUND HIMSELF RIGHT OVER THE TENT.

Russians at Tashkent, and questioned Tom in his presence as to his father's name, rank, friends, and personal appearance. Tom's answers were frankly given, and confirmed by the Afghan soldier. Another man, who had picked up a little English, was then sent to question Ernest, whose answers tallied exactly with those of his friend. The evidence against Kara-Goorg was complete.

But the Persian was not the man to lose both his plunder and his revenge without resistance, and he resolved to try the effect of a little bullying.

"These prisoners are mine," cried he, "and I am not one upon whose beard every rogue may throw dust. Let those who wrong me dread the wrath of the Ameer and the vengeance of the Oorooso" (Russians).

"The shadow of the Ameer's throne only covers Cabool," replied the young warrior, scornfully; "it is not long enough to reach our mountains. As for the Russians, if they want our pris-

stony, lifeless, unrelieved by tree or bush, their countless clefts gaping like thirsty mouths under the blistering glare of the sun.

All this was seen through the one narrow gateway or rather gap in one of those huge gray walls of dried mud, twenty-five or thirty feet high, so common in Central Asia. This wall, which was nearly circular, enclosed a considerable space, over which were scattered broadcast, without any attempt at arrangement, a number of little box-shaped clay hovels, with flat roofs and low, narrow door-ways. In the midst of these the Afghan band were just dismounting from their horses, while a score or so of women in long blue mantles, the folds of which almost hid their faces, were unsaddling and rubbing down the beasts, or lighting fires to cook the evening meal. Altogether, what with the glittering arms and prancing horses, the strange dresses and swarthy visages of those present, the huge dark wall in the background, and the bright blue sky over all,

this robber village made a very effective but singular picture.

Half a dozen children, brown and shaggy as forest monkeys, had already come scrambling out to meet their fathers, and one grim old warrior, whose scarred features looked just like a railway map, was dandling a little round-faced baby on his brawny shoulder.

"See that old boy petting the baby," cried Ernest. "*He* must be a good sort anyhow."

"*Must* he?" said Tom, with a queer smile. "Do you know what I heard him say just now? 'These two Christian dogs shot my brother in the fight at Cabool, and the first chance I get I mean to kill them both.'"

Chapter VII.

AN AFGHAN GAME OF FORFEITS.

Happily for our two friends, the old Afghan's kind intentions respecting them had to remain unfulfilled for the present. Such a prize did not fall into the hands of the tribe every day, and Ahmed Khan was as careful of his prisoners as if they had been his own children while awaiting the return of the messenger whom he had sent to Cabool to treat with Colonel Hilton for their ransom.

Meanwhile their strength revived in the pure mountain air, and their wounds, which, though severe, were not dangerous, healed rapidly. Within the stronghold they were allowed to walk about as they pleased, for the gate-way was always guarded, and the wall too high to be scaled.

Indeed, even if they could have climbed it, they would have gained little, for on all sides but one it overhung a sheer precipice of nearly a hundred feet.

Even within these narrow limits, however, the boys found plenty to amuse them. The very first day their dinner consisted of a dish quite new to both—a real Afghan "pillau," made of a lamb roasted whole, with the wool on, the entire inside being taken out, and the carcass stuffed with rice, plums, raisins, and spices. On the same evening Tom's attention was attracted by a great shouting and laughing in one corner of the camp, which proceeded from a troop of children who were playing the old Afghan game of "guarding the shoe." A shoe is laid on the ground, and defended by one side, while the other tries to carry it off. All the players hop on one foot while holding up the other with the left hand, and any one who falls or puts down the upheld foot becomes a prisoner to the opposite party. Tom and

Ernest, always ready for fun, joined in on different sides, and before the game ended were the best of friends, not only with the children, but also with their fathers, who were greatly amused to see their national game so well played by two foreign "unbelievers."

But all the band were not equally friendly to our heroes, whose presence seemed grievously to offend the elder Afghans, among whom the national hatred of "the yellow-faced English" was far greater than among the younger and more unthinking men who had formed the escort of Ahmed Khan. Foremost among those hostile to them was old Selim, the old man who had vowed their death in revenge for their having killed his brother; and as day after day passed without bringing any news of the ransom or of the Afghan sent to arrange it, Selim and his party lost no chance of declaring that the "Christian dogs" had imposed upon the chief with a lying tale, and ought to be put to death forthwith.

Thus matters stood, when one evening Selim's baby, which seemed in no way to share its father's hatred towards the two boys, who made a great pet of it, was playing on a heap of rubbish in an angle of the wall. Tom Hilton had just caught sight of it, and was running towards it, when suddenly he saw a large spotted snake glide out of a cleft in the wall, with an angry hiss, close behind the unconscious child.

With one bound Tom was between the serpent and its intended victim, just in time to receive the prong-like fang in the fleshy part of his outstretched hand. The next moment he had the snake by the throat, and with one blow of a heavy stone pounded the flat, slimy head into a shapeless mass. Meanwhile the cries of the frightened infant had drawn several Afghans to the spot, including Selim himself, who, the moment he saw what had happened, snatched up his child and rushed away with it like a madman to his own hut.

Tom's hurt was promptly looked at by a hatchet-faced old gray-beard with one eye, who acted as surgeon to the band. This learned gentleman began by holding a lighted stick* to the pin-like wound, from which flowed a thick black gout of venom, followed by drops of blood. The doctor then sucked the wound, and ended by applying to it a root which he had previously chewed into a pulp. Whether from the strength of the medicine or the weakness of the poison, Tom felt no further inconvenience except a slight inflammation of the hurt hand.

Just as the dressing was completed, old Selim, having at length assured himself that his child was unharmed, came back as hurriedly as he had gone away.

"Christian," said he, "I vowed to make thy father childless, and lo! thou hast saved me from being childless myself. When thou hast need of

---

* The same remedy is used by the African Hottentots.

aught that a man can do, think upon Selim the son of Yakoob."

But although Tom's chief enemy was thus converted into a friend, his other ill-wishers were as bitter as ever, and it was perhaps as well for the prisoners that their foes had just then something more serious to think of. For now came rumors that the English were marching upon Cabool to avenge the massacre, and that detachments of their troops had already been seen among the hills above Jelalabad.

Such a chance of fighting and plunder was too good to be lost, and one morning at sunrise Ahmed Khan, with a fillet of white linen inscribed with a text of the Koran wound round his sword-arm to give him strength in battle, rode out with forty of his best men. According to Afghan usage, a turban was unrolled and stretched across the gateway as a charm against evil; but by some mischance one end of it came loose, and fluttered down upon the young chief as he rode beneath it.

At this evil omen the Afghans grew pale, and old Selim, who was left in charge of the camp, implored his chief to turn back.

"What is to be *will* be," answered the Mussulman. "If I am fated to die, who can escape destiny? Come what may, my sword shall not be slack."

And away he went like a whirlwind.

A week passed without any news from him or his followers. At length, on the seventh evening, a solitary horseman was seen coming up the hill, haggard, ghastly, his gay dress all torn and soiled with dust and blood.

Instantly the whole band were around him, and a score of trembling voices asked what had befallen.

"There is but one God, and Mohammed is His prophet," said the Afghan, in a hollow voice. "The soul of Ahmed Khan is in the gardens of Behesht" [paradise], "but his body is food for the vultures of the mountain. The unbelievers'

steel is red with the blood of our brothers, and I alone am escaped to tell it."

For an instant it seemed as if the dreadful tidings had turned to stone all who heard them, and then there broke forth a yell like the cry of a wounded tiger.

"Well may all go ill with us," roared a fierce-looking warrior, "when we suffer these unbelieving dogs to live among us. Upon them, brothers, and slay without mercy!"

In a moment every sword was out, and the savages came yelling around the two prisoners, who, thinking that all was over, looked round in desperation for some weapon that might aid them to sell their lives as dearly as possible.

But they were not left unfriended. Selim, who at the news of the chief's death had sunk down as if overwhelmed, threw himself with one bound between the boys and their assailants, and stood grimly facing the howling throng, with his terrible yataghan flashing over his head.

"Stand back!" shouted he, in a voice of thunder. "Would ye kill him who saved my child? Let one man of you lift a hand, and he shall feel how Selim's sword can bite!"

The savages hung back for a moment, and Selim, giving them no time to rally, went on in a commanding tone:

"Are you quarrelling like women when the enemy is at your gates? Yusuf, Ali, Hussein, ride down the valley; perchance ye may meet others of our brethren who have escaped from the battle. The rest of you load your guns and saddle your horses; and do thou, Mahmoud, climb the wall, and watch if there be any sign of the English unbelievers marching this way."

This last suggestion startled even the reckless Afghans, who obeyed without a word. The four fiercest of the gang being thus got rid of, and the rest too busy with their horses and arms to think of anything else, the doomed lads had a short breathing-time, and looked around them in the

hope of being able to fly. But a brawny Afghan was sitting on the ladder with which Mahmoud had scaled the wall, and half a dozen others were cleaning their guns in the gate-way; so there was nothing for it but to await the end of a respite which they knew could not be long.

And so it proved. No signal being given of the English approach, the human tigers gathered once more around Selim, clamoring for the blood of the captives. Selim saw that to resist would only cause an immediate conflict, in which he and the three or four men who supported him (for nearly all the friendly Afghans had perished with their chief) would have no chance of saving the prisoners, and he resolved to try a stratagem.

"Brothers," cried he, "why should true believers quarrel about foreign infidels? If it be their fate to fall by your swords, it can be soon decided. Let us have a game at 'Pasha Wuzeeree,' and he who becomes 'Wuzeer' shall decide their destiny."

This proposal was received with a shout of approval by the Afghans, who, hasty and capricious as children, were delighted with the novel idea of deciding the fate of their captives by their favorite game.

"Pasha Wuzeeree" somewhat resembles our own game of "forfeits," differing from it, however, in being played with dice. It is regulated by three casts — viz., "Ameer" (King), "Wuzeer" (Prime-minister), and "Ghal" (thief). The fourth throw (farmer) counts for nothing. The players go on casting until one throws King and another Minister, before which no throw is allowed to count. When both are placed, the next who throws "thief" is seized by the Minister, who leads him up to the King, saying, "I've caught a thief." The King asks, "What has he done?" and the Minister makes some absurd answer, such as "He has stolen his sister's coat," or "He has plucked a horse's feathers off." The King then sentences the culprit to some punishment as ab-

surd as his supposed crime, and so the game proceeds, with great shouting and laughter over every fresh forfeit.

As if on purpose to tantalize those whose doom hung upon it, the game on this occasion moved unusually slowly. It was long before any one threw King, and still longer before the cast of Minister came. But at length Selim threw Minister.

The old warrior's face brightened, it being his plan to sentence the next man who cast "thief" to guard the prisoners with his life; and the "King" being one of his own party, was quite ready to assist the scheme. But fortune was against him. The very next throw was "King," and the rules of the game obliged the existing King to yield his place to the new one, while in another moment a new Minister ousted Selim, who bit his lip savagely as he gave up his place.

"I've caught a thief!" cried the Minister, seizing a man who had just thrown "thief."

"What has he done?"

"Spared the lives of two unbelievers."

"Let him take his sword, then, and kill them both."

Selim attempted to spring up, but stumbled and fell. The Afghan seized his sword with the intention of making his forfeit good, but before the blow could fall there came a sudden and startling interruption.

Chapter VIII.

THE VALLEY OF DEATH.

All the time this game of life and death was going on, Mahmoud had never stirred from his watch-tower upon the wall; and just at that moment he sent forth the long, shrill cry which was the well-known signal of danger, following it up by shouting:

"The Goorkhas, brothers! the Goorkhas!"

At the name of these mountaineers of Nepaul, the fiercest and most dreaded of all the Hindoo troops in the British service, everything else was forgotten in a moment. All was confusion, which was increased tenfold as the three scouts sent down the valley came galloping in, with full confirmation of Mahmoud's evil tidings. To attempt

any defence of such a wide circuit of wall with their scanty force, against disciplined soldiers, was hopeless; and Selim, who alone of the whole band seemed to preserve his presence of mind, gave orders for the mounting of the women and children upon the strongest horses, and the instant abandonment of the stronghold.

Meanwhile our heroes began to hope that they might be overlooked in the general confusion; but they were promptly undeceived by hearing the Afghan who had already been so active against them, remarking that "it was now time to kill the two unbelievers."

"Wilt thou be always a father of asses?" cried Selim, whose cunning brain had already planned how to use this new turn of events to his own advantage. "Know you not that if you shed their blood, the English will kill our people in like manner; whereas, if we keep them as hostages, we may hereafter give them in exchange for our brethren who are in captivity? Let the

Feringhi [European] youths write that as the English deal with their prisoners, so will *we* deal with ours, and it shall be left at the gate for those who come to read."

This new view of the case quite took the Afghans by surprise, and all agreed that Selim's plan was excellent. Tom Hilton, whose hands were loosed for the purpose, wrote the required message with a piece of charcoal on a strip of white linen, which was then fastened in a conspicuous place just outside the gate-way. But his American smartness prompted him to turn the Afghans' ignorance of English to account by adding a postscript for the benefit of any British officers who might be with the Goorkhas, telling the route by which they were to cross the mountains in their retreat — a measure which was to lead to consequences of which Tom never dreamed.

And now began a march such as our heroes had hitherto known only through books of trav-

el. All around, the barren, gloomy ridges stood up black and blasted and hideous, crossing and recrossing each other in every direction like the threads of a spider's web, and seeming to form one horrid complicated trap for every living thing once entangled in it. Through this dismal maze they zigzagged as best they might, now along ledge-paths barely three feet wide, now among fallen bowlders as high as the roof of a cottage, now over heaps of crumbling earth, from which rose at every step clouds of hot, prickly dust that well-nigh choked them.

During the first day our two lads went on foot with the rest, the horses being reserved for the women, children, and older men. But the less-seasoned Ernest soon began to give way under this terrible strain, and Tom, for some wise purpose of his own, pretended to be equally exhausted. So, on the second morning, Selim dismounted one of his own men and put the two boys upon the horse, with the perfect approval

of the band, who were now fully alive to the value of their hostages.

"Ernie," said Tom that night, speaking French, as usual, "here's a glorious chance for us. I heard them say there are signs of a fog, and if it comes they won't be able to see us two yards off."

"But what good will that do?"

"*Everything!* To-morrow we'll pass a place that I've heard Sikander describe many a time—the 'Valley of Death,' where you go along a path no broader than a tea-tray, with three hundred feet of precipice below, and overhead a great black cliff full of cracks and clefts, like that place half-way down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Now, you see, they leave our feet and hands free, and this scarf with which they tie us together is a trashy old thing, which one good tug ought to settle. If the fog comes, we'll wait till we get out on to the ledge, and the minute you hear me scream we'll tumble off on the side next the cliff, push the horse over the precipice, so that they

may think we've all gone down together, and then creep into one of the holes and hide till they're gone. What do you say?"

"I'll do it," said Ernest, setting his teeth; "but can't we manage it without killing the poor old horse?"

"No; he must go; for *then*, don't you see, they'll think *we've* fallen over along with him, and not make any hunt for us. Now go to sleep while you can, old fellow, for you'll have enough to do to-morrow if the fog comes."

The fog *did* come, sure enough; and by the time they reached the perilous ledge-path that overhung the terrible "Valley of Death," day was literally turned into night. But frightful as was the risk of such a passage in such weather, the Afghans durst not hang back, for they were now in the territory of a hostile clan, and the lives of the whole party might depend upon their getting across it as quickly as possible to the friendly tribes beyond. The horses had been shod with

THE POOR HORSE FELL HEADLONG DOWN THE PRECIPICE.

felt, and the perfectly noiseless passage of this long train of shadowy horsemen along the brink of that fearful precipice, through the gray, sullen mist, had in it something indescribably weird and ghostly. In that dead silence the excited boys could almost hear the loud throbbing of their own hearts.

Suddenly Tom Hilton set up a terrific shriek, which made every horse in the cavalcade start and rear. Instantly both lads were off their beast, the scarf that bound them was torn asunder, and as the poor horse fell headlong down the precipice, with a piercing cry, they wriggled into a narrow cleft, and were hidden from view.

Chapter IX.

LOST ON THE MOUNTAINS.

"So far, so good!" muttered Tom Hilton, as the wild cries of the Afghans died away in the distance. "Their horses have taken fright, and they'll have quite enough to do to manage *them*."

"I am sorry for that poor horse, though," said Ernest. "But what are we to do now?"

"Take the back track, to be sure, and find our way down into the valley by the same way that we came up. Those Goorkhas can't be far off, and once we sight *them* we're all right."

Tom spoke as confidently as if the thing were already half done, and his cheeriness communicated itself to his companion, whose fatigue seemed quite forgotten in the delight of being free once more.

But, as those who have marched through Afghanistan know to their cost, it is easier to find one's way through the most pathless forests of Brazil, or over the widest prairies of the far West, than amid the fatal net-work of mountains that reaches in one endless maze from the source of the Cabool River to the frontier of Kashgar. So long as the ledge-path continued, indeed, they could not easily miss their way, there being not footing enough for a cat anywhere beyond its two or three feet of rocky surface. But it came to an end as suddenly as if the earth had swallowed it, and to the bewildered eyes of the wanderers the whole country seemed one endless succession of fathomless gulfs and unscalable precipices, among which they looked in vain for any trace of the way by which they had come. They were *lost!*

The two young explorers eyed each other in silent dismay as the fearful truth burst upon them; but even in this crisis Tom Hilton was ready with an idea.

"If we can't find our way back, Ernie, there's something else we can do, which is better than staying here and starving, anyhow. This is just the time when the Afghans mostly come down from the higher mountains, and we're likely enough to fall in with some of them. Now, I heard Selim say yesterday that all the people of this district are special enemies of his tribe; so it seems to me that if we tell them we've just escaped from Selim's crowd, and give them the news of Ahmed Khan and all his men having been killed, they'll feel like giving us a good reception. Anyhow, I guess it's worth trying."

Ernest agreed that it was, and having discovered a goat track that led away to the left among the crags, they proceeded to follow it.

Suddenly Tom stopped short, held up his finger warningly, and crept forward to the edge of a projecting crag that flanked their path to the right, Ernest silently following.

Although a faint glow still lingered on the

hill-top, all below was already wrapped in deep shadow; but just at the foot of the cliff over which they were peering, the gloom was broken by the glare of a huge fire, around which several tents were pitched, while a number of figures in Afghan dress could be seen constantly passing and repassing.

"I say," whispered Tom, "this is a case of 'out of the frying-pan into the fire.' These fellows are Selim's tribe too; I know them by the color of their turbans and the shape of their tents."

"But not the party we've escaped from, surely?"

"No; they're too numerous for that; they must be a war band out raiding, and a pretty strong one, too, or they wouldn't camp on the enemy's ground in this free-and-easy way. Now I vote we just wait till they're all asleep, and then go down and get hold of some food and a couple of guns, for when once we have arms and ammunition we can forage for ourselves."

Unhappily the Afghans seemed in no hurry to go to bed, and it was not until the boys were both almost benumbed with the raw chillness of the night air, which made itself felt even through the thick Afghan mantles given them by their late guardians, that Tom at length gave the word to descend.

The descent was almost as sheer as the side of a house, and had not the firelight shown them where to plant their feet, they must certainly have been dashed to pieces. Even as it was, Ernest twice escaped, as if by a miracle, from falling headlong to the bottom, and when they at length reached the ground below, both were so exhausted that they could hardly stand.

Luckily their descent had been perfectly noiseless, and the keenest eye could not have detected their figures amid the black shadows of the rocks. But the first glance showed them, to their no small dismay, that their difficulties were only beginning. Reckless as the Afghans were, they had

not forgotten that they were on hostile ground, and the fire-glow played upon the tall figure of a sentinel, who stood leaning upon the sickle-shaped butt-end of his long rifle not twenty yards from the spot where they lay.

It was, indeed, as Tom Hilton had said, "out of the frying-pan into the fire;" but the daring young American was not easily disheartened. Profiting by his experience in the Ameer's garden, he lowered himself into a deep trench scooped by the torrent which had once poured through the cleft by which they had descended, and crawled along it until he reached the tents, closely followed by his comrade.

Finding all quiet, the boys cautiously left the trench, and keeping well in the shadow, proceeded to help themselves. Tom seized a goat-skin bag full of wheaten bread and dried fruit, while Ernest Clairmont slung over his shoulder a half-devoured joint of goat. The latter then clutched a gun that lay beside a slumbering warrior, while

Tom Hilton, seeing a splendid rifle hanging with its ammunition pouch across the door of the nearest tent, crept up and seized it.

In doing so, however, he came within the circle of light cast by the fire, and the sentinel's eye was instantly upon him. The native mantle might have disarmed suspicion, but his fair skin betrayed him at once. Uttering a hoarse cry of rage, the Afghan levelled his rifle. But just then something glittered behind him, and with one convulsive spring he fell heavily upon his face, his gun going off harmlessly in the fall.

The next moment came a yell that awoke all the echoes of the silent mountains, and out of the darkness broke a wave of fierce faces and glittering weapons, sweeping right down into the camp. Then rose on high a wild clamor of rage and alarm, as the half-awakened sleepers sprang up and seized whatever weapon came first to hand. In a moment the whole camp was in one whirl of hand-to-hand battle, blows raining at hap-hazard

amid the darkness, and pistols and rifles flashing through the gloom like summer lightnings, death coming no one knew whence or how.

Meanwhile the boys, unnoticed in the confusion, had got clear of the camp, and were scrambling across the river-bed beyond it, in which the long drought had left only a tiny stream trickling through the centre of a wide waste of sand and gravel. But along the farther bank stretched a belt of thick, wiry scrub, dense enough to screen them from every eye; and they were hurrying towards it when a terrific clamor from behind told them that the beaten Afghans were fleeing in the same direction, while their pursuers, following close at their heels, were cutting down man after man.

There was no time to lose. The boys dashed through the water and over the pebbles, and had just gained the top of the bank when a deep booming sound shook the air, followed by a deafening crash, and an inky-black torrent came rush-

ing and roaring down the dry channel, sweeping away like leaves the whole crowd of combatants, whose livid faces stood out spectrally in the rising moonlight for one moment before the swirling foam closed over them.

"Poor fellows!" said Ernest; "I wish we could save some of them. Thank God it didn't come a minute sooner! Ha! what's that?"

It was a solitary horseman, struggling in midstream. A high gravel bank had saved him for the moment, but it was fast giving way, and another instant must seal his doom. Just then a ray of moonlight struck full upon his face, and the boys recognized Sikander!

Chapter X.

SIKANDER'S NEWS.

"Turn round!" roared Tom Hilton, recovering from his momentary stupor. "The rock! the rock!"

The brave Afghan, cool as ever in that deadly peril, heard and understood. One rapid glance over his shoulder, and then, just as the gravel gave way beneath him, he turned his horse's head and set it straight at a huge sloping bowlder, nearly six feet broad by as many high at the upper end, which lay a little behind him. The swirl of the current was tremendous, and horse and rider almost disappeared in the boiling foam; but they rose again instantly, and another moment saw them safe upon the rock.

By this time the fury of the flood was beginning to subside. No longer pent up between the cliffs whence it had issued, it had spread itself over so wide a space as to lose much of its force and volume. In the softer soil near the camp it had already ploughed a deep channel, through which it was rushing so fiercely that Sikander had evidently no chance of crossing *there*. But the farther bank, high, shelving, and stony, soon shallowed the stream on that side so much that Sikander, having given his spent horse time to rest and breathe, found little difficulty in reaching the spot where the boys were standing.

A cordial greeting passed between the three friends so strangely reunited, and our heroes hastened to offer Sikander a share of their provisions, which they had not yet found leisure to touch. The Afghan, who was quite as hungry as themselves, readily assented; and there, in the heart of the lonely mountains, with the cold moon looking down upon them, and the rushing torrent at

their feet, the three wanderers made a hearty meal.

"Noble Aghas" [gentlemen], said Sikander, when they had finished, "since God, the all-merciful, hath brought us together once more, let us not linger here. Such of my poor lads as the flood has spared must be far away by this time, and the river will be impassable on that side for at least three days to come. Hear me! They who feed their flocks beyond these hills are my friends and brothers; wherefore let us hasten to sit under the shadow of their tents. My horse will bear ye both with ease, and I will lead him by the bridle."

But the boys objecting to this, it was agreed that they should ride by turns, and away they went.

On the way Sikander told them sundry fragments of news which considerably astonished them. They now learned for the first time that Cabool was again occupied by the British, the Ameer a prisoner in their hands, and Cavagnari's murder

being avenged by numerous executions. From these events he turned to others that interested them even more. Immediately on learning that they were still alive (which he heard from one of his own men, who had seen them borne off by Ahmed Khan's band) he had gathered his warriors and started in pursuit, accompanied by Colonel Hilton. The Colonel, however, had been struck down at the very outset by a fever resulting from over-fatigue and distress of mind, and was now lying in the British lines near Cabool—"watched night and day," added Sikander, "by my old comrade, the English soldier whom you call Bill."

"What? isn't he dead, after all?" cried Ernest, when this was translated to him. "Hurrah for old Bill!"

Sikander proceeded to relate how he had found Ahmed Khan's stronghold occupied by a Goorkha detachment, the English leader of which, in reply to his questions, had produced the written

message left there by Tom. Sikander had set off at once in the direction indicated, but he had followed by mistake the trail of another party of the same tribe—an error resulting in the night attack which had come so opportunely to save our two heroes.

"And Professor Makaroff?—do you know anything of him?"

"He who sought the Lost City? Evil has come to him, as to all who seek *it*. On our march we met one of the Afghan hunters who were with him, and he told us that the Cabool guide led them astray among the hills of the Bolor-Dagh" [the range bordering Afghanistan on the north-east], "where the men of the mountain fell upon them and slew many of them, and scattered the rest; but whether the Russian himself were living or dead he could not say."

"I'll be bound that Persian rogue, Kara-Goorg, had a hand in that, as he has in everything that's bad," growled Tom.

"Kara-Goorg! The day after the fight he went to the Russian Ambassador, and said he had paid some men to take you away and keep you safe until all was quiet again, but that the Afghans had taken you from them by force; and the Ambassador gave him great praise, and sent him on a mission to some of the chiefs of the north. Perchance I may meet him there, and *then*—" A clutch of his sword-hilt completed the sentence.

Day was just breaking when they turned the corner of a huge cliff, and saw before them a fortress, similar to that of Ahmed Khan, standing in the midst of a green valley. The boys were surprised to see so many sheep feeding around the wall, but they afterwards learned that the mountain Afghans preserve their sheep for the sake of their milk, and live on goat's flesh instead of mutton.

Several figures were already moving about, and Sikander hailed them with a peculiar cry, which

was instantly answered. A few moments later the Afghan was being warmly greeted by his old friends, while Tom and Ernest, who, now that all danger was over, could hardly keep their eyes open from fatigue, were led away into the fort, and made as comfortable as its resources permitted.

Tom's first thought on waking was to communicate with his father as quickly as possible. With a sheet of white bark, and a soft red stone ground into a point, he managed to write a few lines, which Sikander sent off at once by one of the tribe disguised as a pilgrim, with the assurance of a large reward if he delivered it safely.

And now for the next four or five days our heroes enjoyed a perfect holiday after all their troubles. They learned to drink ewe milk, which they thought a little too sweet just at first, and to eat goat's flesh, which inspired Ernest with a joke about "Billygoatawney soup." They studied Afghan cookery, and even practised it in the

queer little native ovens, which consist merely of a hole scooped in the earth, and sheltered from the wind by two or three piled-up stones.

When evening came, Tom's recital of his adventures eclipsed every other *kessehgou* (story-teller) in the camp, the mountaineers being in raptures at the defeat of their enemies, and the way in which the boys had outwitted and escaped them. Finally both lads made such brilliant scores in a shooting-match that the old chief himself complimented them by saying that their father must be a famous robber to have trained them so well.

This characteristic praise was aptly followed by the ceremony which they witnessed that evening. A warrior led up his infant son, who was just old enough to run alone, to a hovel, in the clay wall of which a small hole had been cut. Through this hole the father made his child creep to and fro, while the by-standers shouted in full chorus, "Ghal shah!" (be a thief).

"BE A THIEF!"

"I suppose that's the Afghan way of saying, 'Be a good boy,'" said Tom to Ernest, as they stood watching. "Fancy some careful American father apprenticing his son to a thief, and commanding him to be faithful and industrious, and do credit to his profession!"

"It is a queer country, certainly," answered Ernest, "where a thief's held in honor, and a laboring-man looked down upon as a disgrace to his family. It just reminds me of that old fellow in Homer who thought Telemachus such a fine, gentlemanly-looking man that he *must* be a pirate."

The next morning in came Sikander's raiders, who had at length succeeded in crossing the swollen river in quest of their missing chief. Their coming was the signal for a grand feast, after which Sikander announced that as one day would suffice to rest the party, they might all start for Cabool on the second morning following.

Here, then, our heroes' adventures might have

ended, this strong escort being an ample security against every danger. But in an evil hour they recollected that they had not yet tried their skill upon the wild goats of the surrounding hills; and such a chance of tracking down the shyest game in Afghanistan, and requiting the kindness of their hosts by providing them with some fresh meat, was too good to be lost.

"When once we get back," said Tom Hilton, "there'll be an end of our adventures, so we may just as well have one more before starting."

That "one more" did it all.

Chapter XI.

THE LOST CITY.

With the first gleam of daylight the next morning the boys were afoot, and soon left the valley and its encampment far behind them, plunging deeper and deeper into the heart of the mountains. Their usual good-fortune appeared still to attend them, for in little more than half an hour from the start they caught sight of a bristly black head and a pair of huge curled horns rising from the crest of a projecting crag overhead.

"Ernie," whispered Tom, "creep round to the left and try to draw a bead on him. I'll go to the right. Be as quiet as a mouse, for he's a fellow worth having."

He was indeed. As Tom crept nearer, and got a fuller view of his game, he could hardly restrain a cry of admiration at sight of the magnificent creature, larger by one-half than any that he had yet seen.

Already Tom was just within range, when the crash of a falling stone, dislodged by his left foot, startled the goat, which darted away like lightning. Tom fired, but the animal bounded on unharmed. The next moment, however, came an answering shot from the other side of the cliff, followed by a shout of triumph from Ernest.

"I've hit him!" cried he. "Hurry up, Tom. I'm sure he can't go far."

The goat had sprung across the chasm separating the crag on which he had been standing from the main cliff, and was now flying along a kind of ledge upon the side of the latter. But here he was at a disadvantage, for the path was covered with soft earth that had slid down from above, into which his sharp, narrow hoofs sank deeply

TOM WAS JUST WITHIN RANGE.

at every bound, while the boys, with their flat, broad-soled Afghan sandals, got over it easily. They gained rapidly upon their game, and might have shot it with ease, but unluckily neither had had time to reload.

"I don't care!" cried Tom, savagely; "I'll have him yet, if I follow him to China!"

Hardly had he spoken when the goat drew itself together, and went sliding down a descent so steep that at any other moment Tom would have thought twice about trying it. But now his blood was thoroughly up, and away he went, Ernest following.

The goat having reached the ground below, started off at a pace which seemed likely to baffle the young hunters after all. But his speed soon slackened, and it was plain that the wound given him by Ernest was beginning to tell.

"Hurrah!" cried Tom, "he's running right into a trap. We've got him now, safe enough!"

The frightened animal had indeed rushed head-

long into a deep, narrow gully between two perpendicular cliffs, from which there was no outlet. The boys at once began to reload, while the goat, finding himself hemmed in, turned fiercely to bay, his great black head lowered threateningly, his terrible horns levelled for a decisive blow, and his eyes darting fire.

"What a splendid beast he is!" said Tom, admiringly. "I almost wish now that we hadn't meddled with him at all; but we'd better finish him at once than let him bleed to death from his wound. Here goes!"

His rifle cracked as he spoke, and the goat, with one convulsive spring, lay dead before them.

"Well hit!" cried Ernest. "There's meat sufficient there to feed twenty men; and when we get back—"

"Well, what then?" asked Tom, turning round in amazement at his companion's sudden pause.

"Are you sure, old fellow," said Ernest, gravely, "that we *can* get back?"

Tom started, and glanced keenly around him.

What place could this be into which they had penetrated so easily, but from which there was no return? All around the vast circular basin in which they stood, black frowning precipices towered up grim and vast, upon whose perpendicular sides not even a chamois could have found footing. The gullies that branched off on every side only increased their misery by a delusive semblance of hope, all appearing to lead out of the fatal gorge, yet all ending abruptly at the foot of some unscalable precipice.

"We seem to have quite a genius for losing our way," said Tom, forcing a laugh; "but we can always go back to that place where we slid down, and climb up *there*."

Back they went, and sprang up the steep incline with all the briskness of revived hope, only to come sliding down again instantly, half buried in crumbling earth. Again and again they flung themselves upward, clutching and clawing at the

treacherous surface with feverish energy. It was all in vain. As well might they have striven to find foothold upon running water as on this liquid soil, which poured down in streams at every touch. At length, bruised, spent, half-stifled, dripping with heat, they desisted from the hopeless effort.

"Well," said Tom at length, "if we are lost, we needn't be starved too. There's meat enough on that goat to last us for a week, and Sikander's bound to find us before that. Come and help fix him for dinner."

The goat was quickly skinned, several large "chunks" cut from his side, and a fire having been kindled by flashing a charge of powder into the armful of fuel cut from a neighboring clump of thorn-bushes, our castaways cooked and ate with a will.

"First-chop stuff," said Ernest, finishing his third slice; "but I wish we had something to wash it down with. I'm as thirsty as a Broad-

way car-horse in July, and these jolly old rocks don't look like having much water in them. However, let's see."

But in jumping up he stumbled and fell sprawling among the bushes behind him. Tom was just beginning to laugh at this style of commencing the search, when Ernest cried, excitedly,

"Tom, come and look here!"

Tom did so, and started as if he had been stung. The brier clump, already thinned by their chopping, had given way altogether beneath Ernest's weight, and disclosed a smooth round opening faced with *hewn stone.*

Both boys stood silent for a moment, and then Tom said:

"Ernie, there have been men here before, and where one can get in another can get out. This must be an old water conduit, and we'll just creep through it. Come along."

The passage was so low that they were forced to crawl on their breasts, and the thick, close air

seemed like a hand clutching their throats. Wriggling along in the darkness, Ernest shuddered at every contact with the slimy wall (taking it for the touch of a snake), and thought dismally of the possibility of their sticking fast in this hideous tunnel, and dying by a slow and horrible death. Just then Tom's voice reached his ears, harsh and hollow as if coming from the depths of the earth:

"Light, Ernie!—light ahead!"

The boys redoubled their efforts, and soon emerged into a scene which made them forget even the thirst that was torturing them. Through the heart of the mighty cliffs that rose hundreds of feet on either side ran a wide roadway straight and smooth as a railway cutting, and coming out a little way ahead of them into a vast circular space, overshadowed by a sharp peak behind it. In the centre of this space stood clearly out a snow-white row of tall, slender columns, of which any Greek sculptor might have been justly proud,

while behind appeared the crumbling remains of other and lighter buildings.

But just then the sparkle of a tiny stream among the fallen stones blotted out every other thought till they had plunged their hot faces into it and drunk their fill.

"Ernie," whispered Tom at length, as they rose to look around them, "it's my belief that we've found the Professor's 'Lost City.'"

"But didn't that Tartar say it was in the Tien-Shan?"

"Pooh! a Tartar's geography is never first-rate; and, besides, here's all that he described—the open space, with the big building in front, the straight-cut roadway, the sharp mountain-peak, and— Hark! what's that?"

"It must be Sikander and his men coming to look for us," said Ernest, as voices were heard.

"Or somebody else and his men coming to murder us. We'd better just lie low till we see who they are."

They scrambled up the net-work of creepers twined around the nearest pillar, and had just time to conceal themselves behind the cornice above, when a dozen tall, gaunt, wild-looking men in tattered goat-skins and huge felt caps, with long guns on their shoulders, came gliding into the ruins, and halted in the very colonnade over which our heroes were perched.

Chapter XII.

A BAD FIX.

"Behold our *caravanserai!*" (resting-place) cried a big, hook-nosed fellow, with a coarse, uninviting face, who seemed to be the leader of the gang. "Here will we take our ease until they come."

"It is well spoken, Issa," answered one of the others; "and *when* they come, rich will be our booty. Assuredly this is a fortunate day!"

Tom Hilton with difficulty repressed a start that would have betrayed him at once. Although these unexpected visitors wore the dress of the country, their language and accent showed them to be Persians; and our hero's thoughts flew at once to his Persian enemy, Kara-Goorg, whose

presence in these northern mountains he had already learned from Sikander Beg. That Kara-Goorg was not himself among the band Tom saw with considerable relief; but, under the circumstances, it was only natural to conclude that he must have become aware of their presence in like manner, and have sent these ruffians to track them down and kidnap them again.

"It just serves me right!" groaned Tom, repenting of his rashness when it was too late. "If I hadn't been fool enough to come out on this hunt, we'd have been off to Cabool to-morrow with Sikander. Now here we are in a pretty bad fix, and I can't see any way out of it."

The "bad fix" soon became worse, for the Persians now kindled a fire, and the smoke well-nigh stifled our unfortunate heroes, who could barely keep down the violent bursts of sneezing which threatened them. Even as it was, Tom's blood ran cold as he heard the smothered coughs which Ernest let off from time to time; but happily the

robbers were too busy with their dinner to notice them.

"Is this Oorooss [Russian] for whom we are waiting, in very deed a great magician?" asked one.

"What words are these, Ali?" cried another. "Must he not be a greater magician than Lokman, to come safely out of the den of that lion-killer, Saadut Khan of Mahmoud Tepe [Mohammed's Mound], and then to venture hither with but a single guide?"

Tom breathed freely again for a moment, for the last words showed him that he and Ernest were *not* the game which these human bloodhounds were tracking down. But he instantly bethought himself that the only Russian whom they could be expecting amid the ruins of the Lost City was Makaroff himself; and he resolved to save the poor old Professor, cost what it might.

But how was this to be done?

"Our chief has said that his ransom will be as

the ransom of a king," cried Ali. "Who is he, then, that his life should be so precious?"

"Know you not, then, brother," rejoined his comrade Abdullah, "that the Feringhi [European] magicians have the power of finding hidden treasures? Wherefore should this Russian be in such haste to reach this place if not to discover treasures buried here by Sikander Rumi [Alexander the Great], the mighty Sultan of the Feringhis?"

"But how escaped he those blood-drinkers at Mahmoud Tepe?" asked another. "Tell us, Issa, for thou wert there."

"Hear, then," replied Issa. "When they led him before the Khan, Saadut wondered greatly to see him so small and feeble, for he had been a very Rustam* in the fight, and had killed five of the warriors before they bore him down. But the Russian looked at him as haughtily as if he

---

* The national hero of Persia, famed for his strength.

were but a mender of carpets, and said, 'Afghan, thou hast done ill to fall thus upon a stranger who came to thy tents in peace. I seek no harm to thee or thine; I seek but the Lost City of the Greek Sultans; and if thou wilt free me, and send thy warriors to carry me thither in safety, all shall be well, but if not, know that within three days there shall come to pass that which will make thee and all thy tribe tremble.'"

Here the speaker paused impressively, while a murmur of astonishment broke from his hearers.

"Then," resumed he, "came a silence deep as that of the desert at midnight, for till then no man had ever dared to speak thus to such a slayer of men as Saadut Khan. At last the Khan said, 'Let thy words be proved. If thou hast spoken truth thou shalt be set free with honor; if thou hast lied, on the third day thou shalt die.'"

"'Good!' exclaimed the listeners.

"The third day came," pursued Issa, "and still all was well, and the Khan asked, scornfully,

'Where are thy threats now?' But the Russian pointed upward, and answered, solemnly, 'Even now is the time come.' And, low! even as he spoke the noonday sun hid his face, and all was dark as if Azraël, the Angel of Death, had spread his wings over the sky; and all the warriors fell on their faces, and the Khan himself tore his beard in dismay, and offered the magician whatever he might ask if he would but bring back the light once more.

"Then the magician spoke again, and the light came back, and the warriors kissed his feet, and the Khan sent him forth the next day with rich presents, guarded by swordsmen, who bowed before him as if he had been our holy Prophet himself. Brothers, my tale is ended."

Tom was bursting with laughter at the awe-stricken faces of the listeners; for he saw at once how the wily Russian had turned to account a total eclipse of the sun announced for that day

by the scientific journals. The next words, however, made him serious enough.

"Tell me, Issa, if this Russian is so great a magician, how did he not perceive that our chief was setting a trap for him in offering to guide him instead of the guide who was slain?"

"In what ox-stall wert *thou* born?" retorted Issa. "Knowest thou not, son of a witless father, that when any magician has done a mighty deed he is exhausted of his magic for a season, as a serpent of its venom when it has struck, and for a time he hath no more power than another man? In a fortunate hour did our chief meet with him, for when he brings him hither *alone* he is ours."

"Alone?" echoed Ali. "And the Khan's warriors?"

"They will await the Russian's return in the valley below; they dare not enter these unsainted ruins."

This last remark was unlucky, as reminding

the Persians (already excited by Issa's startling tale) of the unearthly terrors ascribed to the dismal place they were in.

"True," cried Abdullah; "this spot must indeed have an evil name if Afghan robbers fear to enter it."

"And we are laying wait *here* for a magician!" added Ali, gloomily. "What if he have power to call forth the spirits to seize us!"

"Let us shift our camp lower down," said a third, tremulously. "Once, in Khorassan, some Koords camped in an old ruin despite all warning, and at midnight came a fearful thunder-clap, and the earth opened, and—"

Just then Tom, suddenly inspired with a brilliant idea, flung his large powder-horn with sure aim right into the fire. An explosion, sharp and stunning as any thunder-clap, scattered the burning brands on every side, and sent sprawling the whole band of terrified robbers, who sprang up instantly, despite their burns and bruises, and

fled down the pass with yells of terror. And then our heroes descended from their perch, and laughed till all the mountain echoes ha-ha'd in chorus.

Chapter XIII.

WHAT WAS WRITTEN ON THE PILLAR.

"Well done, Tom!" cried Ernest, ceasing at last from sheer exhaustion; "you scared 'em finely that time! Fancy the poor old Professor coming innocently into such a horrid trap! But we've saved *him*, anyhow!"

"Twelve guns," counted the practical Tom, reckoning up the spoils left on the field, "five provision bags, three scarfs, seven daggers, and any amount of ammunition. Well, I think I've invested that powder-horn rather well, and got very good interest on it."

"Won't it be fun to see how foolish that rogue of a guide will look when he gives the signal for

his chums to jump out and collar the Professor, and *we* jump out and collar *him* instead! We'll give it him, won't we, Tom?"

"We *will!* And now let's look about us a bit, for one don't see a place like this every day."

"Wait a minute," cried Ernest: "I've got a grand idea. Let's cut our names on this pillar in *Greek* letters, like an old inscription; and then, when the Professor comes up and goes to read it, he'll be rather startled, I fancy."

The names were soon carved, and smeared with earth to give them an antiquated look, after which they set out to explore the ruins. It was certainly a wonderful sight to behold all these marvels of civilization in the depths of this savage wilderness, now peopled only by fierce beasts and men fiercer still. Although the marble fountains had long run dry, the group of flower-crowned nymphs carved around them were beautiful as ever, and the graceful figures painted along the walls seemed as if the artist had only

just completed them. In one house which had been almost destroyed by a falling bowlder, Ernest found a tiny bust of a child uninjured amid the surrounding wreck, while Tom picked up several coins, for each of which a collector would gladly have given fifty dollars.

But everywhere reigned a dreary and awful silence, beneath which even the buoyant spirits of our young adventurers were weighed down as if by a nightmare. The ghostly impression haunted their evening camp-fire, and interwove itself with their dreams; and when Tom, awaking with a start from his first sleep, saw the cold moon playing fitfully on the gapped walls and broken columns of this city of the dead, he felt something as nearly akin to fear as his stout American heart could feel.

Towards morning the fire burned out, and our heroes awoke, very cold, very stiff, and (if it must be owned) rather cross. But they soon fell asleep again, and the sun had risen before they were

A GAME OF FORFEITS. [*Page* 108.

aroused by a familiar voice beside them, saying in Russian:

"This is undoubtedly the Lost City, and an extremely fine specimen of later Greek architecture. How Barânoff and Tchelovitski will envy my good-fortune in being the actual discoverer of this magnificent relic! And here, I declare, is a Greek inscription, doubtless of considerable antiquarian value."

Tom nudged Ernest, who bit his lips to keep down his laughter, as the Professor began to decipher the "inscription" which their knives had left on the pillar a few hours before. Meanwhile, the guide (who was a tall, sallow man, in the rough sheep-skin cloak and high, shapeless felt cap of a Kashgarin) gave a sudden shrill cry like the scream of a vulture, and looked so blank at finding it unanswered that the boys could hardly keep from laughing aloud.

"Thomas Hilton, Ernest Clairmont," cried Professor Makaroff, rubbing his eyes with an air of

bewilderment. "What *can* this mean? there are no such words in Greek!"

The guide, thinking that his accomplices might not have heard the call, repeated it, and this time with a result which he little expected. The boys at once issued from their hiding-place, crying,

"Good-morning, Mr. Professor; glad to see you again!"

The Professor looked startled, as well he might, but the guide seemed actually turned to stone. His dark face grew livid with terror, while his quivering lips hissed rather than spoke the words,

"Ali! it is they!"

"Kara-Goorg!" roared Tom, for whom the Persian exclamation and the voice that uttered it were quite enough. "You villain! this shall be your last treachery!"

He extended his arm to seize the Persian, but Kara-Goorg dashed it aside, and darted down the pass like an arrow. Seizing his gun, Tom sent a bullet after him to hasten his steps. In his blind

"GOOD-MORNING, MR. PROFESSOR; GLAD TO SEE YOU AGAIN."

terror the Persian did not see that right in his path lay a deep pit half filled with crumbling masonry. Stumbling over its edge, he fell headlong into it, while the huge stones dislodged by his fall came thundering after, crushing the wretched traitor out of all semblance of life.

Little remains to be told. By the time our three explorers reached Cabool, Colonel Hilton was almost well again, and they left for Tashkent just in time to escape the desperate battles that preceded the blockade of the British army in its camp at Shirpur. It afterwards appeared that Kara-Goorg, in the course of his mission among the northern chiefs, reached Mahmoud Tepe just as its Khan was about to free Makaroff in deference to his supposed powers as a magician, and instantly formed the plan of acting as his guide (which his own perfect disguise and the Professor's ignorance of his person made easy), and then, by betraying him into the hands of his confeder-

ates, to share whatever ransom the Russian government might give for its ablest scientist.

The discovery of the Lost City made considerable stir in the learned circles of St. Petersburg, and was described at length by more than one scientific journal. Professor Makaroff insisted upon giving up to Tom and Ernest, despite their protest, the reward promised to the finder of these famous remains, contenting himself with the honor of being the first to describe and explain them. It is said that he has never quite forgiven the Lost City for being found two hundred miles south of the spot where he had located it; but the Order of St. Vladimir from the Czar's own hand has somewhat consoled him.

Bill Barlow's health has begun to give way in consequence of his wounds, and he is about to be sent for a holiday to Northern India, where he will probably be visited shortly by Ernest Clairmont, who is to join his regiment in the Punjab next spring. He will be escorted as far as the

British frontier by his friend Sikander Beg, who is now more powerful than ever, the tribe of Ahmed Khan having been almost annihilated in the attack upon General Roberts, and Selim himself having fallen at their head. As for Tom Hilton (who has been the "lion" of Gashkent ever since his return from Cabool), we may perhaps meet him again, amid scenes even more exciting.

THE END.

INTERESTING BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

THOMAS W. KNOX'S WORKS. 8vo, Cloth. Profusely Illustrated.

THE BOY TRAVELLERS IN THE FAR EAST. Five Parts, $3 00 each. The Five Parts in a Box, $15 00.

PART I. JAPAN AND CHINA.

PART II. SIAM AND JAVA. With Descriptions of Cochin China, Cambodia, Sumatra, and the Malay Archipelago.

PART III. CEYLON AND INDIA. With Descriptions of Borneo, the Philippine Islands, and Burmah.

PART IV. EGYPT AND THE HOLY LAND.

PART V. JOURNEY THROUGH AFRICA.

THE VOYAGE OF THE "VIVIAN" to the North Pole and Beyond. Adventures of Two Youths in the Open Polar Sea. $2 50.

HUNTING ADVENTURES ON LAND AND SEA. Two Parts. $2 50 each.

PART I. THE YOUNG NIMRODS IN NORTH AMERICA.

PART II. THE YOUNG NIMRODS AROUND THE WORLD.

CHARLES CARLETON COFFIN'S WORKS. Four Volumes. Copiously Illustrated. 8vo, Cloth, $3 00 each.

THE STORY OF LIBERTY.
OLD TIMES IN THE COLONIES.
THE BOYS OF '76.
BUILDING THE NATION.

COUNTRY COUSINS. Short Studies in the Natural History of the United States. Illustrated. 8vo, Cloth, $2 50.

INDIAN HISTORY FOR YOUNG FOLKS. By FRANCIS S. DRAKE. Copiously Illustrated. 8vo, Cloth, $3 00.

THE CATSKILL FAIRIES. By VIRGINIA W. JOHNSON. Illustrated by ALFRED FREDERICKS. Square 8vo, Illuminated Cloth, $3 00.

WHAT MR. DARWIN SAW in his Voyage round the World in the Ship "Beagle." Illustrated. 8vo, Cloth, $3 00.

HARPER'S YOUNG PEOPLE. Bound Volumes II., III., and IV. Vol. V. *just ready.* (Volume I. *out of print.*) 4to, Cloth, $3 50 each. Each Volume contains the 52 Numbers for a year, with over 800 pages, and about 700 Illustrations.

HARPER'S YOUNG PEOPLE SERIES. Illustrated. 16mo, Cloth, $1 00 per volume.

TOBY TYLER; OR, TEN WEEKS WITH A CIRCUS. By JAMES OTIS.

MR. STUBBS'S BROTHER. Sequel to "Toby Tyler." By JAMES OTIS.

TIM AND TIP. By JAMES OTIS.

RAISING THE "PEARL." By JAMES OTIS.

LEFT BEHIND; OR, TEN DAYS A NEWSBOY. By JAMES OTIS.

THE MORAL PIRATES. By W. L. ALDEN.

THE CRUISE OF THE "GHOST." By W. L. ALDEN.

THE CRUISE OF THE CANOE CLUB. By W. L. ALDEN.

MILDRED'S BARGAIN, AND OTHER STORIES. By LUCY C. LILLIE.

NAN. By LUCY C. LILLIE.

THE FOUR MACNICOLS. By WILLIAM BLACK.

WHO WAS PAUL GRAYSON? By JOHN HABBERTON.

THE TALKING LEAVES. An Indian Story. By W. O. STODDARD.

THE ICE QUEEN. By ERNEST INGERSOLL.

DIDDIE, DUMPS, AND TOT; OR, PLANTATION CHILD-LIFE. By LOUISE CLARKE-PYRNELLE. Illustrated. 16mo, Cloth, $1 00.

NEW GAMES FOR PARLOR AND LAWN. By G. B. BARTLETT. 16mo, Cloth, $1 00.

POLITICS FOR YOUNG AMERICANS. By CHARLES NORDHOFF. 12mo, Half Leather, 75 cents; Paper, 40 cents.

GOD AND THE FUTURE LIFE. The Reasonableness of Christianity. By CHARLES NORDHOFF. 16mo, Cloth, $1 00.

THE BALL OF THE VEGETABLES, and Other Stories in Prose and Verse. By MARGARET EYTINGE. Illustrated. 8vo, Cloth, $2 00.

THE HISTORY OF A MOUNTAIN. By ÉLISÉE RECLUS. Illustrated by L. Bennett. 12mo, Cloth, $1 25.

THE ADVENTURES OF A YOUNG NATURALIST. By LUCIEN BIART. With 117 Illustrations. 12mo, Cloth, $1 75.

AN INVOLUNTARY VOYAGE. By LUCIEN BIART. Illustrated. 12mo, Cloth, $1 25.

THE BOYHOOD OF MARTIN LUTHER. By HENRY MAYHEW. Illustrated. 16mo, Cloth, $1 25.

THE STORY OF THE PEASANT-BOY PHILOSOPHER. (Founded on the Early Life of Ferguson, the Shepherd-Boy Astronomer.) By HENRY MAYHEW. 16mo, Cloth, $1 25.

YOUNG BENJAMIN FRANKLIN. By HENRY MAYHEW. Illustrated. 16mo, Cloth, $1 25.

THE WONDERS OF SCIENCE; or, Young Humphry Davy. The Life of a Wonderful Boy. By HENRY MAYHEW. 16mo, Cloth, $1 25.

THE BOYHOOD OF GREAT MEN. By JOHN G. EDGAR. Illustrated. 16mo, Cloth, $1 00.

THE FOOTPRINTS OF FAMOUS MEN. By JOHN G. EDGAR. Illustrated. 16mo, Cloth, $1 00.

HISTORY FOR BOYS; or, Annals of the Nations of Modern Europe. By JOHN G. EDGAR. Illustrated. 16mo, Cloth, $1 00.

SEA-KINGS AND NAVAL HEROES. A Book for Boys. By JOHN G. EDGAR. Illustrated. 16mo, Cloth, $1 00.

THE WARS OF THE ROSES. By JOHN G. EDGAR. Illustrated. 16mo, Cloth, $1 00.

HOW TO GET STRONG, AND HOW TO STAY SO. By WILLIAM BLAIKIE. With Illustrations. 16mo, Cloth, $1 00.

SOUND BODIES FOR OUR BOYS AND GIRLS. By WILLIAM BLAIKIE. Illustrated. 16mo, Cloth, 40 cents.

DOGS AND THEIR DOINGS. By Rev. F. O. MORRIS, B.A. Illustrated. Square 8vo, Cloth, Gilt Sides, $1 75.

TALES FROM THE ODYSSEY FOR BOYS AND GIRLS. By C. M. B. 32mo, Paper, 25 cents; Cloth, 40 cents.

CAST UP BY THE SEA; or, The Adventures of Ned Grey. By Sir SAMUEL W. BAKER. Ill'd. 12mo, Cloth, $1 25; 4to, Paper, 15 cents.

THE ADVENTURES OF REUBEN DAVIDGER; Seventeen Years and four Months Captive among the Dyaks of Borneo. By J. GREENWOOD. 8vo, Cloth, $1 25; 4to, Paper, 15 cents.

WILD SPORTS OF THE WORLD. A Book of Natural History and Adventure. By JAMES GREENWOOD. Ill'd. Crown 8vo, Cloth, $2 50.

HOMES WITHOUT HANDS: Being a Description of the Habitations of Animals. By the Rev. J. G. WOOD, M.A., F.L.S. With about 140 Illustrations. 8vo, Cloth, $4 50; Sheep, $5 00; Half Calf, $6 75.

THE ILLUSTRATED NATURAL HISTORY. By the Rev. J. G. WOOD, M.A., F.L.S. With 450 Engravings. 12mo, Cloth, $1 05.

CAMP LIFE IN THE WOODS; and the Tricks of Trapping and Trap Making. By W. HAMILTON GIBSON, Author of "Pastoral Days." Illustrated. 12mo, Cloth, $1 00.

DAVIS'S NIMROD OF THE SEA. Nimrod of the Sea; or, The American Whaleman. By WILLIAM M. DAVIS. With many Illustrations. 12mo, Cloth, $2 00.

REID'S ODD PEOPLE. Odd People: being a Popular Description of Singular Races of Man. By Captain MAYNE REID. With Illustrations. 16mo, Cloth, 75 cents.

FRIENDS WORTH KNOWING. Glimpses of American Natural History By ERNEST INGERSOLL. Illustrated. 16mo, Cloth, $1 00.

PAUL B. DU CHAILLU'S WORKS ON AFRICA. Five Volumes. Illustrated. 12mo, Cloth, $1 50 each.

THE COUNTRY OF THE DWARFS. MY APINGI KINGDOM.
WILD LIFE UNDER THE EQUATOR. LOST IN THE JUNGLE.
STORIES OF THE GORILLA COUNTRY.

ROUND THE WORLD; including a Residence in Victoria, and a Journey by Rail across North America. By a Boy. Edited by SAMUEL SMILES. Illustrated. 12mo, Cloth, $1 50.

THE SELF-HELP SERIES. By S. SMILES. 12mo, Cloth, $1 00 each.

SELF-HELP. CHARACTER. THRIFT. DUTY.

STORIES OF INVENTORS AND DISCOVERERS in Science and the Useful Arts. By JOHN TIMBS. Illustrated. 12mo, Cloth, $1 50.

THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS; or, The Arabian Nights' Entertainments. Translated and Arranged for Family Reading by E. W. LANE. 600 Illustrations. 2 vols., 12mo, Cloth, $3 50.

OUR CHILDREN'S SONGS. Illustrated. 8vo, Cloth, $1 00.

FAMOUS LONDON MERCHANTS. A Book for Boys. By H. R. FOX BOURNE. Illustrated. 16mo, Cloth, $1 00.

PRAIRIE AND FOREST. A Description of the Game of North America, with Personal Adventures in their Pursuit. By PARKER GILLMORE. Illustrated. 12mo, Cloth, $1 50.

PUSS-CAT MEW, and Other New Fairy Stories for my Children. By E. H. KNATCHBULL-HUGESSEN. Illustrated. 12mo, Cloth, $1 25.

FAIRY TALES OF ALL NATIONS. By EDOUARD LABOULAYE. Translated by MARY L. BOOTH. Illustrated. 12mo, Cloth, Bevelled Edges, $2 00; Gilt Edges, $2 50.

JACOB ABBOTT'S WORKS.

SCIENCE FOR THE YOUNG. Illustrated. 4 vols., 12mo, Cloth, $1 50 each.

HEAT.
LIGHT.
WATER AND LAND.
FORCE.

FRANCONIA STORIES. Illustrated. 16mo, Cloth, 75 cents each.

MALLEVILLE.
MARY BELL.
ELLEN LINN.
WALLACE.
BEECHNUT.
STUYVESANT.
AGNES.
MARY ERSKINE.
RODOLPHUS.
CAROLINE.

LITTLE LEARNER SERIES. Illustrated. 16mo, Cloth, 75 cents each.

LEARNING TO TALK.
LEARNING TO THINK.
LEARNING TO READ.
LEARNING ABOUT COMMON THINGS.
LEARNING ABOUT RIGHT AND WRONG.

MARCO PAUL SERIES. Marco Paul's Voyages and Travels in the Pursuit of Knowledge. Illustrated. 16mo, Cloth, 75 cents each.

IN NEW YORK.
ON THE ERIE CANAL.
IN THE FORESTS OF MAINE.
IN VERMONT.
IN BOSTON.
AT THE SPRINGFIELD ARMORY.

RAINBOW AND LUCKY SERIES. Illustrated. 16mo, Cloth, 75 cents each.

HANDIE.
RAINBOW'S JOURNEY.
THE THREE PINES.
SELLING LUCKY.
UP THE RIVER.

YOUNG CHRISTIAN SERIES. Illustrated. 12mo, Cloth, $1 75 each.

THE YOUNG CHRISTIAN.
THE CORNER STONE.
THE WAY TO DO GOOD.
HOARYHEAD AND M'DONNER.

THE YOUNG CHRISTIAN. A Memorial Volume. With a Sketch of the Author by one of his Sons. Steel-Plate Portrait of the Author, and Woodcuts. 12mo, Cloth, $2 00.

ABBOTTS' (JACOB AND J. S. C.) BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORIES. Illustrated. 16mo, Cloth, $1 00 per volume.

CYRUS THE GREAT.
DARIUS THE GREAT.
XERXES.
ALEXANDER THE GREAT.
ROMULUS.
HANNIBAL.
PYRRHUS.
JULIUS CÆSAR.
CLEOPATRA.
NERO.
ALFRED THE GREAT.
WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR.
RICHARD I.
RICHARD II.
RICHARD III.
MARGARET OF ANJOU.
MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS.
QUEEN ELIZABETH.
CHARLES I.
CHARLES II.
HERNANDO CORTEZ.
HENRY IV.
LOUIS XIV.
MARIA ANTOINETTE.
MADAME ROLAND.
JOSEPHINE.
JOSEPH BONAPARTE.
HORTENSE.
LOUIS PHILIPPE.
GENGHIS KHAN.
KING PHILIP.
PETER THE GREAT.

JOHN BONNER'S CHILD'S HISTORIES.

CHILD'S HISTORY OF GREECE. Illustrated. 2 vols., 16mo, Cloth, $2 50.

CHILD'S HISTORY OF ROME. Illustrated. 2 vols., 16mo, Cloth, $2 50.

CHILD'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES. New Edition, Revised, and brought down to the Close of the Rebellion. Illustrated. 3 vols., 16mo, Cloth, $3 75.

THE STORY OF THE UNITED STATES NAVY, for Boys. By BENSON J. LOSSING. Illustrated. 12mo, Half Leather, $1 75.

FRENCH HISTORY FOR ENGLISH CHILDREN. By SARAH BROOK. With Illustrations and Colored Maps. 16mo, Cloth, $1 00.

CHILD'S HISTORY OF ENGLAND. By CHARLES DICKENS. Illustrated. 2 vols. in one, 16mo, Half Leather, 60 cents.

THE HISTORY OF SANDFORD AND MERTON. By THOMAS DAY. 18mo, Half Bound, 75 cents.

THE HISTORY OF A MOUTHFUL OF BREAD, and its Effect on the Organization of Men and Animals. By JEAN MACÉ. Translated by Mrs. ALFRED GATTY. 12mo, Cloth, $1 75.

THE SERVANTS OF THE STOMACH. By JEAN MACÉ. Reprinted from the London Edition, Revised and Corrected. 12mo, Cloth, $1 75.

HOME FAIRY TALES. By JEAN MACÉ. Illustrated. 12mo, Cloth, $1 75.

YOUTH'S HEALTH-BOOK. 32mo, Paper, 25 cents; Cloth, 40 cents.

STORIES OF THE OLD DOMINION. From the Settlement to the End of the Revolution. By JOHN ESTEN COOKE. Illustrated. 12mo, Cloth, $1 50.

FRED MARKHAM IN RUSSIA; or, The Boy Travellers in the Land of the Czar. By W. H. G. KINGSTON. Illustrated. Small 4to, Cloth, 75 cents.

SELF-MADE MEN. By CHARLES C. B. SEYMOUR. Many Portraits. 12mo, Cloth, $1 75.

ROBINSON CRUSOE, of York, Mariner; with a Biography of DEFOE. Illustrated. Complete Edition. 12mo, Cloth, $1 00.

THE SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON. Illustrated. 2 vols., 18mo, Cloth, $1 50.

THE SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON—Continued: being a Sequel to the Foregoing. 2 vols., 18mo, Cloth, $1 50.

THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS. By JOHN BUNYAN. With a Life of the Author, by ROBERT SOUTHEY. Illustrated. 12mo, Cloth, $1 50.

PUBLISHED BY HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK.

☞ HARPER & BROTHERS *will send any of the above works by mail, postage prepaid, to any part of the United States, on receipt of the price.*